

Local heroes recognized by community



Every day, hundreds of first-responders and educators in Santa Monica spend countless hours attempting to make the community better with actions that go unseen or unrecognized by the public.

And while it's not always easy, many local teachers, officers and firefighters will still continue to go above and beyond their call of duty to make Santa Monica a better place.

This is why the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce started hosting the New Heroes Celebration more than two decades ago, according to chamber President Laurel Rosen, who described the event as an opportunity for the business community and city residents to welcome Santa Monica's newest "heroes."

"We're really excited to do this every year because quite frankly our first responders and our educators don't get that many thank yous and they're always so humbled and excited and quite frankly shocked that people are thanking them and welcoming them and giving them

gifts,” Rosen said Tuesday. “So, it’s a delight and it’s a joy to really stop and say, ‘Thanks for putting your lives on the line every day or for creating our future leaders.’”

With more than 150 new hires in the community’s police force, fire department and schools, community leaders, residents and attendees of Tuesday’s event packed into the Saint Monica Catholic Community Grand Pavilion Tuesday to welcome them. Not all of Santa Monica’s rookie officers, firefighters and teachers were able to attend the evening’s festivities, but those who did had the opportunity to enjoy food from various vendors while they socialized with loved ones and various political representatives prior to the presentation of the 2019 Inspirational Heroes awards.

Young Inspirational Hero

The first award presented during the night was the Young Inspirational Hero Award, which was given to Eighth-Grader Cali O’Donovan for the work she has done while studying at Crossroads School for Arts and Sciences.

O’Donovan’s teacher Josh Adler introduced O’Donovan to the stage after describing the honor student’s artistic and athletic talents, the humanitarian work she performed south of the border and her caring demeanor.

“Last year on Earth Day, Cali led a student protest that drew attention to the climate crisis and she petitioned crossroads to reduce its carbon footprint by having a ‘Meatless Mondays’ program for school lunches,” Adler said.

Once at the podium, O’Donovan added she hopes to continue the work she has begun at Crossroads, “because now more than ever I feel that our local community includes more than just what lies inside the boundaries of Santa Monica.”

Before exiting the stage, 2019’s Young Inspirational Hero thanked her school, community for assisting her in her efforts to make the world a better place.

Inspirational Hero in Education

Keeping with the theme of education, the next award presented during the night was the Inspirational Hero in Education, which was awarded to a group of heroes at the Santa Monica Ed Foundation — an organization that raises funds to provide additional supports to local schools.

“We are humbled to be on this stage in front of you to accept this award,” said John Baracy, secretary of the foundation’s board of directors. “Along with our board, this is the team that

keeps the Ed Foundation running, but the real engine of the foundation is our donors, (who) give generously to keep arts, STEM and wellness programs at our schools.”

Baracy added that donors are the true heroes of local schools and he hopes the community will continue to provide the means that will allow every student in the community to find a path to success.

“We are honored to be part of this effort with you all,” Baracy said, before the chamber moved to honor a police officer who has found ways to also impact the youth of the local area.

Inspirational Police Hero

Officer Noell Grant has been a Santa Monica Police Officer for approximately 12 years and for the past five years she has been assigned to the Santa Monica Police Activities League, which is known as PAL.

During her time with PAL, Grant has fostered a bond with many local youths as she’s created and developed a self-defense class titled “Girls on Guard” to empower girls and their mothers, a basketball team and other popular programs.

Chief Cynthia Renaud said during the event that she feels Grant has offered kids a different path that would not have been possible without her guidance.

“If it was not for her intervention, for her mentoring and for her guidance, I truly believe we would’ve lost some of our youth here in this city to a path that was not good for them,” Renaud said, adding: “So it is truly my pleasure that she’s honored tonight and that I get to be here tonight to introduce her.... Congratulations.”

Grant added Tuesday that she believes her work is important because it builds trust between local families and the police force, which has been a goal of hers since she first started working with the Police Activities League.

There are positive interactions to think back on, “and not only when it’s a crisis or emergency,” she said. “They get to know me not only as Officer Grant but Noelle as well... So watching the growth of these kids and knowing I had a positive impact is one of the most fulfilling parts of my career.”

Inspirational Firefighter Hero

Chief Bill Walker would take the podium shortly to introduce the Inspirational Firefighter Hero Jeffrey Adams, who battled many fires this year while working in the Santa Monica Fire Department – including California’s largest, the Thomas Fire.

Walker said Adams has been in the department a little more than five years and his peers voted him firefighter of the year for a multitude of reasons.

“One of the good things about attitude and behavior and action is they’re contagious. And Jeff brings such a positive attitude and respect for the fire service and such absolute energy every day that his peers have developed that much respect for him despite him being at the early stages of his career,” Walker said, mentioning Adams is the epitome of what you want in a firefighter. “He makes all of us want to be better. When you’re around Jeff, you want to be at the highest level.”

Adams said at the podium that it means “everything” for him to not only be able to work in a community like Santa Monica but to also have made an impact on his peers and the city.

“I work in the best place in the world,” Adams added, thanking the heroes who serve alongside him every day.

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