

Doing the right thing

Live-saving effort rewarded

Former fire chief Ordyna honored for his rescue of injured women in Lake Buel

By Jenn Smith
Berkshire Eagle Staff

MONTEREY — When Michael “Mike” Ordyna saw Katherine Stevens slip on a boat dock, hit her head and fall into Lake Buel on July 9, his response was to do what he was trained to do — help.

Ordyna, 60, worked as a Great Barrington firefighter for 27 years and served as the fire chief.

He was operating a weed harvester on the lake for his current employer, Tryon Construction, when the 64-year-old woman slipped.

Though he’s had two knee replacement surgeries in the past year, Ordyna jumped into the water, rescued Stevens and safely swam them both to safety. Ordyna then rushed to call 911, and tended to the summer resident until emergency medical technicians and police arrived to the scene to take over care.

Ordyna, who is new this year to tending to the lake, then swam back to the harvester and resumed his work.

On Monday morning, the Monterey Select Board and about two dozen other well-wishers gathered to show their gratitude for Ordyna and his act of quick response and bravery.

“He’s a good guy,” said Ordyna’s wife, Shelley, who watched as her husband was awarded a medal, mounted on an engraved wooden plaque bearing the town seal. He was also given an honorable written citation from the town.

“Everyone wonders how they would act in an

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emergency situation. In Michael’s case, he relied on his training,” said Select Board chairwoman, Muriel Lazzarini. “In awarding him this medal, we also honor all first responders for doing what they do.”

Ordyna said he was honored and humbled by the awards, which, along with Monday’s ceremony, was coordinated by Monterey Police Sgt. Michael Johnson.

Ordyna said he credits Johnson and all emergency responders “for what they do 24-hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.”

“It’s interesting because it was a lousy day on the lake, and hardly anyone was around,” Ordyna said. “I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.”

Johnson said it was important to honor Ordyna because “he saved a human life.”

“One of the best things you can do for a person is help, or in this case, save a person,” Johnson said.

Select Board member Wayne Burkhart, who co-presented the awards with Lazzarini and fellow member Scott Jenssen, called what happened July 9 “a rare incident.” But Burkhart said people in town are constantly looking out for one another, immediately reporting to the authorities if they see something that looks dangerous or out of the ordinary.

Johnson said he appreciates having all the help he can get. He said the police department consists of two full-time officials and four part-time officers, and they all work closely with the town’s fire department and area emergency responders.

“When a call comes in, we all come running to respond,” Johnson said.

“I think an event like this is a test of your heart, it’s a test of your soul, it’s a test of what’s right and wrong, good and bad. And this event had a very happy ending,” Ordyna said during his remarks on Monday. “And I want to thank all of you, from the deepest place in my heart, for this prestigious recognition, and not only for me, but for my entire family. Thank you very, very much.”

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Michael ‘Mike’ Ordyna said he was honored and humbled to be recognized on Monday.

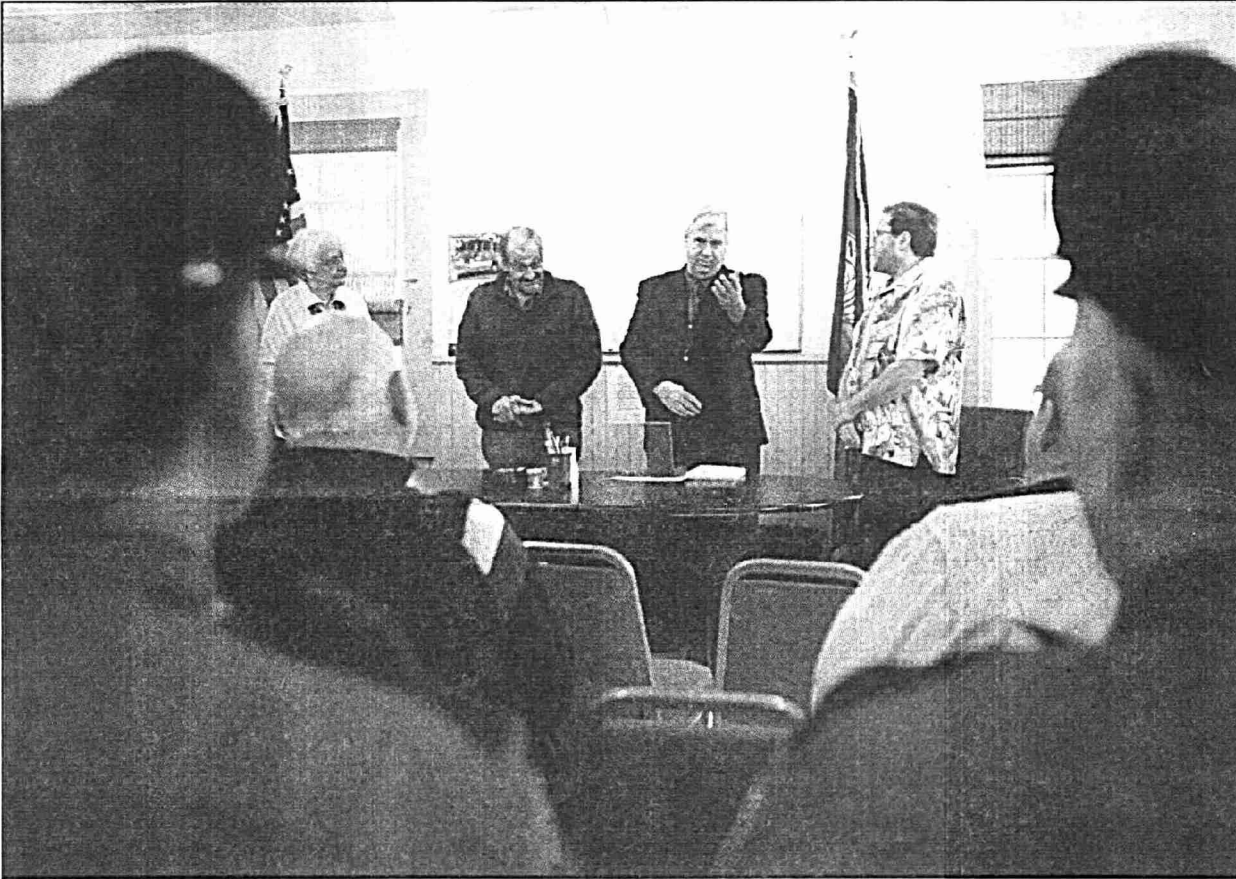




Ordyna



Ordyna received this medal and a written citation for the town of Monterey on Monday.



Stephanie Zollshan / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Former Great Barrington Fire Chief Michael Ordyna, shown gesturing to members of the Monterey Police Department and others in the audience, was recognized by the town for his quick action in saving Katherine Stevens in July.