



President Mike Davis, left, and Business Rep Mark Rolow, right, present the IBEW Life Saving Award to, from left (Davis), Nicolas Starkey, Richard Gonzales, Steve Hakker, Rayshawn Neely, Ken Simon, Nelson Pereira, (Rolow).

PHOTO BY ERIC WOLFE

“I heard him say, ‘I’m here from Jesus come to take you home.’”

McBride was back on his feet, assaulting two women who’d come over to help. A hitchhiker began slamming McBride in the head with a camp axe. “People were screaming and hollering,” said Starkey.

Crew members wrestled McBride back to the ground.

“I just had to make this guy stop hurting Rayshawn,” said Starkey, who is friends with Neely outside of work.

IBEW members are trained how to respond to emergencies. But this was almost beyond belief.

“I don’t think there is any training that could prepare you for the level of craziness in that incident,” said Starkey.

You could call it instinct. Or courage. But Simon, like Neely, calls it something else: family.

“I feel we as a crew, we become sort of a family. What we were doing was protecting our brother, our fellow lineman, from any harm that could come to him,” Simon said.

“I want to thank all of my brothers,” said Neely after the awards presentation. “This is for them.”

The others know that if the situation was reversed, he would do the same for them.

That’s what brotherhood means.

Protecting our brother

Members earn life saving award

What does “brotherhood” mean? Rayshawn Neely knows.

“It means I’m going to look out for you. I’m not just looking after your well-being at work, I’m looking after you because you’re like a family to me.”

When Neely, a foreman at PG&E and 4-year IBEW member, was assaulted by a deranged motorist in Fresno, his crewmates leaped to his defense.

For their selfless action, Neely’s union brothers were awarded the union’s highest honor—the IBEW Life Saving Award. Receiving the award in person at the union’s April 27 Advisory Council meeting in Vacaville were Richard Gonzales,

Steve Hakker, Nicolas Starkey, Ken Simon and Nelson Pereira. Also receiving the award but unable to be present were Anthony Esposito and Stan Zamora.

The bizarre assault unfolded on Feb. 1 when a car crossed the center line and hit Neely, pinning him to his truck.

“I jumped back,” said Starkey, who’d been standing near Neely. “He missed me by about a half foot.”

Ken Simon, also standing near Neely, wasn’t as lucky.

“I got hit and thrown about 10 or 15 feet,” said Simon. He jumped to his feet—“my adrenalin was rushing so hard I didn’t even realize I’d got hit”—and saw Neely pinned to the bucket truck.

When the driver, a huge man named Jett McBride, tried to get out, Starkey slammed the door on him and told him to stay in the car. But when Starkey turned his attention to helping Neely, who was seriously injured, the driver got out and started ranting at Neely.

“I heard him say, ‘I’m here from Jesus come to take you home,’” said Simon.

When McBride started pulling on Neely, Starkey jumped on McBride and pulled him to the ground. All the commotion began to attract the attention of shoppers at an outdoor swapmeet.

“Everybody and their mother came over,” said Starkey. “It was just pandemonium.”