

CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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Ten CAL FIRE Firefighters Receive Medal of Valor *Highest honor given to state employees*

Sacramento – Today in a ceremony hosted by the California Highway Patrol, ten CAL FIRE employees received the prestigious State of California Governor’s Medal of Valor award for acts of heroism extending above and beyond the normal call of duty. The recipients were part of 29 state employees who were honored for their extraordinary acts of bravery and heroism to save the life of another.

“While protecting lives, property, and our natural resources is our mission, there are times when first responders must put themselves at extraordinary risk to meet that mission and serve the people they were called to help,” said CAL FIRE Director and Fire Chief Joe Tyler. “Today I am proud to see these extraordinary individuals honored. They deserve the highest commendations for their heroic acts.”

Governor Newsom’s Cabinet Secretary Ann Patterson presented the Medal of Valor, which is the highest honor that California bestows on its public servants, to the following CAL FIRE employees:

Fire Captain Josh Clark and Firefighter IIs Kyle Callaway and Kenneth Ellis:

On February 21, 2023, the Santa Cruz Mountains were experiencing another winter storm in a season of consecutive atmospheric rivers. While this storm had less precipitation than previous ones, local winds were steady at 36 miles per hour, with gusts up to 50 miles per hour. Many trees in the area had been weakened by previous storms, and trees more than 100 feet tall were falling, damaging structures, and making roadways impassable. CAL FIRE Engine 1760, staffed by Fire Captain Josh Clark and Fire Fighter IIs Kyle Callaway and Kenneth Ellis were asked to assist the neighboring Boulder Creek Fire Department with a report of a tree that had fallen onto a house and trapped a victim inside. Engine 1760 and Boulder Creek Fire units arrived at the residence that was badly damaged. The top of a redwood tree that was over 10 feet in length and 12 inches in diameter had broken off and fallen through the roof of the home and continued through the floor, trapping a young toddler underneath. The toddler’s pelvis was pinned between the tree and the badly damaged floor. Trees and other debris continued to fall from unknown directions all around, threatening the rescuers’ lives. Captain Clark, Firefighters Callaway and Ellis and the Boulder Creek firefighters worked from the rooftop and inside the home to stabilize the structure's roof and floor and remove the tree while also monitoring the toddler. The toddler was fading in and out of consciousness and his condition continued to deteriorate. The crew decided to free him before the entire tree could be removed, which presented a particularly technical challenge. They had to relieve the log’s weight from the toddler while preventing the roof from caving in. In an effort that can only be described as brute strength, Firefighters Callaway and Ellis lifted the remaining tree section just enough for another firefighter to pull the toddler out from underneath. Due to the weather conditions and rapid wind gusts, a helicopter air ambulance was not able to respond, so the toddler was escorted by firefighters, paramedics, and sheriff deputies to a trauma center where he underwent multiple surgeries for associated injuries. Fire Captain Clark, Firefighters Callaway and Ellis and the Boulder Creek Fire Department displayed instinctual courage in this dynamic and hazardous environment. The toddler’s dad shared, “If everybody wasn’t doing their job, I don’t know if he’d be alive or not.”

Peace Officer Fire Captains John May, Kory McGranahan, Timothy Cabral, James Green, and Ariel Sosa:

On June 29, 2022, at approximately 5:54 p.m., the Perris Emergency Command Center dispatched a response to a three-vehicle traffic collision with a person trapped inside one of the cars. The first arriving unit was Riverside County Sheriff's Deputy Carlos Rosado, who broadcasted that the vehicle was on fire and confirmed the driver was trapped. Deputy Rosado requested additional nearby units that were carrying fire extinguishers to respond. CAL FIRE Peace Officer Fire Captains John May, Kory McGranahan, Tim Cabral, Joe Green, and Ariel Sosa heard the radio call and responded that they were on duty and assigned to their patrol nearby.

