



# AVAG News

Summer 2021 • Volume 8 Issue 3



Connecting Veterans through our recognition night. U.S. Army WWII Veterans, Howard Koch and Royal Warner Olsen Jr., opened the event with an accordion performance of "Amazing Grace." (Paul Buron)

## A Band Was Born at Cottonwood!

Special Thanks to Michele Goodman, Band Coordinator, Band Mother, Clarinetist, Long Beach City College Band, Long Beach Community Band, Driveway Band

By Michelle Goodman

In an effort to bring music and lightheartedness to Veterans Recognition Night at Cottonwood Church, March 26, 2021, a diverse group of musical strangers came together and produced an original. Among the group was my good friend, Warner Olsen, 93, a clarinetist I had met a decade ago when I joined the Long Beach City College Evening Wind Symphony and a Veteran who was to be honored at the event. Warner served in the Korean War. It was that experience which

Continued on Page 7

## Veterans Recognition Night

By Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto  
Photos Courtesy of Paul Buron

March 26, 2021 — AVAG partnered with Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos to recognize our amazing veterans that have done so much for us and our country.

As the veterans walked up they were greeted with smiles from our wonderful volunteers and escorted into the brand-new sanctuary. The Long Beach Community Band and the Long Beach City College band played patriotic music. Michelle Goodman, Band Coordinator, reached out to us before the event to see how they could get the two bands together to be part of this event. Tables were decorated with beautiful red, white, and blue decorations and volunteers had prepared large variety of desserts.

The Boy Scouts of Post 295 out of Cypress Boys and Girls Club performed the presentation of the flag. Marine Corps Veteran Steve Gandara lead the Pledge of Allegiance. He was so much fun getting the crowd excited for our night of recognition.

U.S. Army WWII Veterans, Howard Koch, age 96, and Royal Warner Olsen Jr., age 93, open up our event with their accordion performance of "Amazing Grace." After they finished

Continued on Page 2

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### Veterans Recognition Night

AVAG partnered with Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos to recognize veterans.

#### A Band Was Born at Cottonwood!

A group of musical strangers join to bring music to the Veterans Recognition Night.

#### Meet Our AVAG Veterans

Stories from our veterans and their families.

#### An AVAG Drive-By Birthday Celebration

Casitas LaVerne residents celebrated a much-loved World War II veteran's 97th birthday.

#### Mother's Day at Sequoia Mobile Home Park

The AVAG team and partners put together a special Mother's Day celebration.

#### AVAG Helping Our Veterans in Hemet Palm Vista

Stories of three veterans and how AVAG provided much needed assistance.

#### In Memoriam: Gayle Bohnhoff-Vrabec

AVAG says goodbye to a friend.

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram



@AmericanVeteransAssistanceGroup



@social.avag

or learn more about us at AVAGUSA.com



Sarge Perez presented every female veteran in attendance with a Rosie the Riveter plaque

## Veterans Recognition Night continued

everyone stood up and cheered for them. Howard and Royal Warner were the first to receive recognition that night and a Quilt of Valor.

Howard and Royal have become friends since being introduced by Chaplain Doreen. They both were attending one of our veterans' events and she found out they both played the accordion — what was the chance of that? They came to audition for Chaplain Doreen for this event with their care givers, Kim San Jose and Susanna Zuenga.

That is exactly what we wanted to see happen as a result of organizing the Veteran Outreach events; veterans meeting, becoming friends and growing together.

Our next group were our amazing women veterans — over twenty women veterans received recognition at this event. WWII U.S. Army LT Nurse Mary Joan Morris, who is 98-years-old, was the first woman to receive recognition at the event and a Quilt of Valor. She was so happy to receive this recognition and had brought all her family to be part of the celebration.

We also had a big group from AMVETS Post 77, which is an all-female post founded in 2013 in Loma Linda. These ladies were so much fun and were the life of the party.

American Legion Post 295 in Cypress, Marine Corps Riders, American Legion Post 30 from Chino, and DAV Chapter 23 out of Orange all gave a big presentation.

Some amazing prizes donated by The Richard Breunig Foundation, also in attendance to help with the presentation and to deliver the prizes to the veterans during the raffle. AVAG also raffled off a brand-new La-Z-Boy recliner to a lucky veteran and the winner was Rev. Rick Bergquist.

Before the event closed, Pastor Rick took the mike to express his appreciation. Like any good Christian shepherd, he briefly shared the



Boy Scouts from Post 295 Cypress posting colors.

Gospel of Christ. He invited hands to be raised for accepting Jesus as savior and leading all in a prayer for a new life of healing and victory over the trauma of war. "God heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds. Psalms 147:3"

Over sixty Quilts of Valor were crafted by our partners from So Cal Quilts of Valor to present to our veterans. We would like to give a special thanks to Barbara Winkler for her support.

Thank you to Sarge Perez who donated all COVID essentials for everyone at the event which included hand sanitizer and masks. He also brought special gifts for all the female veterans.

Special thanks to the City of Los Alamitos — we gave out over 200 certificates from the City of Los Alamitos and certificates prepared by Steven Mai from the Office of Senator Tom Umberg, 34th District. Senator Umberg is a retired U.S. Army Colonel. He is married to Brigadier General Robin Umberg, Deputy Commander Clinical Services 3rd Medical Command, is one of several female United States Army general officers. ♡



Rev. Rick received his Quilt of Valor from Volunteers Martha Rivera Barreras (left) and Valerie Saldana (right).

### From Rev. Rick Bergquist:

This is what he posted on social media after he went home:

“Friday, I responded to an invite by my good friend Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto of AVAG to attend a Veterans Recognition Night. Chaplain Doreen truly loves and respects our veterans! This evening I enjoyed watching so many of our military warriors, male and female, WWII, Korea and Vietnam veterans being recognized and thanked for their service to our Country.

But late in the evening I was disappointed by not being one of the many veterans called up to receive certificates of recognition

by the California Senate and the City of Los Alamitos. Honestly, there I sat feeling overlooked and forgotten when I was totally surprised to hear Rev. Bergquist called up to receive certificates.

Feeling more appreciated now, I was still disappointed that I had not also received a personalized Valor Quilt. I know, poor me. Then a young lady came to me where I sat and asked for my signature on the list of recipients of Valor Quilts, explaining my quilt was not overlooked and I would indeed receive one. Sure enough, I was called up once more to receive my quilt as Chaplain Doreen cited my Vietnam service.

I returned to my table seated with my good friends Brian Alvarado, USMC Iraq, his lovely wife Rocio and their artist daughter, Rhi. The event was coming to a close as all the door prizes were handed out to winning ticket holders. Now it was time to draw the winning ticket for the grand prize, a genuine La-Z-Boy recliner! I told Rocio I could really use a new recliner as the one I had was shot!

