



AVAG News

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Our communities mourn the loss of four of its members.



Members of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 23 were in attendance to support fellow member David King who was honored as a 2024 Veteran of Distinction by Congressman Michelle Steel.

Congressional District 45 Honors Veterans Making a Difference

The American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) was honored to nominate a veteran for the 2024 Veterans of Distinction Award, presented by Congresswoman Michelle Steele's office. This award recognizes veterans residing or working in California's 45th Congressional District, which includes Fountain Valley, Artesia, Brea, Buena Park, Cerritos, Cypress, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Hawaiian Gardens, Lakewood, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Placentia, Rossmoor, Westminster, and Yorba Linda. The award celebrates veterans who continue to serve their communities and make a meaningful impact after their military service.

AVAG selected David King as their nominee. Drafted into the U.S. Army in 1968 during the Vietnam War, King served with distinction as part of the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, 9th Division. As a sergeant in an air mobile assault unit, he participated in numerous helicopter combat missions. Over the course of his year-long service, King earned multiple commendations, including three Air Medals for over 75 combat aerial assaults, three Army Commendation Medals, and four Bronze Stars—one of which was awarded for valor.

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Congressional District 45 Honors Veterans Making a Difference continued

Following his military service, King built a successful career as an estimator and later a part-owner in the power and telecommunications construction industry. Unfortunately, health complications linked to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam forced him into early retirement. Despite these challenges, King remains a dedicated advocate for veterans. He serves on the executive committee of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 23 in Orange County, which recently hosted a luncheon for over 900 patients and staff at the Veterans Hospital of Long Beach.

The award presentation took place on November 1, 2024, at the Brea Heights Campus. Members of DAV Chapter 23 showed their strong support by attending in large numbers. Other honorees included David Shackelford, a veteran of the of the 82nd Airborne Division from American Legion Post 295, and Robert Harrison, a familiar face at many AVAG events. ✈



AVAG Hosts 7th Annual Veterans Appreciation Luncheon at Cottonwood Church



American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) proudly held its 7th Annual Veterans Appreciation Luncheon at Cottonwood Church, where we were thrilled to welcome an incredible turnout for this event.

A sincere thank you to our guest speaker, Air Force Veteran Damon Jones. Thank you also to Mellissa Arriola Breunig and Marla Ogelvie whose help with all the raffle prizes—your efforts were greatly appreciated by AVAG and all who attended the luncheon.

We extend a special thanks to the resource organizations that joined us to share vital information with our veterans and their families:

- **Salvation Army:** Caroline Hernandez
- **Doctors Hospice Southern California:** Lisa Abbott
- **Joint Forces Training Base:** Ron Cabrera
- **American Legion Post 295 - Cypress, California:** Commander Tom Roepke
- **DAV Chapter 23 - Orange County CA:** Craig Abbott
- **Long Beach VA Homeless Outreach:** Brian Thom
- **Navy Federal Credit Union**
- **Heart of Compassion Distribution**
- **Home Instead**



Your contributions make a significant difference in the lives of our veterans. Thank you for helping us honor and support those who have served our country. ✨



AVAG's 7th Annual Veterans Appreciation Luncheon at Cottonwood Church



AVAG Partners with Brookhurst Community Center for Memorable Veterans Day Celebration

AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and Pam Punzalan, Senior Program Specialist at Brookhurst Community Center, collaborated to create a Veterans Day celebration which was held on Thursday, November 14.

In preparation, Doreen secured from SoCal Quilts of Valor beautifully handcrafted Quilts of Valor to be presented to veterans, who had registered ahead of time. Each veteran also received a certificate of appreciation and special gifts generously donated by Children's Giving Gifts.

The celebration featured live music, filling the room with joyful energy. Smiling seniors danced to lively tunes, momentarily transported back to their younger years. The event was a huge success, honoring the veterans' service but also promoting a strong sense of community. 🦋



Rene Cabrera, US Air Force, Germany, Music Ambassador—she was a member in the band that was playing at the event today.



