



AVAG News

Fall 2020 • Volume 7 Issue 3

AVAG's Rent Assistance Relief Program



Navy Veteran Rick Messina with AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto together at a pre-pandemic event.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) had provided a rent assistance relief program. The money would provide up to \$1200 for one year in rental assistance for low-income veterans and veterans' widows.

Due to this year's pandemic, there are many households with members who have lost work, fallen ill, or had to assist sick family members, so rent assistance is needed now more than ever. There is a waiting list of people requesting rent assistance. AVAG is working to be able to increase this funding for our program. The opportunity to help our veterans and their widows is one of our top priorities.

To receive rent assistance, candidates complete an application and provide the proper information along with their DD 214 Veterans identification. Chaplain Doreen communicates with them through the process and the board of directors give their approval. The recipients are presented with a letter when they are approved.

AVAG is looking to add additional funding to the rental assistance program next year. That money would require fundraising and board approval. In addition, donations to AVAG to help a veteran can be made on our website, AVAGUSA.com or mailed to the American Veterans Assistance Group, Inc., 326 W. Katella Ave, Suite #4L, Orange, CA 92867

We wanted to share some of the stories of the veterans and veterans' widows that this program has helped this year. The story of Rick Messina appears on this page and the stories of others follow within the pages of this issue of the AVAG News. 🦋

Rick Messina, Navy Veteran, Shares His Story

Navy Veteran Rick Messina began service in the Navy on December 28, 1955 and served honorably until his 21st birthday, July 5, 1959. In those days they called it a "Kiddy Cruise," enlisting at age 17 and getting out at 21. After completing Basic Training, Prep School, and Class A School, Rick was assigned to a Patrol Squadron where he flew as a crew member on Neptune P2V bombers. Fortunately, it was "Peace Time," but we still had to patrol the Atlantic for submarines, etc.

He has lived in Hemet, CA for over 18 years in a mobile park which has changed owners a few times, presently owned by Santiago Palm Vista. Along with the many fantastic park improvements, they also brought in AVAG.

Rick said "The American Veterans Assistance Group has given aid and a helping hand to our veterans, including myself, for which I am very grateful. They removed my defective, badly leaking swamp cooler from the roof and replaced it with a plastic dome –

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AVAG's Rent Assistance Relief Program

Stories of the Program in Action

Rick Messina, Navy Veteran, Shares His Story continued

Photos courtesy Dorene Matsumoto and Rick Messina

no more leaks! Most of all, they have helped me financially with a temporary discount in my rent. I was embarrassed to ask for and to accept the help, but they made me feel worthy and at ease.

“AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and Amanda Breunig and other team members, along with our community Manager, Donna Bohn, have improved the lives of all our park residents — veterans and non-veterans. It will be great when the pandemic has been defeated and AVAG can resume the park luncheons with guest speakers and wonderful food.”

According to Doreen Matsumoto, “Not only is Rick a Veteran, but he is a musician and singer. At the last Christmas AVAG party he sang “Ave Maria” to our group. He is a proud member of the Knights of Columbus and one of the kindest men I’ve ever met.” 🦋





Allen Braverman

U.S. Navy Veteran Allen Braverman served on the Blue Waters of the Pacific Ocean from December 1958 thru January 1961 (4 years) and was Active Reserve from January 1961 thru 1964 (3 years) — re-commission the USS Kearsarge (CV-33) and re-commission the USS Oriskany (CV / CVA-34).

“My wife and I have been going to the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) for about two years now. We were skeptical about them; thought it was just another organization to hang out at. How wrong we were – AVAG has helped us in so many ways,” said Allen.

- “1. Our rent has been reduced by \$100 every month,
- “2. They helped in getting a wheel chair from the VA,
- “3. They helped in getting an electric scooter from the VA,
- “4. I received a beautiful recliner from them (my old one was falling apart),
- “5. They showed me how to get benefits from the VA and am now receiving several that I did not know I had and have increased my monthly disability payment,
- “6. They have constantly given us all kinds of food and clothing – without us asking,
- “7. We have met a lot of new, wonderful people through AVAG,
- “and 8. Their staff and volunteers are the most wonderful and considerate people that you would want to know.

“Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto has to be the best organizer in the world.” 🐦



Hope Lopez

Veteran's Widow

Hope Lopez resides in Diamond Bar Estates, Walnut, CA. She says that the AVAG Rent Assistance Program will help with the rent and give her “peace of mind.”

Her experience with AVAG and their staff and volunteers has been really great. She is so happy and loves the food she gets; it's a big blessing. The food is so wonderful and convenient, too!

Hope said, “I have been able to participate in the hybrid Bible study put on by Chaplain Doreen. I was able to partner with one of the other residents, Melissa Landis. I have also participated in the American veterans assistance group community dinners.” 🐦



Charles Lattimore

Charles Lattimore served in the Marine Corps for nine months in the 70s as A1. He had a bad heart when he went in; his heart gave out before graduation. He served at the San Diego Marine Corps Recruiting Depot. His Dad served in WWII; two brothers served in the Army – one died from Agent Orange.

When asked if he had to do it over again, would he serve, he said “Yes.” He tried to go back but they refused him because of his heart. He still would have gone in even if he known about his bad heart.

What he liked about serving was the camaraderie and how everyone treated you the same, no prejudice. “We were all fighting for the same cause.” What he didn’t like was that there wasn’t leave like in other branches of the military. The lessons he learned in the service about discipline, patience and good communication have served him well in civilian life.

His transition from the service to civilian life took a while. He returned to a different world full of prejudice, with all races against each other — it was like a culture shock. In the military there was no race, everyone was there for the same reason and treated each other the same — not like how it was back home. It was hard to get use to that again.

His favorite officer was Sgt Warner. “He was really tough on me and I didn’t know why. He was white and he told me he’s not just training me for the military, he’s training me for life after. He wasn’t prejudiced; he just cared about his men which I really appreciated cause it prepared me for when I came home.”

Charles resides in Creekside Estates, Orange. A friend told him about the rent assistance program and so he requested help because he needed it. He had been laid off, but still didn’t think he would qualify. Then he met Chaplain Doreen and she really helped get his application through. Charles says he really appreciates the program, which has helped him a lot.

“That extra \$100 helps spread to other necessities, groceries, gas, food. At 67 years old, it goes a long way,” said Charles.

“AVAG also helped to get me qualified for VA benefits that I didn’t think I could get. Gayle, the Outreach Coordinator, went out of her way to help me. AVAG has helped me and my family in many ways. Repairs on our home, a new shed, food, a La-Z-Boy recliner, necessities and more.” 🐦



Rose Hovanec

Widow of Navy Veteran George Hovanec

Navy veteran George Hovanec was a Navy Pilot. He served in Pensacola, Florida from 1952-1956 for training then went to Austin, Texas.

Rose Hovanec resides in Creek Orange. Rose said that without the AVAG Rent Assistance Program she doesn't know how she would make it with only having Social Security. By the time the bills are paid, there is not much left. She is grateful for the assistance. Her husband originally requested the assistance. It really helped when her husband passed since she was only getting one income.

Rose is part of our Bible Study and has made many friends. AVAG makes sure to take food and necessities to her. We never want to forget our veterans' widows.

Her experience with AVAG and their staff and volunteers has been great; everyone is very helpful. 🦋



James Adams

James Adams served in the Navy 1958-1962 as a Seamen. He was stationed at Pearl Harbor on a ship. He was enrolled in college when he went into the Navy. He wanted to be an orthopedic doctor.

What he liked about serving was seeing a big part of the world. He didn't like being treated like a kid in the military — being told what to do. A grown person should be able to think for himself, but that was not the case in the military. However, going into the military at 17 did help him grow up. It was strict and he learned to follow orders. His transition from the service to civilian life was good; wasn't hard. After the 4 years, he was ready to leave the Navy.

He became friends with many of the officers, but they got in trouble because they weren't supposed to hang out with him. He was able to travel on R&R to Australia for 10 days, Western Australia in Perth in 1960. If he hadn't been in the military, he wouldn't have had the chance to visit China, Guam, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

James requested the rent assistance and says it has helped immensely with helping to pay bills since he only gets social security.

He turned 79 on June 22. Happy belated birthday! 🦋

Kenneth Compton

Air Force Veteran Kenneth Compton from Creek Orange served from 1954-1958 in Guam after two years of basic training. He was an Airmen First Class – 3 Stripes. He loved Guam — on base he played football, and they won and then played in the All-Star game.

