



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 7, 2024

2024 National EMS Awards of Excellence Recipients Announced

Clinton, Miss. — NAEMT and EMS World are pleased to announce the recipients of the 2024 *National EMS Awards of Excellence*. The awards will be presented during NAEMT's General Membership Meeting on Tuesday, September 10, and at the Opening Ceremony of [EMS World Expo](#) on Wednesday, September 11 in Las Vegas, Nevada. We congratulate the following recipients and recognize their outstanding contributions to the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) profession and the patients they serve:

Zachary T. Alvey, NREMT, Woodland Park, Colorado

2024 NAEMT EMT of the Year Award, sponsored by Demers-Braun-Crestline-Medix

Lt. Houston Holcombe, Paramedic, North Lauderdale, Florida

2024 NAEMT Paramedic of the Year Award, sponsored by Velico

Jennifer N. Rhoads, PhD, CP-C, Mountain Home, Idaho

2024 NAEMT-NAMIHP Community Paramedic of the Year Award, sponsored by the National Association of Mobile Integrated Healthcare Providers

Damien G. Coy, BA, NRP, NCEE, Williamsburg, Virginia

2024 NAEMT EMS Educator of the Year Award, sponsored by Jones & Bartlett Learning Public Safety Group

Maia Dorsett, MD, PhD, Rochester, New York

2024 NAEMT EMS Medical Director of the Year Award, sponsored by Bound Tree

Jonathan C.R. Lu, DBH, MPH, MCHES®, NRP, Dayton, Ohio

2024 NAEMT Military Medic of the Year Award, sponsored by North American Rescue

Debbie Kuhn, Firth, Nebraska

2024 NAEMT-American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Pediatric EMS Award, sponsored by Handtevy

Baytown Fire Department EMS, Baytown, Texas

2024 Dick Ferneau Career EMS Service of the Year, Sponsored by Ferno

Ellington Volunteer Ambulance Service, Ellington, Connecticut

2024 Volunteer EMS Service of the Year Award, sponsored by Digitech

Butler County EMS, El Dorado, Kansas

2024 NAEMT-ACEP EMS Safety in EMS Award, sponsored by Technimount EMS

Amy Strobach, EMR, Clear Lake, Wisconsin

2024 EMS Caring Award, sponsored by Dynarex

Brett Zingarelli, NRP, CCISM, Wilmington, Delaware

2024 Wellness and Resilience Award, sponsored by FirstNet®, Built with AT&T

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Zachary Alvey

Alvey embodies the essence of dedication and service in the field of EMS with a focus on patient care. “Zach is the truest definition of a dedicated and driven EMS practitioner,” said his supervisor. With over a decade of unwavering service and now at Ute Pass Regional Health Services District, Alvey serves as a full-time 911 EMT with a daily commitment to the community to provide accessible, high-quality medical care for all. Beyond his clinical role, he is deeply involved in shaping the future of EMS through his leadership as President of The Friends of Emergency Medical Services Board, a political action committee, and the Ute Pass Regional EMS Partnership. He is also the only EMT on the Colorado State Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board. Alvey is a member of the National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP) Colorado Chapter, where he works toward the advancement of EMS practices and policies. He also serves NAEMT as an advocacy assistant to support association advocacy goals at the national level. His passion for EMS legislation and advocacy contributed to his appointment to the Colorado Emergency Medical Practice Advisory Council (EMPAC) in 2022, representing Basic Life Support (BLS) practitioners and advocating for his fellow EMTs. He was the EMS Association of Colorado’s 2023 BLS EMS Professional of the Year. Alvey imparts knowledge and inspires future generations of EMS practitioners by serving as an EMT instructor at the University of Colorado Health and Pikes Peak State College. His journey in EMS is marked not only by professional accomplishments but also by a profound commitment to mentorship and community service. His tireless advocacy and leadership efforts are helping to shape the landscape of emergency medical care and ensure a stable and fruitful career path for future EMS professionals.