Bob Gilland, US Navy, Vietnam, 1964–1969, he also served in the Cuban missile crisis



Ed Thomas US Marine Corps, Vietnam, 1959–1964



Joseph Hodeck US Army, Vietnam veteran 1967–1970



Thomas Baer, US Navy, 1958–1964



Robert Brenner, US Marine Corps, Vietnam veteran 1956–1961



Left, John McLean, US Army, Vietnam veteran, showing off a photo from back when he was in the military. At right, receiving his Quilt of Valor



Douglas Gilmour, US Army



David "Bulldog" Lopez, US Marine Corps

Cal Poly Pomona Students Host Veterans Day Event Featuring Green Beret Richard Simonian

In celebration of Veterans Day, the students of Cal Poly Pomona's College Republican's club extended a gracious invitation to our organization to join them on campus at their November 12 meeting. This club is dedicated to promoting free speech and the exchange of political ideas, with a mission to engage students in current events.

AVAG founder Richard Simonian, a U.S. Army veteran who served as an original member of the U.S. Army Special Forces, also known as the Green Berets, represented AVAG at the club meeting. Mr. Simonian shared his military experiences, offering valuable insights into his service and the sacrifices made by veterans.

Mr. Simonian added a question and answer session, a personal touch, engaging students directly. When a student posed a question, he walked over and presented them with his personal challenge coin, creating a moment of connection and appreciation.

The president of the College Young Republican Club, Aadi Mehta, expressed great satisfaction with the event, praising the enthusiastic participation and thoughtful questions from the audience. Following the discussion, lunch was provided for all attendees, allowing students the opportunity to further engage with Mr. Simonian in informal conversations and ask additional questions. 🦋





Howard Koch 100th Birthday Celebration

Howard Koch celebrated his 100th birthday on January 18, 2025, at the La Mirada Activity Center. Howard's family organized the celebration, and all of them came into town for the celebration.

It is estimated that over 80 people celebrated his birthday with a delicious taco bar, champagne, and cake. Howard took pictures with most of the attendees. Howard's medals and photos of his past were displayed for all to see along with a slideshow. His family also told some stories. Howard's cheeks must be tired as he smiled and laughed all evening.

To celebrate with Howard were his family, his major domo Susana, neighbors, friends from AVAG, Cottonwood Church, Hope Chapel Huntington Beach, ekklesia.today Church, Veterans Connect, DAV, and many others.

Howard received several Certificates of Proclamation from:

- United States Congressman Corra. Congressman Corra also read the contents of Howard's certificate on the floor of the House of Representatives into the Official Congressional Record in Washington D.C., where it will be maintained in the permanent record of the United States.
- California State Senator Tom Umberg (a veteran)
- The City of La Mirada

A special letter of recognition was also received from the Commander of the 10th Mountain Division now headquartered at Fort Drum in the state of New York. The letter recognized Howard's contribution to the 10th Mountain Division seizure of German positions on Riva Ridge in Italy, breaking through the German mountain defenses into the Po River Valley and reaching the northern end of Lake Garda by



the war's end. During nearly five months of intense ground combat in Italy, the division was opposed by 100,000 German troops, yet effectively destroyed five German divisions, unhinging the defense in Italy and drawing forces away from other theaters.

A young man, Aesop Birkemeir, with his family, also showed up. He was invited because he won the Gold Medal for the Junior Individual Performance in the 2024 National History Day National Contest. His award-winning project was a short melodrama about how the 10th Mountain Division changed the course of the war in Italy during WWII. It was inspired by stories he heard growing up about his great-grandfather's time with the 10th Mountain Division and the assault on Riva Ridge. One of his resources for the presentation was Howard. For Howard's birthday, this young man played a videotape of his presentation. Everyone was impressed with his presentation, which included photos, narration, and Army combat gear.

Howard's 100th birthday celebration was a wonderful success enjoyed by all. 🦋



Veterans Connect: Celebrating the Holiday Season with Fellowship and Gratitude

The 2024 holiday season was filled with incredible gatherings and celebrations for our Veterans Connect group. Here's a look at our activities during the third quarter of 2024.