Mr. Compton said, “When I was on base, I became the dog catcher because there were a lot of wild dogs around, but I really liked it. There was always tension between the Air Force and Marines/Navy guys which led to the Navy and Marines getting drunk and fighting all the time. We were more mellow and didn’t drink like they did.”

He didn’t like being away from his wife for a long time. He was on surveillance and wanted his wife to come but she couldn’t.

In the service he learned to get along with people, relax, and don’t get “excited.” He mellowed out a lot. After the service he returned to Arizona, went to Cal Poly on the GI bill, and worked for his wife’s aunt in orange groves and farmed.

His favorite officer was Bergis who was in charge of armed service police; taught self-defense. Sergeants on base always helped.

Mr. Compton is grateful for the rent assistance. He requested rent assistance because of being on a fixed income (Social Security).

It helped feeling comfortable not having to worry about not having enough money after paying all the bills. He will be 85 in October. We want to wish Ken a happy 85th Birthday.

Ken wants AVAG to focus more money on the rent program. The \$100 is great and he would like to see more veterans receive it because the \$100 really makes a huge difference and helps a lot. Ken is grateful for the weekly food deliveries and extra stuff the AVAG team brings by.

Ken is a great guy and funny too. He jokes around at our meetings, loves knowledge, and ask our guest speakers lot of questions. 🦋





Joseph "Joe" Magnante

Joe served in the Army from 1966-1968 in Vietnam. He reached the rank of Corporal, MOS Automatic Rifleman.

Drafted six months after graduating high school, Joe enjoyed the camaraderie of the guys in his unit because they stuck together and had nicknames for each other. His nickname was "Tapeworm" because he was so skinny (128 lbs). However, he didn't like that some guys were promoted over him. Five out of twelve received Purple Hearts and the rest didn't, including himself, even though they all did the same thing.

The lesson he learned while serving was to always to tell the truth. His transition from the service to civilian life was without too many problems. He went back to college for body and fender repair. His dad got him a job in construction.

His favorite officer was Sgt Manuel "Speedy" Gonzalez. When he was on R&R, he traveled to Tokyo, Japan for seven days. If he wasn't in the military, he would have missed seeing Japan and Vietnam.

Joe, who will turn 74 in November, lives at Creek Orange and has been receiving rent assistance from AVAG. He requested the assistance because of being on a fixed income, there wouldn't be anything left to pay other bills. Being in the Rent Assistance Program has helped him afford dental work, leaves a little in the checking account, and he can pay car and truck insurance. He wants AVAG to focus more money on the rent program to assist more veterans because it really helps. He knows how hard it can be to not have enough money for living situations. 🦋



Sam Padgett

Sam served in the U.S. Army from 1966-1968. He was first stationed in Fort Worth in El Paso, Texas, then went to Oklahoma, from there he went to Fort Lewis in Washington state, and then finally was stationed in Korea. The first place he went to in Korea was Camp Kasey and then he was transferred to Camp Kaiser.

“There I met a man named Francis Brown, one name I will never forget. He and I arrived at Camp Kaiser at the same time, we were replacements and we became buddies really fast; because we were the same age and arrived together, we were outcasts at first. After every pay day all the guys would talk about going to the village and the girls there... then they would all come back broke and complain about it. But Brown and I never went, we didn’t want to waste away all of our money, said Sam.

“One day Brown’s name got put on the board for patrol. Everyone dreaded going on patrol because you would head out at 7 PM and come back around 6 AM. I was worried Brown wouldn’t come back. But he did, and he wasn’t the same. We use to feel like the outsiders with all the other guys because we were younger and new, but once he went on that patrol that changed. It’s like he became one of them and I was left behind. But a few days passed and it was my name on the board. One of the other soldiers hands me the binoculars and I saw three Korean soldiers coming towards, us but they were stopped like they were taking a break. I was told to ‘just do as I was told and I’ll be fine.’ The platoon and I went around both sides of the three Korean soldiers and it was all over in an instant. I had never even been to a funeral or seen a dead body before that day. After that I realized why Brown changed and realized all those guys actually have my back and we watch out for one another.


