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Police honor residents' acts of bravery

Residents, crews assisted in officer's rescue

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Michael McCollum/The Record

Stockton Assistant Police Chief Blair Ullring reads citations Wednesday afternoon for Alejandra Contreras, left, Chau Nguyen and John Taylor, right, for their personal valor in an accident involving two police cruisers during an awards ceremony at the Police Department.

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By **Christian Burkin**
Record Staff Writer
January 15, 2009 6:00 AM

STOCKTON - When two police cruisers collided at an intersection, then careened into other cars before bursting into flames, there was John Taylor, without a fire extinguisher, surveying the wreck.

Then he saw Alejandra Contreras, standing ahead of a crowd that had gathered around the intersection of Hammer and West lanes, and carrying a fire extinguisher almost as big as she was.

"There's this little angel standing there with a fire extinguisher in her arms," Taylor said.

Contreras; Taylor, who doused the flames with the extinguisher; and Chau Nguyen, who helped others before bringing his own fire extinguisher, may have saved the life of Stockton police Officer Richard Vanover, who was trapped, unconscious, inside a burning patrol car.

The Stockton Police Department honored them, three other citizens, two paramedics and two police officers Wednesday for acting with speed and bravery when they were needed.

When, for example, a purse snatcher robbed an elderly woman early last year on the Miracle Mile, there were the Vega brothers, Hector and Jose, and Justin Varvel, who chased him down.

"He pushed the old lady," Hector Vega said. "That's why I got so mad."

Assistant Police Chief Blair Ullring praised the Vega brothers and Varvel, who was unable to attend the ceremony.

"This is a perfect example of citizens taking action when necessary," he said. "Action that's necessary to keep the streets of Stockton safe."

Also recognized were two American Medical Response paramedics, Anthony Daniello and Michael Denu, who came to the aid of a Stockton police officer under assault by an intoxicated driver after a crash.

The Police Department also lauded two of its own.

Officer Kevin Duffy was awarded the Golden Star for saving the life of a woman under attack by a knife-wielding man, and Officer Greg Gall was given a Meritorious Service Award for twice saving a girl from jumping from the sixth story of a parking garage.

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- Argument leads to stabbing
- Man flees CHP, crashes; passenger killed
- Man's fingertip bitten off in fight

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- Three arrested in homicide of north Stockton man (UPDATED: 10:46 a.m.)
- Former Franklin High football coach dies (UPDATED 1:19 p.m.)
- Crime Stoppers -- Published Jan. 19, 2009
- 4 arrested, drugs, cash, cars seized in SWAT raids (UPDATED: 11:19 a.m.)

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- Four held in large-scale Stockton drug bust
- 4 arrested, drugs, cash, cars seized in SWAT raids (UPDATED: 11:19 a.m.)
- Gunbattle critically injures two in Stockton
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Contact reporter Christian Burkin at (209) 546-8279 or cburkin@recordnet.com.

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