October: A Special Gathering at Hope Chapel

Our October Veterans Connect meeting at Hope Chapel was a tremendous success with an outstanding turnout. We were thrilled to have AVAG volunteer Sherry Walker join us all the way from Oregon. Together, we continued our study in Operation Timothy, Book 3, deepening our spiritual growth and fellowship.

A generous potluck brought everyone together, offering plenty of delicious dishes to share and enjoy. A special highlight was veteran Barry surprising Chaplain Doreen with a birthday cake—such a thoughtful gesture! Additionally, we held a raffle with gift cards for the lucky winners.



John "Pops" Walker's 95th Birthday Celebration

One of the most touching moments of the quarter was celebrating the 95th birthday of John Walker, affectionately known as "Pops." A proud Korean War veteran, Pops was a race car driver and continued riding motorcycles until he was 93 years old. He was a cherished member of Veterans Connect, faithfully attending our events.

Chaplain Doreen visited him at his rehab facility and arranged a special outdoor celebration. Friends and fellow veterans came to wish him a happy birthday, bringing cards and well-wishes. The highlight of his gifts was a Trump hat,

which he proudly wore immediately. In an unforgettable moment, the Huntington Beach Police Department honored Pops with a motorcycle and police car drive-by.

November: A Time of Gratitude and Thanksgiving

Our Veterans Connect Thanksgiving celebration was a truly meaningful occasion. One of the special activities was when the group's veterans shared what they were thankful for. We were blessed with a delicious catered meal by Meals on the Grill prepared by Jason Cruz.

A special thank you to Liz Greco for bringing veterans from the Long Beach Blind Rehab to join in our gathering. Attendees enjoyed winning raffle prizes, and everyone left with special keepsakes. To top it off, the dessert table overflowed with an array of delicious pies, generously provided by our members.

December: Christmas Cheer and Festivities

Our Christmas celebration at Hope Chapel brought together veterans and their families for a night of fun, fellowship, and faith. The turnout was fantastic, filled with holiday spirit.

The afternoon's activities included:

Cookie Contest – A deliciously competitive event!

Name That Christmas Song – Testing everyone's holiday music knowledge.

Christmas Sweater Contest – Showcasing the most festive and creative holiday attire.

Christmas Duet – Beautiful music performances by our talented veterans.

Christmas Human Wrapping Contest – A hilarious and entertaining highlight of the night.

We also played *Christmas Pass Along* with gift cards. It was a wonderful afternoon filled with laughter, great food, and the joy of celebrating together.

Join Us for Future Gatherings

Veterans Connect continues to meet every fourth Saturday of the month at 12 noon–1:45 p.m. at Hope Chapel, located at 715 Lake St., Huntington Beach. We welcome all veterans and their spouses to join us for faith, fellowship, and community. 🦋

OCTOBER



NOVEMBER – Veterans Connect celebrates Thanksgiving



DECEMBER – Christmas Cheer!



Meet AVAG Veterans

John Counts

John Counts is a servant whose mission in life is to help, to get things done, and to fix things—the long way if it's the right way. But he gets it done, and he does what he says. He has a particular sense of humor. We know he has a sense of humor because he lived in Barstow for a long time.

Picture John, a 17-year-old on the verge of turning 18, was looking for a mission in Alb.—which led to one of the most remarkable careers of service, Cryptologic Technician. What precisely does a Cryptologic Technician do? Well, I could tell you, but then John would have to... suffice it to say it involves secrets and codes. He still texts people in Morse code to this day.

John's journey took him from the sunny shores of Imperial Beach, California, to places most of us only see on maps—Kamiseya and Hokkaido in Japan, Okinawa, Norfolk, Taiwan, and even the mysterious halls of the NSA in Washington, DC.

Next, picture this young man from New Mexico stepping onto a destroyer, or as they called it, a "Radar Pickett Ship"—heading into the vast Pacific. John probably thought he'd seen it all after his first tour.

But like many of the Greatest Generation, when he returned home and found no jobs available, he did what came naturally—he signed right back up! John's service stands out not for the locations or secrecy, but for his dedication—five years in Taiwan, multiple tours in Okinawa, safeguarding vital communications—all a testament to his commitment beyond duty.

