



NEWS RELEASE

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**CONTACTS:** Megan Contreras 239-338-3500

**Hospitality industry awards honors area's unsung customer service superheroes**

*New category recognizes hurricane hero*

**LEE COUNTY, FL** – The Lee County Visitor & Convention held the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards to acknowledge excellence through extraordinary customer service and dedication.

The “E Awards” ceremony held at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa in Bonita Springs celebrated local customer service professionals who have gone above and beyond the call of duty. More than 670 nominations were received from residents and visitors from all over the world recognizing the superheroes on the front lines.

New this year and only this year is the Hurricane Hero award. The category recognizes a tourism employee who exhibited selfless acts during Hurricane Irma in 2017.

Presented by the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) and The News-Press Media Group, the “E Awards” is a collaboration with local businesses to encourage customer service that makes a difference.

Nomination criteria included service satisfaction, leadership, work ethic, job knowledge, performance skills, familiarity with the destination and assistance during an emergency.

Selected for their distinctive service and dedication:

**Honor of Distinction Winner:**

Domingo Nieves, Sandalfoot Beachfront Condominium

**Hurricane Hero:**

Mario Ramirez, Holiday Inn Express & Suites at the Forum

**Accommodations:**

Rodney Sasher, Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina

**Attractions:**

Anne Falcone & Rhett Stanberry, Everglades Day Safari

**Restaurants:**

Michelle Wyatt, Hampton Inn & Suites Fort Myers-Estero

**Transportation:**

Mike Burnley, MBA Airport Transportation

**Other Services/Businesses:**

Marie Dreessen & Sheila Simpson, Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce

**Good Samaritan:**

Desiree Atkinson, Bubba's Roadhouse Restaurant

**Best Tourism Boss:**

Aaron Alger, Drury Inn & Suites Fort Myers

Frosch Geraci Travel sponsored the 2018 Honor of Distinction award given to Domingo Nieves, facilities manager at Sandalfoot Beachfront Condominiums, for his leadership in hospitality.

Nieves has been the facilities manager for almost two decades. A nominator described him as "one in a million."

One of the nominations mentioned Nieves sent six generators, at his personal expense, to Puerto Rico to help people in his uncle's neighborhood. Another person says he visited a guest in a local hospital every other day for a month and he cuts fresh flowers and arranges them into a bouquet for visitors' special occasions. In addition, Nieves assists elderly guests with mobility issues, loans out his own fishing gear and gives guests rides to the grocery store if they don't have a car. Nieves also helped people living on Sanibel prepare for Hurricane Irma, checked on properties and helped with clean up after the storm.

Another nominator describes him as "tireless, self-sacrificing, humble, compassionate and all around an exceptional human being."

The Hurricane Hero award was given to Mario Ramirez with the Holiday Inn Express & Suites at the Forum. The nominator stated that during Hurricane Irma, Ramirez delivered extraordinary customer service. During the time the hotel was without power, Ramirez brought food and juices to an elderly woman who had no family to assist her. He also helped paramedics manually lower a guest in a wheelchair from the third floor to a first floor room.

The nominator wrote that even though Ramirez' own house had some flooding, he didn't hesitate and put the hotel guests' needs before his own. He stayed on property until all services were restored, which meant he had many sleepless nights.

For summaries on the individual stories of the above-mentioned award recipients, visit [www.EAwards.org](http://www.EAwards.org).