

Winter
2025
EDITION

HALL OF FLAME NEWSLETTER



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HallofFlameMuseum of Firefighting

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Auf Wiedersehen!

Museums usually get excited about acquiring new items for their collection. But in October of 2024 the Hall of Flame Museum found reason to celebrate giving away part of our collection.

Representatives of the Hall of Flame were among those who gathered in Washington, D.C., for a ceremony the German Embassy. It marked the return of a parade banner from the Hall of Flame Museum of Firefighting to the fire department of Wiescherhöfen, a small town in Westphalia, Germany, through the agency of the Monuments Men and Women Foundation. The velvet and silk banner, which depicts German firefighting of the period, was acquired by the Wiescherhöfen department in 1929.

Lost and presumed destroyed in Allied bombing in 1944, it was later purchased by Hall of Flame Museum founder George Getz, Jr. from an antiques dealer in London, and was in storage at the museum until 2016. At that time, it underwent restoration by textile conservator Martha Grimm, at the direction of now retired Hall of Flame Executive Director Peter Molloy, who had found the piece in storage and recognized its historic significance and its aesthetic beauty.

It was then displayed for several years in our Gallery One, where it came to the attention of the Wiescherhöfen department,



who requested its return. Current Hall of Flame Executive Director Chuck Montgomery and Museum President George Getz agreed to the return, which was executed by Hall of Flame Office Manager Dawn Cullen, assisted by volunteer Tim Leija. The Monuments Men and Women Foundation, under the direction of Robert Edsel and Anna Bottinelli, then coordinated the return through the U.S. State Department and the German government.

The return ceremony itself was a wonderful, emotional experience, and a very proud hour for the Hall of Flame. Family representatives Dyan Getz and George “Chip” Getz and Hall of Flame Curator of Education Mark Moorhead attended. Washington, D.C. and other area fire departments also turned out for the event to support the German visitors, and the Wiescherhöfen firefighters brought the Hall of Flame a gift: a working siren from a German fire station! The firefighters insisted on testing the two-tone siren in the courtyard of the embassy; it's extremely loud, and we look forward to finding uses for it that may get the attention of our neighbors.

Though we are sad to see the banner absent from Gallery One, this was a proud hour for the Hall of Flame Museum. It has been our great privilege to preserve and display this banner, and an even greater privilege to see it go home.



Photos Courtesy of
Monuments Men and
Women Foundation / ©
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Volunteer Spotlight: Ed Rostron



Unlike so many of our Hall of Flame volunteers, Ed Rostron can't say he particularly wanted to be a firefighter growing up.

“Not really,” he says with a shrug. “My Dad was in the VFD when I was a kid; he was in a truck company.” Joining the fire department in his hometown of Somerville, New Jersey, was more of a family obligation.

“In my family, there were four of them in the fire department...When I got out of the service, my Dad said, ‘You’re joining the fire department.’ So, I joined the fire department.”

Rostron already had a trade. “I was an apprentice carpenter in the service in '68 when I went in the army. Mainly, I drove an armored personnel carrier, M-113”

He was in Vietnam February of 1969 to February of 1970. Of his time there, he says “You take the good with the bad. I went to Bangkok, Thailand on R&R, spent a weekend.”

After his service, Rostron resumed his career as a union Master carpenter.

“You had to be in the union, man,” he says with a chuckle. “Come on, it’s Jersey. I worked out of the union hall, all commercial [jobs]. But my father and I did remodels, on the side.” He also worked as a paid firefighter, for the Veteran’s Administration supply depot, for three years, and as a maintenance mechanic.

Eventually Rostron’s second wife Darcy, who worked for Toyota Motor Company, was transferred to Phoenix. “So I retired.”

He was introduced to the Hall of Flame when he brought a friend who was visiting from out of town. Soon he was volunteering, and over the years has become one of the Museum’s best drivers, operating rigs in the Veteran’s Day Parade and even carrying Kurt Warner and his family in the Fiesta Bowl Parade.

Asked if he remembers any fires from his long career particularly vividly, Rostron replies with three examples.

Example one: “Carpet Craftsman Carpet Warehouse. Before that it was a roller rink. All that stuff they put on the floor? Big fire. As the guys were going up the stairs, they had a backdraft, and guys going up to the second floor got blown back out the door.” It had a happy ending, however: “No fatalities.”

Example two: “Granite’s Warehouse. Brick walls, wooden roof. That ended up being a ‘surround and drown,’ and I was up on a ladder, which was really fun. The roof had caved in, and we were just pouring water in.”

