



# NEWS RELEASE

Orange County Fire Authority  
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## **Orange County Fire Authority Recognizes its Best and Bravest at Annual Awards Ceremony**

**Irvine, CA** – More than 400 people came out to the Orange County Fire Authority’s “Best and Bravest” awards ceremony that honors our firefighters and staff employees for their bravery and merits on Thursday, January 29.

Engineer / Paramedic Dan Brown was selected Career Firefighter of the Year, Bruce Newell was named Reserve Firefighter of the Year, Todd Muilenburg was chosen Manager of the Year, and Jason Caya was awarded Staff Employee of the Year.

Captain/Paramedic Paul Holaday received the esteemed **Lifesaving Medal** for his heroic actions by a pool in Palm Desert when he was vacationing with his family. On August 20, 2014, a three year old boy slipped unnoticed into a crowded resort pool and was pulled out, unconscious and not breathing. Paul was alerted by his wife of the situation and quickly sprung into action to help this child who was found lifeless. Paul, along with another off duty firefighter paramedic from Orange City Fire (Brandon Chastain), began treating the boy. He performed CPR while Brandon assisted. After a few minutes of CPR, the boy started to cough. They continued their rescue efforts until local firefighter paramedics arrived. Upon the arrival of the firefighter paramedics, the boy was crying and was regaining his muscle tone. The small child was transported to a local hospital in his mother's arms and then was airlifted to Long Beach Memorial Hospital where he was released after spending a day in the hospital. This call shows how CPR saves lives and children drown without a sound. During 2014 in Orange County, there were 85 drowning calls and 41 of those were fatal. “Paul’s quick actions directly contributed to the successful outcome of this call,” said OCFA Fire Chief Jeff Bowman. “If Captain Holaday was not there, this little guy might not be with his family today.”

**The Medal of Merit** was awarded to Michele Hernandez who is currently assigned to Strategic Services. Michele's unwavering commitment to the OCFA, comprehensive background in the Emergency Command Center, extensive historical knowledge, and specialized education has demonstrated to be invaluable as she has brought significant advancements in the form of technology and innovation to the Strategic Services Section. One of her many duties is the oversight and management of Secured Fire Protection Agreements (SFPA) between the OCFA and various land-developers throughout the County of Orange. The nature of these agreements require continuous management, review for accuracy and clear documentation, adherence to timelines, and on-going communications-negotiations with developers; often times lasting several years before being finalized. This work, which mostly goes unnoticed, has brought millions of dollars of revenue to the OCFA over the years. Since 2002, she have worked on 35 separate Secured Fire Protection Agreement projects which has generated the OCFA over 10 million dollars in revenue.

**The Unit Citation** was presented to OCFA firefighters who helped save four people from a burning home on January 8, 2014. Engines 70 and 72 were dispatched as part of a working structure fire response to a home on N. Hathaway Street in the City of Santa Ana. Responding units received reports from the Santa Ana Police Department that there were children trapped inside the house. Engine 70 arrived at scene to find a single story home with heavy fire involvement in the garage and was told that there were children inside; they immediately went into rescue mode utilizing the "rescue exception." Engine 70's crew worked efficiently and proceeded to the inside rear of the house to begin a search for the victims and brought one of them out. Engine 72 arrived and began assisting with the rescue effort of others. Both crews searched from the side and rear of the structure, but were pushed outside due to the intense heat levels. Engineer's Levi Medina and Matthew Berger prepared hose lines on the driveway in preparation for other arriving resources. Firefighters Austin Brawner, Nick Kruger and Pariet Hernandez returned to the front to man the hose lines on the driveway, in hopes of making conditions better for the continued rescue attempt. Captains Fernando Salas and Cliff Blasi were at the rear of the structure and knew they had little time left to save anyone else inside. Upon searching the first room, they found a second person and removed her to the front yard. If not for the immediate, aggressive actions of these two crews entering the house despite there being a large volume of fire, the patients would have perished. In all, four people were rescued and treated and have since recovered.

**The Unsung Hero** was awarded to the OCFA Benevolent Association.

The Orange County Fire Authority Benevolent Association was established in 1986 by a small group of firefighters following a severe off-duty injury to an OCFA firefighter that left him permanently disabled. Although fellow firefighters scrambled to help their brother in need in his personal challenges, this tragic event illuminated the need for an organization that could help in a more formal way outside of the fire department's responsibility. This small group formed a not-for-profit corporation that we now know as the OCFA Benevolent Association. The Board of Directors volunteer numerous hours of their time and represent every battalion and section of the Orange County Fire Authority. The motto "Taking Care of Our Own" is the benchmark for their decisions, many of which are done behind the scenes to protect the privacy of those involved. The Association provides many benefits and services to its members thanks to their future planning and prudent investing. These include providing personalized assistance and special needs to members who are sick, injured, disabled; providing loans and grants to those experiencing a hardship; member and dependent death benefits and funeral assistance; providing low cost supplemental insurance and offering \$25,000 in annual scholarships.

The Best and Bravest awards ceremony and dinner is coordinated by three Orange County Exchange Clubs and the OCFA Ceremonies and Protocol (CAP) Team. OCFA's Board of Directors was represented on stage by the OCFA Board Chair Al Murray and Orange County Supervisor Todd Spitzer. We would like to thank our sponsors; Western Medical Center, Mission Hospitals as part of the St. Joseph Health System, Southern California Gas Company, Care Ambulance, Prime Healthcare Hospitals of Orange County, Orange County Professional Firefighters Association, Shoreline Ambulance, Don Dressler Consultants, OC Employees Association, OCFA Benevolent Association, Orange County Chief Officers Association, Ambulance Association of OC, Allstar Fire Equipment, Hoag Hospital, City of Mission Viejo, Camel Financial, Doctors Ambulance and Woodruff, Spradlin and Smart. Special thanks for certificates provided by Senator Janet Nguyen and Assembly members Donald Wagner and Young Kim. Best and Bravest Challenge coins were provided as part of the Southern California Gas Co. Sponsorship.

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*The Orange County Fire Authority is a joint powers authority that serves more than 1.8 million residents in 23 cities*