



AVAG News

Winter 2019 • Volume 6 Issue 4



AVAG Veterans Appreciation Lunch in Cypress, CA on November 6, 2019 — inspirational speaker and Vietnam combat Marine Corps machine gunner Phil Downer spoke before an audience of veterans, family members and service members. Story on page 8.

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Founding members observed AVAG's fifth anniversary.

AVAG Fall Festivals

AVAG communities celebrate Fall with potlucks, sweets and fun.

Military Appreciation Night

American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) and Cottonwood Outreach participating in Military Appreciation Night at Harvest SoCal.

AVAG Veterans Appreciation Lunch

Veterans were honored at a luncheon held in Cypress and at Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos.

DAV Donation

DAV Chapter 23 donates to help one of our veteran's home projects.

Veterans Home Gets A Rehab

A veteran's aging mobile home gets much needed repairs thanks to Team Home Depot.

AVAG: Five years of helping veterans

The September monthly meeting in the Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park was a poignant gathering as some of the founding members of the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) celebrated five years of service to veterans. It was in Sequoia that AVAG coalesced into a working organization that eventually helped several hundred veterans and their families since 2014 throughout communities in the Veterans Affordable Housing Program in San Bernardino, Orange, Riverside, Contra Costa and Santa Clara counties.

Under the leadership of AVAG Director Lee Martin, AVAG started with providing free furniture to veterans in several communities as one of the first veterans AVAG assisted was Air Force veteran John Finneran. He received a uniquely designed recliner through the free furniture program. "I'll never forget John," Martin said. "When we were working with him, to help get him the recliner, it really hit me as to the potential good doing that AVAG could do for the veterans in our communities....The other thing I'll always remember about that

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Chaplain's Corner

Santiago Creek Orange Fall Festival

Photos courtesy Paul Buron and Doreen Matsumoto

Santiago Creek Orange AVAG community celebrated their Fall Harvest Festival with a potluck, fun, delicious sweet treats bake-off, and a costume contest.

Harold Gomer's 96th birthday was celebrated. Harold is a World War II Navy veteran who is originally from Minnesota where he served in the Austin American Legion Post 91. He worked for Hormel for 47 years and has been retired for 37 years. He has 4 children, 8 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren, and 2 great-great grandchildren. He lives at the park with his daughter, Pam Crawley; says he helps her by watering plants and doing household chores. Asked what he thought about turning 96, he said, "Glad to be alive". Pam says she couldn't ask for a better father growing up; he's gentle, kind, and loves him so much.

The Fall Harvest Festival was a community partnership between Sandy LaBella, Manager



Harold Gomer with his daughter, Patty Swanson, Brenda Woods (eldest grandchild) and daughter, Pam Crawley.

of Creek Orange, Debbie Turro, HOA Activities Director, and Doreen Matsumoto, AVAG Chaplain. Sandy has been the manager since August and likes the residents of this community; "they are great people". She is well-liked by the residents as well. Sandy is a mother of 2, grandmother of 13, and great-grandmother of 10.

Debbie Turro, a five-year resident, has been the HOA Activities Director for the past 4 years. She loves getting her community together to socialize and get to know their neighbors. 🐦



Festival Committee, left to right, Sandy LaBella, Doreen Matsumoto, and Debbie Turro.



Costume contest winners left to right, Sherry Olsen, Sue Tyus and Ted Sundeck.



Winners of the Fall Festival Bake-Off above, left to right, 1st place winner Joan Gates, 2nd place winner Frank Mann, and 3rd place winner Nancy Novak.



Regal Movie gift cards were won by Phyllis Lopez, at left, Carolyn Olson, center, and Nancy O'Neill, at right.



Harold Gomer congratulates lucky raffle winners, recipients of In and Out gift cards, Stan Makse and Linda "Knuckles" Walker.

