



AVAG News

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Among the many different organizations that the AVAG Team has worked with includes the "Lew Millett (MOH) Memorial Chapter" of the 82nd Airborne Association. This 82nd Airborne Association participated in the Memorial Day event on the Cottonwood Church campus. The members of this honor guard include, from front left, Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Crebbs, and Lt. Col. Gary Macnamara — both men are also members of Special Forces Association Chapter 78 in Orange. In the back are Joe Astengo, 11th Airborne veteran and Don Collins, of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Networking is key to AVAG growth

Six years ago unconventional soldier and entrepreneur Richard Simonian sought ways to help veterans find affordable housing through his company Santiago Communities. At that time, the motivating force was simple: manufactured homes are less expensive and easier to maintain, and let's help veterans help themselves through this program.

Santiago Communities partnered with the non-profit Affordable Community Living that offered the Veterans Affordable Housing Program to veterans. As time marched on, more than 140 veterans obtained housing through this program as fellow Green Berets joined with Simonian to assist veterans: Jim Duffy, a highly-decorated Green Beret team leader; G. Lee Martin, a Green Beret medic, John S. Meyer, a Green Beret commo man, and Mike Keele, a 1st Cavalry veteran and the recipient

of the Distinguished Flying Cross. All four served during the Vietnam War. They were joined later by Marine Corps veteran Craig Schmelter and American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto. Through these veterans and AVAG Team Member Scott McReynolds, AVAG was formed to further assist veterans within the 40-plus communities that operate under the aegis of Santiago Community and Affordable Community Living.

A key component to the AVAG growth has been the continued support from Affordable Community Living and an ever-expanding network of community groups, veterans' organizations and service-oriented programs and fundraising campaigns over the years that assist veterans and the communities where

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AVAG North Update

Rick Martin new AVAG Chapter 7 Commander

Rick Martin, a U.S. Navy veteran, is the new American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) Chapter Seven Commander for Santiago Island Village on Bethel Island, CA. Rick has commented how much he loved being surrounded by an ocean of water while he traveled the seas. So, it is only fitting that he loves Bethel Island. Which is surrounded 100 percent by the California Sacramento delta, accessible only by one bridge or by boat.

Without the lights of a big city, Bethel Island is a stargazer's paradise, weather and/or fog permitting. Fishing is excellent year-round anywhere on the island.

Rick's passion is helping people, especially the veterans in the park. He regularly picks up debris throughout the close-knit community on his daily walks. A man of many skills, you will find him assisting neighbors with many projects while proclaiming a lifelong belief, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Thank you, Rick Martin, for your continued service as a leader with AVAG.

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AVAG continues to grow as it partners with an ever expanding network of groups, organizations, programs, and fundraising campaigns that exist in our communities.

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A new Commander for Chapter 7 and Chapter 6 honors WWII veteran.

Chaplain's Corner

Photos from activities throughout AVAG Southern California communities.

A weekend with the Angels for AVAG Members

Active duty service members, veterans and their families enjoyed first class treatment while enjoying Angels baseball.

Chaplain's Corner

AVAG communities activities and events

Diamond Bar Estates

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



In recent months 90-year-old Dottie Cosgrove, the mother of AVAG Member Chris Garcia, wife of Ruben Garcia, has brought more to the AVAG meetings and Bible studies than the bright sparkle in her eyes and cheerful personality. She has crafted many red, white and blue afghans for veterans wives.



At left, Mrs. Braverman. Pat Roth and Nancy Gordon admire the surprise afghans presented to them recently during an AVAG meeting in Santiago Creek Orange Estates in Orange. *At right*, during a recent meeting in Santiago Palm Vista in Hemet, Lupe Hanks, Janice Castillo and June Fabian proudly display the red, white and blue afghans that Dottie crafted.



The Bible study group that began earlier this year with a few participants has grown in size. Here group member gather with AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto following a successful meeting.



Diamond Bar Estates veterans and their significant others spent several hours helping AVAG team members collect, separate, and pack backpacks that were distributed to children who live in that community. AVAG reps and Staples donated items to this pre-school campaign. Here the veterans stand with happy student recipients of new backpacks.

At left, AVAG Director John Meyer presented backpacks to Ethan Adams, who is getting ready for kindergarten, and his sister Marilyn Hernandez.

At right, new AVAG member William "Bill" Lensky was one of the Diamond Bar veterans helping to pack and distribute backpacks to students. After receiving her backpack from Bill Lensky, Haily presented a beautiful thank you card to him.

