

2021 ORANGE COUNTY HEROES AWARDS

Celebrate the Hero Within!



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Orange County

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The 2021 Orange County Heroes Awards videos and virtual event were produced by Hildreth Media Group, Inc.

WELCOME

Becky Firey



On behalf of the American Red Cross, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the 2021 Class of Orange County Heroes. Although we are unable to be together this year to celebrate in person, it's an honor to share their stories with you. These are truly extraordinary individuals and organizations who have made a lasting impact on the community and embody the spirit of the Red Cross mission.

From all of us at the Red Cross, please accept my sincere thank you for your support. Because of you, the Red Cross touches our community every day through the following programs:

- **Disaster Services**
- **Training Services**
- **Service to the Armed Forces**
- **International Services**
- **Biomedical Services**

Even as coronavirus threatens millions, major disasters continue to shatter communities from coast to coast. Destructive hurricanes; relentless wildfires; a derecho that decimated Midwest towns and home fires nationwide—last year, we started a new disaster response nearly every day on average, delivering relief and hope on an unprecedented scale.

Last April, the Red Cross took on a new role and began collecting and distributing plasma from people fully recovered from COVID-19 to help treat patients battling the deadly virus.

In Orange County, the Red Cross empowers ordinary people to perform extraordinary acts in emergency situations. Whether it's a wildfire or a home fire, a call for blood, or a call from a service member or military family in need, the Red Cross continues to deliver its vital mission, and provide hope when it's needed most.

Because of your support in the last fiscal year, the Red Cross Orange County Chapter:



Responded to **102 local disasters** and provided help for those affected



Provided **1,847 services to military members**, veterans, and their families



Collected **57,690 red blood cell units**



Enrolled over **31,800 people** in Red Cross health and safety training courses



Supported by more than **2,300 local volunteers**

We were able to do all this and more because of the generous support of partners, volunteers and donors. Thank you once again for joining us and helping us advance the Red Cross mission in our community.

With appreciation,

Becky Firey

Executive Director
American Red Cross of Orange County
Southern California Region

HERO AWARDS

2021 Class of Orange County Heroes

Gift of Life Heroes:

Jackie and Victor Miller

Good Samaritan Hero:

Michael Sean Wright, Wound Walk OC

Disaster Services Hero:

Orange County Fire Authority

First Responder Hero:

Long Term Care Facility Team & Expert Stewardship

Corporate Hero:

Wing Lam, Wahoo's Fish Taco

Youth Hero:

Nithin Parthasarathy

Animal Welfare Hero:

OC Animal Care Field Services Team

Service to the Armed Forces Hero:

Jodie Merkle

Thank you to our 2021 Orange County Heroes Selection Committee:

Al Austin

Terry Bailey

David Engwall

Sara Garske

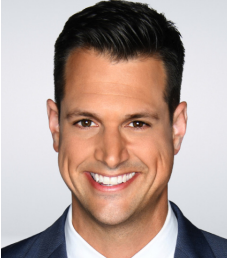
Dr. Karla Nichols

Elyse Shelger

Tara Thiara

Event Emcee

DOUG KOLK



You can mostly find Doug Kolk on the red carpet covering everything entertainment for KTLA. He joined the station in March 2012 as general assignment news reporter. It wasn't long after he found himself alongside Hollywood's A-List.

After college, Doug worked for his father's produce company in the Bronx, N.Y., before joining WICZ-TV in Binghamton, N.Y. He then worked as a traffic anchor for WBBH-TV in Fort Myers, Fla., and then spent five years reporting for KFMB-TV in San Diego.

Doug is a graduate of Hofstra University and a self-proclaimed "concert-going fool!" Although, the live performances may have to be put on hold for now as he and his lovely wife Natalie just welcomed their first child into this world, a baby girl named "Preslee," named after "The King."



Gift of Life Heroes

JACKIE AND VICTOR MILLER



Jackie and Victor Miller are regular platelet donors and are on a first name basis with the staff at the American Red Cross Santa Ana Red Cross Blood Donation Center.

Jackie and Victor book their platelet donation appointments together for every other Sunday morning at 7:00 a.m. Platelets are tiny cells in blood that form clots and stop bleeding. For millions of Americans, they are essential to surviving and fighting cancer, chronic diseases and traumatic

injuries. Every 15 seconds someone needs platelets. Platelets must be used within five days, and new donors are needed every day.

Combined, Jackie and Victor have donated over 1,000 units. They never miss an appointment and book well in advance to make sure the units are available for those undergoing cancer treatment. Despite juggling work and family, even a pandemic has not stopped them from their commitment to give. Their dedication is the perfect example that every day heroes can make a world of difference for people with cancer.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **Jackie and Victor Miller** for their platelet donations, which have given the gift of life to countless patients in need.

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Good Samaritan Hero

MICHAEL SEAN WRIGHT

Wound Walk OC



When Michael Sean Wright moved to Santa Ana four years ago, he immediately noticed the homeless, who were unsheltered, and in many instances, in need of medical care. He began carrying a small first aid kit and some cleaning solution on his daily walks, offering wound care to those who needed help.