Now, I didn't have the winning ticket in my hand, at least not yet! Rocio had volunteered to decorate two tables for the event, the one where we were seated and another next to us where a family with two veterans had left early. When the winning ticket numbers were called several times without response and shouts of “flush it” could be heard, Rocio saw the two left-behind tickets at her table, quickly noticed the winning numbers, and raised the ticket high saying “we have the winner! It's Rev. Rick!”

You can only imagine my surprise! Talk about feeling blessed! Wow! What a night of surprises! Thanks Lord! Thanks Rocio, and thanks Chaplain Doreen for all the love and respect you show our veterans. The old recliner was being used by my wife who now has Parkinson's and it was less than comfortable and hard to adjust with her weakened condition. The new La-Z-Boy is adjusted electronically by simply pushing buttons. A real blessing!” 🙏



Sarge Perez presenting plaque to Korean War Air Force Veteran Maria Martinez.



Steve Gandara of Marine Riders addresses the audience.

# Veterans Recognition Night – Honoring Our Veterans



Air Force Veteran Ruben Cortez



Air Force Veteran Art Flores, Jr. and Korean War Veteran Art Flores Sr.



Vietnam Veteran Michael Sandoval



AVAG Chapter Members from Creek Orange



DAV Chapter 23



Duff Conrad, Marine Riders



Marine Corps Veteran Samuel Cafiero, Post 30



AVAG Chapter Member from Diamond  
Bar Army Veteran Wayne Giffin



Army Veteran Joseph Walker

## Mary Joan Morris

*WWII U.S. Army Veteran*

Veteran Mary Joan Morris, one of over twenty women veterans who attended the Veteran's Recognition night, was honored with a Quilt of Valor and also received a Certificate of Recognition from the City of Los Alamitos. Her family members, pictured below, proudly celebrated with her at the event.



### American Legion Post 295, Cypress



Army Veteran David Breunig



Army Veteran Richard Crowe



Army Veteran Robert Crebbs



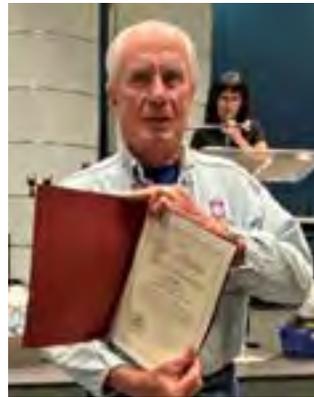
Marine Corps Veteran Richard Hunter



Marine Corps Veteran Lloyd Hall



Navy Veteran Patrick Lewis



Army Veteran Don Collins



Army Veteran David Shackelford

### Long Beach Blind Rehabilitation Center



Several veterans from the Long Beach Blind Rehabilitation Center attended the event with Elizabeth Greco, a Recreational Therapist at the facility, a part of the VA Long Beach Healthcare System. Barbara Winkler, pictured in the upper left photo at left, and volunteers presented the veterans with Quilts of Valor to honor their service.



Chaplain Gilbert Garcia presents LBPD Challenge Coin to Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto

# A Band was Born at Cottonwood!

## continued

led to composing his symphony, “Frozen Music.” His musical knowledge, creativity and mere presence, remains inspirational. (Don’t miss “Frozen Music – Portrait of a Korean Pagoda” on YouTube).

Warner’s companion and caregiver, Kim San Jose, had asked if I could provide a musical element for the patriotic occasion and, of course, I said “Yes!” .... but how?

The two concert bands I play with had been silenced by COVID for over a year. Warner, who had been a band member for fifty years, would be recruit #1!

I contacted members of both the Long Beach City College and the Long Beach Community Band and, with a flurry of texts and emails, more musicians signed on to participate. Lorena Sikorsky, (trombonist for Long Beach Community Band, retired music educator and current music studio owner), invited friends from her “Driveway Band”.

Glen Kamida (musical director and specialist at Torrance Unified School District), contacted associates, as did Eric Holdaway, (trumpeter at Long Beach Community Band, and member of local church and jazz bands). My special friend, internationally acclaimed jazz performing artist, producer and composer, Benn Clatworthy (visit [Bennclatworthy.com](http://Bennclatworthy.com)), drove in to help deliver a memorable evening, as did Chuck Herrbach, (Big swing, jazz, pit orchestra, club, movie and TV musician).

The birth of this new ensemble could not have happened without the assistance of Wayne Brenner (trumpet, jazz musician), Frank Fox (french horn, Long Beach Community Band, retired music educator), Ken Hedrick (trumpet, Long Beach Community Band, jazz and brass bands), Tim Shevlin (trumpet, Orange County Philharmonic, community and jazz bands), Paul Shivers (trombone, Long Beach Community Band and jazz musician), Jim Thompson (drums, music educator), Janet Young (flute, piccolo, Long Beach City College Band), the lovely couple, a tuba and a euphonium player, whose names I never knew, and, finally, Greg Flores, (conductor/ artistic director at Long Beach Community Band), who provided resources and invaluable advice during the group’s gestation.

Bringing this band to life as a tribute to, and celebration of, our beloved Veterans was the tangible proof of our common bond. Strangers uniting in music, patriotism, friendship, and joy. Music begot friends and friends begot the Birth of a Band. 🦋



The band that was born at Cottonwood prior to their performance on March 26th.



Michelle Goodman and Royal Warner Olsen, Jr.

# Meet Our AVAG Veterans

## R. Warner Olsen, Jr.

I'd like to add a special thank you to Chaplain Doreen, your assistant who has visited us, and all your staff for your kindness to both Kim and myself and for all you have done for both of us. It is so much appreciated — more than I can tell. I want to tell you something you may have need of in the future. In Seoul, a general passed away while on duty and our band was in attendance at his funeral — held on the major street in front of the capitol building. From the bandstand, a trumpet played the first phrase of “Taps.” It was echoed by a second a block away and a third on another street, even farther away. The most impressive “Taps” I’ve ever heard. For bands, there is a ceremony I like. The ‘empty chair.’ The deceased band members horn is on his chair for all to see, as if he were still there with his band.

### His story

I, R. Warner Olsen, Jr., enlisted in the Army on July 7, 1946, two weeks after I graduated from Garfield County H. S. in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Basic training was at Fort Bliss, near El Paso, Texas, and like all veterans, I survived it. Many of us from Colorado who had enlisted on the same date were still together when we arrived at Camp Stoneman, near San Francisco. When we received orders that we were being sent to Korea, I exclaimed to my friends that I might have known, and told them where it was and what I knew about “The Land of the Morning Calm.”

