



# AVAG News

Winter 2022 • Volume 9 Issue 1



Representatives from AVAG, Women in Networking and Unleash Your Purpose gathered for a group photo during Angel Light Academy's Above and Beyond Gala. AVAG was honored to receive an Above and Beyond Award for Excellence from the Academy.

## AVAG Honored at Above and Beyond Awards Gala

The American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) was honored at Angel Light Academy's Above and Beyond Awards Gala on September 25, 2021. AVAG is a community of veterans within each manufactured housing community involved with the Veterans Affordable Housing Program. Their mission is to thank and reward veterans for their service. AVAG helps to support veterans by creating a safe and supportive living environment and a way to connect with one another. Partnerships with other veteran and community groups allow AVAG to reach more veterans in the community providing services and information on healthcare, training, education, and other services and resources.

During the pandemic, AVAG and its partners fed over 10,000 households and helped to provide them with events, informational seminars, movie nights, parties, dinners, recreation such as exercise classes and sports teams, food distribution programs, outreach programs, and resource referrals for employment career training, and benefits.

Mr. Richard Simonian, a veteran of the U.S. Army Special Forces Green Berets, created the non-profit organization AVAG to assist veterans with affordable housing, holiday meals,

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Angel Light Academy honors AVAG for their service.

#### First Responder Appreciation Barbecue

AVAG honors veterans now serving on police and fire departments.

#### Backpack Giveaway

Backpacks and haircuts given away just in time for back to school at Pacific Palms in Highland, CA.

#### National MIA/POW Recognition Day

AVAG holds its first event for this recognition day in Huntington Beach, CA.

#### AVAG In Action

AVAG has three busy months celebrating Veterans Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas — along with doing its work to assist the veterans in its communities.

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or learn more about us at [AVAGUSA.com](http://AVAGUSA.com)

## Honoring Angels on Earth for Their Service continued

Photos courtesy Doreen Matsumoto

informational workshops about veteran benefits and other outreach programs. Mr. Simonian had various life events that made him very aware of God's blessings in his life. As a successful businessman, he feels very passionate about serving the veteran communities and understands the challenges veterans face in today's society. The Angel Light Academy declared Mr. Simonian and the AVAG team as "angels on earth" by serving veterans who have courageously served this country.

### About Angel Light Academy (ALA)

Angel Light Academy (ALA) is a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation dedicated to teaching leadership to youth and adults. ALA's mission is to improve the health, happiness, and well-being of individuals through the practice and demonstration of unconditional love. This is accomplished through service, education, and research. ALA's Leadership Training Institute trains youth in leadership, problem solving, communication, bullying resistance, and service. Through training and mentoring, ALA creates leaders who provide exceptional service to themselves, others, and the community.

### ALA's History

The Angel Light Academy was founded 1995 to serve those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. After serving over 600,000 children through Project Prevention, an abuse prevention program, founder Julia Wilmot wanted to give hope to those who had experienced some form of trauma.

ALA began serving those with PTSD by teaching them to use their innate leadership traits and to use a simple, effective problem-solving model. Creating simple, doable action plans helped those with PTSD take control of their lives, make positive change, and build hope for the future.

The first Youth Leadership Conference was held in 1998 in Arizona. Due to demand from volunteers and parents, the conference was moved to the Coachella Valley in 1999. The first conference, held in Indio, California served 30 children.

Each year ALA's conference serves more than 200 children. Demand for this high-quality program grows each year as schools and districts request programming and training.

Many children from the conference join the year-round Junior Leadership program. Junior Leaders meet every six weeks with well-trained volunteer facilitators for in-depth training in leadership skills including character traits, problem solving, communication, team building, and service. They also conduct a Music and Memory program to assist those with Alzheimer's and other memory diseases. 🦋

### From AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto

#### About the Angel Light Academy's Above and Beyond Awards Gala:

There was a great turn out of supporters for AVAG. Jim Duffy presented challenge coins from Richard Simonian and AVAG to Brigadier General Richard Wilmot. His wife Julia was very touched by the thoughtfulness of the gift. Even the MC Paul Dean Martin posted on Facebook how awesome it was to receive a challenge coin. So many amazing organizations were being represented that night. It was great to see all of our veterans having a wonderful time.

Mr. Richard's video was awesome and everyone really wanted to meet him. I had never seen all those old photos of Mr. Richard in the service; it was really cool. ([https://youtu.be/rW57V9\\_vTdg](https://youtu.be/rW57V9_vTdg)). See the some of the photos that appeared in this video presentation on page 4 of this issue.



Pictured above left, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and AVAG Board Member Jim Duffy accepted the Above and Beyond Award on behalf of AVAG at the Gala.





Jim Duffy, at center, presents AVAG challenge coins to General Wilmot on behalf of Richard Simonian and AVAG. Julia Wilmot is seated at right.



Angel on Earth Award recipients — First row, seated, Chanda Zaveri (Scientist), Charis Ifland (Surfing the Nations), Gen Wilmot, Julia Wilmot, Nora Caldwell (Human Options), Lauren Costa (The Academy Project); Second row, standing, Doreen Matsumoto & Jim Duffy (AVAG), Zach Ifland (Surfing the Nations), Dr. Denise Price (New Hope Academy of Change), Holly Morrell (Heartfelt), LBPD Officer Jason Lehman (Why'd You Stop Me), Talaat Captan (Open Sky for Autism), Prof. Angelo Molino (International Music and Wellness Council), A. G. Kuwamura (Solutions for Urban Ag)

## Meet Angel Light Academy Founders, Julia and General Richard Wilmot

**Julia Wilmot** first founded Angel Light Academy in 1995 to assist those with PTSD by helping to draw out their innate leadership traits, learn to find solutions to their problems, and take action to change their lives. She brought with her thirty years of entrepreneurial business experience, and experience as a secondary school, special education, and college teacher, fundraiser and creator of highly successful prevention programs for children.

She developed, implemented and raised funds for Project Prevention, a program that reached over 600,000 youth in Arizona. This program served as a model for abuse prevention programs throughout the United States. In 2003, she was awarded Woman of the Year for her thirty years of community leadership and service in Arizona.

