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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hero presented Medal of Valor for life-saving heroism in face of fire

(Colchester, VT) George Elwood received the Medal of Valor from the State of Vermont on Thursday, August 2 at a special presentation at his employment site, Champlain Community Services (CCS) in Colchester. Elwood earned the honor by rescuing a man from a burning apartment building in Burlington on June 9 when that man's power wheelchair failed to operate.

Faced with a 20-foot wall of flame, Elwood refused to leave Paul Betz, Jr. behind and was ultimately able to push, pull and drag their way to safety, though each experienced multiple second-degree burns.

Monica Hutt, Commissioner of Vermont's Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), along with Vermont Division of Disabilities Services Director Clare McFadden, and Assistant Director Amy Roth, presented the award at the start of CCS' monthly all-staff meeting.

Hutt said in relaying details of the event to others at the Agency of Human Services, "They reacted exactly the way I did. They were blown away." She said Department of Corrections Commissioner Lisa Menard suggested the Medal of Valor, "that DOC uses when own of their own risks their own life in service to others."

The medal is, "an honor given only rarely, but so appropriate today," Hutt said.

Paul Betz, Jr. was on hand, along with his family, and said, "I would like to say thank you to George Ellwood for pulling me out of the fire. If it wasn't for George, I might not be where I am now. I also want to thank all of his family for helping me to get back up on my feet as fast as possible, and all the people at CCS that helped pull things together."

Members of Elwood's family were present, another part of the surprise at the emotional ceremony. Humble in accepting the honor, Elwood considered his colleagues and said, "Anyone in this room would have done the same thing."

"While George's actions were particularly heroic, I do see examples of strength and bravery from our staff every day," said Elizabeth Sightler, Executive Director at CCS. "We were excited for the opportunity to celebrate George in the presence of his colleagues on our dedicated staff, and grateful that the State recognized his heroism."

CCS is a nonprofit organization based at Fort Ethan Allen that offers coordinated supports to Vermonters with intellectual disabilities and autism. It is a Specialized Services Agency within the State of Vermont's Developmental Services System, a member of Vermont Care Partners, and the United Way of Northwestern Vermont. More information at www.ccs-vt.org.

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PHOTO: George Elwood (right) displays the Medal of Valor award received for saving the life of Paul Betz, Jr. (seated) during an apartment building fire in Burlington. Presenters included (from left) Monica Hutt, Commissioner of Vermont's Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), Clare McFadden, Director, Vermont Division of Disabilities Services, and Amy Roth, Assistant Director, Vermont Division of Disabilities Services