Santiago Palm Vista

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



AVAG Director John S. Meyer speaks to veterans about the eight-year secret war conducted during the Vietnam War to veterans, family members and AVAG Team members at a recent meeting in the refurbished Santiago Palm Vista Community Room in Hemet



The AVAG Team meeting at Palm Vista Estates in Hemet enjoyed the largest turnout of veteran, family members and team members this year. They heard guest speaker Eric Porche, of the DAV address many veteran-related issues.



During the June AVAG Team meeting in Hemet, two additional Quilts of Valor were presented to veterans.

In the top right photo, the first Quilt of Valor was presented to Robert Brown, a Vietnam veteran,

In the next photo down, the second Quilt of Valor was presented to Juan Rodriguez.



Below, the Palm Vista Estates team pauses for a post-meeting group photo.

Santiago Hillside Estates

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



A very special So Cal Quilts of Valor presentation was held at the July 26 Santiago Hillside Estates AVAG meeting. Marine Corps veteran and AVAG member James Eger, a Korean War Veteran, is all smiles, sitting in front of his Quilt of Valor that was presented to him that night.



AVAG team members and guest speaker Frank Guevara, second from right in the back, pose with many of the students who received back-to-school backpacks courtesy of a joint donation effort by AVAG and Staples.



Above, Jim Eger, his wife Linda and son Billy, stand in front of the quilt that took weeks to put together.



The guest speaker at Hillside was Frank Guevara, director of the Veterans Affairs Office for San Bernardino County. Guevara, who served his country 36 years prior to joining the Veterans Affairs Office, explained many of the benefits veterans are entitled to, and provided statistics on how San Bernardino's veterans program has assisted veterans in obtaining more than \$36 million in benefits in 2017 alone - one of the best service records in the state of California.

Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park

(Photo courtesy Paul Buron)



At a recent Sequoia meeting Mike Newminski, right, and John Gibbs, left, hold their certificates of appreciation presented by AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.

Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



The July 25 AVAG Team meeting in Casitas LaVerne Mobile Home Estates featured a healthy, hearty lunch and good cheer among veterans and their loved ones. The highlight of the event was the presentation of five Quilts of Valor to community residents.

Pictured above, three of the Quilt of Valor recipients, from left to right, WWII Navy veteran Edward Kruger, WWII Navy veteran Terrie Faris, and Korean War veteran Ruth Rogers Armantrout. Here Korean War veterans Ruth Rogers Armantrout, stand in front of their handcrafted quilts with their family members at the end of the La Verne meeting.



At left, Ruth Rogers Armantrout, *at right*, Terrie Faris, and *below*, Edward Kruger are joined by AVAG Director John S. Meyer, guest speaker Mary Rubado, of the Torres Mortuary, and AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.



After the AVAG Team meeting in Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and AVAG volunteer Amanda visited Air Force Veteran David Matter to present him with a Quilt of Valor, because he was too ill to attend the meeting.



Before the AVAG Team meeting in Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and AVAG volunteer Amanda visited Marine Corps veteran Terry Manning to present him with a Quilt of Valor, because he was too ill to attend the meeting. The AVAG team shared prayers of hope with the Marine Corps veteran who was grateful for the warm quilt.

AVAG's expanding network of support

Continued from Page 1

they live. The first networking group was the Orange County-based Special Forces Association Chapter 78, where Duffy, Martin, Meyer and Keele are active members. Soon after AVAG was formed four years ago, Patriots and Paws worked closely with Martin and other AVAG Team members to assist veterans in obtaining furniture, clothing, household items and, in some case, food donations.

Today, the expanding AVAG network of support includes, to name a few:

- ♦ The Home Depot's Team Depot Program run under the Home Depot Foundation;
- ♦ The United Mission for Non-Profits of America;
- ♦ Boy Scout Troop 104 in Orange;
- ♦ So/Cal Quilts of Valor non-profit, lead by Barbra Winkler;
- ♦ The Home Depot Rialto store and staff;
- ♦ The Orange County Veterans Military Family Collaborative;
- ♦ The state run Cal-Vet Program;
- ♦ The San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs Office;
- ♦ OC Goodwill;
- ♦ The Veterans Association of North (San Diego) County;
- ♦ Staples store in Rialto;
- ♦ The Richard Bruenig Foundation;
- ♦ Cottonwood Church, Los Alamitos;
- ♦ Helping Hands Giving Hope;
- ♦ Godspeed Motorcycle Club;
- ♦ Mariners Church, Irvine;
- ♦ Miran Johnson, of Southern Calif. Funeral services;
- ♦ Ralph Torres of Torres Mortuary;
- ♦ Steve Owens, of England Family Mortuary.



Left, Chris loads a new donated washer and dryer donated to AVAG.

Right, AVAG Team members Chris and Paul stand in front of another load of clothes, drinks, water and fruit donated by Gayle Bohnhoff-Vrabec and other generous donors that were taken to Hemet for veterans and their families.