Example three: “House fire. We arrived on the scene, we grabbed the hose line of the back of the truck and went in the house. The fire was on the back porch. I was second man on the line, and we went in through the front door and then we were in the kitchen and we could see the flames leaping up under the outside door. We were waiting and waiting for water. It was a new Han engine, and they couldn’t figure out how to get water from the tank to the pump. One valve. All he had to do was pull one valve! You could see the fire creeping in over the top of the door. The guy on the nozzle started backing me up, and the whole line backed up, and the fire came in across the ceiling and up the stairs. We were on our bellies when the fire went over us. Eventually they got water on it, but there was a lot of yelling and cursing.”

Revisiting “Ancient” History

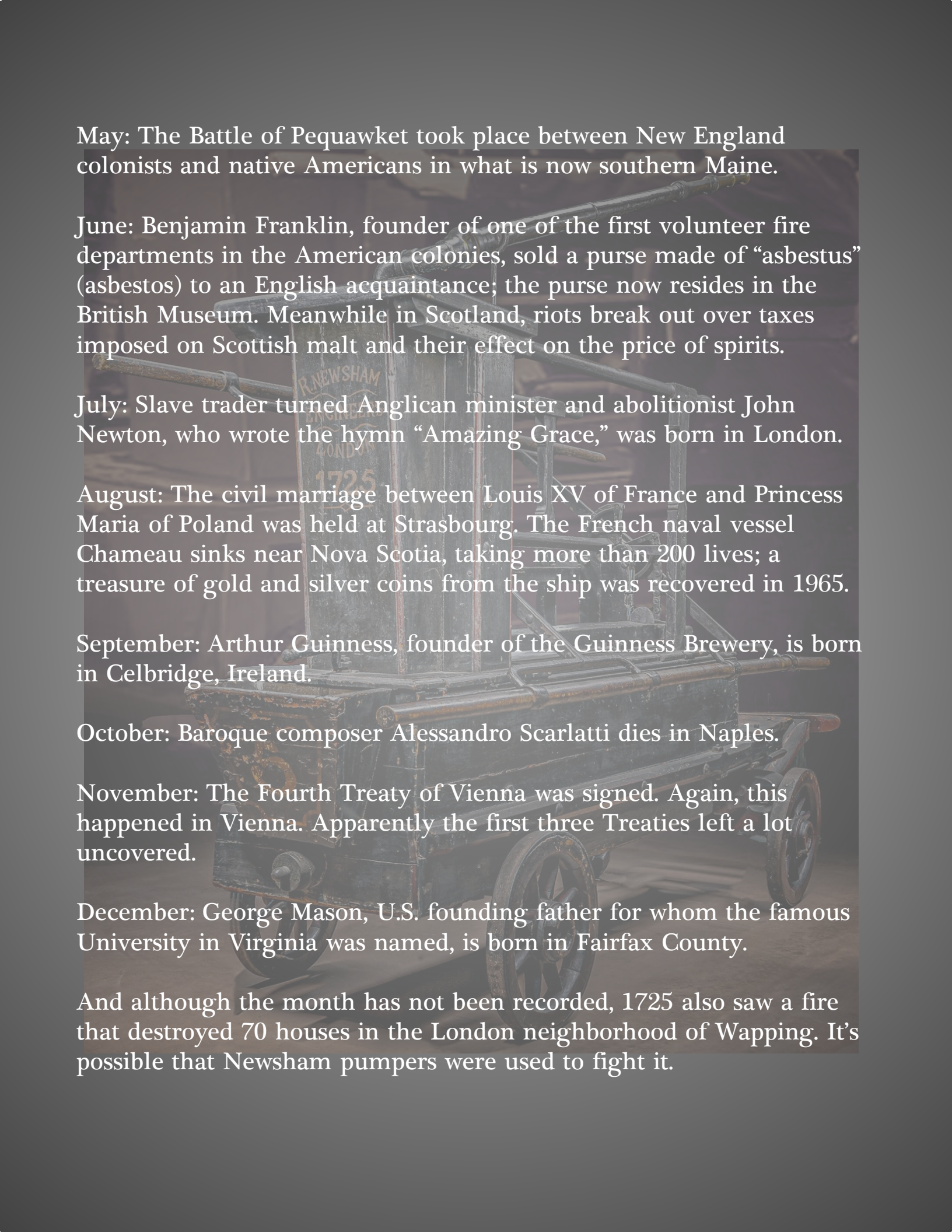
When introducing our Newsham hand pumper from England, we often note that she was built in London seven years before George Washington was born. It's quick way to put the oldest large piece in the Hall of Flame's collection in historical context for our visitors, especially kids. But this year our beloved Newsham turns 300 years old. So in celebration of her Tricentennial, let's look at some of what else was going on in the world in 1725:

January: The earliest known professional boxing match was held in London on January 20, promoted by James Figg, between an English drover and a Venetian Gondolier. The Englishman was the victor.

