



2026 Orange County Heroes Awards

Celebrate the Hero Within!

Friday, May 1, 2026
Richard Nixon Presidential Library



American Red Cross
Orange County



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Technologist

The 2026 Orange County Heroes Awards videos
were produced by Hildreth Media Group, Inc.

Help Prevent Home Fire Deaths and Injuries

This year's Orange County Heroes Awards will benefit the Red Cross Home Fire Campaign.

Most of us don't realize we have just two minutes to escape a home fire—which is the nation's most frequent disaster. That's why the American Red Cross is preparing families to act quickly through our Home Fire Campaign.



Every second counts when there's a home fire. Home fires claim seven lives every day but having working smoke alarms can cut the risk of death by half. The Red Cross Home Fire Campaign helps save lives by installing free smoke alarms in homes that don't have them, and by educating people about home fire safety.

Through Sound the Alarm events, which are part of the Home Fire Campaign, the local Red Cross partners with fire departments and community partners to install free smoke alarms and provide Orange County residents with important fire safety education. Together, we meet with local families to install free smoke alarms, help them create a two-minute fire escape plan and share safety information on home fires and other local disaster risks.

Since the program launch in 2014, we have installed more than **23,000 free smoke alarms**, made over **8,300 homes safer**, and **educated over 26,300 residents** in Orange County.

Nationwide, over **3.2 million free smoke alarms** have been installed and **2,577 lives** have been saved thanks to smoke alarms installed by the Red Cross and partners through the Home Fire Campaign.



Learn more about the Home Fire Campaign



Please consider donating today. Text the word **OCHEROES26** to **76278** or donate online.

\$22 provides 1 smoke alarm installation

\$50 provides 1 fire clean-up kit

\$250 provides installation of 1 smoke alarm for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

\$680 provides financial assistance for a family impacted by a local disaster, like a home fire



A Little Help Foundation and The Caring Path Foundation Fund will match all donations made at today's event up to \$30,000.

When you donate to the American Red Cross, your donation is used efficiently. An average of **90 cents of every dollar** the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. The American National Red Cross is registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions to the American National Red Cross are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. The Red Cross' tax identification number is 53-0196605.

Event Program

Registration and Networking

Presentation of Colors

Marine Corps Air Station, Camp Pendleton

National Anthem

Katrina Pesek

Introduction and Welcome

Award Presentations

Animal Welfare Hero Award
OCFA Technical Rescue Crew

Corporate Hero Award
Sungrow North America

Gift of Life Hero Award
Matthew Murphy II

Disaster Responder Hero Award
Otoniel Gomez

First Responder Hero Award
Officer Marcus Futch

Service to the Armed Forces Hero Award
Dr. Randy Moraitis, CarePossible

Good Samaritan Hero Award
Felicia Johnson

Youth Hero Award
John Whitlock and Lincoln Happoldt

Closing Remarks

Event Co-Chairs

Lance Britt II ▪ Tara Kasmarek

2026 Orange County Heroes Selection Committee

Lance Britt II, Tara Kasmarek, Nate Brown, Patricia DiSaia, Pervin Edmunds, Steven Engerer, Larry Fortmuller, Sara Garske, Denise Ibarria, Adrienne Kessler, Neetu Khilnani, Wing Lam, Carol La Vache, Kristen Lewis, Sam Namirianian, Joshua Nguyen, Elyse Ordoñez, Denise Tafoya-McNevin, John Waldeck, Julie Warne Roberts



Chip Yost

Master of Ceremonies

Chip Yost started as a reporter with KTLA in 2007 and has since covered some of the biggest news events of our time. He was at the Vatican when Pope Francis was elected. He was at the 2016 Republican and Democratic National Conventions. He has reported live from hurricane zones in Florida, Texas and Hawaii, and from mass shooting scenes in Uvalde, Parkland, Dallas, Orlando and San Bernardino.

Chip also serves as KTLA's Orange County Bureau Chief, where he has covered wildfires, mudslides and the "snitch scandal" that derailed the prosecution of the man responsible for the worst mass shooting in county history.

Before joining KTLA, Chip worked as an investigative reporter at KUSA in Denver and a general assignment reporter at KOLD in Tucson, KYMA in Yuma, and KGET in San Diego. Chip's reporting has earned him numerous awards, including the duPont Silver Baton, Emmy and Golden Mike.

