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Heroes to be honored at Las Cruces Mayor's Gala

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LAS CRUCES - From saving a life to saving a school, from organizing the largest community service project in New Mexico State University history to providing for the continued compassionate care of the sick and dying, there are all kinds of acts of heroism that happen in Las Cruces every day. On Friday, the local chapter of the American Red Cross in Southwestern New Mexico will once again honor local heroes at a gala event which itself was first convened in 2008 by Mayor Ken Miyagishima to rescue the once-troubled organization.

"It is important that we have a Red Cross chapter, and that it is southern New Mexico's Red Cross," he said.

Thanks to that first gala event, the local chapter of the Red Cross was able to turn around its financial situation and "we are doing better than ever, in fact, we are thriving," Melanie Mitchard, community chapter manager, said.

Mitchard said the American Red Cross in Southwestern New Mexico is currently sheltering and providing food for people in three southern New Mexico counties who have lost their homes because of wildfires, she said.

"All the money from the gala goes to support direct services we provide," she said. "The Mayor's Gala is very important to the American Red Cross in southwestern New Mexico. It is very important to continue to deliver the services."

Last year, she said, the local chapter decided to recognize members of the community who have gone "above and beyond the call of duty" in selfless acts of heroism.

Heroes are recognized in seven categories for acts which exemplify the Red Cross' humanitarian mission to provide relief to victims of disaster and help people in emergency situations or any kind of need. This year, the Red Cross received more than 30 nominations for local heroes, Mitchard said.

The seven heroes were chosen by a panel of community leaders, she said.

Miyagishima said at a time when many nonprofit organizations are struggling financially, the Red Cross gala "really needs the community's support."

"The Red Cross is one of those organizations that is instrumental in times of loss and tragedy," he said.

The American Red Cross is mandated by Congress to provide services in every county of the nation, he noted. However, it is an unfunded mandate, thus requiring communities to sustain their own local chapters.

"We hope everyone can come," he said. "It's a good event."

Jeff Barnet can be reached at (575) 541-5476.

If you go

- What: Fourth annual Spirit of the Red Cross Mayor's Gala
- When: 5:30 p.m. Friday; 6:15 p.m. silent auction and awards ceremony for local heroes
- Where: Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum, 4100 Dripping Springs Road
- Cost: \$50
- For tickets: Call Helping Hands Event Planning, (575) 522-1232 or visit the office at the Wells Fargo

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Tower, Suite 900. Also, tickets may be purchased at Spiritofthe [RedCross.com](http://www.RedCross.com)

- To sponsor or reserve a table: Call Stephany Trego at Helping Hands Event Planning, (575) 522-1232

Local heroes: their stories

- Good Samaritan Youth: Jenae Golden, director of community outreach for the Associated Students of New Mexico State University

Golden planned, promoted and executed The Big Event, which set a record for the highest level of student involvement for a student-sponsored community service event in NMSU history.

- Good Samaritan Adult: Gilbert Gutierrez, principal at La Academia Dolores Huerta Charter School

Gutierrez voluntarily reduced his hours from full time to part time in order to pay for the cost of busing more than 100 students to the school.

- Philanthropist: Gerald Deabel

Deabel set up a trust that will ensure that Mesilla Valley Hospice and the La Posada facility will always be available to the residents of Do-a Ana County.

- Animals/Wildlife: Charlene Curry, Therapaws Volunteer Program

Curry and other volunteers bring animals to visit with children with disabilities in the schools, patients and residents in local hospitals and nursing homes, and people who are sick and the dying at the Mesilla Valley Hospice Foundation La Posada residential facility.

- Armed Forces Award: PFC Thomas Leonard, 595 Sapper Company, 2nd Engineer Battalion, White Sands Missile Range

While on patrol in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, on Sept. 19, 2010, PFC Leonard quickly, calmly and accurately applied tourniquets to a fellow soldier who lost both legs above the knee and an arm above the elbow when a bomb detonated. Medical personnel in Afganistan said that the soldier would have died if PFC Leonard had not applied the tourniquets when and how he did.

- Professional Emergency Responder: Marc Lopez

After coordinating an October 2009 rescue attempt for a hiker who suffered cardiac arrest while far into the Baylor Canyon Trail, Lopez created the AMR Reach and Treat team of EMTs and paramedics that have been involved in four rescue attempts in remote wilderness areas of Do-a Ana County.

- Volunteer Emergency Responder: Organ Mountain Technical Rescue Squad

Members of the Organ Mountain Technical Rescue Squad rescued four hikers stranded in Spring Canyon south of Deming on Dec. 16-17, 2010. Two of the hikers were trapped on a small ledge as temperatures were dropping fast and winds were gusting to 40 to 60 mph. The rescue team reached the ledge at 3 a.m., by which time one of the hiker's body core temperature was 82 degrees. The team loaded the hikers into a hovering Border Patrol helicopter that touched down on one skid. Both hikers would have potentially died had the team not rescued them. The rescue was potentially life threatening to the team members as well. Team members: Marta Reece, Jim R. Moore, Aaron Hobson, Ellie Ramos, John Gallegos, Bruce Gather, Robert Cort, Robert Matulich, Kenny Coppedge.



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