



# 19 Honored for Bravery

## LAPD hosts its 46th Medal of Valor ceremony.

Story and photos courtesy Police Officer Sara Faden, Public Information Officer, LAPD; and Rose Guzman, Administrative Assistant, Los Angeles Police Foundation

LAPD — On May 10, 18 police officers and one former officer received the LAPD's highest honor, the Medal of Valor. The award celebrates bravery and heroism beyond the call of duty. The 46th Medal of Valor Ceremony, which was expected to draw more than 500 guests, was held at the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood.

The 46th Medal of Valor Ceremony was sponsored by the Los Angeles Police Foundation.

The Medal of Valor is the Los Angeles Police Department's highest honor and is awarded to officers who distinguish themselves by conspicuous bravery or heroism above and beyond the normal demands of police service. To be awarded the Medal of Valor, an officer would have performed an act displaying extreme courage while consciously facing imminent peril.

The medal was awarded by the Board of Police Commissioners and was presented by the Chief of Police in the name of the Department at the annual Medal of Valor awards ceremony. The award consists of a medal, ribbon and citation. The Medal of Valor was first presented in 1925. Medals of Valor were not awarded in 2004 and 2005.

The Club sincerely congratulates those honored at the ceremony for their true dedication to service. Their individual stories follow.

## AT LONG LAST



**Walter Kesterson**  
POLICEMAN  
KILLED IN THE LINE  
OF DUTY FEB. 4, 1946

While conducting crime-suppression duties near 43rd Place and Avalon Boulevard, Metropolitan Division Officers Walter H. Kesterson and E.W. Patrick observed two robbery suspects. The suspects, Nathaniel Cooper and Gus Boyd, had just committed an armed robbery at a local movie theater. Kesterson, the passenger officer, exited the police vehicle and attempted to detain the two suspects. However, Cooper reached into his jacket pocket and a scuffle ensued between Cooper and Kesterson. Cooper then removed a .38-caliber revolver from his jacket and fired at Kesterson, striking him in the upper torso. Kesterson simultaneously returned fire, which resulted in the death of Cooper.

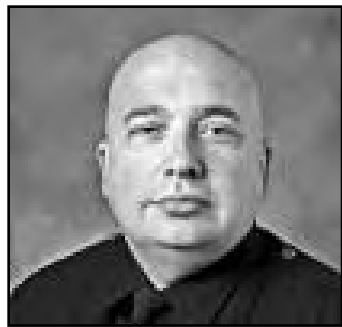
Concurrently, Kesterson observed Boyd in the process of removing a handgun from his pocket. Officer Kesterson was able to fire at Boyd, thus neutralizing his deadly threat. Both suspects were pronounced dead at the scene.

Kesterson was taken to the George Street Receiving Hospital and died upon arrival. Subsequent investigation revealed the suspects had committed at least 25 armed robberies in the Los Angeles area. Two weeks prior to Kesterson's shooting, Vernon Police Officer Richard Pennington had stopped both suspects for driving under the influence just one block from the Vernon Police Headquarters. After arriving at Police Headquarters for processing, Boyd exited his vehicle with a handgun and shot Pennington in the upper torso and head, killing him instantly.

Kesterson's partner, E.W. Patrick, was not involved in the officer-involved shooting. He was in the process of parking the police vehicle and by the time he exited the vehicle, the gun battle was over.

Officer Kesterson had not been recognized by the Department for this incident until this 2007 Medal of Valor honor.

## SAVING ANOTHER OFFICER



**Joseph Meyer**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
77TH STREET AREA

On June 3, 2006, Southwest Area Officers Joseph Meyer and Kristina Ripatti were patrolling the area of Leighton and Denker Avenues. Suddenly, a male, later identified as James McNeal, ran in front of their police vehicle, causing Meyer to brake to avoid hitting him. With the intent to issue a citation, Ripatti ordered McNeal to stop. McNeal looked in their direction then increased his speed. McNeal's desperate attempt to avoid contact with the police led the officers to believe he was running for some other reason. Unknown to the officers at the time, McNeal was running from the scene of an armed robbery he had just committed.

