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Monday, Feb. 11 2008

**Four Truck Drivers in Running for 25th Goodyear Highway Hero**

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AKRON, Ohio, Feb 11, 2008 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- As finalists for Goodyear's 25th annual North America Highway Hero Award, two professional truck drivers dove into chilly, murky waters to pull victims to safety in separate incidents; a Canadian driver made a lightning-quick decision and paid the ultimate price to save others; and a New Mexico driver rescued a pregnant woman from a brutal attack after she was run over by her boyfriend's truck.

(Logo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20050204/GTLOGO>)

Rick Tower, of Yreka, Calif.; Richard Filiczowski, of Bountiful, Utah; the late David Glenn Virgoe, of Innisfil, Ontario; and Ronnie D. Greene, of Regina, N.M., were named finalists today for trucking's most prestigious award for heroism.

"Each year, we are amazed by truck drivers from the United States and Canada, who put their lives on the line to help others. On this 25th anniversary of the Goodyear Highway Hero program, we truly are in awe of these brave men and women who travel our highways," said Steve McClellan, vice president for commercial tire systems for The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company.

"This year, we are honoring one driver posthumously, and our thoughts and prayers go out to his family as well as those of the victims who lost their lives on North American roads and highways. Time and again, truck drivers have emerged as bona fide heroes. When motorists needed help, they've stopped and put themselves in harm's way," McClellan said.

For 2007, the finalists are:

Rick Tower, of Yreka, Calif., a driver for Earl Bryant Trucking, which is based in Happy Camp, Calif. Tower, 40, was heading home on Highway 96 near Horse Creek, Calif., on Sept. 19, 2007, when a westbound car left the roadway and landed in the swift Klamath River.

Tower said he jumped from his rig and yelled to a man who stopped behind him to call for help. He ran down to the river and saw that the car was moving downstream, so he had to act fast. He heard an 82-year-old woman screaming for help, and he jumped into the river and swam to the car.

Fighting a strong current, he struggled to open the car door and pull the woman out as the water rushed into her car. She went under a few times, but Tower was able to carry her as he swam. He was tiring quickly, but fortunately, the man who had stopped earlier was on shore and ready to help with a rope.

Both men made the woman comfortable as they waited for help to arrive. Fortunately, the woman only suffered a broken ankle and slight hypothermia. Tower said he was thankful everyone survived.

Richard Filiczowski, of Bountiful, Utah, a driver for C.R. England Inc., based in West Valley City, Utah. Filiczowski, 38, formerly of Zion, Ill., saved the life of an 8-year-old girl after her father inadvertently drove his car into a pond along Interstate 90, near Plankinton, S.D., on April 26, 2007.

Richard's wife, Janet, was driving the rig when she saw the one-car accident. She yelled for her husband, who was resting in the sleeper compartment. Filiczowski quickly dressed, grabbed his shoes and ran a quarter-mile to the scene. As he entered the frigid 8-foot-deep pond, he could hear the girl's screams.

The girl's father was unresponsive, and she unbuckled her seat belt and crawled into the back seat. Two other men joined Filiczowski in the water, but the car doors were stuck. They somehow managed to open the rear hatch, and Filiczowski carried the girl to his wife.

The car quickly sunk in the dark water. The three men then worked to free the girl's father, who was held in by a seat belt. One of the men found a pocketknife on shore and used it to cut part of the seat belt; Filiczowski cut the remainder, but the man's legs remained lodged under the steering column.

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One rescuer freed one of the man's legs, and Filiczkowski dislodged the other. After 10 minutes, the truck driver finally pulled the father from the car and swam to shore, but it was too late. The Worthington, Minn., physician had died.

Richard and Janet Filiczkowski attended Dr. Jeff Bern's funeral at the request of his widow, and the two families remain in close contact.

David Glenn Virgoe, of Innisfil, Ontario, a driver for Wilburn Archer Trucking, based in Norwood, Ontario. Mr. Virgoe swerved his empty tanker truck to avoid three cars weaving in and out of traffic on Highway 400 near Bradford, Ontario, on June 18, 2007.

Mr. Virgoe, who was cut off by one the street-racing cars, had to drive his truck into the median guardrail, and then he made a split-second decision. Rather than allow his truck to slam into oncoming traffic across the median, he swerved to the right, crossed the highway and drove into a ditch along the right side of the road.

An air ambulance was called, but Mr. Virgoe, 48, died before he could be transported. In his quick selfless reaction, Mr. Virgoe was hailed as a hero by witnesses and Ontario police, who said his actions helped to save the lives of countless others.

Three men were arrested for dangerous driving resulting in death. Mr. Virgoe left wife Debbie, three children and five grandchildren.

Ronnie D. Greene, of Regina, N.M., a driver for A. Passmore & Sons, of Altus, Okla. Greene, 35, and fellow driver Brian Peterson were en route to Albuquerque on U.S. 84 near Espanola, N.M., on April 27, 2007, when they saw a pregnant woman attacked and run over by a pickup truck.

The woman's boyfriend, who had beat her earlier at their home, reportedly tried to pull her into his truck before hitting her with the vehicle's door and running over her legs and pelvis. Greene, a former firefighter and paramedic, ran to the injured woman and helped her stand.

The boyfriend wheeled around and tried to run over the woman and Greene, who pushed her between his truck and trailer, shielding her with his body. The enraged man tried three more times to run over Greene and the woman.

On the final attempt, the pickup truck struck a Medanales, N.M., engineer from Los Alamos National Laboratory, who also had left his vehicle to help the woman. When the pickup left the area, Greene placed the woman in his truck cab with Peterson, and then he went to help the fellow Good Samaritan, Michael Rutkowski, who died with the truck driver at his side.

Journalists from the trucking industry are now voting on the four finalists, who will be featured March 27 at the Mid-America Trucking Show in Louisville, Ky. One driver will be named the 2007 Goodyear North America Highway Hero at the Truck Writers of North America annual banquet and receive a \$10,000 U.S. Savings Bond, a plaque and a specially designed ring; the other finalists will receive a \$5,000 U.S. Savings Bond and plaque.

Founded by Goodyear in 1983, the Highway Hero program recognizes professional truck drivers and the often unnoticed, life-saving rescues and roadside assistance they provide as their jobs take them across North America.

For more on the program, go to  
<http://www.goodyear.com/truck/news/hero.html>.  
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