Julia is truly a dynamic angel on earth, with an untiring devotion to the betterment of mankind. She is a pioneer in combining the concepts of science, spirituality, philosophy and psychology to leadership, team building, problem solving, communication and community development.

**General Richard Wilmot** is a retired US Army Brigadier General who has been involved in leadership at the national level for many years. He has traveled extensively and visited more than 100 countries. He has lived abroad for many years and is well-versed in national and international affairs. His expertise puts him in high demand as a public speaker. He is also an author and has owned and operated think tanks focused on national concerns.

The General's extensive travel and experience on the national and international stage has given him a unique perspective on leadership. His focus is to help fill the void in leadership at the local, state, and national level by helping to train young leaders. 🦋



# AVAG Founder, Richard Simonian



Richard Simonian, above next to the 10th Special Forces Group Headquarters sign, was one of the original 600 Special Forces from the newly formed 10th SF Group that trained at Flint Kaserne, Bad Tölz, Germany in 1953.



SF "Originals" at Ft. Bragg, NC in early 1953. From left, Richard Simonian, Wayne Marchand, Charles Neal, and an unidentified soldier, before a parachute jump at Ft. Bragg. Marchand was one of the first Green Berets killed in S. Vietnam in the early days of the war.



Richard on the periscope while on a tour of the USS Helena, while it was docked in San Diego in 2007. Richard had enjoyed submarine training while serving in Special Forces aboard the USS Sea Lion.



Richard Simonian with President George W. Bush



Richard Simonian with Mikhail Gorbachev



At left, Ralph "Jerry" Licon, a fellow "Original" Green Beret and Richard Simonian.



Richard Simonian at his desk in his office at Santiago Communities.



# First Responders Appreciation Barbecue

We had an amazing turn out for our First Responders Appreciation Barbecue on August 26th covering two shifts 11 am to 5 pm at Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach. Thank you to everyone who helped make this event happen. Thankful to meet so many veterans that are now serving on the police and fire departments. We were able to feed them an amazing lunch and it was great seeing our AVAG veterans volunteering.

All these groups came together to bless these veterans who now serve on first responder jobs.

- The Richard Breunig Foundation
- American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG)
- Huntington Beach Fire Department
- Huntington Beach American Legion Post 133
- Huntington Beach Police Department
- Bracken's Kitchen
- So Cal Quilts of Valor
- Grateful Hearts Storehouse
- Hope Chapel Huntington Beach chaplains and leadership team came out in full force to serve everyone.

They were so happy to receive our challenge coins and every veteran received a Quilt of Valor. So Cal Quilt of Valor set up a table so the veterans could choose the quilt they liked.

They were cooking on the grill, serving desserts, and all the side dishes. Chaplain Mellissa brought raffle prizes and decorated all the tables.

Even Huntington Beach Chief of Police Julian Harvey showed up and was very impressed with our Chaplains. 🦋



Left to right, Mellissa Arrriola Breunig, David Breunig, Patrick Duffy, Doreen Matsumoto, Huntington Beach Chief of Police Julian Harvey, Hope Chapel Pastors Paul and Ainsley Harmon, Sean Hersey, and Amanda Breunig



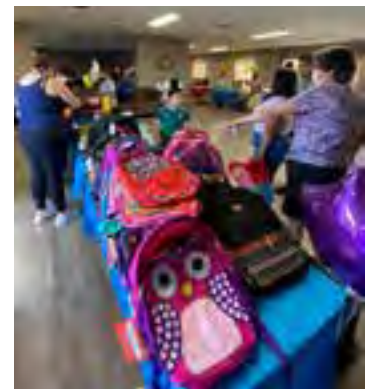


# Backpack Giveaway

What an amazing day! We blessed so many children at Pacific Palms Mobile Home Park in Highland, CA with new backpacks, school supplies, free hair cuts and lunch provided by American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG).

It was a wonderful day with the Richard Breunig Foundation and AVAG out in full force. David Breunig cooking up the hot dogs and burgers. We had our newest associate Chaplain Scott Perry working with David. Mellissa Arriola Breunig heading up the volunteers passing out backpacks and school supplies. Lisa giving haircuts to the kids and our veterans.

Thank you Megan and Marin for your administration skills. Special thanks to our volunteers Alice, Vanessa, Eric, Kathy, and Patricia from Sequoia Mobile Home Park. Thank you to our veterans, Mr. Green and Michael Goens, that came out and volunteered. Big shout out to the manager, Jennifer, from Pacific Palms; she was a great host 🦋





# National POW/MIA Recognition Day – Hope Chapel, Huntington Beach

This was the first time AVAG put together an event for National POW/MIA Recognition Day, which fell on September 17 in 2021.

With the help of our new associate chaplains, Sean Hersey and David Breunig put on an excellent event. Everyone pitched in to make this day a success. These chaplains that are veterans took the lead in sharing the information regarding the recognition of this day. They also led the prayer — we had so many veterans show up. As the community drove by people were honking, waving, and saluting. It was a great opportunity for an outreach. Associate Chaplain Kathleen sang and played guitar. We served food provided by Chaplain Lori McGee. 🙏





# AVAG In Action



## Wishes Come True – A Scooter for Veteran

AVAG was able to gift an electric scooter to Vietnam Army veteran Gary Mountcastle. We heard he had been in and out of the LBVA and was having a hard time getting around.

AVAG was approached by the American Legion Newport Beach Post 291 Service Officer, Cory Vigil, who told us that he knew Ed Griganavicius who had a scooter to donate.

We picked it up with the help of our volunteer David Breunig and took it to our friends at AR Mobility. We bought a new battery and got it ready to give it to Gary. What a surprise for him when we showed up at his house! We asked him to come outside and see what we had for him. He lives in a mobile home park and sees people cruising by on their scooters. He had said he was envious and wished he had one.



## About Gary Mouncastle

Gary Mountcastle was 21 years old in 1969 when he enlisted in the Army. He was sent to Vietnam from February 1970 to August 1971. He had honored his father's wish that he not to join the military until he was not living under his father's roof anymore. His father, John Mountcastle, was a POW in Germany in World War II, so

it's understandable that he didn't want his son to go through what he went through.

