



TEAMSTERS JOINT COUNCIL 25

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NEWS >>

IDOT TEAMSTER SAVES PASSENGERS FROM BURNING CAR AFTER ACCIDENT

Local 700 Emergency Traffic Patrolman Puts Life on the Line to Serve Public

At 1:48 a.m. on Tuesday, May 31, Illinois Department of Transportation Minuteman and Teamsters Local 700 member Matt Spina was responding to a crash when a drunk driver on the Dan Ryan expressway slammed into his truck.

Matt — who has been an Emergency Traffic Patrol (also known as Minutemen) for 10 years — works the nightshift and had just responded to a crash on Chicago's South Side at 59th Street. As he was heading out, his supervisor called him about another crash on the Dan Ryan at 47th Street.

When Matt arrived on the scene, he saw two empty cars close to the shoulder and the passengers were walking close by with no injuries. He dropped flares around the curved exit at 47th Street and got back into his truck to move behind the vehicles.

Within moments, another car traveling 80 miles an hour plowed into the back of Matt's truck, sending it forward about 15 feet. He was instantly dazed, and felt a dull pain start to spread from his neck to his back. When he looked in his rearview mirror, all he could see were flames erupting from the car that just hit him.

Taking quick action, Matt got to the burning car and attempted to pry open the door. All he could hear was screaming and knew the people inside were hurt and afraid. With the assistance of his supervisor, Matt pulled the driver and the passenger out through the car windows and placed them on the shoulder.

"They were seconds away from burning inside the car," said Matt. "I didn't want to see these people die so we did whatever we could to get them out of the car as soon as possible. I started to really feel some pain, but I think the adrenaline just kicked in because I knew lives were in danger."

Firefighters arrived shortly after and extinguished the burning car. After the quick rescue, Matt had a chance to sit down and collect himself.

"That's when the pain really started to set in," said Matt. He went to the hospital around 2 a.m. and was released seven hours later after X-rays, blood tests and a CAT scan. Though he was lucky to walk away without major injury, Matt suffered bad neck and back strains from the impact and has been off of work at the direction of his doctor since the accident occurred.

The driver who plowed into Matt was arrested for her second DUI — she was two and a half times over the legal limit at the time of the accident. The driver and her passenger survived the accident, most likely due to the quick response of Matt and his supervisor.

"I know the situation could have been a lot worse for everyone," said Matt.



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This Teamster is no stranger to being vulnerable while on the job. Last year on St. Patrick's Day, he was helping out a stranded motorist when the same thing happened — a drunk driver crashed into his truck. Luckily, the damage was minimal and no one was seriously hurt. It was the fourth time the Local 700 member had been rear-ended while working. He's suffered other minor injuries during countless other incidents due to stopped vehicles and distracted drivers.

"We are thankful that everyone survived this accident and commend Matt for putting his own well-being aside to help save the lives of the people in that car," said Becky Strzechowski, President of Local 700 and Trustee of Teamsters Joint Council 25. "Our members that work on roads and highways are unfortunately vulnerable to these types of accidents and really put their lives on the line to serve the public."

Matt's advice for anyone behind the wheel? "You can't be in that much of a hurry where you have to drive on the shoulder," he said. "It's just not safe for anyone, even when traffic is light or it's late at night."

Teamsters Local 700 is an affiliate of Teamsters Joint Council 25, America's premier labor union for Chicago, Illinois and northwest Indiana.