



## APSA Members Receive International Recognition

Today, Vertical Aviation International (VAI) announced the recipients of their 2026 Salute to Excellence Awards, including APSA members Nicholas Romano and Matt Pagano.

Deputy Nicholas Romano of the Broward Sheriff's Office has been selected as the 2026 recipient of VAI's Salute to Excellence Law Enforcement Award for his leadership in public-safety drone operations. Raised in a law enforcement family, Romano began on road patrol before moving to the detective bureau as a computer forensics examiner. Nearly a decade ago, he was selected as one of the agency's first drone pilots, despite having no prior experience in unmanned systems. He built expertise through intensive research, became an early trainer, and later served as unit coordinator. Romano credits the significant advancement of sensors and other capabilities with protecting officers, including during a barricaded-suspect incident in which a drone, instead of a SWAT officer, drew gunfire. Deputy Romano was also the recipient of [APSA's 2025 Unmanned Aerial Systems Award](#).

Matt Pagano, senior mechanic for the Riverside Police Department Air Support Unit (ASU), will receive the VAI Salute to Excellence Maintenance Award, recognizing his sustained excellence in rotorcraft maintenance under demanding conditions. A former US Marine Corps aviation maintainer and Hamilton Standard quality-control and blade-repair specialist, Pagano earned his FAA A&P certificate and joined the ASU in 2003. Pagano is currently the sole mechanic for the unit, which operates two Airbus H125 helicopters, each flying 1,100 to 1,200 hours annually. Having led standardized preflight training and managed a fleet transition from MD 500s, he prioritizes clear pilot-mechanic communication to protect crews and missions. Senior Mechanic Pagano was also the recipient of [APSA's 2025 Technical Specialist Award](#).

These awards bring international recognition to the great work being done by members of the public safety aviation community and reflect positively on our profession and Association.

APSA is honored to see our members celebrated both within our organization and across the international aviation community. Please join us in congratulating Deputy Nicholas Romano and Senior Mechanic Matt Pagano on their remarkable accomplishments.

[2026 APSA Awards and Scholarship submission period is now open](#). Join us in recognizing an APSA member for their contributions to public safety aviation, or your child for outstanding academic achievement. Accepting award nominations and scholarship applications through May 1, 2026.

Don't miss your chance to nominate someone for an award or submit a scholarship application this year!