

JERMAINE SHIRLEY

GREENWICH, CT BRANCH 759



2014 NATIONAL
HERO OF THE YEAR

“I smelled something burning,” Greenwich, CT Branch 759 member **Jermaine Shirley** recounted. He had been on his way to work around 7 a.m. on Dec. 19, 2013, and the smoke he smelled was coming from the city carrier assistant’s own apartment building in the Bronx.

Shirley went to see if his wife had left a curling iron on, but he found nothing. He then checked the stove—nothing again. As Shirley headed downstairs, the smell of smoke got stronger. He followed the scent to a second-floor apartment.

He then ran through the building, knocking on all six doors to alert residents to the potential danger. “I started calling their names and calling 911 at the same time,” he said.

While the letter carrier was helping his own wife and baby to safety, he heard his neighbor, Everdean Codner, calling for help from a third-floor apartment. Shirley knew the man and his wife, and he was concerned for them.

Shirley tried to kick in the Codners’ front door, but “I could feel the smoke pushing me back out,” the carrier said. When Shirley finally got inside, he saw that the apartment was clear, so he started to move on.

Then he spotted Codner holding one of his sons.

“I wanted to get my babies out and I ran to the fire escape,” Codner told the *New York Daily News*, referring to his 11-month-old twin boys, Israel and Ishmael.

The carrier quickly climbed on top of a single-story shed located below the building’s fire escape. “I told him, ‘Drop the baby,’” Shirley said.

Codner complied, dropping them one at a time into Shirley’s waiting arms below. Once the twins were safe, Codner jumped from the third-floor fire escape to the shed’s roof, followed by his wife.

By that time, firefighters were on the scene to tackle the blaze, and paramedics checked everyone’s condition. There was severe fire, smoke and water damage to every apartment in the building, but fortunately, Shirley had managed to safely get everyone out of the building without serious injury, including the twins.

“It really is a miracle,” the twins’ mother, Nikalia Codner, told the *Daily News*.

“We’re here today because of our neighbor’s quick response,” Everdean Codner said. “It’s the best holiday gift you could ever ask for.”

Shirley said that people had started to call him “Hero” instead of “Jermaine.” And the judges agreed. In selecting Shirley as the National Hero of the Year, they said that “by making multiple attempts to warn several families of the danger, his actions had a significant, life-saving impact.”

Shirley downplayed his actions, however. “It was just instincts. They just kicked in right away,” he said. “I have a family, too. I would want somebody to do the same for me.”

