

AMERICA'S Heroes

Saluting First Responders

(NAPSA)—Ever since the country's first police officers took to the streets in 1712, America's men and women in blue have sacrificed to protect and serve. Similarly, the country's first professional fire-fighting force was established in 1678, and today, countless fire-fighters devote their lives to saving others.

Now, a group of veterans who were wounded in battle is saluting the courage and sacrifices made by these first responders.

"While the men and women of our armed forces dedicate their lives to the defense of our country, the men and women of our federal, state, county and local police and fire departments equally lay their lives on the line on a daily basis," says Harry Smart, the national public safety officer for the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH).

To honor that sacrifice, the MOPH established an award for first responders and each of its chapters will have a "First Responder Coordinator." The coordinator's duty is to report to the group's national headquarters whenever a local public safety officer is injured or killed in the line of duty. The MOPH then recognizes the individual or his surviving family with a special "First Responder Memorial Plaque."

In the past year, 71 memorial plaques and national citations have been presented.

The MOPH is unique among veteran service organizations in



MOPH First Responder Memorial Plaque presented to Chief, Charleston, S.C. Fire Department.

that all its members were wounded in combat. For this sacrifice, they were awarded the Purple Heart Medal. In addition to honoring first responders, the group works to provide comfort and assistance to all veterans and their families, especially those requiring claims assistance with the VA, those who are homeless and those requiring employment assistance.

Smart says it was easy to see the parallels between his group's members and America's first responders.

"On September 11, 2001, our whole outlook on the service of these brave men and women changed," he explains. "The heroic dedication and accomplishments of the police and firefighters in New York City, Washington, D.C. and Shanksville, Pennsylvania made us all aware and appreciative of the dangers inherent to their service and sacrifice."

For more information, visit www.purpleheart.org or call (888) 668-1656.