



Jasmine Morris, left, and JaCora Lashale, right, receive Carnegie Medals presented by Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst, center left, and West Des Moines Mayor Russ Trimble, center right, on Friday at West Des Moines City Hall. The West Des Moines sisters were honored for rescuing two boys from drowning in an icy pond last year.

PHOTOS BY MICHELLE GUTIERREZ/THE REGISTER

Sisters who rescued boys recognized for heroism

Carnegie Medals awarded a year after youths pulled from icy pond

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Des Moines Register | USA TODAY NETWORK

Two West Des Moines sisters who saved two boys from an icy pond outside their apartment building were presented Friday, almost a year later, with international recognition for their heroic acts.

Jasmine Morris, 16, and JaCora Lashale Morris, 18, were 15 and 17 years old on Feb. 25, 2023. That's the day they saw two boys, who were about 9 years old, had fallen through the ice on a retention pond at their apartment complex, according to the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission.

Jasmine and JaCora were presented with a Carnegie Medal — the highest civilian honor for heroism — on Friday. After the ceremony they told the Des Moines Register that they didn't think that day last year, they just acted.

"If you see someone in need, you should act immediately and not wait on others to react, because at the time, no one else saw them," Jasmine said.

The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission recognizes civilians in the U.S. and Canada who chose to risk death or serious injury in order to try to save the life of another person who was not in their care. The commission extends benefits to a hero's survivors if they died in the



Jasmine Morris, left, and JaCora Lashale Morris, right, hold their Carnegie Medals on Friday. The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission recognizes civilians in the U.S. and Canada who chose to risk death or serious injury in order to try to save the life of another person.

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Jasmine Morris

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JaCora Lashale Morris, left, and Jasmine Morris, right, speak with Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst after both received Carnegie Medals on Friday at West Des Moines City Hall. The West Des Moines sisters were awarded the medals for rescuing two boys from drowning in an icy pond last year. MICHELLE GUTIERREZ/THE REGISTER

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rescue attempt.

But the Morris sisters not only survived, but succeeded in rescuing the two boys from about 6 feet of water.

Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst and West Des Moines Mayor Russ Trimble, surrounded by first responders and others, presented the Morris sisters with the Carnegie Medals at West Des Moines City Hall.

Ernst said the commission asked her to present the medals. "These are not given out every day," she said of the honors awarded to the Morris sisters.

The bronze medallions name the rescuer, the rescued, and the place and date of the heroic act, according to the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission's description.

According to the commission's account of what happened at the pond on Feb. 25, 2023, the two boys were about 10 feet from the nearest shore.

Trimble added that Jasmine and JaCora were upstairs in their apartment when they saw the boys and they ran outside.

Jasmine entered the water first and swam to one of the boys.

She tried to break a path back through the ice with her elbow, but when that didn't work she pushed the boy up onto the ice so he could crawl to shore.

JaCora had also entered the water and pulled up the other boy, who was wearing a backpack and was sinking.

The backpack made him too heavy for her to push up onto the ice, so JaCora removed it, let it sink and then managed to get the boy up onto the ice. A bystander then helped her from the water, while Jasmine got herself out.

The sisters had cuts on their arms and legs but otherwise were not injured.

Jasmine and JaCora's parents – Tarbin and Jacquelin Henderson – attended the ceremony Friday. Tarbin said he felt "immensely proud" of his daughters.

Tarbin said he used to be a police officer in Arkansas, and one of his daughters had been on a ride-along with him, but "I never thought they would do this."

The Des Moines Register's search of online Carnegie commission records showed that Jasmine and JaCora Lashale Morris are only the tenth and eleventh people in the Des Moines area to

be recognized by the commission in its 120-year history — most of which were also water rescues or attempted water rescues:

- Morris A. Nourse, 58, saved a 9-year-old from drowning in the Des Moines River on July 19, 1905.

- Carroll M. Kester, 16, drowned with another 16-year-old student he was attempting to save from the Des Moines River on June 18, 1910.

- Kenneth E. Kline, 30 and a patrolman, saved a 5-year-old boy from drowning in the Des Moines River after a family boat capsized on May 30, 1960.

- Pearl K. McDonough, 51, saved a 61-year-old man from the icy water of Coon Valley Sand Pit on Feb. 10, 1974.

- Guy Arvid Nelson, 25, saved a 76-year-old woman from a burning church rectory on the night of Dec. 11, 1977.

- Dallas Joe Dalton, 25, and Terry Lee Van Ellen, 35, helped to save a 16-year-old boy from drowning in the Des Moines River on May 10, 1982.

- John J. Sholly, 42, saved a 76-year-old man who had jumped off a bridge in the Des Moines River on June 7, 1983.

- James Scott Clay, 30, was fatally shot on Nov. 4, 1986 after saving a 30-year-old woman, a friend, who was held at gunpoint by an intruder in her home.

The Morris sisters — who said they are Lincoln High School students — are the first people in the metro to receive the Carnegie commission's recognition in 38 years for acts of heroism and appeared to be the first Iowans recognized since 2021.

People who are awarded a Carnegie Medal are eligible for benefits, including one-time grants and scholarships. Only about 10% of nominees in the commission's 120-year history have been awarded — and about 20% of the awarded medals have been posthumous.

Friday had also been proclaimed by the West Des Moines City Council as the "West Des Moines Day of Kindness," with the council's proclamation encouraging people to do a random act of kindness by "giving your best self to others without requests or promise of return on investment. It's simply doing something nice for someone else, without them asking and without you doing it for anything in return."

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