“Later there was an opportunity to attend a Levy school that was only in Korea. Our whole platoon went, including Brown. It was a school to learn guerrilla warfare. A school like this could never exist in the U.S. It was nasty, they would train us by shooting live ammo at us. I was asked ‘what would you do if you got caught?’ I replied ‘nothing because I won’t get caught.’ It was miserable at this school; the weather was terrible all the time. We would eat and sleep in the rain everyday it seemed like.

“One day they were going to let us all eat in the only building that was at the school, but ya know it wasn’t the biggest building and there were a lot of us, so people fought to eat in there to get a spot at a table. I told Brown to save us a spot. When I got to the table where Brown was when one of our mutual friends pushed me as a joke, as guys do, and I ended up spilling my hot coffee all over Brown. All of a sudden Brown got really mad at me and we started fist fighting. It got broken up and the Marines Captain called us into his office. We were in trouble. He said ‘I thought this school was tough enough but apparently not if you two still have enough energy to fight each other.’ He asked us for both sides of the story and they were the same; that it was an accident but our friendship was never the same after that. After graduation we went to different units and never spoke to each other again.”

After the service Sam moved back to Globe, Arizona. He asked his grandfather once, “why do we live in Globe?”



His grandfather replied “because I was too busy fighting Germans in WWII, when I got shot and healed, I had a limp. They gave me a choice; either go back to war or work in the copper mines. So, I chose the copper mines and they were located here in Globe, Arizona.”

Sam also shared about how he raced for NASCAR for three years and raced stock cars for twenty-two years in the U.S. until he was 62 years old. The Rent Assistance Program will help him because he is on a fixed income and it barely covers the rent alone. 

Frank and Helen Paglia

Army Air Corp (Air Force) Veteran Frank Paglia served in China, Burma, and India from 1943-1946 as a Tactical Sgt.

Following are the ways Frank and Helen said the Rent Assistance Program and AVAG has helped them.

- Helps so much with bills
- Socializing at the luncheons
- Received a lot of information from the meetings
- Food delivery programs
- Repairs on home

Their experience with AVAG staff and volunteers has been a blessing. They are happy with the work on the front porch and getting a new faucet for the kitchen. 🦋





Alvin Corbett

Army Veteran Alvin Corbett was an SP4 who served from 1966-1970 in Germany and was in Vietnam for two years. He resides in Mountain View Estates, San Bernardino.

When asked if he had to do it over again, would he serve and he said “Yes, it’s my country. People said it was a useless war but if we didn’t go, who knows what would have happened; we might have become a communist country.”

He learned that there are two types of strong: muscle strong and Army strong. Alvin says he grew up a lot and was able to get a good education, was able to go to college after the service. All of his medical is paid for. He has a heart condition and had strap metal in his leg. He’s considered 100% disabled so he has no co-pay.

The lessons he learned in the service that he used in civilian life was driving trucks which he learned to do in Germany, although here

he didn’t have to worry about land mines. His transition from the service to civilian life was very hard for him because if he heard any kind of loud noise he would freak out and any small annoyance would make him angry and want to fight very easily.

His favorite officer was Sgt Airs, an AIT Sergeant. If he didn’t serve, he would have missed seeing Germany. He loved Germany but didn’t like the cold weather.

AVAG has also supplied him with a brand-new dishwasher which was sponsored by AVAG board member Mike Keele. He also received a new recliner. AVAG volunteers have gone to his house multiple times to drop off food and necessities. This organization truly lives by their motto “Veterans Helping Veterans.”

Alvin said, “They have also helped my community by hosting a giveback day for the residents so they can get food and necessities they needed.” 🙏



Chris and DeeAnna Tomczak

Praise from Chris Tomczak, U.S. Navy Veteran and his wife, DeeAnna:

"I wanted to take a minute to thank you and AVAG for our rent assistance at Santiago Creekside Estates.

