

# NEWS RELEASE



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## CAL FIRE HELICOPTER CREW RECEIVES MEDAL OF VALOR

The California State Firefighters Association honored four CAL FIRE Riverside Unit personnel for their bravery on a harrowing rescue of a stranded hiker on Lily Rock, a popular rock climbing area on Mt. San Jacinto.

The awards ceremony, hosted by the California State Firefighter's Association (CSFA), took place on Thursday, September 6, 2018 at the Westin Mission Hills Resort in Rancho Mirage.

CAL FIRE Riverside Unit's Hemet Ryan Air Attack Base Helicopter 901 Pilot, George Karcher, Crew Chief, Captain David Rodriguez and rescuers, Fire Captain Donald Kowalski and Firefighter Nathan Carrion were present as the CSFA Medal of Valor was presented to them for their efforts on rescuing a stranded rock climber that slide down with debris caused by a rock slide on the face of 8,800 foot elevation, "Lily Rock" in the Mt. San Jacinto Wilderness on September 6, 2017.

CAL FIRE Helicopter 901 Pilot, George Karcher recalls the rescue crew locating the victim, an adult male hanging upside down in his rope rigging in a crevice on the shear rock face. The victim was reported to be badly injured and unable to move where it was then determined by the rescue crew that a hoist rescue of the victim was necessary.

Pilot George Karcher steadied the helicopter against erratic winds and turbulence while Captain Rodriguez lowered rescuer, Firefighter Carrion into position next to the victim, who was inverted on the rock. Once Firefighter Carrion assessed the victim's injuries, he was able to secure the "Quick Strap" rescue device around the injured patient, cut away his tangled ropes and sent up a "ready" signal to Captain Rodriguez.

Fire Captains Kowalski and Rodriguez assisted rescuer, Firefighter Carrion and the victim into the helicopter who was now unconscious and unresponsive. The rescue crew initiated basic life support care during the five-minute flight to a waiting air ambulance at the Keenwild helibase station in Idyllwild. The patient was then transported to an area trauma center for treatment of his serious injuries.

The Pilot and rescuers on CAL FIRE Helicopter 901 exhibited extreme competence and care of the patient during this rescue, thus saving his life. The video link below demonstrates the extreme conditions Karcher, Rodriguez, Kowalski and Carrion, as well as the patient faced.

"I am very proud to be in the presence of our men and women who provide service to the citizens of Riverside County, Partner Cities and the State of California. To have our Helitack Crew receive the Medal of Valor for a rescue showcases the exemplary work our employees do day in and day out." - *Fire Chief Shawn C. Newman*

[View a short video from the event here.](#)

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