Gary, originally applied for two tours in Vietnam to be part of the Hilo Project. He was in the officer's program and everything started off good. He was sent to basic training in Fort Walters, Texas to learn the rules and standards and how to fly helicopters. But then they put him in the Infantry.

He said "If I could do it all over again, I would've taken the flight program more seriously." He said he was a cocky little snot-nosed kid when he went in the military.

His advice for a person going into the military is to do it 110%, give it everything you've got and be dedicated. It can be very difficult and very lonely at times. The service takes you to strange places but at the same time it's a wonderful experience.

The 101st Airborne in Vietnam were the best trained; they liked to stick their noses in beehives.

He left the Army in 1971 as rank E4. After he got out, he went to college. He did suffer from PTSD, and one Saturday night in 1975 his brother was killed in a car accident. He and his parents had a hard time dealing with his loss. This was during the Carter Administration, when there were no jobs, so he reenlisted in the Navy in September 1975 to September 1978.

His first cruise was to WestPac, the Philippines and Vietnam. He worked on the flight deck on aircraft carriers. He left the Navy as an E5, which offered him a college opportunity at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.

Gary studied as an Artist/Illustrator. The Navy paid for all four years in college, which would today cost \$50,000 a year for three semesters and that's just tuition. He then went on to work for McDonnell Douglas.

Gary received a special award from a two-star General. It was for 101st Airborne Air Assault Veterans, Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord. This was a 23-day battle in July 1970 between elements of the 101st Airborne and two reinforced divisions of the North Vietnamese Army.

Gary said the Army was very structured and the Navy was more fun. The Navy permitted us to work with creativity, teaching us to find a quicker safer way to get the job done. There was lots of young guys that were fun to work with and teach them new things.

His thoughts on AVAG:

He was very happy to be introduced to us by David and Mellissa Breunig of the Richard Breunig Foundation. He appreciates organizations like ours who work tirelessly to help veterans. Without people like AVAG so many people would suffer, he loves organizations like ours.

Gary said, "A veteran to me is a brotherhood, we all raised our right hand to serve and protect our country." 🦋







## AVAG Repairs a Pacific Palms Veteran's Home

AVAG is honored to help with home repairs and rent assistance for this war hero — another amazing home transformation. He's a great asset to the community; always looking out for everyone. Veteran Joe DuBois from Pacific Palms needed the stairs and shed fixed. See the before and after pictures showing the repairs below.

### Meet Joe DuBois

Joe DuBois served in the Navy from 1964-1979. Joe completed basic training in San Diego and Navy Seal training in West Virginia. He was stationed in Vietnam and also served in Korea.

"If I had to do it all over again I would, because it's my country and I wouldn't change a thing. I was a young man when I joined and worked my way up." The highest rank Joe received was Master Chief E9, which was the top highest enlisted recruit.

"What I liked the most during my service was showing the new recruits how to do it the right way. I was able to train them what not to do and not make mistakes because when I first started, I made mistakes but I learned from them so they didn't have to.

"When I got out, I joined the LAPD and worked there for 14 years. Being in the military helped me have certain skills needed when I was a police officer in North Hollywood.

"My transition to civilian life wasn't too bad, we all had to do a psych evaluation and all the normal checkups. I had PTSD, I would hear a Helicopter above my house and react as if I was still in Vietnam.

"I was in charge of over 4,000 people, and I didn't like anyone, and nobody liked me, but I took care of my men.

"Being in the Navy I got to see a lot, they said if you join the Navy, you'll see the world and that's exactly what I did. My favorite places were Spain and Germany, they were very welcoming and nice to us and one of the friendliest countries I've ever been too.

"When we were in Vietnam, we went to rescue a lot of our soldiers that had been captured and imprisoned for a long time. We found them in an underground prison where they were being kept. We beat the Vietcong and got our men out. I remember how sickly and skinny they were. We were scared to snap them in half when we carried them out. One of the men asked why it took us so long to rescue them, but at that time we had just gotten the order." 🦋



Before



After



Before



After



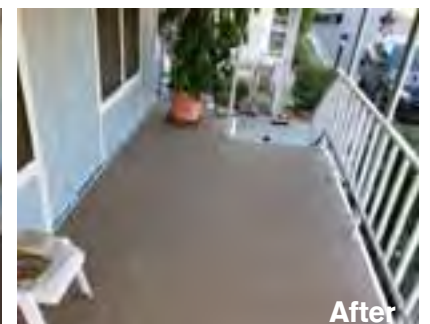
Before



After



After



After



## A San Bernardino Veteran's Home Repaired by AVAG

Mike Newminski was drafted into the Army on June 26, 1963 and served until March 26, 1965. He was stationed in Korea at Camp Casey.

Camp Casey is a U.S. military base in Dongducheon, South Korea, 40 miles north of Seoul, South Korea. Camp Casey was named in 1952 after Major Hugh Boyd Casey, who was killed in a plane crash near the camp site during the Korean War.

Mike was a truck driver and transported soldiers and ammunition and anything else the army told him to transport.

Mike has been part of our AVAG Sequoia San Bernardino Chapter since its inception. He reached out to us about needing home repairs inside and outside his home.

Last November, AVAG completed the much needed home repairs. His bathroom really needed help. AVAG installed a new shower. Flooring in both the bathroom and kitchen were replaced. New skirting for the outside was installed and his home was painted.