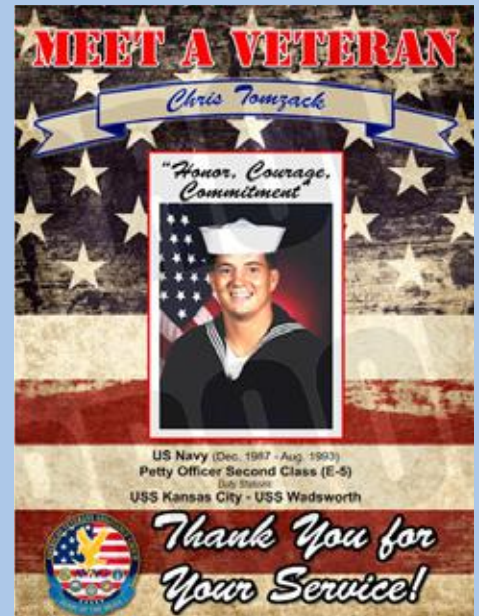
"The money has allowed us to make a few home improvements and eased some of the pressure from everyday expenses.

"The work of the AVAG team is never ending. They are constantly helping our communities with whatever our needs are. Since the time we have lived here at Santiago Creekside Estates AVAG has helped us obtain a refrigerator, a brand-new La-Z-Boy recliner, furniture, clothing, and food for us and many others in our community.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic we have received much needed produce, food and milk, which is another financial burden lifted off our shoulders.

"We do miss the Kids Bible study meetings that Chaplain Doreen and Amanda put on for the kids in the community. Even at Christmas time and Easter they make sure that the kids in our community receive toys and other items.

"We are so thankful for everything that AVAG does for our family and our community." 🦋



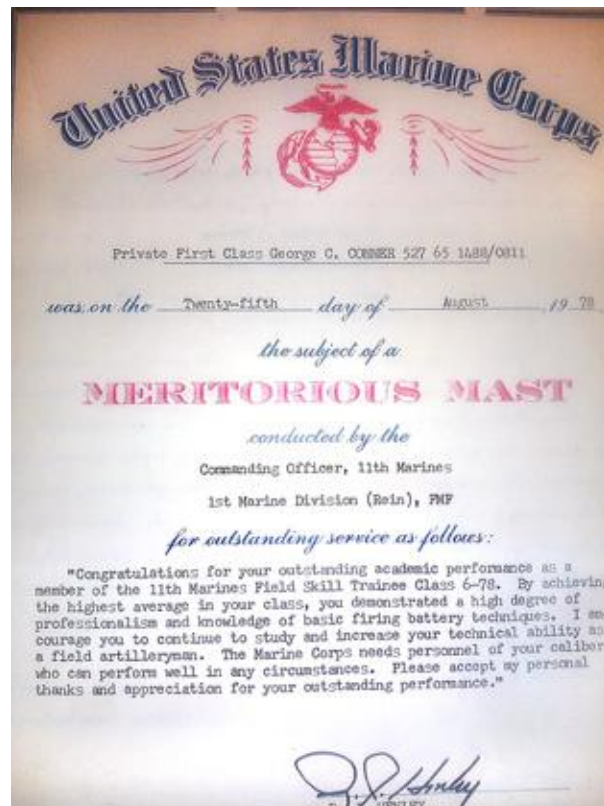
George Conner

George C. Conner, Sr. served in the Marine Corps from 1977-1980 as an E3 Lance Corporal at Camp Pendleton — second highest in the Marine Corps and was #1 in Artillery Training. He currently lives in Copper Country, Globe, AZ.

He was an artillery man; he was injured when a breach closed on his hand, almost was cutting it off, and he ended up losing the feeling in 3 fingers. He would have been a lifer if he hadn't been injured. At 18-years-old, he was an rifle expert and trained people. He was asked what he would do differently, he said he "would have moved his hand out of the way." He served during peace time and thought it was good because he served under President Carter and he had the chance to ride on a float.

After serving, he worked 22 years in carpentry.

The AVAG rent assistance program has been a life saver for him because he only makes \$800 a month. Going to food banks knocks the pride out of you. 🦋



Pam Crawley

Pam comes from a military background. Her husband, David Crawley served in the Navy from 9/12/1966 to 9/11/1968, and her father, Harold Gomer, a WWII veteran, served in the Navy from 11/26/1942 to 1/10/1946. She lives with her father at Creek Orange and helps him. They receive the rent assistance each month from AVAG, which helps with paying other bills because they are on a fixed income.

