
CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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Nine CAL FIRE Firefighters Receive Medal of Valor Highest Honor Given to State Employees

Sacramento – Last Friday, nine CAL FIRE firefighters 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 52 state employees who were honored for their extraordinary acts of bravery and heroism in order to save the life of another.

“I know each and every day our firefighters may be called upon to risk their life to protect another,” said Chief Ken Pimlott, CAL FIRE director. “These nine however went above and beyond the call of duty.”

Governor Brown's Executive Secretary Nancy McFadden presented the Medal of Valor, which is the highest honor that California bestows on its public servants, to the follow CAL FIRE employees:

Firefighter Brian Cali, CAL FIRE San Bernardino Unit - On August 16, 2012, Firefighter Cali was leaving work and enroute to Temecula when he came across an accident on Highway 79. A car had gone over the embankment and was resting on its driver’s side with the passenger side skyward. The engine was on fire, the car was quickly filling with smoke, and a bystander told him someone was inside. Firefighter Cali quickly grabbed a log and broke out the passenger side windows, then asked bystanders to help him put the car back on its wheels so he could reach the victim. Once the vehicle was righted, he attempted to open the doors, but they were jammed shut. The flames were now reaching the victim’s legs. Firefighter Cali reached into the burning car, placed his arms around the victim’s torso and attempted to lift him out, but the victim’s legs were tangled in the seat belt. He asked bystanders to throw dirt on the burning engine, knowing he needed more time. With the threat of fire increasing, Firefighter Cali finally lifted the man from the burning car and administered CPR until help arrived. The victim unfortunately succumbed to his injuries; however, Firefighter Cali saved him from burning inside the vehicle.

Fire Captain Robert Chesnick, CAL FIRE Humboldt-Del Norte Unit - On June 30, 2012, Fire Captain Chesnick was off work and traveling on Highway 89 near the town of McCloud, when he saw headlights off to the side of the highway. Stopping to investigate, he found a truck had gone off the road and crashed into a tree. The engine was still running and the driver was unconscious, his head bleeding profusely. Captain Chesnick called for assistance and noticed smoke coming from under the truck. After quickly assessing the driver for neck injuries, he heard a loud “whoosh!” as the gas in the truck ignited, sending flames between the bed and the cab. Captain Chesnick pulled the man from the burning truck and dragged him about 15 feet away from the vehicle. The local fire captain arrived on the scene and the two began administering first aid when the truck became fully engulfed in flames, and .22 caliber bullets that had been stored in the truck, suddenly began discharging. The victim was transported to a local hospital and treated for severe lacerations on his face and neck.

Firefighter Elizabeth Marks, CAL FIRE Madera-Mariposa-Merced Unit - On June 22, 2012, Firefighter Elizabeth Marks was off-duty and enjoying a day at the Merced River near Briceburg, when beach goers suddenly began yelling and she saw a young teenage girl struggling in the water, headed straight towards the rapids. Firefighter Marks jumped into the water; she was able to reach the girl, pull her to her chest, and swim back to shore. Once on land, the girl began saying she wanted her father. A Federal Bureau of Land Management Ranger spotted the man in the water and jumped in with a rescue board. The ranger reached the man and yelled he needed help, so Firefighter Marks again entered the water to assist with the rescue. With the girl's father in tow, they reached the slippery bank and, with difficulty, pulled him to shore. He was unresponsive and not breathing. Firefighter Marks began rescue breathing and CPR while the ranger went to contact dispatch and get additional equipment. An ambulance arrived, but it was on the opposite side of the river, so once again Firefighter Marks entered the water with two sheriffs and they took the man across the river on a rescue board to awaiting paramedics. Sadly he did not respond to the life-saving measures, however, the heroic efforts of Firefighter Marks saved his 14 year old daughter's life.

Fire Apparatus Engineer/Paramedic Jason Moorhouse, CAL FIRE San Mateo-Santa Cruz Unit - On September 5, 2011, Fire Apparatus Engineer/Paramedic Moorhouse was off-duty with his fiancé at a friend's house in Lakeport, when he noticed a dark column of smoke nearby and ran down the street to identify the source. When he arrived at a house six doors down, he saw a man with a garden hose attempting to extinguish a fire blowing out of a broken bedroom window. The man said his mother was still inside the burning home. Engineer Moorhouse asked his friends to call 911 and went to the front door. He was met with a wall of thick black smoke and heard a woman calling for help, saying she was lying on the kitchen floor. Wearing only shorts and flip-flops, Engineer Moorhouse and his friend attempted to enter the burning house, but they were hampered by the heat and smoke. The friend went to look for another way in and Engineer Moorhouse's fiancé appeared with a towel to help with his breathing as he and another person again attempted to enter the burning house. Crawling on their stomachs, they located the 84 year old woman and dragged her to safety. Engineer Moorhouse began administering first aid as the woman was suffering from burns and smoke inhalation. She was transported by helicopter to the hospital where she was successfully treated for her serious injuries.

