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HOMETOWN HEROES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER HUSTEAD
AND CECILIO RICARDO JR.

When we asked civic and governmental leaders in the community for their nominations for

Hometown Heroes, we asked that they recommend folks who had performed acts of courage, selflessness or philanthropy in the county.

We added that these acts should not have been publicized widely in the community, as we wanted to feature the unsung heroes who live and work in Loudoun County.

All of the nominations we

received were indeed praiseworthy, and from those we selected five whose efforts were of particular note. It turns out that Loudoun is a small world, for when we gathered our heroes for a photo shoot (which Lt. Nick Pierson unfortunately was not able to attend), two of them reconnected immediately after years.

Dr. Daphne Thomas recognized Jane Ramirez as her daughter's teacher's aide before Ramirez had become a special education teacher, and they had a happy reunion at our shoot at Lansdowne Resort.

The photo shoot also brought together LINK volunteer Jim Butts and his daughter, Leesburg photographer Jennifer Hustead, whom we contracted to photograph the heroes that evening.

As part of our mission to inspire, educate and entertain our readers, *Loudoun Magazine* celebrates these Hometown Heroes. All of the nominations we received also will be published online at our website, www.LoudounMagazineOnline.com. Have a comment? Please post it on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/LoudounMagazine.





HOMETOWN HEROES



It takes a special kind of person to choose firefighting as a career, and it takes an even more unique breed of firefighter to specialize in hazardous materials. "A lot of people are intimidated by it because of the unknowns," says Lt. Nick Pierson of Fire Station 19 at the Dulles South Public Safety Center, home to the county's primary hazardous materials response unit. "There's a lot of chemical reactions where stuff it may be OK by itself but once it reacts to something else, it could produce a toxic byproduct."

That's exactly what happened Dec. 27, 2011, when Pierson and his team responded to a person who had ingested aluminum phosphide. Pierson recognized a potentially fatal situation to first responders and staff because toxic gases are produced when a person ingests aluminum phosphide. After emergency room staff started showing symptoms of phosphine exposure, officials decided to

move the patient to an outdoor treatment area. "Due to the quick work of fire and rescue personnel, emergency room personnel were able to properly and safely treat the patient," Loudoun County Deputy Fire Chief Randall L. Shank wrote in a nomination form for the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce's 2012 Valor Awards.

The nomination includes the hazmat teams, other fire and rescue personnel, and Inova Lansdowne staff, but Shank singled out Pierson. "If no one had picked up on that, it could seriously have injured or killed" someone, he says.

An active fire volunteer since the age of 15, Pierson can't imagine doing anything else. "I say it every day, it's the best job in the world."

Lt. Nick Pierson, HAZMAT 619 • Dulles South Public Safety Center



In explaining why she makes the time to lead medical missions around the world while practicing medicine in Inova Loudoun Hospital's Lansdowne campus and raising two daughters in Potomac Falls, Dr. Daphne Thomas hearkens back to a saying that her parents have lived by: To whom much is given, much is required.

"I felt that I really have been privileged and I need to (give something) back." She began leading teams on medical missions around the country, and then people started offering her donations of medications that were expired or about to expire.

"So that's what I started doing, taking supplies from the U.S. and additional monies for medications, and so we started in India."

Word about her missions spread among her international network of friends, and one country led to another. To date, she has led medical trips to India, Cambodia, Tanzania, Nicaragua and Haiti. This year,

she will be traveling to Haiti in May and Laos in October. "You see these people appreciating medical care in these countries because they have nothing. Back here, it's a right, they expect it.

It's not appreciated. For me, it really puts in perspective what I became a doctor for."

"She organizes at least one mission trip a year and is one of the most giving and selfless people I have ever met," says Dr. Edward Puccio, medical director at Inova Loudoun's Department of Emergency Medicine. "Her desire to help others knows no boundaries."



PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. DAPHNE THOMAS

DR. DAPHNE THOMAS EXAMINES A CHILD AT A TANZANIA CLINIC DURING A MEDICAL MISSION IN OCTOBER 2010.

Dr. Daphne Thomas, Emergency Room Physician • *INOVA Loudoun Hospital*