

KATY'S HOMETOWN HERO

Katy resident Brent Workman was in the right place at the right time to save a life

Written by Sara K. Parker | Photography by Sara Isola

When Brent Workman left his house to walk his dogs on the evening of March 3, 2016, he didn't plan to be gone long. Minutes after starting down the street with his girlfriend's father and brother, Workman smelled smoke. Curiosity quickly turned to alarm when the three men heard a woman screaming for help.

A Cry for Help

At first, the men weren't sure where the voice was coming from. Then, yards away, the front window of a two-story home blew out, smoke billowing into the yard. Without hesitation, Workman raced up to the front door and yanked it open. Inside the doorway, 68-year-old Donna Cole lay on the ground unable to get out of the house. In her haste to escape the fire, she'd fallen and couldn't get to her walker.

Seconds to Save a Life

"I didn't have time to think," Workman recalls. "I grabbed her up off the floor and took her to the driveway." Meanwhile, his girlfriend's father and brother called 9-1-1 and alerted other neighbors of the fire, urging them to evacuate their homes.

The fire was so hot Workman had to move Cole across the street. Not 45 seconds later, according to Workman, the whole house went up in flames. "It was the hottest fire I've ever been a part of as a firefighter," says Lieutenant Simon VanDyk, public information officer for the Harris County ESD 48 Fire Department. The cause of the fire was determined to have come from a cigarette falling onto a sofa, and Cole's oxygen tank contributed to its heat and rapid spread.

A Local Hero Rewarded

Workman received two awards for his heroic actions: a Civilian Citizenship award from the Harris County Fire

Brent Workman received a Civilian Citizenship Award from Lieutenant Simon VanDyk with Harris County ESD 48 Fire Department, and a Congressional Letter of Recognition from Congressman McCaul



Workman in front of his neighbor's destroyed home



Department and a Congressional Letter of Recognition from Congressman Michael McCaul.

"I was pretty much speechless about the whole thing," Workman says of receiving the awards. "I just did what I had to do and got out of the way of the fire. I didn't even realize how bad it was until it was over."

"We were so honored to recognize [Workman]," VanDyk says. "Had he been there 30 seconds later, Cole may not have made it."

After the Fire

Cole was released from the hospital after sustaining smoke inhalation and a minor burn to her foot. Her daughter Heather Cole, who lived in the home with her two children, had gone to the store less than 30 minutes before the fire started. The home was a total loss, including everything in it. Recuperating from the traumatic fire has been difficult for the family, but they expressed gratefulness to the community of Katy for rallying around them and supporting them through the difficult weeks that followed. KM

SARA K. PARKER is a freelance writer who lives in the area with her husband and four kids.



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