

## 200 Club memorial honors fallen responders, lifesaving work

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ATLANTIC CITY — When Atlantic City police Sgt. Joseph Falcone saved a man threatening to jump off the ledge of Caesars Atlantic City’s parking garage in September, he was just doing his job.

That included risking his own life to save someone else’s, which was why he was honored Sunday at the 200 Club of Atlantic and Cape May Counties’ 33rd annual Memorial Service and Brunch at Tropicana Atlantic City.

“We’re here together to embrace each other and forge bonds of unity,” said Steve Callendar, president of the 200 Club and general manager at Tropicana.

About 450 Atlantic and Cape May County police officers, State Police troopers, firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, other first responders, local leaders, family and friends gathered to honor fallen responders and celebrate the work of people such as Falcone.

The organization presented Falcone with the Valor Award for his work as a police officer and for saving a 46-year-old man from jumping off the 10th floor of the parking garage Sept. 18, talking with him for nearly two hours before pulling him to safety.

Almost exactly one year prior, another Atlantic City officer was hard at work investigating a robbery at the Caesars parking garage in September 2016 when he was shot in the head and critically injured.

Retired Atlantic City police Officer Josh Vadell and his wife, Laura, were guest speakers at Sunday’s memorial event, and thanked community members and the 200 Club for supporting their family through Vadell’s head injury and eventual recovery.

“Being critically injured in the line of duty is every first responder’s worst nightmare,” Vadell said. “It’s hard to imagine that we leave our homes and our families every night ... to ensure that everyone in society is safe and comfortable in their own homes, but we do it proudly and honorably.”

The 200 Club raises money year-round to help families in the immediate aftermath of the death of a first responder. The local chapter presents families with a \$5,000 check to help with burial expenses and other financial hardships.

The organization also awards scholarships to active first responders, individuals and students for acts of heroism and dedication to law enforcement and other fields of emergency response.

The 200 Club’s donation to the Vadell family in the wake of the officer’s injury inspired Vadell to create the Josh Vadell Foundation, he said. It raises money to help families whose loved ones are injured in the line of duty.

“I went, my heart pounding, to see the officers in uniform at my door, something that many others in this room have unfortunately seen, too,” Laura Vadell said. “They told me Josh had been shot in the head and that he may not survive. He defied all odds. If it wasn’t for the community and the 200 Club, our lives would have been so much more stressful.”

The event paid tribute to the sacrifices of officers, firefighters, first responders and others who have died, including the late state Sen. Jim Whelan, FBI Special Agent Mark C. Johnston and Atlantic City firefighter Albert “Albie” Mallen Jr.

Mallen’s mother, Peggy Mallen-Walczak, was one of the founders of the 200 Club’s chapter in Atlantic and Cape May counties after her husband, State Police Detective Albert J. Mallen, was shot and killed in the line of duty in 1985.

At the time of his death, Mallen-Walczak said, she had less than \$100 to her name and struggled with the immediate costs of a funeral and raising their three children. The family received a donation from the Ocean and Monmouth Counties chapter of the 200 Club, and it inspired her to bring a chapter to Atlantic and Cape May counties.

“This (organization and event) creates something positive out of something negative,” she said. “My children had to wait until my husband’s death for him to be called a hero. We raise money to help families through it and to honor first responders for what they do now.”