



A salute to
FIRST RESPONDERS

Ray Stewart

THE LAS CRUCES
Bulletin

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Las Cruces nurse receives excellence award



BULLETIN REPORT

The New Mexico Center for Nursing Excellence (NMCNE) honored 25 nurses and nurse advocates at its annual New Mexico Nursing Excellence Awards, including Memorial Medical Center (MMC) nurse Karl Ngoye, who received NMCNE's 2023 community service award.

The awards honored excellence in all levels of nursing practice and leadership, NMCNE said in a news release.

Ngoye graduated from Doña Ana Community College in 2015 with an associate degree in nursing and earned a bachelor's degree in nursing from New Mexico State University before going to work for MMC.

Ngoye has received MMC's Daisy Achievement Award multiple times, acknowledging his outstanding patient care. He received NMCNE's "Touch a Life" award in 2022.

Ngoye is also an active community

volunteer.

"We are thrilled to honor Karl Ngoye again this year," said NMCNE Board of Directors President Robert Middleton. "This incredible nurse from Memorial Medical Center is helping his community every single day. "The Nursing Excellence Awards were created by nurses for nurses, making this state-wide recognition especially meaningful and prestigious within the nursing profession."

Throughout its 20-year history, NMCNE "has recognized excellence in nursing practice and honored nurses for the contributions they make to their organizations, communities and our state," the news release said. Since 2005, more than 3,200 nurses throughout the state have been nominated for Nursing Excellence Awards.

Funds support unique project

By **MIKE COOK**
Las Cruces Bulletin

An appropriation sponsored by U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., would allocate \$3 million to the Las Cruces Fire Department to build and furnish a "response station" to house the Las Cruces Fire Department's (LCFD) Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) program and its Project LIGHT (Lessen the Incidence of Grief, Harm and Trauma).

Fire Chief Jason Smith said LCFD is looking at multiple locations for the response station if final funding is approved, including the former Fire Station No. 3 building on

Valley Drive; Fire Station No. 8, 550 N. Sonoma Ranch Blvd.; and the yet-to-be-built Fire Station No. 9, which, like Station 8, will be located on the East Mesa.

LCFD began its Mobile Integrated Health program in 2016 and launched Project LIGHT in early 2023 to

add mental crisis intervention services to MIH. To date, Project LIGHT has received 378 calls for service, LCFD Battalion Chief Matthew Hiles told the city council at its July 24 work session.

Project LIGHT's two

SEE **LIGHT**, PAGE 4

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ON THE COVER: A descanso on Las Alturas Drive remembers the life of longtime Las Cruces Police Officer JR Stewart. (Bulletin photo by Richard Coltharp)

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Stewart's longtime service as first responder lives on

By **RICHARD COLTHARP**
Las Cruces Bulletin

While most police officers retire with 25 years or less, JR Stewart had something different in mind.

"He wanted to go out with the record for most years with the Las Cruces Police Department," said one of JR's three brothers, Chris Stewart. "And at the time, he did; 35 years-plus."

During that long tenure, the man who wore badge No. 141 was never seriously hurt. In fact, to this day, there has never been an LCPD officer killed in the line of duty.

But, of course, there were some close calls. Stewart's

wife, Rosie, stood by him all those years.

"Sometimes, in the morning, I'd wonder if this was going to be the last time I'd see him," Rosie said. "He'd get called on a domestic call, and there would be a guy holding his wife and kids hostage; he was one of the ones on the scene, and sometimes shots went into the air. I guess my faith – I'm Catholic – got me through. I always felt God was going to watch over him."

So it was the irony of ironies, the cruel twist of fate – whatever you want to call it – when in 2017, JR Stewart, retired three years, riding his prized Harley-Davidson, was killed in a crash caused by some law-breaking

carjackers.

A legacy

He was born Juan Ramon Stewart, named for his father, John Raymond Stewart. Everyone knew him as JR, but close family and friends called him Ray.

No matter the name, though, he was always up for the task.

"He lived life to the fullest and was always kind to people," Rosie said. "He would give you the shirt off his back. He loved kids, and it was so hard for him to see children being abused or in accidents."

"When we were younger, he always stood up for people who were getting bul-

lied," Chris said. "Then he would get me and our other brothers involved, and we all stood up for them."