When I was 4 or 5, a missionary had come to our church and had spoken one evening. All us little kids were seated in the front row. He gave an interesting talk, which fascinated me even then. At the end of his talk, he waved his hand wildly and said, “Maybe YOU will go to Korea one day!” His finger stopped and it was pointing directly at me!!

We landed at Inchon. I spent several months in Pusan at the tip of Korea in a 6th Division Infantry outfit. I was not going to be what has been called “An Ugly American” so when something strange seemed to be going on among the native people, I watched, and tried to learn and understand, while most of the others couldn’t care less what was happening.

On February 2, 1947, I succeeded in getting a transfer to the 282 AGF Band in Seoul, where I became a valued member, quickly being promoted to T/4, and even more appreciated some of the customs and even the strange instruments and music of the land. On one of our performing assignments, I had a glimpse of a Russian general, and the wall separating the country between democracy and communism.

A captain from the time in Pusan on a few days leave, had heard me playing in a swing combo, recognized me at a band concert; came backstage and told me that I was wasted in the infantry, and congratulated me for my accomplishments. When I was invited to dine with a well-to-do Korean family, I insisted on learning to eat with chopsticks, and came to enjoy some of the food — even authentic kim chee. At the end of my enlistment, I returned to the states, crossing the International Date-line on my birthday, received my discharge on April 28, returned home and that September, off to Colorado University.



Received my B.MusEd, and taught band and choir five years but was miserable and unhappy. Worked on a Masters of Music at Denver U. and discovered library science. Taught one more year then returned to D.U. and received my Masters in Library Science. Accepted a position at CSULB in 1960. Enjoyed the work, but had many problems. A miserable marriage came to an end and I lost most of my hard-won self-confidence. Was involved somewhat in performance at times, but in 1969, joined the evening band under Gary Scott where most of us were over 50 or no longer in school. I also played in a second group for a while. I believe Michelle joined us in 2009, and she became one of my closest friends and that friendship remains to this day. The next summer, I showed Gary my attempts that began in 1947 to describe a beautiful Korean pagoda, located in an Emperor’s private garden, (a public park when I was there) in music. Gary was of much help and the composition was finished, and received a performance in May, 2012, “Frozen Music—A Portrait of a Korean Pagoda.” It was also performed by the Glenwood Springs HS band, where my interest in band first began. I remarried again in 1976, to Eugenia Goss who had been my first date ever — to the prom in my senior year. We only had 13 happy years together.

I had retired in 1992, and did some traveling. I went as an alumnus, with the Colorado U. band, when they were invited to march in the St. Patrick's Day parade in Dublin. On the last concert the LBCC band played at the Veteran Hospital in LB, my 50th year with the group we re-did the second movement, "Afternoon." Hope the day will come again when we'll be able to resume.

Other honors: invited to participate in the ringing of the Korean Freedom Bell in San Pedro. Received an Quilt of Valor at the func-

tion we played at last month for AVAG. Thank you, Chaplain Doreen and your staff, for all you have done for Kim and I.

About six years ago, I decided to stop driving and began using a home care service. Then four years ago I became very ill, and asked Kim San Jose, the very best of them, to be my 24/7 caregiver. It was through her that we became involved with the AVAG organization. Kim felt that I deserved some recognition and wanted to surprise me with the quilt presentation. ✧



Warner Olsen at left with his friend Howard Koch, right



## Howard Koch

*U.S. Army, 10th Mountain Division,  
Veteran of World War II and Korea*

Written by Paul Buron following an interview with Howard Koch January 30, 2021

Howard was born in 1925 and grew up in Oakland, California. At age 13 he learned to ski at the Donner Summit Sugar Bowl Ski Resort. His dad would

drop him at the Southern Pacific train station, with rented skis in hand, for the ride up to the mountain by himself. The train arrived at the Norden Train Station at the top of Donner Summit early in the morning. Not knowing where to stay he slept in the snow until the slopes opened. Later he found a railroad shack and slept next to a coal stove. Howard took ski lessons and paid for them with money he earned from his paper route. He soon made his own skis and visited the Sugar Bowl quite frequently.

A friend of Howard's belonged to the Sierra Club and told him about their activities. He then joined at the Sierra Club Headquarters in

San Francisco. The Sierra Club had a facility at Norden where he would stay and ski and learned rock climbing. In order to stay at the facility you had to pitch in and help out around there. This is where Howard got his first experience with KP duty.

Howard graduated high school at 16 years old and then attended the University of California Berkley (CAL) majoring in Geology/Mining Engineering. As a freshman he played on the football and baseball teams. On the football team he was a 160-pound right guard. A little light for a lineman. He remembers playing against USC in the Los Angeles Coliseum and defeating them.

Since the country was in the midst of World War II, he knew he was going to be drafted. The military was advertising for volunteers who could ski and rock climb to join a division that, at that time, was called the Ski Troops. Later they were designated as the 10th Mountain Division. About March 1, 1943 just after turning 18 he volunteered and petitioned to join the Ski Troops. With his love of skiing, rock climbing and the outdoors he felt the Ski Troops was where he belonged.

After being accepted, he was sent to Camp Hale in Colorado. Camp Hale was built in a valley near Eagle River. It was built to house 14,000 men and 4,000 mules for packing equipment. Vehicles couldn't go in



day, he was pondering what kind of assignment he would be given as a new Second Lieutenant. He was directed to San Marcello where he was assigned to C Company of the 86th as the Weapons Platoon Leader. They were headed for action to dislodge the Germans defending Mount Belvedere, a position along the Gothic Line. The Gothic Line was a heavily fortified and defended line that the Germans built in the mountainous region which stretched east to west across Northern Italy above Florence.

As part of the 10th Mountain's assault on Mount Belvedere, a German artillery observation outpost on Mount Serrasiccia (sometimes called Riva Ridge) would have to be taken. This outpost could direct German artillery onto the main assault against Mount Belvedere.

On February 17, 1945 Howard and his platoon were piled in trucks with full field packs, weapons and ammunition and taken north of Poretta Terme for an evening hike into the canyon of the Torrente Dardagna,

the snow and mountains in which they were training to fight. The mules were an essential part of their mission. Howard said that the mules were beautiful animals but never seemed to understand the concise field orders he gave them. Howard's success with them was limited.

Howard was assigned to the 86th Mountain Regiment, Second Battalion HQ. The 10th Mountain Division did not receive the typical basic training. Since the division was a new concept, they were developing their own clothing, equipment and tactics to best suit the conditions and terrain where they were expected to fight. Their training taught them how to fight on skis, rock climb, survive in snow and at high altitudes of mountains. The Germans had multiple trained mountain divisions and the United States had none until the formation of the 10th Mountain Division.

