

Central Valley Heroes Awards

Celebrating the Everyday Extraordinary



**American
Red Cross**

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Welcome



On behalf of the American Red Cross, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the **2025 Class of Central Valley Heroes**. It's an honor to share their stories with you and be together to celebrate these everyday extraordinary heroes. These are truly remarkable individuals who have made a lasting impact on the Central Valley 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

In the Central Valley, the Red Cross empowers ordinary people to perform extraordinary acts in emergency situations. Whether it's a wildfire or home fire, 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 of the Central Valley:

- Responded to **247** disasters and provided help for **960** Central Valley neighbors
- Provided more than **2,145** services to military members, veterans and their families
- Enrolled over **17,805** people in Red Cross health and safety courses
- Provided preparedness education to **1,887** adults, youth and businesses
- Installed more than **947** smoke alarms and made **356** homes safer

The Red Cross is responding nonstop with a major disaster occurring as often as every 15 days. 2024 saw the second-highest number of billion-dollar disasters in a single year marked by extreme events like Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

Based on the first two months of this year, 2025 is on track to potentially set new records for the number of major disasters. As disasters are becoming more frequent and intense, the American Red Cross is on the frontlines of disaster response, supporting families across the country who are struggling to cope with this humanitarian crisis.

We were able to do 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,

Lori Wilson

Interim Regional Chief Executive Officer,
Central California Region

Help Can't Wait DURING EMERGENCIES



During Red Cross Month, we invite you and others to join the American Red Cross mission by volunteering, learning lifesaving skills or making a financial donation. Your support helps ensure families don't face emergencies alone.

Volunteer. Donate. Take a Class.
Visit redcross.org/RedCrossMonth to learn more.



Please consider donating today. Text CVHEROES to 76278 or donate online CVHEROES.givesmart.com

Event Program

Registration and Networking

Introduction and Welcome

Awards Presentations

Good Samaritan Hero Award: Alba Aragon

Youth Hero Award: “Project Ethiopia” Gettysburg 5th/6th Grade Class

Healthcare Hero Award: Dr. Naeem Siddiqi, MD

Education Hero Award: Susanne Peterson

First Responder Hero Award: Juan Galindo

Military Hero Award: Bill and Janet Goodreau

Lifesaving Rescue Hero Award: Fresno Police Officers
Jacob Shubin, Andrew Hernandez, Justin Phoolka,
Jonathan Yang, and Christian Andrade

Community Impact Hero Award: Tony Pena

Global Citizenship Hero Award: Rosemary Caso

Clara Barton Humanitarian Hero Award: Oscar Rodriguez

Closing Remarks

Thank you

to our 2025 Central Valley Heroes Awards Planning Committee

Jené D'Ambrosio | Siana-Lea Gildard | Michell Hart | Tasha O'Neal

Reyna Pearce | Taylor Poisall | Noor Sabharwal | Blanca Santana

Rob Schumann | Lori Wilson

Event Emcees



Event Co-Emcee **Brian Dorman**

Brian Dorman is an Emmy and Edward R. Murrow winning TV News Anchor for CBS 47 News. Brian is a Detroit native with 19 years of experience in broadcast journalism. His career spans across much of the Midwest from Michigan, Kansas, Missouri, Indiana, Oklahoma, and now California.

His work in youth suicide prevention, investigations that dig into underserved communities, and breaking news has earned him numerous awards, but it's his connection to the community that he's most proud of. His role allows him to stay hyper focused on community-based journalism and highlight the phenomenal work of non-profits in the Central Valley.

Over the past year, Brian has dedicated much of his career to raising awareness of the deadly dangers of fentanyl. The project sent him to the southern border, Arizona, Texas, and Oregon.

You can watch Brian weeknights alongside Kathryn Herr and Chief Meteorologist Lauren Wallace on CBS 47 at 5, 5:30, 6, 7, 7:30 and 11 p.m.



Event Co-Emcee **Kathryn Herr**

Kathryn Herr co-anchors the CBS47 Eyewitness News evening shows with Brian Dorman and Chief Meteorologist Lauren Wallace. Kathryn has been with CBS47 since 2001, when she returned to her home state after work took her to Oregon and Idaho. Kathryn is an award-winning anchor/reporter, a proud graduate of UC Davis, an avid Dodgers fan,

and an enthusiastic animal lover. She is excited to be part of this great event that recognizes amazing members of our community.

Central Valley Heroes Honorees



Good Samaritan Hero **Alba Aragon**

On the evening of August 4, 2024, Alba Aragon became an unexpected hero when a 23-year-old man's swim in the San Joaquin River turned into a fight for survival. Awakened by frantic screams from the riverbank, Alba saw the man struggling against a strong current and quickly sinking beneath the surface. Without hesitation, she put on a life jacket, grabbed an inner tube, and paddled 30 yards into the river to reach him.

Her courage and quick thinking gave the man the lifeline he desperately needed. Alba guided him safely back to shore, where he was reunited with his family and received medical attention. First responders later confirmed that her selfless actions undoubtedly saved his life.

Alba's bravery in a moment of crisis reminds us that heroes are often those who rise without hesitation when others are in need. Her decisive and compassionate response turned a potential tragedy into a story of survival and hope.



