



FIRE DEPARTMENT • CITY OF NEW YORK
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CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT PETER J. GANCI JR. MEDAL

This year for our annual Medal Day celebration, we are making a change that I believe is long overdue. The James Gordon Bennett Medal, the highest annual honor for bravery to a Firefighter or Fire Officer – which was established in 1869 and was for many years the sole award for valor in the FDNY – will be permanently renamed the Chief of Department Peter J. Ganci Jr. Medal in honor of Chief Peter J. Ganci Jr. who died on September 11, 2001, the highest ranking uniformed member of the Department to be killed in the line of duty in the Department's history.

I want to make sure the reasoning for this significant change is clear. This change is not meant to erase history, and it does not diminish the actions, memory, or valor of the 152 members of our Department who have been awarded this medal since its inception. In fact, it elevates them even more because on our darkest day, it was Chief Ganci who was leading our troops and gave his life overseeing the greatest rescue operation in our Department's history. This important change is meant to help us create a better present and future for our FDNY, one we can all be proud of.

The James Gordon Bennett Medal was endowed by its namesake after Firefighters saved his country residence in 1869. This generous symbol of gratitude began a tradition that we have continued for 150 years. However, James Gordon Bennett also held deeply racist beliefs. Using his publishing empire, he repeatedly expressed abhorrent and hateful views in full support of slavery. These views have no place in any society, and I believe we must cease including this individual's name, and therefore his legacy, in our annual celebration. This tremendous honor for our Firefighters will no longer be tied to someone who never served this Department, never risked his own life to save life and property, and who advocated for despicable actions against others.

The Chief of Department Peter J. Ganci Jr. Medal ensures that this year, and every year moving forward, our highest annual honor for bravery to a Firefighter or Fire Officer is named for an individual who swore an oath to serve others and who crawled down a hallway like all our Firefighters have done to search for New Yorkers trapped by fire. It honors a legendary Chief who climbed the ranks of our job over 33 years; a leader who is still revered by all of us so many years after his death. Several of our medals are named for FDNY members who made the Supreme Sacrifice, and an award of this level should certainly follow that solemn tradition.

Medal Day is the day when we pause to celebrate the bravest of the brave and the best of the best. For 150 years, it has been the moment to acknowledge the most extraordinary life-saving actions of our members; the times when they went above and beyond at great personal risk to save others. Bravery, preparedness, sacrifice, honor; all the reasons our great Department is rightfully revered are at the forefront of Medal Day.

Pete was my friend. He was a good man. He was a leader who inspired others. He was a Firefighter who dedicated his life to our noble profession. He performed many meritorious acts of his own, and he was there on so many medal days to celebrate the courageous efforts of his Firefighters. His legacy of service should be forever connected to this day when we celebrate bravery in its truest form.

Note: The date for Medal Day 2020 has not been finalized and will be announced later this year.

By Order of: **Daniel A. Nigro**, *Fire Commissioner*
John Sudnik, *Chief of Department*