As part of their preparation, they were sent to Camp Swift in Texas so they could add Heavy Weapons Companies to their three regiments, the 85th, 86th and 87th. During his time at Camp Swift, he entered Officers Candidate School (OCS). Howard said that OCS was reputed to very difficult training, but after their intensive training with the 10th Mountain Division, it was a piece of cake.

Howard graduated OCS on November 15, 1944 as a second lieutenant and volunteered to return to the 10th Mountain Division as they were being sent overseas to Italy. Upon his return to Camp Swift, Howard was assigned to the 86th Mountain Infantry Division.

Howard embarked for Italy from Camp Patrick Henry on the USS West Point (prior to the war it was the SS United States). This ship was the fastest troop carrier and could outrun submarines, so they were told. His ship arrived in the Bay of Naples about the first of January 1945 and they made their way up the boot of Italy in coastal steamers and railroad box cars. As he was approaching his 20th birth-

2,000 feet below their objective, the German observation post on Mount Serrasiccia (Riva Ridge). In darkness early the next morning they arrived at the bottom of the Dardagna Canyon and entered a home where they hid out of site from the Germans for the next 18 hours. The home they were in housed his platoon of 36 men. Other homes in the canyon hid the rest of the company.

At 7:30 PM they departed to make their way up the canyon for about a mile where they crossed the Torrente River and started the arduous climb up the steep Riva Ridge. The route taken was the longest and steepest of the 5 routes. Howard's executive officer, 1st Lieutenant John McCown, had pioneered the route several days earlier. He had affixed ropes so they could climb up and over the steepest portions of the route.

There were at least 160 men climbing the one route in total darkness. It was essential that they ascended single file and in silence. A recent storm had left snow and ice along the route making it very slippery. Slipping caused the men to crash into the side of the rocks with their weapons and equipment making noise. Many thought the noise would be heard at the crest of the ridge resulting in a shower of explosives being hurtled down upon them.

After climbing for 10 hours, they approached the top at about 5:30 in the morning, a miracle seemed to happen. A dense fog covered the top of the ridge. The fog allowed them to dig their fox holes and gun positions without being detected. As the sun came up and burned off the fog they were still not discovered by the Germans. Howard's company advanced to discover that the Germans were unaware of their presence and were sleeping in several dugouts. Howard was in a group that opened a dugout door and Howard ordered them to come out with their hands up. There were about 60 Germans in that dugout that surrendered. Their assault on Riva Ridge was a total surprise to the Germans and was captured without firing a shot. The Germans

felt secure in their position, never expecting any attack from the steep ridge and therefore did not have any guards on watch.

All the prisoners were sent down the mountain while they prepared for a German counterattack. The attack began the next day after the Germans discovered their presence. This was his first time under fire and with his company taking casualties.

The success of their attack on Riva Ridge enabled the attack on Mount Belvedere to succeed.

Howard and the 10th Mountain Division continued to battle the Germans up on the mountain tops and in the valleys of Northern Italy all the way up to the Po River Valley and Lake Garda. After some bitter fighting in this region the German Southeastern Austrian Command surrendered on May 2, 1945. Six days later Germany surrendered ending the war in Europe.

Howard remained in Italy with his company until July when they returned to the United States to begin amphibious training in preparation to land on North Tokyo Beach. Soon after their return to Norfolk he heard about the first atomic bomb being dropped on Japan. During his two weeks leave before having to report to Camp Carson to prepare for Japan he heard about the second atomic bomb being dropped on Nagasaki. Before he arrived home in Oakland, the war was over.

After being released from the Army in May 1946, he joined the Army Reserve. Howard returned to the University of California Berkley and in 1948 graduated with a degree in accounting.

During his time at CAL, Howard met and married Averil in 1948.

After graduation, Howard went to work for Burrows selling accounting machines.

In August of 1950 Howard was recalled to active duty in the Army for the Korean War. He reported to Fort Lewis in Washington for training as an infantry officer. On his way to Korea, Howard had a stopover in Japan. It was at that time the Army found out about his accounting degree. It was still post-war Japan and the military had a lot of projects going on that needed fiscal oversight, so instead of going to Korea, he remained in Japan as a Budget and Fiscal officer.

Seventeen months later he was to be released from the Army on February 14, 1952. He was doing such a good job that his commanding officer offered him a promotion to Major if he would stay. Howard declined and returned to the United States to continue his life with his wife, Averil, to whom he remained married for 72.5 years.

Upon his return from Japan, Averil met his ship at the dock in San Francisco. A photographer for the Oakland Tribune was there and snapped a photo of Howard leaning out of a port hole with his buddies holding onto him reaching out to Averil while she was on the dock reaching up to hold hands. The photos made it into the Oakland Tribune and later into LIFE Magazine, February 25, 1972, in the 20 Years Ago section, entitled "A Fingertip Valentine for a Veteran". Elisabeth Taylor was on the cover.

After Howard separated from the Army, he kept in touch with his 10th Mountain Division buddies and attended several reunions. On the 50th anniversary of the attack on Riva Ridge, he and several others returned to the same spot where the assault began and



A photograph capturing Howard and his wife's 1952 reunion was printed twice in LIFE magazine. Once as the "photo of the week" on February 25, 1952 and again on the same date in 1972,



climbed up the same route. Many of the original pitons were still imbedded in the rock face of their ascent. Members of the 10th Mountain, 86th Division, C Company were there to make the climb again as well as members of other companies and divisions. Also, there were current members of 10th Mountain Division and even some of the Germans that were captured during the assault. The re-enactment was conducted in the spring and Howard noted it was much easier the second time...no snow, ice, heavy equipment, fear of being shot at and in the daylight.

During Howard's time in the Army, he experienced a great deal of combat and its horrors but he cherishes the camaraderie and fellowship of his comrades. He has even come to know some of the German soldiers he helped capture on Riva Ridge.

There is much more to this man's courageous story during his time in the Army and in his life that followed but I have already filled too many pages for the AVAG Newsletter and so must close out saying that Howard is a True Hero and a Gentleman through and through. It is my honor to know this man. ✧

## Jim Miller

At our Veterans Recognition Night Jim Miller was invited by Marine Corps Veteran Tom Loveless and his wife, Wendy. One of our volunteers, Karen Martinez and her grandson Zachary, was sitting with him during the event when he shared his life story. A Navy veteran, Jim served from 1959-1965 and then re-enlisted in 1983. He retired in 2000. He hoped to win the La-Z-Boy recliner which was the grand prize. He was on pins and needles when we were calling the number, but he didn't win. But that didn't stop Karen. She wrote Chaplain Doreen, a long letter asking if another recliner came up could we please give it to Jim.