As Ripatti initiated a foot pursuit, Meyer broadcast their location and joined pursuit. Ripatti caught up to McNeal on the front porch of an apartment building. As Ripatti attempted to grab McNeal's arm, McNeal armed himself with a handgun and fired four shots at point blank range, hitting Ripatti. Meyer was approximately 20 feet behind Ripatti when she was shot. Meyer immediately requested assistance and rushed over to aid Ripatti, who was gasping for air. Meyer remained calm, cradled Ripatti and assured her that she would be fine.

Sgt. Robin Brown, assigned to Southwest Area, was the first to respond and joined Meyer in his attempt to locate the wound and stabilize Ripatti. Meyer removed Ripatti's bulletproof vest, tracked the flow of blood under her left arm and plugged the wound with his finger. Brown then used his open palm to cup Meyer's hand to form an airtight seal over the wound and applied pressure. In an attempt to keep Ripatti alert, both Brown and Meyer kept talking to her. Meyer then noted Ripatti had released her hold on his hands and her head collapsed into a lifeless limp.

Simultaneously, Officers Keith Bertonneau, Ralph Ward, Gary Koba and Gilbert Pinel, assigned to Metropolitan Division, Special Weapon and Tactics (SWAT), arrived on the scene and relieved Brown and Meyer. All four officers from the Metropolitan Division are Emergency Medical Technicians and began administering first aid to Ripatti. Pinel used a sterile bandage to apply direct pressure to Ripatti's wound. Bertonneau assisted in applying pressure using the heel of his palm. Ward retrieved a bag valve mask and an oxygen bottle from his kit and Koba positioned himself to conduct chest compression and to monitor Ripatti's pulse. While monitoring Ripatti, Pinel noted she was limp, had no pulse and was unresponsive. All four SWAT Officers immediately initiated CPR.

Pinel elevated Ripatti's head to keep her airway open and placed the oxygen mask over her mouth. Koba initiated chest compressions in cycles of four while Ward pumped the oxygen bag and Bertonneau kept pressure on the wound. After administering CPR for approximately one minute, a pulse was detected on Ripatti's wrist and her heart began beating again. Ripatti's eyes moved upward and she responded to instructions. With guarded optimism, the officers maintained their positions, ensuring Ripatti could breathe on her own until the paramedics arrived.

A trauma doctor at the hospital stated that if the responding officers had not acted in a timely and appropriate manner, Ripatti would not have survived her injuries.

## SAVING A DRIVER



**Rudy Barragan**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
METROPOLITAN DIVISION



**Marco Briones**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
NEWTON AREA

On May 1, 2006, Newton Area's Special Problems Unit (SPU) Police Officers Rudy Barragan and Marco Briones were stopped at a traffic light when they observed a gray Buick crash into a power pole. The officers immediately went to the crash site to render aid.

As they approached, they noted the driver was semi-conscious and trapped behind the steering wheel, bleeding heavily from an eight-inch laceration on the top of his head. Moments later, additional SPU Officers Brain Cooney, Rudy Avelar and Bruce Coss arrived on the scene. While Avelar conducted traffic control, Cooney and Coss grabbed a fire extinguisher from their police vehicle and attempted to suppress the flames in the vehicle.

As the dashboard ignited into flames, Barragan and Briones attempted to open the driver's door with negative results. Then they tried to pull the more than six-foot male driver, who weighed more than 250 pounds, out of the window, but were unable to do so because of the heat from the flames. Utilizing the fire extinguisher, Cooney and Coss then focused their attention on trying to keep the fire from the driver. As the rescue continued, Briones broke out the rear passenger window with his baton. Barragan and Briones then

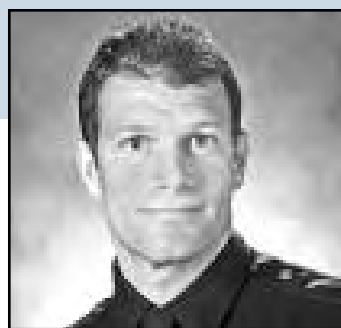
attempted to pull the driver out from the rear door with negative results.

As the fire and heat intensified, Barragan and Briones re-deployed to the front passenger's door as they continued their efforts to rescue the driver by utilizing tremendous strength. They eventually managed to pull the driver from the burning vehicle. Just as they cleared the vehicle and were dragging the driver to safety, the vehicle exploded and was completely engulfed in flames.

