



# AVAG News

Spring 2019 • Volume 6 Issue 1



AVAG recently added a new chaplain to our ranks. Here, Chaplain Susanna Gonzalez shares a copy of the winter edition of the AVAG News with a woman at a recent event in Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino.

## Bethel Island Chapter Survives High Winds

AVAG North Director Lee Martin said heavy/severe weather curtailed Bethel Island Chapter meetings over the holidays.

After weeks of heavy smoke from the fires in Northern Ca., Bethel Island was subjected to severe winds and heavy rains as reported by AVAG commander Rick Martin

It was unsafe for our AVAG meetings. So how bad was it? The winds were blowing his large bar-b-que down the street along with other tenants awnings and outdoor furniture. You could hardly stand in the wind without being knocked over and trying to walk in it was very difficult. The regularly scheduled meeting was cancelled until weather conditions improve. The AVAG team in Bethel Island is hoping for better weather in February. ✖

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AVAG meeting curtailed by unsafe weather conditions.

### AVAG and Our American Flag

Every AVAG community flies our Nation's flag with pride and especially on special days honoring Veterans and historical events.

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AVAG Palm Vista remembers veteran Al Brewer

### AVAG Teams Up With Non-Profits for the Holidays

AVAG volunteers and directors teamed up with several non-profits that brought food, joy, happiness, gifts and dozens of volunteers in December to AVAG communities.

## AVAG and Our American Flag



Every community with an American Veterans Assistance Group of veterans, service members and family member has our Nation's flag flying "24/Seven."

It is the symbol that is also the most beautiful of any other country's flag. There are certain special days when this flag is flown to honor our Veterans and special historical days. But it can be flown every day and night following a few simple rules:

New Year's Day/Inauguration Day/Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday/ Lincoln's Birthday/ Washington's Birthday/Easter/National Day of Prayer/

Mother's Day/Armed Forces Day/Memorial Day (half-staff until noon)/Flag Day/Father's Day/ Independence Day/Labor Day/Patriots Day/Constitution Day/National POW/MIA Recognition Day/Columbus Day/Veterans Day/Thanksgiving Day/Christmas Day/Election Days/ State and Local Holidays/. Reference: Disabled American Veterans. You can "fly it" at night with proper light on the flag

After the September 11, 2001 attack on our country, displaying our flag has exploded all over our great country with pride! AVAG furnishes flags to its members complete with mounting brackets for their homes. ✖

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# Chaplain's Corner

Photos courtesy Paul Buron and Doreen Matsumoto

## AVAG Bible Studies

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, left, recently met with a few leaders at Santiago Palm Vista Bible study group in Hemet this afternoon. Bob Brown, center, and his wife will be the group leaders at this community.

AVAG volunteer Amanda Breunig is working with youngsters from a new children's Bible study at the Hemet Valley RV Park.

Chaplain Susanna Gonzalez meets AVAG Chairman of the Board and Vietnam veteran Mike Keele at a recent AVAG function in Diamond Bar. This new, dynamic duo worked closely with Diamond Bar Manager Michelle Bautista to head up another successful AVAG event.



The Unleash Your Purpose Women's Ministry recently met at the Santiago Desert View Estates in Barstow as part of the AVAG Bible study groups that have grown over the last year. This is the post-meeting photo opportunity.



AVAG Chaplain Susanna Gonzalez enjoys a light moment with Diamond Bar Estates AVAG legend and afghan producer Dottie Cosgrove, 90.



Following a recent Bible study group meeting in Hemet, AVAG volunteers held a free clothing, and purses event for veterans and park residents.



The AVAG Bible study kicked off the new year at the Santiago Creekside Estates with pizza, prizes and scripture.



Alyssa shows off her colorful handiwork.



## Santiago Sun Canyon Estates

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



The AVAG program recently returned to Santiago Sun Canyon Estates in Palm Springs where AVAG volunteers and community staff hosted a lunch complete with raffle gift cards, distribution of American flags and new AVAG T-shirts to veterans. Gayle also brought clothing, shoes and gifts that were distributed to veterans and their families.