Diamond Bar Estates Fall Festival

Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto

Diamond Bar Estates AVAG community celebrated their Fall Festival with food, games, raffles, and a costume contest. It was great to have a good turn out for the Fall Festival and good to see Cindy, who had not been able to attend many AVAG meetings although her husband, Conrad, attends every month; he is one the main veterans at the park. Tonight she told her granddaughter, Cara, “let’s just go to the meeting and have fun.” They had fun playing “Left Center Right” and Cara won the game. She was given an In and Out Gift Card. Tony won the children’s costume contest and was given an In and Out Gift Card. Veterans wives and kids were able to join in the fun. 🦋



Hemet Valley RV Park Children’s Fall Festival

Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto

What a beautiful way to share the love of God. The AVAG Team had an amazing day with the children and their families at Hemet Valley RV Park. Quite a few of the families that we helped to get into a home attended. The kids and their parents enjoyed pizza, games, bobbing for apples, and trick-or-treating. There were four huge tables worth of toys and gifts for the kids. Thank you to our volunteers, Gayle Bohnhoff-Vrabec, Amanda Breunig, and Paul Buron. 🦋



AVAG: Five years of helping veterans continued

Photos courtesy Paul Buron

dear man was how happy he was after we got a wheelchair for him. He told me ‘thank you, I went out and sat in the rain for the first time in years. It felt wonderful to feel the rain hitting my face.’ That did it for me, I knew we were on the right track after working with John and his dear, dear wife Ellie.”

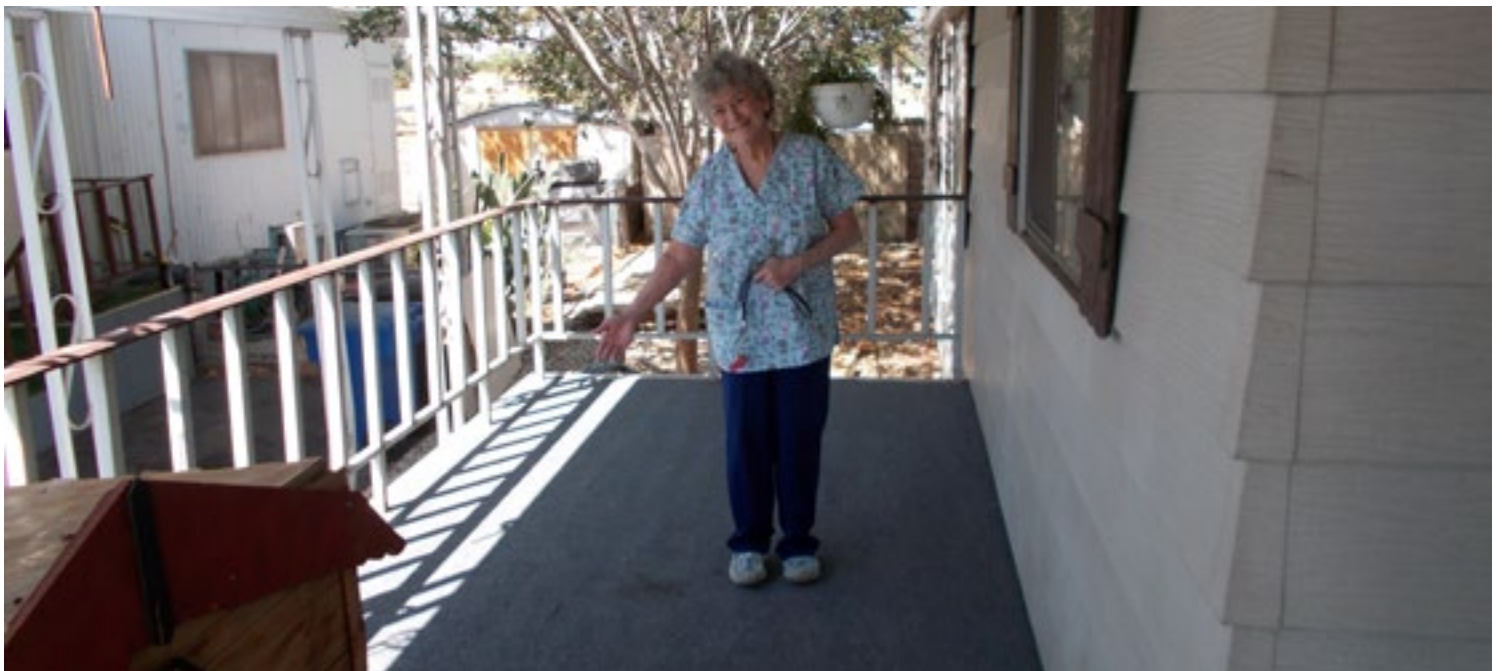
A key element in AVAG getting off the ground was finding talented, dedicated handymen who worked with veterans and their families on everything from fixing stubborn door handles, to bathroom repairs and roof improvements. Army veteran Cliff Gorman focused on helping veterans in Santiago Creek Orange Estates and Santiago Creekside Estates in Orange, and Navy veteran Mike Goens, who for over five years helped many veterans throughout seven communities where AVAG has representatives and volunteers. Last, but not least, Vietnam veteran Mike Keele, who earned a Distinguished Flying Cross in 1968 as a crew chief aboard a Huey from B Company of the 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion of the 1st Cav. Through the five years, Keele worked side by side with Goens, while making donations to help purchase materials and supplies for veteran assistance and rose to Chairman of the AVAG Board of Directors.