Lieutenant Houston Holcombe

Holcombe has been a dedicated member of the fire service since 2016 and currently serves in a pivotal role as Rescue Lieutenant at North Lauderdale Fire Rescue in Florida. His compassion for the patients and families is unmatched and his ability to connect with the patients and demonstrate the empathy needed to be a good paramedic is impressive to watch, according to his supervisor. Houston assures the families are not neglected during the process. As the officer in charge of the department’s Advanced Life Support (ALS) rescue unit, Lt. Holcombe is entrusted with providing crucial emergency care to the citizens of North Lauderdale and its surrounding areas. His role includes conducting comprehensive daily EMS training sessions with his crew to ensure their preparedness and proficiency. Lt. Holcombe oversees the vehicle extrication training program at his department, reinforcing his commitment to operational excellence and innovation in rescue techniques. Further underscoring his extensive expertise, Lt. Holcombe serves as a fire instructor for the Broward Fire Academy, where he dedicates himself to educating and mentoring the next generation of fire service professionals and guides them as they embark on their careers. Students request to ride with Lt. Holcombe because of his passion and dedication to learning and commitment to patient care and outcomes. His exemplary service and unwavering dedication have garnered significant accolades, including the 2022 Broward County Fire Chiefs Association Valor Award, 2022 Broward County Sheriff’s Office Samaritan Award, and 2024 North Lauderdale Fire Rescue Valor Award. These honors reflect his outstanding contributions and steadfast commitment to the field of fire and EMS service.

Jennifer Rhoads, PhD

Dr. Rhoads graduated with her PhD in Health Services with a specialization in Community Health and holds an International Board Specialty Certification in Community Paramedicine, along with various other Healthcare certifications and Emergency Care Licensure. After being honorably discharged from the Air Force in 2009, Dr. Rhoads began a career in academia and continued to work within the civilian healthcare system, caring for patients in both inpatient and outpatient environments. Acquiring a love for teaching and helping others pursue their education, she became the National Program Dean for Allied Health programs while maintaining her faculty status in multiple Allied Health programs. She has contributed to writing curricula and has developed health-related courses that further the understanding of behavioral health disparities in patients, recognizing socioeconomic barriers in populations, how healthcare providers can communicate effectively with patients, how to use relationship-centered care models within provider-patient relationships, the importance of continuity of care, and other topics related to bettering the healthcare experience for both patients and providers. A colleague noted, “Patients are always her first priority, and she does anything in her power to provide the best care possible for them and their families.” Dr. Rhoads is an active member of the National Association of Mobile Integrative Healthcare Providers (NAMIHP), Special Operations Medical Association (SOMA), National Health Career Association (NHA), National Association for Health Professionals (NAHP), and several other supportive memberships.

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She also serves in multiple volunteer positions, including tutoring refugees and newly immigrated individuals on topics related to the topic of nursing assisting. Dr. Rhoads is passionate about caring for her patients and educating others on how to create a more elevated healthcare experience for all involved.

Damien Coy

Coy is Regional Paramedic Program Coordinator for the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Trauma and Critical Care Education (VCU CTCCE), serving in the Crater and Tidewater Regions. He is a Nationally Certified EMS Educator, as well as a Virginia EMS Education Coordinator. “By incorporating case studies and problem-solving exercises, he challenges students to think critically and develop practical skills that are essential for success in EMS,” noted a colleague. He “excels in mentoring EMS students through all stages of their professional development by providing personalized guidance, fostering a supportive learning environment, and serving as a role model for excellence.” His EMS experience spans nearly two decades, serving as a paramedic for Richmond Ambulance Authority, Northumberland Department of Emergency Services, and Fort Belvoir EMS. He previously served as the Program Director for EMS Programs at Brightpoint Community College, EMS Education Program Coordinator for James City County Fire Department, and Field Coordinator with the Old Dominion EMS Alliance (ODEMSA). He was an adjunct EMS instructor with Virginia Peninsula Community College, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, ECPI University, and VCU CTCCE for several years before joining full time. Coy received the ODEMSA 2023 Regional EMS Award for Outstanding Prehospital Educator. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Military History from Longwood University, planning to become a high school history teacher and wrestling coach before finding his genuine passion in EMS, and later, EMS education. He is pursuing a Master of Public Safety Leadership and Administration at Arizona State University.