Above, veterans, loved ones and neighbors line up for luncheon food and drinks provided by AVAG.



From left: Martin and Stella Sullivan, both Vietnam Air Force veterans, John Tanner served in the army 1990 to 1998 First Battalion 8th infantry Fort Carson, Colorado, Daniel Burnet Marine Corps served in Afghanistan as a MP, and Jamie Westbrooks a Navy veteran, served in Iraq during her 16 years of service in the Navy and the reserves.



Quilts of Valor were presented to two veterans at Sun Canyon in Palm Springs during their Thanksgiving dinner — an occurrence that AVAG makes possible for veterans in cooperation with the Southern California Chapter of Quilts of Valor, which has presented dozens of homemade quilts to AVAG veterans in last two years.

In the photo at left, Army veteran John Tanner was pleasantly surprised by the presentation. At right, Navy veteran Jamie Westbrook's smile lights up the room upon receiving her beautiful, hand-crafted Quilt of Valor.



Air Force veterans Martin and Stella Sullivan were unable to attend the dinner at Sun Canyon. So, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto took two SoCal Quilts of Valor quilts to them in their home, which added to their holiday cheer. The beautiful quilts took hundreds of hours to craft.

Martin Sullivan, in the photo at left, stands in front of his Quilt of Valor masterpiece, and Stella stands proudly in front of her quilt at right



From left, Doreen Matsumoto with Ming, the winner of Visa gift card raffle, Regional Manager Betty Villanueva and manager Sheree.



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto presents a new AVAG T-shirt to Army veteran John Tanner.



Santiago Sun Canyon Estates veterans, family members and neighbors pose for the traditional AVAG end-of-the-meeting photograph.



### Hemet Valley RV Park (Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



Santa and some of his helpers pose for a closing photo outside the Holiday Trailer.



Some of the gifts presented to children at the Christmas party donated by UMNPA.



Before the party begins, Santa and AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, center, gather for a Christmas prayer.



Santa and volunteers move out to give presents to children/families unable to attend the event at the club house.



Three days before Christmas at the Hemet Valley RV Park in Hemet, lots of kids, were greeted by Travis Riley, dressed up as Santa, and his helper wife Indigo. AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto said this day was a success thanks to volunteers from United Mission for Non-Profits of America who presented Christmas presents to children, many who are gathered below.



This photo captures the happiness of the Christmas spirit at the Christmas party.



Children said thank you for the gifts presented by Santa and his helpers.



These youngsters get ready to celebrate at the AVAG Christmas party.



Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto greets children and family to the AVAG Christmas party.



## Veterans Appreciation Lunch – Hemet Public Library

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)

AVAG recently sponsored a luncheon at the Hemet Library for veterans, family members and area residents. The library staff in Hemet was kind enough to donate the room rental fee, which was a generous effort. 🦋



Santiago CEO and an original Green Beret Richard Simonian, left, stands with inspirational speaker and Marine Corps Vietnam veteran Phil Downer before the luncheon began.



Any AVAG event requires a lot of time, preparation and volunteer staff to make it a success. Two of the key volunteers for the Hemet luncheon were WWII Navy veteran Harold Gomer, age 95, and Denice Rodriguez from Cottonwood Church Outreach Program.



Attendees line up at the chow line.



Attendees listening to Phil Downer's compelling presentation.



Al Brewer and fellow Palm Vista veterans are all smiles at the luncheon.



# He Came, He Saw, He Helped AVAG Veterans



Al Brewer recently received his Quilt of Valor at an AVAG meeting in Hemet. Here he is wrapped in the Quilt of Valor by presenters AVAG long-time volunteers Amanda Breunig, left and Gayle Bohnhoff-Vrabec.

AVAG Palm Vista veteran Al Brewer recently passed away in Hemet. Once AVAG surfaced at Palm Vista he joined the team whether helping Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, community manager Dawn Moore, or AVAG handyman Paul Gomez. Matsumoto described him as a kind, caring veteran who had a passion for helping fellow veterans and mankind, and who loved cigars. “He was so helpful in the community and so many resident's cared about him,” she said when announcing his passing.