When AVAG received another brand new recliner Chaplain Doreen called Jim to ask if he was still interested. With enthusiasm in his voice, he said yes and agreed to meet with us to pick it up.

We asked him about his experiences during his time in the military.

### Here's Jim Miller's story.

In 1995, my wife was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. The doctors said five months for 5% chance, and, praise the Lord, he healed her and we got another 23 years. Five was the magic number because they say if you survive five years the doctors say you're healed.

We decorate our house every year; we have 10,000 lights on the front of the house for Christmas and my wife says "Jim we need to put up a sign on the garage door saying '5 years cancer free Praise the Lord.'" We kept that sign up until 2018 when she went to the Lord. You would not believe the people that came up to our door who had cancer. We prayed and shared the gospel with them. In December of 2017 she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and she said to me, "Jim I can't put the sign up this year I'm not cancer free." I said, "You were cancer free for 11 months so we changed the sign to "22 years cancer free," then in 2018 the sign said "23 years went to heaven my new home."

Last year it said "24 years I'm in heaven, will I see you there". This year I asked my daughter what is the sign going to say this year? We have to put it back up because everyone in the area, and pretty much all over, comes by just to see the sign. I asked a lady at church the same question, and she said let me pray on it. She called me up and said "how about 'I'm enjoying heaven, will I see you there?'" So that's what it says now and we're not going to change it.

I joined the Navy in August of 1959. They gave me a choice to go to Great Lakes, Illinois or San Diego, California. At the time I was in Detroit, and I said Great Lakes. I didn't know anything about the military, just thought I'd be stationed somewhere in the east coast. Then I got my assignment and it said Long Beach, USS Brace Canyon, and at that time there were 100 ships in Long Beach. The Lord put me on the USS Brace Canyon so two years later I could meet my wife.

Because if I was on any other ship, I wouldn't have met her and she was a strong Christian woman. From 1959-1961 she had a summer job working in the ship yard; she worked in the admin building from 1959-60. Then in 1961 they called her up and asked if she wanted to work there for the summer again and she said yes. They put her in the supply building, and that summer I got the job as the store keeper for the ship I was on. So, every day it was my job to go out to the ship yard to get the supplies we needed to bring back to the ship. And if



she wasn't transferred to that building, I never would have met her, and if I didn't get my job, I never would have met her. On July 1st, I decided I'm going to get that gals name. I had to talk to her a few times, I shined my shoes got a haircut, put on a fresh pressed suit. And that day I walked up gave her the requisition and said "I'd like to get acquainted" and she said, "Jim Miller, Joan Beeson, nice to meet you" and she winked at me. She denied that till the day she died.

She was about to take her break. I asked do you mind if I join you, she said fine so we went to the cafeteria. And the first thing she said when we sat down at the table was "Jim, I want you to know I'm a Christian" and I said to her "I'm a Christian too." That was more important to her than a cup of coffee, and 4 months and 10 days later we got married and were married for 55 years. People asked me what's your secret, and I say the secret is the Lord put us together and when we got our marriage license, we committed our lives to Christ and we put Christ ahead of our home all the way through our marriage and it was a *we* marriage never a *me* marriage. ✨

## Robert “Sarge” Perez

With more than seventeen years of leadership serving honorably in the United States Army, National Guard, and working with the Veterans services community, Robert “Sarge” Perez realizes first-hand that leadership is shaped through persevering through the toughest, most challenging times in life.

A disabled Army Combat Veteran, Sergeant Robert Perez enlisted in the United States Army in 2003. During his twelve years of active duty, he served in two tours in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom with the 2668th Transportation Company as a .50 cal Machine Gunner and the 1113th Transportation Company as an Assistant Convoy Commander. After suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of combat deployment, divorce, and losing his home, “Sarge” experienced a dark depression. A sign he read on a G.E.T. Bus in Bakersfield, CA that said, “It takes the strength and courage of a warrior to get help” led Sarge to immediately seek help with the VA Outpatient Clinic.

The journey to recovery and obtaining services was a long and challenging process. However, through it all, Robert decided to utilize his Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits and was able to attain his Associates of Science Degree in Computer Networking Technology at Kaplan College in 2012. He also graduated with his Bachelors of Science Degree in Human Resources Management from the DeVry University in Pomona, CA. Robert started the Veterans Club at the university, and was also awarded the 2017 Outstanding Extracurricular Leadership Award within the DeVry University community. After numerous letters of denial for employment, bouncing from one job to another, trying to find the right one where he could showcase his knowledge, skills, and abilities, Robert finally joined the team at Southern California Resources for Independent Living where he is currently the Lead Human Resources Coordinator.

Founder and Chief Executive Officer for Sarge’s Resource Center, Robert has proven abilities to be of service to others in the most timely and efficient manner. His work ethic has been essential to ensuring the highest quality satisfaction of service is delivered to all partners and clients. Robert found opportunities to identify and meet a human need as a result of personal experiences and observations, when faced with his own challenges in obtaining veteran resource services. Finding these challenges to be “unacceptable” motivated Robert to change the culture on how veterans receive their resources and services. His mission is simple: “Getting Veterans Squared Away” through our quick reaction capabilities. 🦋



# AVAG Honors Women Veterans



## SSgt Chloe Schulman (Romero)

So, a little about me personally, I have been in the service for over 11 years. I just transitioned to the Air Force as part of one of the first Mental Health Teams in the Air National Guard. 10 of those previous years were in the Army as a medic, where I deployed to Iraq in 2011. After I came home, I started working on my schooling, and now am finishing up my Masters of Science in Healthcare Administration. I have dreams to remain a servant to my fellow service members past retiring from the military. I would love to work for the VA and continue volunteer work to assist military members and veterans in need. This has remained a goal of mine, and was the reason I joined the military in the first place.

I was fortunate to meet my husband who also serves in the military as a Nuclear Medical Scientist with a Civil Support Team. His team responds to domestic emergency situations. He also served a deployment as a Medical Operations staff in Kosovo.

Both of us share similar fond memories of times with our units out in the field training. I learned so many incredible aspects of leadership during my time with the Army, and now the Air Force. Of course, I loved practicing medical scenarios and teaching my platoon everything I know about how to save one another in combat situations, and the camaraderie in these units were unparalleled.

I look forward to continuing to serve my country, and my husband and I cannot express the gratitude we have for AVAG's generous gift to us. It helps make our home more comfortable and we know we are cared for when one of us is away (which is very often) from one another. ✨

## Sharon A. Catlett, USN, Ret.

Military Service: US Army for 4 years, US Navy for 16 years, from May 1975 – January 1996

MOS (Army) & A School (Navy): US Army: Finance Specialist and US Navy: Radioman & Yeoman

Inspiration and Joined for a Challenge: My inspiration was my Uncle Alvin, who spent 20 years in the Army. He used to come to my home and flip a coin off my bed and if it didn't bounce, I had to make it up again.