During the 5th anniversary celebration, Goens reflected on the impact of meeting Martin in September 2014: “The first half of that year I was in a really dark place, I literally felt like my life was crumbling all around me, and the stress was affecting mine and Beth’s relationship. In August (2014) I received that letter about AVAG but couldn’t figure out what you guys were about, then that night in September, when my curiosity got the better of me and I came out to the fountain in front of the clubhouse and met Lee and (AVAG Director) John (Meyer). At that point I guess we could say ‘and the rest is history.’

Lee and I started meeting down in Orange at his favorite restaurant on Katella and began talking about all my construction experience, he had an idea about helping veterans with home repairs that otherwise they would be unable get done! After meeting Mike Keele in December of 2014 when we were assembling the furniture Lee and I began putting the final touches on what would become the AVAG slogan, “Veterans Helping Veterans”, and the only way I can describe the effect on me is to say that this was a life-changing event! Not only was I helping my brother and sister veterans, I was doing the thing I loved to do! Could life get any better?”

Also five years ago years ago, an energetic and spiritual lady Doreen Matsumoto began supporting AVAG with fundraisers and charitable events. One thing lead to another and before long, she completed a chaplaincy study while working longer hours as an AVAG volunteer extraordinaire. Today, she is the AVAG chaplain and has developed dozens of networking relationships throughout the communities where AVAG serves veterans, all in an effort to assist and improve veterans lives through Bible studies, community improvement days, and distributions of food, clothing, bedding, wheelchairs, refrigerators and flooring for veterans homes. She has recruited Chaplain Susanna Gonzalez and volunteer extraordinaire Gayle Bohnhoff-Vrabec, who has collected thousands of clothing items over the last two years from various charities and non-profits that the AVAG team turns about and provides to veterans and anyone living in a community with an active AVAG team.

And, quietly behind the scenes is “Original Green Beret” and entrepreneur Richard Simonian, who wanted to help veterans obtain affordable housing. Working through the Affordable Community Living non-profit, that effort lead to AVAG. After helping more than 100 veterans obtain affordable housing, the AVAG program focused on helping the hundreds of veterans who live in various communities where AVAG programs thrive today, including an AVAG branch that Lee Martin is overseeing in Fresno, Concord and Milpitas. 🦋



Ellie Finneran proudly shows off her new front porch in Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park. Photo courtesy Mike Goens.



The AVAG 5th anniversary cake donated by Navy veteran Michael Goens for the celebration at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park.

Above, AVAG Director John Meyer, right, flashes five, as he and AVAG Director Mike Keele and AVAG Handyman Mike Goens stand in front of the AVAG five-year anniversary cake.

At left, Mike Goens and Mike Keele embrace as they review the many projects they worked on helping veterans over the last five years.

From Lee Martin

American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG)

AVAG — What an interesting and catchy name for a private, non-profit veterans organization. The long simmering idea in the mind of Santiago Communities CEO, Richard Simonian, that happened in the fall of 2014. “American Veterans Assistance Group.” A group made up of veterans that live in Santiago Corporation’s Mobile Home Parks. Five years later, it still thrives in multiple parks in Southern and Central California (AVAG North). As a non-profit veterans organization, it has touched many veterans and their families in a very positive way. From early “free, new furniture” nights to rental assistance, to Veterans Administration assistance and, most of all, the comradeship all veterans cherish, no matter what rank or branch of service they were in.