Mike was thrilled with the results! Check out the before and after photos on this page. 🐦







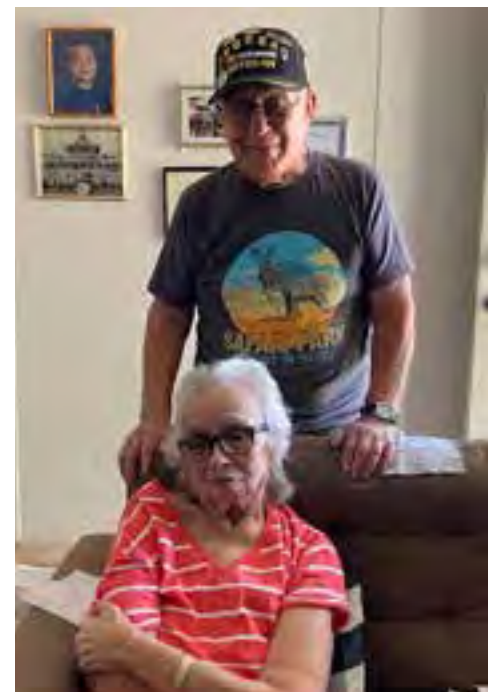
## Santiago Grandview Estates Veteran Receives A Recliner

On a bright and sunny day in late September AVAG went to Santiago Grandview Estates in San Jacinto to deliver a La-Z-Boy recliner to Navy veteran Raymond Holguin.

Raymond served from 1950-53 in the Korean War. He served in two branches of the service, Army Airborne and Navy, stationed on the USS Mansfield.

He is the only veteran currently living at the park, and we had met him one time before when we brought him a flag. He liked our AVAG T-shirt's and asked for one. Raymond takes care of his wife, Armida ,who is very ill and needs help.

This was another great opportunity to serve a veteran. ✕





# Celebrating Veterans Day at Cottonwood Church

What an amazing opportunity to show our veterans in our community how much we love them. Our guest speaker was Pastor Ken Mulkey, who gave an outstanding message. He reminded our veterans to share their stories because it's part of history that can't be lost.

He asked these questions:

- Your branch of service and years.
- Why did you serve?
- Where did you serve?
- What did you have to sacrifice?

I hope our veterans will consider answering these questions by putting the answers down on paper, or letting us interview them to put their story in our newsletter.

Our own board member, Aaron Brandenburg, shared what the Pledge of Allegiance meant to him. The 82nd airborne presented the colors and did the Pledge of Allegiance.

We had amazing hostesses that came out and volunteered to bring the food out and spoil our veterans.

Certificates from the office of Katrina Foley, Orange County Supervisor, were presented to our veterans. Raffle prizes were donated by the Richard Breunig Foundation, and beautiful Quilts of Valor were presented by So Cal Quilts of Valor.

Special thanks to Mike Keele, board member of the American Veterans Assistance Group, and Lana Martinez for making beautiful cupcakes for the occasion. Thank you to all of our resources that came out to support our veterans.

Our veterans enjoyed a beautiful meal catered by Above and Beyond Catering, with soft drinks donated by Grateful Hearts Storehouse.

So many people really enjoyed Pastor Ken's message that they asked when would he be speaking again. I was really surprised with all the amazing feedback we received.

Mr. Richard did a great job picking raffle tickets. Marine Corps Veteran Francisco Para won the recliner. 🦋



At left, guest speaker Pastor Ken Mulkey. Right, AVAG Program Director Scott McReynolds and AVAG Founder Richard Simonian.



## Michael Ducharme

"I think the events that AVAG puts on are very special and the recognition they give to the veterans is very appreciated. I was invited by Susan to attend the Memorial Day event at Cottonwood that recognized Howard Koch. The next event was a luncheon in La Habra with guest speaker former Marine Phil Downer. Next was a beach clean-up in Huntington Beach and recently they did a POW-MIA day in Huntington Beach. I was also blessed to receive a beautiful recliner from AVAG, much gratitude to Susan, Howard, Doreen, and Paul; thank you.

As for my military service, I was a US Marine from 1975-1996 retiring at the rank of MSGT, a Persian Gulf War veteran. My MOS was Aircraft Maintenance Administration; aircraft and engine accounting assigned to helicopter and fixed wing jet squadrons. My duty stations stateside were in Mississippi, Virginia, Washington, Arizona, North Carolina, California, Tennessee, and Nevada. My overseas duty stations were in Japan, Korea, and the Philippines." 🦋





At left, the event's color guard were veteran's from the 82nd Airborne. Center, Aaron Brandenburg speaks about the Pledge of Allegiance. Right, Aaron with his Quilt of Valor.



AVAG partners were on hand to provide information about services of interest to our veterans.



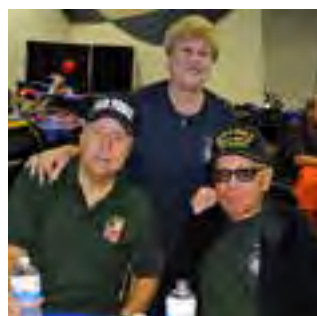
Veteran Francisco Para won this recliner in the raffle.



Delicious cupcakes! Thanks to Mike Keele and Lana Martinez.



Amanda Bruenig and a USMC veteran who won a gift card in the event raffle.



Marcus and Gina

## Community Supporters

By Marcus Byrd, Sales Executive, MSB, Southwest

I am a Sales Executive for the Residence Inn Cypress Los Alamitos. My role is to assist the Cypress Los Alamitos community, the Joint Forces Training Base (JFTB), and businesses with sourcing Marriott Hotels for all meeting room and group room block needs, whether you are searching for a hotel locally, across the country, or even on a global scale. My goal is to make doing business with Marriott as easy as possible.

What a great experience seeing so many happy Veteran smiles at Cottonwood's Veterans Day Event. Chaplain Doreen and Team, I salute you for a job well done! Opening your doors and hosting a fantastic event for our veterans speaks volumes. Being this was my first event, tears filled my eyes as I witnessed a room full of Veterans sharing conversations, eating good food, and celebrating.

I lost my grandfather in 2009, who was a WWII vet. I missed hearing about some of his war stories. He always told me how important it was to him when people said, "Thank you for your service!" I want to thank all the men and women who protected and served our country. 🇺🇸



# Veterans Day at Hope Chapel Huntington Beach

Our veterans received certificates from the Office of Assemblywoman Janet Nguyen, 72nd District and Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley. We also had a special Quilt of Valor presentation from So Cal Quilts of Valor for:

- Marine Corps Veteran Magdalena (Maggie) Najera Morales
- Marine Corps Veteran Benedick Tedius
- Army Veteran David Dedinsky
- Navy Veteran Charles Ben Cowart, Junior
- Marine Corps Veteran Richard Rowe
- Army Veteran Sergeant Fredrick Schofield

Army Veteran Sergeant Fredrick Schofield also received a Purple Heart coin from our friends at the DAV Chapter 23 Orange.

