

**Agenda Item:** 1.e

**Meeting Date:** November 6, 2025

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** City Commission

**Through:**

**From:** Michael Handoga

**Date:** 2025-10-15

**Subject:** Presentation of the Medal of Valor to Firefighter/Paramedic AJ Gonzales and Firefighter/EMT Makayla Bowers

**Presenter(s):** Michael Handoga, Fire Chief

**Staff Recommendation:** Present the Medal of Valor to Firefighter/Paramedic AJ Gonzales and Firefighter/EMT Makayla Bowers in recognition of their distinguished bravery and life-saving actions during a residential structure fire on October 14, 2025.

**Strategic Themes:** N/A

**Boards & Committees:** N/A

**Budget Impact:** N/A

**Past Action:** N/A

**Next Action:** N/A

**Attachments:**

**Background:** On October 14, 2025, Dunedin Fire Rescue crews responded to a working residential structure fire on San Mateo Drive with reports of a trapped occupant. The first-arriving medic unit, staffed by Firefighter/Paramedic AJ Gonzales and Firefighter/EMT Makayla Bowers, arrived to find heavy smoke and flames showing from a single-story home. Upon learning that the resident was still inside, Gonzales provided a calm and precise size-up and advised that they were making entry for a rescue.

Armed only with a set of irons and a three-gallon water can, Gonzales and Bowers made a directed search to the reported rear bedroom, located the victim, and removed them from the burning structure as fire conditions rapidly worsened and debris fell around them. They did all of this prior to any other units

arriving on scene. Once outside, the crew immediately initiated advanced life-saving care, including airway management and administration of a cyanokit.

Their quick actions, composure, and courage under extreme conditions directly resulted in the rescue and survival of the victim. For their extraordinary bravery and selfless actions in the face of extreme danger, Firefighter/Paramedic AJ Gonzales and Firefighter/EMT Makayla Bowers are being awarded the Medal of Valor â€” presented to individuals who display an act of distinguished bravery by placing their own lives in extreme peril, thereby preventing the loss of another life.