



## Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection

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## FIRE ACADEMY GRADUATION INCLUDES MILITARY VETERANS WHO FOUND NEW CAREERS IN CT AS FIRST RESPONDERS

Among the 43 recruits graduating from the Connecticut Fire Academy this Friday are six young men who are part of Hero to Hero, an innovative program that helps members of the military transition into first responder careers.

"As my time in the Navy was coming to a close I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had no family in the fire service or EMS or anything like that. I was kind of lost," said Casey Berryman. "But then I found Hero to Hero."

Started in Connecticut, [Hero to Hero](#) selects participants, gets them into the academy and into a fire service job. Since its inception, the program has helped approximately 100 veterans make a smooth transition into first responder careers.

"We aim to cut through the red tape, get them into the academy and on to a job as quickly and as smoothly as possible," said Chris Shea, a North Haven firefighter and former Navy SEAL, who founded Hero to Hero with his wife Anita. "One of the biggest things we do is mentor them."

The six future firefighters who graduate this Friday say Hero to Hero has been an invaluable opportunity, opening the door to first responder careers during what can be a rough transition. The program also makes sure tuition, insurance, and salaries for the recruits are covered.

"A lot of veterans do struggle. For people who don't have Hero to Hero it's pretty difficult. You go through so many interviews with so many departments. This helps you bypass a lot of stuff," said Liam Chrzanowski, a Marine who will go to work in Westport after graduation.

Across the nation, fire and police departments are struggling to fill vacancies. Every year 200,000 service members from all branches of the U.S. military leave active duty.

"Hero to Hero is part of the solution to a crisis we are facing in recruiting a new generation of first responders. We also know that veterans have the background and training that is invaluable," said DESPP Commissioner Ronnell A. Higgins.

The 43 members of the Recruits of Class 76 will go to work in 18 municipal fire departments, including Danbury, East Hartford, Greenwich, Mansfield, Meriden, Middletown, Milford, New London, Shelton, Southington, Stratford, Westport, Plainville, Ridgefield, Vernon, Willimantic, West Haven, and Suffield.

Media coverage of the graduation is encouraged. For assistance, contact Rick Green, 860-539-0159, [richard.green@ct.gov](mailto:richard.green@ct.gov).

**WHO:** Commissioner Ronnell A. Higgins, Hero to Hero graduates.

**WHAT:** Class 76 graduation, Connecticut Fire Academy

**WHERE:** The First Cathedral, 1151 Blue Hills Avenue, Bloomfield, CT

**WHEN:** Friday, Dec. 5, 1:30 p.m.