



AVAG News

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Introducing the AVAG News

Fellow veterans, here is the inaugural edition of the quarterly publication, *AVAG News*. The newsletter of American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) will feature stories and news items on veterans and their families who are members of our AVAG communities. We hope you enjoy this first edition.

If you have any suggestions or want to participate in future productions, please call: John Stryker Meyer at 619-892-5983.

Veterans program kicks off in San Bernardino

*Reprinted from the
09/17/14 San Bernardino Sun*

The Veterans Affordable Housing Program kicked off its “Free Furniture For Veterans” campaign last week at the Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park’s community room on West Foothill Boulevard in San Bernardino.

Here, Army veteran John Finneran, a resident at Sequoia, sits in his free motorized lift reclining chair for the first time in his home as VAHP representative Lee Martin looks on.

“We’ll never be able to thank you enough for this wonderful recliner,” Finneran told Martin Thursday.

The program will continue at Sequoia under the leadership of Martin, who oversees



the newly formed American Veterans Assistance Group.

The program provides services to veterans living in Sequoia and other Santiago communities. More than 600 veterans are served through AVAG, according to a spokesman.

The organization has communities throughout California, with seven manufactured home communities in San Bernardino.

There are more than 600 veterans in the communities and, of those, 135 have been assisted through more than \$280,000 in private and corporate funds. ✈

Information: Lee Martin at 562-787-9437



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The Women in Networking (WIN) group continued its support of the Veterans Affordable Housing Program with a \$5000 donation to be used to help veterans obtain affordable housing.

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Free Furniture For Veterans

After receiving several pallets of free furniture from an anonymous donor, volunteers and members of the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) recently held the first “Free Furniture For Veterans” giveaway to veterans at the Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park on West Foothill Boulevard in San Bernardino under the direction of AVAG Executive Director Lee Martin.

“This is the start of a good program for veterans and their families,” Martin said, after he personally helped veterans select and carry furniture to their homes recently.

Navy veteran Michael Goens, one of the early recipients of the furniture said, “We’ve talked about getting new furniture but couldn’t afford it now...this program is wonderful. My wife was real happy to see us bring home the new furniture.”

Since that quiet opening event in Sequoia, Martin has worked with several veterans to give them new furniture through this program. The veterans live in the 40 Santiago manufactured home committees where more than 600 veterans live across five western states.

In recent months, Martin has met with veterans in several communities putting together local AVAG groups, consisting of veterans and their wives or significant others to discuss mutual interests. One of the key missions that has surfaced is a general desire by veterans to help other veterans.

As each group meets, gets to know other veterans within their local campus, veterans are told about the Free Furniture For Veterans program, which becomes one area where they can help each other.

Martin then arranges for the veterans to review the selection of furniture, determine which pieces they want for their manufactured home and then assists them in arranging transportation to move the furniture from the showroom to their homes.

The veterans agree not to sell the furniture, but to use it for their residences.

AVAG is not a government organization. It is a new, private non-profit 501 C 3 formed to assist veterans who live in the 40 Affordable Community Living and Santiago Communities Inc. across the west. ✈

For further information about the Free Furniture For Veterans program call Lee Martin: 562-787-9437, or e-mail him at: leemartin112@aol.com.



U.S. Navy veterans Robert Goens, left, and his father, Michael Goens, right, are all smiles during the first night of the AVAG Free Furniture For Veterans giveaway recently held at the Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park on West Foothill Boulevard in San Bernardino. The father-son team checked several pieces of furniture before picking the ones that they carried to their home.



Robert Goens, left, and Michael Goens, right, pick up the sofa they selected to take home from Free Furniture For Veterans program recently in San Bernardino. AVAG Executive Director Lee Martin assisted them in selecting and moving the furniture from the display room into their homes after they completed the necessary paperwork in this program.



Veteran's Spotlight

Featured Veteran – Lee Martin

As a Green Beret combat medic during the Vietnam War, Lee Martin saw the full spectrum of human suffering ranging from saving lives on the battlefield to delivering babies during sick call at his Special Forces A Camp.

That caring spirit and dedication to those he cared for as a combat medic, whether it was a fellow, wounded Green Beret or a Montagnard tribesman's ill wife or grandfather, is alive and well today in Lee as the executive director of the recently formed American Veterans' Assistance Group – the program designed to work with the more than 600 veterans living within the 40 Veteran Affordable Housing Program communities throughout the five western states.

"I don't look at this as a job," said Lee, who served in various positions of leadership for the Boy Scouts of America over 35 years, "I look at this opportunity as a chance to serve fellow veterans, fellow Americans who have served their country with honor and integrity."

As the executive director, Lee, who received a Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart during his tour of duty in Vietnam, is forming American Veterans' Assistant Groups (AVAG) in each of the 40 Santiago communities, one community at a time.

"The mission is simple, we're bringing together the veterans and their wives and significant others for the camaraderie enjoyed by veterans being around other veterans with the fundamental desire to help other veterans," Lee said.

"Lee brings a can-do spirit to the AVAG

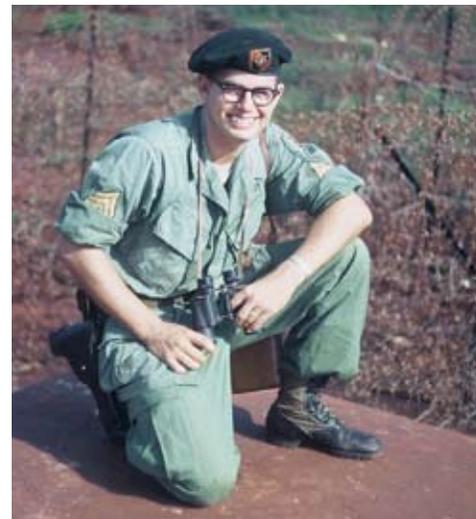
mission," said fellow Vietnam War Green Beret and Purple Heart recipient Jim Duffy, who works with Lee and serves on the AVAG Board of Directors. "Lee is doing this the old-fashioned way, going to one community at a time, meeting the veterans, listening to them and working with them," Duffy said.