Newton Area Sergeant Chris Gomez arrived just as Barragan and Briones pulled the driver from the vehicle. Sergeant Gomez observed the vehicle burst into flames just seconds after the rescue. Sergeant Gomez stated that the driver would not have survived if the officers had not extracted him from the burning vehicle. Two witnesses were interviewed and shared the same opinion. The driver was rushed into surgery and survived the incident.



**Albert Gavin**  
SERGEANT,  
TRAINING DIVISION



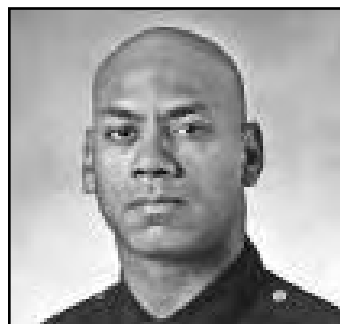
**Jeffrey Wenninger**  
SERGEANT, USE OF FORCE  
REVIEW DIVISION



**Jose Castellanos**  
SERGEANT, AUDIT  
DIVISION



**Miguel Lopez**  
SERGEANT,  
SOUTHWEST AREA



**Guy Dobine**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
METROPOLITAN DIVISION



**Jude Washington**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
SOUTHWEST AREA



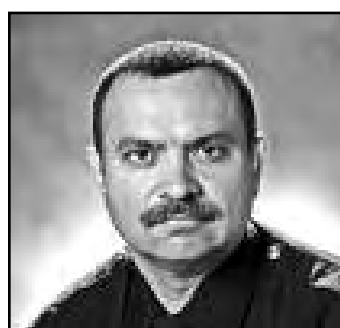
**Alberto Junco**  
DETECTIVE, OPERATIONS,  
WEST BUREAU



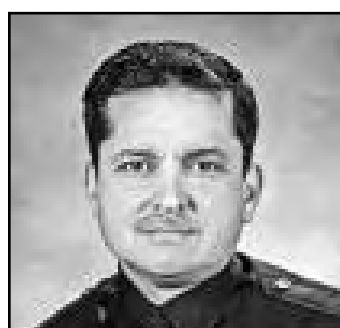
**Mark Pursel**  
DETECTIVE,  
WEST LOS ANGELES



**Sandy Kim**  
DETECTIVE, SANTA ANA  
POLICE DEPARTMENT



**Arturo Perez**  
POLICE OFFICER, BURBANK  
POLICE DEPARTMENT



**Stephen Oiaz**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
WILSHIRE AREA

## SAVING LIVES IN A BUILDING ON FIRE

On June 21, 1996, Wilshire Area Police Officers Jeffrey Wenninger and Jose Castellanos were on patrol when they heard an explosion. They then observed smoke and flames billowing from a window of a retirement home. The officers knew the retirement home was occupied by numerous elderly and physically handicapped citizens, and without hesitation, exited their vehicle to render aid. As they approached the retirement home, the window exploded from the intense heat generated by the flames. Fearing that an elderly person was trapped inside the bedroom, they requested the Fire Department and quickly formulated a plan for a rescue.

Wenninger and Castellanos entered the retirement home via the front door. They were unable to see due to the thick smoke in the hallway and crawled down the hallway to the bedroom door. Wenninger informed Castellanos that he (Wenninger) would enter the bedroom and "run the walls" to locate potential victims. Wenninger instructed Castellanos to remain at the door in the event he (Wenninger) became disoriented and could not find his way out of the room. However, due to the thick smoke in the bedroom and the hallway, both officers were forced to exit the building.

Upon exiting the retirement home, Wenninger and Castellanos met Albert Gavin and Sandy Kim, Miguel Lopez, Alberto Junco, Stephen Diaz, Arturo Perez, Mark Pursel, Kenyard Bilal, Gerald Jackson, Guy Dobine and Jude Washington near the front door. Believing an elderly citizen was still in the burning bedroom, Wenninger, Castellanos, Diaz and Junco formed a human chain and

Jude Washington reentered the room. They were unable to see due to the thick smoke, had difficulty breathing and had to feel around on their hands and knees. After locating no one, the officers exited the bedroom, separated into rescue teams and initiated an evacuation of the entire two-story structure.

