



# AVAG News

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The Community Foundation of Orange held its fourth annual Field of Valor event, a patriotic tribute honoring all Veterans and Active Duty Military personnel, in the city of Orange with an opening ceremony on November 10. AVAG, represented by Director John S. Meyer (pictured above left), was the recipient of a Field of Valor Grant for \$3500. Photo courtesy of Aaron Jacoby. To read more about this event see the article on page 6.

## AVAG Launches Two New Programs in Southern California

During the summer and early fall the AVAG team lead by AVAG chaplain Doreen Matsumoto launched two more AVAG programs in Santiago Estates Sunnymead in Moreno Valley and Santiago Desert View Estates in Barstow.

Doreen was quick to point out that launching AVAG programs into two new communities resulted from team work involving Santiago sales staff, key area directors and outreach staff, community directors and AVAG volunteers from three different counties including long-time AVAG supporters David and Mellissa Bruenig of the Richard

Bruenig Foundation who presented blessing baskets to veterans and families. Dozens of creative volunteers from the SoCal Quilts of Valor project under the direction of Barbara Winkler spent untold hours preparing the quilts presented at those events.

Last but certainly not least, the plentiful and delicious food was prepared by Maria Lugo and her sister Gina.

And in their spare time the AVAG team returned to Santiago Sun Canyon Estates in Palm Springs where some of the first AVAG meetings with veterans were held a few years ago. 🦋

(Photos of community events on pages 3, 4 and 5)

## Santiago Creek Orange Estates Celebrates WWII Navy Veteran 95th Birthday



The October AVAG meeting at Santiago Creek Orange Estates celebrated the 95th birthday of WWII Navy veteran Harold Gomer, who rode to the meeting on his power cart escorted by Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts from Creekside Estates' Boy Scout Troop 104.

Community residents and veterans teamed up for a pitch-in dinner and birthday celebration for Minnesota native son who lives with his daughter in this community.

Additionally, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto presented a Certificate of Recognition to Harold from the City of Orange. 🦋

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New AVAG programs launched at Santiago Estates Sunnymead in Moreno Valley and Santiago Desert View Estates in Barstow.

### Santiago Creekside Estates Celebrates WWII Navy Veteran 95th Birthday



## Chaplain's Corner

Photos courtesy Paul Buron and Doreen Matsumoto

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

### Community members celebrate WWII Navy Veteran Harold Gomer's 95th Birthday



WWII Navy veteran Harold Gomer, followed by his daughter and a friend, on his way with his Boy Scout and Cub Scout escort to his birthday party.



Local residents, fellow veterans and loved ones gather to greet Harold to his birthday party.



Sporting his new motorcycle vest made by his daughter, Harold blows out candles on his birthday cake after everyone sang "Happy Birthday" to him.



Harold's official escorts enjoy the evening's food.

Veterans, their loved ones and AVAG volunteers dig into food prepared by community residents.





## Santiago Estates Sunnymead

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



Navy Veteran Arne Pirkanen, a Vietnam veteran, stands in front of his red-white-and-blue quilt produced by Quilts of Valor while Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto reads the quilt dedication message as part of the formal presentation.



The second Quilts of Valor quilt stitched together by the Southern California chapter, was presented to Kimberly Jones Sager, an Air Force veteran who served her country for 33 years.



Pirkanen, Matsumoto and AVAG Volunteer Amanda review the Quilts of Valor official dedication/name tag that was prepared for the Navy veterans.



Kimberly Jones Sager inspects the intricate stitchery and designs on her quilt. The formal Quilts of Valor dedication/name tag is in the lower right-hand corner.



Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, a fellow veteran, Arne Pirkanen and Kimberly Jones Sager after the presentation of the Quilts of Valor.



## Santiago Desert View Estates

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



Eufelia Munoz, the widow of Korean War Army veteran John Munoz, received his Quilt of Valor on his behalf. John recently passed away.



Vietnam War veteran Henry Gordon, a 20-year Marine Corps veteran, stands in front of his quilt. This is one of eight Quilts of Valor presented to veterans at the meeting.



Vietnam veteran John Yoder served as the crew chief of a B-52 Bomber. Yoder served four years in the Air Force including time overseas and at Travis Air Force Base.



Air Force veteran Ronald Biggerstaff stands in front of his Quilt of Valor quilt.



Gina and Maria Lugo wrap up Army veteran Tatia Smith in her heart quilt.



Army veteran John Smith.



Navy veteran Greg Wages served many years aboard the USS Oklahoma City.





Quilt of Honor recipients gathered post meeting for a group photo.



