

A COAST GUARD RESCUE SWIMMER'S FIRST MISSION SAVES 165 LIVES

By Rachel Stowe Master

BEFORE HE WAS HONORED IN FRONT OF THE NATION with the Legion of Merit, presented by President Donald Trump during his State of the Union Address, Petty Officer 3rd Class Scott C. Ruskan was recognized as the 2026 recipient of the NAPE Expo Charities Anthony J. DeToto American Hero Award during NAPE Summit.

Established in 2023 in honor of the late Anthony J. DeToto Sr., a longtime NAPE supporter, who in addition to his own military service was revered for his tireless support of U.S. veterans, the annual award is given to a member of the U.S. military — past or present — who exemplifies courage, sacrifice and an unwavering commitment to protecting others.

During the devastating Texas floods in Kerr County last summer, Ruskan, a Coast Guard rescue swimmer, helped save 165 people, including children at Camp Mystic.

At the time, he was 26 and on his first mission.

In the words of President Trump when he presented the Legion of Merit: "It was Scott's first-ever rescue mission — young guy, but very brave."

Originally from Oxford, New Jersey, Ruskan earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Rider University before enlisting in the Coast Guard in 2021. He is stationed at Air Station Corpus Christi.

Ruskan was part of the four-member Coast Guard Rescue 6553 crew that received a call for help on July 4, 2025, when rising waters from the Guadalupe River caused a catastrophic flash flood near Kerrville. It took four attempts before the helicopter crew could forge a path through the tumultuous storm.

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The crew landed at Camp Mystic, a summer camp for girls, leaving Ruskan on the ground — with floodwaters raging — to triage and coordinate evacuation. He was the only first responder in the area. Over the next several hours, he braved hazardous conditions to rescue campers and counselors, loading them one by one into helicopters to be airlifted to safety — totaling 165 lives.

The 2026 NAPE Expo Charities Anthony J. DeToto American Hero Award was presented at the beginning of the Energy Leadership Forum.

“Thank you guys so much for nominating me for the NAPE American Hero Award. It's a huge honor and I really appreciate everyone who helped nominate me,” Ruskan told the NAPE audience via video, noting Coast Guard scheduling and training conflicts prevented him from

accepting the award in person.

“This whole case has been a whirlwind of emotions, but it's really just showed me that being part of a team is probably the most important lesson I have learned from this case,” he said, giving credit to his crew members — pilots Blair Ogujiofor and Ian Hopper and flight mechanic Seth Reeves — as well as the maintenance technicians who keep the USCG Air Station Corpus Christi aircraft flying.

“It takes a huge team to get anything done in this world. It's true for my job. I'm sure it's true for your job as well. So just relying on your team is, again, the biggest lesson I've learned,” he said.

A second lesson is the need for support.

“Having people to support you is so important in anything you do in your life, and I've just been overwhelmed with the amount of support I've gotten,

especially from NAPE. So, I just really wanted to say thank you,” Ruskan said.

JUNIOR AMERICAN HERO AWARDS

At the event to accept the American Hero Award on his behalf were Claire Savitz, Ella Moore and Olivia Stehle — three of the campers Ruskan helped rescue — along with Sandy DeToto, widow of the award's namesake. NAPE Expo Charities awarded a \$25,000 grant to the Kerr County Flood Relief, and the three brave young girls were presented with Junior American Hero Award medals.

“There wasn't a dry eye in the auditorium when the young ladies received their awards,” said Bud Scherr, founder and COO of Valence Operating Co., a NAPE Expo Charities Diamond sponsor.

“Seeing Claire, Ella, and Olivia receive their Junior American Hero Awards



NAPE Expo Charities Fund President Nancy McCaskell, CPL, Jack DeToto and his mom, Sandy, and Bud Scherr with Valence Operating, a NAPE Diamond sponsor, helped present the Anthony J. DeToto Junior American Hero Awards to Ella Moore, Claire Savitz and Olivia Stehle.

was such an inspirational moment that made me remember how lucky I am to work in an industry with such a big heart. And they all come from energy industry families, so they have a special NAPE connection," said Michelle Phillips, CPL, chair of the NAPE Operators Committee and vice president of land at Lime Rock Resources.

"Petty Officer Ruskan acted with bravery and valor in the face of an overwhelming natural disaster that threatened the lives of many, especially these young ladies who were enjoying their summer camp experience," continued Phillips, whose father served in the Coast Guard for 25 years. "Without his quick thinking and commitment to the mission, those three lovely girls would not have been able to celebrate with us at NAPE this year. He truly embodies the characteristics that we want to recognize with the Anthony J. DeToto American Hero Award."

Olivia's mom agrees.

"Scott Ruskan is an incredibly humble person who consistently underplays his role in the Camp Mystic rescue. His quiet strength, selflessness and leadership during such a devastating event embody everything this award represents. He was truly the perfect choice, and it was an honor to help recognize him," said Rebecca Stehle, founder of Aquaerial Holdings LLC.

She described her daughter's participation in the ceremony as incredibly meaningful.

"It helped her begin to understand the magnitude of what happened — not just the heroism, but also the profound sadness for those who did not make it. There were many complicated emotions in that moment. So many young girls have had to process trauma in ways we never imagined they would, and being part of the ceremony helped bring a deeper sense of perspective and empathy for her," Stehle said.

