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Exceptional Minds Receives Prestigious Star of the Valley Award for Education



School for young adults with autism recognized by San Fernando Valley leaders for its unique training program that prepares individuals with disabilities for careers in visual effects and animation.

Sherman Oaks, California – September 8, 2018 – [Exceptional Minds](#) was honored during the 21st Annual Valley of the Stars Gala and Awards Ceremony held at the City of Calabasas Civic Center last night.

The nonprofit school and working studio for young adults with autism received the “Star of the Valley” Education Award, sharing the evening’s spotlight with former Los Angeles Laker superstar Derek Fisher, who received the Arts and Entertainment Award; Maria’s Italian Kitchen founder Madelyn Alfano, who received the Business Award; and Goodwill Southern California Chief Executive Patrick McClenahan, who received the Humanitarian award. Since its founding in 1998, the annual gala honors individuals and organizations that have helped grow and strengthen the economy, improve the quality of life in communities, and bring national recognition to the San Fernando Valley

The award ceremony is hosted annually by Sherman Oaks-based The Valley Economic Alliance (www.thevalley.net) whose mission is to engage and unite Valley stakeholders to raise standards of living and economic vitality across the San Fernando Valley.

“We are grateful for this recognition and the countless other ways our unique and talented Exceptional Minds are embraced by the community,” said Bennett, who accepted the award on behalf of the students, staff and board members of Exceptional Minds.

Exceptional Minds is currently the only school of its kind to successfully prepare and place young adults on the spectrum visual effects and animation careers. Its graduates have gone on to work in major studios, and for movies such as *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *Black Panther* as well as Universal’s *The Mummy*, and *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*.

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the U.S. The vast majority of adults with autism are unemployed or underemployed, accounting for the lowest employment rate of all individuals with disabilities. Now in its seventh year, Exceptional Minds has grown from its single classroom beginnings to become a thriving \$3 million nonprofit that has served more than 600 individuals with autism. It continues to forge new career paths for people with autism as a pioneer in individualized instruction, career development and employer education.

About Exceptional Minds (<http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org>): Exceptional Minds is a nonprofit vocational center and working production studio for young adults on the autism spectrum. Exceptional Minds offers technical proficiency and work-readiness training that prepares students for careers in graphic arts, animation, web design and visual effects.

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Photo caption: Exceptional Minds was one of four recognized at the 21st Annual Valley of the Stars Gala and Awards Ceremony on September 7. Left to right, Exceptional Minds’ Yudi Bennett, former Laker superstar Derek Fisher, Maria’s Italian Kitchen’s Madelyn Alfano and Goodwill Southern California Chief Executive Patrick McClenahan.