Chip received his master's degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York and his bachelor's degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Business, where he majored in marketing and real estate.




2026 Orange County Heroes Honorees



OCFA Technical Rescue Crew

Animal Welfare Hero

On February 18, 2025, the OCFA Technical Rescue Crew assisted with a challenging nighttime rescue of Deuce, a horse who was stuck in a ravine in San Juan Capistrano after falling down an embankment. After hours of complex and careful coordination and specialized rigging, OCFA technical rescue crew members rescued Deuce by hoisting him to safety with their helicopter. Later that night, as Deuce was waking up at the Shea Center in San Juan Capistrano, the crews again rigged a complicated hoist system which successfully got the horse to his feet once more. Today, Deuce has fully recovered—thanks in great part due to the heroism and skill of the OCFA Technical Rescue Crew.

Presented by 

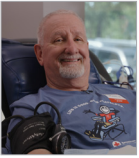


Sungrow North America

Corporate Hero

Sungrow North America has demonstrated extraordinary commitment to strengthening communities and advancing the mission of the American Red Cross. Beginning with urgent support during Hurricane Helene and continuing through the California Wildfires and Texas floods, Sungrow consistently provided timely relief for families in crisis. Their commitment deepened when they became a Ready 365 partner, investing in year-round preparedness. Beyond financial support, Sungrow also hosts blood drives at their Texas office, giving their workforce a meaningful way to contribute to lifesaving efforts. Sungrow embodies what it means to be a Corporate Hero: responsive in times of crisis, committed in times of calm and always guided by a genuine desire to uplift communities.

Presented by  **PACIFIC LIFE** | **PACIFIC LIFE FOUNDATION**



Matthew Murphy II

Gift of Life Hero

Matthew Murphy II has spent more than 35 years donating platelets every two weeks, reaching an extraordinary 1,900 units — making him the top platelet donor in Southern California and among the top 1% of platelet donors nationally. Matthew’s donation journey began in his early twenties, when he first gave blood as a college student. His path took a pivotal turn in 1991, when he learned about platelet donation and discovered its unique ability to help more patients, more frequently. Because platelets expire in just five days, his consistent dedication has supported thousands of patients. Humble and steadfast, Matthew is already working toward his next milestone of 2,000 units, which he expects to achieve in just over a year and a half.

Presented by 



Otoniel Gomez

Disaster Responder Hero

At 1:00 a.m., while everyone was sleeping, a fire erupted at Otoniel Gomez’s house. His wife woke up to smoke and alerted Otoniel, who found the hallway engulfed in flames. Otoniel escaped through a second story window. Once outside, he located his work ladders and placed a ladder for his wife, then a second ladder for his adult son, and a third ladder to save his 11-year-old son. Otoniel climbed the ladder, broke the window with a shovel, and carried his son down. Otoniel then used that ladder to rescue an elderly tenant. She could not figure out how to climb down the ladder, so Otoniel went up and carried her down. By the time the fire department arrived, all five people were safe outside, thanks to Otoniel’s quick, calm and heroic actions.

Presented by 



Officer Marcus Futch

First Responder Hero

On May 21, 2025, Officer Marcus Futch responded to a traffic collision involving a vehicle that had collided with a parked car. The driver, unconscious from a medical emergency, was trapped in a burning vehicle rapidly filling with smoke. Recognizing the immediate danger, Officer Futch rushed to the passenger side, entered the smoke-filled car and pulled the driver out. With help from a civilian, Officer Futch moved the driver to safety and provided medical aid until paramedics arrived. Officer Futch's actions involved extraordinary personal risk and were decisive in preventing serious injury or death.

Presented by 



Dr. Randy Moraitis, CarePossible

Service to the Armed Forces Hero

Dr. Randy Moraitis founded CarePossible in 2013 after seeing how financial barriers prevented many people in crisis from accessing mental health and addiction care. Guided by a strong commitment to veterans and military families, he created CarePossible to ensure high-quality treatment is available regardless of ability to pay. Under his leadership, CarePossible has delivered more than \$6 million in mental health and addiction services to veterans and their families and now serves over 500 individuals—primarily in Orange County—through counseling, therapy, recovery coaching, and family support. Together, Dr. Moraitis and CarePossible have expanded access to care, reduced stigma and supported countless individuals facing trauma, addiction and mental illness.

