



AVAG News

Spring 2020 • Volume 7 Issue 1

AVAG Forms New Partnerships



Volunteers at Casitas La Verne gather for a group photo with John Gurwitzler and crew.



John Gurwitzler, Doubletree by Hilton Director of Catering, greets veterans.

AVAG Partners with Doubletree by Hilton Claremont

Special thanks to the Doubletree by Hilton in Claremont for partnering with AVAG to help the community of Casitas La Verne. John Gurwitzler, Director of Catering, came out in full force with volunteers to work on our AVAG veteran's and seniors' homes November 5, 2019. They also put on a beautiful catered lunch for the community in honor of Veterans Day.

They completed home improvement projects for Casitas La Verne included re-carpeting decks, stair repair and replacement, and general yard clean up. Stairs were repaired for Air Force veteran David Matter, who had just come home from the hospital. World War II Army Air Corps veteran, Frank and Helen Paglia's porch was repaired. They did yard cleanup for senior Madelyn Flum's yard.

John became acquainted with AVAG when he met Scott McReynolds at an AVAG luncheon held at the Doubletree earlier in 2019.

We asked John if he had any veterans in his family. He shared that his step-father and both of his uncles are veterans, and his brother is currently a Colonel in the Marine Corps.

When asked why he and his staff wanted to take on this project, he said they wanted to help veterans because they are a *grossly* under served group. "The sacrifices they made so we could have the life we live should be honored, celebrated and supported in whatever way we can."

Photos of AVAG in action at Casitas La Verne can be seen on page 2 of this issue. ✈

IN THIS ISSUE

New AVAG Partners

Doubletree by Hilton, Helping Hands Giving Hope, Children Giving Gifts, and the Richard Breunig Foundation

AVAG Partners with Cottonwood Church for Serve Day

AVAG partnered with Cottonwood Church for Serve Day at two Santiago communities.

AVAG Partnerships Change Lives

Three Hemet Valley RV Park residents receive life-changing assistance from AVAG partners.

The Veterans that Serve in The Richard Breunig Foundation

The stories of five veterans that serve in the foundation to provide assistance and support to fellow veterans.

Santiago Community Managers Welcome AVAG

La-Z-Boy Recliners for Our Veterans

Twelve veterans receive the gift of brand new recliners.

AVAG Outreach Coordinator Assists Veterans

Outreach Coordinator Gayle Vrabec helps open doors for veterans to receive much needed benefits and assistance.

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram



@AmericanVeteransAssistanceGroup



@socal.avag

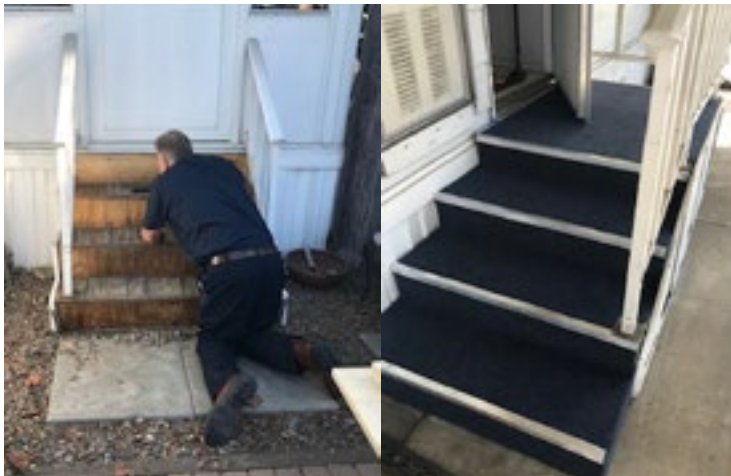
AVAG Partners with Doubletree by Hilton to Help Veterans at Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates



AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and John Gurwitzler, Doubletree by Hilton Director of Catering



Volunteers worked on a variety of home improvement projects, including yard clean-up.



Left, a volunteer works on a stair repair. Right a completed stair repair. (Photo courtesy John Gurwitzler)



Left, Air Force veteran David Matter, who appreciated the repairs made to his stairs, with a volunteer. (Photo courtesy John Gurwitzler)

AVAG News

Editor:

Vicky Jackson

Contributors:

Doreen Matsumoto • Vicky Jackson

Graphic Design:

Debra Holm/Dinwiddie Holm Graphics

POC:

vjj1223@yahoo.com



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



WWII veteran Frank Paglia and his wife Helen on their newly repaired porch.