This was probably the most heartfelt veterans' event I have participated in. It was beautiful to see the whole congregation praying over all the veterans. All the veterans were crying; the Holy Spirit was upon them.

I'm so proud of our Chaplain team and our Team Leaders. It is such a blessing to lead such an amazing group. They invited veterans that have never participated before in any veterans events. 🕊





## Special Veterans Day Event Honors LAPD Veterans

On November 10, 2021, AVAG collaborated with Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Liaison Officer Ryan White to put on a special celebration for the Marine Corps' 246th Birthday and Veterans Day event at the LAPD Headquarters. We were asked to participate in a special presentation for the veterans that served our country and are now serving the LAPD.

They have continued to protect and serve our community. AVAG brought a brand-new La-Z-Boy recliner to raffle off to one lucky veteran, Army veteran, Officer Samuel Lee of the LAPD Hollywood Division won the recliner

We also partnered with So Cal Quilts of Valor to present these one-of-a-kind quilts to our LAPD veterans. AVAG challenge coins were presented by the Chaplain Team consisting of David Breunig, Mellissa Arriola Breunig, Mary Cruz, Amanda Breunig, and Doreen Matsumoto.

Over 70 veterans were in attendance and surprised with all the effort we put in to thank them.

Chief of Police Michel Moore thanked our team personally and invited Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto up to present her with a special challenge coin. We, in turn, surprised him with a Quilt of Valor and wrapped him in love. The officers cheered! 🦋



LAPD Chief Michel Moore presents Chaplain Doreen with a challenge coin.



LAPD Chief Michel Moore wrapped in his Quilt of Valor.



Officer Samuel Lee relaxes in his new recliner.





# Celebrating Veterans/ Thanksgiving Day With Our San Bernardino AVAG Chapter

We established our first AVAG Chapter in San Bernardino at the Sequoia Mobile Home Park in 2015. We have a great group of veterans and patriots that participate and volunteer on our community projects. In the last year we worked on so many homes and helped with rent assistance in this community with the help of our supporters like Howmet Aerospace.

Our special guest for our Veterans Day/Thanksgiving dinner was U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Wilbert Dickens from Howmet Aerospace. We presented him with a So Cal Quilts of Valor. Also, Michael Townsend, field representative for Senator Connie Leyva, presented him with a Certificate of Appreciation. We all enjoyed a beautiful Thanksgiving dinner provided by AVAG. We also presented a plaque of appreciation to the Howmet team for their support. We are grateful for all their help to support our veterans. 🦋



Special guest USMC veteran Wilbert Dickens from Howmet Aerospace spoke to the AVAG members that attended the Veterans/Thanksgiving Day dinner at Sequoia



Above, Wilbert Dickens accepted a plaque of Appreciation for Howmet Aerospace from AVAG, which was presented by Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, for their support.

At left, Michael Townsend, field representative for Senator Leyva, presenting Wilbert with a Certificate of Appreciation for his service as a member of the U.S. Marine Corp.



Wilbert Dickens, at left, was presented a Quilt of Honor. Sequoia AVAG member Dave Rosales assisted with the presentation.



# Thanksgiving Blessing Bags at Creek Orange

This is a yearly event we do in partnership with the ILWU Feeding the Community Day. They have been doing this for 24 years.

The Thanksgiving meals delivered were provided by ILWU Local 13 and Helping Hands Giving Hope.

We arrived at the ILWU Local 13 Union Hall to pick up Thanksgiving blessing bags for our seniors at Creek Orange. We have partnered with them before and it has always been a great experience. There were many people assembling bags and when it was our turn to fill our trucks, they filled them to the top.

The American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) delivered Thanksgiving Meals to our seniors and veterans at Creek Orange. When we arrived at Creek Orange to set up

at Linda Cooperrider's home, there was a line of residents waiting for us.

Thanks to our friends at ILWU Local 13 Dispatch, ILWU Coast Longshore Division and Helping Hands Giving Hope, we were able to help four communities. Frank A. Waldrop picked up meals for people in need. Roy Gonzales picked up for his community. Amanda Breunig delivered to Ninth Street in San Bernardino.

AVAG is proud to serve our community. Each household received a bag with a turkey, all the fixings, and extra items. They also received a bag of fresh vegetables and a large bag of potatoes. The value of the contents of each bag was estimated to be approximately \$150 each. 🦋





# Thanksgiving at Casitas La Verne

We served 100 seniors and veterans Thanksgiving lunch at Casitas La Verne. They all enjoyed the catered meals from Above and Beyond catering. The meals were provided by QMH. Inc. This is our second year working with this amazing company. They also brought 20 volunteers to assist in serving and delivering the meals. We had three teenagers from San Dimas high school volunteer to help. It is great to see so many people of all ages working together to help our communities. 🦋







### Calvin Nichols

We honored one of our veterans from Casitas LaVerne at the Thanksgiving celebration there. He received a certificate from the Mayor Pro Tem from the City of La Verne, G. Muir Davis, and we also presented him with a Quilt of Valor. These quilts are custom made for each individual veteran.

Air Force Veteran Calvin Nichols served from 1971 to 1975. He was stationed in Vietnam from 1972-1973. His service record goes as follows: four years active-duty Air Force in the Security Police Squadron (SPS), 3rd SPS unit, his duties were law enforcement and security. "Our mission was air base defense to provide protection of the air base and all priority A-resources."

The 3rd SPS was a highly decorative unit that earned 17 campaign streamers and 13 decorations.

"I was proud to wear the Vietnam service unit awarded to those who served in South East Asia."

On his return to the states, his last duty station was Beale AFB, California where he completed his active duty in the 9th Security Police and was Honorably discharged as Sgt.