Five years and still growing! Five years of comradeship and lifelong connections through good and bad years.

For me, it all started when I was tasked to start the first chapter in “Sequoia Park” with a call to a veteran named John Finneran. When I introduced myself, he immediately interrupted me with words telling me he was restricted to his home due to his handicap and couldn’t afford to “donate any money to any cause.” He was getting ready to hang up when I assured him I wasn’t asking for donations but had free furniture for veterans with no obligations attached. He replied that I had two minutes to talk and then he was going to hang up. Twenty minutes later, I did hang up after getting an invitation from him to come and visit him the next week at his home and meet his wife Ellie (Eleanor Finneran).

A week later I visited John and Ellie and from that meeting, AVAG started and it’s purpose was born. John and Ellie became two of my hero’s in my life.

John was severely restricted to his home by his handicap and had an old, non-operational “lift chair” to watch his favorite sports teams on TV. Except for a few trips to the VA, arranged by the VA and Paramedics, he rarely “saw the sun and never the stars or moon.” That comment set me on a crusade to find the best, most useful chair for John and, possibly, a power wheelchair that he could use to go outside.

The Good Lord took care of the motorized wheelchair and AVAG was able to secure the strongest and best lift chair for him. He got to go outside, see the stars and even feel the raindrops on his face.

Those events drove me to continue to help veterans and do so to this date!

Vets will always help Vets! 🦋

Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park
(Photos courtesy Paul Buron and Doreen Matsumoto)

Sequoia Residents Celebrate Five Years of Helping Veterans



AVAG members and loved ones join in the Pledge of Allegiance in the opening moments of the meeting.



Cowboy is all smiles surrounded by AVAG's hard-working volunteer Amanda Breunig left, and AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.



Marine Corps veteran Nic Balderas, a veterans service officer with San Bernardino County Department of Veterans Affairs, during his informative presentation during the AVAG meeting.



Sequoia AVAG members enjoy the latest copy of the AVAG News.



The 5th AVAG Anniversary meeting enjoyed one of the highest attendance ratings ever.



Ellie Finneran and Dennis Goens

Military Appreciation Night at Harvest SoCal

Photos courtesy Sandie Cervantes



It was a beautiful evening with American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) and Cottonwood Outreach participating in Military Appreciation Night at Harvest SoCal, August 23, 2019. What a sight to see our veterans bringing out the flag of the United States of America onto the Angel Stadium field as they were honored.

Chris Tomczak, AVAG member who lives at Creekside Estates was interviewed by Harvest SoCal.

"I don't take this opportunity lightly," explains Chris Tomczak, speaking about his participation in the flag presentation at this year's SoCal Harvest Military Appreciation Night. "The flag represents what I stand for, regardless of what's going on in the world, it's who I am."

Chris is a 50-year-old veteran of the U.S. Navy; he served from 1987 to 1990 during the Gulf War, and was in the reserves from 1990 to 1993, having to be on high alert during the tumultuous days of the Los Angeles riots.

He enlisted in the U.S. Navy after his 18th birthday. "I came from a single-income family so there wasn't any money for college." He saw the military as his best choice for an education but he ended up getting so much more than he anticipated. "I had so much fun it wasn't even like a job, I traveled all over the world, to [places like] Panama, Mazatlan, Vancouver, but what was most memorable are the people I met."

When he left the service, tragedy hit. His mother passed away of a massive heart attack and he recalls those days as being very dark, full of bars and drinking. But his time in the military taught him resilience, and although he wasn't walking closely with the Lord, there was always a sense that God was with him even in tragedy, and he knew God had a plan for his life, but he couldn't see it yet.

Years later another tragedy, his dad passed away. And Chris knew he had to make some changes. He fondly remembers his dad telling him, "You guys better be saved cuz I'll be waiting for you all in Heaven!" Chris wanted to set a good foundation for his children and to give

back to God. "I wanted a different life for my family, that's when we dug into church and I devoted my life to Jesus." Soon after, Chris and his wife were baptized together!