February: Russian Czar Peter the Great (1672-1725) dies in St. Petersburg on February 8. Peter is said to have purchased pumpers from Newsham for Imperial Russia.

March: A gruesome month: a man's severed head was found in London. His wife and an accomplice were later executed for the crime; who knows, Newsham workers may have gossiped about this case in the shop while building our pumper.

April: The First Treaty of Vienna, establishing the Austro-Spanish Alliance, was signed in, well, Vienna. Meanwhile, famed lover Casanova was born in Venice



May: The Battle of Pequawket took place between New England colonists and native Americans in what is now southern Maine.

June: Benjamin Franklin, founder of one of the first volunteer fire departments in the American colonies, sold a purse made of “asbestus” (asbestos) to an English acquaintance; the purse now resides in the British Museum. Meanwhile in Scotland, riots break out over taxes imposed on Scottish malt and their effect on the price of spirits.

July: Slave trader turned Anglican minister and abolitionist John Newton, who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace,” was born in London.

August: The civil marriage between Louis XV of France and Princess Maria of Poland was held at Strasbourg. The French naval vessel Chameau sinks near Nova Scotia, taking more than 200 lives; a treasure of gold and silver coins from the ship was recovered in 1965.

September: Arthur Guinness, founder of the Guinness Brewery, is born in Celbridge, Ireland.

October: Baroque composer Alessandro Scarlatti dies in Naples.

November: The Fourth Treaty of Vienna was signed. Again, this happened in Vienna. Apparently the first three Treaties left a lot uncovered.

December: George Mason, U.S. founding father for whom the famous University in Virginia was named, is born in Fairfax County.

And although the month has not been recorded, 1725 also saw a fire that destroyed 70 houses in the London neighborhood of Wapping. It's possible that Newsham pumpers were used to fight it.

Electric Light Parade

Playing with fire is something that firefighters normally discourage with all their might. But Kirby Nellis, though he was a longtime member of the fire department in Mammoth Lakes, California, has also spent much of his working life playing with fire.

A native of Ventura, California, Kirby got interested in fireworks during some childhood years in Saskatchewan, where firecrackers were legal at the time.

“Once upon a time, I was eight years old,” he explains, when asked how he first became interested pyrotechnics. “Guys always understand what I mean when I say that; I have yet to meet a woman that does.”

The interest led to an adult career as pyrotechnician back in California, doing shows around the state including at Anaheim Angels games. Eventually he branched off into electric light shows, rising so far in the profession that he toured with Pink Floyd in the '90s.

It's this electronic part of Kirby's skill set that the Hall of Flame recently called upon; Kirby supervised the design and execution of decorating one of our trucks to participate in the APS Electric Light Parade on December 7.

Our recently acquired 1963 American LaFrance pumper, which served the town of Middleburg and three other communities in the Commonwealth of Virginia, was adorned with thousands of LED holiday lights as well as two large video screens transmitting messages of holiday cheer in the after-dark parade down Central Avenue to Camelback, then south down Indian School Road in Phoenix.

Driven by donor Frank Hoppes, it also carried Kirby's lighted stage palm trees to create a "Christmas in the Tropics" theme, an effect that was enhanced by the use of "Mele Kalikimaka" among the musical selections. What really nailed the island theme down, however, was the presence of our volunteer Tim Leija, decked out in grass skirt and headdress, performing his own improvisational interpretive version of a hula.

Bringing up the rear behind the '63 truck was our 1977 American La France pumper from South Elgin, Illinois, named "Worthington" after the family that donated it to the Hall of Flame. This beautiful rig, driven by Hall of Flame volunteer captain Mark Kauffman, had the honor to carry 2024's Miss Arizona, Shailey Ringenbach, along with the Hall of Flame's own Mimi Hymel, former Miss Phoenix.

It was a night of spectacle, high spirits and holiday fun, and the appreciative reaction from the many thousands of people who turned out along the route kept us warm!



