



# AVAG News

Fall 2025 • Volume 12 Issue 3

## IN THIS ISSUE

### AVAG Celebrates Veterans Day

AVAG held its annual Veterans Day Luncheon at Cottonwood Church, partnered with the City of Anaheim for an event at the Brookhurst Community Center, and participated in an event at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library.

### AVAG Observes POW/MIA Recognition Day

The AVAG community gathered in honor of National POW/MIA Recognition Day at the Costa Mesa Senior Center.

### Honoring Heroes of the Korean War

AVAG proudly participated in the 72nd Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice.

### AVAG Celebrates First Responders

AVAG Chaplaincy team hosts the annual First Responders Appreciation Luncheon, celebrating those who protect and serve our communities.

### AVAG and Partners

AVAG and its partners continue to serve our Veteran community.

### AVAG in Action

Veterans helping veterans, AVAG puts words into action.

### AVAG Veterans Connect

Building community together—veterans AND spouses welcome!

### AVAG Communities Celebrate Halloween

### In Memoriam

Our communities mourn the loss of three of its members.



Attendees at the annual Veterans Day Celebration at Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos enjoyed guest speaker Catherine Barrett's inspiring remarks.

## AVAG and Cottonwood Church Host 8th Annual Veterans Day Celebration

On Saturday, November 1st, the American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) hosted its 8th Annual Veterans Day Celebration at Cottonwood Church in Los Alamitos. Cottonwood Church, a steadfast partner in this annual tradition, once again provided a warm and welcoming venue for a day dedicated to honoring service, sacrifice, and community.

The program featured three exceptional speakers whose stories reflected the strength and spirit of America's veterans. Catherine Barrett opened the celebration by sharing meaningful reflections from her time in service and the impact those experiences have had on her life. She then introduced Korean War Veteran Margaret Smith for special recognition, leading a moving tribute to all female veterans.

(Continued on page 2)



At left, Korean War Veteran Margaret Smith, and right, U.S. Army Veteran Catherine Barrett.

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## AVAG and Cottonwood Church Host 8th Annual Veterans Day Celebration continued

A highlight of the morning, Mr. Richard Simonian, an original Green Beret, presented each woman with a commemorative challenge coin in honor of their service.

Nick Siafan followed with powerful recollections of his military experiences and his continued commitment to supporting fellow veterans. As a decorated war hero, he paid tribute to Vietnam veterans and offered special recognition to those who earned the Purple Heart.

The program concluded with remarks from Jason Murchison, a former Navy SEAL, who candidly shared the challenges he faced after service and how his life has been transformed through his faith. Now actively serving on mission trips, he spoke about finding renewed purpose in helping others. You can read a transcript of his speech beginning on page 5.

In addition to the inspiring speakers, the event featured a catered lunch, lively live music, and dancing enjoyed by veterans, their families, and friends. Attendees also received raffle prizes and special gift bags generously provided by Children Giving Gifts.

AVAG extends heartfelt gratitude to Cottonwood Church for its continued partnership, as well as to the dedicated volunteers and community partners who helped make this meaningful celebration possible. Their support ensures that our veterans are honored with the respect, appreciation, and fellowship they deserve. 🙌



Two U.S. Army Special Forces veterans, at left, Richard Simonian (an “original” Green Beret), and, at right, Erik Berg.



U.S. Army veteran Nick Siafan



U.S. Navy veteran Jason Murchison



Members of the 82nd Airborne Association presented colors at the beginning of the event.

## AVAG News



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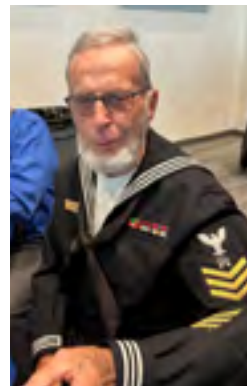
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## Meet Catherine Barrett

My name is Catherine Barrett. Almost my entire life has been in and around the United States Army. My father served 20 years of active duty. He was stationed in Germany where he met and married my mother. I grew up an “Army Brat,” and it was a great childhood. Then I joined the Army when I was 20 years old and served a total of 26 years; 23 Active Duty and 3 Army Reserve. My active-duty career consisted of three years of Regular Army and 20 years as AGR-Active Guard Reserve. I started as a 71L (Admin Specialist), and later as a 75B (Personnel Sergeant). I was able to help many soldiers get promoted and get awards. I took pride in keeping excellent personnel records and was once voted to have the best kept records in the 96th ARCOM (Army Command).