In early November the AVAG team held its inaugural veterans meeting in Barstow at the Santiago Desert View Estates. Not to be forgotten, are the wives of veterans who live in the Barstow community, who were presented afghans hand-crafted by AVAG team member Dottie Cosgrove, 90, who is a proud member of the Diamond Bar AVAG team. From left, are Patty Biggerstaff, Lisa Smith, Santiago Desert View Estates park manager Maria Lugo, and wife Mary Gordon. AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto is in background.



The fourth veteran's wife to receive an afghan hand-crafted by AVAG team member Dottie Cosgrove was Libby Geiger.



Top left, veterans and loved ones line up for the sumptuous lunch prepared by Gina, seen bringing more food to the table on the right.

Top right, veterans and family members take a break from eating to smile for the AVAG cameras.

Below, veterans, loved ones and AVAG volunteers and community volunteers gathered for a group photo in Barstow.



# Honoring Veterans – 1776 Flags Fly at the "Field of Valor"



Four years ago, the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) veterans in the city of Orange and the AVAG Board of Directors were introduced to the first Field of Valor event in Orange sponsored by the Community Foundation of Orange. Since then, AVAG veterans have supported the annual event as the two non-profits have continued to flourish.

The Orange Field of Valor held at Handy Park, is a patriotic tribute honoring all Veterans and Active Duty Military personnel for their dedication and service to our nation, preserving our security, our independence, and our freedom. 1,776 flags were proudly displayed, each dedicated in honor of a friend or family member.

This year, that tradition was continued, with an opening day event at Handy Park on November 10, complete with a huge ceremonial flag hung from a city of Orange hook and ladder fire truck over the Handy Park entrance where the 1,776 flags were neatly lined up complete with the names of donors and to whom each flag was dedicated. Field of Valor volunteers had a historic American flag display of the different flags designed during America's growth from 13 Colonial states to today's flag of 50 stars and 13 red and white stripes.

In addition, Community Foundation of Orange has continued to grow through both an increase in volunteers and donations to the foundation. On Saturday, AVAG was one of the recipients of Field of Valor Grants issued during 2018. In addition to AVAG, grants varying from \$2,500 to \$20,000 were given to: American Legion Post 132, Chapman University Veterans Resource Center, CHOC Foundation, Exchange Club of Tustin, Honor Flight Southland, Honoring Our



Top of page, representatives of organization presenting grant were present at the opening ceremony on November 10 at Handy Park in the city of Orange. Photo courtesy of Aaron Jacoby

Directly above, this is the circular U.S. Flag History display with flags from 1775 through today. Photo courtesy of J. Stryker Meyer

Fallen, Military Children's Charity, Inc., Operation Destination Homebound, Orange Senior Center Veterans Assistance Fund, Patriots and Paws, SCC Veterans Service Office, Support the Enlisted Project (STEP) and the Veterans Legal Institute. The AVAG grant was used to provide a new roof for an AVAG veteran who lives in Orange.

This year, the Field of Valor was open throughout November 17, complete with event every day in support of veterans and military service members. 🦋





In the center of this flag display is the national POW/MIA flag which was designed by the National League of POW/MIA Families. Photo courtesy of J. Stryker Meyer



This is the entrance to Handy Park on Saturday November 10. Photo courtesy of J. Stryker Meyer



The view from inside Handy Park facing the park entrance. After the formal program, spectators, veterans and family members walk among the flags that have been donated to Orange Field of Valor event that covered seven days of activities at Handy Park in Orange. Photo courtesy of J. Stryker Meyer



## Hemet Valley RV Park

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



As part of the project members of the God Speed MC graciously volunteered their time in Hemet despite scorching 100-degree temperatures to help families by grilling up food and donating bottled water, plates, napkins and utensils.

The Prophets MC also attended and provided huge support.

AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto said she and all of the volunteers appreciated motorcycle clubs participation "Put many smiles on the faces of many parents and children. We thank them and Nery Lopez-Mitchell, Kevin Mitchell, Scott Wickenburg, Jessica Cholewinski, Trina Evonne, Larry Jewell, Brenda Rollins, Bobby Vaughn, Kevin Vaughan, Elliott Rivera, Garry Banks, Larry Maddox and Martin Anthony Vasquez."



## Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)

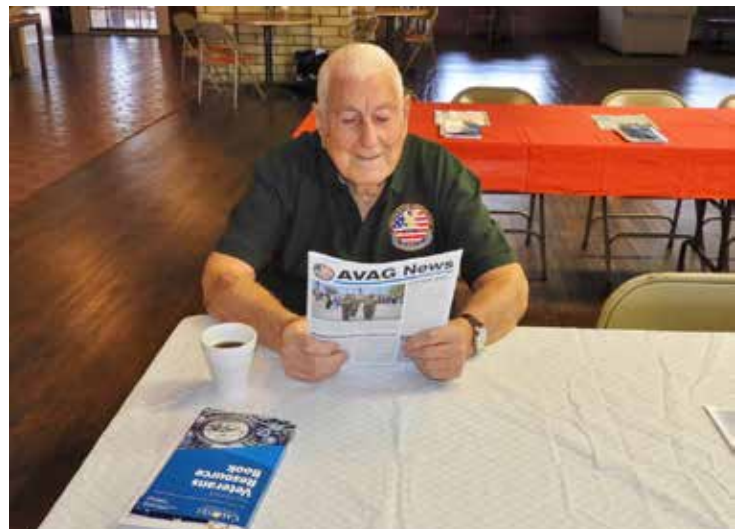


Navy veteran Louie Perez is joyous as he receives his Quilt of Valor during a recent AVAG chapter meeting at the Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates.



