

# Monterey County volunteers shine at United Way CSAs

**Chelcey Adami** 9:36 a.m. PDT April 21, 2016



After donating their time, skills, resources and energy to others all year long, volunteers from around Monterey County took a brief moment to shine Tuesday night as they were honored at the 40th Annual Community Service Awards hosted by United Way Monterey County.

The upbeat event included a wide array of nonprofit agencies that help make Monterey County a better place to live through everything from making computers affordable to making water exercise programs accessible to those with special needs.

“I think it’s good for the whole community to be able to recognize and reinforce good behavior,” said United Way Monterey County President and CEO Katy Catagna. “More importantly, you’re providing an inspiration to others ... We want to flame the fire of volunteerism by appreciating and thanking people for what they do.”

This year, the CSAs honored more than 130 volunteers, and Outstanding Volunteer awards were presented in the categories of education, economic self-sufficiency, health, and safety.

“Those are the basic building blocks of a good quality of life ... If all of those pieces are in place, you know you’ll have a thriving community,” Catagna explained.



**Patterson Emesibe received the CASP For Our Future Award for youth leadership and volunteerism in violence prevention and intervention. (Photo: Provided/Randy Tunnell Photography)**

The United Way's framework already focuses on education, income and health, and when United Way Monterey County conducted a survey involving more than 7,000 locals, they found that safety emerged as strong concern for Monterey County residents as well.

"It really goes back to how you build a strong community, and the vision we articulated from all that information was spelled out here ... It's helping to facilitate change in those areas to really living that vision," Catagna said.

A call for nominations was put out about three months ago, and the annual nominations are always open to any organization that would like to participate.

Individual volunteers or groups of volunteers can be nominated. For example, the Salinas nonprofit Loaves, Fishes, and Computer nominated their entire team of volunteers this year for the Economic Self-Sufficiency Award.

A judging panel that includes United Way staff as well as past CSA recipients choose the winners, but with so many outstanding nominees, some categories ended up with two winners this year, said United Way Monterey County Marketing Director Fatima Dias.

For the first time this year, the CSAs also partnered with the Community Alliance for Safety and Peace to recognize its members with a Founders, Safety and Peace, and For our Future awards. CASP is a coalition of organizations in Salinas and Monterey County focused on reducing violence, and CASP Director Jose Arreola enthusiastically presented the inaugural awards on Tuesday.



**Community Alliance for Safety and Peace Director Jose Arreola presents Salinas Police Chief Kelly McMillin with the CASP Safety and Peace Award. (Photo: Provided/Randy Tunnell Photography)**

The Safety and Peace Award went to the Salinas Police Department this year for its work within the violence reduction framework of Prevention, Intervention, Enforcement and Re-entry.

“One of the things we understand about youth violence is it is a community problem,” Salinas Police Chief Kelly McMillin said in accepting the award for the department. “For so many of the kids in our community, they’re not making choices to get involved in gangs. They’re pushed that way. They’re pushed that way socially. They’re pushed that way because they’ve been marginalized at school. They’re pushed that way because of unemployment, because of lack of housing, because of lack of opportunity. Fundamentally, because of lack of hope. It’s because of people like all of you in this room and the work that you all are doing that are lifting people out of those circumstances. It won’t be law enforcement who fixes the violence in this community. It will be all of us.”



**Salinas Police Chief Kelly McMillin accepts the CASP Safety and Peace Award on behalf of the Salinas Police Department** (Photo: Provided/Randy Tunnell Photography)

Catagna says the awards also give the community a chance to see itself in a larger, brighter context as well as to learn more about and connect with positive people and services here.

For those interested in finding volunteer opportunities, United Way Monterey County offers a searchable website that lists different organizations to volunteer with.

Aside from the direct benefit of helping others, volunteers also build skills, connections and references that can help them move closer to their own personal career goals, Catagna said.

“What’s exciting about volunteering is you can tap into a passion, something you really enjoy, and you can find a way to make it a service to others ... It’s exciting for me that we have a lot of organizations across any issues and areas and there’s always ways for people to step up and volunteer,” Catagna said.

See more photos from Tuesday's award ceremony [here](#). Visit <http://www.unitedwaymcca.org/> for more information on how to volunteer and how to nominate volunteers for next year’s Community Service Awards.

#### 2016 Outstanding Volunteer Awards recipients:

- Outstanding Youth Service: Alexandria Lopez, a full-time student at California State University, Monterey Bay. For the last 13 months, she has volunteered at the Monterey County Rape Crisis Center, amassing over 150 hours per quarter as a sexual assault counselor.
- Outstanding Lifetime of Service: Al Holmstrom, who has served for the past 13 years as a volunteer leader for Breakthrough for Men and created two programs within the organization.
- Outstanding Service for Education: Jerry Gleason who has been teaching and volunteering with L.I.F.E. for more than a decade. As a retired engineer, Jerry first became involved with L.I.F.E. as a tutor and now serves as Chair of the Board of Directors. Gleason coaches the Tech Challenge and First Lego League teams as well as teaches Scratch programming classes.
- Outstanding Service for Health: Margaret Chung Prodis who has served as a board member and volunteer at Kernes Adaptive Aquatics for the past 25 years, working to make warm water exercise programs accessible to more than 120 people with special needs each year and fundraising to expand the program.
- Outstanding Service for Health: Mended Hearts Chapter 370 which supports Salinas Valley Memorial Health System through peer-to-peer cardiac support groups. By checking on patients and families during hospitalization, and providing access to community resources, Mended Hearts promotes health and wellness through a traumatic time in peoples' lives.
- Outstanding Service for Economic Self-Sufficiency: Loaves, Fishes, and Computers which provides low-cost or no-cost computer systems and technology assistance to low-income families, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. Collectively, LFC have volunteered over 10,550 hours over the past 3 years, supporting the mission of alleviating poverty through computer technology.
- Outstanding Service for Economic Self-Sufficiency: Sue Higgins who has volunteered at the Lyceum of Monterey County for more than five years to increase girl's interest and access to STEM education and careers. She created the Lyceum of Monterey County's Cyber Adventurers Program, a summer camp that provides young women the opportunity to learn the basics of computer programming and robotics and acted as a mentor to young girls.
- Outstanding Service for Safety: Jesse Tamayo who has served as the advisor for the Marina High School National Coalition Building Institute Team for more than 10 years. In this time, Jesse has guided NCBI student leadership in the creation of new anti-bullying programs that celebrate the legacy of Martin Luther King and been an active NCBI board member, working to ensure that the goals of educating youth and community members about diversity issues are achieved.

#### 2016 CASP Awards recipients

- Founders Award: Rancho Cielo Youth Campus, which embodies the core values of CASP through collaboration for increased impact, data to drive action, deep and meaningful community engagement, and having youth at the center of decision making.
- Safety and Peace Award: Salinas Police Department for its work within the violence reduction

framework of PIER (Prevention, Intervention, Enforcement and Re-entry).

- For Our Future Award: Patterson Emesibe for outstanding youth leadership and volunteerism in violence prevention and intervention.

- United Way Monterey County