Dr. Maia Dorsett

Dr. Dorsett is an EMS physician and educator in upstate New York. “Her work has helped our system to be one of the most advanced in our nation, with an emphasis in quality improvement and standards that place patients and providers highest on our list of importance, and through creation of opportunities that empower our many EMTs and paramedics to perform to the greatest extent of their capability,” said one colleague. She completed her Emergency Medicine residency at Washington University in St. Louis, where she discovered her love of EMS and stayed on to complete her EMS fellowship. After which, she moved to the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of Rochester Medical Center in Rochester, NY. Among her roles, she serves as the medical director for EMS education programs at Monroe Community College and is the Associate Regional Medical Director for Education and Quality for the Monroe-Livingston Region. A peer remarked, “Her reach extends far beyond Monroe County, influencing the direction of EMS on a State and National level—she is a force that moves us all to be better each day, and supports our excellence in every path we pursue.” She has pursued her passions for both EMS education and quality improvement at the local, regional and national level, currently serving on board of the National Association of EMS Physicians and the National Registry of EMTs, and as the medical director for the Prodigy EMS online learning platform.

U.S. Army Master Sgt. (Ret.) Jonathan Lu

Master Sgt. Lu, a first-generation immigrant, enlisted in the U.S. Army in 2003 as a combat medic. Throughout his career, he demonstrated an unwavering commitment to his comrades and was driven by a high mission to care for those on his left and right. As a route clearance patrol medic, Master Sgt. Lu witnessed the profound impact of traumatic brain injury and PTSD on his comrades, which inspired him. He pursued advanced training, qualified as a Special Forces Medical Sergeant, and rose to the role of Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha Team Sergeant. “Jon’s expertise in providing prehospital medical trauma care is a cornerstone of his reputation as the most technically and tactically proficient special forces medic in his unit,” said his colleague. His military journey culminated as the Chief Medical Operations NCO and Senior Enlisted Medical Advisor for the U.S. Army’s 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), where his leadership and vision ensured the medical operational readiness and holistic well-being of his fellow Green Berets and Special Operations Forces soldiers. A 2020 Tillman Scholar, Master Sgt. Lu embodies the mission of the Pat Tillman Foundation, which unites and empowers remarkable military service members, veterans, and spouses as the next generation of public and private sector leaders committed to service beyond self. Master Sgt. Lu previously served his rural community as a volunteer firefighter/EMT and as president of his local firefighters’ association. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Health Sciences and a Master of Public Health from George Washington University, as well as a Doctorate in Behavioral Health from Arizona State University—all completed while serving as an active-duty Special Forces enlisted soldier.

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Now a civilian, he is the director of the Center for Health Professions at Wright State University. He is also the founder and CEO of HardHat Wellness, a consulting firm serving the unique workforce health and wellness needs of first responder, healthcare, and high-hazard industries. Through his professional, academic, and volunteer work—and in true Green Beret fashion—he continues to empower agents of political, economic, and social change. His dedication to others serves as a lighthouse, shining brightly, so others may find their way toward building a more compassionate and equitable future for all.

