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Photos: Gayle Anderson

An anti-traffic audience of nearly 200 alternative transportation enforcers attend the 11th Annual Rideshare Diamond Awards hosted by Metro Commute Services at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel.

11th annual Diamond Awards honor top traffic-busting commuter programs in Southern California

- **Traffic Stoppers:** Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura County transportation officials hand out 25 glittering Diamond Awards Tuesday to Southern California employers who are putting commuters into the fast lane with alternative transportation options.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(May 19, 2009) From the super-sized savings in commuters' pockets to a decrease in gasoline consumption and emissions reflected in recent public transportation ridership tallies, the concept of ridesharing is fast emerging from a disregarded option perceived as inconvenient into an acceptable, reliable and even preferred commute of choice.

That is why transit officials gave more than a tip of the hat to the frontline employee transportation coordinators at the 11th annual Diamond Awards on Tuesday, handing out some 25 glittering Diamond Awards to top-producing Southern California employers at an awards luncheon held at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles.

Hosted by Metro Commute Services, Ventura County Transportation Commission and Orange County Transportation Agency, the 11th annual Rideshare Diamond Awards showcased the alternative transportation programs of employers whose unflinching stick-to-itiveness continues to chip away at traffic congestion by providing their employees with a full range of commuter options,

services and programs.



At left, Blue Diamond Award winner Kaiser Permanente took top honors. Above, OCTA's Sandy Boyle and Metro Commute Services Director David Sutton with Kaiser's pioneering ETC Virginia Gonzalez

Illuminating a stellar effort in unraveling the region's huge traffic knot, the Corporate Diamond Award for 2009 was awarded to Kaiser Permanente, headquartered in Pasadena.

Kaiser Permanente's commitment to health extends to the health care provider's highly-effective and committed rideshare program for a 30,000-strong workforce located at 18 facilities throughout Southern California. The lifetime achievement award went to the health care provider's former employee transportation coordinator and past president of the Southern California Chapter of the Association for Commuter Transportation, Virginia Gonzalez, whose appreciation for Diamond lanes some 20 years ago led to a lifelong career in promoting alternative transportation for commuters.

In an array of categories that demonstrate the multifaceted approach needed to corral the region's errant traffic, 25 rideshare programs coordinated by employers in Ventura, Los Angeles and Orange counties were singled out for recognition.

By promoting public transportation options in the face of the daily traffic grind, Southern California employers offer solutions to the problem posed by solo drivers, noted co-host Alan Holmes, Ventura County Transportation Commission.

Among them, the top rideshare programs in Los Angeles County included Kaiser-Permanente; California State University, Los Angeles; Transamerica Life Insurance Companies; UCLA; Los Angeles World Airports; California Polytechnic State University, Pomona; Walt Disney Co., City of Pasadena; Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association; Herbalife International; County of Los Angeles; Cedars-Sinai Medical Center; Esterline-Mason Company, and California Institute of Technology.

Photographer Juan Ocampo snaps Metro Commute Services team at the 11th annual Diamond Awards. Team members include event coordinator Donna Blanchard, Rita Linsey, Helana Morad, Edith Goff-Youngblood, Agnes Jose-Eguaras, Jocelyn Feliciano, Teresa Milliken, Liz Armijo-Holbrook, Sarah Zadok, Mary Ann Garcia, Loren Hollis, Juan Miranda, Eva Rodriguez, Laura Almeda, Jill Smolinski, Valerie Rader, David Sutton and Rickey Walker. Metro's own employee



transportation coordinator, Terree Holman, was singled out and commended for developing a system that makes it easier to distribute fare media.

"The Diamond Awards highlight the important work that employers do to ease traffic and improve air quality in Southern California," said David Sutton, director of Metro Commute Services.

Although some form of organized ridesharing has been around since the 1970s, the recent peak in alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle mode of transportation may signal a turning point in relieving traffic congestion on the car-laden corridors of Southern California, he said.