AVAG Partners with Helping Hands Giving Hope

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto)

Shannon and Amber Stewart are the founders of Helping Hands Giving Hope (HHGH). They began their foundation in 2014; their goal is to put the love of God in work clothes and impact lives. HHGH is a faith-based outreach organization that provides a four-square approach to service. HHGH provides homeless care, mentorship, financial literacy education and elements of civic awareness.

The day before Thanksgiving, HHGH with their volunteers and AVAG volunteers filled boxes with Thanksgiving dinners. Everything took place in the parking lot of Grateful Hearts in Los Alamitos. Grateful Hearts is a non-profit community resource center for those in need, serving the local community, surrounding communities, and impoverished areas abroad. ILWU Local 13 donated over 200 turkeys and boxes of food!

Amber recalls Helping Hands Giving Hope was connected to AVAG through Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto. "I met her in Long Beach at Women in Networking. I feel that AVAG is doing great things in

communities all around and I am happy to be in partnership with them. This is the second year we have provided Thanksgiving dinners through AVAG for the veterans, seniors, and low-income families they work with."

All the dinners were delivered to so many of our park families. The parks that received dinners were Glen Aire Mobile Estates and Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino, Diamond Bar Estates, Santiago Creek Orange Estates, Santiago Estates Pedley and Santiago Desert View Estates in Barstow.

Maria Harrison, the manager from Santiago Desert View Barstow, drives all the way to Los Alamitos to bring a little joy to her community. She knows it is not much but she loves to see their faces light up with smiles. She has a team of ladies that have taught her that giving is always better than receiving. She is very thankful to be a part of something so amazing as this. 🦋



Shannon and Amber Stewart and family



Thanksgiving dinners ready for delivery.



Maria Harrison and family

AVAG Partners with Children Giving Gifts

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto)

Chaplain Doreen was introduced to Janeen Reiser by Liz Gecko at the Long Beach VA. They were looking for kids to pass out gifts to 200 veterans that were hospitalized at the VA. Doreen rounded up some of her bible study kids from Creekside Estates Mobile Home Park in Orange and kids from Cottonwood Church to help out. Doreen asked if they would consider going to two mobile home parks

(Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino and Santiago Creekside Estates in Orange) to give the kids in these low-income communities an opportunity to shop for Christmas gifts for their parents or guardians.

Children Giving Gifts was founded by Janeen Reiser in 2008. Children Giving Gifts is structured on the principle that it is essential for disadvantaged children to experience the tremendous joy and fulfillment that comes from giving to others. Our goal is to plant the seed for future acts of kindness during their very important developmental years. We provide disadvantaged children, ages 5-12 years old, the opportunity to 'shop' and give a beautiful new gift... *free of charge.* 🙌



Fred and Janeen Reiser with happy shoppers



Janeen Reiser, far left, and her volunteers



A Christmas shop was set up at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park for the kids to shop for their parents and families on November 23, 2019. We had a U-Haul filled with gifts; items included earrings, bracelets, watches, travel mugs, hats, purses, decorative flowers, decorative boxes, and more goodies. Not only did we invite the resident's children from Sequoia but children came from other Santiago Parks — Orangewood, Hillside, Glen Air, and Rancho Meridian. Thank you to all our volunteers.



On December 14, 2019, the Christmas shop was set up at Santiago Creekside Estates in Orange. Over 100 children attended to shop for their families where they colored and wrote thank you letters before going in to shop. The families received bread donated by Los Alamitos Recreation Center and hot chocolate was provided to all the kids.

Pictured at left, AVAG volunteer Roy Gonzales reads to the children while they wait to shop.

Toy Giveaway at Multiple Parks

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)



It started Thanksgiving morning at 8:30 AM when AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto went shopping at Walgreens with the \$1,000 donation from Cloris Lam, Esq. from the Much Is Given Foundation.



The bible study groups from Diamond Bar and Creek Orange donated toys to the kids at Creekside Estates.



Ironworkers Local 433 donated four boxes of toys from their toy run for the Hillside community — more blessings from Colin Hunt, aka Spike and his guys with toys from their toy run. They also donated two bikes for two veterans' children. Marine Veteran Brian and Rocio Alvarado with their daughter, Rhianna, at left, and right, Navy veteran Chris Tomczak and son Logan, were the happy recipients of the bikes.



AVAG wants to send a special thank you to Navy Veteran Michael Goens, pictured above, from San Bernardino who came out and played Santa at all the communities where toys were passed out.

We were able to bless children in multiple areas of San Bernardino, Diamond Bar, Orange, and Hemet.

We were even able to adopt quite a few families that just needed a little extra help this year. Thank you to everyone who has been volunteering to set up, tear down, and pass out toys.



