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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Coto de Caza Woman's Invaluable TIP:  
Turn Tragedy into Triumph through Shared Experiences**

**LAGUNA HILLS, Calif. – January 20, 2010** – A year after the untimely death of her 13-year-old son, Debbie Simpson and her family moved to California from Washington State. Shortly after settling into their Coto de Caza home, Simpson told her husband she wanted to devote herself to a deserving nonprofit. Neither expected Simpson to choose an organization that provides assistance to families after the death of a loved one, especially not while she was still emotionally recovering from her own painful experience. But the mission of the Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) struck a chord, and she is now certified as a TIP volunteer and acts as an integral member of the organization.

In myriad ways, Simpson has transformed her personal tragedy into an invaluable gift to the community and today was announced as the December recipient of the O'Connor Mortuary Heart & Soul Award. Designed to recognize Orange County citizens for their passion for life and their dedication to making a difference, the Heart & Soul Award is presented to one individual each month.

“Debbie so clearly illustrates grace under extraordinary circumstances and unconditional community selflessness,” said Neil O'Connor, president and CEO of O'Connor Mortuary. “She has fought through immeasurable sorrow and found comfort and strength through the gift of giving. While the Heart & Soul Award maintains a longstanding tradition of recognizing many worthy gifts of self, Debbie has perhaps overcome the greatest adversity in order to present hers.”

For nearly five years, Simpson has devoted her time and energy to TIP – making herself available to the organization 24 hours a day. She is currently the crisis team manager of the Orange County chapter, where she's responsible for ensuring the satisfaction of both the volunteers and constituents. According to Simpson, she speaks with volunteers each day to offer support, compassion and encouragement for the calls each staffer receives, the emotional upheaval of their work and even their personal lives away from TIP.

“The most rewarding part of this job is simply being there to support someone who needs it,” said Simpson. “Whether it’s a family member who just suffered the loss of a loved one, or a volunteer who experienced a particularly difficult call, I love being there to listen.”

Her passion to support others stems from her own experience with the death of her son in 2004. With her husband out of town on business and a daughter away at college, Simpson was left to grieve at the hospital alone. Since becoming involved with TIP, Simpson has been at the side of countless individuals enduring similar circumstances, helping them to cope and even serving as somewhat of a family member, if needed. While her work occasionally elicits painful reminders of her own experience, her desire to serve the needs of others is even greater.

“During training, we are reminded that this is not about us and that everybody’s loss is different. We become focused on the pain of others, and we work so hard to help them move forward that what we’ve been through gets pushed back and we become free to just be there with them,” said Simpson. “There are days I get in my car and cry for my clients’ pain, but it reminds me how quickly things can change. It reminds me how fragile life is and it makes me appreciate my husband and my kids so much more. It puts life in perspective because I see loss every day.”

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

### **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](mailto: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.

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