

Nomination of Paramedic Heather Waites and EMT Ryan Wilkenfeld

On February 17, 2021, during the height of the winter storm in Texas, Paramedic Heather Waites and EMT Ryan Wilkenfeld were transporting a non-emergent patient to the hospital when a vehicle passed them on the icy highway, lost control and spun in front of them, rolled over and landed upside down in icy water in the median. They immediately pulled off the road and jumped into action. Of course there were no other responders around because they had just witnessed the accident, so they did what had to be done themselves.

Heather and Ryan jumped into the icy water to help extricate the occupants. Ryan used a tool he carries to break the window and they were able to assist four people out of the vehicle. They began to take the victims up to the ambulance when someone asked, "Where's the baby?" They turned around and dove back into the frigid water. Heather was able to feel around in the water and mud in the overturned car and found a 1-month old infant under the water. He was pulseless, apneic, and cold. They pulled him out of the partially submerged car and immediately began CPR, warming, and other resuscitative efforts on the baby.

Because of the critical nature of the baby, Heather and Ryan made the decision to emergently transport all of the victims with their original patient to the hospital, which was less than 2 miles away. By the time they arrived at the hospital, the infant had a pulse. He was stabilized and transferred to Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, and within 3 days was extubated and feeding well. He has since been discharged home after a full recovery.

Heather and Ryan received the Distinguished Service Award from Acadian Ambulance Service on April 7, 2021. This is the first time this award has been given in 14 years. Without Heather and Ryan's quick thinking and action, and their willingness to put themselves in harm's way for their community, this baby would not be alive and at home today.