



# 2024 Local HEROES

## Mukilteo-Clinton ferry crew responds to people in distress

By MAEVE SMITH  
contributing writer

MUKILTEO — On Aug. 18, the crew from the Suquamish ferry on the Mukilteo-Clinton route rescued a woman stranded in the water near the Boeing Pier. In less than five minutes after receiving the distress call, Able-Bodied Seaman Austin Burgess and Ordinary Seaman Daniel McCombs brought the woman safely ashore.

“Heavy weather came in quickly and it started blowing very hard out of the south, like, upwards of 30 knots,” the Suquamish’s captain Curtis Larson said of the circumstances of the emergency. This squall trapped a group of five paddleboarders in choppy waters and it stranded one male kayaker who is still missing today. The woman was among the paddleboarders. Two in her group saved themselves by grabbing on to the Boeing Pier itself, and had to have a ladder dropped to them.

It is reported that the kayaker, age 44, was not wearing a life jacket. Search efforts for the missing kayaker continued for many days after his disappearance in the squall. His body was not found.

Burgess highlighted the engine crew’s role in the woman’s rescue, calling them the “unsung heroes” of these emergencies.

“They were ready to launch

the (rescue) boat before I even got there,” Burgess said regarding the launch to retrieve. “It made things that much faster.”

Burgess, McCombs, and Captain Larson all received Life Ring Awards for their involvement in the save. A public ceremony for the Life Ring Awards was held in the fall on the Issaquah ferry at the Eagle Harbor Repair Facility on Bainbridge Island.

“It just kind of comes with the job,” Burgess said reflecting on his life-saving actions.

“Everybody likes to hear someone say ‘you guys did great, you saved somebody’s life today.’ That’s really important for deck, engine room crew and terminal staff to hear,” Captain Larson said.

Captain Larson has been involved with “20? Maybe. I would say 20” rescues during his long run with the ferry system, earning him and his crew several Life Ring Awards.

The Everett Fire Department, Everett Police Department, U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Northwest, and Mukilteo Fire and Police among other agencies participated in rescue efforts on and after Aug. 18.

The Mukilteo rescue went smoothly and quickly thanks to strong communication and the crew’s extensive training.

“We do weekly drills for literally everything,” Burgess said. “For abandon ship, for



Photos courtesy Washington State Ferries

At the life ring awards for the Suquamish crew, from left to right: WSDOT Secretary Roger Millar, Assistant Secretary Steve Nevey, USCS Capt. Mark McDonell, Captain Curt Larson, OS Daniel McCombs, Terminal Deb Young, OS Susan Shelley, Wiper Jason Zwink, and AB Austin Burgess.

fires, for a rescue, for man overboard, for all of those scenarios.”

Rescue boat launch is a frequent drill, as it is the most common type of emergency. These drills are performed spontaneously to help mimic the urgency of real rescue situations.

It takes teamwork and communication to perform life-saving rescues and be able to keep a ferry boat running. “When there’s an emergency, everybody is important,” McCombs said.

An equally important role crew members play in emergencies is crowd control. That day, there were 333 people aboard the Squamish ship, with four crew members trying to navigate them.

“Sometimes crowd control is really challenging,” Captain Larson said. Crew members are encouraged to seek assistance from members of the public when crowd control becomes difficult.

“During medical emergencies, we ask for help from doctors, nurses, and emergency or first responders. Usually a few step forward and offer to help out,” Captain Larson said.

Shoreside terminal staff also play an imperative role in rescue situations. “In this particular case they were instrumental in alerting us to the person in the water and their approximate location,” Captain Larson said.

From the captain, to the engine room, to members

of the public, emergencies on WSF ships are a team effort. Everyone aboard the Suquamish worked quickly to ensure a life was saved.

This is just one of many life-saving rescues performed by Washington State Ferry workers. Another took place a year earlier, on Aug. 26, 2023, when crew members from the Spokane ferry performed CPR on a passenger who collapsed and hit his head on the plank to board the ferry inside the Edmonds terminal.

Terminal staff, crew members, and passengers with medical experience all helped administer CPR and used an automated external defibrillator three times on the man. He eventually regained consciousness and was trans-

ported to a hospital by paramedics.

The paramedics on the scene said that if it weren’t for the WSF crew members’ quick response, the man may not have lived.

Crew members from the Edmonds save were also honored with Life Ring Awards. Overall, 103 people were honored.

Washington State Ferry workers are the first responders on the water. Multiple rescues happen every month, with two more saves in Mukilteo happening one day after the next just last week.

“Much of the time we are the first on the scene,” Captain Larson said. “Our deck and engine room crews are well trained and do a fantastic job.”

### Even more recently

Ferry crews are always at the ready to deploy their rescue boat.

In late October, the Mukilteo-Clinton ferry route crew of the Kitsap ferry launched its boat in response to an individual who’d gone into the water. They were described by Mukilteo Fire as being in a mental health crisis. Ferry workers Able-Bodied Sailors Ian Fels and Collin Brasfield responded in the rescue boat to guide the person back.

The next day, the ferry crew deployed its boat to reach a kayaker in distress.

## Deputy honored by state for traffic safety enforcement



Sheriff’s Office Deputy Dennis Montgomery. (Courtesy photo)

This fall, Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office Deputy Dennis Montgomery received the ‘Outstanding Officer of the Year’ award from the Washington Traffic Safety Commission as part of the commission’s 2024 High Visibility Enforcement Awards.

This recognition highlights an officer’s exceptional efforts in reducing distracted driving, impaired driving, enforcing speed limits, and ensuring occupant protection.

The Snohomish County DUI and Target Zero Task Force had the honor of celebrating Montgomery’s recognition of officer of the year.

—Information from Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office

## Reserve a seat for the American Red Cross Heroes Breakfast on Dec. 12

Individuals who have shown great courage to save a life or given of themselves to help another person or their community will take center stage at the annual heroes breakfast held by the local American Red Cross.

The event will take place on Thursday, Dec. 12 at the Tulalip Resort Casino, 10200 Quil Ceda Blvd., Tulalip. The doors open at 7 a.m. and the program begins sharply at 7:30 a.m. The event should

conclude by about 9 a.m.

The registration cost is by a donation amount of your choosing.

A way to get to the registration link is at [www.redcross.org/local/washington.html](http://www.redcross.org/local/washington.html)

On that page, people can nominate heroes for an award as well.

For questions, call 425-252-4103. The Snohomish County Red Cross branch is headquartered in Everett at 1010 Everett Mall Way SE.

**A Big Thanks**  
 To All The Unsung  
**"HEROES"**  
 In Snohomish County

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**American Legion #96**  
**Snohomish**  
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