



California State President San Jose Police Officer Darrell Cortez

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Less than a week before his retirement, San Jose police Officer Darrell Cortez figured he would work his last few patrol shifts, already looking forward to continuing his work as California State President of the National Latino Peace Officers' Association and playing a few leisurely rounds at Los Lagos Golf Course.

But Thursday morning, the 52-year-old officer found himself cutting down a woman hanging from a rope dangling from a downtown tree and resuscitating her. The 71-year-old woman was taken to a hospital. Her condition was not immediately known, but police reported that she was in intensive care and that she may have a broken neck. Cortez, well known for his charitable work with kids in the city where he grew up, shrugged it off as part of a job he has done for 30 years. "That's what we are here for," he said. "We protect property and save lives. She came back to life. That's what we are trained to do."

Juan Torres, a 26-year freight company employee, was walking to his house when he saw the woman hanging from the tree in the 200 block of North Fifth Street. She looked dead. He tried to get her down but couldn't. A guy drove by on his bike: "Is that for real?" the biker called out. "Yes! Help!" Torres yelled. Then he called police.

A block away, Cortez was at a convenience store when he got the radio call about 9:15 a.m. He and his partner, Shawn Rocha, got there a minute later. The elderly woman was hanging, Cortez said, her feet inches above the ground. A plastic chair was nearby. Cortez grabbed her and lifted. He handed Rocha his pocket knife, and the officer cut her down. They laid her on her back. They called in the grim news — she was not breathing and had no pulse. 'As sirens grew louder, Cortez gave it a shot anyway, shaking her, giving the woman chest compressions to see if he could start her heart again. At 9:18, her arm moved. She exhaled. As the paramedics pulled up, the officers yelled out that the woman was alive.

Later, Cortez found out that the woman lived at a nearby independent living home. She was mentally ill, Cortez said, and may have been depressed about plans to move her to another facility, in Santa Cruz.

The rope, other residents at the home told the officers, was used for piñata parties. The kids sometimes used it as a swing. "It was quick thinking on both officers' parts," said Assistant Police Chief Daniel Katz. "Officer Cortez is finishing off an excellent 30-year career in a way that does the community proud." Cortez said officers sometimes try to insulate from dangerous calls fellow cops who are on the verge of retiring. But, for some reason, many officers end up finishing their careers quarterbacking dramatic incidents anyway.

One officer was involved in a shootout with bank robbers on his last day. San Jose Officer Paul Dini talked down a suicidal man off a building last year on his last day on the job. "What are the odds of this happening? It's just strange," Cortez said. "And I still have three days left."

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