Michael started Wound Walk OC to help those living outdoors who don't have a primary care physician. Most unsheltered homeless consider the ER doctor their primary care physician, but those doctors usually can only stabilize the person's condition or injury. Instead, Wound Walk OC treats and monitors wounds over time, so these injuries can heal properly.

The organization consists of a group of volunteers who walk throughout Orange County, including Santa Ana, Fullerton, Huntington Beach and Anaheim, bringing medical supplies, hygiene products, and food to the unsheltered homeless who live and sleep there.

Faced with the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, Michael and his team of volunteers continued to assist the homeless, providing them with masks, hand sanitizer, meals, hygiene kits and wound care.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **Michael Sean Wright and Wound Walk OC** for embodying the term "Good Samaritan" and caring for those in great need in Orange County.

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Disaster Services Hero

ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY



The past year was unusual in many ways. The world faced and fought the COVID-19 pandemic, while California faced its worst wildfire year in recorded history with more than 4 million acres burned. Thanks to the Orange County Fire Authority, while some property losses were sustained, there was no loss of human life, despite widespread fires. Orange County emerged scarred, but relatively unscathed. This outcome is

directly attributable to the heroic work done by Orange County Fire Authority and Chief Brian Fennessy's leadership.

The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) is comprised of more than 1,000 firefighters serving nearly two dozen cities in Orange County and unincorporated parts of the county. In the last few months of 2020, OCFA combatted three major wildfires in Orange County: the Bond, Silverado and Blue Ridge Fires. Each was fueled by erratic Santa Ana winds. In a time of uncertainty, firefighters continued to show up and adapt with new COVID-19 protocols and a determination to save life and property. During the Silverado Fire, two hand-crew members were badly burned during fighting the flames—highlighting the risk and unpredictability.

In addition to responding to fires and medical calls, OCFA assisted the Orange County Health Care Agency with the rollout of Super Point of Dispensing (POD) sites, capable of administering 7,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses per eight-hour day. OCFA played an important role as the County's unified command and helped stand up an Incident Management Team using their expertise in Incident Command System structure in order to respond to this pandemic in an effective way.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **Orange County Fire Authority** for their heroic and lifesaving actions against wildfires and for protecting residents against the COVID-19 pandemic through vaccine distribution support.

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First Responder Hero

LONG TERM CARE FACILITY TEAM & EXPERT STEWARDSHIP



When COVID-19 outbreaks started occurring in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities in Orange County, the amount of work responding to these outbreaks quickly surpassed the capacity of the Orange County Health Department's Epidemiology Program. In May 2020, the Long Term Care Facility (LTCF) team was formed, shifting nurses from other county programs. Dr. Helene Calvet,

an infection control physician, saw the need and came out of retirement to train these nurses who had no experience in disease control. These nurses had to learn many new skills quickly as the number of outbreaks rapidly increased. Expert Stewardship, a contracted group of Infection Prevention (IP) specialists, joined the team to help with IP assessment and training in facilities. While many of their colleagues were working from the safety of their homes, the LTCF Team had to go into numerous facilities with uncontrolled transmission of COVID-19, risking infection themselves, to give facilities the advice, training and support they needed to deal with outbreaks.

During the first wave, the team had to take over management of an assisted living facility whose staff was wiped out by COVID; for a 10-day period, team members worked on placing the COVID positive patients in other facilities and arranging caregivers, meals, laundry, housekeeping and COVID testing for the remaining 33 COVID-negative fragile older adults. Then, at the peak of the December surge, the team handled almost 80 outbreaks at once. During the slower time between surges, the team helped facilities with training on fit testing of N95s and is currently arranging for vaccination of new residents in skilled nursing facilities.

To date, the LTCF Team has responded to 330 outbreaks, which caused over 14,000 infections and 1,700 deaths (including 16 staff deaths). Expert Stewardship made over 1,300 site visits to facilities, providing valuable feedback and training. The LTCF Team endured unending stress and long hours, as well as threat of infection, to help those who were hardest hit by the pandemic.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **Long Term Care Facility Team & Expert Stewardship** for taking on the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and saving countless lives through infection prevention and control.

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Corporate Hero

WING LAM

Wahoo's Fish Taco



What began as a small act of kindness—a single delivery of 300 meals from Wahoo's Fish Taco to Hoag Hospital in Irvine—turned into California Love Drop, an astounding sea of collaboration of 82 partnering businesses and hundreds of supporters and volunteers, resulting in over 17,500 meals, treats, beverages and PPE delivered to frontline heroes and those in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last April, when many businesses were frozen, Wing asked other business owners if they would join him in delivering burritos to frontline heroes, saying “thank you” to those that need it most, while keeping restaurants open. The California Love Drop has made over 200 deliveries to Southern California frontline heroes, including CHOC Children's Hospital, UCI Medical Center, Hoag Hospital, numerous police stations and firehouses and all 35 American Red Cross blood drives hosted at Antis Roofing & Waterproofing. The founding “droppers” include Wahoo's, Yogurtland, Antis Roofing & Waterproofing, 95.5 KLOS's Heidi & Frank, Cholula, Monster Energy and Hint Water.