For JR that translated well for a career in law enforcement, and was an influence on his brothers as well. Chris worked for both the LCPD and the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Office. Jimmy also worked for DASO and Andre worked as a corrections officer in a detention center.

The family, friends and longtime colleagues who loved Stewart wanted to continue his legacy, so they formed the JR Stewart 141 Foundation. The Foundation created the JR Stewart Endowed Scholarship at New Mexico State Uni-



versity, designed to assist children and grandchildren of active and retired local law enforcement officers. The Foundation champions car seat clinics to ensure young children are buckled safely with proper seats. The

Foundation has an annual golf tournament to raise funds to continue these and other projects.

In these ways, the Foundation believes, people can continue seeing and feeling JR's spirit and goodwill.

THE JR STEWART 141 FOUNDATION



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LIGHT, FROM PAGE 2

response teams, which include social workers and emergency medical technicians, have had 141 patient contacts and interventions. Hiles said. Almost half were for psychological issues and about six percent were medical issues. 40 percent involved multiple issues.

In nearly half of Project LIGHT dispositions, the person involved was transported to a mental health provider, which Hiles said included FYI+, the County Triage Center and Peak Behavioral Health in Santa Teresa. 18 percent of calls resulted in treatment and resolution on

scene, 13 percent resulted in EMS transport and 20 percent were handled by law enforcement officers, Hiles said.

LCPD has requested Project LIGHT teams 103 times, Hiles said.

“The LIGHT teams have been a resounding success,” Acting Las Cruces Police Chief Jeremy Story said. “They have enabled the police department to focus on safety while the mental health professionals focus on providing the best care possible and plugging people into the resources they need.”

The police department “does a really good job of just kind of hanging back,”

said FYI+ Senior Clinical Director Lisa Chavez, who provides clinical supervision to LCFD social workers. Police officers have also been “supportive to step in” when they are needed, Chavez said.

“We are bridging that gap from scene to proper source,” Hiles said, with those individuals Project LIGHT teams are responding to getting the treatment they need.

“This is great and deserves a standing ovation,” Councilor Becki Graham said.

LCFD said its goal is to respond to 90 percent of all mental health crisis calls in the city by July 1, 2024.

Burke will miss brothers, sisters of LCFD

By **RICHARD COLTHARP**
Las Cruces Bulletin

If you ask first responders about the hardest day they ever had on the job, it can be difficult to answer. A police officer must consider times of extreme danger, or times when citizens were saved or protected. An emergency room nurse must consider times when life was snatched from death, or times when many people were hurt at once.

For one Las Cruces firefighter, Louie Burke, the hardest day just might have been his last, Retirement Day.

“It’s a bittersweet moment,” Burke said at his Aug. 31 retirement party.

“The brotherhood, the sisterhood, I’m gonna miss it,” Burke said. “I’ve been choked up all day. The heart of these people. They are so good.”

Others talked about Burke’s heart.

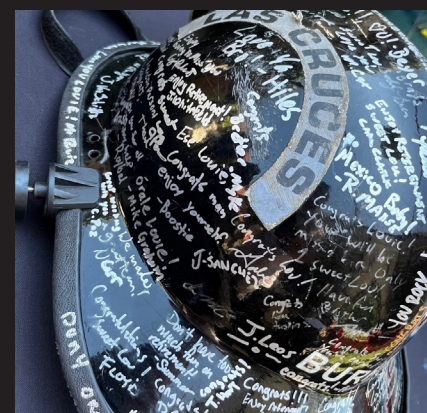
“He’s always made an impact beyond his service,” said Las Cruces Fire Department Chief Jason Smith. “He has the ability to coach the young firefighters with a spirit of happiness. He has dedicated his heart to the department and their families.”

Former LCFD chief, Eric Enriquez, said, “He’s so dedicated. He had many opportunities but stayed here. His heart is this community. He has a servant’s heart.”

Burke swore his firefighter’s oath in December 1997, and called it a career 25 years and 9 months later.

Many know Burke from his days as a boxer and boxing coach.

At the ceremony, Mayor Ken Miyagishima reference that: “He’s a world champ to us in Las Cruces.”



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