



Riverside County District Attorney

# NEWS RELEASE

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## DA ROD PACHECO HONORS TOP PROSECUTORS OF 2009

RIVERSIDE, CA: Riverside County District Attorney Rod Pacheco recognized 95 employees at the District Attorney's Office annual PRIDE (Program Rewarding Incentive of District Attorney Employees) award banquet. For their dedication to ensuring that justice is done and the community is protected, 95 employees were given awards at a ceremony on Friday, March 19, 2010.

"Our office has become one of the most efficient and effective District Attorney's Offices in the state of California," said District Attorney Rod Pacheco. "It is only through the personal dedication and sacrifices of each of our employees every day that we can maintain nearly the best conviction rate and lowest violent crime rate in the entire state."

This year, the Prosecutor of the Year award was shared by **Senior Deputy District Attorney John Aki** and **Senior Deputy District Attorney Michael Hestrin**. Aki joins only four other prosecutors in the history of the office to receive the recognition twice. Hestrin became the first prosecutor ever to receive the recognition three times.

In 2009, Aki tried two cases with four defendants and four juries resulting in four death sentences. The first two involved the case of Raul and Cathy Sarinana, a married couple, who beat their 11-year-old nephew Ricky to death on Christmas Day 2005. Ricky's older brother, Conrad, had been beaten to death earlier in Washington. His body was found during the course of the investigation.

Aki also handled the oldest death penalty case in Riverside County. Jeffree Buettner and Glen Jones killed 18-year-old Stephanie Benton in 2002 because they thought she was a snitch. They bound her and placed duct tape over her entire head before putting her in the trunk of her own car. After seven hours, they finally killed her and abandoned her body in a 55-gallon drum in the Lake Elsinore area.

Hestrin prosecuted the case of Raymond Lee Oylar in 2009. Oylar started the deadly Esperanza fire which killed five U.S. Forest Service firefighters. Oylar's death verdict gained significant attention throughout the legal community. Other prosecuting agencies are now looking at the death penalty in large arsons in which people are killed.

In addition to Oyer, Hestrin prosecuted the case of George Hernandez, a high-ranking Mexican Mafia shot caller. Hernandez was charged with murder for a July 2004 killing of a fellow gang member. While he was in jail awaiting trial, Hernandez threatened the life of the case agent, the lives of various custodial staff and conspired to have a witness against him murdered.

The award ceremony was held at Monteleone Meadows in Murrieta.

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