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OXNARD COLLEGE'S FIRE ACADEMY RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR REINVENTING CALIFORNIA'S FIRE INSTRUCTION

Pilot Program has been Replicated throughout California during the Pandemic

OXNARD, Calif. (January 27, 2020) – Oxnard College's Fire Academy won the prestigious 2021 Bellwether Award on Tuesday, Jan. 26, for its Project RECOVER, which established the state's first-ever hybrid format for firefighting instruction and helped sustain the state's much-needed pipeline of firefighters. The Fire Academy received the highly competitive, national recognition after beating out nine other finalists in the award's Workforce Development category.

Each year, the Bellwether College Consortium of award-winning colleges recognizes cutting-edge and trendsetting programs at institutions throughout the nation. Finalists participated in a rigorous two-round competitive process by peers that culminated at the virtual Community College Futures Assembly.

"We are thrilled by the national recognition our esteemed Fire Academy has received from the Bellwether College Consortium," shared Luis Sanchez, president of Oxnard College. "For decades, this program has produced generations of highly skilled graduates who have gone on to secure rewarding careers in public safety. We are honored to have the Bellwether Award affirm this legacy of service and are especially proud of the Fire Academy's successful efforts to maintain their high standards throughout the pandemic."

"This honor recognizes the resilience of the program's students, faculty and staff and their dedication to working collaboratively across agencies to bring the program safely back after the Stay-at-Home orders," said Ventura County Community College District Board Chair Joshua Chancer. "We are also extremely proud of the Oxnard College Dental Hygiene program, which was a 2021 Bellwether Award Top 10 Finalist."

"What makes this honor even more noteworthy is the fact that Oxnard College was the only California institution to have two programs selected as Top 10 finalists," added Chancellor Greg Gillespie. "This speaks to Oxnard College's commitment to excellence for all its students."

OXNARD COLLEGE

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Following Governor Gavin Newsom's March 2020 Stay-at-Home order, public safety instruction programs throughout the state closed their doors. Oxnard College's Fire Academy quickly proposed and secured new modifications from various state regulatory agencies, paving the path for California's first-ever hybrid format in fire instruction and clearing the way for a return to campus with robust COVID-19 safeguards in place.

The program's success quickly benefited sister academies throughout the state, which replicated Oxnard College's model and reopened their programs, maintaining a much-needed pipeline of firefighting professionals for California during the pandemic. The breakthrough came as the state faced a record-breaking four million burned acres (more than double the previous record).

Project RECOVER (Revisions Encompassing COVID Operations, Valuing Emergency Responders) integrated state and county COVID-19 guidance while establishing standard operating procedures that included new screening processes, health and safety guidelines, and curriculum modifications. The plan was submitted to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and Ventura County Public Health for approval. As a result of their efforts, the Fire Academy achieved an impressive 100 percent completion rate, 100 percent pass rate on the California State Fire Training certification exam and zero instances of COVID exposures or cases.

"We're deeply proud of the effort we piloted for California firefighting instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Matthew Jewett, assistant dean overseeing Oxnard College's Fire Academy. "Our dedicated team of professionals and cadets did exactly what we train them to do in a crisis—we assessed the challenge, developed an innovative strategy, secured buy-in and executed our plan with precision and teamwork. We're humbled that so many sister academies throughout the state were able to replicate our plan and pleased that our collective efforts helped maintain the state's pool of firefighting recruits during a crucial time."

Since 1996, Oxnard College's Fire Academy has provided a vital service to Ventura County and California by producing highly trained emergency responders to protect the state's residents, natural resources and infrastructure. This program has consistently produced a superior pool of successful firefighter candidates who meet fire department needs for pre-service recruits and aid students in successfully securing employment with fire departments throughout the state.

Over the past five years, more than 450 graduates have been hired as firefighters, emergency medical technicians and paramedics. For over 24 years, the Fire Academy's success and retention rates have consistently ranged from 97 to 100 percent.

Oxnard College's Dental Hygiene Program was also selected as a finalist for the Bellwether Award's Instructional Programs and Services category for its Five P's

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model, where its near-perfect Pass Rates and 100% percent Placement rates are attributed to Prerequisites, Performance and Planning.

To read Oxnard College's Bellwether Award applications or to learn more about the college's award-winning programs visit bit.ly/OCBellwetherAward.

About Oxnard College
Oxnard College is one of three colleges in the Ventura County Community College District and annually serves more than 7,000 students. Founded in 1975, Oxnard College is fully accredited and is a proud 2021 Bellwether Award honoree. It is also a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution. Oxnard College's signature programs include marine biology; culinary arts, restaurant management and hospitality management; auto technology and fire technology, among many other undergraduate study and career technical education programs. The Dream Resource Center is a valuable student and community resource. To learn more, visit oxnardcollege.edu and Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.