The sweaty AVAG team stops briefly for a photo op, before heading to Hemet to unload the furniture and other items donated by Virginia Freeman-Robb.



AVAG volunteers, from left Paul Buron and David Breunig, prepare to lift a table up to Chris.



In recent months, working through United Mission for Non-Profits of America, Indigo and Travis Riley have donated more than \$10,000 worth of toys for children residing in Diamond Bar Estates and Santiago Creekside Estates. They've also worked closely with AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and AVAG Team members to assist veterans and to bring holiday cheer — including sponsoring a program where Santa Claus reads to children. Here youngsters and parents look at the donated gifts in Santiago Creekside Estates. Photo courtesy of Paul Buron.



Santiago Creekside Estates veterans, family members and community residents are all smiles after a holiday bash. Photo courtesy of Paul Buron.



Left, Navy veteran Steve Fabian and his wife Lorie stand in front of cabinet in their home in Hemet after AVAG Team members delivered furniture donated to veterans by Seal Beach resident Virginia Freeman-Robb.



Hemet AVAG Team member Marvin Street and Charlotte Mead are all smiles after receiving the clothes washer delivered by AVAG Team members and volunteers.



CSM Robert Crebbs of the 82nd Airborne Association played TAPs on a bugle for the Memorial Day event on the Cottonwood Church campus.



Another example of AVAG networking extends to local Boy Scout Troop 104 in Orange. Here, Luis Gomez, troop leader for Boy Scout Troop 104 out of Santiago Creekside Estates in Orange, holds backpacks Troop members and AVAG Team volunteers recently distributed to young children in Orange County getting ready to return to school. The smiles on these two youngsters faces says it all. Photo courtesy of Doreen Matsumoto.



One more example of AVAG networking was the Easter party hosted at Diamond Bar Estates where donations included, candy and customs for community children, food and drinks for everyone, and some door prizes — some donated by United Mission for Non-Profits of America. Photo courtesy of Paul Buron.

A weekend with the Angels for AVAG Members

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto)



Thanks to the efforts of Anaheim Councilwoman Denise Barnes, Matthew Holder and American Veterans Assistance Group Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, active duty service members, veterans and their families attended three Angels baseball games over the weekend of July 27-29 at Angel Stadium. The attendees watched the baseball games from special luxury box seats in the stadium and enjoyed first class treatment, food and beverages throughout the games.

Above, Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Mineman, Chris Alford, his wife Elyse and their daughters Avery and Reese stand in front of Angel's Stadium before watching the Angels host the Seattle Mariners.



Left, the view from the luxury suites where the veterans and active duty service members enjoyed the game.

Right, there were fireworks after the game.



AVAG team members and Army veterans, from left: Raul Gatewood and George Roth, stand with their wives Denise and Pat, respectively, during the game.



Glenn Williamson and his wife Nancy pose for the camera in between innings.



AVAG member and Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, Glenn Williamson is all smiles entering the suite.



AVAG Director and Marine Corps veteran Craig Schmelter and Glenn Williamson dig into the luxury suite food at Angel Stadium.



George Roth checks his cell phone for work-related messages in between innings while sitting on the comfortable leather seats in the luxury suite.

More from the Chaplain's Corner

Santiago Creekside Estates and Santiago Creek Orange Estates (Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



During the June meeting AVAG meeting in Santiago Creek Orange Estates Army veteran, Lisa Costa, presented information on helping homeless veterans and programs available for veterans in Anaheim.



Lisa Costa, standing next to flag, joined our AVAG members for the traditional post-meeting photograph.



The June AVAG Team meeting in Orange was unique because all of the veterans in attendance received hats from Army veteran Robert Rohm.

The veterans presented hats, included, from left: West Wescott, World War II; Alan Braverman, Navy; Joseph Magnante, Army; Glenn Williamson, Marine Corps; Robert Rohm, Army; John Meyer, Army; AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto; Bub Stoddard, Army; Harold Gomer, Navy; George Roth, Army; and David Walter Winterhalter Jr., Air Force.



During that meeting, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto presented Army Veteran George Roth, his certificate of appreciation issued by the mayor of Anaheim.



The July 24th AVAG Santiago Creek Orange Estates meeting had a full agenda with two guest speakers, dinner, deserts and a special birthday cake and happy birthday song for Marine Corps Vietnam veteran Glenn Williamson.

The first guest speaker of the evening was Jose Guevara, field representative/caseworker for Congressman Lou Correa of the 46 District in California.



At left, the second guest speaker was Howard Maytorena, of Torres Mortuary.

Below, the veterans and their loved ones gathered for the traditional post-meeting photo op.



