



"Village with a Past, City with a Future"

Kenai Police Department
107 S. Willow St, Kenai, Alaska 99611
Telephone: 907-283-7879 / Fax: 907-283-2267

July 24, 2016

Letter of Commendation

On the afternoon of July 22, 2016, the Kenai Police and Fire Departments responded to the report of a personal watercraft that had capsized in the Kenai River during the dipnet fishery. Initial reports were that three people had gone into the river and their boat had become submerged. Several Kenai Firefighters and I motored to the scene of the incident on a rescue boat to assist.

Upon arrival at the scene, I observed Correctional Officer Mike Zener, along with several other individuals, in a personal watercraft. C.O. Zener was off-duty and participating in the dipnet fishery at the time of the incident.

Witnesses to the incident reported to me that they had seen several of the ailing boat's passengers go into the water as the boat rapidly began to sink. Two of the passengers, one of which was a teenaged boy, were pulled from the cold water of the Kenai River by C.O. Zener and Alaska State Trooper Joe Whittom. The third passenger was rescued by another unknown boater.

After pulling the passengers to safety, C.O. Zener and his fellow boat mates located the sinking watercraft and lashed it to their boat. I observed that less than a foot of the ailing boat was visible above the waterline. Rather than releasing the ailing boat on our arrival, C.O. Zener assisted us in securing a rescue line to the boat. He assisted maintaining control of the sunken boat as we towed it back to the dock. During the tow, the boat righted itself but remained full of water. C.O. Zener remained with the ailing boat's passengers and their boat until they were safely on land and the saved boat was trailered.

I am highly impressed by C.O. Zener's willingness to help his fellow Alaskans in a moment of chaos and crisis. He handled the situation with the calmness of a seasoned professional. His selfless actions, along with those of his boat mates, undoubtedly saved the ailing boaters from serious physical harm or death. Impressively, he also assisted in saving their vessel. During the incident, C.O. Zener remained humble and downplayed his heroic actions. Although he did not identify himself to the public, C.O. Zener's actions were a great representation of the values and expectations of the Department of Corrections and I commend his efforts.

Lt. Ben Langham