"My time in the service is an experience I would gladly do again. I thank GOD I was able to make it home".

Special thanks to our partners So Cal Quilts of Valor. 🦋



Left, Julia Pinto Cisneros, COO, and, right, Brenda Pinto, owner, of Quality Material Handling helped present the Quilt of Valor to Calvin.



On behalf of the City of LaVerne, Mayor Pro Tem G. Muir Davis presents Calvin Davis with a Certificate of Appreciation for his service.



Left to right, AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, Julia Pinto Cisneros, G. Muir Davis, Calvin Nichols, and Brenda Pinto.



# Christmas Food Delivery

For the past five years we have partnered with Cottonwood Church to bring “Love To Others” bags filled with all the necessities for a Christmas dinner.

In November we do these blessing bags with turkeys, but in December they receive hams. We gathered our volunteers from Cottonwood Church and AVAG to put on a very special delivery day. This one was the best ever; every home gladly received the blessing bag. We were able to pray for multiple people and we brought joy to their hearts as you can see in some of the photos.

Cottonwood was definitely generous again this year as we provided blessing bags for Desert View in Barstow, Parkside in Rialto, Orangewood, Glen Aire and Hillside in San Bernardino. We also had enough to give one of our volunteers, Roy Gonzales, bags to take to his apartment complex. We had our veterans from Creekside Estates come to Creek Orange to pick up their bags.

Our friends at Children Giving Gifts allowed us to put special gifts together for all of our veterans. We had Elijah deliver them and the veterans were so happy. 🦋



## Meet Bill Miller

Patricia Miller, who participated in our Christmas dinner delivery day, wanted to share her husband’s military service with us. She was so proud to be a military wife. Pat is part of our Bible Study on Wednesdays in Creek Orange.

“Bill went into the Navy right out of high school. He spent three years in the Navy, it was called the “kiddy cruise,” and then he was in the Reserves for a few years. When Bill came right out of boot camp, he went aboard the USS Hector to repair the ship. He spent all his time aboard this ship and he was in charge of the telephone.” Written by Pat Miller, wife of Bill Miller – June 20, 1933 – November 9, 2009



# A Special Christmas Celebration for Veterans

We were asked to partner with His Place Church, at 14061 Chestnut St., in Westminster, CA. They were looking for families to sponsor and Flagman Frank recommended our organization. We were able to partner with them to bless our veterans' families. The church put on a big event and brought in a busload of toys and goodies for the kids. They also shared the gospel and one of our very special veterans' wives, DeeAnna Tomczak, shared how AVAG has blessed their lives. More and more people are recognizing what we are doing in the community and want to help. 🦋







### Elvia Huizar's Story:

I met with the USMC recruiter, Sgt Fletcher. We chatted that day, and I even got the opportunity to view their Boot Camp video. That was when I stood up, walked out of that office, and decided to become the World's Greatest United States Airman. I walked into the recruiting office next door and enlisted in the US Air Force



Amazing times in service; all of it, actually. My favorite subject in school was history. After being stationed in Germany; Spangdahlem Air Base, I joined their Base Honor Guard Team and was blessed with the opportunities to travel with them throughout Europe.



I performed in military ceremonies in places like where they had the Battle of the Bulge and General Patton's gravesite — places I read about and did essay papers about for history classes.

I miss the camaraderie, that's for sure, of the people I served with.

Being a single mother has definitely been very hard. I first became a single mother at the age of 14. My parents were not very forgiving of that, but they did help me out a lot,

with my first daughter. I was expected to keep my grades in school up. A B-average was the expectation and college bound. I had to beat the "Hispanic teen mom" statistic for my parents. I had made a mistake, and they were going to help me out, as long as I succeeded. In return, for them and my baby, and I did.

No more kids after that, unless I was married. Anyhow, after being discharged from the military, I was told by several different doctors at the VA that I would not be able to have any more kids. This was due to the amount of exposure that I had with radiation, burn pits, depleted uranium, and other technologies during my deployment.

Fast forward again...

My oldest turns 18 and I find out a few months later that I am pregnant. It was a toughie, high risk pregnancy. Oh my, all in all, I believe GOD had a huge part in my pregnancy. That is why I named my baby, Desti'Nee Faith. I got married shortly after she was born. Unbeknownst to me there was a lot of turmoil waiting for me. I experienced domestic abuse. I had ankle surgery and was bound to a wheelchair for over a year. I had to learn how to walk all over again, and with a baby.

Shortly after, I find out that the \$40,000 I had saved up from my military service, and my last deployment was all gone. With this money I had planned to purchase my very own first house. In a matter of just 3 years, my husband had wiped me out completely and left me with a negative \$700 balance in my account.

When I confronted him about this, he admitted to it and then went missing for days. In those days, our rent became overdue, and I had 3 days to move everything out of our 2-bedroom apartment in Corona. I did this with a baby and a cast on my foot. He was nowhere to be found. I had no money for even a box to pack my belongings in.

I wasn't working due to my surgery and disability would not cover my rent, milk, diapers, and a car payment. I packed my and the baby's stuff in trash bags and put my stuff into storage. My parents had no room in their home, so I slept in my car with a 1.5-year-old. I was recovering from ankle surgery with my baby and no one to help me.

Section 8 had a year's wait list and HUD VASH said I made too much money from my VA rating of 80%. Now, I will tell you this, just because one has "recovered from homelessness" that does NOT automatically mean that everything is now perfect and better.

We recovered from homelessness April 2019 but were still struggling.

AVAG was able to present Elva with a Quilt of Valor that had an animal print and she told us that's how she felt when she was homeless, she went into survival mode. We also were able to give her a La-Z-Boy recliner for her new apartment. She is working at Disneyland now and getting on the right track.

On December 22, 2021, we partnered with Flagman Frank to sponsor Elvia and her daughter for Christmas and other AVAG veteran families. 🦋

### From Elvia:

Thank you so much, Chaplain Doreen for making our Christmas wish come true.

Most importantly for teaching me that God NEVER forgot about me... especially when it felt so. Prayer, prayer, prayer... God Bless you and your family this holiday season.