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto is surrounded by members of the Patriot Guard Riders who escorted Al Brewer's remains to the Riverside National Cemetery and participated in his memorial service and burial. AVAG salutes the Patriot Guard Riders, led by Patriot Guard Riders' Ride Captain David Grubb, including Maurice Jones, Kriss Ross, June Lovejoy, William Forrey, Kathryn Young Demary, Craig Breskin, Cindy Joswiak, David and Peggy Palomares, Daniel G. Median (Grey Wolf), Dollar Bill, Jerry Cowan, Larry Medcraft, Rudy and RayRod.



Al Brewer, right, with fellow AVAG veteran Bob Brown. They're standing in front of a Shark Squad Motorcycle Attorneys club which has worked closely with AVAG staff and volunteers through various programs in Hemet.



Here Brewer stands with fellow Palm Vista veterans and loved ones. He is standing to the right of AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.





Patriot Guard Riders escorting Brewer's remains into cemetery by Patriot Guard Riders' Ride Captain David Grubb.



A Patriot Guard Rider stands at attention with our flag at Brewer's burial.



Chaplain Matsumoto shared fond memories of Brewer at the funeral service for the Army veteran.



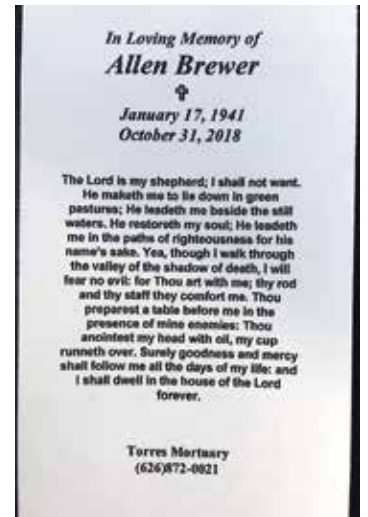
Marine Corps honor guard who participated in Brewer services.



Patriot Guard Riders' Ride Captain David Grubb renders final salute to Brewer during services.



Army honor guards fold ceremonial American flag during service.



The memorial service program from Al Brewer's service.



# AVAG Teams Up With Non-Profits for the Holidays

Photos courtesy Paul Buron

In December AVAG volunteers and directors teamed up with several non-profits that brought food, joy, happiness, gifts and dozens of volunteers who did handyman projects and clean-up/gardening work around manufactured homes owned by veterans. The effort went to four separate communities where the AVAG program is running.

(More photos on back cover).



AVAG volunteer coordinator Amanda Breunig addresses all the Cottonwood volunteers that were bussed into Santiago Creekside Estates, the first AVAG community visited on this project.



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, right, works with AVAG volunteers Vicky and Ruthie organizing deliveries of food and gifts to veterans.



The Community Room is awash with red blessing bags that volunteers and AVAG filled before distributing them to veterans.



AVAG Director Scott McReynolds shops for snacks and other essentials for the volunteers who worked with the project.



Cottonwood volunteers move out into Creekside community to pass out *Love To Others* bags that were filled with food, supplies and gifts.



Navy Veteran Chris Tomczak, from Creekside came out to fill bags for the community.





A week before the huge volunteer project AVAG volunteers went into the four AVAG communities they served in Santiago Creekside Estates, Santiago Creek Orange Estates, Hemet and Barstow.

From left, surrounding the “mayor” of Santiago Creek Orange Estates, Linda Cooperider, are AVAG volunteers: Vicky Jackson, Susanna Gonzalez, Lee Figueroa Duco, Yvette, Isabella and Sasha.



AVAG veterans volunteered this morning to help out during server day from Cottonwood Church. Here, Dennis and his wife from Barstow, load 30 food bags to take back to Barstow veterans and families.



AVAG director John Meyer and Denise Rodrigues from Cottonwood Church Outreach Program escort Korean War veteran Bud Stoddard to the Community Room for lunch.



The third phase of the operation brought blessing bags to Hemet Valley veterans and family members.