Most people would think retiring from the Navy and working for Southern California Edison for 18.5 years would be enough public service for one lifetime. Not John Counts! John decided to take on a whole new challenge with the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Imagine an experienced veteran climbing up a Jacob's ladder—basically a rope ladder swaying in the wind—to inspect massive cargo ships and oil tankers—as a volunteer!

From the engine rooms to the sleeping quarters, from lifeboats to galleys, John inspected it all. He helped develop the Marine Domain Awareness manual, trained others in marina inspections, and even managed the auxiliary materials center in Anaheim on weekends. By 2020, John had accumulated an astounding 27,000 volunteer hours with the Coast Guard.



John's service record is more than assignments—it reflects a life of purpose. From a teen eager to exit Albuquerque to a devoted volunteer with 27,000 Coast Guard hours, he embodies the best of America.

And now, after climbing all those Jacob's ladders and inspecting more ships than most of us have seen in pictures, John has traded in his clipboard for a cribbage board!

So as AVAG recently honored John at 83 years young, all present were not just celebrating his military service or volunteer work. They were celebrating John Counts—a man who has lived a life of dedication, service, and integrity.

His commitment and humility have inspired and touched us all. His example continues to guide us. AVAG proudly salutes John Counts. Thank you for supporting our organization. Cheers to your retirement. 🦋



Vic Sober

Meet Vic Sober, a new Creek Orange resident, who served in the Navy and as Fleet Marine Force Corpsman for 24 years.

For 17 years he served with the Marines, completing two combat tours in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Desert Storm. He earned the Combat Action Ribbon and Navy Commendation Medal during combat operations.

His duty stations include Camp Pendleton, Camp Lejeune, Okinawa, Japan, Naval Stations Treasure Island, Mare Island and San Diego. He retired as a Chief Petty Officer in 2014. 🦋



Sequoia Plaza MHP Community Outreach

AVAG is privileged to serve the residents of Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park through our food distribution program. We appreciate the unique opportunities to connect with the community and provide much-needed support.

Each month residents can receive freshly prepared meals, both healthy and hearty, from Bracken's Kitchen and other essential items. We appreciate the many residents who often join in to help. It has been encouraging to see new faces among those seeking help, underscoring the growing need for our efforts.

Special thanks to Bracken's Kitchen for consistently helping us provide freshly prepared meals to the community. Their contributions have been instrumental in making a positive impact. We also thank Hearts of Compassion for the donations of essential items so appreciated by the residents.

In addition to these monthly events, our weekly food deliveries remain a cornerstone of our program. These deliveries are brought directly to the homes of veterans, seniors, and low-income families. This personalized approach ensures that no one is left behind, further highlighting the importance of our mission.

We are honored to continue this outreach and look forward to many more opportunities to serve and connect with the wonderful residents of Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park. 🦋



Give Back Day: American Veterans Assistance Group at Rancho La Paz

With the help of the AVAG veterans at Rancho La Paz Mobile Home Park, the Chaplain team, and Pastor Cris and his church ekklesia.today. We were able to help U.S. Army veteran John Hodges and his family with some home and yard maintenance.

John is 80 years old and needed help cleaning up his porch and shed. We also cut back his bamboo trees. Joe Penna, a friend of Chaplain Doreen, used his expertise as a contractor to help by power washing John's home. Chaplain Doreen and Commander Pepper even installed a new U.S. Flag.

Our friend Doug Duran brought his trailer, which was filled up with items that needed disposal.

It was a huge project, but we'll be back to help him repair his porch and roof, and to paint his home. 🦋



The crew—AVAG veterans, the Chaplain team, Pastor Cris and his team from ekklesia.today at Rancho La Paz Mobile Home Park.



Chaplain Wendy Loveless



Installing the new flag.



Chaplain Doreen and Pastor Cris



Pastor Cris and Brian Williams



Michael Martinez



ekklesia.today member Sandy Martinez



Doug Duran's team hard at work.