# A Christmas Sponsorship – BJ's Restaurant, Irvine

Sometimes I can't believe how blessed we are. I share many stories online regarding what AVAG is doing in our communities. We have some amazing partners, and they share our stories too. Someone saw that we were sponsoring children for Christmas. They suggested to BJ's Restaurant Irvine's General Manager, Brian Romero, that the staff host a family for Christmas.

Flagman Frank and I were already working on another Christmas project for some of our veterans' families that would be held at his church. Who would have thought that we would be doing two events at the same time?

We found a beautiful family for BJ's restaurant to sponsor. Fifteen family members, ten children and five adults, living under a two-bedroom roof. They only requested jackets because they were cold. Our partnership that will continue next year with BJ's, who gave them all gifts, including clothing, brand new shoes, warm jackets, and toys. They also gave them \$150 in gift cards for Target and treated the family to a beautiful catered dinner.

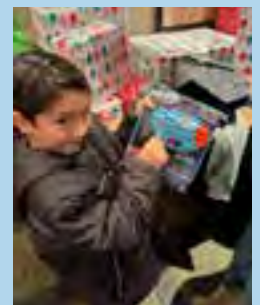
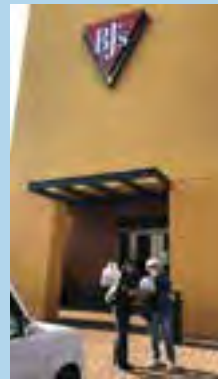
We are so blessed and we get to be a blessing to others. These children have never experienced being in a restaurant before. I also presented Brian with an AVAG challenge coin.

The staff treated us with excellence and everyone was so amazed with their generosity. 🦋



Above, BJ's Restaurant staff and the family they sponsored for a special Christmas celebration.

Right, Doreen Matsumoto and Flagman Frank arriving at BJ's and with General Manager Brian Romero, who is holding an AVAG challenge coin just presented to him by Doreen.

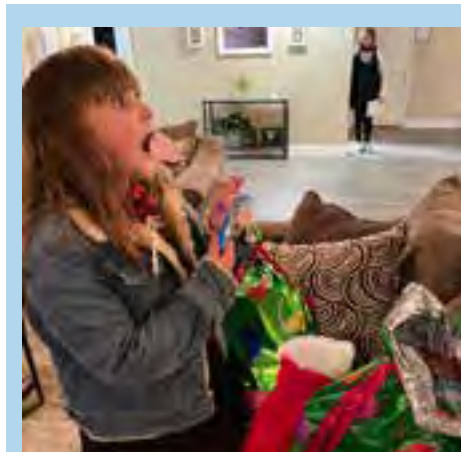




# AVAG Communities Celebrate Christmas

## Diamond Bar Estates

The Christmas season had started, we were at Diamond Bar Estates delivering the Christmas gifts to the children from their special sponsors. I love the expression on Sophia's face and this is what her mother posted on social media after (see below). 🦋

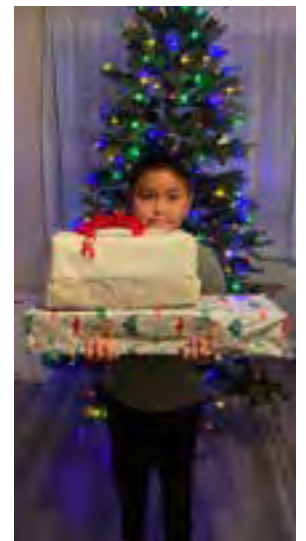


Above, Sophia squeals with excitement over the beautiful necklace she received in her gift bag from her sponsor at the Diamond Bar Estates Christmas celebration.

Below, Sophia holding the gift bags she received.

### From Jennifer Baldini:

Doreen, thank you form making our Christmas brighter! We are forever grateful! Sophia is smiling ear to ear!! Such a blessing!! Thank you so much!





### Ninth Street Mobile Home Park

We delivered Christmas toys to the kids at Ninth Street Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino.

These children were sponsored by friends of mine that support our organization. Each child received exactly what they wanted for Christmas and then some. The sponsors also included gift cards for their parents. We really enjoy working with the manager Theresa. 🐦







### Hemet Valley RV Park

The Richard Breunig Foundation and The Highway Riders sponsored our annual Christmas toy giveaway at Hemet Valley RV Park in Hemet. The toy drive was a huge success; all the kids received toys and goodie bags.

Polar Drinks donated all the drinks for the event and the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) supplied all the food that consisted of hamburgers and hotdogs. Fifty-five kids signed up to receive brand new Vans shoes, and we couldn't accomplish giving those out without our generous sponsors! We also raffled off bicycles for all the kids.

I am so happy we sponsored David, Melissa and Amanda to go to Chaplaincy School; they have been a blessing to our communities.

AVAG is blessed to partner with some amazing organizations and groups. We want to say a special thank you to the Richard Breunig Foundation and the founders of the organization Mellissa Arriola Breunig and David Breunig and The Highway Riders MC.

This is when you see Veterans in action helping others. How amazing to give back to so many families in need right now and bringing Christmas joy to so many kids. 🦋







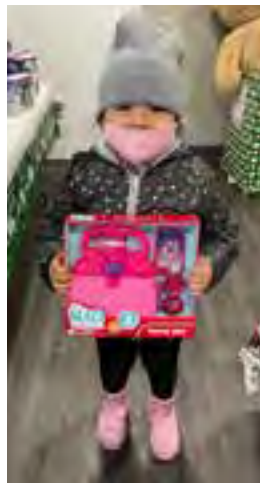
## Santiago Orangewood Estates Toy Delivery

At our Christmas event at Orangewood Estates in San Bernardino we set up all the toys to allow kids to pick the one they wanted. We also had a section for the children to select gifts for their parents, from the donations from our partner Children Giving Gifts.

The children waited in line and had hot chocolate and treats. As they went in to pick their toys, we had Santa waiting for them for

photo ops. Our Santa, once again, was Navy Veteran Michael Goens from Sequoia Mobile Home Park. We supply the Santa suit!

