



**American Red Cross**  
Southern California Region

2024

# Inland Empire Heroes Awards

Celebrate the Hero Within!

Wednesday, March 6, 2024  
Ontario Convention Center

# Thank You to Our Sponsors

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*This year's Inland Empire Heroes Awards  
will benefit Red Cross Blood Services.*



Every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs lifesaving blood — a person giving birth, a child with sickle cell disease, a neighbor receiving treatment for cancer and so many others. A sufficient blood supply is critical to being able to provide timely care for all patients in need of lifesaving blood transfusions. It's the blood on the shelves that helps in times of emergency.

Please make an appointment to give blood or platelets now by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org) or calling 1-800-RED CROSS

(1-800-733-2767). You can help ensure that everyone facing health-related emergencies gets the blood they need.

### **A Legacy of Saving Lives**

The American Red Cross provides about 40% of the nation's supply of blood. This unparalleled reach is only possible through our nationwide blood banking system and volunteer blood donors and support from the community. To help meet patient need, the Red Cross is expanding Blood and Platelet Donation Centers across the country, including Riverside County to support the Inland Empire. The Red Cross Riverside Blood Donation Center/Humanitarian Services Center will serve as the central hub for community members rolling up a sleeve to give blood, platelet and plasma to help hospital patients. There's no substitute for blood products — when a patient receives blood, plasma or platelets, it was given in advance by a generous donor in our community. This will be the first Red Cross hybrid center offering Humanitarian Services and Biomedical Services serving Riverside and San Bernardino Counties!

You can help ensure that everyone facing health-related emergencies gets the blood they need. With your gift, you will help support our mission-critical work, including the Red Cross Riverside Blood Donation Center/Humanitarian Services Center, making a lasting impact on our ability to deliver safe and reliable blood to people in need.



[Learn More](#)



Please consider donating today. Text the word  
IEHEROES24 to 76278 or donate online.

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When you donate to the American Red Cross, your donation is used efficiently. An average of **90 cents of every dollar** the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. The American National Red Cross is registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions to the American National Red Cross are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. The Red Cross' tax identification number is 53-0196605.

# Event Program

## Registration and Networking

### Presentation of Colors

California Highway Patrol Inland Division Honor Guard

### National Anthem

Tina Hargett

## Introduction and Welcome

### Award Presentations

**Animal Welfare Hero Award:** San Bernardino County Fire ME231

**Disaster Service Hero Award:** R. Espinoza

**Good Samaritan Hero Award:** Cesar Morales

**Gift of Life Hero Award:** William Taylor

**Service to the Armed Forces Hero Award:** Robert J. Ethridge

**First Responder Hero Award:** Cory Wheeler, *Murrieta Fire & Rescue*

**Youth Hero Award:** Emma Gray

**Gift of Life Hero Award:** Tina Vazquez

## Closing Remarks

*Thank you to our 2024 Inland Empire Heroes  
Selection Committee*

Andrew Behenke | Rossina Gallegos | Lashon Halley  
Donna Luginbill | Dora Mejia | Ed Monie | Michael Ramirez  
Ivan Sandoval | Laura Tolbirt | Diane Wiesmann

## Event Emcee



**Shelby Nelson**

*Event Emcee*

Shelby Nelson is a reporter and multimedia journalist in the Inland Empire. She joined KTLA 5 News in December 2021 and is thrilled to be storytelling in the region she grew up in.

The Covina-native graduated from San Francisco State University with a bachelor's degree in broadcast electronic communication arts. San Francisco is where Shelby kick-started her career. She worked as a writer for KTLA's sister station, KRON 4 News, and later moved on to KPIX 5. After living in the Bay Area for six years, Shelby moved to Palm Springs to become a multimedia journalist and reporter at KESQ-TV.

Shelby has an interest in health, which prompted her to return to school while working in news. She attended City College of San Francisco to achieve a pre-nursing certificate. She is currently working toward a master's in public health to expand upon her passion for health reporting.

After having reported in the Coachella Valley, Shelby went on to become KTLA's first Inland Empire reporter. She interned for the station in 2012 and never could have imagined continuing her dream at Southern California's top news station.

# 2024 Inland Empire Heroes Honorees



## Animal Welfare Hero San Bernardino County Fire ME231

Following inclement weather in January 2023, Seamus, a one-year-old Australian Shepherd, was swept away in a storm drain after running away from his owner on a walk. As the owners searched for their dog, local crews were dispatched to assist. While canvassing the area, San Bernardino County Fire ME231 was flagged down by someone who had heard a dog barking in a nearby channel and witnessed the dog floating away. Firefighters quickly made access to the dog, ultimately bringing him to safety. The crew took Seamus with them in the fire engine, drying and warming him up on the way to his house. Firefighters soon returned Seamus to his worried owners and reunited the family back together.

