

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley’s First Annual ‘Women Making a Difference’ Event Draws Over 200 Guests, 62 Nominees, and 12 Awardees

Orange County, CA – Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley hosted the first annual Women Making a Difference awards ceremony at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana on March 31, 2022. Attended by over 200 guests including honorees, community leaders, members of the public, judges and elected officials, this event honored the tremendous contributions from the women who make a difference to improve our County as neighbors, friends, coworkers, business owners, caregivers, community-leaders and residents.

“Women’s History Month provides the opportunity to acknowledge Orange County’s long history of trailblazing women championing noteworthy causes,” said Supervisor Foley. “Our Women Making a Difference event honored our caring community leaders whose work benefits families through caregiving, access to justice, advocacy for workers and businesses, positive climate action, public education, the arts, neighborhood safety, and more. Many of the awardees shared stories of their family’s immigrant experience and pursuit of the American dream through hard work, education, and innovation. Our honorees and awardees contribute to our Orange County lifestyle and improve our quality of life all year long.”

Nominees were honored for the following categories: Arts, Business, Community Service, Education, Health Services, Judicial, Labor, Military Service, Philanthropy, Public Safety (Fire), Public Safety (Police), and Services Industry.

2022 Awardees

- *Arts – Diana Farrell*

As the Founder, President, and Artistic Director of Lyric Opera of Orange County, Diana brought opera back to our county after a 12-year hiatus with plans to put our county on the national opera map. In a few short years, her opera company has produced 7 operas and dozens of educational events and competitions, inspiring staff and musicians to perform joyfully and at their peak level.

- *Business – Kelly Vlahakis-Hanks*

President and CEO of ECOS, Kelley Vlahakis-Hanks, has transformed her family's 55-year-old green cleaning products company started by her father, a Greek Immigrant, into a leader in sustainable manufacturing and safer communities throughout the world. Kelly has created a corporate culture of diversity and empowerment with a leadership team that is 58% female and 41% BIPOC. Kelly's leadership demonstrates how successful businesses can prioritize employees, customers, and the planet. ECOS is headquartered in Cypress, California.

- *Community Service – Claudia Keller*

Claudia Keller serves as the second female and first Latina CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County and, under her leadership last year, Second Harvest distributed nearly 60 million pounds of food through its partner network, serving more than 489,000 residents per month. Today, nearly 300,000 Orange County residents do not know where their next meal will come from. The work of our food banks remains more important than ever.

- *Education –Hon. Carol Crane*

An immigrant who left Lebanon due to war, Newport Mesa Trustee Carol Crane gives back to this great country that's provided her with so much. She has tirelessly supported our schools through children's education in the Newport Mesa Unified School District since the late 1990's and as a trustee. Carol is also a leader of the PTA for fundraising and general school support. She is active in her community, at all levels, and strives to make decisions that benefit children's health academically, socially, and mentally.

- *Health Services – Karin Reed MD*

Dr. Karen Reed is an Emergency Medicine Physician serving as the Director for the Hoag Hospital Presbyterian Emergency Department who specializes in improving Emergency Department efficiency while overseeing a team of Doctors, Physician Advocates, Nurses, and more. Dr. Reed's work literally saves lives—and that was especially true during the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- *Judicial – Judge Maria Hernandez*

Judge Maria Hernandez served as the Assistant Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court. In 2009 she was appointed as a Superior Court Judge presiding over adult criminal matters until being assigned to Juvenile Court in 2010,

where she developed a program called GRACE, which focuses on separating teens from a life of forced prostitution. Over her career, Judge Hernandez has empowered victims and supported our most vulnerable children and has demonstrated the power the legal system can have to change lives and make social change.

- *Labor – Gloria Alvarado*

As Executive Director of the Orange County Labor Federation, Gloria has led 95 different unions consisting of over 200,000 essential workers through the pandemic. While many workers remained at home and under quarantine, grocery store workers, nurses, sanitation workers, bus drivers, and so many more risked their own health to protect all of us. Under her leadership, the federation spent the pandemic providing resources, food, and unemployment support services to the workers and the wider community.

- *Military Service – Alexis Federico*

Alexis Federico served as an attack helicopter pilot in the US Marine Corps from 2003-2013, completing multiple combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. She is the recipient of numerous military awards including the Order of Daedalians Marine Corps Exceptional Pilot Award. She left the Corps as a Major and now devotes herself to the law and private philanthropy. A summa cum laude graduate of UCI law school, she was a co-founder of its Veterans Legal Clinic. She sits on the County's Veterans Advisory Council and the Board of the Dana Point 5th Marine Regiment Support Group which assists active-duty Marines and their families. More recently, she and her husband, retired Marine Corps Lt. Col. and Dana Point Councilmember Jamie Federico, have been leading an effort to help former Afghan interpreters to escape through Pakistan and resettle here in Orange County.

- *Philanthropy – Janet Ray*

Janet Ray devotes her life to creating and supporting philanthropic institutions in Orange County. Janet is the driving force behind the establishment of the Discovery Science Center and a benefactor for Orange County School of the Arts, MIND Research Institute, the Pacific Symphony Youth Ensemble, and so many more critical institutions in our community. Orange County is better because of the many contributions of Janet Ray.

- *Public Safety, Fire – Brenda Emrick*

A proud member of the Costa Mesa Fire Department, Brenda Emrick is a tireless

advocate for public safety and works as the lead trainer for the CERT Program (Community Emergency Response Team) and works with the Police Department and American Red Cross. She adapted and condensed the CERT Program into a Business Preparedness Academy and supports NMUSD with a School Preparedness Academy and piloted Church Preparedness Academy.

- *Public Safety, Police – Christina Strunk*

Investigator Christina Strunk is a 10-year veteran of the Orange County Sheriff's Department, having worked at the Intake and Release Center and Central Women's Jail, as a patrol and field training officer, and as a drug recognition expert and investigator. Since August 2017, Christina worked as an expert to fight human trafficking Crimes and was named the 2021 Investigator of the Year.

- *Services Industry – Angie Nguyen*

Born in Vietnam, Angie Nguyen is a 13-year In-Home Supportive Services provider. As a member of UDW, she participates in union activities aimed at improving the lives of others. Through the TEO program and her own home visits as a provider, she understands the challenges providers face and strives to be a voice for those who cannot speak out. Over the course of her career, Angie has improved the lives of countless individuals through her compassion and dedication to her work.

Nominees and awardees were presented with a plaque and a commemorative pin to memorialize the event. Guests enjoyed a presentation of colors by the Orange County Fire Authority's (OCFA) Honor Guard and entertainment, including performances by Relampago Del Cielo, Asya Gorska (vocalist from the Saint Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Church), local students from Orange County School of the Arts (OCSHA) and Newport Mesa Unified School District's Kaiser Elementary School, and the first live performance by Santa Ana Unified School District elementary students after the pandemic.

Find photos of the event here: <https://d2.ocgov.com/women-making-difference>

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Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley joined the Board of Supervisors in 2021. She serves on the Airport Ad Hoc Committee & Fly Friendly working group, and boards of the Orange County Transportation Authority, CalOptima, Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, Law Library, Newport Bay & South Orange County Watershed Management Area Executive Committee & Santa Ana River Flood Control Protection Agency