Youth Hero

"Project Ethiopia" Kristyn Giesel and the Gettysburg Elementary Class

What does it take to save lives halfway across the world? For the fifth and sixth-grade students at Gettysburg Elementary, the answer was determination, creativity, and the guidance of their teacher, Kristyn Giesel. When they learned that \$400 could fund a life-saving surgery in Ethiopia, they decided to take action. With Ms. Giesel encouraging their compassion and drive, the students crafted bracelets, origami art, and stress balls, which they sold during school events. Their efforts raised over \$2,000—enough to fund five surgeries. These remarkable students proved that when young minds are inspired, they can change lives across the globe.



Healthcare Hero **Dr. Naeem Siddiqi, MD**

Dr. Naeem Siddiqi's five-decade career is a testament to the American Dream and a life of unwavering generosity. An immigrant from Pakistan, he overcame personal loss and challenges to build a career devoted to compassion and service. As a physician at Kaweah Health Medical Center, Dr. Siddiqi provides not only expert care but also emotional and holistic support to his patients. Beyond his practice, Dr. Siddiqi works an extra day every week, donating those earnings to charities that help provide food and resources to vulnerable communities.

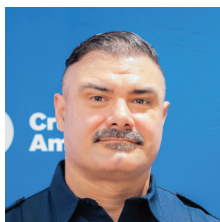
His selflessness ensures that countless lives are touched far beyond the walls of his clinic. Resilient and humble, Dr. Siddiqi's dedication reflects the highest ideals of healthcare, making him a true hero to his patients and his community.



Education Hero **Susanne Peterson**

Susanne Peterson, a World Literature and AP Language Arts teacher at Sanger West High School, is redefining inclusion through her passionate advocacy for students with special needs. Recognizing the social isolation many of these students face, she created a student-led initiative to bridge the gap between neurotypical students and those with special needs.

From organizing events like the “Buddy Prom” to implementing sensory-friendly activities, Susanne’s work has fostered meaningful relationships and transformed her school’s culture. Her vision extends beyond her classroom as she collaborates with other schools in the district to expand these inclusive opportunities. By championing connection and understanding, Susanne is creating a legacy where every student feels seen, valued and empowered to thrive.



First Responder Hero **Juan Galindo**

On the night of October 3, 2024, Firefighter Juan Galindo faced an inferno and made a decision that would save a life. When Fresno Fire arrived at a burning two-story apartment building, frantic civilians directed them to a trapped child inside. With flames spreading rapidly and time slipping away, Firefighter Galindo acted with extraordinary bravery.

Hearing the child’s screams but without the protection of a hose line, he entered the blaze to search for her. Overcome by the searing heat, he was forced to retreat, sustaining burns in the process. Undeterred, Firefighter Galindo returned with a hose line, battling the fire and continuing his search. Against all odds, he found the child under the protective cover of a dog. Carrying her to safety, he provided critical medical care en route to the hospital, ensuring she had the best chance of survival.

Firefighter Juan Galindo’s courage and selflessness that night reflect the highest ideals of service and sacrifice. His actions not only saved a life but embodied the unwavering commitment of first responders to protect others.



Military Hero **Bill and Janet Goodreau**

Every Honor Flight carries more than veterans—it carries healing, closure, and gratitude. For over a decade, Bill and Janet Goodreau have ensured that these missions honor those who served. Bill, a Vietnam-era U.S. Army veteran, and Janet, a steadfast patriot, have dedicated themselves

to every aspect of the Central Valley Honor Flight program, from logistics to personalized details like memorial etching supplies. Their compassion extends beyond planning; their teamwork creates bonds of camaraderie among veterans, offering many the welcome home they never received. Together, Bill and Janet have made Honor Flights a journey of healing and remembrance.



Lifesaving Rescue Heroes
Fresno Police Officers Jacob Shubin, Andrew Hernandez, Justin Phoolka, Jonathan Yang, and Christian Andrade

On October 26, 2024, in Fresno, an ambush against Police Sergeant George Imirian turned a routine patrol into a life-or-death situation. A homicide suspect, armed with an AR pistol, fired multiple rounds into Sergeant Imirian's vehicle, striking him several times in his legs and lower body. As the suspect continued to fire, endangering officers and the community, five Fresno Police Officers worked together to save the sergeant's life while ensuring public safety.

Amid gunfire, Officer Jonathan Yang moved to the injured sergeant, applying a tourniquet to control bleeding. Officer Christian Andrade provided critical assistance, applying a second tourniquet and stabilizing the sergeant's condition. Officers Justin Phoolka and Andrew Hernandez monitored vitals, addressed shock, and kept the sergeant calm and conscious through steady conversation. Meanwhile, Officer Jacob Shubin drew the suspect's attention, allowing his team to perform life-saving measures under immense pressure.

Medical professionals later confirmed that the officers' swift actions, including applying tourniquets and addressing blood loss, were vital in saving Sergeant Imirian's life. Their teamwork, courage, and decisive use of American Red Cross life-saving techniques embody the highest ideals of service and sacrifice.

