

## Celebration of Heroes in Oakland



*“There a lot of people who talk about the bad news in Oakland and in the world. You are the good news!”*

### Oakland Fire Captain Ray Gatchalian

The Institute developed **Oakland Celebration of Heroes Awards Ceremony** honoring young people for doing good deeds in their community. Prior to the event, we organized **Beautify Fremont High Day** as a community service event to spruce up Fremont High School. The school’s auditorium hadn’t been used in many years – so we painted it and solicited new sound equipment for the event. We planted trees and flowers at its entrance.

**Oakland Fire Department, East Bay Conservation Corps**, parents, students, teachers and alumni participated. **Fruitvale Starbucks** provided refreshments to everyone.



**Captain Ray** was the keynote speaker and presented awards to **Oakland’s Youth Heroes**. **Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown** presented him with the **Institute’s Community Hero Award**. **Wendy Tokuda**, television station **KRON** anchor, will be the master of ceremonies. The event will feature musical entertainment from **SoVoSo**, an a cappella

hip-hop group; an original performance with **Oakland’s Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company**; the premiere of a TV hero report featuring Gatchalian, the first in a series of reports with Walter Cronkite. Every TV station in the SF/Bay Area covered the event, giving Oakland an opportunity to be proud of their young people. Thanks to the media recognition, one student received \$100,000 towards his college education.

**Captain Ray received the Institute’s Community Hero Award from Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown.** **Ray** has dedicated his life to helping young people be the best they can be. He has worked with Oakland leaders, Mayor Jerry Brown, Alameda County Schools and Juvenile Hall programs, California Association of Peer Programs and California Wellness Foundation’s Violence Prevention Initiative. A Stone Soup Leadership Institute board member, Ray served as faculty in Martha’s Vineyard and Cincinnati, Ohio. “I hope you will join me, so together we can reignite our spirits and work towards building of a better future, especially for our children,” Ray says. Sadly, Ray passed away shortly after the event while in Chile where he was filming street children.



### Young Heroes of Oakland

**Saundre Allen**, Oak Technical School  
**Tamara Bradford**, Patten Academy High  
**Rigoberto Calderon**, Lionel Wilson College  
 Preparatory Academy  
**Contrena Jones**, Castlemont High  
**Nidya Báez**, **Verónica García**, **Damon Witts**,  
 Fremont High School  
**Latoya Phillips**, McClymonds High  
**Ashante Laree Washington**, Holy Names High  
**Kenneth Jones**  
 East Bay Conservation Corps Charter High School

## **Young Heroes of Oakland Bios**

### **Saundre Allen Oakland Technical School**

Saundre is a hero because she helps other young people to stay focused on their goal of being the first in their family to go to college. A student at Oakland Technical High School, Saundre has overcome many obstacles that have claimed the attention, and in some cases, the lives of many of her Oakland peers. Despite the economic and social challenges that she has faced, Saundre has always remained committed to her education. As a participant in the Upward Bound Program at Mills College, she spends countless hours helping others keep focused on their goals.

"At a time when Oakland youth are too often being highlighted for their negative behavior and some times fatalistic attitudes," says Romeo Garcia, Upward Bound program, "Saundre shines as a beacon of hope and accomplishment in a community that often has a dim view of the future for our young people."

"Saundre is a living example of how commitment and perseverance can lead people to accomplish their goals despite seemingly insurmountable odds," says Garcia. In spite of having to deal with periodic homelessness, Saundre has won several coveted Upward Bound achievement awards, maintained the grades to attend a summer residential program, and remained committed to studying and helping others to maintain their focus." The greatest heroes do not "try" to be, they just are, like Saundre.

### **Contrena Amber Jones Castlemont High School**

Contrena Jones wants to be a high school math teacher when she grows up. So for now, she tutors elementary school children at Hope Academy in math, teaching third graders to tell time, count money and more. A member of the Girl Scouts for 12 years, Contrena really enjoys giving back to her community. A high school senior and honor roll student Contrena, 17, has demonstrated academic excellence in all courses of study since 9th grade.

