

Jackie Lacey

District Attorney
<http://da.lacounty.gov>



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Shiara Dávila-Morales, Chief
Media Relations Division
213-257-2000
SDavila-Morales@da.lacounty.gov
Twitter: @LADAOoffice

Nov. 2, 2017

Eight Honored for Stopping Sexual Predator, Rescuing Unattended Baby in Car and Subduing Violent Assailant

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today recognized four men who stopped a violent sexual predator, assisted police with his capture and, ultimately, helped prosecutors secure a conviction.

Four others also were honored at a Courageous Citizen Awards Ceremony in Granada Hills hosted by the Kiwanis Club of Northridge. The District Attorney's Office presents these awards four times a year to recognize ordinary people who have performed extraordinary acts of valor.

"Most of us are not prepared to act on a moment's notice to prevent a crime, save a life or capture a criminal," District Attorney Lacey said. "To our great benefit, however, there are people among us like our honorees who can be counted on to act decisively in the face of danger."

The honorees and case details are as follows:

Ben A. Hobbs, 53, of Lancaster, Dominic Kalmeta, 30, of Murrieta, Brandon Fenoglio, 25, of North Carolina and Sherwin Santiago, 33, of Connecticut (Case no. MA065982)

A 15-year-old girl was walking home alone on the evening of May 6, 2015, when a man drove up, identified himself as a police officer and ordered her to get into his car. The girl reluctantly complied.

The man drove the teen to an abandoned trailer in a deserted area of Lancaster and strip-searched her. He forced her into the trailer and sexually assaulted her. When the assailant turned around, the girl ran out of the trailer and toward a church.

He chased the girl as she screamed for help. Hearing her cries, Ben Hobbs, Brandon Fenoglio, Dominic Kalmeta and Sherwin Santiago called 911 and left the church in an attempt to detain the man, chasing him on foot. But the man drove off into the desert. The assailant soon crashed his car into a ditch and was arrested.

On March 24, 2016, the 44-year-old defendant was found guilty of 15 felony counts including kidnapping to commit rape, lewd act upon a child and forcible rape of child. He was sentenced to 100 years and eight months to life in prison. The case was investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Max Miller, 22, and Elijah Lee Williams, 22, both of Los Angeles (Case no. LA083861)

A man called his girlfriend on June 19, 2016, to invite her to his place. When she arrived, he grabbed her by the hair and put her into his car. He told her to apologize for giving him "attitude."

The victim did so, but soon got out of the car in North Hollywood and ran away. Elijah Williams heard the woman's cries and let her into a café.

The assailant forcefully pushed his body against a closed door, knocking Mr. Williams to the floor. Max Miller, a café patron, tried to stop the assailant as he dragged the woman to the exit but the assailant punched him.

The commotion drew attention from other strangers, who stopped to help. The attacker finally released the woman after being surrounded and detained until police arrived.

On Aug. 3, 2017, the 28-year-old defendant pleaded no contest to injuring his girlfriend and assault with a deadly weapon. He was sentenced to a year in jail, five years of probation and 52 weeks of domestic violence counseling. He also was ordered to stay away from the victim for 10 years. The case was investigated by the Los Angeles Police Department.

Jolie Wirth, 19, of North Hills, and Augustine Lopez, 48, of Panorama City (Case no. PA085994)

On the afternoon of March 9, 2016, Augustine Lopez saw a 9-month-old girl inside a locked car in the parking lot of a gentlemen's club in North Hills. The baby appeared to be hot and sweaty and was crying uncontrollably.

Mr. Lopez told people nearby that the child needed help. Jolie Wirth and another person rushed to the car to provide aid. A cracked window allowed the Good Samaritans to open the car door. The child was removed and given water.

When the father came out of the club, he tried to take his daughter but Ms. Wirth refused to hand over the baby. The father left and called 911, telling the dispatcher that his baby and car were being held hostage. When police arrived, the father was arrested. Video footage later recovered from the club revealed the father left the child unattended for more than 40 minutes.

On April 26, 2017, the 36-year-old defendant pleaded no contest to child abuse and was sentenced to five years of probation and 10 days in county jail. He also was ordered to complete 45 days of Caltrans service and 52 weeks of parenting classes. The case was investigated by the Los Angeles Police Department.

[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 protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.