



**SOUTH ORANGE VILLAGE  
POLICE DEPARTMENT  
STEPHEN DOLINAC, ACTING CHIEF OF POLICE**

201 South Orange Avenue  
South Orange  
New Jersey 07079  
[www.southorange.org](http://www.southorange.org)  
P 973.763.3000

**To: All Personnel**

**From: Acting Chief Stephen Dolinac**

**Re: Commendation – SOPD Response to Tropical Storm Ida, September 1st & 2nd, 2021**

**Issued to:**

**9/1/2021**

Lieutenant Ernesto Morillo  
Sergeant Mark Wilkins  
Sergeant Richard Lombardi  
Officer Zavian Bryant  
Officer Darrell Terry  
Officer Kirk Kirlaw  
Officer Jason Rambally  
Detective Niko Nasisi  
Officer Samantha O'Connor  
Officer Imani Crawley

**9/2/2021**

Lieutenant Joseph Levanda  
Lieutenant Brian McGuire  
Lieutenant Eric Moore  
Lieutenant Adrian Acevedo  
Sergeant John Niedzinski  
Officer Michael Pannullo  
Officer James Nugent  
Det. Frank Auriemma  
Officer Jose Albino  
Det. Miguel Hunt  
Officer Dylan O'Connor

On the evening of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, Tropical Storm Ida inundated New Jersey and South Orange with a tremendous amount of rain in a short period of time, causing significant flash flooding, property damage, and unfortunate loss of life.

While there were tragedies around the State, I am relieved, gratified, and exceedingly proud of the work done by the people of the South Orange Police Department to help bring this community through the storm with no loss of life in profoundly dangerous conditions. Additionally, by our fellow officers going above and beyond the call of duty and putting their own lives on the line, we did not have any reportable injuries to civilians or the responding officers during the storm.

Sgt. Wilkins, Lombardi, Officers Terry, Kirlaw, Rambally, S. O'Connor, Crawley, and Det. Nasisi displayed great courage in the face immediate and observable danger by entering into swift moving and rising flood waters on foot to rescue stranded motorists whose vehicles were submerged, creating the likelihood of drowning.

In one instance, P/O Rambally quite literally carried a person to safety on his back in water that was rising past his chest.



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P/O Crawley saved a senior citizen that drove into water that almost completely covered her vehicle.

Lt. Morillo, Sgt. Lombardi, and P/O Bryant played a critical role in answering a staggering number of 9-1-1 calls and coordinating our police Communications during the emergency.

In addition, after the storm departed, much of the follow up work could begin. Not only did our officers work to document storm damage, coordinate with work with and assistance to other Town departments, they also rose to the occasion to respond to an unprecedented number of disabled vehicles potentially causing hazardous situations. This was handled professionally, under conditions in which our resources were highly stressed from overwhelming demand for police services. Lts. Moore, McGuire, Levanda, and Acevedo, Sgt. Niedzinski, Officers Pannullo, Nugent, Albino, D. O'Connor, Det. Auriemma and Hunt all greatly assisted the community and SOPD by ensuring this important work was performed professionally and promptly as possible under the circumstances.

Tropical Storm Ida was one of the most dangerous and damaging public safety emergencies this community has ever experienced. South Orange's public property has sustained damages valued in millions of dollars and the damage to private property has yet to be fully calculated.

As we recover from this event, we will evaluate the lessons that we learned and work diligently to advance and improve our ability to provide police services during extreme weather. Training, equipment, and operational plans are our goals and we will all work together to share the knowledge and experience gained as we go forward to be prepared for the next emergency.

I have no doubt in the months and years to come we will continue to be an excellent police agency composed of people that have proven their willingness to put the community first and potentially make the ultimate sacrifice.

On behalf of the South Orange Police Department, thank you all for your service.

Respectfully and with deep gratitude,

Acting Chief Stephen Dolinac