AVAG Partners with Cottonwood Church for Serve Day

On December 7, American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) partnered with Cottonwood Church for Serve Day at two Santiago communities. How did we put two amazing events on at the same time? We had an awesome staff and volunteers, Cottonwood College (CC) students, and the wonderful volunteers from Cottonwood Church. Over 300 meal bags were supplied by Cottonwood Church. It was a successful day due to team work at both parks, Creek Orange and Creekside Estates.

At Creek Orange, the CC students passed out Christmas meal bags and additional bags with detergent and cleaning supplies. We had another big group of volunteers that came out to work on 17 homes. They cut trees, cleaned yards, did small repairs, and household duties. Thank you to Doug Darrah with Douglas Masonry for providing the dump truck to remove the debris from these homes. The veterans and seniors in the park were so blessed by it; but we were even more blessed.

Thank you to all the volunteers. We were also able to send meal bags to low-income families in Riverside and San Bernardino communities. Thank you, Veronica Padilla (San Bernardino) and Claudette Hernandez (Riverside) for coming out to pick up the meal bags.

At Creekside Estates, we had Neighborhood Family Day led by Chaplain Susana Gonzalez and Vicky Jackson. We were able to give the community Christmas meal bags filled with ham, pie, Hawaiian bread, and all the fixings which were passed out by the CC students and a busload of volunteers from Cottonwood church. Activity stations were set up for the residents at the clubhouse; hot chocolate and cookie station, coloring contest, games, crafts, letters to Santa, and free giveaways. It was a success because of everyone who came to help. Special thank you to the CC students who manned the stations and worked with the children.

Denise Rodriguez, Cottonwood Church Outreach Events Coordinator, recalled how it all began with AVAG and Cottonwood Church. One of AVAG's first collaborations with Cottonwood Church took place in May 2018. AVAG volunteers and Cottonwood Church volunteers came together to perform yard work and minor repairs in the homes of two veterans near Cottonwood Church for the church's annual Serve Day event. Later that year, two busloads of Cottonwood volunteers delivered Christmas meal bags at Creek Orange and Creekside Estates. In July 2019, AVAG and Cottonwood Church volunteers performed yard work and minor repairs in the homes of Creek Orange residents. The partnership between AVAG and Cottonwood Church has developed significantly in a rather short period of time—we look forward to future collaborations as we come together to bless veterans, seniors, and families! 🙌



Cottonwood Church volunteers working on residents' homes, yards, and passing out meal bags at Santiago Creek Orange Estates. (Photos by Paul Buron)



Doug Darrah of Douglas Masonry, to the right of Doreen, provided dump trucks to assist in the clean up during Serve Day at Creek Orange. (Photo by Paul Buron)



Cottonwood College Students volunteered to help at Serve Day events at both Santiago communities in Orange, Creek Orange and Creekside Estates. (Photo by DeeAnna Tomczak)



Creekside Estates coloring contest winners with Erica Lewis, Vicky Jackson and Chaplain Susana Gonzalez. (Photo by DeeAnna Tomczak)



The craft table at Creekside Estates was popular with kids of all ages. (Photo by DeeAnna Tomczak)



Navy Veteran Max Lawrence playing harmonica (Photo by DeeAnna Tomczak)



Volunteers passing out Christmas meal bags. (Photo by DeeAnna Tomczak)



Cottonwood Church volunteers and Santiago Creekside Estates residents during the Neighborhood Family Day. (Photo by DeeAnna Tomczak)

AVAG Partners With The Richard Breunig Foundation

Photos courtesy Paul Buron

As related to AVAG by Melissa Breunig, “The Richard Breunig Foundation was started in 2016 in honor of Richard Breunig, my husband’s late father who was a 3-time war veteran serving at the end of WWII, the Korean Conflict, and the Vietnam War. He grew up homeless before being placed in an orphanage in Brooklyn, New York. In dedication to his life, we created this non-profit to assist the homeless, veterans, foster-care children and low-income families in need.”

Melissa recalls how they became involved with AVAG. “I was introduced to Chaplain Doreen by past Commander Carl Millock at the American Legion Post 295 in Cypress, CA during a fundraiser event. We exchanged phone numbers and about a week later she called to ask how we could partner to help local veterans. I shared with her what we do. We help with toiletries and at that time we were looking at ways we could assist more veterans in need with necessities. Immediately Chaplain Doreen gave us a mission to hand out toiletry baskets to vet-

erans and families in need in San Bernardino. It’s been an amazing partnership ever since.