What does the future look like for Chris? "I want to help vets get the help and resources they need because it can be hard cutting through all the red tape, and I want to serve my community and make an impact."

This will be the very first SoCal Harvest for Chris. He and his family made every effort to be here Friday night, not only to join other military servicemen and women on the field but to experience worshipping and praising God along with hundreds of other believers. "That is going to be awesome and it gives me goosebumps just thinking about it!" 🦋



Chris Tomczak, AVAG member of Creekside Estates

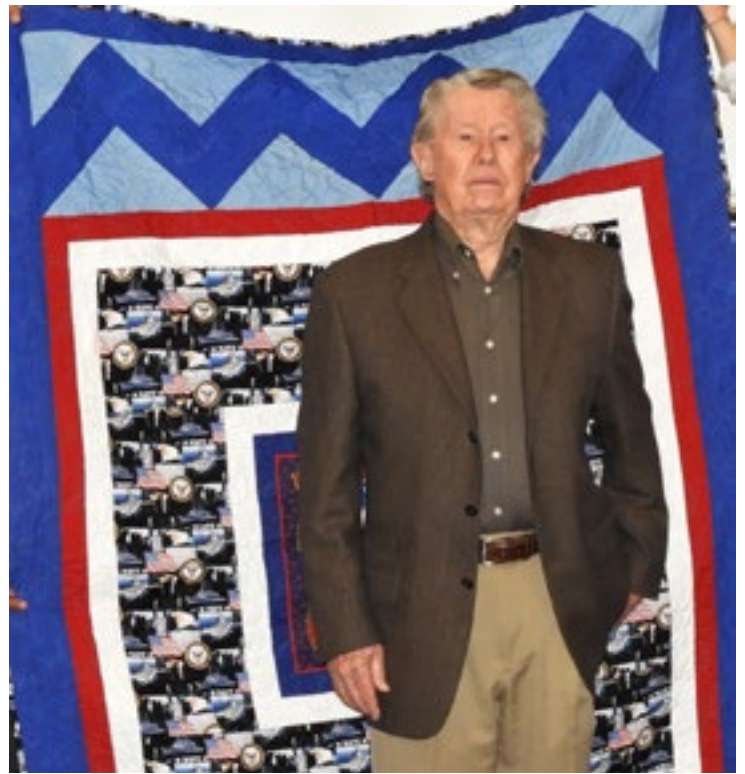
AVAG Veterans Appreciation Luncheon November 6, 2019

Photos courtesy Paul Buron

We had a great turn out at the Veterans Appreciation Luncheon at the Courtyard by Marriott in Cypress. John Yeandle and Doreen Matsumoto were great emcees and Phil Downer's testimony of his time in Vietnam and life after service was awesome. Navy Veteran, Rick Watson, was honored with a beautiful quilt from Quilts of Valor.

This event could not have succeeded without our wonderful sponsors:

- Andy Benun — Andtech Corporation
- Gary Brendzel — CPA
- Terry Cagnolatti — Veteran
- Barry Cole — Manufactured Housing Insurance Service
- Courtyard by Marriott
- Phil Downer — DNAmilitary.org
- Casey Journigan — Arcadia Chair
- Mike Keele — Veteran
- Rich Macaluso — Orange Coast Title
- Ed and Susan Meltzer
- Marla Robinson — Merhab, Robinson, Jackson and Clark
- Mike Mihelich — Attorney at Law
- Robert Schoeffler — Farmers and Merchants Bank
- Ralph Tingle
- Ron and Karen Van Wert



Navy Veteran Rick Watson with his So Cal Quilts of Valor.





The luncheon was attended by veterans of all ages and their family members – a roomful of heroes and amazing stories. Below are the stories of a few:



Isabel Gaglio

Isabel Gaglio, widow of Reyes Gaglio III, Musician 1st Class (MU1). Reyes Gaglio was in the Navy band sent on a goodwill mission to play for President Eisenhower and the President of Brazil. On approach to the airport in heavy fog, the Navy plane collided with a Brazilian commercial airliner over Guanabara bay, and fell in pieces to the water.