Presented by 

## Disaster Services Hero R. Espinoza

On October 7, 2023, Detective R. Espinoza, several family members, and nearly 30 others from his church group landed in Israel for a vacation. Hours later, Hamas attacked Israel. Espinoza jumped into action to ensure the safety of his group. They sought safety in bomb shelters while he worked tirelessly to find flights back to the United States. He initially secured safe passage for four individuals, as few seats were available on outgoing flights. Espinoza remained behind, shepherding the remainder of his group to safety on a harrowing journey. Many group members were elderly. Espinoza rarely slept, staying up most nights providing medical aid and comfort to fellow group members. Eventually, Espinoza was able to secure ground transportation for the group to Jordan. After the 11-hour drive, he booked two smaller charter aircraft, and his group was flown to Turkey, where he obtained commercial flights for the entire group to Los Angeles, ensuring their safe passage home. They ultimately returned a week after the war began, thanks to Espinoza's leadership and courage in the face of danger and uncertainty.

Presented by  Chino Valley Medical Center  
Montclair Hospital Medical Center  
San Dimas Community Hospital  
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### **Good Samaritan Hero Cesar Morales**

In April 2023, while driving a K-FROG station vehicle back from an event at the Norco Rodeo, the K-FROG Street Team was involved in an auto accident. After being rear-ended, then hit again on the side of the van, K-FROG team member Cesar Morales pulled the station vehicle over and exited the van, preparing to exchange information with the other driver. Instead, he realized the driver was having a medical emergency, which likely caused the driver to lose control of the vehicle. A nursing student and former Marine, Cesar immediately sprang into action, administering CPR and reviving the driver, ultimately helping to save the man's life.



### **Gift Of Life Hero William Taylor**

Since 2018, Red Cross platelet donor William Taylor has been traveling from his home in Riverside County to Pomona to regularly donate platelets — about 72 miles roundtrip. A dedicated platelet donor, William waits patiently at each appointment as specialized equipment draws whole blood from one arm, separates platelets and returns red blood cells to him. The process takes up to three hours and results in several transfusable platelet units. William has donated over 370 platelet units. Platelets can be used to help organ transplant patients, those undergoing surgery or patients battling cancer. Because platelets have a shelf life of five days they are in constant need, and the Red Cross is thankful for volunteer platelet donors like William who play a critical role in offering hope and healing for patients in Southern California and beyond.





## Service to the Armed Forces Hero Robert J. Ethridge

At the age of 17, Robert J. Ethridge enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving from 1987 to 2002. His time in the Army included multiple combat deployments. During Operation Enduring Freedom he was severely wounded and medically discharged. After taking time to heal from his wounds he joined the U.S. Forest Service, and over the course of his 20-year career, he has worked tirelessly to protect and serve others. His efforts include helping to protect Californians during the Rim Fire, Station Fire, Ranch Fire, August Fire and others. He has also deployed to support search, rescue, and recovery efforts after Hurricane Katrina and helped fight the devastating Australia wildfires from December 2019 to January 2020. Robert spends his evenings and weekends helping local veterans with the Valued Veterans Program, going above and beyond to ensure veterans in the community feel seen and valued — a hero helping heroes.

Presented by  Altura<sup>®</sup>  
CREDIT UNION



## First Responder Hero Cory Wheeler, Murrieta Fire & Rescue

Fire Engineer Cory Wheeler and his team responded to a 911 call in which a nine-year-old girl lost her father. After this heartbreaking call, the young girl found a guardian angel in Cory. Recognizing the immediate and long-term needs of this young girl, Cory initiated a fundraising effort that garnered over \$6,000 for her, which was used to provide essential items like clothes and personal necessities. He even orchestrated a trip to Disneyland, creating lasting memories for a child who faced unimaginable hardship. To ensure the young girl had continued support, he placed the remaining funds in a controlled account to help provide necessary resources for the future — making a positive impact for a young girl facing a tragic situation.

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## Youth Hero Emma Gray

Emma Gray was walking into her high school with friends when she noticed a student on the floor experiencing a seizure. As an American Red Cross certified lifeguard, she assessed the situation and realized he had a laceration on his neck and was still seizing. Emma used the hoodie she was wearing to put pressure on the wound, while using the larger portion of the hoodie to cushion the student's head. She remained with him and kept the pressure on his wound while waiting for help to arrive. When medics arrived, they informed her that his laceration to the neck was his carotid artery, and that if pressure was not held on the wound, the student could have died in minutes. Thanks to Emma's training in First Aid and CPR through the American Red Cross Lifeguard training program, she was able to jump into action and help save her fellow schoolmate's life.