Pastor Janus throwing trash in the dumpster



James Warner, a Rancho La Paz veteran



John Hodges thrilled beyond words after all the work was done.

AVAG Bible Study Outreach

The American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) continues to make a profound impact in the lives of veterans through its Bible study gatherings. These faith-based meetings, held in various AVAG communities, provide a place of fellowship, spiritual growth, and support for veterans and residents alike.

Westmount Senior Living



The Bible study at Westmount Senior Living remains a strong group, currently working through Operation Timothy Book 3. The seniors participate in Monday morning gatherings, beginning with music led by Mellissa Breunig before study and discussion. The impact of this gathering continues to grow, with even caregivers now attending and requesting Bibles and Operation Timothy books. In honor of the holiday, special Christmas gifts were given to all attendees in December.

Cherokee Mobile Home Park



Cherokee Mobile Home Park's Bible study group has seen consistent growth, with increasing attendance each month. With more veterans actively participating, the group continues to expand—they may soon require a larger meeting space.

In October, members reached out to Chaplain Doreen with a special request—transportation to church. Honored by the opportunity, she provided rides, allowing the group to worship and praise together. By December, the group's sense of fellowship was further strengthened with the distribution of Christmas gifts to all participants.

Diamond Bar Mobile Home Park



The Diamond Bar Mobile Home Park Bible study group remains enthusiastic in their journey to explore the Bible together. This dedicated gathering continues to seek deeper biblical wisdom, fostering a spirit of learning and fellowship. In December, small Christmas gifts were distributed to all attendees, reflecting the spirit of giving and strengthening the community bond.

Casitas La Verne Mobilehome Estates



The Casitas La Verne Bible study group continues to grow in discipleship and fellowship as they work through Operation Timothy: Book 3. In the spirit of their shared journey, they also took time to celebrate the October birthdays of their members, including Cathy, Chaplain Doreen, and Lou Bosch, who marked a special milestone—her 92nd birthday.

The Power of Faith and Fellowship

Through these Bible study groups, AVAG is making a difference, bringing veterans and community members together. The studies provide a comforting space for those seeking spiritual nourishment and community, reinforcing the values of service, compassion, and shared devotion.

As the groups continue to grow, the commitment to providing guidance, encouragement, and support remains. The group's stories illustrate how the love of Christ, combined with the spirit of service, can transform lives in remarkable ways. ✨

AVAG and Partners in Action

Disabled American Veterans (DAV)

Thank you to DAV 23 for partnering with AVAG to help veterans.

In October at DAV's E-Board meeting, they presented Chaplain Doreen with \$1000 worth of \$50 gift cards to pass out to our veterans in need. This is the second time they have done this for us.

In December, AVAG joined with DAV Chapter 23 in Orange County, California, with the objective of spreading Christmas joy among children. The unwavering support of these veterans for our organization over the years is truly appreciated. We are grateful to Nightrain Joe for inviting us to participate in this initiative alongside veterans' families from our communities. "As a lifetime member of DAV 23, I am proud to be a part of their organization," said American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG), DAV Chapter 23 Orange County CA, Nightrain Joe.

Thank you Heart of Compassion Distribution for providing the Disney ears and hats for this Christmas celebration. 🦋



We Are Vets

Chaplain Doreen met up with Paul Jones, who ran for the office of California State Assembly District 62, located in Southeastern Los Angeles County, last November. Paul, a retired combat Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, works with We Are Vets, a local foundation that helps veterans. AVAG was able to give him a few walkers and some items for the veterans. 🦋



Karta Motorwerks

At AVAG, we are deeply grateful for the support of Atrak Rahmani, owner of Karta Motorwerks. His generosity and dedication to our veterans have made a meaningful impact on our community, and we want to take a moment to recognize his contributions.

Atrak has been a steadfast supporter of our mission, demonstrating his kindness by sponsoring lunches for our AVAG meetings at the Cherokee Mobile Home Park. His commitment goes beyond financial contributions—he also volunteers his time, attending meetings and offering assistance wherever needed.