We were debating one day about his nieces and nephews and who was strong enough to join the military. I stated I could join and do 20 years just like him. He made me a bet, that if I did do 20 years that he would give me \$5,000.00. I took him up on it, did 20 years, retired from the US Navy, and collected my \$5,000.00 upon arriving home.

Quilts of Valor: Nothing is more rewarding than being appreciated for a job well done. To know that others are aware of the sacrifices and struggles you endured to perform a particular position or project is ever so awesome. That is enough to make you want to do it all over again. I was fortunate enough to receive two quilts. Both are beyond beautiful!

Position in AMVETS Post 77: I'm the Finance Officer. ✨



## Cmdr Shirrell McCarey

*Navy Commander, Army Paratrooper, and Special Forces, Retired*

Preparing for our recognition night one of our previous nominees, Lisa Diggs nominated Shirrell McCarey for her dedication and commitment to the Veteran community as she pays it forward in her volunteerism.

Lisa shared that Shirrell drives up and down the State of California to drop off groceries, prescriptions, toiletries, toilet paper, paper towels, and baked goods to disabled and shut-in elderly Veterans. She has a strong passion for service to others, and this past year during the pandemic, she didn't stop helping others. She was also honored as Women Veteran of the Year 2020, from 47th district Assemblywomen Eloise Reyes, for her tireless service to her fellow Veterans.

Shirrell is also the first woman and woman of African-American Descent, elected Commander of DAV Chapter 12, San Bernardino, CA in 96 years. She is definitely a true leader, who exhibits, honor, strength, courage and valor in her 38 years of military service in the Vietnam Era, Cold War, Enduring Freedom, and 9/11 Iraqi Freedom.

She has also served as President Chair of Loma Linda Mental Health Advisory Council for 8 years but total advisory council for 25 years in total. Certified peer support specialist for 8 years to present, mental health first aid deputy chief of staff for DAV for 2 years, now Alternate SEC Cmdr District 11, and also Advisor to the Employment committee DAV nationally. DAV Chapter 12 Treasurer 2019-2020 Mentor Veterans Court San Bernardino & Riverside CA. Women Veterans Unity Group Advisor to Ms. Ann Duson, CEO and founder. California Women veterans leadership council assistant to the women veteran's coordinator for DAV State of California to Mrs. Peni Turner Brown.

Shirrell said "as a child I was very lucky to come from loving women in my family, hardworking, and very caring hearts. Our door was open to everyone who knew us. The women in my family were the ones who disciplined us when we acted out. I could only remember one time getting in trouble; I miss them. All of my great-grandmother and great-grandfather's children are all gone now and my Aunt Virginia was the last; my heart is so broken now I am lost for words. My family were all military and law enforcement, seven and five generations, that's something to be proud of for sure. I am deeply blessed beyond words and am grateful for their life teachings of us kids what to do and not do in life there will never be again that is probably why I am the way I am because of them these beautiful women of strength and courage. God bless all women. Thank you from Cmdr S. McCarey"

Shirrell was awarded a beautiful Quilt of Valor at our veteran's recognition night and two certificates of recognition from our local and state governments. 🦋



## Lisa Diggs

Lisa Camille Diggs, born in Jamaica, NY. — I was always fascinated with joining the military since the age of 14. In high school I joined the Honor/Color Guard and Army ROTC, and then when I went off to college at the University of New Orleans in 1982. I was a very studious young lady who wanted to pursue Nursing, so I joined the ARMY ROTC in college to hopefully become an Army Nurse and 2LT at commissioning, but I was really in need of financial assistance, so I joined the Louisiana Army National Guard in December of 1983, served in the HHQ Battery at Jackson Barracks in New Orleans, within a year of signing up, took my physical, and was sent to Ft. Jackson, in Columbia SC, where I did my basic training and tech school, and graduated in November 1985, and finished tech school as an 71L10 Administrative Specialist in April 1986.

I am very happy to have served for 9 years consecutively in Louisiana and California Army National Guard in the S2/S3 Tactical Operations Center as a radio operator and logistics specialist. I had the opportunity to serve for 2 years on Federal Orders as a Unit Assistant Clerk for the HHB 40th INFANTRY DIVISION UNIT out of Los Angeles, CA and one of those years as a Training Specialist at Camp San Luis Obispo, Officer Military Academy.

Since my honorable discharge in January 9, 1992, I have graduated with my Bachelors of Science degree in Hospitality Management from California State Polytechnic University Pomona in 1993, and then after 15 years in the Hospitality Industry with many Fortune 500 Industry Leaders, such as Marriott, Aramark, Provider and Disneyland. In 1999 I decided to enter the area of teacher education, so I did a 2-year term of service with the Americorps Program and then returned to my Alma Mater Cal Poly Pomona to study Teacher Education, graduated with a Master's in Education for Language and Literacy. I am currently an elementary Title One Reading and Math Intervention Teacher in the Moreno Valley Unified School District. I also serve as the Public Relations Officer for the AMVETS Post 77, Loma Linda, Ca. as well as Blue Star Families Volunteer Ambassador, Foundation of Women Warriors, and Women Veterans Network as Peer Leader and just recently a part of the Mission Continues Leadership Corps. I am paying it forward as an active volunteer helping military families and spouses, as well as our sheltered in place Veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering food and supplies. I have been honored as Women of the Year in 2018, Veteran Women of Influence Finalist, 2020, Veteran Hero Award Recipient, 2020.

It was truly an honor to have received a Quilt of Valor in March 29, 2019, and it was a shock and a joyful moment. This year I nominated several Female Veterans from my AMVETS Post 77, Sharon Catlett, US NAVY Retired, Shirrell McCarey, US NAVY, Retired and Virginia Chavez, US ARMY National Guard, and I also nominated my dear Veteran Brother Robert "Sarge" Perez of Veterans Standing Together, US Army OEF Veteran, who was so wonderful to donate PPE and other items to the Veteran Appreciation Event, as well as Carolina Hernandez, of Veteran Couture, Fashion Designer and US NAVY still serving in Naval Reserve. ✨



## Sheryl Alexa Shaffer

Served in the Women’s Army Corps from 6/68 to 6/71 as a Vietnam Era Veteran. I was trained as a Personnel Specialist at Ft. Knox, KY and was stationed there most of my tour and was at the Armor School. From Oct. 70 to June 71, I was stationed at the 97th General Hospital in Frankfurt, Germany. My hometown is Pacifica, CA. Honorable discharge at rank of E-5.

