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News Release

MASTER SERGEANT RECEIVES FIRE CHIEF'S AWARD FOR VALOR

By Tech. Sgt. Ann Bennett

BETHESDA, Md. – An Air Force master sergeant at the Uniformed Services University received the Prince George's County Fire Chief's Award for Valor recently for saving two people from a fire in their home.

Master Sgt. Raul Navas, noncommissioned officer in charge of the university's audio visual department, said he's just glad he could help.

In a letter to Navas, Prince George's County Fire Chief Ronald D. Blackwell thanked Navas for his unselfish and brave actions that day. He also noted, "... your quick actions served to prevent any serious injuries to those two residents, and also prevented further damage to their home and property."

Other than his family, Navas didn't tell anyone else of his good deed. It wasn't until he asked to leave early to receive his award that his supervisor, Cathy Hemelt, found out about it.

"As soon as I found out, I started making phone calls to spread the word," Hemelt said. "He was low-key about it and embarrassed by the fuss, but I told him this is a big deal and he's a hero."

Navas, who lives in Upper Marlboro, Md., was out for a morning run on Feb. 15 when he saw flames and smoke coming from a house about half a mile from his home. The door was

unlocked, so he went in and called out, but got no reply. Then he saw an elderly woman in the kitchen where a toaster and table were on fire.

“She was just standing there looking around,” he said and didn’t think anything of it at the time. He got her out of the house and wrapped her in his jacket since it was cold outside. He then ran to a busy street nearby, stopped a car and asked the driver to call 911.

When he turned back to check on the woman, he saw she was going back into the house. “I ran up to her and asked what she was doing. She said her mentally retarded son was still in the house.”

So the 38-year-old went back inside, but by now he couldn’t see anything because of all the smoke. He had to crawl around to look for the son, and finally found him in a back room.

“He didn’t want to come with me, he was scared of me,” Navas said of the son who he guessed to be about 40 years old. “I just grabbed him by his waist and pulled him out of the house with him struggling all the way.”

While waiting for the fire department to show up, Navas noticed a hose attached to a faucet at the side of the house. He grabbed it and was able to put out the fire before the firefighters got there.

He went back that afternoon to make sure the two people were okay and the woman hugged and thanked him.

“It made me feel real good that I was there and able to save two lives,” Navas said.