

# Grand Ronde firefighter honored with distinguished conduct award

By Danielle Harrison

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

Grand Ronde Firefighter/EMT Erika Alcantar was preparing to go on shift at an August wildfire near Canyonville, Ore., when she received a call that a 15-passenger fire crew van had crashed nearby.

Four of the occupants were in critical condition. Additionally, they were Spanish-speaking and needed someone to translate their medical condition to emergency responders.

Alcantar grew up acting as the family translator for her mostly Spanish-speaking parents, so she quickly sprang into action.

“The driver had fallen asleep and they crashed and rolled the vehicle,” she says. “I did triage as four of them needed to go to the hospital.”

The four critically injured passengers were treated for their injuries and recovered thanks in part to Alcantar’s ability to communicate their needs during the emergency.

Her lifesaving efforts didn’t go unnoticed and she was nominated for a Meritorious Award in Distinguished Conduct by Oregon Fire Chiefs Association members Trampas Bergstrom and Blake Paulsen. The two are with the Yamhill and Garibaldi fire departments and also served as task force leaders for the summer wildfire crews in Canyonville.

According to the Fire Chiefs Association website, the distinguished conduct award may be granted to a member of the fire service who “acted with professionalism and



Photos by Kamiah Koch

**Grand Ronde Firefighter/EMT Erika Alcantar displays her Meritorious Award in Distinguished Conduct and award medallion on Monday, May 16, in front of the emergency services truck used during the emergency response for which she was awarded. Alcantar received the award in Bend on Thursday, May 5, from the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association for simultaneously administering medical care and translations during an accident involving 15 Spanish-speaking wildland fire crew members in Canyonville, Ore., on Aug. 15, 2021.**



**Grand Ronde Firefighter/EMT Erika Alcantar turns on a LIFEPAK defibrillator in the back of one of the Grand Ronde EMT vehicles on Monday, May 16.**

efficiency when faced with a specific danger or adversity and who carried out their duties properly despite this danger/adversity.”

Additionally, the action for which the award is earned must go above and beyond when compared to expected emergency responder duties.

Grand Ronde Emergency Services Manager and Fire Chief Steve Warden says that Alcantar’s award is rare in the fire service.

“They don’t give those out like

Erika’s actions. Ninety percent of patient care is communication and they felt she saved lives that day. These awards are rare, hard to earn and we are very proud of her.”

Warden knew that Alcantar would be honored a few months beforehand and tried to keep it a secret, but eventually logistical issues meant he had to tell her.

She was honored at the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association annual conference by President Scott Stanton on Thursday, May 5, in Bend. Warden, as well as Alcantar’s mother and sister, were in attendance.

“I teared up as they read through all of the stuff she had done to help those folks out,” Warden says. “It was a moment where I realized I had made very good decisions on hiring. Erika has been a leader since day one. It was a proud moment.”

Alcantar adds that receiving the honor was “an amazing feeling.”

“I knew the injured passengers were scared and not sure what was going on,” she says. “I’m glad I could help and it felt really good to represent Grand Ronde with this award. We have come a long way in a short time.”

Alcantar has worked for the Tribe since 2020, starting as a contact tracer.

“We have awesome people working here,” Warden says. “If anything, Erika is a beacon for other folks to follow. We want that kind of excellence and service to the community. It’s been an outstanding experience so far and I hope it will continue to go that way.” ■

## We Want To Hear From You!

The Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center Comment Box is located at the entrance of the Health & Wellness Center, next to the drinking fountain. Share your experience, good or bad with us! ■

**Come volunteer with us!**

## Prairie Restoration June 26, 2022

Help restore prairie habitat and a future first foods gathering site while learning about prairie ecology and its cultural significance.

No special skills required! All tools and instruction provided.

Please RSVP to Sara at [saraalaica@appliedeco.org](mailto:saraalaica@appliedeco.org) so we can bring enough tools for everyone.



- WHAT** Remove weeds and seed native camas
- WHERE** Champoeg State Heritage Area
- WHO** Everyone!
- WHEN** Sunday June 26 9am - 1pm
- BRING** Water, lunch, and gardening gloves if you have them



## PORTLAND AREA

If you have not applied for the Covid-Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) or Homeownership Assistance Fund (HAF) We will be in Portland to help with applications



**CALL AND SET UP AN APPOINTMENT TO GET ASSISTANCE IN FILLING OUT APPLICATION.**

- Bring with you your most recent utility bills (gas, electric, water, and garbage)
- Rental agreement or mortgage agreement
- Tribal ID
- Proof of income

**10 a.m.-3 p.m. Tuesday, June 14, 2022**

**10 a.m.-3 p.m. Wednesday, June 22, 2022**

Portland Area Office, 4445 S.W. Barbur Blvd, Portland, OR 97239

Please call or e-mail: Joanna Brisbois 503-879-2149 or [joanna.brisbois@grandronde.org](mailto:joanna.brisbois@grandronde.org)