The 2018 Ron Olitsky Extra Mile Award was awarded to Jim Schwilk. Jim started as a customer service representative in 1996. His interest in technology led to his Microsoft training and implementing a cutting-edge technology infrastructure at Underground Service Alert of Southern California (USA/SC). His technological expertise and the center’s robust network have directed other notification centers to utilize USA/SC’s network for their backup. As the Vice-President and Manager of USA/SC, Jim looks for new and interesting ways to promote the Contact Before You Dig Process. As a Lakers fan, he has secured digital advertising during Clippers/Lakers games. The 2018/2019 Anaheim Ducks hockey season will have in ice advertising at all home games. In 2013 Jim had the idea to have a float in the Rose Parade. Working with Fiesta Parade Floats they created an award-winning float that cruised down Orange Grove Blvd in Pasadena on January 1, 2014. The annual parade is seen by close to a million people and watched on television by millions more across the country and around the world. What a great way to get the Contact Before You Dig message out to not just Southern Californians but everyone who might one day be digging. As Leo Castaneda opined after working with Jim on the floats the past few years, “Many local heroes go unnoticed. In December Jim spends innumerable hours at the DigAlert/811 Rose Parade Float acting as an ambassador for safe digging. Jim spends his time at the floats greeting and educating the thousands of volunteers on how important contacting 811 is before you dig. Every connection Jim makes helps spread the Safe Digging message to the Southern California region and beyond. His commitment and passion for saving lives are exciting! He makes you want to call 811 every time you grab a shovel. He makes you think twice before you plant a tree or open a hole up at a construction site. Jim wants each and every one of us to be safe.”

New Ticket Types to Debut March 1, 2019

Mark your calendar! March 1, 2019 the names of ticket types will be changing. DigAlert, in conjunction with USA North 811, will be using the same terminology for tickets as well as formats. This collaboration will benefit both excavators and owners of underground lines. The chart to the right lists the old ticket type names and corresponding new names. For more details about the format, headers and explanations visit docs.digalert.org.
It was just last January that the center took its 16 millionth ticket; how could the 17th millionth happen so quickly? A booming economy and more awareness that before digging you need to get a ticket. Getting a ticket is what Justin Topp with Technico TV Inc was doing on May 24th, 2018. Just like he had been doing since May of 2017 whenever Technico TV would be digging on projects like the fiber optic conduit that was being installed in Mission Viejo. He and the Customer Service Rep were both rewarded with a check for the momentous occasion. Who will get the 18th millionth ticket? It could be you, but only if you get a ticket each and every time you dig.
Where’s DigAlert/811?

DigAlert has always looked for new avenues to promote contacting 811 before digging. Our members have been instrumental in this regard as well. 2018 was another year of innovative ways to spread the word about 811. If you spot DigAlert advertising in 2019 text “RC2018NL” and where you saw the logo to DIGALT (344-288) to be entered into a drawing for some SWAG.

Electronic Positive Response

Underground Facility Owners/Operators – Have you tried electronic positive response through DigAlert yet? This communication method makes it simple for underground facility operators to inform the excavator about what has been done in regard to marking their lines. This method is especially effective if the operator does not have any lines in conflict with the proposed excavation. Excavators – Before you submit a No Response ticket, have you checked the responses from the members? If you have not supplied DigAlert with an email or number to text you can check the responses on our website at www.digalert.org. If you have supplied an email and/or number to text after the legal start date and time, a copy of the ticket with the responses will be sent to you. Please note that at this time Electronic Positive Response through DigAlert is voluntary and the response of “Member did not respond by the required time” does NOT necessarily mean the member did not mark. It could mean that they have chosen not to participate. The benefits of this program include: enhanced communication between the member and excavator, traceable documentation, reduction in no response tickets, excavators able to check responses at any time and it’s easy to use. For more information on visit docs.digalert.org.
New Dig Safe Board

After two deadly underground pipeline explosions in 2015, California passed The Dig Safe Act of 2016. The California Underground Facilities Safe Excavation Board (Dig Safe Board) was created as part of the new law. The nine member board consisting of appointees by the Governor and Legislature is tasked with developing standards for safe excavation practices, investigating accidents, ensuring 4216 requirements are being followed and coordinating education and outreach efforts. Their first meeting was in January 2018 and they have been meeting almost monthly to develop standards for continual excavation tickets, reasonable care when working on dirt roads and grading shoulders as well as setting up education, investigations of damages and regulations on fees. For more information and to be kept up-to-date visit digsafe.fire.ca.gov.

Tickets Processed 24/7 Now

According to the Common Ground Alliance’s Best Practices, one of the best practices for a notification center is to process tickets 24/7. On October 1, 2018 DigAlert began sending tickets to members 24/7. DigAlert understands that not all members operate a 24/7 shop and nothing has changed for a member’s response time. If a ticket is received over the weekend or in the middle of the night that counts as the date of notification, members have until the legal start date and time to respond. Excavators have access to input their tickets online at any time. If the excavation is an emergency as defined in 4216, an excavator should contact the member directly. Inputting a ticket online will also give the excavator a list of the members emergency contact numbers. We urge all members to make sure their after hours and emergency numbers are up-to-date.

A Diamond Gem

Note From President Ann Diamond

2018 has been a year of breaking records. It started in January with the most DigAlert Express tickets done in a month and largest percentage of web tickets done in a day. February followed with the most DigAlert Express tickets in a day and then March broke the DigAlert Express monthly record. The record was broken again in April and then again in May. August was the busiest month in the center’s 42 year history. But wait! October broke the record set in August and our second busiest day in the center’s history was in November. Even with the increase in tickets, according to the Damage Information Reporting Tool (DIRT) report California’s damages are still caused by no notification to the center. Awareness of the 811 process is an ongoing endeavor and you can help. When asked how a new caller has heard about DigAlert it’s usually from a utility, permitting agency or a friend/neighbor. Keep spreading the word – Contact 811 Before You Dig. Because the one record we don’t want to break is the most damages and injuries from unsafe excavation practices. DigAlert wants everyone to be safe and to go home at the end of the day.
Look for the DigAlert/811 Float on January 1, 2019

Founded in 1976, Underground Service Alert of Southern California is a state mandated regional notification center for anyone planning to excavate in Inyo, Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara or Ventura counties.

Our mission is to prevent damage to underground infrastructure through advocacy, education and operation of an effective, efficient communications link between excavators and owners of underground infrastructure.