As the flames and dark smoke engulfed the second floor, the officers and the supervisor began a door-to-door search and evacuated approximately 80 senior citizens to safety. Some officers heard cries from inside locked bedrooms and were forced to kick open numerous doors to conduct their rescue. The rescued senior citizens were physically carried down the stairs to safety.

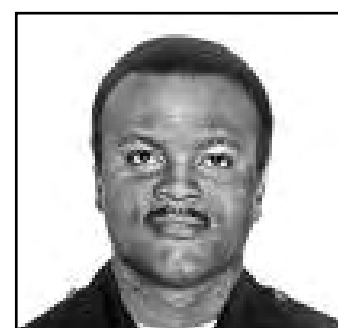
Each officer reentered the burning and smoke-filled retirement home between five to ten times to rescue the elderly residents of the facility. The rescue continued even after the Fire Department arrived and after the fire sprinkler system was activated.

While other officers were treated at the scene, Wenninger, Lopez, Junco and Castellanos suffered smoke inhalation, headaches and other breathing-related problems and were taken to Westside Hospital. Lopez, Junco and Castellanos were treated and released at the hospital. However, due to the amount of carbon-monoxide exposure, Wenninger was admitted into the intensive care unit. He was discharged the following day.

All of the elderly citizens were rescued from the retirement home. Those who required medical treatment were treated and released at the scene.

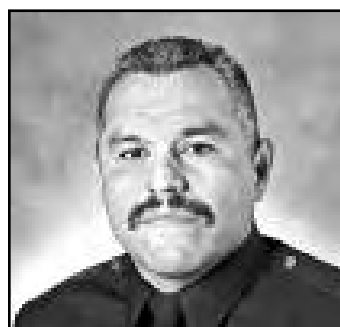


**Kenyard Bilal**  
FORMER POLICE OFFICER



**Gerald Jackson**  
DEPUTY SHERIFF,  
L.A. COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

## SAVING ANOTHER OFFICER



**John Porras**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
HOLLENBECK AREA

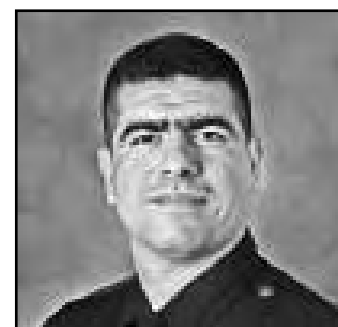
On Aug. 12, 2006, Hollenbeck Area Officers John Porras and James Tuck were patrolling the area of Lincoln Park in their marked police vehicle. Porras and Tuck observed a black Honda Accord traveling northbound with only one headlight working. Porras made a U-turn and initiated a traffic stop. The driver of the Accord failed to yield, made several turns and then pulled over.

As Porras was coming to a stop behind the Accord, the front passenger, Jose Perez, exited the Accord armed with an assault rifle. Perez then fired the rifle numerous times at Porras and Tuck, striking the hood and the windshield of the police vehicle. Both officers returned fire. However, Tuck was struck multiple times in the left arm. Perez continued firing his weapon as he approached the passenger side of the police vehicle. Porras exited the police vehicle, returned fire, hitting Perez in the upper leg. Perez subsequently dropped his weapon and fled southbound from the location. The driver of the Accord, Rogelio Espinosa, drove away during the gunfight.

Hollenbeck Area Officer Jason Smith, a Certified Medical Technician, was the first to respond. Smith wrapped Tuck's hand and applied a tourniquet to his left bicep to control the bleeding. Smith also checked for additional wounds and located a gunshot wound on Tuck's back. Smith cared for Tuck's wounds and kept him stabilized until paramedics arrived.

Rescue Ambulance personnel at the scene stated that Tuck could have lost his hand, or his life, from loss of blood, if not for the actions of Smith.

Perez was subsequently taken into custody during a search of the area. On October 31, 2006, the driver of the Accord was also taken into custody during a domestic-violence investigation.



**James Tuck**  
POLICE OFFICER,  
HOLLENBECK AREA