AVAG volunteer and Santiago Desert View Estates Manager Maria Lugo, in Barstow, and a volunteer deliver a blessing bag to a grateful Barstow resident



## Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park (Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



Veterans, family members, and veterans widows had a wonderful Christmas party at the refurbished Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park Community Room where they feasted on an Olive Garden dinner, received \$25 gift cards, conducted a gift exchange and played games. This Cowboy set the tone for the evening.



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto has some fun with Larry, seated, and AVAG Director Mike Keele.



A cleverly disguised Korean War veteran Richard Reynoso takes a moment to enjoy the latest copy of the AVAG News.



No Christmas smile was brighter than long-time AVAG member Ellie Finneran.



Before the Christmas party got into full swing, veterans Mike Newminski, left and Dave Rosales pose for the camera with AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and longtime, faithful AVAG volunteer Amanda Breunig.



Even on Christmas we paused to say the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by grace.





Margaret Gurule receives her Christmas gift card from Mike and Doreen.



Roberta Gardner also received a Christmas gift card from Mike and Doreen.



Navy veteran Mike Goens receives his Christmas gift card.

Ten days after AVAG veterans and family members held their Christmas meeting, they teamed up to bring food and toys to more than 100 children and families who lives in the Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park thanks to on-going working relationships with several organizations, including Helping Hands Giving Hope ministry, Amber and Shannon Stewart ILWU 13, Garden Grove Elks Lodge, UMNPA, and the Richard Breunig Foundation.



The party goes paused for the traditional post-meeting team photos.

When the AVAG team began to run low on toys the ILWU 13 responded with a car load of quality toys. AVAG volunteers picked up two truck loads of food from the Garden Grove Elks Lodge. UMNPA brought more toys and books. Then AVAG volunteers and veterans from Sequoia teamed up to make gift and food packages for children.



Don't tell the happy children, but Santa Claus is actually Navy veteran Mike Goens, a handyman in Sequoia and for area veterans.

The weekend before Christmas AVAG volunteers and partners provided toy giveaways to in four AVAG parks.



Some of the AVAG volunteers and veterans.



Garden Grove Elks Lodge Post 1952 members load food that was distributed to veterans and families a few days before Christmas.



At left, Shannon Stewart of Shannon Stewart Ministries and Helping Hands dropped off a truck load of toys in the parking lot at Cottonwood Church that AVAG volunteers delivered to Sequoia.



## Santiago Creekside Estates (Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto)



Three days before Christmas at Creekside Estates in Orange, lots of kids, were greeted by Travis Riley, dressed up as Santa, and his helper Indigo, who just happens to be his wife.

AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto said this day was a success thanks to the to UMNPA donating toys for area children.



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto greets Christmas partiers to open the days events.



The audience listens to Santa's presentation before handing out gifts.



A young girl is happy with her Christmas present.



Another happy young man with Santa.



This girl needs help carrying presents that are bigger than she is.



Santa has everyone's attention.





Santa and his helper take a moment to pose with happy kids.



In addition, Indigo and Santa (Travis) also purchased iced cream for all of the children in attendance at the Christmas party.



During a brief break in the Christmas celebration, Santa and Indigo presented a red, white and blue afghan to DeeAnna, wife of Navy veteran Chris Tomczak. The afghan was crafted by Dottie Cosgrove, a member of the AVAG Diamond Bar veterans group. Dottie is 90.

### Santiago Creek Orange Estates (Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



Santiago Creek Orange Estates and Navy veteran Alan Braverman received hand-crafted quilt recently from SoCal Quilts of Valor during an AVAG veterans luncheon.



Army veteran George Roth stands in front of the SoCal Chapter of Quilts of Valor hand-crafted quilt presented during the veterans luncheon.



George's wife Pat give him a celebratory kiss.

### Santiago Desert View Estates (Photos courtesy Paul Buron)

Unleash Your Purpose Women's Ministry recently celebrated veteran Linda Sweeley's service to our country with the presentation of a SoCal Quilts of Valor at Santiago Desert View Estates community Barstow. Long-time, hard-working AVAG volunteers Mellissa Breunig, left, and her daughter Amanda, hold up the L.A. Dodgers-themed quilt before wrapping it around Linda, prior to AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto reading the official inscription on the baseball-themed quilt.