Debbie Kuhn

Kuhn has had a long commitment to EMS. Beginning in the early 1980s, Kuhn served as a First Responder for the Ceresco, Nebraska Volunteer Fire Department and later obtained certifications as an EMT and as an AHA BLS Instructor. In 1987, Kuhn became an EMS Specialist at the Nebraska Department of Health in the EMS division and became a champion for EMS for children. Through a grant from the EMS for Children State Partnership, Kuhn became the Program Manager and initiated several programs, resources and pediatric training for EMS agencies and hospitals across Nebraska. Kuhn developed Nebraska's Medi-Tedi program which provided stuffed panda bears to all ambulance services for sick and injured children. Medi-Tedi became the state EMS mascot and was utilized to provide injury prevention and education to services and schools throughout Nebraska, and was instrumental in developing the Nebraska Emergency School Guidelines for schools across the state. Kuhn's other impressive accomplishments include statewide BLS pediatric equipment distribution through a partnership with local Kiwanis Clubs, Carter Kits (first responder kits for children on the autism spectrum), EMS and hospital communication cards, pediatric reference cards, emergency care guidelines in both English and Spanish for day care center and babysitting classes, Pediatric Ready Ambulance and Hospital recognition program, Pediatric Emergency Care Coordinators (PECC) and pediatric bear disaster triage training kits. Kuhn also established Pediatric Education for Prehospital Professionals™ (PEPP) courses statewide. Although recently retired from the State of Nebraska, Kuhn continues to advocate and volunteer for children's causes.

Baytown Fire Department

On the northern side of Galveston Bay just east of Houston lies Baytown, Texas, served by the Baytown Fire Department covering a population of 88,000 and growing. "Our EMS responses have increased to over 13,500 calls annually, making EMS 80% of our call volume," says Dana Dalbey, who has served as the department's Assistant Fire Chief for the past 10 years. Baytown Fire Department is currently staffing five MICU ambulances with plans to add a sixth ambulance in the near future, alongside seven ALS engines as first responders. The City of Baytown merged its EMS Division and Fire Department in 2013, leading to streamlined communication and training, says Dalbey. Nearly 100 paramedics are now dual-certified as firefighters, "Our new training field is a game-changer. It's a state-of-the-art facility that allows our paramedics to experience a wide range of real-world scenarios, from high-rise rescues to hazardous materials incidents," says Dalby. Baytown Fire Department created an employee protocol committee to provide input on protocol development, workflow and quality assurance. A QA/QI specialist reviews all EMS calls and analyzes data through EHR and health data exchange systems. Baytown Fire Department collaborates with a local hospital on its Cardiac Care Committee, Stroke Committee, and accreditation surveys to provide better continuity of patient care. Baytown Fire Department has participated in the Cardiac Arrest Registry to Enhance Survival (CARES) initiative since 2008, allowing the agency to double its ROSC outcomes in out-of-hospital cardiac arrest and raise the rates of overall survival to hospital discharge to 24.4% in 2022 compared to the national average of 9.3%. Baytown Fire Department collaborated with the city's telecommunications center to become a certified EMD agency. An Active Threat Protocol prepares crews for active shooters, explosions, or motor vehicle attacks and includes funding for ballistic vests and bleeding control supplies. Community engagement activities are a priority, and public education includes fall prevention, child safety, station tours, CPR, first aid, Stop The Bleed campaigns and more. "As we continue to grow and evolve, we remain committed to excellence in emergency response, continuous improvement through collaboration and innovation, and fostering strong bonds with the people we serve," says Dalbey.

Ellington Volunteer Ambulance Corps

Ellington Volunteer Ambulance Corps (EVAC) has been serving the town of Ellington, CT, and surrounding communities since 1962. The organization is made up of 45 personnel, which includes volunteer, supplemental town employees, and a high school explorer program called Rescue Post 512.