At left, guest speaker Frank Guevara, director of the Veterans Affairs Office for San Bernardino County traveled to La Verne to explain to veterans the latest changes/improvements in veterans benefits, both with the VA and with state veteran benefits.

Below, World War II Army Air Corps veteran Frank Paglia takes a moment to read an interesting veterans profile in the latest copy of the AVAG News.



Many of the volunteers gathered for an end-of-the-event photo.



## Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



AVAG Director John S. Meyer speaks to veterans at Sequoia with news updates prior to introducing Steve Bric as the guest speaker



Army veteran and Gold Star Family Member Steve Bric was the guest speaker at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park AVAG meeting held in the renovated Community Clubhouse in the park during the summer. Bric's brother William was a Green Beret killed in action Aug. 23, 1968 at a top secret base in Da Nang.



Navy Korean War Veteran Richard Reynoso was presented a Quilt of Valor at the September team meeting. Vietnam veteran and AVAG Director Mike Keele holds up the Quilt of Valor presented to Navy Korean War Veteran Richard Reynoso. AVAG Director John S. Meyer is holding up the other end.



Left to right, Mike Keele, Reynoso's daughter Roxanne Rios, Richard Reynoso, John S. Meyer and David Rosales



Sequoia veterans, family members, directors and neighbors join for the post-meeting photo.



## **Santiago Orangewood Estates**

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



AVAG recently developed a new partnership with Amber and Shannon Stewart of the Shannon Stewart Ministries and Helping Hands program. The Cottonwood Church church members donated 25 backpacks to AVAG for its back-to-school donation program. From left, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, Amber and Shannon Stewart.



Shannon Stewart holds up two of the 25 back packs they donated to AVAG.



Young students who live in the Santiago Orangewood Estates in San Bernardino proudly show their backpacks that were donated by Ambet and Shannon Stewart a few days before the event supervised by AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.

## **Santiago Hillside Estates** (Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



Top, Vietnam veterans Cowboy Joe Bob Smith recently received a Quilt of Valor during an AVAG meeting in San Bernardino. Smith said he appreciated the beautiful quilt because when he came home from service in Vietnam he felt his service was unappreciated at that time.



## Diamond Bar Estates

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto and Paul Buron)



Diamond Bar Army veteran Don Jennings and his wife Shellie are all smiles after he received his Quilt of Valor at a recent AVAG Team meeting.



Veteran Bill Lensky stands in front of his Quilt of Valor presented during the Diamond Bar AVAG meeting this summer. From left, Doreen Matsumoto - AVAG Chaplain, AVAG, Army veteran Conrad Barrera, and AVAG Director John S. Meyer.



Guest speaker Frank Guevara, director of the Veterans Affairs Office for San Bernardino County traveled to Diamond Bar during the summer to explain to veterans the latest changes/improvements in veterans benefits, both with the VA and with state veteran benefits.



Lensky proudly posed with his Quilt of Valor for the traditional after-meeting AVAG team photo.



## AVAG Groups Meet to Celebrate Thanksgiving and Veterans Day

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)

Because the AVAG team's monthly meetings in Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino are early in the month, veterans and loved one held an early Thanksgiving/Veterans Day celebration with veterans from Sequoia, Santiago Hillside Estates, Santiago Parkside Estates and Glen Aire Mobile Estates a few days before the traditional Veterans Day date of November 11.



The AVAG team gathers for a photo at Mimi's Restaurant.



Korean War Navy veteran Richard Reynosa shares a bright moment with Margaret Gurule and Doreen Matsumoto.



Marine Corps veteran Jim Eger and his wife Linda are all smiles getting ready for the early holiday celebration with AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, who borrowed Jim's Marine Corps cap for a few minutes.



Linda Eger shares recipes with fellow AVAG members at the Mimi's Restaurant prior to dinner being served.

### A Little Friendly Competition



Sometimes the competition during game night at AVAG veterans meetings can become intense, as witnessed here in an arm-wrestling contest between AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and AVAG Director and Vietnam Veteran Mike Keele. Photo courtesy of J. Stryker Meyer



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