“AVAG has not only helped our nonprofit reach and assist more people; we absolutely love our partnership and look forward to the many amazing opportunities we have been given through AVAG. All the work AVAG puts into its community has driven us to do more and with a wonderful team to partner with has made this journey even better than we ever expected.”

Our latest outreach with The Richard Breunig Foundation was at the Hemet Valley RV Park on December 22, 2019. Melissa and David Breunig made a difference and impacted the lives of these children and parents. Thank you to the veterans from the Highway Riders Motorcycle Club. Tasha Rodriguez, the wonderful face painter and balloon artist who donated her amazing talent, John and Jennifer Berner who donated brand new Vans to the kids, David who cooked up hot dogs and gave out chips, water, and juice, and to Lana Martinez who provided awesome cake



Melissa and David Breunig

pops and desserts. Kids won bicycles and there was a grand prize winner of a TV and game station. Every child went home with toys and goodie bags.

This park has touched Melissa and David’s heart since AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto asked them to do an outreach in this community. AVAG Chaplain Doreen is working with Navy Veteran Paul Gomez and managers, Angie and Danny Gaona to help homeless families get off the street. ♡



The Breunigs with Tasha Rodriguez, face painter and balloon artist.



David Breunig serving up hot dogs.



The Grand Prize winner took home a new television and game station.



The thrilled winner of a new bicycle.



John and Jennifer Berner generously donated new Vans shoes to the children.



A happy painted face and new Vans sneakers.



The Hemet Valley RV Park volunteers gathered to pose for a photo.

The Veterans that Serve in The Richard Breunig Foundation

Photos courtesy Paul Buron



David Breunig

At the age of 59, David has surely seen his share of life's challenges. Serving as an E5 Sargent in the United States Army from 1986 to 1991, his unit was responsible for removing Manuel Noriega from power in Panama. And when war broke out in the Middle East in '91, he was put on high alert as part of the Quick Reaction Force, a team ready to head to war at any

moment. Yet, through trials God shows His grace.

But before enlisting, David also experienced challenges closer to home. He got involved with biker gangs; he went through a bad divorce, was hooked on drugs, and lost the will to succeed. He hit a low point and found himself living in a motel, crying and distraught, he knew he wasn't doing a good job of running his own life so he decided to let Uncle Sam run it for him. It was through God's grace he overcame these trials. At the age of 26, he joined the Army, and it was there

that he found the discipline he needed. "The Army gave me the tools I needed to be able to cope with different things that happen in life, the discipline and training that helps me to this day."

One of his favorite saying is, "It's mind over matter, if you don't mind it, it doesn't matter."

Still, it was clear to him that God was showing grace and mercy in his life over the years. He suffered a massive heart attack, and coded 4 times, "I knew if God brought me back, then I was going to support my wife doing her good work of helping others. I was always a charitable person, a spiritual person, but not religious. And whenever I asked God for help, He always gave me a path out. When I met Melissa, she helped me out of some bad situations. She was a believer and she preached Jesus through the way she lived and not just her words. She was beautiful and made me want to be a better man."

Together, they formed a nonprofit to help underprivileged children, the homeless, and veterans.

David has been reading the Bible and going to Bible study and was recently baptized. "I was shown the path to God and I was smart enough to take it!"



John Berner

John Berner served in the Coast Guard for 10 ½ years achieving the rank of MK2. He was based out of San Pedro, CA and Norfolk, VA. He and his wife, Jennifer, wanted to do something to give back in 2019. Mikki Waldbaum got them involved with The Richard Breunig Foundation. Jennifer, who works for Vans Shoes was responsible for the Vans shoe donation to the children living at the Hemet RV Park. John is involved with Heroes on the Water's San Diego Chapter. Their mission is to help warriors relax, rehabilitate and reintegrate through kayak fishing and the outdoors.



Mikki and Brian Waldbaum

Mikki and Brian Waldbaum both Sergeants in the Marine Corps; were five years active duty. They met while serving in the Air Wing as fighter jet mechanics in Cherry Point, NC. Now married with two children, they are members of the Highway Riders Motorcycle Club, and are supporting the Richard Breunig Foundation. Mikki is an

operating room nurse at Hoag Hospital and Brian is a mechanical engineer at TMT.



Duane McKay

Duane McKay served in the Army for two years in Mainz, Germany achieving the rank of E2. Duane retired from the LA Unified School District after 29 years in Storage Procurement. He is a member of the Highway Riders Motorcycle Club (MC) and partnered with The Richard Breunig Foundation to bring awareness of what the Highway Riders MC does to assist veterans and low-income commu-

nities. He loves to be involved in his own neighborhood and surrounding communities. Duane is a role-model to his ten grandchildren; showing them how to give back and be a blessing to others.