Recently Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto asked Atrak if he could help locate an affordable, dependable car for Marine Corps veteran Ryan Gutierrez, whose story will appear on the following pages, to help him get to job interviews and then to a job once he is hired. Amazingly, Atrak had just finished repairing a car that he had acquired and said that Ryan could pick the car up—FREE—a few days later! Ryan and Erika were extremely grateful for these blessings!

As a token of our appreciation, AVAG recently presented Atrak with a custom tablecloth featuring his business information. This gift will allow him to showcase his shop whenever he joins our meetings.

Karta Motorwerks is a family-owned business that takes great pride in providing quality automotive services. If you or someone you know ever needs assistance with car repairs or maintenance, we encourage you to reach out to Atrak.

For all your automotive needs, visit Karta Motorwerks at: 725 South Beach Blvd., Anaheim, CA 92804

Thank you, Atrak and Karta Motorwerks, for your generosity and dedication to supporting our veterans! 🐦

Meet Atrak Rahmani

Atrak Rahmani is the owner/operator of Karta Motorwerks on Beach Boulevard in Anaheim. He is a proud, first-generation American. His father started the business in 1995, in Cypress, as Papa's Auto Service. But the family's story has roots in the land of ancient Persia, known now as Iran. In Iran, Atrak's father was well educated and had earned a bachelor's degree and completed law school. He also was an active supporter of a women's rights organization and operated a successful clothing boutique. In 1979, the lives of the Rahmani family changed literally overnight when Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi was overthrown in the Iranian Revolution that put the current regime in power. Like many other Iranians, the Rahmani family escaped from Iran and found their way to Orange County, California, where they had relatives.

Being a very enterprising entrepreneur, Atrak's father quickly found employment. But he had the dream to open a vehicle repair business. Papa's Auto Service was born in 1995! His business added many satisfied customers to its list of "regulars," and the repair shop was very successful. Atrak, born in Orange County, was very young as the repair shop grew. He spent many hours at the shop with his father and uncle Majid (who goes by the name of "Charlie"). It was a high priority for Atrak's dad to build community relationships and to support the community in any way that he could. He started offering towing services, roadside assistance, and helping people in their time of need, especially women with children whose cars had broken down at night. The AAA-approved auto repair shop was birthed as a result of his caring heart.

Atrak, very bright and attentive, followed his father's example of getting an education and serving others while learning about automotive repair. Atrak graduated with a business management degree from Cal State Fullerton in 2008 and took on more responsibility at Papa's Auto Service. He wanted to see the shop continue to flourish so he sug-



Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto and Atrak Rahmani with the custom tablecloth presented to Atrak by AVAG in appreciation for his generosity and dedication to our veterans.



Tony Martinez of Cherokee Mobile Home Park and Atrak Rahmani.



Karta Motorwerks' owner Atrak Rahmani and U.S. Marine Corps veteran Ryan Gutierrez at the POW/MIA event in September.

gested several changes that transformed the business. It was decided to move the shop to its current location, Anaheim, and to change the name to “Karta Motorwerks.” As automobiles became more technically complex, an updated name would suggest a more modern automotive repair facility, which would attract a younger clientele.

Tony Martinez (aka “the Commander”), a veteran living in Cherokee Mobile Home Park, a 55+ resident community in Anaheim, had been a faithful customer at Papa’s Auto Repair shop for many years. When the shop moved to Anaheim in 2013 and changed its name, Tony continued to have his automobile serviced by the friendly Rahmani family at the new location. Tony referred Karta Motorwerks to other residents at Cherokee, many of whom are veterans.

I’m sure all of us have seen how connections grow and how people discover mutual friends as they reach out. This is what happened at Cherokee! Tony had the opportunity to meet AVAG’s Chaplain Doreen. In 2023, Tony and Doreen planned the first Veterans event at Cherokee. It has turned into a monthly event that approximately twenty-five veterans, spouses, and friends attend on a regular basis. The monthly luncheon, coordinated by Chaplain Doreen, features speakers and representatives from businesses and organizations that benefit veterans and seniors. Since Tony knew of Atrak and the excellent services that he provided, Tony told Doreen about him and his business. She contacted Atrak to talk about AVAG and the AVAG events that take place. While they were talking, at one point they discovered that Atrak and Doreen had a mutual connection! Both of their family businesses had been in the city of Cypress. Atrak and his family had been good customers of the other business for over fifteen years. At that moment the trust of working together was immediately established between Atrak and Doreen!

