



# NEWS RELEASE

Orange County Fire Authority  
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## **Orange County Fire Authority Annual Awards Ceremony Recognizes it's Best and Bravest**

**Irvine, CA** – Last night, the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) honored its firefighters and staff employees at the annual “Best and Bravest” awards ceremony in Irvine. The event pays tribute to employees who have provided exemplary service during the year.

David Newell was selected for **Career Firefighter of the Year**, Scott Mermel was named **Reserve Firefighter of the Year**, Jeremy Hammond was chosen **Manager of the Year**, and Collette Whitlock was awarded **Staff Employee of the Year**.

**Unsung Hero Award** - The Orange County Fire Authority Chaplain Corps.

The OCFA Chaplain Program was established May 10, 1997. The program consists of nine Chaplains, each assigned to a single battalion, as well as to serve the OCFA as a whole. The OCFA Chaplains Program was designed to provide a variety of services including the provision of spiritual and social ministry to OCFA employees, their immediate families and even the community during and following emergency and crisis situations. They go above and beyond that calling daily. They've been there to help us celebrate in the good times by performing weddings and baby dedications or to support us in our darkest hours providing funeral services for OCFA family members. There are many more activities that our OCFA Chaplains participate in all with a positive approach and all in the name of family. One small example of their support shows in their attendance at every Board Meeting where they lead in the invocation prior to the meeting, sometimes reminding the Board that it is their responsibility to look beyond individual personal agendas, set aside personal differences, have an open heart and make decisions for the greater good.

**Medal of Merit** - Tammie Pickens

Tammie has served the Orange County Fire Authority since March 2006 as the Senior Accountant in the Finance Division. Tammie is responsible for ensuring that the OCFA's financial activities are properly recorded and accounted for in compliance with governmental accounting regulations. Each year, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) issues new requirements and without fail, Tammie adapted to the changes and ensured that OCFA remained compliant. This past year, those changes were highly complex. Tammie implemented the provision, which changed financial reporting for pension liabilities for all government agencies. Tammie then successfully presented and explained the complex details of the new requirement to the OCFA Board of Directors and in the process improved OCFA's financial transparency for the public. As a result of Tammie's high standards and skilled-ability to compile the year-end accounting records, the OCFA's financial statements have received clean audit opinions from the external auditor and has resulted in award of the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting each year that she has overseen the process. Achievement of the award affirms that OCFA is not only recognized nationally as a premier fire service agency but also as a model for financial reporting and disclosure.

**Lifesaving Medal** - Darren Johnson

The Lifesaving Medal is the third-highest decoration awarded to any member of the OCFA. It is awarded for acts that display anticipation, ingenuity, and participation in unexpected or unusual situations in the saving of a life. On May 15, 2015, Darren Johnson was eating lunch at Sizzlers in the City of Lake Forest and heard people screaming and calling for help. Darren immediately ran over to see what was happening and saw an elderly man choking and unable to breath. A woman was performing a non-effective type of Heimlich maneuver so he stepped in and performed the proper Heimlich technique until the food was dislodged. The patient slumped on the floor and caught his breath. If not for Darren's quick actions, the outcome of this patient may not have been favorable. The Orange County Fire Authority commends Darren Johnson, for his heroic and unselfish actions in saving a life.

We are proud to honor all of the award winners recognized at last night's Best and Bravest ceremony.

The Best and Bravest awards ceremony and dinner is coordinated by three Orange County Exchange Clubs and the OCFA Ceremonies, Awards and Protocol (CAP) Team. OCFA's Board of Directors was represented on stage by the OCFA Board Chair Gene Hernandez and Vice Chair Beth Swift. We would like to thank our sponsors: Title Sponsor - KPC Health/OC Global Medical Centers, Medal of Courage Sponsor – So Cal Gas Co., Waste Management, City of Mission Viejo, Care Ambulance, Prime Healthcare/La Palma Hospital, Shoreline Ambulance, North Murray & Associates, Don Dressler Consulting, Irvine Ranch Water District, Ambulance Association of Orange County, Chief Officers Association, OC Professional Firefighters Union, Orange County Employees Association, and the OCFA Benevolent Association.

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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*