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Civilian Bravery Foundation celebrates 10th anniversary

by Sarah McAllister

The Civilian Bravery Foundation celebrated its 10th anniversary yesterday with an awards ceremony to commemorate many men and women who risked their lives to save others last year. The event, which has honoured 265 heroes in the decade and grows in stature each year, is an opportunity to recognise ordinary people who, although having done extraordinarily brave acts, might otherwise go unnoticed.

The most prestigious award of the event, the Gold Medal of Civilian Bravery, went to D.V. Lasantha Buddika who was tragically killed last year whilst protecting a woman and her child from thieves. Lasantha, a 25-year-old bachelor from Bentota, was returning home by bus on the evening of September 11th, 2002 from the garment factory where he worked as a quality controller. Fellow passenger Ranjani Hemalatha and her child asked him to accompany them along a dark road. When Ranjani was attacked by a gang who tried to rob her purse, Lasantha stepped forward to protect her. The gangsters stabbed him in the abdomen and throat, fatally wounding him, whilst Ranjani escaped relatively unhurt.

The guest speaker at the ceremony, Deepal Suriyarachchi, made a moving and eloquent speech to remind the audience of the value of life. "We don't think of life until we face danger for our survival. We take our lives for granted."