Atrak now attends the monthly events at Cherokee and offers amazing service to its residents. One example is when Cathy Rubino, a resident and veteran, needed her car to be serviced, Atrak picked up her car from her home, serviced it, washed it, and returned it to her home!

Not many places give THAT degree of service! In at least one of the past few months, Karta Motorwerks provided the monthly lunches at Cherokee. Recently, rather than the usual In-N-Out burgers, Atrak provided a sumptuous lunch of Persian cuisine from Hatam Restaurant, located on Lincoln Avenue in Anaheim. Atrak’s father, now retired, met Hatam’s owner when the Rahmani family arrived from Iran. The owner of the restaurant formerly owned a clothing boutique (like Atrak’s father had owned in Iran), and they became forever friends.

Another example of Atrak’s desire to help others was in September of this year. He attended a Veterans Luncheon at the Brookhurst Community Center in Anaheim commemorating POW/MIA (Prisoner of War/Missing in Action) Day. At the event, Chaplain Doreen introduced Atrak to a young veteran, Ryan Gutierrez, who had no job. He, his pregnant wife, and young son had come to the event by bus. He also had to use the bus to go to job interviews since he had no car. Chaplain Doreen asked Atrak to be on the lookout for an affordable car that would provide reliable transportation for the young veteran and his family. “Coincidentally” (by God’s providence), Atrak had recently received a donated auto that needed mechanical work. He had just finished fixing it up, and he arranged to transfer ownership to Ryan (at no cost!) later that week! Ryan’s situation improved dramatically! Now, Atrak says that when he saw him recently, Ryan even looked like a new man! God bless you, Atrak!

At the close of my interview with Atrak, I asked him how he had come up with the name “Karta Motorwerks.” He said that it was really quite simple. He merely spelled his name backwards! K-A-R-T-A!

If you are looking for reliable, reasonably priced auto repair services, you may want to consider Karta Motorwerks. Not only will your car be taken care of, but you’ll also make a new, caring friend! 🐦

Meet Ryan Gutierrez

Ryan Gutierrez served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2009 to 2013 as a Combat Engineer. During his four year enlistment as a Marine, he was stationed at Camp Pendleton and went on two overseas deployments to Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) that were each four to six months in duration. Ryan decided not to reenlist and was discharged. He attained the rank of Lance Corporal (E-3).

Once he became a civilian again, Ryan started work as a carpentry apprentice and landscaper. He also was employed as a roofer and did part-time security work to be able to meet his financial obligations. He was a roofer for about five years and then went to work in a warehouse with the Tierney Center for Veterans Services until he injured his hand in a non-job related accident. He then faced a period of unemployment.

A few years out from serving in the military, in 2015, Ryan met his wife Erika. He never found the type of career related job that he was seeking and life was a constant struggle. In 2022, Erika and Ryan had their first child, a son, Samson. Having a baby in the home made life even more complicated. In early 2023 the couple welcomed a second son, Elijah, into the family. Erika was also pregnant with their third child, but their joy was short-lived when Elijah passed away unexpectedly in August of 2024. In addition, Ryan was still unable to secure a permanent job.



Left to right, Melissa, a veteran who connected Ryan with Doreen; Erika, Ryan’s wife; Samson, son of Ryan and Erika; Chaplain Doreen; Pastor Cris; Atrak Rahmani; Ryan Gutierrez; and Patrick Duffy.

Life was very complicated, finances had dried up, and they no longer had a car. Ryan applied for many different jobs, taking the bus to job interviews. The death of their infant son was difficult enough, but they could not even pay for the final expenses related to their baby’s death. Needless to say, Ryan and Erika were very discouraged.