Pam says AVAG has helped them in many ways:

To begin with, at the first meeting Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto informed Veterans and their families how to learn about all the benefits they deserve. Since then there have been many different speakers at

AVAG meetings sharing different information about the VA and opportunities for Veterans and their families.

Pam and her dad have appreciated all the great items Chaplain Doreen and the volunteers have delivered to them. The food and household items have helped during this time in their lives with the world in such turmoil. They also really enjoy the surprise gifts Chaplain Doreen and the wonderful volunteers deliver on special occasions.

From Chaplain Doreen: "Such kind words, but Pam is the 'Super Hero.' She takes care of her dad and husband. She also is the first one at our AVAG meetings to volunteer and help. She welcomes us into her home like we are family. We are so lucky to have met her and have her in our lives." 🦋



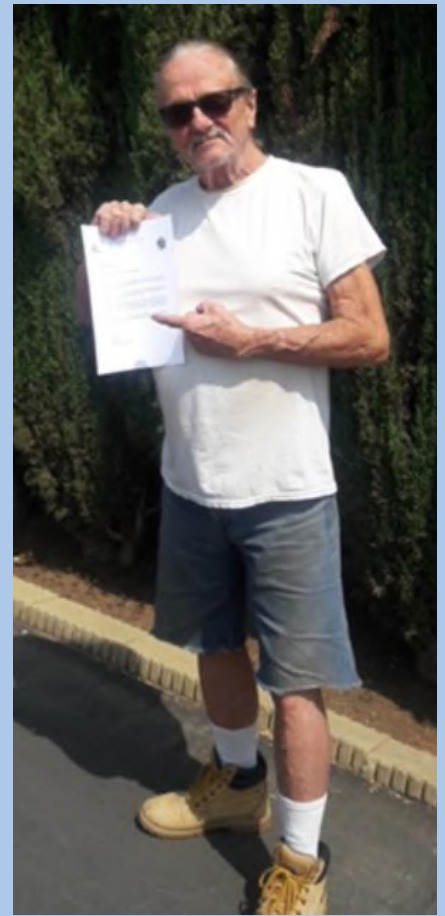


Joe Bob & Jerrell Smith

Air Force Veteran Joe Bob Smith served in Vietnam and the Philippines from 1960-1964. He achieved the rank of A1-C E4.

The AVAG Rent Assistance Program has been a huge blessing; the Smith's can hold onto a little extra cushion so it's less stressful.

Joe has enjoyed his experience with AVAG staff and volunteers. Likes that he has been in the AVAG newsletter a few times. Loved the meetings; everyone was always so nice and helpful. He really misses the meetings and the friendships he has made with other veterans. 🦋



Jack Krajczar

Jack, who lives in Palm Vista, served in the National Guard from 1964 to 1976 as a Specialist E4. He served in California, first at Fort Ord, and then to Fort Rubin in Barstow; he was stationed out of Los Angeles.

His funny story was when he was leaving LA on his way to Camp Roberts in Paso Robles, the Watts riots started and they had to immediately turn around. They had weapons but no ammunition, and the rioters were throwing bottles at them trying to hurt them. They even had to spend the night in a Catholic Church and people were opening up the doors and throwing stuff at them.

As for the Rent Assistance Program, he says that it gives him a better quality of living; he can buy decent food and clothing, which really helps. He said all of our AVAG staff and volunteers are very nice and helpful. He's looking forward to seeing everyone again when we are able to gather for a meeting. 🦋

Veterans' ally leaving area, but not their cause

John Stryker Meyer moving to Tennessee to slow down, write more

By Laura Groch

September 20, 2020, 12 PM, *The San Diego Tribune*

His mission to help U.S. veterans may be ending in San Diego County, but John Stryker Meyer will be opening it on a new front.

Meyer is the co-founder and a trustee since 2007 of the Oceanside-based Veterans Association of North County (VANC), a one-stop resource association of veterans organizations; and has led Interfaith Community Service's Veterans Advisory Committee. He has also filled key roles with other agencies, including the nonprofit Veterans Affordable Housing Program, which gets veterans into affordable housing communities in Southern California and other Western states; and with the American Veterans Assistance Group, which networks those communities.

