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Celebrating success stories at 30th awards, South Bay Workforce thanks partners, applauds alumni

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Executive Director of the South Bay Workforce Investment Board Jan Vogel (center right) is honored with an award for his decades of service at the South Bay Workforce Investment Board's 30th annual awards ceremony on Oct. 30th, 2025 in Torrance, CA. (Photo by Gil Castro-Petres, Contributing Photographer)



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The South Bay Workforce Investment Board held their 30th annual awards ceremony Thursday evening to recognize the contributions of businesses and community partners in addition to honoring 16 individuals who have achieved success in the workforce by utilizing one of SBWIB's One-Stop Business and Career Centers.

Around 500 people from all 11 cities that SBWIB serves filled the courtyard and banquet room at the Torrance Marriott South Bay Thursday night to acknowledge the award recipients, mingle with fellow community leaders and enjoy entertainment from jazz singer Brenna Whitaker.

While this was the 30th awards ceremony, SBWIB has been serving the South Bay for 43 years, creating "an unmatched portfolio of no-cost services and training and support opportunities for adults, youth, job seekers and dislocated workers throughout our service area which includes the communities of Carson, El Segundo, Gardena, Hawthorne, Hermosa Beach, Inglewood, Lawndale, Lomita, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach and Torrance," SBWIB Chief Executive Officer Jan Vogel said in a written statement.

Of the 16 individuals who were honored as "Outstanding Alumni," two people spoke about the impact SBWIB had on their lives.



Robinson Helicopter Company is honored with an Outstanding Business award at the South Bay Workforce Investment Board's 30th annual awards ceremony on Oct. 30th, 2025 in Torrance, CA. (Photo by Gil Castro-Petres, Contributing Photographer)

"I had a 40-year career working in aerospace and in 2024 found myself being laid off," said Pete Freeland from Redondo Beach. These were programs and opportunities that I and my peers had no idea even existed. I mean we would never look, right?"

Freeland was able to participate in SBWIB's Rapid Response Program for dislocated workers and earn his instrument and commercial pilot ratings at Sling Pilot Academy. He now performs as an air show pilot and leads STEM outreach programs, encouraging youth to pursue careers in aerospace and aviation.

Majesty Goodlow from Carson spoke about her experiences overcoming domestic violence, homelessness and trauma and the role SBWIB played in that.

"I survived domestic violence that tragically took the life of my daughter," Goodlow told the crowd. "My special needs son and I were left homeless, broken and unsure of where to turn. Just when I thought things couldn't get worse, we were involved in a horrible hit and run car accident. Our car flew off the 91 freeway and flipped over seven times. By the grace of God, we survived, but I felt completely lost. Then came the South Bay Workforce."

Goodlow visited the South Bay One-Stop Business & Career Center in Carson where she was able to receive housing assistance, counseling, childcare and career services.

"Today, I am proud to say that I'm employed and no longer homeless," she continued. "I graduated from Compton College with five social arts degrees and six certificates."

Goodlow is now working on her BA at CalState Long Beach University.

"I stand here today, not just for myself, but for every person out there who needs a second chance," she said. "Please continue to fund and support the South Bay Workforce Program. You have no idea how many lives you are saving, how many futures you are changing and how much hope you are restoring. Thank you for believing in people like me. Thank you for giving me and my son a chance to dream."

The other Outstanding Alumni awardees were Uriel Gutierrez from Torrance, Lesly Leon from Carson, William Yoon from Carson, James Camper from El Segundo, Hernan Villanueva from Gardena, Luis Vizcaino from Hawthorne, Carter Fortunato from Hermosa Beach, Jeremiah Richardson from Inglewood, Yasmine Brown from Inglewood, Daniel Olivares from Inglewood, Valeria Villalpando Goytia from Lawndale, Esmia Saldivar from Lomita, Tonya Haynes from Manhattan Beach and Margaret Liu from Redondo Beach.

Additionally, El Camino College President Brenda Thames received the Esther Williams Award of Excellence. Esther Williams was the first SBWIB chairperson in 1982 and this award named after her is awarded to individuals "who epitomize her record of service and commitment to the lofty ideals of the South Bay Workforce Investment Board, and who strive to improve the quality of life in our communities through their professionalism and lasting contributions," reads the description.

Thames has more than 25 years of experience in instruction and education, and is a hands-on member of the SBWIB Youth Development Council, bolstering youth programs.

“In the spirit of Esther Williams... Dr. Thames has exemplified the same unwavering dedication to uplifting youth, advancing educational equity and building strong community partnerships,” reads a written statement from SBWIB. “Her leadership has directly supported pathways for young people to access high-quality education, workforce training and meaningful career opportunities.”

In a surprise addition to the program, the SBWIB Board of Directors took the stage to honor Vogel and award him the Lifetime Achievement Award.

“Under Jan’s leadership, the South Bay Workforce Investment Board is growing into a national model of innovation, collaboration and results,” said Glenn Mitchell, chair of SBWIB. “He’s guided us through challenges, inspired us to change (and) to build an organization that has touched lives in every corner of the South Bay.”

Other awards were handed out for Outstanding Partner and Outstanding Businesses.

The recipient of the Outstanding Partner Award was the Centinela Valley Union High School District (CVUHSD) for their work with SBWIB to offer internship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities to students.

Recipients of the Outstanding Business Awards were Robinson Helicopter Company in Torrance, Centinela Hospital Medical Center in Inglewood and ByFusion Global Inc. in Gardena.

All net proceeds from Thursday’s event will benefit youth-focused programs such as Inglewood and Hawthorne Teen Centers and the Blueprint for Workplace Success Program.