AVAG Partnerships Change Lives

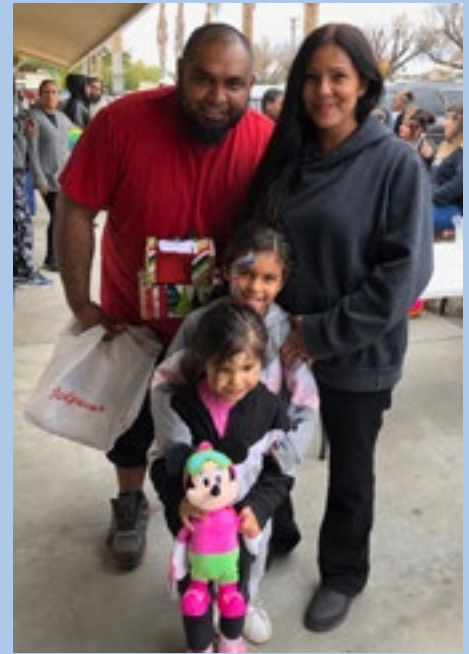
Photos courtesy Paul Buron



Dolores Moya



Regine Bedell



Margarita and Lorenzo Reyes

Dolores Moya has lived in the Hemet Valley RV Park for just a few months with her three grandchildren. She was overwhelmed with emotion at what AVAG and The Richard Breunig Foundation were doing for the community. She had never experienced this before; her grandchildren were going to have gifts for Christmas. Prior to moving in to Hemet Valley RV Park, she was living in a hotel for a month paid through Welfare and the Housing Authority. She said that God sent a young lady to her, Angie Gaona, who took her section 8 voucher and got her into the Hemet Valley RV Park.

Regine Bedell, originally from New Jersey, was homeless and living in her car with her daughter Serenity when she came to Hemet Valley RV park 15 months ago. They were introduced to AVAG Navy Veteran Paul Gomez through a Hemet case worker for Section 8 housing. Paul reached out to Chaplain Doreen asking if there were resources to help with a downpayment to get them off the streets. She reached out to the Orange Christian Business Ministry (OCBM) to

ask them to help with downpayment assistance. Chaplain Doreen also works with the OCBM. Their board of directors agreed to assist the women that were homeless with downpayment assistance.

Regine also said that the toy and shoe giveaway is a huge blessing to her, her daughter, and the community. The majority of these kids would not have this opportunity if not for organizations like these. She loves participating in these events and would like more events held at the park because it's a way for the residents to socialize and get to know each other.

Margarita and Lorenzo Reyes have lived at the Hemet RV Park since September 2018. Before living here, they had financial problems; lost everything and had to start over from scratch. They lived with family for a while but it didn't work out. Margarita became pregnant with Emma while they both were working in a factory. For three months they slept in a U-Haul in a Denny's Restaurant parking lot. Then they both lost their jobs and found themselves homeless. They went to the county office out of desperation for assistance but were turned

away. They found out about the Housing Authority and submitted an application for the Hemet Valley RV Park. In the meantime, while they were waiting, living in a hotel for six weeks, Lorenzo was working. But the commute was too long – having to ride a bus, he lost that job too. The wait to get into a home was taking so long that AVAG Chaplain Doreen reached out to the OCBM for help. OCBM gave them downpayment assistance so they could move in — they received the keys to their home a week later. Two weeks after moving in, they both got jobs. Lorenzo works for AVM (an Amazon company); he is now a supervisor. Margarita started working at Panera Bread, eventually becoming a Manager. They were able to buy a car; used but new to them. They are grateful for their life and are blessed to have a home with their two beautiful daughters.

Santiago Communities owner, Veteran Richard Simonian, founder of AVAG, also saw the need to help these families. With all of our efforts and partnerships we were able to house many families that were homeless. 🦋

Santiago Community Managers Welcome AVAG

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto)



Yesenia Macias

Community Manager
Sequoia Plaza Mobile
Home Park

How did you start your relationship with AVAG?

I met with Lee Martin in 2014. He told me about the AVAG program and how it would help veterans. I was very interested in helping out.

What projects have you done with AVAG?

Events, mostly community involved. I make sure to let the community know of any AVAG events, so they can get involved.

Do you have any veterans in your family?

Yes, my uncle. Angel Y. Banuelos, Staff Sergeant, US Army.

Why do you want to help veterans' families?

