

The Chief

FEATURED

Honored by Employer, Council, Assembly Laud HA Caretaker for Fire Heroics That Brought Family, Dog to Safety

By RACHELCISTO Oct 7, 2016



Courtesy Photo

'ALL LIFE IS PRECIOUS': Ivan Maestre, a Caretaker at NYCHA's Claremont Rehab development in The Bronx, is being hailed as a hero for rescuing four adults, an infant and the family dog from an apartment fire in August. 'I don't feel like a hero,' he said. 'I w I believe all life is precious.'

A veteran Housing Authority employee was honored by city and state lawmakers after saving people and a dog from an apartment fire in The Bronx this summer.

Ivan Maestre, a caretaker at NYCHA's Claremont Rehab development, and a six-year veteran of the department, grew up in the authority's Saint Mary's Park houses, and has three siblings and an uncle who also work for NYCHA.

'There Must Be a Fire'

He was making his usual rounds through the Claremont development sometime after noon on Aug. 2.

"I was in the basement filling up the bucket with water so I could do the mopping," he said, "he heard a commotion above him. "It sounded like glass popping and I knew there must be fire."

His first instinct was to alert the tenants. "I was running and shouting and banging on doors like a maniac," he said.

He said he was afraid the fire would reach one of the building's gas lines, and cause the brownstone to explode. "I've seen too many stories like that," he said.

Mr. Maestre said a few construction workers who were outside joined him as he raced to the second floor.

But when they reached the third floor, they were confronted with a cloud of thick smoke from a third-floor apartment where the fire had started.

"I told the people that were with me to go back downstairs and I kicked in the door to see if there was anyone there," he said.

Getting no response, Mr. Maestre ran up to the fourth floor, where he knew there was a family with a new baby and a dog.

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“I pounded on their door and told them not to open it because there was a fire downstairs, I head to the fire escape,” he said. He then ran to the roof and climbed down the fire escape family’s apartment.

“They opened the window and climbed out and I helped them down,” he said. “It was hard because some of them were scared of heights.”

Mr. Maestre’s actions saved four adults, a two-week-old infant, and the family dog.

A Face of NYCHA

They also won him accolades and proclamations from City Council Member Vanessa Gibso state Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner, and a spot as the face of the agency’s “I Am NextGeneration NYCHA” campaign.

“We were so happy to hear about what he had done,” said NYCHA spokeswoman Crystal V “We thought he was a perfect example of the values we’re promoting through NextGen NYC

“I’m deeply honored,” Mr. Maestre said of all the praise he’s received. “It’s a good feeling, but really don’t feel like I did anything heroic.”