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Emily Graves, Community Outreach Specialist
egraves@cityofventura.ca.gov

**Four Ventura Police Officers honored for
extraordinary bravery and excellent public service**

Ventura, Calif. — On Saturday evening, the actions of Officers Jack Ortega, Ashley Hetzel, Tristan Cullum, and Karl Reyes were recognized by the Peace Officers Association of Ventura County (POAVC) at the Medal of Valor Awards Ceremony for outstanding acts of bravery, courage, and compassionate service to the City of Ventura.

“Each of these officers has gone above and beyond the call of duty in service to our community,” said Police Chief Darin Schindler. “They run toward danger, they place the safety of others above their own, and they make a difference every single day. We are honored by their selfless dedication to Ventura.”

Such was the case for Officer Jack Ortega who received a Medal of Valor for swiftly and effectively bringing a vehicle pursuit of an armed suspect to a close with no police officer or civilian injuries.

After a lengthy vehicle pursuit on city streets and a tire deflation, the suspect came to a stop directly across from a busy shopping center and residential area where residents were in significant danger. The suspect fled; Officer Ortega immediately gave chase. The suspect then produced a handgun and fired towards Officer Ortega. Ortega returned fire and struck the suspect, stopping any further threat to the public.

“That night, Officer Ortega demonstrated what he had displayed his entire career; sound judgement, unwavering good decision making, and an ability to remain calm under pressure,” said Commander Sarah Heard, the Watch Commander on duty that evening. “Officer Ortega certainly deserves to be commended for keeping with the highest standards of the Ventura Police Department and for acting with extraordinary bravery in a life-threatening situation.”

Officer Ashley Hetzel, and her trainee Officer Tristan Cullum, were both awarded a Medal of Merit for applying a life-saving tourniquet on a stabbing victim during an rapidly changing, life-threatening incident. Officers Hetzel and Cullum responded to a call of a stabbing, and upon arrival, located a woman actively bleeding out from her wounds, with an armed suspect still inside the residence. Officer Hetzel quickly evaluated the situation, instructed her trainee to hold coverage on the front door, and had to make a choice to cover the first-floor patio door or attend to the victim who was quickly losing consciousness.

Officer Hetzel chose to attempt to save the victim’s life by applying a tourniquet which emergency room staff stated unequivocally saved the victim’s life. The suspect was taken into custody and no one else was injured.

“During this incident, officers made the conscious decision to place themselves in harm’s way to save a life,” said Chief Schindler. “The actions of Officers Hetzel and Cullum that night were an outstanding act of

service, requiring extreme bravery and devotion to duty.”

Finally, Detective Karl Reyes was honored as the Ventura Police Department’s Investigator of the Year. Detective Reyes is assigned as a Street Crimes Detective and is part of the Ventura County Auto-Theft Task Force (VenCATT). From January through November 2021, Reyes investigated nearly 300 cases, assisted with and made over 50 arrests, and sent nearly 20 arrest warrants to the District Attorney’s Office. On top of local cases, he also spent significant time assisting other County agencies in recovering stolen vehicles and arresting car thieves.

“Beyond his investigative attributes, Detective Reyes is the epitome of a fantastic team member. His candor and humbleness are appreciated, and his leadership presence is respected and trusted,” said CHP Sergeant and supervisor of the VenCATT, Matt Marien. “The Ventura Police Department is fortunate to call Detective Reyes one of their own.”

Every year, the Peace Officers Association of Ventura County honors acts of bravery, heroism, and service by law enforcement personnel and community members. These exemplary individuals receive recognition at the annual ceremony and are presented with their medals by the sheriff or respective chief of police.

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