They need to know they are not forgotten. Their loved ones fought for something and we should show our appreciation.

Can you tell me about yourself?

I'm 38. I'm in a relationship going on seven years. I have three kids. My daughter Aaliyah is a full time college student, my son Nicholas is a junior in high school and my son Christian is a 3rd grader. I moved to San Bernardino from Coachella, CA about six and a half years ago. I'm the oldest of five. I've been with Santiago going on six years in February and I love my job.

Now that you've been involved with AVAG, helping veterans and families in low income areas, how do you feel about AVAG now?

I think it's a great organization, bringing veterans and their families together, reminding them their service didn't go unnoticed.

Would you help them again?

Absolutely.



Claudette Hernandez

Community Manager
Santiago Estates Pedley

How did you start your relationship with AVAG?

Our amazing Chaplain Doreen reached out to me and made me feel so welcome. I remember talking to her about some of my dreams as well as a bit of myself to her — she has an amazing listening ear.

What projects have you done with AVAG?

We have worked together in recognizing our amazing veteran James, we celebrated two holidays with our residents, providing them with holiday meals, and help be an elf (heh,heh).

Do you have any veterans in your family?

Yes, I do my two brothers, my grandpa, my sons' dad, niece and nephew. I also served for Security Forces for Department of Defense.

Why do you want to help veterans' families?

I care for our veterans; I have the upmost respect for our Military.

Can you tell me about yourself?

My goal is to bring some sunshine and butterflies to the world, spread love and peace to all, and hope to those who have lost their hope. I'm a devoted mother of two boys and devoted wife to the most amazing husband in the world.

Now that you've been involved with AVAG, helping veterans and families in low income areas, how do you feel about AVAG now?

I saw the amazing work they are doing for our veterans and our residents. I wanted to be part of this amazing project.

Would you help them again?

I love AVAG! I was a bit down to do the move from Northern California but now having AVAG, I feel the love and the support. God Bless everyone for all your hard work and thank you for your support.



Donna Bon

Community Manager
Santiago Palm Vista

(pictured above to the left of Doreen in the gray sweater)

How did you start your relationship with AVAG?

I started my relationship with AVAG when I became the community manager at Santiago Palm Vista and through Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.

What projects have you done with AVAG?

AVAG luncheons and meetings.

Do you have any veterans in your family?

Yes, I had an uncle, nephew, and cousin in the service.

Why do you want to help veterans' families?

I want to help veterans and their families to give back to the men and women who have made sacrifices and fought for our country and our freedom.

Can you tell me about yourself?

I am a single mother of two wonderful daughters, I have two grandsons, and cannot wait to welcome my new granddaughter in May of this year. I have been managing mobile home communities for almost ten years and I love my work. The challenge of meeting corporate demands and helping residents sometimes means just listening to them.

Now that you've been involved with AVAG, helping veterans and families in low income areas, how do you feel about AVAG now?

I think this is a wonderful organization that does great work and I am very thankful I can be a part of it. I look forward to helping veterans and their families any way I can in the future.

Would you help them again?

Yes, I would love to help them again.

***Maria Lugo Harrison***

Community Manager
Santiago Desert View
Barstow

How did you start your relationship with AVAG?

I found out about AVAG through Chaplain Doreen back in November 2018 when I was introduced to her at a corporate meeting. Best day of my life; this day changed my life forever.

What projects have you done with AVAG?

I am involved with Santiago Desert View Bible Study and I volunteer for AVAG events like AVAG Veterans Appreciation Luncheons. I am also involved with Women in Networking (WIN) where we encourage and uplift women to never give up; God's plans are much greater than we can imagine. We also volunteer to distribute baskets of food to my community. I also have helped with the passing out of Quilts of Valor to our veterans here in the Barstow community.

Do you have any veterans in your family?

I have an active-duty daughter, Unique Pedregon, who is stationed in Hawaii for the Air Force.

Why do you want to help veterans' families?

I feel we have so many veterans on the streets and in need of help

that it breaks my heart to see men and women who have given their lives to serve this country are living on the streets.

Can you tell me about yourself?

My name is Maria Lugo Harrison. I am a wife and mother of five beautiful children. I work for Santiago Desert View as the Community Manager. I have been truly blessed with this job and opportunity to be able to help and give back to my community.

Now that you've been involved with AVAG, helping veterans and families in low income areas, how do you feel about AVAG now?

I love AVAG and I will volunteer as long as they will have me. I love being part of something so amazing like what AVAG is doing.

Would you help them again?

Yes, I have met so many great people in this group that care so much for our veterans that have inspired me to do big things.