Upon arrival, the officers observed that the driver was trapped, screaming, burning, and bleeding. The driver needed to be pulled from the vehicle, but no one could pry open the door given the extreme conditions. Officer Green rushed to provide support by moving fire extinguishers and assisting Officers May and McGranahan. Due to the twisted metal and hidden fire between the engine and the dashboard, the fire extinguishers did not suppress the fire. Officer McGranahan climbed into the vehicle and placed himself in the fire's path to curtail the flame's growth by inserting the fire extinguisher's dry powder into gaps and cracks near the driver's lower legs. Officer May used his handheld forceable entry tools to peel open the hood and fenders to access the seat of the fire. As more fire extinguishers arrived from nearby units, both Officers May and McGranahan used them to keep the fire from growing. Officer Cabral aided Officers May and McGranahan in attempts to combat the fire. Officer Cabral pulled his ice chest full of water to temporarily suppress the fire's growth beneath the vehicle. These forward-thinking actions slowed the fire's spread, but the driver was still in harm's way. The first fire engine arrived at approximately 6:02 p.m. Still facing the active burning fire without any fire-suppressing agent left, Officers Cabral and Sosa pulled the hose from the fire engine while the firefighters suited up in additional safety gear. Thankfully, Officers Cabral and Sosa extinguished the fire. Additional fire engines arrived and cut the driver out of the vehicle. The driver was flown by air ambulance to the nearest local trauma and burn center.

Pipeline Safety Engineer Al Giese:

On June 21, 2023, Pipeline Safety Engineer Al Giese witnessed a vehicle accident directly ahead of him near Buttonwillow on Interstate 5 as he headed toward Crimson Pipeline Beer Nose Facility. He pulled over to lend assistance and ensure notifications were made to emergency responders. Mr. Giese checked the damaged SUV for the condition of the occupants. A male driver and a female passenger were inside the vehicle and clustered in the front passenger seat. The driver was mobile and calling for help and the passenger was immobile but breathing. Mr. Giese advised the driver to leave the passenger in a sitting position to help their breathing until emergency responders arrived. While waiting for emergency responders, smoke began to appear within the cab of the damaged SUV. Mr. Giese found that a small fire had started near the front brake area of the vehicle. After unsuccessfully stopping the fire, a decision was made to remove the passenger from the vehicle which was soon engulfed in flames. Unfortunately, the driver had not revealed that the car contained explosive fireworks. As a result, the passenger again needed to be moved to another location away from the ongoing blasts and dangerous fire that had spread to the interstate shoulder and shut down traffic in both directions. Emergency responders then arrived and aided the passenger and mitigated the fire. Due to internal injuries, unfortunately, the passenger did not survive. Mr. Giese's duties are typically related to inspections of pipelines and pipeline facilities. His responsibilities do not involve responding to emergencies nor acting as a first responder, but he saw that people's lives were at risk and acted heroically without hesitation and at great risk to himself to ensure their welfare.

Fire Apparatus Engineer Paramedic Christopher J. Acevedo:

At 11:25 p.m. on April 11, 2022, off-duty Fire Apparatus Engineer Paramedic Chris Acevedo was at home with his family getting ready for bed. While upstairs, his daughter looked out the window and could see flames coming out of a large two-story home across the street. She notified her dad, who then ran across the street into the burning home. Mr. Acevedo made entry through the front door and yelled, "Is anyone in here?" Hearing mumbling coming from the second floor, Mr. Acevedo found and climbed the stairs. He quickly located a male victim and dragged him out of the burning home to safety. Mr. Acevedo remembered that a small child and two older adults lived in the home as well. By this time, Mr. Acevedo's wife and father were yelling for him not to go back in, but he was compelled to enter the burning home once more to search for potential victims. He again

made his way up the stairs but was pushed back by the smoke and heat. Going back down the stairs, he performed a search of the first floor before exiting, suffering from smoke inhalation. Both Mr. Acevedo and the victim were transported to the local hospital for treatment. It was later determined that thankfully the other residents were not home at the time of the fire.

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