

Carson National Forest

*208 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, NM 87571
505-758-6200*



News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Kathy DeLucas
(505) 758-6303

*He's your oldest and your best friend
If you need him, he'll be there again
He's always willing to be second-best
A perfect lodger, a perfect guest
--Beautiful Loser by Bob Seger*

Carson Firefighter Awarded Forest Service's Chief's Award

Taos, NM, October 14, 2007 —On a warm May day in 2006, Joseph Gallegos, an assistant engine captain for Carson National Forest, was on fire patrol when the crew he was with saw smoke. The fire crew came upon numerous cars that had pulled off NM522, near San Cristobal, while several people waved the crew down.

A small pick-up truck that was transporting landscaping equipment, including containers of gasoline and oil, lost control, hit the guardrail, flipped end over end, and slammed into a tree. The tree and surrounding vegetation caught fire. The crew jumped out of their vehicle and prepared to gather equipment to put the fire out.

Gallegos asked the crowd if anyone had come out of the truck. No one knew. Gallegos ran down to the embankment to check the vehicle. The bed of the truck and the landscaping equipment in it were fully engulfed and the fire was quickly spreading.

-more-

Gallegos pounded on the vehicle, the cab now fully filled with smoke. For a brief second, two hands appeared out of the smoke, palms pressing on the driver's side window. Gallegos didn't hesitate and grabbed the door handle, so hot it quickly burned his hand from the heat of the fire. He opened the door.

"I grabbed him by the arm. The fire was burning so hot, but I was able to lift him out of the vehicle," Gallegos said. "At the time I pulled him out and laid him down, the whole cab went up in flames."

For this action, Gallegos recently traveled to Washington D.C. to receive the Forest Service Chief's Emergency Response Award. The award recognizes an individual or group who demonstrates an outstanding level of accomplishment in responding to floods, fires, storms, earthquakes, disease outbreaks, or other conditions requiring emergency response. But this hardworking Questa native doesn't see himself as a hero. That would be expected from someone whose favorite song is Beautiful Loser by Bob Seger.

"My actions are not my own, but a reflection of the people I work with," he said. "To me it's not a big deal, I'm sure someone would have done it for me."

"We take a certain aspect of everyone we work with and learn from that to succeed," Gallegos says.

USFS