



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Driver Engineer/Paramedic Derek McBrayer receives the Florida Elks Association First Responder of the Year-Firefighter Award**

Lakeland, FL – On Saturday, May 29, 2021, Lakeland Fire Department (LFD) Driver Engineer/Paramedic Derek McBrayer received the Florida Elks Association First Responder of the Year-Firefighter Award at their 115<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention at the Rosen Centre in Orlando, FL. In addition, two of his crew members, Driver/Engineer Alvin Catholic and Firefighter/Paramedic Wade Kirkland were recognized as First Responder of the Year-Firefighter Team. Driver Engineer/Paramedic McBrayer expressed he is, “humbled and honored to be receiving recognition for an award that is also deserving of so many others.” Driver Engineer/Paramedic Catholic added, “I feel this is an honor and I feel very privileged that I was recognized for such as prestigious award. The individuals were nominated for the award by Lakeland Fire Department Fire Chief Douglas E. Riley.

The narrative of the event that lead to this award nomination is below:

*The narrative was written based on the accounts from the involved LFD firefighter/paramedics, a medical and incident narrative provided by Derek McBrayer, and his Battalion Chief, Jim Thompson.*

On August 19, 2020, at approximately 1:00am, first responders were dispatched from the Lakeland Fire Department’s (LFD) Fire Station 4 to a motor vehicle accident on Brunnell Parkway.

Rescue 42 with Driver Engineer/Paramedic Derek McBrayer and Firefighter/Paramedic Wade Kirkland arrived on scene of a single vehicle accident in Lake Bonnet. The vehicle was found upside down with a trapped driver. Bystanders were assisting the driver by keeping her head above water to avoid drowning. The driver was belly down, between the vehicle’s B-Post and seat, unable to free herself and stuck precariously where any movement of the vehicle could injure the bystanders assisting or resulting in her drowning in the layer of water she found herself stuck in.





# LAKELAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

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Driver Engineer/Paramedic McBrayer is a previous Firefighter of the Year recipient so is no stranger to dangerous situations that require the selfless sacrifice you come to expect from first responders. Driver Engineer/Paramedic McBrayer immediately sprang into action and entered the water to make contact with the driver. Upon submerging himself and assessing the situation, Driver Engineer/Paramedic McBrayer requested a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) to be able to use the air as he waded through the muddy bank and eventually provided air to the driver. Driver Engineer/Paramedic McBrayer was unable to use the SCBA so he dove into the water, beneath the occupant, and into the back-seat area. He was able to determine the driver was caught by the seat belt and he was able to disengage the seat belt, freeing the driver. The driver was lifted out of the water by Driver Engineer/Paramedic McBrayer and was assisted to shore where she shared that there were originally more people with her. It was determined that three others were in the vehicle. Under the direction of Driver Engineer/Paramedic Alvin Catholic, who was the Step-up Lieutenant on LFD Engine 41, Driver Engineer/Paramedic McBrayer and Firefighter/Paramedic Kirkland made multiple entries into the vehicle, submerged in the water, sweeping all area with negative results. They repeatedly put themselves in harm's way to search for the three passengers. After multiple attempts they were relieved to learn that the other three occupants had freed themselves when the accident occurred and were found ashore, among the bystanders.

The Lakeland Fire Department became aware of their heroic efforts when the department was contacted by grateful witnesses. One witness provided an image of the scene, which further proved how truly dangerous the situation was and how fortunate the driver was to have competent care by LFD's first responders that day.

This incident, which could have had a devastating outcome, instead resulted in a life saved thanks to the actions of Driver Engineer/Paramedic Derek McBrayer, Driver Engineer/Paramedic Alvin Catholic, and Firefighter/Paramedic Wade Kirkland. They, like most of the Lakeland Fire Department's Firefighters, are extremely humble and would be uncomfortable by the mere thought of being nominated for this award. However, their actions on this day are proof that they are in this line of work not because of self-service, but rather the need and ability to help those that need it most. They are shining examples of the caliber of the men and women that serve Lakeland as firefighters and they live the department's creed of duty, honor, integrity, and trust.

Photographs from the ceremony are attached.

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