By the grace of God, things started to change. Ryan was put in contact with AVAG Chaplain Doreen by an Air Force veteran friend, Melissa. Chaplain Doreen invited Ryan and Erika to a veterans luncheon at the Brookhurst Community Center, in Anaheim, on POW/MIA Day in late September 2024. Chaplain Doreen arranged for Uber to bring them to the luncheon, and she had also worked with Mrs. Johnson of Torres Mortuary and CHOC Hospital to make final arrangements for their son. At the POW/MIA event, another veteran, Patrick Duffy, learned of the young couple’s plight and arranged to pay the remaining expenses related to their son’s death.

It also “just so happened” that Atrak Rahmani, owner of Karta Motorwerks in Anaheim, a strong supporter of veterans, was at the same event. Chaplain Doreen asked Atrak if he could help locate an affordable, dependable car for Ryan so that he could get to job interviews and then to a job once he was hired. Amazingly, Atrak had just finished repairing a car that he had acquired and said that Ryan could pick the car up—FREE—a few days later! Ryan and Erika were extremely grateful for these blessings!

A few months later, the Gutierrez's welcomed a daughter, Hosanna, into their family. She was born on Veterans’ Day, November 11th!

Ryan is now taking classes at the Santa Ana campus of Oak Valley College. He is currently in his second semester of pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business. He is on track to graduate in early 2027 and has plans for a ministry/career following his graduation.



The Gutierrez’s at the AVAG Christmas party in December.

His dream is to form a 501(c)(3) non-profit ministry helping people with free education and affordable housing. He would also like to operate food trucks to hand out food on skid row to unhoused men and women, to tell them the “good news”, and direct them into faith-based rehabilitation programs.

While developing the non-profit organization, he believes that he has learned the skills that he could use to buy a four-plex and “flip it” or start his own roofing company. The recent change of events in his life have encouraged him greatly and have given new hope for the future of his family.

Ryan and Erika are very grateful for all of the people that partnered with AVAG to bring about such a great change in their lives! 🦋

SoCal Quilts of Valor

SoCal Quilts of Valor (QOV) has awarded more than 7,800 quilts to veterans since 2007. The veterans pictured earlier in this issue at the Brookhurst Community Center Veterans Day event were awarded Quilts of Valor.

In October, we visited Rowntree Gardens Senior Living to present a Quilt of Valor to Air Force veteran John Sweet. One of our retired chaplains, Patrick Duffy, was on hand to assist in presenting the quilt. Members of the American Legion Post 716 from Los Alamitos and Post 295 from Cypress was there for the presentation.

Also in October, AVAG presented a Quilt of Valor to Army veteran Ruben Johnson at Sequoia Mobile Home Park, where Ruben regularly attends monthly AVAG meetings. Ruben served from 1976 to 1979, and he served in the Reserves from 1979 to 1990. Ruben was an E5, and when he retired from the service, he held a meat-packing job and also worked as a truck driver.

In November, AVAG presented a Quilt of Valor to Army veteran Catherine Barrett, who served her country from December 1982 to October 2008. She was stationed at Fort Knox, KY; Salt Lake City, UT; Los Alamitos, CA; Indianapolis, IN; Fort Totten, NY; and Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. She attained the rank of Master Sergeant

Later in the month, a Quilt of Valor was presented to Freddie House, a U.S. Air Force Vietnam veteran. When he saw the quilt his eyes welled up with tears of gratitude. The quilt was perfect for him, with a design that included musical notes, and he is the leader of a band.

In December, AVAG was proud to join forces with So Cal Quilts of Valor to celebrate the remarkable achievements of Staton Gibson III, an exemplary Air Force Vietnam veteran who demonstrated extraordinary commitment and bravery during his 12 years as an E6 technical sergeant flight engineer and 6 years in the National Guard as an E6 Staff Sergeant refueling aircraft and vehicles.

Thank you to SoCal QOV for honoring our veterans. 🦋



Ruben Johnson, a Sequoia Mobile Home U.S. Army veteran



Catherine Barrett, U.S. Army veteran



Freddie House, U.S. Air Force Veteran



Staton Gibson III, U.S. Air Force Vietnam veteran