Firefighter Jason Patterson, CAL FIRE Riverside Unit - On October 31, 2012, off duty Firefighter Patterson was at home when he smelled smoke and discovered fire was coming from the apartment below. He told his girlfriend to call 911, then ran downstairs to wake his neighbors. After pounding on the door and getting no response, he opened the unlocked front door, and fearing his neighbors were still inside, entered the smoke filled apartment. He was crawling along the floor, feeling his way, when he heard the sound of coughing coming from a bedroom. He made his way to the bedroom and found a three year old boy in the doorway, coughing violently. He carried the little boy out of the building, grabbed a fire extinguisher and went back in. The small fire extinguisher, however, was no match for the fire and once it was emptied he was forced to retreat. Despite Firefighter Patterson's valiant efforts and the subsequent quick arrival of local fire engines, a woman was found deceased inside the apartment. The three year old boy was in fair condition and expected to recover.

Fire Apparatus Engineer Joshua Potter, CAL FIRE Riverside Unit - On August 5, 2011, Potter was off duty with his family in Half Moon Bay when he heard a man yelling for help. Engineer Potter saw a small boat had overturned approximately 300 yards from shore and a man with no life jacket was struggling in the water. Engineer Potter entered the frigid ocean water without any rescue equipment or a flotation device and began swimming towards the victim, a 64 year old man. He was joined by another man with a Zodiac inflatable boat. Engineer Potter and the other rescuers quickly put the man into the Zodiac boat and Engineer Potter began evaluating his medical condition. He stayed with the man until he was able to transfer care to the first responders.

Unit Forester/Division Chief Matthew Reischman, CAL FIRE Sacramento Headquarters - On December 3, 2012, Unit Forester/Division Chief Reischman was off-duty in his private vehicle in Grass Valley when he witnessed a head-on collision. As Chief Reischman approached the scene, he saw an SUV on its side with the engine on fire and fluid draining out. The driver was pinned under the vehicle. After checking to make sure the people in the second vehicle were all right, he assisted them to a safe location and then turned his attention to the SUV. The driver had significant head trauma and was unconscious, but breathing. Enlisting the help of two men on the scene, Chief Reischman lifted the vehicle approximately six inches to free him. The driver's legs were still pinned however, so despite the spreading flames Chief Reischman kicked out the windshield and repositioned his legs. The driver was soon extricated and moved to a safe location. Shortly afterwards, the vehicle became completely engulfed in flames.

Fire Apparatus Engineer Joseph Walton, CAL FIRE Lassen-Modoc Unit - On March 31, 2012, Fire Apparatus Engineer Walton was off duty and at home in Paradise when he heard someone screaming for help. He and his mother-in-law ran toward the cries and saw three pit bulls viciously attacking his female neighbor. The dogs had dragged her to the ground and were biting her repeatedly, one going for her throat while the other two were biting her arms. Engineer Walton pulled the dog going for her throat off of her and threw him to the side. He then pushed the other two dogs away. He confirmed 911 was called and pulled the woman further away from the dogs so he and his mother-in-law could administer medical care. The aggressive dogs circled back repeatedly, and Engineer Walton and other neighbors fought them off with sticks and even their bare hands. The woman was transported to a Trauma Center with severe injuries. She underwent multiple surgeries and skin grafts, but survived the ordeal.

Firefighter II Joshpae White, CAL FIRE Madera-Mariposa-Merced Unit

- On June 4, 2011, Firefighter White, along with two other firefighters, responded to a call involving a vehicle crash in a notoriously rugged stretch of the Feather River on Highway 70 in Butte County. Upon reaching the area, one of the firefighters spotted a child floating face down in the swift moving river. Firefighter White decided that as company officer, he would enter the frigid water instead of waiting for a second engine to arrive. He quickly donned swift water protective equipment and a fellow firefighter positioned himself with a throw bag rope along the downstream bank. Firefighter White, fighting the rapids, reached the boy, lifted his head out of the water, secured him in his grasp, and then swam to shore with him. The firefighter aided Firefighter White with the rope and once they reached shore, they began CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Despite the decisive action of Firefighter White, the 9-year-old boy could not be revived.

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Photo of the nine recipients along with CAL FIRE Director Ken Pimlott and California Natural Resources Agency Secretary John Laird:

http://www.fire.ca.gov/downloads/images/MedalOfValor_with_SecLaird.jpg