***Marissa McCaffrey***

Community Manager
Santiago Hillside Estates

How did you start your relationship with AVAG?

Met with Chaplain Doreen one day after I heard of her and the amazing work she does for the communities and started to help her in whatever I could.

What projects have you done with AVAG?

Easter, Backpack Giveaway, Toy Giveaway, Ice

Cream Social event, helping veterans fix their homes or give them any appliances or furniture they might need.

Do you have any veterans in your family?

My ex-husband is a veteran. He served in the US Marine Corps.

Why do you want to help veterans' families?

Because it brings joy to my heart whenever we can put smiles on these families faces.

Can you tell me about yourself?

I'm the eldest from a total of five siblings. I'm a wife, and mother of two children Alyssa, 21, and Jonathan, 17. I was born and raised in Long Beach CA. and took to the Inland Empire in 2004 and have been here since.

How did you get involved with AVAG?

Passing out flyers to our events; contacting veterans or personally talking to get them to come to events organized by AVAG.

Now that you've been involved with AVAG, helping veterans and families in low income areas, how do you feel about AVAG now?

I feel very blessed, because I feel a part of an amazing organization who's helping veterans who may not be so fortunate, get the help they so desperately deserve and need. 🦋

La-Z-Boy Recliners for Our Veterans

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron)

We have some great relationships with many organizations and people that just want to get involved to help veterans. If someone has something, whether it's new or used, they call us, and we might be able to find a home for it. Small or big items; we know there's someone that can use it. It's always exciting when we get brand new items and are able to bless our veterans with something they probably would not have bought for themselves.

Vietnam veteran Dennis Geiger from Barstow and park resident Michael Wise met Chaplain Doreen at Great American Logistics and Distributing, Inc. to pick-up brand-new La-Z-Boy recliners.



We must give a special thank you to Sophia, pictured at left, at Great American Logistics for all her help setting up the pick-ups for the chairs that were donated to our AVAG Veterans.

Chaplain Doreen said, "Every time I show up with a veteran to pick up the chairs, they are so friendly and the workers right away go get the forklift to pick up the chair and load it in the truck of the veteran. They shake their hand and tell them thank you for their service. Sometimes we get some good photos with the workers too."

AVAG has been able to supply veterans with comfortable, cozy, brand new La-Z-Boy recliners in Diamond Bar, Orange, San Bernardino, and Barstow.

Recipients:

Dennis Geiger – Navy Vietnam Veteran

Willie Smith – Army Veteran

David Rozales – Marine Corps Veteran

Bob Dunbar – Marine Corps Korean War Veteran

JP Clelland – Marine Corps Veteran

David Vierra – Marine Corps Veteran

Kevin Mitchell – Marine Corps Veteran

Glen Williamson – Marine Corps Veteran

Chris Tomzack – Navy Veteran

Alan Braverman – Navy Veteran

Timothy Gadaneli – Marine Corps Purple Heart Veteran

James Ballard – Vietnam Air Force Veteran



Michael Wise, Doreen Matsumoto, and Navy Veteran Dennis Geiger



Above, Navy Veteran Alan Braverman with volunteers picking up a recliner.

At left, Michael Wise, Dennis Geiger and another volunteer worker working together to load a recliner at Great American Logistics and Distributing.



As you can see in the photos below the veterans were very happy to receive such a wonderful gift.



Chris Tomzack, Navy Veteran



Dennis Geiger, Navy Vietnam Veteran



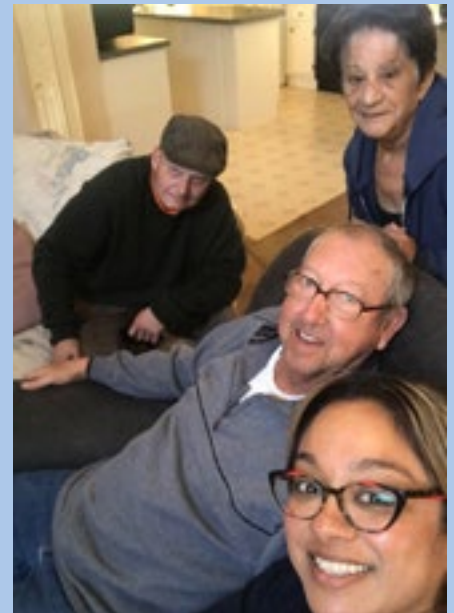
Timothy Gadeneli, Marine Corps Purple Heart Veteran



