

January 24, 2018

To judges of the California Journalism Awards

The Mercury News/East Bay Times is proud to nominate 'You just gotta get out of here' -- our exclusive look at police body-camera video from the Wine Country fires -- for a 2018 California Journalism Award in the Enterprise News Story category.

So much has been reported about the night of the deadliest wildfires in California history, but this immersive multimedia project added a new experiential layer and call to action for the millions of Californians who could be in the path of the state's next destructive blaze that even the best investigative pieces cannot deliver: When the cops knock on your door in the middle of the night with an orange glow lighting up the sky, 'You just gotta get out of here.'

But not only did this project allow viewers to experience the heroic rescues and harrowing escapes through Santa Rosa police body-camera videos that uniquely captured the first desperate hours of the Tubbs Fire. It also captured the surprising obstacles: residents unable and unaware how to open garage doors when the power goes out; upscale retirement complexes abandoning scores of elderly residents; stubborn homeowners insisting they could defend their homes with a garden hose.

'You just gotta get out of here' provided viewers a unique window that clearly explained the life-and-death choices to be made before and after the next big wildfire. It also gave the participants themselves an extraordinary look at how they reacted that night -- and how those moments, decisions and indecisions profoundly changed the course of their lives.

As staff writers Julia Prodis Sulek and Matthias Gafni wrote, "Together, we watched the most dramatic and treacherous moments of their lives. What did they learn? What would they do differently? Could they even bear to relive that night?" Gafni obtained more than eight hours of captivating body-cam video by doing something no other media organization thought to do -- file a public records request.

The striking presentation, including interactive graphics, original and body-cam videos, resulted in a digital package that won the 2018 EPPY for the Best Investigative/Enterprise Feature for websites with more than 1 million unique monthly visitors.

The reaction from viewers is what really defined how the reporting, writing and visual digital storytelling of 'You just gotta get out of here' pushed the boundaries of excellence and innovation in explanatory storytelling.

LA City EMD [@ReadyLA](#) was one of the many emergency services agencies who [tweeted about the story's impact](#): "The videos reveal, in shake-you-to-the-core detail, some surprising reasons so many people were left behind — and the seemingly simple lessons Californians can take away as we prepare for another fire season."

9:33 AM - 21 May 2018

Arizona Daily Star columnist **Tim Steller** [@senyorreporter](#) lauded the project's uniqueness: [Brilliant journalism here](#) -- the [@mercnews](#) requested and used police body-cam footage not to document a shooting, as we often do, but to tell the story of and glean lessons from the terrifying Santa Rosa wildfire.

5:01 PM - 20 May 2018

And **Curly is a Dodgers fan despite her picture** [@curlsmcgee7](#) tweeted about how her experience had finally been captured: [I never thought people would be able to see exactly](#) what my husband endured that night as we evacuated in one direction and he threw his uniform on and headed towards the fire in the opposite direction.
<http://extras.mercurynews.com/wildfirecam/>

12:45 PM - 21 May 2018

We're honored by their recognition. And we're confident that you will agree that 'You just gotta get out of here' is a memorable example of unique digital storytelling that is deserving of a California Journalism Award.