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City of Riverside to Honor Medal of Honor Recipients with Library Re-Namings

Libraries in Eastside and Casa Blanca to commemorate recipients of nation's highest military honor

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Two Riverside residents who were posthumously named recipients of the Medal of Honor in 2014 will be honored Thursday (11/10) by the City of Riverside, which will rename a library in honor of each man.

The Staff Sergeant Salvador J. Lara Casa Blanca Library at 2985 Madison Street will be officially renamed at 9:30 a.m. The Specialist Jesus S. Duran Eastside Library at 4033-C Chicago Avenue will be renamed at 11 a.m. The ceremonies will be attended by family members, city officials and dignitaries. The public is invited to attend.

Both men were honored during a ceremony at City Hall shortly after President Obama officially named them recipients of the Medal of Honor in 2014 during a ceremony at the White House. Since then, the City has worked with surviving family members to come up with a public memorial to both men.

“Riverside is a city with a proud military history and a lasting commitment to its veterans,” Mayor Rusty Bailey said. “Honoring our latest Medal of Honor recipients this way demonstrates our gratitude for their service while keeping their memories at the forefront of our minds forever. Every time a young person walks into one of these libraries, they will be reminded of who these brave men were and inspired by their acts of heroism.”

The Medal of Honor, established in 1862, is America's highest military honor. It is presented by the President of the United States in recognition of “acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty.”

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Lara fought with valor in World War II. According to his official Army biography, then-Pfc. Lara aggressively led his rifle squad in neutralizing multiple enemy strong points during a battle in Aprilia, Italy, on May 27, 1944. The next morning, when the attack resumed, Lara sustained a severe leg wound, but did not stop to receive first aid. He died on September 1, 1945, while serving with the 602d Ordnance Armament Maintenance Battalion in Europe.

Army Specialist Four Duran served with distinction in the Vietnam War. The Army noted that, on April 10, 1969, when a reconnaissance platoon was ambushed, Duran rushed toward hostile forces in the face of gunfire and grenades. Firing on the run, he eliminated several of the enemy, causing the remaining enemy forces to flee, and saving the lives of countless American servicemen.

The two men join Ysmael R. “Smiley” Villegas as Riverside’s trio of Medal of Honor recipients. Villegas, who died in battle in World War II, was presented the Medal of Honor posthumously in 1945 by President Truman. He is the namesake for Villegas Park and Villegas Community Center, both of which are in Casa Blanca and are a short walk from the library being named for Lara.

“Many communities are honored to see even one of their members receive the Medal of Honor, and Riverside now has three, including two from Casa Blanca,” said Mayor Pro Tem Andy Melendrez, who grew up in the neighborhood and now represents the Eastside on the City Council. “Naming libraries for these heroes in the neighborhoods where they were raised sends a strong message that we value their contributions to America and thank them for their service.”