"There are a lot of people who work professionally to help veterans, and a lot of people who volunteer on boards, organizations," said Interfaith Community Services CEO Greg Anglea. "He crossed over all these traditional roles and has worked to bring them all together to help veterans. He has a no-nonsense, action-oriented personality that just gets stuff done and helps make the community a better place."

A 25-year Oceanside resident, Meyer kept an eye on veterans and military stories as a newspaper reporter and editor, working at the then-San Diego Union, and the now-defunct Oceanside Blade-Citizen and North County Times.

Before that, he was a Green Beret, a member of the elite U.S. Army Special Forces unit, Special Operations Group, serving two tours in Vietnam from 1968-70, part of the "secret war" of infiltration into North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Unit members were forbidden to discuss their missions for 20 years, but Meyer has since written several books about them — *Across The Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam (Expanded Edition)*, *On the Ground: The Secret War in Vietnam*, and *SOG Chronicles Vol. 1*.

"Those were written when we had four teens and a baby," recalled Meyer, 74, in an interview. His wife, Anna, encouraged him to write during that time, he said. "She carried me."

Now he's ready to embrace a change of pace and focus on writing more books with a move last week to Franklin, Tenn., to be with family, including two grandchildren.

"There's been so much going on over the years," he said. "It's time for a little bit slower lifestyle."

Known as "Tilt" to many (from his pinball-playing youth in Trenton, N.J.), Meyer has been tireless in his work with veterans.

"Being a veteran myself and seeing veterans not as fortunate as myself, I always wanted to help," he said. "I kept running into veterans and veteran-related issues."



John Stryker Meyer, center, at his last AVAG board of directors meeting in Orange. Left, Jim Duffy, board chairman Mike Keele, Richard Simonian and Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto. (Courtesy photo)

That help has included connecting them with housing, home repairs, health care, burial benefits, even food. "What has he not done?" asked Anglea.

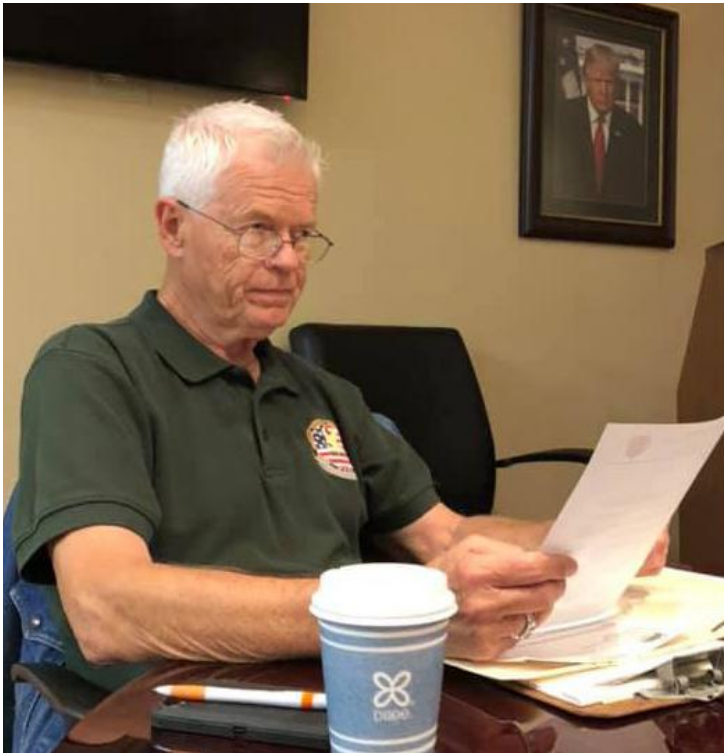
Interfaith hired Meyer for community outreach when it was working to finance a community-based transitional housing program for veterans. It was right before the Great Recession of 2008 hit, recalled Anglea. After a few months, "he went to our CFO and said, 'Stop paying me.' He kept working, and he didn't tell the rest of us. It just shows his character and who he is."

Said Lori Boody, executive director of VANC, "He doesn't just talk the game. When he commits, he's right there with us, supporting us 100 percent. He gives totally of himself, constantly."

Meyer has seen government services for veterans improve greatly in recent years. He cited the increased flexibility of the Veterans Administration on medical appointments, and the state's Cal Vet program, which connects veterans with low-cost loans and benefits they often don't realize are theirs to claim.

