

## Truck News, 3/30/2008

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MATS Report: Goodyear's Highway Hero named during emotional ceremony

By James Menzies

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -- There were very few dry eyes in the building when Goodyear named its annual Highway Hero at the Mid-America Trucking Show Thursday night.

Those present at the Truck Writers of North America (TWNA) awards dinner agreed each of the finalists, including Ontario's David Virgoe, who lost his life reportedly steering into the ditch to avoid hitting oncoming motorists when street racers created an accident, were heroes. However, it was Richard Filiczowski, a driver with C.R. England out of Zion, Ill. at the time, that was ultimately named the winner – an honour he said really belonged to nine-year-old Abby Bern, the girl whose life he saved.

When Filiczowski was named the recipient of Goodyear's 25th Highway Hero Award, he was surprised to learn that Abby and her mother Marty Bern were present to congratulate him. After a tearful embrace, Filiczowski approached the podium and declared that Abby was so strong during the ordeal, that she was the true hero.

The dramatic rescue unfolded on Apr. 26, 2007, when Filiczowski (now out of Bountiful, Utah) was awoken from the sleeper cab by his wife, who was behind the wheel and had just witnessed a car veer across several lanes of traffic, landing in a pond. Filiczowski quickly dove into the water in an attempt to save the trapped motorists.

"I dove right in because I saw Abby pounding on the car's back window. My only instinct was to get her out of the car as soon as possible," he recounted. "In situations like that, seconds count."

Abby's father was also trapped in the car, his legs pinned beneath the dashboard. The 42-year-old father of three was strapped into the vehicle by his seat belt. Once Abby was removed from the vehicle and taken to safety, Filiczowski and other passersby attempted vigorously to free her father. Tragically, they were unable to do so in time, and he succumbed to his injuries.


"I wish I was faster for him," Filiczowski said. "My only regret, I just wish I was faster."

Donn Kramer, director of marketing for Goodyear Commercial Tire Systems, said "Richard's name is on the award, but his wife and tandem truck driver Janet is equally deserving. Together, their heroics are truly inspiring."

Other finalists for the award included: Virgoe, who was honoured post-humously for saving several lives on Hwy. 400 north of Toronto last summer. His employer Wilburn Archer and widow Debbie, made the trek from Ontario to represent him at the ceremony. Rick Tower of Yreka, Cal., who rescued an 82-year-old woman from her sinking car after it left the road and plunged into the Klamath River. And Ronnie Green of Regina, N.M., who saved a pregnant woman from a brutal attack in which she was run over by her boyfriend's truck.

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