I served in various positions and units and slowly worked my way up in rank. I was active duty during both Gulf wars, but I didn’t deploy until the second one. At that time, I was an Assistant Inspector General, and I volunteered for deployment ending up at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait working for Central Command’s Inspector General Office. I worked with many young soldiers and was able to counsel and guide them when they came to IG Office.

One of the most rewarding things I did while in Kuwait was help get a child pornographer arrested. I was walking to the dining facility while in Kuwait and found a USB drive in the sand. We had just received a briefing on keeping classified documents off our personal drives, and in my mind I was thinking, “Ha! This drive has classified material on it and I’m going to find out who it belongs to and expose them!” Not really, I would just have returned it to them, with a warning if it had classified documents on it. When I looked at the drive on my computer, turns out it was full of child pornography. I turned it over to the CID (Criminal Investigation Division). I had never been so thoroughly fingerprinted in my life. Even when I first joined the Army. Long story short the CID found the man the USB belonged to and arrested him in Iraq. Turns out he was also wanted in Georgia for child pornography. One of the CID investigators I turned the drive over to had later been reassigned back to Georgia and was aware of the outcome of his case. He informed me that the guy pleaded guilty to international transportation of child pornography and was sentenced to federal prison.

While in Kuwait, I was privileged to go TDY to Djibouti, Africa. I truly believe that God was watching over me on that trip. My SGM and I started our trip on UAE airlines. Their economy class is as good as if not better than our first class. We changed planes in Dubai to an Ethiopian airline and landed in Djibouti. We were there to check on soldiers stationed there and offer our IG services. Back at the airport to go back to Kuwait, our luggage was confiscated and held hostage until we paid them a tip. The plane took off but turned around 20 minutes later back to the airport. We were told there was some kind of trouble with the plane. We sat on the runway for an hour

or so and were fed some food. Then, without any forewarning, the plane’s engines started, and the plane took off! No fasten your seatbelts, no put away your food and tray tables, nothing! I believe it was God’s good grace that allowed us to return to Kuwait safely.

One of the best things that happened to me in Kuwait was that I met my husband over there. We spent time together after work for about six months before he went back to the states. We kept in touch and four months after he left, I redeployed back to the states. I retired and moved down to North Carolina, where he was stationed at Fort Bragg, and we were married. We just celebrated 17 years of marriage.

I enjoyed my career in the Army because it gave me purpose and structure in my life. I was serving my country, and the Army gave me discipline. I enjoyed the camaraderie of my fellow soldiers, especially other women soldiers, and I miss that to this day. I still keep in touch with some of the women friends I made while in the service. I was a single mom to one daughter for most of my career, and the Army gave me a steady job and paycheck that allowed me to take care of my daughter and send not only her to college, but also myself.

There really isn’t anything I did not like about the Army. I was physically fit and passed my PT tests, but physical exercise is not my favorite thing. I didn’t really care for early morning PT formations, or road marching, but it did keep me fit.

The most striking change in my life now is that along with my husband, I am fully committed to God, attend church regularly, read my Bible, and pray daily. I’m retired and get to spend time with my grandchildren. I’m working with them and their parents to lead them to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I hope I have at least laid a foundation for them that they will remember when they are older and return to God if they stray. (Funny story, parents staying in bed while they made my sister and me get up and walk to church on Sundays.)

I now volunteer with Doreen and AVAG to assist veterans with submitting their VA claims. After a sermon from my pastor about completing Jesus’s command to bring others to Christ, the Holy Spirit convicted me that working with Doreen would be my ministry. In addition to helping veterans with claims, I pray with them, some who don’t even believe, and encourage them about Christ. 🦋