Eighteen members of the band were killed; three other Navy men not connected to the band survived when the tail section in which they were seated was severed from the plane.

Isabel was living in Washington, DC at the time with three young children and pregnant with her fourth child. A friend called her and realized that Isabel had not heard of the plane crash — she went to Isabel's house to give her the sad news. The Navy helped Isabel with all the arrangements needed for her to return to Los Angeles, CA. Six weeks later she delivered a daughter. She purchased a home in Westminster where she still resides. As a single mother of four, taking three classes a year at Cal State Long Beach, she received her BA, MA, and a teaching certificate.

She was so happy to be able to attend the luncheon with her youngest daughter.



Bill Oehlman

Bill Oehlman an Army Vietnam Veteran served a total of three years and twenty-one days. He was born and raised in Long Beach, CA. He and his wife have been married fifty-two years. He volunteered for the draft and was stationed at Ft. Ord for basic training then on

to Ft. Gordon, GA for Advanced Individual Training (AIT) where he became an MP. He served for five months in Minnesota in an underground missile silo as an MP. He was sent to Ft. Benning, GA to attend officer candidate school (OCS). He then served at the Presidio in San Francisco as a 2nd Lt. for the 6th Army HQ. He received Vietnam orders but was told he needed troop time; he was sent to the 30th MP Battalion at the Presidio where his mission was care and maintenance equipment, honor guard, burial detail and prisoner detail. He said that taps has a whole new meaning to him because of being a Funeral Honor Guard.

He served in Vietnam for one year as the Executive Officer (2nd in Command) of a 360-man company 36 miles of perimeter near Saigon. On February 23, 1969 (Tet Offensive), a battalion attacked his section of the perimeter — green tracers coming in and red going out. The following day there were 117 dead bodies of the enemy on the battlefield.

Bill and his wife had five children after his return from Vietnam.

Bill enjoyed himself at the Veterans Appreciation Luncheon and looks forward to being at Cottonwood Church's luncheon with this wife.



Steve Gandra

Steve Gandra served in the USMC for thirteen years. He was part of the 1st FSSG Supply Battalion. He stationed in Camp Pendleton, Okinawa, Japan, Hawaii, Guam, and Korea. He was able to go to all these places because "every unit needs supplies." He was a Force

Recon Marine and earned his jump wings (Airborne). Because of his military training he feels blessed to be the Manager of Fashion Nova. His message to the younger generations is "that no matter what branch you decide to serve in, don't join because of how good the uniform looks (which was why he chose the Marines). Decide on what you want to do after you get out — continue your trade."



Craig Watson

Craig Watson served in the Army, was stationed in Ogsburg, Germany as an MP. He served for nineteen months when he received a hardship discharge. He has been retired for twelve years; he owned a local construction company for forty-five years. He said he feels honored when he is invited to veteran events.

Santiago Estates Grandview

(Photos courtesy Paul Buron and Doreen Matsumoto)

During the late summer, the AVAG team held its first Meet & Greet event for the new AVAG group at the Santiago Estates Grandview located in the San Jacinto community near Hemet. This first gathering included pizza, ice cream sundaes, raffles and giveaways. 🦋



Community members and veterans gathered for a group photo.



Enjoying ice cream treats while reading the AVAG News.



Community members happy to get a new flag from the AVAG team.



At left, Korean War Army veteran Raymond Holguin holds up his new AVAG t-shirt.

Above, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and Danny Gaona, Manager of Santiago Hemet Valley RV Park, put the finishing touches on installing a new American flag and flag holder for Holguin.



Residents inspect the remaining free items and clothing offered to them through AVAG.

Santiago Creek Orange Estates

(Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto)



Among the special SoCal Quilts of Valor presentations that night included one for Korean War veteran Congetto A. “Jack” Inzauro held by John Meyer and David Vierra as AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto explains the tradition and history of Inzauro’s quilt.



At the end of the August Santiago Creek Orange Estates AVAG meeting, the four veterans who earned \$25 In-N-Out Burger gift cards were, from left Jack, George, James and Alan, with AVAG Director John S. Meyer supervising the winners’ smile photo op.