### **Tamara Bradford Patten Academy High School**

Tamara likes helping people, especially children. For the last two summers, she's volunteered at Camp Read-A-Lot, helping ages five to seven year olds learn to read. "By the end of our class, all the students had read ten books!" she says. "It took some time, but the smiles on the kids faces made all the effort worthwhile." By participating in the Volunteer Youth Program at Highland Hospital, Tamara had the opportunity to see the everyday lives of doctors, nurses and patients. A basketball star, Tamara believes that helping others also builds character. "Volunteering is a great way to keep kids out of trouble. "We can carve out a new image for ourselves and gain a better outlook on our lives." "Before I started volunteering I didn't know what it was like or how it felt to help someone and make their life go smoother," she says. "It feels good to see I can make someone smile and to have them eager to see me every day."

### **Ashante' Laree Washington Holy Names High School**

Ashante' wants to be a doctor some day. Last summer she volunteered 120 hours at Highland Hospital's Nursery Department. "I just love the feeling of helping others and making them feel better."

One of her favorite memories is of baby David. "Everyday I would go to the nursery at noon to feed him. He was so small. He never ever smiled. Then one day I was playing with him and he smiled with the cutest dimples," she says. "I was overjoyed!"

At times, Ashante had to overcome her own fears. "I love children, so my biggest obstacle is seeing children hurt, harmed or suffering victims of drugs and alcohol abuse," she says. When she grows up she wants to be on the OUSD Board of Education to help all students get a better education. "It's very important for young people to help others because we are the future," she says. "Whatever we do will benefit us and our brothers and sisters and tomorrow's future."

**Rigoberto Calderon, 12**  
**Lionel Wilson College Prep Academy**

Rigoberto started by just saying "yes" when his little brother's kindergarten teacher asked him to read to her students. Now he actually leads the whole class sometimes and even gives up most of his lunch period to work with the kids. "Before Ms. Ray asked me to read to her kids, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. Then, when I got my experience from the kids, I knew that I really, really wanted to be a teacher," he says. I've grown from knowing that a lot of kids needed my help. I've learned things with the kids - and I've had a lot of fun. I also learned that it is really hard work to be a teacher and that it takes a lot of patience."

**Kenneth Jones**  
**East Bay Conservation Corp Charter School**

Kenneth is a young hero in Oakland who is caring for the earth. As a Crew Leader for the East Bay Conservation Corps, he clears land, restores creeks, cleans up Diamond Park and planted sycamore trees on Embarcadero in Oakland. "Fifteen years from now, those trees will be a canopy," he says proudly. "I like to start in my own backyard first, teach people to take pride in where they live, start cleaning up the streets," he says. "I like making a difference in my community."

Kenneth also volunteers on Earth Day, and even traveled to Puerto Rico with the Bay Area organization Earth Train to teach a workshop on rainforest restoration. He started out at Castlemont High School, then spent time at juvenile hall and is now graduating from the East Bay Conservation Charter School in June. "I decided to change my life because I didn't like the image I was putting out there," Kenneth admits. "I had to learn how to stand up and be my own man. I had to give up my old friends, and make new ones." Now Kenneth serves as a role model for other young people. "If you want to change the world, you have to work on changing yourself and lead by example." Since I was a little kid, I've wanted to start a program called Red Life Saver to get kids off the street. We need to focus on one family at a time - help the parents get an education, too, so they can get jobs. "I'd like us to come all to come together, fight for one cause and create unity and justice, instead of killing each other. We have 93 murders in Oakland - we should be coming together."



**Nidya Báez**  
**Verónica García**  
**Damon Witts**  
**Fremont High School**

Nidya, Veronica and Damon have each shown remarkable leadership in this role ASB Student Body presidents and Fremont's School Site Council. They work both in the public eye and behind the scenes, organizing student activities and rallies. "They have brought a sense of school spirit to the student body that has not been seen for years," says Fremont principal, Brian McKibbon.

Nidya says, "I believe that Oakland students have what it takes to change the world." Nidya feels strongly that by being a leader herself she inspires others to become leaders, too. "Young people have lots of potential, and we know what our community needs," she says.

Damon works with the Alcohol Policy Network, organizing community workshops, campaigns and resolutions that encourage one less person to suffer from alcohol abuse. He also conducts research surveys, audits and public speaking that led to improvements in Oakland's recycling - "this made me very proud."

Veronica is excited about the success of Bombast, a lunch program that helps reduce school truancy. She had to overcome her shyness so she could get things done - and now finds great joy when other young people get involved. "Young people have to help each other so we can create a better future for all of us."

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