JP Clelland, Marine Corps Veteran



Willie Smith, Army Veteran



James Ballard, Vietnam Air Force Veteran



Glen Williamson, Marine Corps Veteran



David Rozales, Marine Corps Veteran



Kevin Mitchell, Marine Corps Veteran



**AVAG Outreach Coordinator
Gayle Vrabec**

AVAG Outreach Coordinator Assists Veterans

Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto

Chaplain Doreen met Gayle Vrabec years ago through her mom, Margaret, a WWII Veteran. Gayle and Margaret would come to some of our fundraisers and everyone treated her mother like a queen. "I noticed how Gayle honored her mom and when I started working with AVAG I dreamt of implementing a program to help our veterans who were having difficulty getting their benefits from the

VA. They needed help to get through the paperwork. Many people said it wasn't that difficult, but no one really stepped up to the plate to help.

"Gayle volunteered with us and one day she decided to join AVAG permanently in the position of Outreach Coordinator. Initially her

duties were focused on helping with the community's needs by collecting and distributing donated items like clothing and furniture to veterans and their families.

"However, still on my heart were the veterans, especially the older veterans, that got frustrated with paperwork. Some issues were due to poor vision, phone wait times, or not understanding technology. Gayle made my dream come true by accepting that position and she's blessed AVAG and the veterans in the communities. She treats them like her WWII mother, with nothing but respect and dignity. My hat's off to you, Gayle, for all you do for our veterans. Thank you for joining our team."

Gayle has helped veterans who reside in the Santiago communities of Creekside, Creek Orange, Hemet, Diamond Bar, and other communities. Many veterans from these communities were unaware of the resources such as medical benefits or compensation for disabilities.

Here are a few examples of veterans she has assisted and their stories:



Bob Dunbar

Korean War Veteran, Bob Dunbar (Marine/Navy) resides in the Diamond Bar community. He had never filed for his VA benefits. Gayle encouraged Bob to agree to start receiving medical benefits by taking him to the VA to file for them. She walked him through the

process and he was approved. She took him to his medical appointments to get him started. He has received hearing aids which he desperately needed and is on his way to receiving much more.



Daniel Reynosa

Veteran Daniel Reynosa resides in the Parkside Estates Rialto community. Daniel contacted AVAG frustrated with legal issues. He had recently been told that the gas company could not work on his mobile home due to a lien on it. Gayle, after doing research and speaking with

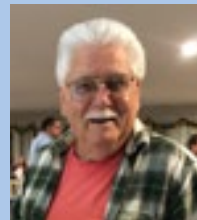
Daniel, made calls to some of her connections. Gayle was able to walk Daniel through the process of assisting him in getting the lien removed. Daniel was grateful and relieved; he can now move forward.



Daniel Kellogg

Army Veteran, Daniel Kellogg, resides in the Diamond Bar community. Daniel was in the hospital, not the VA, when AVAG became aware that he needed VA services due to him. After he came home from the hospital he received a \$50,000 hospital bill. Daniel agreed

to go with Gayle to the VA to look into his medical benefits. He also was approved for services at little or no cost. Gayle also took him to his medical appointments. Now receiving his medical benefits, Gayle then investigated into finding a way to help him with that hospital bill. She found out that because he is a veteran, he can fill out papers and submit them to the VA. This resulted in the VA paying off his debt. Daniel is extremely happy and relieved.



James Adams

Navy Veteran James Adams resides in the Creek Orange community. At one of the many AVAG events that James attended he heard Ron Garcia speak about VA benefits. Jim was very interested in what Ron had said. He agreed to have Gayle assist him with filing the proper documents and

walking him through the arduous process to see if he would qualify for his service-connected disabilities. Gayle has since discovered that he may qualify for three separate documented service-connected disabilities. Jim has been receiving VA medical benefits for many years. Even though he had a relationship with the VA, he had no idea about filing for these particular benefits. Gayle has been able to cut through the red tape by using her resources to help Jim.



Charles Lattimore

Marine Veteran Charles Lattimore resides in the Creekside Estates community. Stressed over the medical costs he was incurring, he was referred to Gayle by Chaplain Doreen. Charles was afraid he would no longer be able to meet his financial responsibilities. He had never applied for his VA medical benefits or disability compensation. He didn't think he would qualify. Agreeing to go with Gayle just to see what the VA would say, Gayle walked him through the process at the VA and he was approved. Due to his income, he was approved for medical benefits at no cost to him. The next step is to take Charles to file for his service-connected disability.

These are just a few stories of the veterans Gayle has assisted to obtain much-needed and well-deserved veteran benefits. Thank you Gayle for your dedication and persistence, and for sharing your knowledge to help our veterans.