One of our Bible study members supplied us with a beautiful jacket. She said to give it to a little girl who needs it. We also had someone give us brand new Air Jordans to give to a boy. We found a home for both of those items. We invited all the other parks to come to all of our toy drives that we were doing in San Bernardino. The event turned out excellent. 🦋





## Pacific Palms MHP Toy Giveaway

We put on our toy giveaway with the help of our veterans at Pacific Palms in Highland.

We recently did home repairs on Tom Sowers' house and Mr. Green's home; both of them came out to assist. Tom checked in all the residents and Mr. Green helped with the Children Giving Gifts table.

Mr. Green was so nice to all the kids greeting them with a "how are you today and are you ready to shop for your parents"?! He also called me over to pray for a young father and his son as his baby daughter was in the hospital with a brain tumor.

The manager, Jennifer, set up our treats table and Mike Gomez came from Sequoia and played Santa. I couldn't believe how many little babies there were.

Melissa and David with the Richard Breunig Foundation donated bicycles for us to raffle off. A couple of the kids cried that didn't win, but they got over it when I offered them an additional toy. We also had our veteran from Mountain View, Alvin Corbett, that just lost his wife to cancer and his son stopped by to say hi to Santa and pick up some gifts for their children and grandchildren.

It was a successful event. Special thanks to all of our volunteers and especially to Roy Gonzales who drove out from Buena Park to help us and to Megan and Marin who came out from Orange County. It takes a lot of manpower and a lot of hours to put these events on.

But it's well worth it! 🦋





## Sequoia Plaza Toy Delivery

They were able to shop for their parents and our volunteers who manned the table were Roy Gonzales and three of the teenagers from Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park. Our other volunteers that come to our monthly meeting and our veterans helped with check in and lining the children up passing out hot chocolate and goodies.

We even had some of the residents put together a potluck for our veterans and volunteers. Michael Goens was Santa Claus and all the kids took photos. 🦋





## Palm Vista

On December 21 we put on a Christmas luncheon at Palm Vista in Hemet. We have helped many people in that community and have built up a culture to help others. We are all working together for the better good in the community.

One of our Unleash Your Purpose Ministry Team Leaders from Bible Study, Lucy and her husband Carlos, who is also a veteran asked if they could sponsor a veteran for Christmas. I chose Roy and Joy Duvall. They are an elderly couple that live in a fifth wheel at Palm Vista and are having a hard time. We are hoping that they will get a ground level rental when a space becomes available. They gave me \$200 to give to them. It came just in time as the tires on his car are no good.

We also presented a beautiful flag decorative plaque to Rick Messina that was donated by Janice Castillo's brother, Steve House. It was great to see everyone working together. What a blessing to share God's word with everyone. 🙏





# Meet an AVAG Veteran



Robert and Jeanne Brown

## Robert Anderson Brown

“I enlisted at 19. I was just getting out of high school and my buddy and I decided to join the Navy. I served in the Navy from 1965-1967 in Vietnam. I was on the USS Eversole DD789 off the Tonkin Gulf in Vietnam. We were the gun fire support, we sat about 1.5 miles off shore and shot chemicals to shore to get rid of the Vietcong that were on land still, and some that were hiding underground, in order to help our ground troops. We fired 24/7 and I stayed on the ship the whole time for support. The highest rank I got was an E3. I was a gunner’s mate. This was hush hush, but we had nuclear weapons on the USS Eversole in Vietnam. We never used them, but we always had them ready if we needed them. I remember seeing this huge box on board that barely gave you much room to walk by.

The best thing about my service was being at sea. I loved looking around and being the only ones out there, only seeing the ocean for miles. It was really cool to see the flying fish trying to keep up with the ship and hearing them flap it was the neatest thing. The worst thing was having to see some the things I did, all of the death and destruction, even just from the ship, you could still see everything.”

Robert has been part of our AVAG group at Palm Vista since 2017. He and his wife, Jeanne, helped launch our first Bible Study. They would set up coffee and take care of all of our needs. Now they help with feeding the community and events. ✕



Robert Brown’s family — top left, his brother Donn Gordon Brown, top right Robert Brown in his Navy uniform, bottom left, his mother Ruth Anderson Brown, bottom right, his father Kenneth Cummings Brown.



Robert’s Vietnam veteran’s cap also displays a patch with the USS Eversole’s insignia, identifying him as having served on this ship



# In Memoriam

From AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto: It's not easy getting to know these veterans and their families and having them pass away.



## Joe Bob Smith (Cowboy)

With much sadness, we say goodbye to our dear friend Joe Bob Smith, a.k.a. Cowboy, who passed away October 30. He was such a sweet man. Served in Vietnam and was not treated good when he came home. It was our mission to show him how much we loved him. Prayers for his wife Jarrell, Godspeed my friend. Say hi to Mr. Reynosa and Mr. Edger. I know you'll be starting an AVAG chapter up there in heaven.



## Peggy Lou Corbett

Peggy Lou Corbett, wife of Vietnam War Army veteran Alvin Corbett, passed away on October 23. They were married for 40 years and resided in Mountain View Estates. She was a loving wife, mother, and grandmother. Praying for our veteran Alvin Corbett and family.



## Bud Studdard

I am so sad to say good bye to my "honeydew." Korean War veteran US Army, Bud Studdard, passed away November 2, 2021.

God speed my friend, let the dancing begin in Heaven. I will see you one day. You always brought joy and fun to our AVAG meetings.



## Larry Martinez

With a heavy heart my friend USMC veteran Larry Martinez went home to be with the Lord November 1, 2021.

The first time I met Larry was at American Legion Post 295 – Cypress, California. We presented him with a So Cal Quilts of Valor. He was so moved and honored that he broke out in tears and shared his heart with his fellow veteran brothers and sisters. I remember when he came to pick up his brand-new La-Z-Boy recliner. He was so happy and couldn't wait to get it home. He became a great volunteer for AVAG along with his wife and grandchildren. He was just at our beach clean-up in July. I can't believe you're gone, but you're not forgotten.

God Speed my friend see you in Heaven one day.



# AVAG News

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