



News Release

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Monterey Lifeguard honored with Medal of Valor

Sacramento, CA.— State Park Peace Officer/Lifeguard Justin S. McHenry received the Silver Medal of Valor Thursday, April 23, 2015 for heroic actions in rescuing a woman in dangerous ocean conditions.

Nancy McFadden, Executive Secretary to Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr., presented the awards in a ceremony at the California Highway Patrol Academy in West Sacramento. The Medal of Valor is the highest honor given to state employees.

“These individuals put their lives on the line, acting selflessly to protect others.” McFadden said. “They are our modern day heroes.”

“California’s public servants are dedicated to their state,” said CalHR Director Richard Gillihan. “These acts of bravery are not surprising because these individuals have dedicated their careers to helping others. They represent the best in public service.”

On October 25, 2010, at approximately 3:15 p.m., State Park Peace Officer/Lifeguard McHenry responded to an emergency call at Carmel River State Beach of two women who were standing on the beach and then caught by a rogue wave, pulled into heavy surf and swept out into the ocean. Lifeguard McHenry arrived on scene, put on his wetsuit, and spotted one of the women. Knowing he couldn’t enter the water directly in front of her due to the dangerous surf, McHenry ran 100 yards north along the beach and swam out to her.

When he reached the 62-year-old woman, she was physically exhausted after being in the 57 degree water for approximately twenty minutes and was having a difficult time keeping her head above water. Lifeguard McHenry put a rescue tube around her and swam her out beyond the dangerous breaking waves, towing her for 15 minutes while searching for a safe shore. A CAL FIRE Inflatable Rescue Boat arrived and Lifeguard McHenry assisted the woman into the boat. She was transported to the shore, taken to a local hospital by ambulance, and



treated for extreme hypothermia and near drowning. After swimming back to the beach, Lifeguard McHenry continued a visual search for the second victim who sadly did not survive.

Lifeguard McHenry started work with the California State Parks as a seasonal lifeguard in 2001 and became a peace officer/lifeguard in 2009. McHenry is presently a Superintendent serving in the San Diego Coast District.

A total of 52 present and former employees were honored in the ceremony from nominations provided to Cal HR. Since 1959, 523 employees have received the Medal of Valor.

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