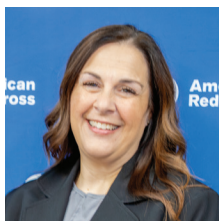


Community Impact Hero
Tony Pena

Through his visionary leadership at Washington Union High School, Tony Pena is transforming lives and addressing critical healthcare gaps in the Central Valley. As the founder of the Patient Care Pathway program, Tony created a school-based clinic that provides free healthcare to local residents while offering students invaluable hands-on medical training. Under his guidance, students not only develop practical skills but also graduate with a Medical Assistant license, opening direct pathways to careers in healthcare.

To ensure the program's sustainability, Tony forged partnerships with Pride Sports Medicine physicians, who mentor students and expand the clinic's outreach. By empowering students with education, compassion, and responsibility, Tony has instilled a culture of service that impacts both the school and the wider community.

Tony Pena's unwavering dedication to creating opportunities and improving access to healthcare exemplifies the true spirit of community impact, leaving a legacy of hope and resilience that will endure for generations.



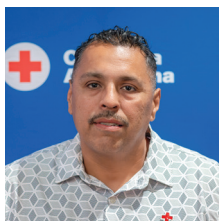
Global Citizenship Hero

Rosemary Caso

Rosemary Caso has dedicated her life to building a stronger, more resilient community as the Executive Director of United Way of Tulare County. Whether leading efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic or spearheading flood relief in 2023, Rosemary has consistently stepped up to address critical needs. Her leadership in the Community Care Coalition has brought together over 40 organizations to bridge resource gaps, providing essential support to vulnerable populations across the region.

In 2023 alone, Rosemary led efforts to deliver 2,400 pounds of fresh meat and secure gift cards for families in need. She also championed farmworker assistance, helping to distribute \$5 million in aid to over 8,400 individuals. Beyond emergency response, Rosemary ensures foster families and underserved communities receive holiday meals and gifts, fostering hope and connection year-round.

Though she prefers to work behind the scenes, Rosemary's tireless advocacy and belief in the power of community make her a transformative leader. Her ability to bring people together and leave no stone unturned ensures a brighter future for our community.



Clara Barton Humanitarian Hero

Oscar Rodriguez

Oscar Rodriguez's journey is one of redemption, resilience, and relentless determination to uplift his community. Growing up in inner-city Fresno, Oscar faced the pull of gang life and the consequences that followed, including incarceration. But instead of letting his past define him, he chose to transform his life and give back to the neighborhoods he once impacted.

In 2016, Oscar and like-minded people co-founded Martin Park, a community hub that turns neglected spaces into thriving centers of hope. By 2023, he expanded this vision with Martin Park-Webster, transforming a once-dangerous area into a safe haven for families. Today, over 500 families benefit from food programs, youth activities, literacy resources, and a supportive environment for growth. By hiring staff from local neighborhoods, Oscar ensures that his work not only serves the community but empowers it from within.

Oscar's story is proof that it's never too late to rewrite your legacy. His unwavering commitment to creating opportunities, fostering connection, and building a brighter future for underserved families reflects the very essence of Clara Barton's humanitarian spirit. Oscar Rodriguez's "Park With a Heart" stands as a living testament to how one person's determination can inspire change across generations.

Regional Leadership

American Red Cross Central California Region Leadership Team

Lori Wilson, Interim Regional Chief Executive Officer

Dana Regier, Regional Chief Operating Officer

Siana-Lea Gildard, Regional Chief Development Officer

Anthony Benedetti, Regional Disaster Officer

Mathew Garcia, Regional Volunteer Services Officer

Jose Molina, Regional Service to the Armed Forces and
International Services Manager

Taylor Poisall, Regional Communications Director and
Interim Executive Director (Central Valley Chapter)

Hector Vazquez, Executive Director (Kern County & Eastern Sierra Chapter)

Christina Milstein, Executive Assistant

Board of Directors

Central Valley Chapter

Chair, Channele Charest, Solomon Advising

Vice Chair, Thilani Grubel, Noble Credit Union

Marc' Bady, Fresno Housing Authority

Jené D'Ambrosio, D'Ambrosio Trading Inc.

Gerald Golstein, California Health Sciences University

Michell Hart, Bank of the Sierra

Everardo Legaspi, Kings County Public Health

Liz McIlvaine, Total Concept Enterprises

Jordan Scott, Kaiser Permanente

Steven Shaw, KSEE24 and CBS47



**American
Red Cross**

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.

Diversity Vision Statement

The American Red Cross aspires to be an organization fully committed to diversity and inclusion by creating and maintaining a diverse, high-performing workforce of employees and volunteers who reflect all communities we serve; by cultivating a collaborative, inclusive and respectful work environment that empowers all contributors; and by leveraging diverse partnerships — all of which helps to ensure culturally competent service delivery supported by effective community leadership and engagement.

Central Valley Heroes

Photos from today's event will be shared at [flickr.com/RedCrossCCR](https://www.flickr.com/photos/RedCrossCCR/)
Connect with us on social media @RedCrossCCR

Nominations are accepted year-round at [redcross.org/CVheroes](https://www.redcross.org/CVheroes)