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## **Michael Sagely Named HAI's Salute to Excellence Pilot of the Year**

*Alexandria, Virginia (Jan. 08, 2024)* – Helicopter Association International (HAI) is pleased to announce that Michael Sagely, senior pilot with the Air Operations unit of the Los Angeles County (California) Fire Department (LACFD), is the recipient of the 2024 Salute to Excellence Pilot of the Year Award. The award recognizes an outstanding single feat performed by a helicopter pilot or UAS aircraft pilot during the past three years or for extraordinary professionalism over time. It will be presented Feb. 26, 2024 at HAI HELI-EXPO 2024 in Anaheim, California.

Sagely, who in 1984 learned to fly helicopters in the US Army, has expressed extraordinary professionalism, leadership, and skill throughout his career. His story differs from that of most other army aviators.

Sagely joined the service in his mid-20s after having been a Division I All-American athlete in men's volleyball at San Diego State University and having briefly played on the Olympic team. After enlisting in the army, he was accepted into flight school, aced Warrant Officer Candidate School as a distinguished graduate, and was an honor graduate from primary flight school, flying the UH-60 Black Hawk.

Upon assignment to the army's 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, Sagely progressed rapidly and was selected for the instructor pilot course before becoming a CW2. During his 22 years in the army, Sagely served in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and later was accepted into the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), where he flew elite special combat missions in multiple aircraft types. During his service, he received seven Air Medals and a Bronze Star for his actions in multiple combat operations and earned a bachelor's degree in professional aeronautics with an aviation safety minor.

Upon retirement from the army, Sagely worked as a contract fire pilot for the Angeles National Forest Rappel/Helitack crew before being hired by the Santa Barbara County (California) Fire Department. In Santa Barbara, he became the first pilot in the unit's history to conduct night-vision goggles (NVG) snorkel operations.

Sagely credits his success during his first three years of aerial firefighting to his army flying experience. Managing multiple radios for air and ground assets, flying in combat situations, using NVG, and performing precision operations transferred well to wildland firefighting.

Sagely joined the LACFD in 2009 as a pilot. His leadership skills and pilot talents led to his promotion to senior pilot in less than two years. He has since earned two valor awards from the department and three separate rescue awards from Sikorsky for heroism for his part in multiple rescues and other lifesaving missions.

PILOT OF THE YEAR  
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Sagely attributes his success as a pilot and leader to significant mentors throughout his career. Unsurprisingly, he takes mentorship seriously today, choosing people to mentor who are willing to step outside their comfort zones and grow. Indeed, his leadership and mentorship within the LACFD have contributed to strengthening the department.

When reflecting upon his career at the LACFD, Sagely says it isn't the awards and heroic missions that define his experience. Rather, his particular passion has been making LACFD Air Operations better.

“In the military, we had a saying: Leave the foxhole better than you found it,” Sagely shares. “If I were to highlight one piece of my career, it is my focus on the overall health of the organizations where I work, from adjusting attitudes and approaches to work to creating processes and procedures that help everything run more efficiently and safely.”

The Pilot of the Year Award will be presented during HAI HELI-EXPO 2024. HAI HELI-EXPO<sup>®</sup>, the world's largest helicopter trade show and exhibition, will be held at the Anaheim Convention Center in Anaheim, California, Feb. 26–29, with the exhibit hall open Feb. 27–29. For more information on HAI HELI-EXPO 2024, visit [heliexpo.com](https://heliexpo.com).

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*HAI is the professional trade association for the global helicopter industry and represents more than 1,100 companies and over 16,000 industry professionals in more than 65 countries. Each year, HAI members safely operate more than 3,700 helicopters and remotely piloted aircraft approximately 2.9 million hours. HAI is dedicated to the promotion of the helicopter as a safe, effective business tool that provides unique advantages to society and to the advancement of the international vertical aviation community.*