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The organization has an operating annual budget of approximately \$300,000, with two ambulances and one service vehicle. EVAC runs approximately 1,800 calls for service per year. “Over the years, there have been ups and downs, but EVAC has remained as an ambulance/EMS-only department embracing innovation and rethinking its strategic plan to brace for the future,” says Bruce Hoffman, Vice President of EVAC. “EVAC has a robust incentive program that allows members to earn so many dollars per call that they first respond to, or are part of the transporting crew.” The organization began reaching out to college students to help them experience what life is like in EMS and to serve their community. The organization has also made renovations to help improve the quality of their facility. “We have maintained and altered our building to include beautiful quarters to sleep in, relax in, study in, and cook and eat in,” says Hoffman. EVAC has five instructors on staff and runs one of the first high school-based EMT programs in Connecticut. “We have an active Rescue Post 512, which has approximately 20 high school students who are in an EMR or EMT class, and the students leave school during the day to respond to calls,” says Hoffman. EVAC recently contributed \$100,000 to the town’s budget to offset expenses. Their charts are 100% audited for billing and QA/QM. Due to a rise in response times, as noted by the organization’s QA system, they secured funding to provide every first responder in town with an AED so there is always one within a 3–4-mile radius. Chief Peter Hany has been with the department for over 45 years—and is still an active first responder. “[Hany] picks up over 100 hours or more of volunteer duty time per month and helps maintain the building and the vehicles,” says Hoffman. “He actively sits on our new ambulance committee and works to make sure that the building and our vehicles are safe. He embraces public service and has given of his time, as a volunteer, to support EVAC.”

Butler County EMS

Established in the 1970s, Butler County EMS is currently comprised of 60 full and part-time personnel. With a budget of \$4.6 million, the service covers over 1,440 square miles with 6 ambulances running approximately 7,300 calls per year in the largest county in Kansas. Stuart Funk, paramedic and director of public outreach and education, stresses the culture of safety for both crews and patients embodied by the agency he’s been a part of since 2006. It begins with hi-visibility clothing and improved ambulance markings with peripheral outline stripes, fluorescent text markings and badging, improved fonts, and reflective elements. Butler County EMS is moving away from traditional large-box ambulances to a conventional European medium-height van-style chassis with a single seat beside the patient facing forward with a 3-point harness in a cockpit-like surrounding with all equipment within reach. A second seat is at the head of the cot facing rearward, also with a 3-point harness with all airway equipment at arm’s reach. Each ambulance is equipped with an automated chest compression system, mounted ventilator and cardiac monitor, hydraulic assisted lift cot, pediatric restraint system, and power load system. Larger ambulances are also designed for optimal crew and patient safety using single seats equipped with 5-point harnesses. All interior surfaces are antimicrobial, high-flow ventilation fans circulate air, and UV lighting has been included to neutralize viruses. “All of our crew members have a safety officer attitude and have adopted the “2 to say Go, 1 to say No” mentality during patient care,” Funk says. To enhance road safety, vehicle policies have been instituted that include maximum road speed, limits on lights and sirens, requirements on drivers to complete a National Traffic Incident Management Safety course, and strict state training and certification on emergency vehicle operation. Outside the ambulance, Butler County EMS has incorporated the Fit Responder Injury Prevention program and new hires are instructed on injury-free patient handling movements and postures. Butler County EMS utilizes Three Sixty Safety through ICI Insurance, a program designed to reduce injury by improving workspace and operational safety awareness. “All reports are reviewed monthly with a risk management provider along with peers to identify and correct hazards which could potentially create a future incident,” Funk says. Butler County EMS has implemented an Internal Safety Committee comprised of Safety Champions from each shift as well as a representative from part-time staff. The organization participated in the National Safety Council’s Road to Zero initiative and was invited to present at the 2023 State KDOT Safety Conference on its Post-Crash Care safety initiatives.

Amy Strobach

Strobach joined the Clear Lake Area Ambulance Service, serving rural northwest Wisconsin, in 2011. According to nominator Misty Wood, Ambulance Director at Clear Lake Area Ambulance Service, Strobach has been an asset to the organization from the very beginning and has not wavered in her desire to serve the community in a multitude of roles. “I began working alongside her in 2014 as her EMS partner and now as her director,” says Wood. “[Amy] has become the program coordinator for the explorer program, working on recruiting future EMS professionals and assisting in their training and journey into EMS.”