Army Korean war veteran Bud Stoddard shows off a special AVAG challenge coin, designed and produced by John Joyce of Excalibur Industries, introduced by AVAG staff at the meeting.



Navy veteran Chris Tomczak shows off his AVAG challenge coin and a water kettle he won.



The August meeting had one of the largest turnouts in recent years.



During the August AVAG meeting veteran Christopher Oleksa received his So Cal Quilts of Valor as AVAG team members looked on.



A surprised WWII veteran Herb May stands in front of his SoCal Quilts of Valor quilt.



Among the winning veterans at the meeting were Marine Corps veteran David Vierra, Army veteran Herb May and Navy veteran Chris Tomczak, who hold the gift cards donated by Bishop Herman Hodges of DAV.



Purple Heart Medal recipient Glenn Williamson holds a Purple Heart challenge coin presented to him by Doreen Matsumoto.

At left, Marine Corps veteran Kevin Mitchell displays his coin and new AVAG shirt.

AVAG Bible Studies

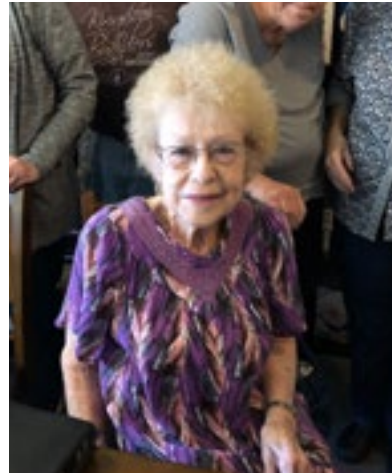
A new Bible study was launched at Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park. Every week it has grown with new members. Bible study is offered in English and Spanish the second and fourth Tuesday of every month led by Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, Chaplain Susanna Gonzalez, and Amanda Breunig. 🙋



Above, the Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino held a new Bible study meeting and greeted two new members, Roberta Gardner (back row 2nd from right) and Linda Eber (back row 3rd from right). Photo courtesy by Amanda Breunig



The Bible study at Santiago Desert View Estates in Barstow was amazing!! God is Good. Above, Maria Harrison (manager), at left, with Monica Dunigan, Dustin Luse, and Darcy Newberry Hawkin. Photo courtesy Maria Harrison



We were blessed to have Arlene, pictured at left, join us for the first time at Bible study at Creek Orange. We had been praying for her to join us for over a year. She had been in and out of the hospital, even on life-support. We never stopped praying for her. Photo courtesy of Doreen Matsumoto

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you

Matthew 7:7



God is so good. We have been praying for God to open the door to share his Word with more people. Albert, in the group above at far left, joined us at Diamond Bar Estate's Monday bible study. Photo courtesy of Doreen Matsumoto

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Proverbs 22:6



Santiago Creek Estates' Children's Bible Study group gathered for a group photo. Photo courtesy of Doreen Matsumoto



What a beautiful photo of our bible study kids praying over Chase for his upcoming surgery. Children's Bible Study kids are amazing. Photo courtesy of DeeAnna Tomczak

Santiago Creek Orange Estate, the City of Los Alamitos and Panera Bread Partner in Bread Distributions to Seniors and Veterans



AVAG Team member Linda Cooperider (left), the “mayor” of Santiago Creek Orange Estates, helps organize the distribution of bread to our seniors and veterans at Santiago Creek Orange Estates. A special thank you to Emeline Noda (center) and Trini Zenovka (right) of the Los Alamitos Recreation Center who are always thinking of our veterans and to the City of Los Alamitos and Panera Bread for their partnership with American Veterans Assistance Group. Photos courtesy of Doreen Matsumoto

AVAG Partners with Cottonwood Church for Veterans Day Luncheon

Photos courtesy Paul Buron

There were over two-hundred in attendance at the Veterans Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos on November 8, 2019. Attendees enjoyed a beautiful, catered lunch and raffles. The event also included resource tables and the presentation of seventeen Quilts of Valor to veterans. The City of Los Alamitos Recreation Center donated bread to give to the Veterans. Volunteer hostesses decorated tables and supplied gifts and treats. Air Force veteran Ana Maria Broussard led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and Ariana Warde beautifully sang “God Bless America.” Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and Pastor Gabriel Rodriguez partnered to host the luncheon. Pastor Bayless Conley was the main speaker who expressed his thanks to the military. “Whenever I think of the military, I think of honor, discipline, and service.”

