



Township of Belleville *New Jersey*

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Two Belleville Men Who Saved 81-year-old Man to Be Recognized by Mayor and Township Council

BELLEVILLE, NJ – Sept. 27, 2021 – Two Belleville men who saved an 81-year-old man from drowning in the surging flood waters from Hurricane Ida will be honored for heroism.

Samuel Fontanez and Ivan Mancheno will be recognized with a proclamation at the Tuesday, Sept. 28 Township Council meeting.

The neighbors and close friends rushed from their nearby homes to save Rocco Cicchetti, 81, after he had slipped under the knee-high waters and could not get to his feet.

Fontanez and Mancheno grabbed him up out of the water and carried him to the safety of some nearby steps, so he could regain his breath.

Then, they walked him to his home on Fairway Avenue in the drenching rains.

“They were truly lifesavers,” said Cicchetti’s daughter, Gia Stansci. “If they weren't there, he would have definitely drowned because of the force of the water. Being that he's older, he couldn't get himself up. He went under like three times. Then he wasn't able to get up.

“I truly believe that it was because of those two guys that my dad is still with us today,” she added. “They saved his life.”

Cicchetti, a grandfather of two, was returning home after working his shift at the deli counter at a supermarket in Nutley.

In the darkness of the night, he misjudged how deep the waters had already become on Continental Avenue.

When his car stalled, he decided to try to wade through the water. When he opened the car door, he said water rushed into his vehicle.

“Each time a car would pass, it would create a little wave,” he said. “That would knock me down. I would get up, but then another wave would knock me down again. Finally, I just didn't have the strength to get up and I found myself with my head under the water.”

Fontanez, who has lived in Belleville for about 20 years and works for Canon, and Mancheno, who has been a Belleville resident for 25 years and works as a truck driver, quickly sprang into action.

In the chaos of the wind, rain, lightning and thunder, they reached Cicchetti and picked him up out of the water.

“We’re trying to get him to safety and he’s saying stuff like, ‘You guys saved my life,’” Fontanez said. “We just wanted to get to safety because we were both terrified. If a transformer blew and a wire fell down into the water, that would have been a dangerous situation.”

After the flood waters subsided the next day, Mancheno located Cicchetti’s car keys. They had come to rest several blocks away, having been whisked away by the rushing water the night before.

While looking, Mancheno also located Cicchetti’s dentures, which had fallen out when he fell in the water.

“I am happy that Mr. Cicchetti is safe,” said Mancheno. “Really though, I was just doing what I hope someone would do for me if I were in that situation.”

“We heard about many acts of kindness, of neighbor caring for neighbor as the remnants of Hurricane Ida hit Belleville,” Mayor Michael Melham said. “What these two humble heroes did went well beyond being a good neighbor. They are life-savers and the township is eager to recognize them.”

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