I created Veterans Helping Veterans TV (VHVtv) in 1996 as an outreach to veterans in San Mateo County while working as an EDD Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER).

VHVtv is filmed in the HD studio at the Mid-Peninsula Media Center in Palo Alto and Sheryl is a Volunteer Community Producer. Since 2016, we have produced VHVtv episodes in the Mid-Peninsula Media Center’s state of the art HD studio and during the past few years, have had many guest hosts. All MC studio produced HD content is on this website.

VHVtv has gone through many changes since we began and none as dramatic as 2020 with the COVID 19 pandemic. The Media Center in Palo Alto has been closed since March 13, 2020. Since June 2020, we pivoted and kept filming interviews virtually to create content for Veterans Helping Veterans TV. VHVtv co-producer Richard Gonzales and I created twelve Virtual Interviews. These Virtual Interviews are with Women Veterans about how military service changed them into living lives of service as Veteran Advocates. We present stories of diversity, inclusion and being of service in the Veteran Community.

We are aligned with the Veterans Resource Center at UC Riverside and will soon have a new VRC intern to assist us with Social Media.

I am 73 years old and a volunteer community producer. Right now, I have 4 virtual interviews in pre-production. There are so many great veteran stories to tell, especially those of women veterans.

Because I volunteer, I was honored to receive the Certificate of Award and Medal as the California State Society Daughters of the American Revolution 2021 Outstanding DAR Veteran Volunteer for Service for Veterans at the California State Society Daughters of the American Revolution (CSSDAR) 113th State Virtual Convention on March 5, 2021.

Sheryl was recently presented with a Quilt of Valor which features “Rosie the Riveter.”

About the quilt Sheryl said, “I love the Rosie quilt. The quilt means a lot to me because it says “We Can Do It!” We did a video about the Rosie flight, which I was on and I got to meet America’s longest working Rosie the Riveter, Elinor Otto. We filmed an interview with her at the March Air Field Museum. That was an amazing experience.” Video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yml5Mxwkffo>

Sheryl’s Military Family Story can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/ffY8q6Lx8rc>

Sheryl appreciates AVAG for including her story in this newsletter. ✨



Basic training photo, Women’s Army Corps 1968.



Sheryl’s parents James C. Hoke and Blanca Armida Romero in 1942. “My mom was in the WAAC for about a year and married my father shortly after they met. He was recuperating from war injuries from his service as a Marine in Guadalcanal.”



# An AVAG Drive-By Birthday Celebration

*From AVAG Chaplain, posted on AVAG Facebook page on Friday, February 12, 2021:*

Today we celebrated World War II Veteran Frank Paglia, from Casitas LaVerne. We sent out flyers to the residents and let them know it was his 97th birthday. We asked them to drive by or come by and pay him a visit. We had a chocolate birthday cake and we decorated his house with balloons and signs. Many of the residents came by, especially the veterans. They were all asking when we would be doing a luncheon. We gave out blessing bags to everyone who came by and we dropped a few off at the homes of seniors that have a hard time getting out of the house.

His wife, Helen, was very grateful we also gave them a \$25 gift card to Chili's so they can treat themselves to something to eat for their special day.

Helen and Frank always speak very highly about Mr. Richard (Simonian) and talk about his brother who is a dentist.

There was a very special thing that happened — a little nine-year-old boy with his grandmother and mom got out of the car to wish Frank happy birthday. The boy was blind and it was very moving that he made his way over to talk to Frank personally. When we left, Frank broke down in tears and said he was so happy and thankful for remembering him on his birthday. 🐦



# Mother's Day at Sequoia Mobile Home Park

On Saturday, May 1, 2021 we celebrated the Mother's Day at Sequoia Mobile Home Park. As they walked up, we had a photo booth with all kinds of props put together by Amanda Breunig. They posed with their kids, went into the clubhouse, and received a personal gift.

We had a beautiful catered lunch by Above and Beyond Catering which included chicken with mashed potatoes, vegetables, and homemade cookies. Grateful Hearts donated soft drinks.

After lunch, we took them to the coffee room which was converted into a Mother's Day store. Everything was free and all the items were donated by Grateful Hearts, the Richard Breunig Foundation, and Sway to the 99.

The items consist of jewelry, hair dye, make up, nail polish, treats and all the beauty products you could think of. Each woman walked out with a huge bag of stuff. They returned to the main room and we did a raffle where every woman won a prize.

We ended our event by sharing the word of God and reading Proverbs 31. It was read in Spanish and English by Chaplain Doreen and Margaret Gurule.

We want to give a special thanks to the residents at Sequoia that volunteered; Kathy Bryant did check in, Roberta Gardner, Alice and Angel Guest helped with set up and the Mother's Day store.

AVAG team Paul Buron, Amanda Breunig, Mary Cruz, Mellissa and David Breunig also helped to make this event a success.

The extra food was delivered to our veterans. ✂



# AVAG Helping Our Veterans in Hemet Palm Vista



## Frank Goodwin

By Chaplain Doreen

Frank Goodwin served in the Navy 1970-74.

“My Dad gave me five choices, join the Stockton Bible School for Boys cause my dad was a preacher, and the other choices were Army, Air Force, Navy, or Marines. So basically, my dad said you’re leaving, because I was a star kid and never did anything wrong.... on Sundays.

“I joined when I was 17 and that was the age when you start learning about life. It was all western Pacific tours and we picked up the Apollo 14 when it splashed down. I then left the service as an E4.

“It was fun; I traveled to Hawaii, Japan, the Philippines, and all throughout Taiwan. There were a lot of good guys, but there’s one I still keep in contact with who lives up north — but we still communicate.”

Chaplain Doreen asked him why he chose the Navy. He said, “Well for the Air Force you had to have a high school diploma and the Army recruiter was a big fat ugly guy with a cigar and I didn’t want him to be my mother. Then I took the test for the Marines and the Navy and I found out the Navy was the boss of the Marines so I selected the Navy.”

I thought the story of his dad’s conversation with him was funny, so I asked about his dad.

“His name is Ralph Goodwin. He served during the Korean War but he never left the states. He worked at the Commissary on the base in San Diego. He then became a pastor and had a few churches in Anaheim, Bellflower, and Blythe.”

Frank has lived at Palm Vista for 11 years now and he installs masonry and modular homes for a living. It was great getting to know him when we dropped off his new La-Z-Boy recliner.

We are actively working with the residents and manager to bring awareness that if there is a need we want to help. 🐦



Frank Goodwin holds a portrait of his father.



Ralph Goodwin, Frank's father



Frank enjoying his new La-Z-Boy recliner with Chaplain Doreen and Donna Bohn, manager of Palm Vista.