“It is a privilege to serve others, particularly at a time when we all feel the stress and strain of the hardships brought about by the pandemic. Many of our business partners have been seriously impacted by lockdowns but continue to give. We are so fortunate to have such a dedicated group focused on something so much bigger than ourselves. I know that's why we will come out of this stronger than ever,” says Wing Lam, Co-Founder of Wahoo's Fish Taco and California Love Drop.

Wahoo's Fish Taco has a history of philanthropy. For close to two decades Wahoo's has generously donated thousands of meal coupons to the American Red Cross, which are used to thank countless blood donors.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **Wing Lam** for his dedication to the community and acts of kindness to frontline workers in Orange County.

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NITHIN PARTHASARATHY



Nithin Parthasarathy started his non-profit, Zero Waste Initiative, with the aim to rescue food waste and reduce food insecurity while preserving environmental sustainability. Growing up, he was always instructed about being conscious of food waste. Once, while eating at a Bruegger's bagel shop, Nithin observed that the surplus unsold bagels were discarded after store closure every day. These were good quality bagels, but simply made in excess. He reached out to several shelters and food banks to see if they would be willing to absorb those

unsold bagels. Thus, he began daily operations collecting surplus bagels from one bagel store and delivering them to two charities.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 was impacting employment and economy, so Nithin decided to accelerate the operations and reached out to more stores, including Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts. Getting approval and organizing food distribution to different non-profit organizations required a lot of advocacy given the pandemic-induced fear of the unknown, alongside overcoming obstacles with regards to health risk.

Nithin constantly reaches out to high school students to recruit volunteers and trains them on pickup and delivery procedures, coordinating between donation sources and recipients. Expanding to seven student volunteers, his non-profit has rescued over \$100,000 in wholesale value of baked goods, such as bagels and donuts, in just nine months donating to various organizations and shelters.

Volunteers from Zero Waste Initiative pick up and deliver baked goods seven days a week and serve about 12 local and national organizations such as Salvation Army, Power of One Foundation, Share Our Selves, Families Forward, and others. Hundreds of people throughout Orange County benefit from these donations.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **Nithin Parthasarathy** for his hard work and dedication to reducing food waste and helping feed those in need.

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Animal Welfare Hero

OC ANIMAL CARE FIELD SERVICES TEAM



In late December of 2019, OC Animal Care received a report of 300 rabbits with no food or water at a residence in Fullerton. Upon arrival, Animal Control Officers noticed rabbits in the front yard and the driveway.

Several contacts were made with the elderly owner. OC Animal Care staff assessed the situation and determined the owner was in desperate need of help. It was clear the owner was struggling to take care of the large number of rabbits. The rabbits had built burrows in both the front and back yards.

In January of 2020, over the course of two days, a team of OC Animal Care Animal Control Officers safely captured and impounded over 300 rabbits. While on scene, each rabbit was photographed, documented, and fully examined to assess their physical condition and triage their medical needs. After several months, all the rabbits were given a clean bill of health and new lease on life.

The elderly owner was grateful for the assistance of OC Animal Care and admitted it had been a huge burden caring for over 300 rabbits for so long. All the rabbits found their forever homes and continue to live happily with their new owners.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **OC Animal Care Field Services Team** for their actions in saving those rabbits lives and finding them new homes in Orange County.

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Service to the Armed Forces Hero

JODIE MERKLE



Jodie Merkle was introduced to the military community in 2003 when her husband Christopher Merkle deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom. During this time, Jodie stepped up and became the core support for herself and her first-born child, who was only two months old. This was only the beginning of Jodie's role as a military spouse.

Christopher deployed multiple times over the course of several years, and during this time, Jodie worked full time and cared for their children. Jodie also filled in and fulfilled the role of Cub Scout leader in the absence of her deployed husband.

In 2015, Jodie saw the impact that military life and deployments can have on veterans and their families and knew it was her duty to take action. Additionally, because high rates of suicide in the veteran communities, she felt an even higher calling to help all members of the military community. Jodie and Chris founded the Orange County Chapter of Team Red White and Blue (RWB), a group that focuses on helping build and maintain the mental and physical health of veterans and their families.

Team RWB faced challenges during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to restrictions on community engagement. Jodie became chapter captain of Team RWB and has since been instrumental in creating engagement opportunities for all members of Team RWB during the pandemic. Jodie encourages chapter members to compete in challenges in teams, creating a pathway to build community and comradery. She organizes weekly socially-distanced outings where chapter members can safely continue to the path to mental and physical health betterment.

Jodie's contributions have resulted in a community of hundreds of veterans and family members. Jodie juggles many important hats: mother, wife, chapter captain of Team RWB, and Cub Scout Leader; and, she serves as a courier that transports COVID-19 vaccines.

The American Red Cross is proud to honor **Jodie Merkle** for her contributions to the military community in Orange County, and for her passion for serving those who have served.

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Glenn Maddalon Regional Chief Development Officer	Becky Firey Executive Director (Orange County)
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Steven Alt Regional Director of Service to the Armed Forces	Yvette Baysinger Executive Director (San Bernardino County)

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**American
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Mission

The American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

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