



Correction Officer and Medal of Honor recipient Lenin Orellana with Colleen Cassar (left) and Courtney Ahlsen, daughters of John Rey, whom Orellana rescued from a burning van on July 5.

Jail cop saluted for fiery rescue

BY JOHN LAUNGER
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AS MAYOR BLOOMBERG awarded Correction Officer Lenin Orellana the department's highest honor yesterday, two women in the crowd stood up, snapping pictures and smiling.

They were not Orellana's family. They are the daughters of the man he pulled from a burning van seconds before it exploded in a collision with a wrong-way drunken driver.

The heroic act made Orellana, 41, one of three Correction Department employees to receive the department's Medal of Honor at an awards ceremony on Rikers Island.

John Rey, 64, of Greenlawn, L.I., was driving a shuttle bus on the Long Island Expressway in Queens on July 5 when a car hit him head-on.

Orellana, a father of four who has been a correction officer for two years, passed the accident on his way to work. He pulled

over, jumped the median and dragged the unconscious Rey from the burning van.

Rey died in a Queens hospital 18 days later. But his daughters — Colleen Rey Cassar and Courtney Ahlsen — said they can't thank Orellana enough for saving their father from a fiery end.

"You gave us the opportunity to have some sort of final moments with our father — and we will forever be grateful to you," Ahlsen said.

"I did what I had to do," said Orellana, of Bellport, L.I. He had tears in his eyes.

Correction Officer Eric Poggioli received the top honor for pulling a man from a burning car on the Gowanus Expressway. The man survived.

Edward Clas, a civilian mechanic for the Correction Department, earned the distinction for saving a woman and two children from a burning home in his Ozone Park, Queens, neighborhood.

Like Orellana, both were off duty at the time.

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