

CHIEF GENE SAUNDERS SELECTED FOR IAOTP'S PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF DISTINCTION IN PUBLIC SAFETY AND HUMANITARIAN SERVICE

The International Association of Top Professionals (IAOTP) will honor Chief Gene Saunders at their annual awards gala in NYC at the Plaza Hotel

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, March 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The International Association of Top Professionals (IAOTP), a leading global professional organization known for its prestigious annual awards gala and exclusive vetting process, recently selected Chief Gene Saunders, the Founder/CEO & Chief Director General

of Lifesaver International, based out of Port St. Lucie, Florida, for IAOTP's Presidential Medal of Distinction in [Public Safety and Humanitarian Service](#) for 2026.



Inclusion with the International Association of Top Professionals (IAOTP) is an honor in itself. The Presidential Medal of Distinction in Public Safety and Humanitarian Service recognizes individuals who have broken barriers, pioneered innovative life-saving methods, and set new standards of excellence in public safety. In recognition of his extraordinary impact and enduring commitment to search and rescue, Chief Gene Saunders will be honored for this award at IAOTP's 2026 Annual Awards Gala.

As a dynamic, results-driven leader who has excelled in every position he has had the honor of serving, Chief Gene Saunders founded Project Lifesaver International in 1999. He has overseen its growth to include more than 1,600 public safety organizations across 50 states, nine provinces in Canada, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C.

Project Lifesaver is a 501(c)(3) community-based public safety nonprofit organization that provides law enforcement agencies, fire and rescue personnel, and caregivers with a program

designed to protect and, when necessary, quickly locate individuals with cognitive disorders who are prone to the life-threatening behavior of wandering.

Project Lifesaver's program has provided thousands of families with peace of mind, knowing their loved ones are protected should they wander. To date, more than 5,000 individuals have been safely rescued through Project Lifesaver.

Chief Saunders' impressive repertoire of prior roles includes 33 years of service with the Chesapeake Police Department, during which he served in Patrol, Vice, Narcotics, Detectives, and Training. He held both line and command positions within these units. In 1974, Chief Saunders co-founded the Special Weapons and Tactics team, serving as Tactical Commander and Team Commander for 23 years and leading more than 800 operations.

Additionally, Chief Saunders served as the Chief Investigator on several large, multi-state and international drug trafficking and organized crime conspiracy investigations. He also served as a Shift Commander and was assigned to the Olympic Security Team for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, overseeing security for a major soccer venue. Upon his retirement in 2001 at the rank of Captain, he continued his service in the National Guard and State Defense Force, serving in Infantry, Airborne, and Ranger units in leadership and command roles.

Moreover, Chief Saunders served in the U.S. Air Force Auxiliary, Civil Air Patrol, as a Senior



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Squadron Ranger Commander and spent five years as Commandant of the Middle East Region Staff College. He is also a certified instructor in Pursuit Driving, Firearms, Special Operations, Raid Planning, General Law Enforcement, and Search and Rescue. In addition, Chief Saunders has served as a volunteer Helicopter Flight Officer with the Virginia Beach Police Department and has several years of skydiving experience.

His remarkable skills and specialties include but are not limited to Search and Rescue, Training, Interrogation, Public Speaking, Firearms, Emergency Vehicle Operations, Special Operations, Investigations, Nonprofit Leadership, Crime Prevention, Preparedness, Command, Electronic Search and Rescue, Intelligence, Program Management, Expert Witness Services, Community Policing, Team Building, Supervisory Leadership, First Response, SWAT Operations, Crisis Management, Surveillance, Emergency Services, Private Investigations, Project Planning, Homeland Security, Disaster Response, Criminal Justice, Patrol Operations, Security Management and Personal Protection.

Throughout his illustrious career, Chief Saunders has received numerous awards and accolades and has been recognized internationally for his expertise. He is widely known as the Father of Radio Tracking Recovery for Persons at Risk. In 2024, he was awarded Most Inspirational Member and received the Presidential Award in Military from IAOTP. In 2023, he was named Man of the Year and was featured on the Nasdaq billboard in Times Square and the Planet Hollywood billboard on the Las Vegas Strip numerous times. He was also exclusively interviewed on TIP Radio and published in the Top 50 Fearless Leaders book. In 2021, Chief Saunders graced the cover of TIP, Top Industry Professionals, Magazine, and received the Top CEO of the Year Award at IAOTP's Annual Awards Gala. Additionally, he has earned three Commendation Medals, the Chief's Leadership Award from the Chesapeake Police Department, three Line of Duty Injury Medals, and three Silver Stars for Valor from the American Police Hall of Fame. He also received a Presidential Commendation for his SWAT service from President Bill Clinton, the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation's Service Before Self Citizens Honor Award, and was named Treasure Coast Nonprofit Leader of the Year in 2019. In 2025, Chief Gene Saunders was honored with the Lifesaver of the Decade Award, Top Sponsor of the Decade and Project Lifesaver was selected as Top Global Non-Profit of the Year by the International Association of Top Businesses. He will be honored with the Trailblazer Award in Search and Rescue as well as IAOTP's Presidential Medal of Distinction in Public Safety and Humanitarian Service at IAOTP's Annual Awards Gala at the iconic Plaza Hotel in New York City in December 2026.

Among his many additional honors, Chief Saunders has received the Local Hero Award from Bank of America, was named a Person of Distinction by the Al Cole Radio Show, received the Moving America Forward Award presented on the William Shatner television show, and was granted the Hero Award from Pilot International, Virginia District. He remains actively involved in 11 prestigious professional organizations as his career continues to advance.

Beyond his successful career, Chief Saunders is a highly sought-after speaker and the author of several published articles on wandering. He has appeared on numerous local, national, and

international radio and television programs, including CBS's The Early Show, Extreme Makeover Home Edition, Fox News, The Discovery Channel, CNN, The Daily Buzz, and William Shatner's Moving America Forward. He has also held lead and supporting roles on television series such as The Prosecutors, The FBI Files, The New Detectives, and The Untold Stories of the Navy SEALs.

Looking back, Chief Saunders attributes his success to his perseverance, education, resourcefulness, and patience. When not working, he enjoys spending time with his family and traveling. For the future, Chief Saunders will continue his mission of "Bringing Loved Ones Home".

For more information on Chief Saunders, please visit: www.projectlifesaver.org

To view his videos, click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3uFGX9AXes>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rhYK9-fi7M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfGzuEG6Ubl>

About IAOTP

The International Association of Top Professionals (IAOTP) is an international boutique networking organization that selects the world's most distinguished and accomplished professionals across a wide range of industries. These elite professionals are provided opportunities to collaborate, share insights, serve as keynote speakers, and inspire others within their fields. Membership is not open to the general public. Candidates must be personally invited by the President or nominated by an esteemed honorary member following a brief interview.

IAOTP's experts have recognized and credentialed thousands of top-tier professionals worldwide, helping them strengthen their personal brands and expand their influence. The organization prides itself on being a one-of-a-kind boutique network that handpicks only the most exceptional individuals and brings them together on a premier platform designed to foster meaningful connections and professional growth. IAOTP remains one of the most elite and highly respected professional recognition organizations in the world.

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