Presented by 



## Gift of Life Hero Tina Vazquez

Tina Vazquez, a Red Cross Blood Program Leader, has been instrumental in the resurgence of in-person blood drives sponsored by Circle K West Coast after the COVID-19 pandemic. Tina personally recruits Circle K staff and community members to give blood at local Circle K West blood drives, printing and posting flyers at stores and neighboring businesses, community centers and places of worship. "Tina is a wonderful advocate for Red Cross within Circle K and beyond. She has such a huge heart and is committed to serving her community," said Lois Beckman, Executive Director of the American Red Cross of Riverside County. "Her work and efforts have undoubtedly led to many lives saved through the blood drives she has coordinated. She is fierce when it comes to recruiting blood donors. She is a true hero who goes above and beyond to serve others."

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# Creating a world of limitless possibilities.

Proud to support the American Red Cross.

La Quinta Branch  
78435 Highway 111  
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With gratitude, Altura recognizes the extraordinary individuals who make the Inland Empire a stronger, brighter place.

Check out our Impact Report: [AlturaCU.com](http://AlturaCU.com)



Congratulations to the 2024 Inland Empire Heroes for their outstanding courage.

DoubleTree by Hilton Claremont is grateful for your bravery!



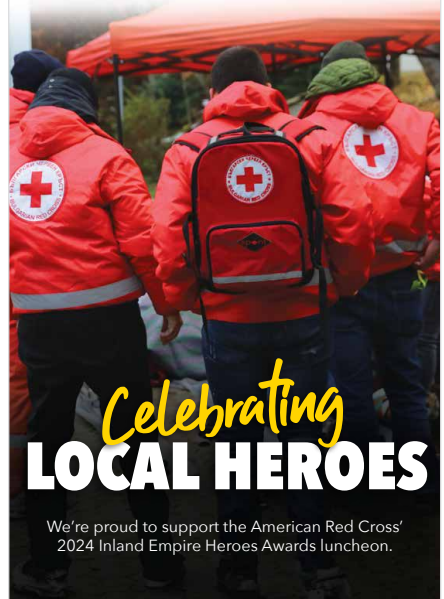
International Association of  
Plumbing and Mechanical Officials  
is a proud supporter of the  
American Red Cross.



Congratulations to this year's  
honorees! You are true heroes in  
our communities!



[iehp.org](http://iehp.org)



## Celebrating **LOCAL HEROES**

We're proud to support the American Red Cross'  
2024 Inland Empire Heroes Awards Luncheon.

Don & Donna Luginbill  
congratulate the 2024  
Inland Empire Heroes!



Prime Healthcare  
and our Inland Empire  
hospitals are proud to  
support the 2024 Inland  
Empire Heroes Awards event.



Chino Valley Medical Center  
Montclair Hospital Medical Center  
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[primehealthcare.com](http://primehealthcare.com)  
Top Ranked Health System



**Serving the World Flavor**

High Desert - Riverside - Redlands -  
Calimesa - Moreno Valley - Grand Terrace -  
Corona - Temecula



**Congratulations  
to the 2024  
Inland Empire Heroes!  
Thank you for your courage  
and commitment to  
the community.**



**TOPGOLF**

# Regional Leadership

## American Red Cross Southern California Region | Leadership Team

**Sean Mahoney**, Regional Chief Executive Officer

**Malinda McDonald**, Chief Operating Officer

**Glenn Maddalon**, Regional Chief Development Officer

**Debbie Leahy**, Regional Disaster Program Officer

**Daniel Beighley**, Regional Service to the Armed Forces Director

**Christine Welch**, Regional Communications Director

**Debbie Pari**, Regional Volunteer Services Officer

**Becky Firey**, Executive Director (Orange County)

**Lois Beckman**, Executive Director (Riverside County)

**Yvette Baysinger**, Executive Director (San Bernardino County)

**Ann Anderson**, Director, Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Program

## Board of Directors | Riverside County

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Bernard Herman

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Danny Renko

Ivan Sandoval



## #IEHeroes



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Videos at YouTube.com/SoCalRedCross



Photos from today's event will be shared at  
Flickr.com/SoCalRedCross

Nominations are accepted year-round at [redcross.org/ieheroes](https://redcross.org/ieheroes)

## American Red Cross

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GIVING DAY



American  
Red Cross

MAR  
27

## Help can't wait after a disaster.

Imagine your life being turned upside down by a disaster. This happens every eight minutes to families across the country. But you can help.

On March 27, unite with compassionate people like you to provide shelter, food, relief supplies, emotional support and other assistance.

Please donate for Giving Day at [redcross.org/GivingDay](https://redcross.org/GivingDay)

**#HelpCantWait**



*Thank You!*

## Valued Community Partners



**American  
Red Cross**

## *Mission*

The American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

## *Diversity Vision Statement*

The American Red Cross aspires to be an organization fully committed to diversity and inclusion by creating and maintaining a diverse, high-performing workforce of employees and volunteers who reflect all communities we serve; by cultivating a collaborative, inclusive and respectful work environment that empowers all contributors; and by leveraging diverse partnerships — all of which helps to ensure culturally competent service delivery supported by effective community leadership and engagement.