Programs easing veterans back into civilian life, like those at MiraCosta College and Cal State San Marcos, are also vital, he said.

"When service members transition from getting orders every day to a life on their own," many can't handle the change, he said. "We've had different programs for veterans to come in and get training, how to write resumes, how to dress, how to talk in a job interview. We're still trying to find ways to reach in and talk to future veterans when they get ready to leave the military."



John Stryker Meyer attending to the business at hand at the last AVAG board of directors meeting. (Courtesy photo)



Col. Jack Isler, left, commander of the top secret base CCN at Da Nang in April 1969, with Lieutenant General Richard Stilwell, and Reconnaissance Team Idaho leader John Stryker Meyer before the team went on a mission in Laos. (Courtesy photo)

But where veterans need help most, Meyer said, is with mental health.

“The painful one is suicide. Everyone has responded to it (as a problem), but no one has come up with a golden cure — something that could really reach veterans. Getting the programs for veterans into the hands of the veterans — that is the challenge.”

His advice to veterans: Speak up.

“They don’t advocate for themselves enough,” he said. “There are services out there, but it’s a two-way street. You gotta go look for help, and then work with the program. Be able to listen. There are so many programs.”

Meyer has been involved with lots of them, as well as classes, speakers and networking efforts. VANC co-founder and president CEO Chuck Atkinson noted that when veterans first meet Meyer, “They become best friends instantly. He’s like a magnet. He draws all these veterans to him. He tells a lot of stories veterans like to hear, and they like to hear them from him.”

The stories won’t stop, Meyer said. He’s experimenting with podcasts and online platforms like Instagram, so he’ll still be connecting with veterans. “My heart will be with them. Friendships won’t end just because I’m 2,000 miles away.”

Neither will his legacy of comradeship, service and generosity, say those who know him.

“Tilt has done a great job of recruiting and building resources for veterans that will continue to help them while he is enjoying life in Tennessee,” said Anglea. “He’s going to be really missed.” 🦋



John Stryker Meyer and his wife Anna (Lonny Holmes)

AVAG Receives Grant from Home Depot



Anthony Oquendo, center, standing in front of his newly repaired home in San Bernardino at Pacific Palms Mobile Home Park. AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto at left and, at right, Pacific Palms Community Manager Jennifer Mora



Areas of Anthony Oquendo's home exterior that were in need of repair.



Anthony Oquendo, left, with Home Depot's Victor Villarreal and Gladys Guardado. Gladys Guardado was the Team Depot Captain overseeing the project.

Anthony Oquendo has lived in San Bernardino Pacific Palms for more than 20 years so his home really needed repairs. The American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) applied for a Home Depot Grant to get these repairs done.

The Home Depot Store in Redlands was assigned the project and Gladys Guardado was the Team Depot Captain overseeing the project but due to the COVID-19 pandemic the project was put on hold.

We did not give up, we reached out to Mr. Ryan Braddy, the Foundation Field Manager, Western Division of Home Depot. He let us know that Home Depot employee volunteers could not participate due to the pandemic, but he was able to get the Western Division of Home Depot to approve the \$2000 grant and AVAG was given \$2000 in gift cards to purchase materials for the project. AVAG in addition, hired Marine Corps Veteran, Alex Gavidia, from Gavidia RRP (Restore, Repair, Paint) to do the labor. AVAG with Home Depot did the paint, skirting, and the belly band repairs on his home. Prior to that, AVAG re-carpeted the front and back stairs. Anthony is very thankful to AVAG and Home Depot for the repairs to his home.

Army Veteran Anthony Oquendo served two years (1971-1973) and was stationed in Germany for 16 months. He left the service as an E4.

Anthony said he learned a lot in the military about life by understanding people. He also learned how to take advice from other people like his Lt's and Captains. It really changed his life.

The transition from the military to civilian life was good.

"I went to work for the post office and the school district," Anthony said.

Anthony feels he's lucky because he's able to go to the VA hospital and receive his benefits. He sees a therapist and a medical doctor to get help with prescriptions for his heart condition.

Anthony shared that he is not the only one who served in his family. His father, Nino Oquendo, served in the Army as an MP in WWII and the Korean War. 🦋

AVAG News

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