## Lawrence Mitchell

By Amanda Breunig

Lawrence Mitchell was drafted by the Navy at age 19 and served from 1971-1975. After leaving the Navy he became a deputy sheriff and continued as a reservist. When offered a commission he enlisted into the Marine Corps. Lawrence became a pilot and flew a Bell-Jet Ranger, was in the Marines for 36 years, retiring in 2003. People would say that aviator gunner men have a 9-day life expectancy.

He completed basic training at TC San Diego, was part of seven fleets, and was then assigned to three destroyers: the USS Camden, USS Turner Joy, and USS Albert David. Mostly he was in Vietnam, but the main port was in Long Beach, California before it closed.

“I would have joined even if I wasn’t drafted. I was a 19-year-old kid from Compton and my dad, Lawrence Eugene Mitchell, was a deputy and was always at work supporting me and my siblings. I have two brothers and one sister. Plus, my mom, Grace Ann Mitchell, was a Navy nurse, she served during WWII from 1942-1946.

“I achieved E6 in four years as a gunner’s mate, they then reassigned me to be an aviator gunner mate on a helicopter with no training only because I knew how to shoot an 8mm. They were supposed to send us to A school or weapons school, but that changed. So instead they gave us new assignments.”

I asked Lawrence what he liked best about being in the service. He said, “Everything! I liked being a policeman of the world and making things right that were wrong and helping people in other countries get their freedom. Traveling, of course, and the camaraderie and the lifelong connections you make — it’s a bond you can’t break even with death.”

When asked what he liked least about being in the service he said, “it was how much racism and prejudice there was and not letting a man do his job and duty because of their skin complexion.”

He shared a story from his time in the military: “I remember we were flying over and got hit by a missile over the Kuwait-Afghan border. We called it “making a splash” when that would happen. A nuke sub picked us up and they had an emergency on board. A paint chipper/maintenance man was the only one that was able to fix the problem. The chief said to everyone on board to ‘follow what he says’ and ended up skipping a few ranks and moved up because he saved everyone on that sub.”

His family’s reaction when he enlisted was mixed. He said, “My mom was happy and my dad was on the fence. Then my brother, Joseph Mitchell, joined the Navy after me so it was a brother duty. And of course, I had the haters who didn’t agree with the war. Both of my uncles served in the Army during WWII so they were pro.”

Lawrence was asked if he had any second thoughts about serving. He said, “No, I only had second thoughts of the roll we were playing in Vietnam, like don’t shoot till shot at and rolls changed week to week, month to month, depending on different presidents and administrations, and seeing so much loss of life, you start to question the role you play and start to grow a conscience.” 🐦



Lawrence enjoying the new recliner he received from AVAG.

## Roy and Joye Devoll



As told by Roy Devoll: “I joined the Air Force when I was 17 1/2. We had about three guys we hung out with and we talked each other into joining. But we couldn’t stay together because they got different assignments. I was asked if I wanted to get out two months early, so I did. But in that two months’ time they declared the Vietnam conflict so I didn’t qualify for benefits since I got out early. I was in the Air Force for four years and the highest rank I achieved was airmen second.

“I did my training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, then was stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. They sent me to Korea. It was nice and it wasn’t very populated back then, it was just dirt roads and I lived in the barracks there. Later, they sent me to Albuquerque, New Mexico and I loved it there.

“When I left the service, I came back to California to help with the family store. It was a mom-and-pop shop. My dad was working the most in the store and it was wearing on him. He ended up getting ALS and I had to take over the family business.

“My wife and I will be married 38 years in July. She lived three streets over and we met at a neighborhood party. Our mutual friend was playing the match-maker and we instantly hit it off. It took Joye two years to marry me, but it was worth it.

We moved to Palm Vista and were introduced to AVAG through their monthly food program. We started talking to Chaplain Doreen about what AVAG does for veterans. We told her about our financial situation and we were looking for help for medical benefits and other needs. AVAG has already helped us with rent assistance, home improvements for safety, food, removal of broken furniture and provided us with a brand-new La-Z-Boy recliner.” 🦋



Above in the photos at left, AVAG volunteers work together to move the Roy Devoll’s brand-new La-Z-Boy recliner into his home. At right, Roy relaxing in the recliner with his wife Joye by his side. The recliner includes a lift to help Roy to get up with ease.

# Meet Army Veteran, Jo-Vane Newton, Assistant Manager at Santiago Desert View Estates



Jo-Vane Newton in front of the sign that greets residents and visitors as they enter the park.

At the age of 17, Jo-Vane Newton joined and served as a Combat Medic in the United States Army. In 2004, she was the youngest soldier in the United States Army. While in the service Jo-Vane participated in over 200 OIF/OEF medevacs and ran the entire OB/GYN Department (consisting of five different clinics) at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. She served on the medical team for former President Ronald Reagan's funeral and on the decontamination team for former President Gerald Ford's funeral. She deployed to Baghdad, Iraq where she served in combat. She is now a proud wife and mother of seven. Jo-Vane currently works for Santiago Desert View Estates in Barstow, CA. "I serve all my jobs as proudly as when I was in the service!"

She also volunteers for our AVAG events in her community with manager, Maria Lugo Harrison. 🦋



Left to right, Mellissa Breunig, Jo-Vane Newton, Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, Santiago Desert View Estates Manager Maria Harrison, and Amanda Breunig getting ready for event at Santiago Desert View Estates.

# In Memoriam

## Gayle Bohnhoff-Vrabec

Died April 3, 2021

Saying good bye to our friend Gayle — words can't even express how we felt when we heard of Gayle passing. She had been such a blessing to our organization. She was truly doing what was in her gifting and talents. She would take the veterans to the VA to get their benefits and was always at all our events. She was part of our bible study group and she became very close to Barbara Winkins and even helped her move out of state. If you asked Gayle for help, she would do it.

She knew what our heart was in AVAG; that we wanted to help anyone who needed help. She organized AVAG yard sales put clothes together for multiple organizations. If you needed medical equipment, she had it stored in her back yard. She even put suits together for Torres Mortuary for veterans that needed a suit for burial.

It's going to be strange not having her here. She was an active member with the VVA and the DAV.

We will miss you but one day we will see you again in heaven. ✨



Gayle Bohnhoff-Vrabec



Gayle pictured above with her mother and sister.



Gayle and Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto

## AVAG News

**Editor:** Vicky Jackson

**Contributors:**

Doreen Matsumoto • Vicky Jackson  
Amanda Breunig • Paul Buron

**Graphic Design:**

Debra Holm/Dinwiddie Holm Graphics

**POC:** vjj1223@yahoo.com

**Website:** avagusa.com

**Facebook:** @AmericanVeteransAssistanceGroup

**Instagram:** @social.avag



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