Thank you to all the volunteers that came out to help; you made this event spectacular. ✧



Seventeen SoCal Quilts of Valor (QOV) quilts were presented to veterans at the event. Five quilts shown above. Thank you to Barbara Winkler and her team of volunteers.



Ariana Warde singing “God Bless America” during the event.



Air Force veteran Ana Maria Broussard led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.



Pastor Gabriel Rodriguez and Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto



Pastor Bayless Conley, the event’s main speaker.



Thank you to all the volunteers at the Cottonwood Church Outreach Veterans Day Luncheon.

DAV Donation

Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto

Thank you to the DAV Chapter 23 for the \$500 donation towards helping one of our veterans home projects. We appreciate the support.

DAV (Disabled American Veterans) is a nonprofit charity that was created by the United States Congress in 1920. The organization provides a lifetime of support for veterans and their families, helping more than 1 million veterans each year to high-quality lives with respect and dignity.

Learn more about DAV by visiting their website at dav.org or visit Chapter 23's website davcal.org to learn about this chapter's work in California. 🦋



Lead by DAV Commander David Tilson, holding an actual donation check, members hold a ceremonial DAV \$500 donation to AVAG.



Bishop Herman Hodges holds a DAV Service & Appreciation Plaque in recognition of his years of dedicated service to helping veterans, including working with AVAG. Bishop Hodges has served the DAV for over 50 years. The plaque reads "Service & Appreciation Award — Jack Fisher Chapter 23 wishes to honor Bishop Herman Hodges. The members of Chapter #23 deeply appreciate your devotion to the men and women whom served our great nation in uniform. Your commitment reflects the highest dedication to service, in which we all strive to achieve. Thank you for a lifetime of dedication to serving those in need. September 2019"



During a recent meeting of DAV Chapter 23 at the Elks Lodge in Old Town Orange, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto spoke to the DAV members about AVAG programs.

AVAG has some really good friends that are involved in this chapter: Night Train Joe, David Tilson, the commander, and Bishop Herman Hodges. In addition to the \$500 donation towards our cause that Doreen accepted at that meeting, they have generously given us Purple Heart challenge coins to give out to our veterans and Target gift cards to give out.

Team Home Depot Rehabs a Vets Home

Photos courtesy Paul Buron

During the hot summer days in San Bernardino County, a call went out to Rialto Home Depot Store Manager David Yniguez concerning an AVAG veteran James Brown's aging mobile home needing repairs. Additionally, Brown a blind Korean/Vietnam War veteran was dealing with some personal issues at the time and spoke to AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto — who carried Brown's needs to Yniguez.

Once again, Yniguez and key members of that Home Depot office responded to Brown's compelling story. In recent years, Yniguez and Home Depot staff and volunteers assisted several AVAG veterans by helping them with everything from basic repairs to floor replacements and several other challenging tasks.

Yniguez turned to his Team Home Depot staff to work on this "store project" where store employees volunteered to work on the Brown project — all working as volunteers, on their free time, donating their time and store resources to repair Brown's home.

And, all of the Team Home Depot work was performed during the grueling hot days of summer which included working on skirting around Brown's home, replacing wood rot in key parts of the home and repainting it. 🦋



Near the end of the project, a smiling Brown poses with six of the Team Home Depot workers who worked long hours on their own volunteer time to help this proud Korean/Vietnam War veteran. Brown is also joined by family members and AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto.



This t-shirt captures the spirit of the Team Home Depot volunteers.



Team Home Depot volunteers hard at work.



How the project looked during the rehab phase.



Volunteers begin removing the old, torn and battered skirting.

AVAG News

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Under the aegis of VAHP
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The Team Home Depot volunteers getting after the painting.



One Team Home Depot volunteer pauses from his hard work to give a thumbs up for the project.



Team Home Depot volunteers take a break from the hot San Bernardino sun for some In-N-Out chow while James Brown enjoys his strawberry shake.