AVAG North Update continued



Second AVAG Chapter 6 Veterans Appreciation Dinner honors WWII Veteran

On Sunday May 27, 2018, the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) Chapter #6 celebrated its second Veterans Appreciation Dinner for everyone residing in the park. By special request, a very popular Mexican catering company was chosen to prepare and serve the dinner. The food was out of this world in quality and quantity! Over 100 guests enjoyed the great meal and special deserts, including a large Veterans cake, said AVAG Director Lee Martin.

The highlight of the evening was hearing about a very special World War II Marine Veteran and longtime resident, Harry White, of The Willows. The nearly 100 year-old veteran passed away in 2017 and the entire event was dedicated to him.

One of the highlights of the event were the opening remarks about Harry made by AVAG Chapter #6 Commander Lewis Edwards. Lewis was his neighbor for many years and they shared many "war stories" throughout the years. Among the special guests in attendance included his children and grandchildren, told stories about this real war hero in the Pacific battles of World War II. Many guests had "sand in their eyes" as tears were wiped away.



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Veteran's Spotlight

Featured Veteran – Frank Paglia

La Verne Veteran remembers WWII service

On January 20, 1943, 13 months after World War II was triggered by the cowardly attack at Pearl Harbor, 19-year-old Frank Paglia followed the footsteps of hundreds of thousands Americans who rallied for our country then: he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps at Ft. Upton, N.Y. The quiet, five-foot, seven-inch brown-eyed New Yorker took his oath of enlistment and promptly reported to Miami Beach for basic training as a machine gunner on the heavy bombers, the B-17s and B-24s and as a flight maintenance engineer. “I was real happy about Miami Beach for basic training, especially in the winter, can you imagine?” Paglia told AVAG News.

He never looked back. From Miami Beach he went to Amarillo, Texas for engine mechanic training, then to Santa Rosa for training as a crew member on a B-17 before going to Las Vegas for further advanced training. Finally, after all of the training and a month-long boat trip to the China-Burma-Indian campaign, landing in Bombay, which is Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra. After a short period of time, they transferred northeast to Calcutta as a member of the 493rd Bombardment Squadron which flew bombing missions in B-24s over enemy targets in between flying aviation fuel and critical war supplies over the deadly Burma hump into China.

There was little time for rest in those days, Paglia said. “We flew fuel to the (famous) Flying Tigers in China and we started bombing runs in Thailand and India in B-24s.” He paused a few minutes, as his mind flashed back to those missions, then he casually acknowledged that deadly the supply and bombing runs were deadly over the Burma Hump – which lies between India and China, where Japanese forces had occupied many cities for more than seven years. Asked about the sheer terror of flying in a slower, heavy bomber while quicker and more agile enemy fighter planes attacked, Paglia simply rolled his eyes upward, looked at the ceiling for a moment and silently nodded yes, without saying a word about those terrifying moments

And, he still remembers one bombing mission deep over enemy: “It was our longest bombing run from India. It was so far away that when we were returning to our home base, we were running out of gas and had to land in Rangoon, Burma to refuel....that one was close, real close,” he said.

After 14 months of service in the war zone, Paglia returned to United States where he formally separated from the Army on Nov. 2, 1945 as a tech sergeant. Never one to sit around, Paglia connected with his cousin in New York City, who had a civilian job working with converted B-24 and B-17 bombers that countries such as Sweden were purchasing. He went to work with his cousin and over time worked as a flight ground crew chief on everything from DC-4s, to 707s, DC-10s, 747s and eventually the Concorde. Eventually he landed in LaGuardia Field, where he met his wife of 44 years, Helen. “She was working in personnel and I was on the lines. We both had first marriages that were mistakes, before we found happiness in each other,” Paglia said.

Helen added, “At first, I thought he was a bit pompous. He was overseeing a union that had over 800 men working in it. Over time, at the end of a long day, we’d both be hungry and go out for a bite to eat, then we started going out. I was 36 and he was 50 when we married, that led to 44 blissful years, well mostly blissful, together,” she added with a quick laugh. Over time Frank earned her respect, “especially after he became a shop steward. I saw him work with people, care for people. Frank had to deal with all sorts of tough issues, personal issues: drug addiction, alcoholism, social issues, even back then.... Both the union and the non-union people liked him because he was fair.” And, over time, Frank won over her heart and they are living happily in La Verne. 🐦



Frank Paglia in his Army Air Corps uniform during WWII.



Helen and Frank Paglia at a recent AVAG meeting in La Verne.



During the June AVAG meeting at the Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates, two Quilts of Valor were presented to community residents

From left, WWII Army Air Corps veteran Frank Paglia and Army veteran Armondo Coronado, stand in front of their quilts.