



*L-R NCOA President Vincent Patton, Amy Byrne (University of Phoenix), Cpl Daniel Aguirre Vargas, Victoria Aguirre, SgtMaj Richard Thresher, and NCOA Chairman of the Board Terry Haines.*

The NCOA Marine Corps Vanguard Award is presented in honor and recognition of Medal of Honor recipient Corporal Larry L. Maxam. The recipient of the 2019 NCOA Marine Corps Vanguard Award, sponsored by the University of Phoenix, is Corporal Daniel B. Aguirre Vargas

Shortly after midnight on 1 April 2018, then Lance Corporal Aguirre Vargas was travelling along South Pacific Street in Oceanside, California, when he noticed smoke rising from a vacation townhouse situated near the road. The vacation home was built with two floors above a basement. The bottom two floors comprised one unit and was occupied by five adults and five children. The top floor contained a second unit and was occupied by two adults and four children.

Corporal Aguirre Vargas quickly moved from his vehicle to the house to alert possible occupants. After knocking on the front door with no answer, he ran down an outdoor staircase to the basement level in search of another way to notify occupants. Corporal Aguirre Vargas found two sets of sliding glass doors that connected to separate bedrooms. Through one of the doors, he saw smoke and faintly caught the movements of an elderly woman. A clothes dryer in this room had caught fire while the occupants of the townhouse were sleeping and was pouring smoke into the room. Corporal Aguirre Vargas attempted to summon her to the door in order to instruct her to unlock it, but she was too disoriented to comply. He began to pull the door from its frame to get her out, but the woman disappeared back into the smoke. By this time, two other occupants had awoken in the adjacent room. A man came outside, and Corporal Aguirre Vargas alerted him of the fire and smoke. The man proceeded to gather everyone inside the house to evacuate as Corporal Aguirre Vargas withdrew back to the front door to assist.

Upon reaching the front door, he entered the home now filled with smoke and began ushering children and adults out of the house to safety by the road. The fire was still burning and the smoke continued to thicken in the house. The elderly woman emerged into the living room from downstairs, clearly weak and disoriented. Corporal Aguirre Vargas immediately supported her as she began collapsing from smoke inhalation. He remained in the house while supporting her weight and coughing heavily in order to ensure all other occupants safely evacuated.

Once he was certain that all other occupants were outside and away from harm, Corporal Aguirre Vargas carried the woman out of the house to the street and monitored her until emergency medical technicians arrived on scene. She was subsequently transported to the local hospital and treated for smoke inhalation. The Oceanside Fire Department stated that 10 more minutes of exposure to the smoke would have resulted in her death. Through his steadfast courage and heroic efforts, Corporal Aguirre Vargas directly contributed to the safe evacuation of five adults and five children.

Corporal Aguirre Vargas' unwavering courage reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Uniformed Services.