

Jackie Lacey
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NEWS RELEASE

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**Four Los Angeles County Residents Recognized
For Their Courageous Acts**

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today commended four Los Angeles County residents for their bravery and fortitude that helped advance justice.

They included a concerned resident in Bell who sought details about the salaries of its city's leaders and helped uncover one of the county's largest civic corruption scandals; a man and a woman who intervened during the brutal beating of a homeless man by the co-founder of the Pinkberry frozen yogurt chain; and an LAUSD plant manager who caught a man who sexually assaulted a 6-year-old girl at an empty elementary school.

"The four people being honored today put the needs of others before their own," District Attorney Lacey said. "Whether challenging the veracity of civic leaders or coming to the aid of a defenseless homeless person or a young girl, each of the honorees jumped at the chance to help others and never second-guessed their actions in the pursuit of justice. Our community is a better place because of them."

The District Attorney's Office presents Courageous Citizen Awards several times a year to people who have performed extraordinary acts of valor and selflessness in assisting in criminal prosecutions, aiding victims, preventing crimes or capturing suspects.

The honorees are:

Roger Ramirez, 61, of Bell (Case BA377197/BA376025)

When Bell resident Roger Ramirez heard a rumor in late 2008 that the city's top executive was making \$400,000 a year, he decided to investigate.

He was rebuffed by then-Chief Administrative Officer Robert Rizzo, who told Ramirez he wouldn't be working in Bell if he made that kind of money. Some councilmembers also failed to answer Ramirez's

questions about how much they were making.

Ramirez then filed a Public Records Act (PRA) request and within a couple of weeks he was given a document that turned out to be falsified. This fraudulent response, which vastly underreported Rizzo's salary, was a key piece of evidence used to successfully prosecute the city's two former top officials and five former councilmembers in what was the biggest municipal corruption case in the history of the District Attorney's Public Integrity Division.

Ramirez testified at a preliminary hearing and at two trials. The judge noted Rizzo deserved additional punishment because he falsified the PRA.

Rizzo pleaded no contest to dozens of misappropriation of public funds counts in October 2013 and was sentenced to 12 years in prison; former Assistant City Administrator Angela Spaccia was found guilty of 11 felony counts in December 2013 and was sentenced to 11 years, eight months in prison; and five former councilmembers were convicted at trial and received sentences ranging from six months in local custody to two years in prison.

Alicia De la Cruz, 47, of Studio City and Robert Edwards, 44, of Woodland Hills (Case BA392191)

The heroic actions of Alicia De la Cruz and Robert Edwards likely saved the life of a homeless man on June 15, 2011.

The transient was panhandling on a freeway off-ramp when he antagonized the suspect, the co-founder of the Pinkberry frozen yogurt chain. The suspect and another man returned later and chased and beat the homeless man with a tire iron.

Edwards, unarmed and outnumbered, ran toward the attackers and intervened. The two suspects ran away, but Edwards followed after checking on the victim. He was unable to catch them but he called 911 and gave police a description of what happened.

De la Cruz also saw what occurred and approached the suspects. She threatened to call police and when the suspects fled, she chased after them in her vehicle and wrote down their license plate number. She returned to the crime scene and gave police the information.

At sentencing, the judge suggested the good Samaritans deserved an award for their bravery. Jurors found the defendant guilty of one count of assault with a deadly weapon in November 2013 and he was sentenced to seven years in prison.

The case was investigated by Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart Division.

David Muñoz, 37, of Montebello (Case BA382538)

On March 25, 2011, a 6-year-old girl was lured by her assailant from a neighbor's front yard to a nearby empty elementary school in Boyle Heights.

The child's family went to the school to look for the girl and encountered plant manager David Muñoz. He helped the family search the grounds. Along the way, they found her discarded clothing.

Muñoz came upon a water heater closet where he discovered the victim, naked and crying, and the suspect who had just sexually assaulted her. The defendant ran away, but an undeterred Muñoz gave chase, caught the man and pinned him down until police arrived.

Muñoz testified at a preliminary hearing, despite being fearful of retaliation by the defendant's family and his possible gang affiliates. In August 2013, the defendant pleaded no contest to three counts of forcible lewd acts upon a child and was sentenced to 45 years in state prison.

The case was investigated by Los Angeles Police Department's Hollenbeck Division.

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About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to seeking justice for victims of crime and enhancing public safety. Last year, the [Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#) prosecuted more than 73,000 felony defendants and 113,000 misdemeanor defendants.