### Diamond Bar Estates (Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



What is smiling Army veteran Conrad Barrera doing standing in a presentation to wives of veterans? Conrad was standing in for his wife Cindy who was performing grandmom duties.



Part of the group in attendance for the meeting, which included community members who joined our veterans for the night's activities.



Diamond Bar veterans are joined by AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and director John S. Meyer, center, back row. Navy Korean War veteran Sai-On Li, seated, was a first-time attendee and promised to return.



Diamond Bar Estates Community Manager Michele Bautista hands a gift card to Bob Dunbar.

At a recent Diamond Bar Estates AVAG team meeting, the skills and dedication of our members were on full display. Of course, before any meeting, there's good eating, as evidenced here by veterans, led by Korean War veteran Robert Dunbar — he and his wife Corey supplied a large quantity of sodas for the event. There were a lot of gift cards handed out, prizes that had been donated by AVAG volunteer Gayle Bohnhoff-Vraber. The highlight of the night was the surprise presentation of seven hand-crafted afghans to wives of veterans or widows of AVAG veterans who passed away. The afghans were crafted by 90-years-young AVAG member Dottie Cosgrove.

### Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates (Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



The Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates AVAG meeting featured speaker and veteran Chad Shipley who wove details of his personal life and how he obtained veterans benefits for himself first before speaking to veterans groups to ensure that AVAG veterans have all of their benefits. Here Frank and Armando inspect the latest copy of the AVAG News.



AVAG Director John Meyer leads the group in the Pledge of Allegiance



Chad Shipley speaking.



Left to right, WWII Veterans Edward Kruger and Frank Paglia with their wives are all smiles while chatting with AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto



# AVAG Thanksgiving (Photos courtesy Paul Buron)

AVAG volunteers from Helping Hands Giving Hope teamed up with AVAG members to fatten up veterans during Thanksgiving by donating turkeys, dressing, and food to veterans in our Santiago communities where AVAG programs are up and running.

As is often the case with AVAG community projects, there were several critical organizations that helped to collect the food, sort it, pack it and deliver it to veterans in four communities Creekside, Creek Orange Estates, Santiago Desert View Estates in Barstow and Hemet. In addition to Helping Hands Giving Hope, the ILWU and The Richard Breunig Foundation made significant donations both in food items but also with volunteers who spent hours working to give AVAG veterans an enjoyable Thanksgiving.



Helping Hands Giving Hope volunteers on turkey day.



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto helps volunteers pack the food boxes for veterans.



David Breunig unpacks turkey dressing. In the background are boxes of food waiting to be packed and a stack of boxes already packed for distribution.



Among the many volunteers were Gina, left, and Maria Lugo who brought six people to help put boxes together. They took three car loads of food to Desert View Estates in Barstow.



An AVAG volunteer delivers a box of goodies to a happy resident.



Boy Scouts from Troop 104 assisted in the delivery of food to veterans.



Korean War veteran Bud Stoddard and his son say thank you for the gift.





Chris Matson, left, and Chris Lo, Marine Corps Veteran



Members of a Cottonwood Church film crew interviews Air Force veteran Ken Compton to record veterans stories.



Cottonwood Church Outreach volunteer cleans a veteran's gutters preparing for winter storms.



Army veteran Raul Gatewood came out to help our community residents.



Nellie Cox, left thanks the volunteers from Cottonwood Church Outreach volunteers who cleaned her windows.



Air Force veteran Ken Compton gets ready to chomp down on one of the hundreds of hotdogs and burgers he grilled for veterans and the Cottonwood Church Outreach volunteers.

## AVAG News

**Publisher/Editor:**  
John Stryker Meyer

**Contributors:**  
Lee Martin • Mike Keele

**Graphic Design:**  
Debra Holm

**POC:**  
idahoonzero@sbcglobal.net



**Under the aegis of VAHP**  
**VeteransAffordableHousing.org**  
**(888) 923-VETS (8387)**



This is just one clear example of the hard work performed by Cottonwood Church Outreach Program volunteers removing weeds from one veterans yard, and the final result of their hard labor.