



News Release

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State of California Honors State Parks Lifeguard with Governor's State Employee Medal of Valor Award *Award is the highest honor state bestows on its public servants*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The State of California today honored California State Lifeguard Christopher Connolly of Ventura with the Governor's State Employee Medal of Valor Award for his act of heroism, during a ceremony at the California Highway Patrol Academy in West Sacramento. The Medal of Valor is the highest honor the state can give its employees.

Medals were presented to 22 recipients, from seven state departments, on behalf of Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. by Keely Bosler, the Governor's Cabinet Secretary. Other state officials participating in the ceremony included Richard Gillihan, Director, California Department of Human Resources; Joseph A. Farrow, Commissioner, California Highway Patrol; John Laird, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency; Brian P. Kelly; Secretary, California State Transportation Agency.

The award comes in two distinctions, the Special Service Award (Silver) for an act of heroism by a state employee extending above and beyond the normal call of duty or service performed at personal risk to his or her safety to save human life or state property, and the Special Act Award (Gold) for an extraordinary act of heroism by a state employee extending far above and beyond the normal call of duty or service, performed at great risk to his or her own life in an effort to save human life.

California State Lifeguard II Christopher Connolly (Lifeguard Connolly) was honored with a silver medal for a rescue performed in treacherous surf on December 2015 that saved the life of a surfer caught in pounding waves.

During the biggest El Niño surf event in years with 15-20 foot waves along a rocky shoreline, Lifeguard Connolly rescued a tiring surfer under the difficult conditions and at great peril to himself. Responding to a call at Faria Beach north of the City of Ventura on December 11,



2015, Lifeguard Connolly entered the water without hesitation. He swam to the victim, secured him to a life buoy, then fought wave sets while seeking a safe spot to exit the surf. Connolly traveled more than 3/4 of a mile in a swift current while attempts by first responders to reach the pair from shore failed. Connolly held the victim close for protection and talked the surfer through the ordeal. Eventually, Lifeguard Connolly was able to reach a sandy beach with his rescuee who was exhausted, but unhurt. Without the actions of Connolly, the surfer likely would have been lost to the pounding surf. Veteran State Parks lifeguards called Connolly's efforts one of the most demanding and dynamic rescues ever witnessed.

Connolly, 44, is a seasonal lifeguard with California State Parks and has worked as a lifeguard for 16 years. He is a Spanish instructor at Ventura Community College and a volunteer with the Fillmore Fire Department. He has a daughter Piper.

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