

# Emergency run changes VFW award-winner's outlook

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During what otherwise appeared to be a usual EMS run, Kathy Baker witnessed something that forever changed her outlook.

The Farmington Hills firefighter and emergency medical technician went to an auto accident on I-275, which turned out to be as gruesome as it was bizarre. A large deer crashed through the car windshield of a couple driving on the freeway. Once inside, the animal continued to kick and thrash, which literally removed the woman's face. She remained breathing despite her horrific injuries.

"It seems like when you get into a stressful situation, you either stay in control and do something

or lose control," said Baker, who was honored recently as the VFW's Farmington Hills Firefighter of the Year. "... You can't think about what you're looking at."

Baker and the EMT crew rushed the woman to the hospital. After the accident, Baker continues to wrestle with an image of the injured woman and her distraught husband that night in October.

She couldn't fathom how the victim could survive with such disfigurement. She thought about the husband, who only moments before had been driving with his wife at his side only to have their lives forever altered because of a wayward deer.

When word came she died, Baker said she felt relieved in a sense.

"I felt so sad for her and her husband," she said. "He was so helpless to see her like that and not be able to do anything until we arrived."

The accident made Baker even more grateful for what she has: A husband and three children, her health and a career that provides self-discovery as well as rewards and challenge.

Baker has been with the Farmington Hills department since 1994. After having her third child, she wanted a career.

With a psychology degree from Madonna College, Baker was unsure about a career path. "I've been a physical person all my life; I didn't want to sit behind a desk," Baker said.

After reading a notice about the need for volunteer firefighters, Baker attended an informational meeting.

She went from being an on-call volunteer to full-time firefighter. She's back to part time, working out of Station No. 3 while helping with her husband Ron's computer consulting business.

In her four-year career, Baker earned a paramedic license. She did it in six months compared to the usual 12 months.

Baker also gained six Unit Citations, a Certificate of Appreciation and several letters from residents thanking her.

At the VFW award dinner Feb. 13, Interim Fire Chief Peter Baldwin related how a neighbor approached him about Baker helping his wife after a fall.

"There is the difference between treating the patient and treating the person," Baldwin said.

Baker also handles the department's "Fire Fit 100" program, which encourages fitness by having people exercise 100 days. She also oversees physical fitness training for new hires.



Accepting: Farmington Hills firefighter Kathy Baker thanks the VFW for choosing her as the 1998 Firefighter of the Year, as interim Fire Chief Peter Baldwin listens.

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