

Mississauga man



Photo by Bill Roberts

Scarborough firefighter and Mississauga resident Bruce Correa (centre), flanked by Ontario's Lt.-Governor Hilary Weston and fellow firefighter Kevin Nicholls, when the firefighting duo received the Ontario Medal for Firefighters' Bravery, the province's highest bravery honor.

lauded for bravery

By Kim Goodman
Special

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Peel Braver.

As flames ripped through the burning house, Scarborough firefighter, and Mississauga resident, Bruce Correa could feel his skin burning through his protective gear.

His heart sank, realizing there was no chance of finding the child who'd been reported inside.

Correa, and fellow firefighter, Kevin Nicholls, of Barrie, are members of the Toronto Fire Services' West Command in York.

The duo were among four firefighters and eight police officers in the province to recently receive Ontario's highest honor for bravery at a ceremony at Queen's Park.

Last July 5, the firefighters, both 31, had frantically searched the second floor of a burning York Region house in a bid to find a 2-year-old inside.

The first time they ventured into the flaming building — something they wouldn't have attempted had it not been for the child — they, and firefighter Colin Ash, rescued an unconscious woman, 18.

Ash gave the woman first aid outside while Correa and Nicholls turned back inside to search for the child.

As flames intensified and visibility was reduced to nothing, Nicholls and Correa were forced to the ground floor.

There, they attempted to get more information

about the child's location. Then, once again they fought thick black smoke and intense heat to go back in for a third time.

"We were searching the room where the missing person was reported to be, but a water supply problem had developed outside the building causing the fire to engulf the first floor, cutting off any exit," said Correa.

"We didn't know it but the temperature had dramatically increased, to a point where I knew my skin was burning."

Their platoon chief radioed the firefighters to bail out a window. They jumped to safety from the second storey.

Both suffered second and third degree burns to their hands. Correa's arms and back were also severely burned.

Sparklers from a Canada Day celebration were later determined to be the cause of the fire.

The child's body was located behind a first floor couch, unfortunately, too late.

"It's a great feeling to have been able to save the first person, however, the pain of knowing we couldn't save the child will last forever," said Correa.

The annual awards, cross-shaped medals, recognize acts of exceptional bravery, taken without concern for personal safety.

"I feel proud to receive this," said Correa, who said he accepted for all of the 40 firefighters who'd fought that July fire.

"The people we are honoring are stellar examples of the bravery and self-sacrifice which are an integral part of our police and firefighting services," said Solicitor-General Robert Runciman who attended the ceremony with Ontario's Lt.-Governor Hilary Weston.

The awards focus public attention on the dangers faced regularly by firefighters and police.