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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT 146th ANNUAL FDNY
MEDAL DAY CEREMONY**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Chief Gala. Thank you very much for leading us today. It is an honor to be at the 146th FDNY Medal Day. And this year – so important to all of us – the 150th anniversary of this extraordinary department – I want to talk for a moment about what this history means. But let me first thank and acknowledge Commissioner Dan Nigro, who’s doing an outstanding job; First Deputy Commissioner Robert Turner; Chief of Department James Leonard; let’s thank all of them for their leadership.

[Applause]

And I want to thank all of the labor leaders who represent the men and women of this department. Steve Cassidy, president of the UFA; Jake Lemonda, president of the UFOA; John Sullivan, president of EMS Superior Officers Association – and he is being honored here today – congratulations, John; Vincent Variale, president of the Uniformed EMS Officers Union; Izzy Miranda, president of the Uniformed EMTs, Paramedics and Fire Inspectors. Let’s thank them all for representing the men and women of this department.

[Applause]

It’s the 150th anniversary, which is extraordinary onto itself of a department that means so much to this city. It doesn’t just mean so much in terms of the work that these individuals do every day, and have done – those before them – for 150 years, protecting the people of this city, keeping this city whole. It’s also what the FDNY means to the heart and soul of New York City. It’s part of what makes us proud as New Yorkers – is this extraordinary department. It is world famous for a reason. It epitomizes the strength, the resiliency, the bravery, the professionalism, the sense of innovation – all of which we see is part of what is great about New York City, what we are proud of as New Yorkers – the very characteristics that make us proud to say this is our home.

But that history actually goes back even farther. 150 years of the modern department, but, you know what, there were firefighters in a different form, going back right here, very near to where we stand today. Even as far back as the 1640s, there were the bucket brigades. Even back to the time when this was a small Dutch colony, there were individuals who put their lives on the line to save others. In those days it was a bucket of water and a rattle to warn people that something was wrong. It’s obviously come a very, very long way in terms of the training, and the innovation, and the technology. But the spirit is the same, the bravery is the same, the professionalism is the same – something we’ve experienced for hundreds of years. So everyone being honored today is part of an unbroken tradition. And they’re in fact building upon that tradition, showing that this department can go even farther.

Today, 71 members of the FDNY will receive individual group medals. They all have one profoundly important thing in common, which is courage – courage in risking their lives to save others. Something I always say – not every human being is built this way. It takes special people to exhibit this kind of courage. And it should be humbling for all of us to be in their presence. They have run toward harm in many cases in their careers many, many times. And they have risked their lives many times. And they have succeeded in saving other lives may

times. There are many, many stories of heroism today. When you add them up, it is easy to understand why these men and women are called New York's Bravest. Let me give you one example.

Captain William Grant – here with us today from Engine Company 168 – the recipient of the James Gordon Bennett Medal, the highest award for a firefighter. Last July, he was at home – in his own home – and he was awoken by an explosion next door. He hears screams. He runs out to find the next door engulfed in flames – smoke pouring out – his 60-year-old neighbor in that house. This is something that happened with no warning. From a dead sleep, suddenly he's in action ready to save a life. He has no safety gear. He has no equipment. He has no backup. He just goes to save a life. The door of the neighbors house is locked, so he kicks it in and enters into an inferno. Realizing he couldn't go that way to reach his neighbor – the flames were too intense, the smoke was too great – he thinks quickly. He goes to another neighbor's yard. He grabs a ladder. He puts the ladder up against the house with the help of his son who is an NYPD officer. They go to where the neighbor is trapped. But the neighbor at this point is incapacitated – not responding – the smoke has overwhelmed. So, in the midst of this extraordinarily difficult circumstance, the captain crawls, searching hand-by-hand, trying to find the neighbor – finds her, drags her to the window, starts carrying her down the ladder. And this drama keeps going because the ladders breaks. But because of his heroism, both he and his neighbor survived. They were taken to the hospital and, thank God, treated and recovered. No equipment – no backup, except for, thank God, his son. But something so extraordinary – the training, the professionalism, the dedication that is the core of the FDNY. That is the kind of story that makes all New Yorkers proud. And there is a good woman alive today because of the heroism of Captain Grant. Let's give him a round of applause.

[Applause]

Let me tell you also – so many good people here, but I think it's important to give you a few examples that epitomize this extraordinary group. Let me tell you about two EMTs, Shaun Alexander and Khadijah Hall of the EMS Station 58 –

[Cheers]

And they have their cheering section here – receiving the Christopher J. Prescott Medal, the highest EMS award. They are off duty one day in Brooklyn. They're sitting in EMT Hall's car. And then again, out of nowhere – no warning – they hear gunshots, and they see a man firing at two NYPD officers. There's a live situation. No one knows how many people are involved – how many shooters – all they know is an NYPD officer has been hit and is down. The two EMTs don't think of anything but helping that officer. They rush to help the wounded officer even with the danger around them. The officer had been shot in both legs, and because the EMTs were there so quickly and provided immediate help, it helped to save this brave officer's life. And let's take a moment to thank that officer, James Li, who is here with us today. We thank him for his bravery.

[Applause]

So, EMTs Alexander and Hall – they didn't know that day sitting in the car they would be in the middle of a firing range. They didn't know what was about to happen. They only knew their obligation was to save the life of their fellow New Yorker, and they did it selflessly, and they did it well. Let's thank EMTs Alexander and Hall for their bravery.

[Applause]

Let's talk about one example of the kind of units that make this department so great. Rescue 1 – a special unit trained for the most difficult rescues. Well, Rescue 1 lives up to the name. They make those rescues happen. They are the best that is. And by the way, in New York City, they have every opportunity to find out just how complicated that mission can be. Think about a few months back – two men dangling 68 stories outside the Freedom Tower – 68 stories above the ground, dangling from a rig. If it wasn't for Rescue 1, those men would never have been saved, but they were through the creativity, and the innovation, and professionalism of Rescue 1.

Think about the East Harlem Gas Explosion. Again – no warning. Have you seen the video tape of that day? Out of nowhere, suddenly a building explodes. There's heavy smoke. There's debris. Rescue 1 arrives and the wreckage was described as a "jagged cliff face, two to three stories high, filled snapped floor joists, twisted and mangled fire escapes, pipe and other debris." Imagine coming upon a situation – there's no rhyme or reason. There's only danger. Rescue 1 found and rescued an elderly woman buried deep in that rubble, and continued searching, even though it was an unstable and dangerous situation. Today, they receive medals for their heroic efforts. Let's thank everyone who's part of Rescue 1.

[Applause]

I conclude by saying we honor these individuals and these units, but at the same time we honor the entire department. Because every member of this department should be proud of what they do, should know how much we are proud of them, and how much the people of this city honor them and believe in them – and it is because of what they've shown us time and time again.

Winston Churchill once said, "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others." Nowhere is that more true than at the FDNY. And we say thank you and God bless you.

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