

Highland Ambulance Service's Todd Zobrist receives state EMS Hero Award

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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SPRINGFIELD – The recipient of this year's EMS Hero Award by the Illinois Department of Public Health is Todd Zobrist of Pocahontas.

On the morning of March 16, 2017, Todd Zobrist and members of the Highland Ambulance Service responded to a call of a car being driven into a lake. On their arrival, they found the vehicle submerged with only 12 to 15 inches of the car above water. Zobrist jumped in the 40-degree water and was able to pull an infant from the submerged car to on top of the vehicle where he began CPR. Zobrist's immediate and courageous actions have been attributed to saving this infant's life.

"It was dark out and we were able to make a quick assessment at the scene," Zobrist said. "From what we saw from the shore, the doors of the vehicle were in tact, so I felt we needed to swim to make an assessment. I took my sweatshirt, boots and socks off and swam about 75 feet to get to the driver's side window and was able to see inside the window; that window was not intact.

"For a split second while I was out there, I thought to myself I had made a terrible decision and got myself in trouble. I was already committed to go out there. I am so glad now I decided to continue on to the vehicle. It was 29 degrees outside and the water temperature was 45 degrees. The water was very uncomfortable. I felt pain all over and my muscles were freezing up.

"On the hood, I realized there wasn't an option other than to swim back. I told myself it was a short 75 feet from the dock and there would be a warm ambulance and warm showers waiting and I took off, doing the backstroke for about 10 feet, then I touched and ran back to the shore."

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is celebrating National EMS (Emergency Medical Services) Week, May 21-27, 2017, and EMS Children's Day, May 24, 2017, by recognizing the important contributions and dedication of paramedics, police, firefighters, and other first responders who provide day-to-day lifesaving services.

“The men and women being honored during National EMS Week are true heroes who have acted selflessly to help people in need during emergency situations,” said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D. J.D. “Thousands of emergency workers in Illinois put their lives on the line every day, while others are simply citizens who have acted with courage to help others avoid serious injury or even death. This week, the Illinois Department of Public Health honors these heroes and would like to say thank you for their courage, time, and dedication.”

This year's national theme, “EMS STRONG: ALWAYS IN SERVICE” underscores the immediate nature of the situations to which EMS personnel must respond and their strength to do so.

In Illinois, there are 63 EMS resource hospitals, 67 trauma centers, 7,894 individuals licensed as first-responder defibrillators, 36,842 emergency medical technicians (EMTs – 20,469 basic, 605 intermediate, 15,768 paramedic), 4,959 emergency communications registered nurses, 2,702 trauma nurse specialists, 409 pre-hospital registered nurses, and 2,892 emergency medical dispatchers providing 24-hour service to the people of Illinois. Approximately two-thirds of all EMS providers are volunteers.