Presented by 



Felicia Johnson

Good Samaritan Hero

Felicia Johnson acted with remarkable courage when she rescued an elderly man whose car began floating in fast-rising floodwaters, leaving him trapped during a torrential storm in Costa Mesa. The man unknowingly drove into a flooded area around 3 a.m. After hearing his call for help outside her apartment and contacting 911, Felicia waded into waist-deep water to reach the Vietnam veteran, risking her own safety to pull him from his flooded car. Her quick actions and selfless bravery ultimately helped save his life.

Presented by Warne Family Charitable Foundation



John Whitlock and Lincoln Happoldt

Youth Heroes

John Whitlock and Lincoln Happoldt, Seal Beach Junior Lifeguards, acted quickly when they saw their instructor, Isaiah, floating face down in the water during free time. Initially thinking it was a drill, they rushed to Isaiah and realized he was unable to move as he continued to float face down. They turned Isaiah over and brought him to shore, then ran for help after Isaiah told them it was a neck trauma. John and Lincoln's fast, calm response prevented Isaiah from drowning. Isaiah is now in rehabilitation, making significant progress. John and Lincoln's actions undoubtedly helped save Isaiah's life.

Presented by **UCI Health**

a little help
FOUNDATION
est. 2014

the
CARING
PATH

ANTIS 35 YEARS
KEEPING FAMILIES SAFE & DRY!



THANK YOU...

to all the Red Cross Heroes making an
impact in our community!

SAVE A LIFE, DONATE BLOOD AT ANTIS!

Scan here to see our upcoming drives!





The beauty of community in action

U.S. Bank is proud to support the 2026 Orange County Heroes Awards.

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Experience extraordinary care in every aspect of our service, from coverage to community support, through Nationwide's backing of the American Red Cross of Orange County.

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Congratulations, 2026 Orange County Heroes!

Thank you for supporting our community with compassion and purpose. We celebrate you and your commitment to making our community stronger.



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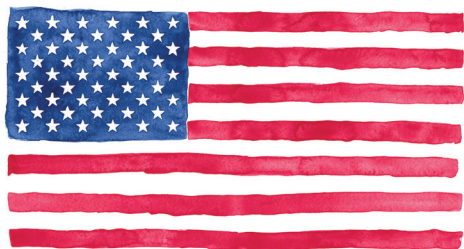
#OCHeroes

Hero videos from today's event will be shared at [YouTube.com/SoCalRedCross](https://www.youtube.com/SoCalRedCross)

Photos from today's event will be shared at [Flickr.com/SoCalRedCross](https://www.flickr.com/SoCalRedCross)

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

American Red Cross
OPERATION CARE & COMFORT
Supporting Our Military & Veterans



**Help Support Our Unhoused
Military & Veterans at Operation Care & Comfort!**

Wednesday, May 13, 2026

4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

**American Red Cross – Orange County Chapter
600 Parkcenter Drive, Santa Ana, CA 92705**

**Join us for an afternoon of service as we assemble
100+ American Red Cross Comfort & Hygiene Kits for
unhoused military members and veterans.**

We'd love your support! If you're able, consider donating supplies for our veterans through our Amazon Wish List. Just scan the QR code or [CLICK HERE](#) and ship items directly to the event — no need to be there in person to make a difference. Every donation is a gift of hope for those that have served our country!



Amazon Wish List

Please RSVP to Jana Priest by May 6, 2026 at jana.priest@redcross.org.



American Red Cross
Tiffany Circle



**American
Red Cross**

Regional Leadership

American Red Cross Southern California Region | Leadership Team

Sean Mahoney Regional Chief Executive Officer	Debbie Pari Regional Volunteer Services Officer
Malinda McDonald Chief Operating Officer	Becky Firey Executive Director (Orange County)
Glenn Maddalon Regional Chief Development Officer	Lois Beckman Executive Director (Riverside County)
Debbie Leahy Regional Disaster Program Officer	Yvette Baysinger Executive Director (San Bernardino County)
Daniel Beighley Regional Service to the Armed Forces Director	Ann Anderson Director, Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Program
Christine Welch Regional Communications Director	

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Tara Kasmarek UCI Health	Elyse Ordoñez, MSN, RN, PHN, CCRN Irvine Unified School District	John Waldeck Pacific Life Insurance Company



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.

Thank You to Our Valued Community Partners!