Before starting her own firm, Stehle spent 10 years at ExxonMobil. Her husband, Jamie, works at Chevron but also worked at ExxonMobil previously.

"The ceremony was a powerful reminder that true heroism often comes without fanfare. It was moving to see the energy community come together to honor courage, compassion and service beyond our industry, while also supporting causes that truly matter," she added. "We deeply understand how critical this industry is in keeping the world moving, and we're proud to be part of a community that values both innovation and giving back."

NAPE EXPO CHARITIES HONOREES

Since 2009, more than \$6 million has been donated through NAPE Expo Charities events to help nonprofit organizations that support U.S. veterans. These awards are made

possible thanks to donations from NAPE sponsors, attendees and supporters.

In addition, in 2019, a group of America's energy producers honored President George H.W. Bush with a \$1 million donation given in his name to the NAPE Expo Charities Fund. This generous donation is distributed in \$100,000 increments each year in President Bush's name to worthy veterans charities selected by the NAPE Operators Committee.

This year the NAPE Expo Charities Foundation presented \$100,000 checks to two deserving organizations: K9s For Warriors and Operation Second Chance.

HEALING FOR WARRIORS

Founded in 2011, K9s For Warriors is dedicated to ending veteran suicide by pairing military veterans suffering



Junior American Hero Award recipients Ella Moore, Claire Savitz and Olivia Stehle

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from PTSD, traumatic brain injury and/or military sexual trauma with highly trained psychiatric service dogs — many rescued from shelters — at no cost to the warrior, while also integrating trauma-informed mental health services through its Warrior Wellness Initiative to ensure long-term healing, resilience and reintegration. Now the nation's largest provider of service dogs to veterans, K9s serves warriors in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and Guam.

"Being recognized by NAPE Expo Charities is a profound honor for our organization. It affirms that leaders within the energy industry see the urgency of the veteran suicide crisis and believe in the effectiveness of our mission-driven, evidence-informed approach to addressing it," said Janey Hicks, senior grants specialist. "This recognition not only validates the

hard work of our staff, volunteers and warrior alumni, but also elevates national awareness of the invisible wounds veterans carry long after their service ends. It signals to our warriors that their struggles matter — and that respected partners across industries stand beside them in their journey toward healing, resilience and renewed purpose."

Benefiting the nonprofit's Warrior/Service Dog Pairing Program and Warrior Wellness Initiative, the NAPE Expo Charities funds will help underwrite residential training, public access exposure work, service dog care and veterinary support, and embedded mental health services, including suicide risk screening, crisis intervention and case management.

"In addition to the three-week immersive training experience, the gift supports lifelong wraparound

services such as peer mentorship, family engagement, recertification and ongoing wellness monitoring — ensuring that each warrior has sustained support long after graduation," Hicks said. "Ultimately, this donation translates into fewer veterans in crisis, stronger families and renewed purpose for those who have sacrificed so much."

She added: "NAPE's culture of giving elevates the entire energy industry as a beacon to other sectors. By demonstrating that corporate success and community responsibility go hand in hand, the NAPE audience sets a powerful example — showing that industry leaders can leverage their influence not only to drive economic progress, but also to strengthen families, restore lives and inspire a broader movement of strategic, compassionate philanthropy."



Bud Scherr with Valence Operating, a NAPE Diamond sponsor, helps present a check in the amount of \$100,000 to representatives from K9s For Warriors.

HELP FOR HEROES RIDGE

Founded in 2005, Operation Second Chance supports veterans and their families by building relationships and identifying and supporting immediate needs and interests. Its Heroes Ridge retreat center provides opportunities for veterans to experience emotional healing through peer support, group activities, interaction with the natural world, and targeted adaptive sports and equine therapies.

"We are profoundly grateful to NAPE Charities for your extraordinary \$100,000 grant in support of Operation Second Chance and our work at Heroes Ridge. This generous investment is not simply a gift, it is an opportunity for healing," said Cindy McGrew, founder and CEO.

The grant will enable more wounded, injured and ill veterans, along with their families and Gold Star families —

those who have lost an immediate family member in military service — to participate in immersive healing retreats focused on health, wellness and restoration.

"At Heroes Ridge, families reconnect. Veterans find peace. Caregivers are strengthened. Gold Star families are honored and surrounded by a community that understands their sacrifice," McGrew said.

The NAPE Expo Charities grant will directly expand access to therapeutic equine connection, health and wellness programming, mindfulness and resilience training, nature-based healing experiences, and time for families to reconnect in a safe and restorative environment.

"For many of the veterans we serve, trauma does not end when they leave the battlefield. The invisible wounds — PTSD, traumatic brain injury, chronic

pain, grief — continue long after service. Your investment allows us to provide a place where healing is intentional, community is strong, and no one walks alone," she said.

Operation Second Chance's 2026 goal is to serve more than 250 veterans and their families with weekend retreats as well as serve local veterans with equine therapy and healing programs such as nature bathing, nutrition, creative arts and mindfulness breathing.

"The impact of this grant will extend far beyond a weekend retreat. It will ripple into stronger marriages, healthier families, renewed purpose and hope restored," McGrew said. "On behalf of the veterans, caregivers, children and Gold Star families who will walk the grounds of Heroes Ridge because of your generosity — thank you. Your belief in this mission is changing lives." ♦



NAPE Charities Diamond Sponsor Bud Scherr with Valence Operating helps present a check in the amount of \$100,000 to a representative from Operation Second Chance.