

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Officer who rescued toddler wins praise, high-five

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2013-08-15 18:46:45



BUENA PARK – A Buena Park policeman who saved a toddler who was running alone in a busy roadway was praised by the boy's mother for his heroic actions and got a celebratory high-five from the boy a week after the near-death episode.

Officer Ryan Herst, 33, was leaving a call for service when he saw the 3-year-old boy named Kenzo in the 8200 block of Whitaker Street near Indiana Avenue the evening of Aug. 6.

"I saw a little man in a crosswalk," said Herst, who is the father of three young boys. "The last thing I would want is another boy the

same age as mine getting hurt."

Herst parked his car and approached the boy, who was climbing a wrought iron fence on the corner of the intersection.

"Hey buddy! Where's your mommy? Where's your daddy?" Herst recalls asking the boy.

The boy looked at him and darted into the lanes of traffic. Herst ran after him to try to protect him.

"I scooped him up and tucked him into my chest and rolled onto my back," said Herst, who returned to work Wednesday after spending several days recovering from moderate back and shoulder injuries.

The incident unfolded as many residents in the area were returning home from work.

Terry Diggs was about to make a right turn from Whitaker onto Verdi Drive when he saw a boy bolt out into the heavily traveled street.

"The child made it about 40 percent through the crosswalk and the cop dove hands first and scooped up the child," Diggs said. "I'm glad he went above and beyond to put his life out there for that child."

Residents from nearby apartments approached the officer and asked if he was OK as he remained on the ground with the toddler on his chest. One of the residents who ran out was the boy's uncle, who was unaware the boy had gotten out of their first-level apartment.

Roman Petre, 23, quickly realized the boy the officer was holding was his nephew. Kenzo was crying but unharmed.

Herst, unable to move, asked Petre to hand him his radio to call for help.

A 12-year veteran of the Buena Park Police Department, Herst was taken to Western Medical Center-Anaheim and treated for back and shoulder injuries. He was released from the hospital the same night.

Juan Manjarrez, 12, was playing outside in the courtyard of an apartment complex when the boy ran into the lanes of traffic.

“He saved the little kid's life. He's a hero,” Manjarrez said.

Kenzo's mother, Maria Petre, was working when the boy she described as “mischievous” slipped out the apartment where his grandmother was watching him, his twin sister and his 5-year-old brother.

“It happened in a split second. He walked out the back,” Maria Petre, 26, said in Spanish. “The boy is very mischievous.”

The woman, who moved to Buena Park from Romania two years ago, said she was cleaning a house when her brother called to tell her what happened.

“I was so desperate,” she said. “When I saw he was OK, I calmed down.”

On Wednesday, Maria Petre met Herst and thanked him for saving her son's life.

“I will be eternally thankful,” Maria Petre told Herst, adding that she has been distraught just thinking about what could have happened if he wasn't there.

Herst smiled and said he was glad Kenzo was doing well.

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