Lee began his campaign at the two Santiago communities in Orange, before going to Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park, Diamond Bar Estates in Walnut and Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates. Besides that, Lee is networking with other veteran organizations and establishing working relationships within the VA, in order to find key staff personnel who can assist AVAG veterans in obtaining their VA benefits or in updating their VA information packets.

In addition, one of the most exciting aspects of Lee's job has been acquiring household goods, home repair materials and free furniture that are available to veterans in the AVAG program.

"Veterans have always helped fellow veterans," Lee said. Through the AVAG program it will give veterans "an opportunity to help themselves, their families and their fellow veterans. In recent weeks, fellow veterans have helped veterans pick up free furniture as well as helping other veterans with home repairs and refurbishing programs that are available at no costs to them."

For example, Army veteran John Finneran, a resident at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park, needed a motorized lift reclining chair. While working with another non-profit called Patriots and Paws, Lee learned that organization had such a chair. He and



AVAG Lee Martin, Viet Nam.

a volunteer picked it up from Linda Lee in LaVerne, took it to Finneran's San Bernardino manufactured home and delivered it. When they arrived, Lee found that a new transformer was needed for it. Lee obtained a new transformer, installed it for Finneran and watched the Army veteran successfully use it.

Later that day, at the first "Free Furniture For Veterans" give away, Navy veterans, father and son, Mike and Robert Goens selected and moved several pieces of free furniture to their manufactured home in Sequoia.

"This is outstanding," Mike Goens said after taking a sofa and several other items to his manufactured home. "I needed some new furniture. Receiving free furniture is an unexpected benefit that I wouldn't have were it not for Lee and this program."

AVAG is NOT a government organization. It is a private non-profit 501 C-3 formed to assist veterans and, as Lee would say, "It's to help us make a difference for fellow veterans." ✨

Editor's note: This is the first *Veteran's Spotlight* feature that will appear in all future editions of *AVAG News*. If you have a suggested veteran to be spotlighted, please call John Stryker Meyer at 619-892-5983 or e-mail him at idahonezero@sbcglobal.net. Thank you.

Women in Networking donates \$5000 to help veterans obtain affordable housing

Early this fall, the Women in Networking (WIN) group continued its support of the Veterans Affordable Housing Program with a \$5000 donation which WIN member Doreen Matsumoto requested be used to help veterans obtain affordable housing.

By early November, that \$5000 donation assisted two veterans in making down payments for manufactured homes in the Veterans Affordable Housing Program based in Orange, CA. Three years ago, Santiago Communities Inc. partnered with the non-profit organization Affordable Housing Living (ACL) to offer this program which has assisted more than 130 veterans to obtain affordable manufactured homes.

“Needless to say, we’re very pleased and excited to learn that two veterans and their wives have been able to move into the comfortable manufactured homes that are “offered to veterans through the Veterans Affordable Housing Program,” Matsumoto said recently.

Garry “Duke” Edmundson, chairman of the ACL Board of Directors, added, “We’re pleased that hard-working groups such as WIN continue to support our long-term mission to help veterans own affordable houses instead of living in relatives’ garages or worse, in the streets.”

And, no one is happier than the two newest veterans who live among the 40 manufactured home communities that ACL and Santiago Communities Inc. oversee in the five western states: Albert Gonzales and his wife of 45 years, Marsha Gonzales and Darryl Beatty and his wife of 40 years Cynthia Temple. They join more than 600 veterans presently living in those communities.

“To tell you the truth,” said Albert Gonzales during an interview in his manufactured home in Santiago Estates Pedley, north of Highway 60, “My wife and I thought we’d never own a home again, let alone a home as spacious and as nice as this one.”

Speaking from his home in Santiago Parkside Estates in Rialto, Darryl Beatty said, “My wife suffered a fall and was unconscious for more than three weeks. When she fell, we lived in an apartment in Upland. When she regained consciousness, we had a new house here, thanks to this program.”

Gonzales is an Army veteran who served our country for five years and translated his military experience into landing jobs with Boeing and Lockheed Martin, where he produced materials for helicopter blades and other various aircraft components. He and Marsha have two children.

Beatty served three years, 11 months and 27 days in the Marine Corps where he was an F-4 Phantom jet mechanic during the Vietnam War. After a long career as a professional truck driver, he and Cynthia are retired and have three children. ✈



From left: Smiling upon receiving a \$5000 donation are Garry “Duke” Edmundson, chairman of the Affordable Community Living Board of Directors, Richard Simonian, CEO of Santiago Communities Inc., and Vietnam Veteran Lee Martin, a team member of the Veterans Affordable Housing Program. Martin received the donation from the Women in Networking group in support of the Orange County-based Veterans Affordable Housing Program in support of efforts to assist veterans seeking affordable housing in Southern California. By November, two veterans each received \$2,500 from that donation which assisted them, and their wives, to move into ACL/Santiago communities.



Albert Gonzales and his wife Marsha Gonzales



Darryl Beatty and his wife Cynthia Temple