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 Wednesday, May. 19, 2010

Red Cross to honor 'Heroes of Middle Georgia'

By ANGELA WOOLEN - awoolen@macon.com

WARNER ROBINS — Heroes inspire. Their tales of bravery, courage and strength are recorded for centuries in oral and written traditions.

For the people who were chosen for the seven Heroes of Middle Georgia awards, their individual stories of self-sacrifice encourage others to be heroes.

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A ceremony hosted by the American Red Cross Houston-Middle Georgia chapter and Robins Federal Credit Union honoring these individuals will be held at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Century of Flight Hangar at the Museum of Aviation.

The winners are:

Fire Fighter Award: Lt. Danny Williams, Warner Robins Fire Department

During a middle school football game, lightning struck and hit 13 people. Williams was in the stands and rushed to the scene, administering CPR to the coach. He was assisted by another person, whom Williams previously had taught CPR. According to Lt. Tony L. Theus of the Warner Robins Fire Department, Williams "is a fine asset to our department, and most of all he's my friend."

Law Enforcement Award: Officer Kirk Lowry, Warner Robins Police Department

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While Lowry was off-duty, he observed what he believed to be a crime being committed at a restaurant: five people were chasing one person with weapons.

With his family in the car, Lowry parked his car and proceeded to take action against the criminals. Lowry was able to subdue the men until other officers arrived on the scene. Nominator Capt. John Clay, said Lowry's "calm and controlled handling of these men kept an arrest from escalating into something more serious."

Good Samaritan: Jeff, Misty and Paul McAfee, Joanna McAfee Childhood Cancer Foundation

The Joanna McAfee Childhood Cancer Foundation, which was founded five years ago, has raised almost a half million dollars. The organization, named for Jeff and Misty's daughter who died of a form of cancer in 2005, has given 11 grants to six research institutions and gifts to 45 families in the Middle Georgia area. They also have developed the Joanna license plate tags to raise awareness of childhood cancer.

In their nomination, Paul and Aimee Curtis of Curtis Photography wrote, "The fact that the McAfees moved on to reach beyond their own pain and establish this foundation in order to help other children with cancer and their families is one of the largest examples of heroism we have ever witnessed."

Emergency Management Services Award: Chief Leslie Sewell, Pulaski County

Sewell has been the Emergency Management Agency director and fire chief for Pulaski County for five years. Before getting the combined job, he was the fire chief for 12 years.

During his tenure, Sewell has helped out in many life-or-death situations, including rescuing a homeless man during flooding in 2009 and working with the Waycross firefighting efforts in 2007.

He also was involved in holding a fundraiser to make sure the Jaws-of-Life equipment was properly maintained.

"Sewell wears many hats in our community and has dedicated himself to creating a safe and secure environment," C. Brooks Bailey, sole commissioner for Pulaski County, wrote in his award nomination.

Emergency Medical Services Award: Jimmy Kersey, Houston Healthcare

In his nomination letter for Kersey, David Borghelli, director of Emergency Medical Services at Houston Healthcare/Houston County EMS, explained how Kersey has gone the extra mile in his position as a paramedic.

A 17-year-old girl was in a life-threatening automobile accident, and Kersey used his paramedic skills to save her life. Even after the accident, Kersey made follow-up calls and visits to the family to check on the girl.

Military Award: Master Sgt. David Barber and Master Sgt. Robert Rose (tie), Robins Air Force Base

Nominated by 1st Sgt. Clifford Powers, military supervisor, Barber and Rose were both awarded the Bronze Star for their work in capturing insurgents in Iraq.

Rose led a unit on 135 missions while Barber led teams on 131 missions.

The pair worked with the 506th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron at Kirkuk for almost six months.

Christopher Johnson Youth Character Award: Alexander Alvonellos, Warner Robins

Alvonellos is credited with a heroic act when he heard a cry for help. A 7-year-old girl had witnessed her brother fall into a pond. Alvonellos, who was 16 at the time, went into the pond looking for the boy and instructed the girl to call 911. Alvonellos was nominated by his father, Spyros Alvonellos, who said, "the distinctive and selfless act of bravery by Alexander Alvonellos reflects great credit upon himself and the citizens of Warner Robins."

Finalists, who also will be recognized at the banquet, are: Judy Mason, Lynne Harry Cuppett, William Barnes, Brandi Clifton, Sgt. Porter Wood, Senior Airman Arik Tipton, Stanley Chamberlain, Tommy Stanley, Greg Chapman and Adam Stretch.

For more information about the banquet, contact the American Red Cross Houston-Middle Georgia chapter, at 923-6332.

To contact writer Angela Woolen, call 923-5650.

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- [Houston/Peach](#)
- [Nation](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
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- [Politics](#)
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- [Technology](#)
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- [World](#)
- [Wires](#)

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- [Basketball](#)
- [Colleges](#)
- [Fort Valley State](#)
- [Georgia Southern](#)
- [Georgia Tech](#)
- [Univ. of Georgia](#)
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- [Columnists](#)
- [Football](#)
- [Atlanta Falcons](#)
- [Golf](#)
- [High School](#)
- [Hockey](#)
- [Horse Racing](#)
- [Little League](#)
- [Motorsports](#)
- [NASCAR](#)
- [Atlanta](#)
- [Other Sports](#)
- [Outdoors](#)
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- [Local theaters](#)
- [Movies](#)
- [Music](#)
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- [Television](#)
- [Wires](#)

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