GFOA’s First Annual Hero Awards Announced

(Chicago, Illinois – May 20, 2019) Government Finance Officers Association’s (GFOA) First Annual Hero Award recognizes finance officers who have demonstrated extraordinary actions during a time of financial, natural, or human-made crisis.

The Hero Award Committee, composed of members of GFOA’s Executive Board, recently convened and selected the following recipients of the inaugural award:

- **Scott Dowell**, Administrative Services Director and Finance Director, City of Chico, CA

  In November 2018 the City and Butte County experienced a devastating fire that destroyed the Town of Paradise, California. Chico is the largest city and economic center for Butte County. As a result, thousands of fleeing residents from Paradise and surrounding towns came into Chico that the city jumped into its projected population for 2030. Mr. Dowell prepared a location in the Old Chico City Hall to operate as a standup office to continue government operations. His Information Technology staff provided close support to re-establish backups and financial systems and only with Mr. Dowell’s help was Paradise to even meet payroll. His success brought a tremendous relief to Paradise Town Administration at the worst time in the County’s history.

- **Fred James**, Deputy Director/CFO, Las Vegas–Clark County Library District, Las Vegas, NV

  Prior to the “Great Recession,” Mr. James used key budget management strategies to ensure that library services remained accessible seven days a week. During the
recession he provided additional ongoing and proactive budget management strategies to navigate complex state-wide tax caps and “secondary funding formulas” that severely depressed the growth of post-recession tax revenues back from the drop of 2004 funding levels. In 2011, he was instrumental in getting Board of Director approval to launch a successful pay-as-you-go new capital project strategy that resulted in the design and construction of two new library facilities in Mesquite, Nevada (opened May 2018) and East Las Vegas (opened April 2019).

- **Maggie Keenan**, Director–OBM, Cuyahoga County, Cleveland, OH

In late 2015 when Maggie took her position as Budget Director, the County was in the process of adopting a biennial budget that, at the start, had a nearly $70 million operating shortfall, more than half of the positions in OBM were vacant, communication between OBM and elected officials was incomplete, and looming just ahead was the loss of $30 million per year in Sales Tax revenue due to the loss of Medicaid Managed Care sales tax. Since that time under Ms. Keenan’s leadership, the County has adopted balanced budgets each year, ratings have either been maintained (Sales Tax bonds are rated AAA) or improved, the accuracy rate of quarterly forecasts has increased to an average of 99%, budget-related audit findings have been eliminated, and both the quality and quantity of OBM’s work product has dramatically improved.

- **Christopher McCullion**, CFO, City of Orlando, FL

Only weeks before stepping into his role as CFO, the City of Orlando was struck by the terrible tragedy that occurred at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando. In the immediate aftermath, there was a tremendous outpouring from individuals and businesses around the world who wanted to provide financial support to the victims. Mr. McCullion was involved in the logistics of setting up the OneOrlando Fund, which received and processed donations from tens of thousands of individuals totaling $31.7 million. He served as a Board Member on the OneOrlando Board, which provided oversight and guidance to ensure that funds were disbursed in a timely, accountable, and transparent manner. Mr. McCullion was also involved with the establishment of the Orlando United Assistance Center, which provides individuals and families with community resources to assist with healing, which is still open today.

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The recipients were recognized at GFOA’s 113th Annual Conference in Los Angeles, California. For more information regarding GFOA’s Hero Award or to learn how to join GFOA, please visit gfoa.org.

Government Finance Officers Association
203 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2700
Chicago, IL 60601-1210
Phone: 312/977-9700
Fax: 312/977-4806
e-mail: membership@gfoa.org
gfoa.org

Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) advances excellence in government finance by providing best practices, professional development, resources and practical research for more than 20,300+ members and the communities they serve.