



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: October 30, 2025

TO: Parks and Recreation Department Employees

FROM: Andy Field, Director, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2026 First Quarter Employee of the Quarter Selections

It is my pleasure to announce the winners of the Parks and Recreation Department's Employee of the Quarter (EOQ) winners for the First Quarter of Fiscal Year 2026.

As you know, winners are nominated by their peers, supervisors, and managers each quarter. Then, each Deputy Director reviews their division's nominations for eligibility and chooses up to six nominations to forward to the Parks and Recreation Department Rewards and Recognition Selection Committee. Winners are selected by the Rewards and Recognition Selection Committee (see attached roster of committee members) based on some or all the following criteria: exceptional work performance, customer service, professionalism, cooperativeness, work schedule availability and attendance, and dedication.

Each selectee receives one day (8 hours) of Discretionary Leave and a \$300 cash award. Please note that all Discretionary Leave and monetary awards are prorated for part-time and hourly employees, per City policy.

I am excited to recognize the following **Parks and Recreation Department Employees of the Quarter** for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2026:

- **Alicia Bianchi**, Therapeutic Recreation Leader, who worked adapted camps during the summer. The camps consisted of field trips, surfing, crafts, and water activities. She created three programs at Park de la Cruz (PDL) Community Center known as Community Service, Monday Movie Magic, and Famous Artist Factory. Monday Movie Magic gave participants an opportunity to analyze and critique classic movies in the company of their friends. Alicia used community resources to host an annual Family Campfire at the Fiesta Island Youth Camp Amphitheatre bringing in over 100 people for a fun family special event, which included food, songs, skits, and activities for people of all ability levels. Alicia is always looking for donations and ways to make programs successful at a lower cost;
- **Martha Buelna**, Account Clerk, who is an absolute rockstar within the Balboa Park Division's fiscal team. During this quarter, she continued to provide administrative fiscal support to the MBSP and CMS Divisions by closing/opening purchase orders, and processing hundreds of invoices, particularly from vendors that provide CO₂ and chlorine for the 15 swimming pools and 30+ water features throughout the park system. Despite encountering challenges from the AVC related backlog of invoices from the previous fiscal year, she always maintained a professional and pleasant demeanor, even on the most hectic of days. She demonstrated a

willingness to lend a helping hand by assisting with the onboarding of her new supervisor. Her efforts to keep the fiscal wheel turning truly deserve recognition;

- **Diego Cruz Cota**, Grounds Maintenance Worker 2, who continues to excel in his role at South Kellogg Park. He consistently arrives early, prepared, and ready to work. When asked to adjust his regular routine, Diego willingly steps in to cover other areas or assists fellow employees without hesitation. He demonstrates an impressive work ethic and professionalism, has excellent attendance, always dependable and ready to contribute. Diego approaches each day with a positive attitude and takes pride in keeping his park up to high standards. He also contributed to various projects in the park such as assisting in moving the Natal Plums and helped install two picnic tables and a BBQ grill. Diego's reliability, teamwork, and dedication make him a valuable member of this team;
- **Armando Diaz**, Utility Worker 2, who displays professionalism at many levels in Mission Bay Park. During this period, he worked in an OCA capacity as a Grounds Maintenance Supervisor. The assignment oversaw a staff of 17 Grounds Maintenance Workers and multiple park areas with distinct challenges. He focuses on priorities, addressing issues immediately in a very detailed oriented manner, and with excellent customer service skills. He has shown great communication skills and completes job tasks with photo documentation. He has encountered a few emergency situations during this period, his communication and documentation was excellent. He has extensive knowledge and has shown to be an effective leader learning all the skills to become a maintenance supervisor;
- **James Howe**, Custodian 3, who with his outstanding reliability, and commitment to operational excellence is a consistent asset to the Balboa Park team. He voluntarily adjusts his schedule and switches shifts during understaffed periods to ensure that all essential tasks are completed without interruption to service. This quarter, James led by taking the initiative to train staff in the proper use of carpet cleaning methods and machinery for high-profile areas in the Balboa Park Club. His effort directly resulted in the improved quality and consistency of the facility's appearance. He consistently looks ahead to identify and resolve potential maintenance or operational issues before they escalate. This forward-thinking mindset has been invaluable, as it minimizes, and prevents interruption to services;
- **Lawrence Levy**, Recreation Leader 1, who does a great job teaching Adult Watercolor Paint Classes by preparing art lessons that are engaging, relaxing and inspirational. He shares his passion for art and painting by proudly displaying his students' work after each session. He follows up individually with his students for class feedback. Before each season, he reflects on potential improvements to encourage returning and new students to participate. It should be noted that Mr. Lawrence started with only a handful of students and has grown the program to teaching full classes. His students enjoy his class so much and have told their friends to sign up to future sessions. His hard work continues to be a big draw for his students and his program is expected to expand;
- **Shalaye Patterson**, Recreation Leader 1, who did an amazing job at the Scripps Ranch Rec Center while on an out of class assignment as an Assistant Recreation Center Director during the busiest season. Despite having little prior experience with core center operations as a supervisor, he made contributions such as permit creation, participant registration, scheduling, and communications, while embracing the challenge with professionalism, and commitment. He has consistently shown reliability and leadership, often stepping up to "hold the fort down". He approaches every task with focus and initiative, and his

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contributions have had a positive impact on both the staff and the community. His work ethic, dedication, and collaborative spirit, are sincerely appreciated;

- **Erik Romero**, Park Ranger, who with his outstanding leadership, initiative, and dedication launched the Shoreline Sea Lion Volunteer Program that now includes five active volunteers expanding the park's capacity for community engagement and conservation support. He assisted in authoring two key state mandated wildlife monitoring reports, one on sea lion activity at La Jolla Cove and another on harbor seal behavior at the Children's Pool for the California Coastal Commission. The reports provided critical data that informed marine mammal management strategies and supported regulatory compliance. He also continues to lead the Shoreline Sea Lion Rookery Monitoring Program, which he developed to monitor sea lion activity and promote safe, responsible tourism;
- **Clayton Walsten**, District Manager, who consistently demonstrates excellence in managing high-impact teams, including Citywide Turf, Irrigation, Aquatics, Mowing and Sweeping, and the Equipment Repair Shop. He approaches every challenge with a solutions-oriented mindset, ensuring that all projects and maintenance operations are completed efficiently, safely, and to the highest standards. His ability to evaluate and improve processes has resulted in measurable gains in efficiency and resource management. His leadership style emphasizes fairness, accountability, and growth, as he provides his team with consistent guidance, training, and opportunities for professional development. He effectively fosters positive relationships with peers, management, and community partners.

My heartfelt appreciation and congratulations to all these employees who are some of our many, many wonderful employees who exemplify the Parks and Recreation "Heart of Service." I'm proud to say that's why we're the best darned department in the City of San Diego!

A huge thank you, as always, to all of you who took the time to recognize and nominate some of our many exceptional employees, and my sincere appreciation goes out to all of you who work so hard, whether nominated and/or selected this time around or not. Our department is truly fortunate to have so many hard-working and dedicated employees with a true Parks and Recreation "Heart of Service"!

Thanks to everyone who was involved in this process: Nominators, nominees, the Rewards and Recognition Selection Committee, and, last, but not least, those who were selected as this quarter's Employees of the Quarter. My congratulations to all!

Sincerely,



Andy Field
Director, Parks and Recreation Department

Attachment: Fiscal Year 2026 Parks and Recreation Rewards and Recognition Committee Members

cc: Parks and Recreation Department Unclassified Leadership Team
Parks and Recreation Department Rewards and Recognition Committee Members
Payroll Specialists