



Trust.

Media Contact:

Jessica Fix
HKA, Inc. Public Relations
jessica@hkamarcom.com
(714) 426-0444

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Local Teen Honored for Recognizing Life's Blessings,
Extending Personal Good Fortune to Aid Others**

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, Calif. – May 16, 2011 – For many high school students, current events amount to nothing more than dating gossip and prom voting, and volunteering is something that simply helps make a college application more impressive. But occasionally, there comes a high school student who is actually well-versed in global headlines and whose selflessness stems from a genuine passion for helping people. For her unique perspective on her own life, and the many altruistic contributions she makes to enrich the lives of others, 17-year-old Courtney Avila has been announced as the May 2011 recipient of the O'Connor Mortuary Heart & Soul Award.

Created by [O'Connor Mortuary](#), the Heart & Soul Awards program is designed to recognize Orange County citizens for their passion for life and their dedication to making a difference, whether they possess a lifetime of endeavors or for a one-time inspirational achievement. One Orange County citizen is presented the award each month.

“Courtney is a true asset to the Orange County community because her compassion not only is genuine, but it goes beyond her family and friends,” said Neil O'Connor, President and CEO of O'Connor Mortuary. “If this generation thinks beyond themselves as Courtney does, I am incredibly optimistic for the future.”

Growing up, Avila's older brother greatly influenced her—a young man who, despite suffering from mitochondrial disease, is, according to the high school senior, one of the happiest and liveliest people she knows. Witnessing her brother's triumphs against adversity, she gained an appreciation for what she has and learned to not take anything for granted—life lessons many people never grasp. Inspired by her brother, Avila has been volunteering for six years at Special Camp for Special Kids in San Juan Capistrano where she works with physically and mentally disabled children. On the other side of the generational spectrum, Courtney also plays bingo once a month at the Del Obispo Terrace senior living center.

While the people whose lives she touches greatly value her, Avila affords them the same gratitude. According to the teenage philanthropist, without them, her brother specifically, she would not be the person she is today, and for that she remains eternally grateful.

- more -

“I have been teaching for 25 years and you only come across kids like Courtney once in a lifetime,” said Mike Borowski, Avila’s teacher at JSerra Catholic High School in San Juan Capistrano. “This young lady is full of life and love and everything a school and a teacher could ever wish to have as a student.”

In addition to her volunteer work, Courtney started the Lacrosse team at her high school, a program that is still going strong; and recently traveled to China to participate in the Ambassadors Peace Program, speaking on global leadership before an audience of 500 Chinese students. She plans to attend college at Texas Christian University in the fall and volunteer at a daycare for Down syndrome children.

As a winner of the Heart & Soul Award, O’Connor Mortuary will present Avila with an official plaque, and a donation will be made in her name to Special Camp for Special Kids.

ABOUT THE HEART & SOUL AWARDS

Created by O’Connor Mortuary in February 2010, the Heart & Soul Award honors Orange County individuals each month for their exemplary and inspiring roles within the community. In celebrating the human spirit, the award recognizes OC residents for pouring their heart and soul into making a difference, whether for a life filled with dedicated endeavors or for a one-time inspirational achievement. One recipient is honored each month with an award plaque, a one-time donation to a local nonprofit organization in his/her name and recognition at a quarterly award reception. To nominate an outstanding Orange County citizen, email Patricia Kolstad at patricia@oconnormortuary.com.

ABOUT O’CONNOR MORTUARY

[O’Connor Mortuary](#) is the oldest family owned and operated mortuary in California. With offices in Laguna Hills, San Juan Capistrano and Irvine, Calif., it is the leading “stand alone” mortuary in Orange County. Founded in 1898 by Patrick J. O’Connor, and succeeded by his son Joseph and grandson Joseph Jr., the company today is managed by fourth generation CEO, Neil P. O’Connor and his two brother-in-laws, Joseph Fitzgerald, CFO and Charles Ricciardi, COO; as well as Jeff Turner, CAO. O’Connor Mortuary is recognized throughout Southern California for its longstanding tradition of caring, personalized service, honesty and integrity. The multi-generational company is active in numerous local charitable organizations and was honored by the California Historical Society for more than 100 years of continuous care and service to Southern California families. In addition, the company was honored in 2005 by the Family Owned Business Council for longevity and has received the Leatherby Award for Ethics in America.

###