



LOS ANGELES COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE MEDIA RELATIONS DIVISION

JACKIE LACEY • District Attorney
SHARON J. MATSUMOTO • Chief Deputy District Attorney

JEAN GUCCIONE • Director
JANE ROBISON • Asst. P.I.O.

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Four Honored With Courageous Citizen Awards

LOS ANGELES – District Attorney Jackie Lacey will honor today a home-care provider who thwarted the attempted kidnapping of her 95-year-old client who suffered from Alzheimer's disease.

Three others also will be recognized at a Courageous Citizen Awards luncheon from noon to 1:30 p.m. at The City Club, 333 South Grand Ave. The event will be hosted by the Rotary Club of Los Angeles.

"These otherwise ordinary people have taken extraordinary steps to assist others when they were most vulnerable," District Attorney Lacey said. "They stopped a crime. They made sure that a criminal was prosecuted. They helped a crime victim during a terrifying moment of need. They are vital to the pursuit of justice and our community is a safer place because of them."

Nida Tapel, 52, of Los Angeles, will receive a Courageous Citizen Award for enduring a painful pepper spray attack in an effort to prevent the kidnapping of her frail, elderly client on Dec. 19, 2011. With her eyes and face burning after being pepper sprayed by her client's daughter, Tapel ran outside, yelled for help and got a passerby to call 911. Tapel then jumped into the suspect's SUV to protect her client.

Tapel remained in the vehicle as the suspect took off and led police on a wild chase for several miles before being captured. The defendant pleaded no contest to charges of attempted kidnap, battery and evading an officer and is scheduled to be sentenced on May 2.

District Attorney Lacey also will recognize Samuel Nunez, 24, and Kem Gaskin, 44, both of Lancaster. The two came to the aid of a 77-year-old woman who was battered and robbed by a gang member. Henry Hernandez, 44, of Whittier, who pulled a badly injured woman out of a burning car after her angry ex-boyfriend ran her car off the road, also will be recognized.

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Nunez and Gaskin will receive Courageous Citizen Awards for chasing down and helping to capture a violent career criminal who robbed a 77-year-old woman of her purse and cell phone after pushing her to the ground. The incident occurred in the parking lot of a Lancaster store on Sept. 27, 2011.

Nunez was first on the scene after he saw the defendant running away with the victim's purse. Nunez jumped in front of the suspect and tackled him to the ground then fought off the suspect as he was being stabbed in the head.

When Gaskin, a church pastor, witnessed the attack on Nunez, he intervened and managed to stop the attack before the suspect fled. However, Gaskin chased the suspect for a short distance before losing sight of him and directed police to the suspect's approximate location, leading to his capture. The defendant pleaded guilty to attempted murder, robbery and assault with a screwdriver. He was sentenced to 35 years to life in prison.

On Jan. 4, 2012, Hernandez, a bus driver, was on his way to work around 4 a.m. when he saw a car being closely followed by a pickup truck traveling westbound on Whittier Boulevard. Unbeknownst to Hernandez, the driver of the truck was the ex-boyfriend of the woman in the car and he already had rammed her vehicle several times.

Hernandez lost sight of the vehicles, but a short distance later, he saw the car wrapped around a tree. Moments before the car burst into flames, Hernandez managed to pull the victim free and carry her to safety.

Hernandez testified at the defendant's trial. The defendant was convicted of assault with a deadly weapon and hit and run with injury and sentenced to six years and four months in prison.