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She's forged a relationship with the local school district to improve how emergency training and first aid are taught to students throughout the county. In these recruitment efforts, Strobach has managed to expand the first responder team. "Amy is always taking care of the ambulance and the facilities, doing things beyond what is expected of her," says Wood. "When we were training new CPR instructors, she was the first person to say 'yes—I want to be an instructor.' Since then, she is teaching CPR at the local churches and clubs and working on all the athletic departments in the schools." Colleagues and patients share Wood's praise for Strobach. "Everyone that works with Amy at the ambulance service has reported to me that they love working with her because she knows everything," says Wood. "She knows how to handle the stress, the traumas, the medicals, the crazy cases and the boring cases. She understands people and how to talk to them to make them feel comfortable and safe. Patients will often ask if Amy is on that day because they will let her help them. We have parents who report that if their kid has an emergency, send Amy because their kid knows her and likes her, and she will know them." Strobach put in over 6,300 hours of call time with the service and participated in 177 of 235 911 calls received last year, reported Wood, adding that she received a Lifesaver Award for a CPR save in 2023. Beyond EMS, Strobach is a full-time farmer and mother of two, and sits on the Clear Lake Civic & Commerce Board, where she brings local events to life, along with serving in other civic responsibilities. "Not only is she an amazing person but she is one amazing first responder," says Wood. "This service has only been able to function as good as it has because of her dedication to her job and her love and passion for what she does."

Brett Zingarelli

After Brett Zingarelli lost his grandfather when he was 12, he knew he wanted to find a way to help people. EMS emerged as a natural path and became a lifelong passion. Along the way he has developed a mission to safeguard the health and wellness of the providers in his profession. Zingarelli began as an EMT in high school before joining the U.S. Army as a medic. Since 2002 he has served the City of Wilmington, Delaware, as well as surrounding agencies and departments. He currently supervises the Inter-Facility division of the State of Delaware's EMS department, as well as community service efforts, critical incident stress management (CISM), emergency management team, and special operations teams. "Brett has a long and demonstrated history of supporting other first responders during emotional distress," says Gary Peterson, NAEMT Mid-Atlantic Regional Director. Zingarelli became an active member of the New Castle County CISM team in 2007, and after gaining considerable experience in peer support, he founded the Saint Francis Healthcare EMS CISM team in 2019. Zingarelli achieved the rank of lieutenant, and in command of that team he helped lead a group of over 20 peer-support members, a K9 therapy asset, and a spiritual director. Under his leadership, the team has been able to grow and respond to numerous calls for support, including line-of-duty deaths, first responder funerals, and other CISM/CISD activations in the tri-state region. "Brett has helped construct a spiritual room adjacent to the workplace so that members of any religion can have a private space to practice their beliefs without interruption. Finally, Brett works with the Employee Assistance Program as a liaison between the EAP and EMS colleagues needing support." Zingarelli is a member of the National Association of EMS Educators DEI committee to "ensure that our workforce represents our members and is offering optimal mental health support," says Peterson. He serves as Assistant Director of Peer Support and State Ambassador for Mind the Frontline, a nonprofit organization that works to pioneer innovation in research, education, and overall wellbeing for first responders and military personnel. "Brett continues to promote peer support, wellness, and resiliency programs and works tirelessly to advocate for fellow first responders," says Peterson. "Brett has demonstrated the drive to positively impact not only our department but the larger community, state, and national deliveries of EMS." Zingarelli states that his goal is to "keep doing this work until it is no longer necessary because peer support has been fully integrated into every EMS and first responder agency."

[View nomination criteria](#)

About NAEMT – Formed in 1975 and more than 90,000 members strong, the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians ([NAEMT](#)) is the only national association representing the professional interests of all emergency and mobile healthcare practitioners. NAEMT members work in all sectors of EMS, including government agencies, fire departments, hospital-based ambulance services, private companies, industrial and special operations settings, and in the military.

About EMS World – [EMS World](#) serves the full spectrum of emergency medical services providers: EMTs, paramedics, dispatchers, physicians, nurses, educators, researchers and administrators. Through a website, podcasts, webinars and the world's largest EMS-dedicated annual conference, [EMS World Expo](#), EMS World is the leading authority on providing expert-guided clinical, management and regulatory content to a discerning and dedicated audience on the front lines of out-of-hospital care.

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