Marshall Flames

Since late summer, visitors to the Hall of Flame Museum of Firefighting may have noticed a spellbinding new attraction. In the entryway to our Gallery 4 sits the prognosticator Marshall Flames, a sage soothsayer who dispenses fortunes, life wisdom and fire safety lessons! For the measly price of a buck, Marshall Flames will spring to life, and teach you something about subjects ranging from, say, smoke detectors to the importance of having fire drills in your home as well as in school. Then he'll dispense a card with priceless advice like *"Don't let the waves knock you down, fight through them and the entire ocean will be yours."*

Marshall Flames is a creation of Characters Unlimited of Boulder City, Nevada, which hand-builds fortunetelling attractions for venues throughout the country. Around since 1987, the company specializes in products featuring Zoltar, the sage that figures prominently in the plot of the 1987 Tom Hanks movie Big. Indeed, Characters Unlimited holds the official trademark on the Zoltar character.

"We also do licensing," says the firm's Karina Stanton, "So there's a Zoltar slot machine, and t-shirts and stuff."



Karina, who helps run the firm with her family—parents and founders Olaf and Krishun Stanton, and brother Gunnar—is quick to note that Characters Unlimited, as the name implies, is not limited to Zoltar, but makes other oracular figures. They created an “Ask the Coach” attraction in the likeness of Detroit Lions head coach Dan Campbell, for instance

Their fortune tellers, says Karina, are “all over the U.S. and the world. Any major tourist town or boardwalk.”



Marshall Flames came to the Hall of Flame in an unusual and dramatic fashion, however. When one of Characters Unlimited’s cabinets was damaged in a warehouse fire this past April, the firm, rather than simply discarding the singed piece, created Marshall Flames and generously donated him to the Hall of Flame! We think the burn marks on his side give him character. Unlimited character.

We also think he sounds a lot like our beloved Hall of Flame docent Joe Hinkle; were they separated at birth?

Kevin Woyjeck Explorers for Life Association



We were inspired by this story of courage and tenacity, passed on to us here at the Hall of Flame by our friend Joe Woyjeck, co-founder, with his wife Anna, of the Kevin Woyjeck Explorers for Life Association. Joe and Anna's son Kevin was one of the 19 Granite Mountain Hotshots who died in the Yarnell Hill Fire in 2013; the Explorers for Life Association, based in Seal Beach, California, is devoted to helping young men and women pursue careers in the fire service. We thought we'd share the story:

"My name is Nicholas Ramirez, and I am 19 years old. After graduating high school in 2023, I experienced a life-changing event that shaped my future. I tragically lost my older brother, Noah Rodriguez, who served as an ambulance operator at LA County Fire Station 192 and was a dedicated LA County Fire Explorer with Post 20. His passing deeply affected me, and I was profoundly moved by the unwavering love and support from the fire service community. Inspired by their example, I committed to pursuing a career in firefighting.

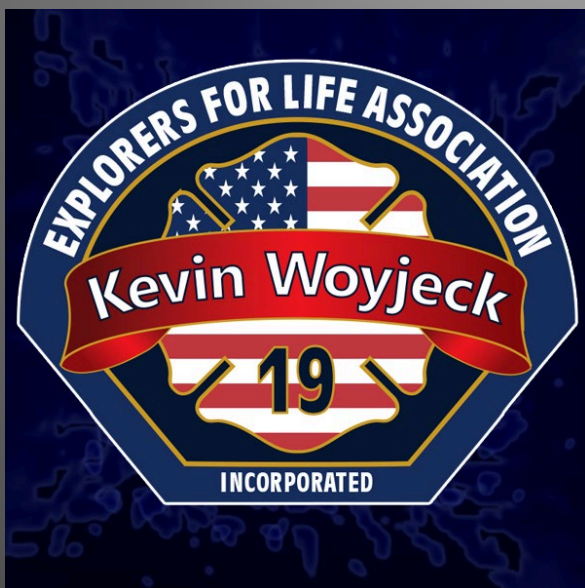
I enrolled at Rio Hondo College, where I began studying EMT and Fire Technology. Eventually, I qualified for their Basic Firefighter 1 Academy, Class 103. At just 18 years old, I worked tirelessly to help support my mother and pay for my education.

As the Academy approached, I became concerned about affording the program, knowing I would have little time to work. Hoping for assistance, I reached out to the Kevin Woyjeck Explorers for Life Association. To my surprise, the organization was aware of my brother's legacy and knew I was a Los Angeles County Fire Explorer in Battalion 8. They generously awarded me a full scholarship, covering the cost of my books, gear, and uniform.

Thanks to their incredible support, I successfully attended the Academy and recently graduated as part of Rio Hondo College's Class 103. I am deeply grateful to the Kevin Woyjeck Explorers for Life Association for their kindness and for giving me the opportunity to fulfill my dreams.

Thank you for making this life-changing journey possible.

Sincerely,
Nicholas Ramirez



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