## Reflections from Navy Veteran Jason Murchison

### A featured speech from the AVAG & Cottonwood Church Annual Veterans Day Celebration

I'd like to welcome all of you in attendance today and thank you first of all for your service to this great country. I am here today as a witness to share my story in the United States Navy and, more importantly, how God has guided me through my time in the military and the love he has shown me throughout this challenging time. My name is Jason Murchison. I am just a common man with an uncommon desire to succeed. I have been tested in ways I never thought possible, only to come out of my trials and tribulations as a stronger, more focused, and humbled individual. I come from a family that has a military history that dates all the way back to the Revolutionary War in this country. My grandfather, John, was a Navy Seabee chief who had a career that spanned from 2 weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor all the way through tours in Vietnam in the 1970s. My grandfather, Ken, was a Marine who had combat tours in Korea, and my step-grandfather, Frank, was also a Marine who was in a supply unit in Okinawa. These men told me stories as a child of their experiences, and this greatly shaped how I perceived the military; it sounded like a great adventure filled with sacrifice. I never dreamed I would follow in their footsteps, as the only thing I was focused on was school and surfing.

However, after attending my brother's graduation from basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and his receiving his blue cord for being in the Army's infantry, something changed inside me. I saw my brother do something I never thought he would do...he changed. No longer a lost man, he was part of something bigger...something more selfless. My brother and I were also very competitive, and if he was to do something like this... well, then I must do something that in my eyes will be even better. So I began researching what I would do in the military, and the only thing that ever interested me was being in the water. I also had been taught to shoot at an early age by my father, as he was a member of the Los Angeles County SWAT team known as SEB. As a child, I was brought to many demonstrations to watch how to clear rooms with a team of operators, watched them flash-bang these rooms with precision, and take out simulated terrorists while saving mock hostages. This "shoot house" experience always resonated with me, as there was more excitement in this scenario than I had ever seen before in any part of life. So I decided to follow in my family's line of service and join an elite unit within the US Navy.... I enlisted to become a US Navy SEAL.

The first school you go through in this great odyssey is Basic Underwater Demolition school, known as BUD/S... It is a sobering experience. No TV show, movie, documentary, or book can do it any justice or truly explain the amount of physical and mental adversity you go through. But everyone there is there of their own free will...we all volunteered for this, and please do not feel sorry for anyone there. BUD/S was an all-day, every-day-and-night wake-up call to being a man. There were people from all over the country, and everyone had a different background. But the common goal was there...to be part of the "Teams." Every man there wanted to be a team guy...part of something bigger. I wanted that so bad... that it had become the only



thing I thought about, cared about, and I put it above everything. The SEAL teams have an ethos...it speaks of the importance of the team itself, and these lines became how I saw the world.

"I will never quit. I persevere and thrive on adversity. My Nation expects me to be physically harder and mentally stronger than my enemies. If knocked down, I will get back up every time. I will draw on every remaining ounce of strength to protect my teammates and to accomplish our mission."

I am never out of the fight."

These were sacred words to me... I was beginning to lose myself and my walk with the Lord. I worshiped the teams and the instructors who were the gatekeepers to being a SEAL. I was about to find out how truly cruel and sadistic these men were... I was now part of a piratical culture that was a cult and one that did not have God as its focus. I thought I was there to train to kill terrorists and hunt them down in the darkest of nights. The thought of going to war was the only thing I prayed for... My heart turned hard as my body was becoming forged like iron in the training I was undergoing. I could swim, run, climb, and sneak around in the dark... I wanted to make martyrs of the men who opposed my country or anyone who got in my way. The world I was living in was not something that was sustainable, and the Lord saved me from it... ✕





Jason's helmet from BUD/S training.

I was a member of BUD/S class 287, and that means that 286 other brave classes had gone before me. It was a winter class that started in January. The water was 50 degrees on a daily basis, and you were cold, wet, sandy, and starving on a daily basis. I thought this was paradise at the time... This helmet you see in front of me held so much power at the time, as it symbolizes just one man in the group of almost 300. Every day, it was inspected by instructors and checked for imperfections, as it had to be polished and free from rust on the chin straps. At certain times it was dragged across the blacktop of the grinder by an instructor as a way to discourage you, as you had to spend time that night putting a new coat of varnish on it. If you ever decided you had had enough of training, you put this helmet down by the instructors' office and ring a big brass bell 3 times to signal that you had quit. The fear of quitting was so immense for most people that it could drive you to tears or madness. I knew in my heart I would never quit... So every day I would wake up on my quest to earn the golden trident you eventually are awarded when you complete SEAL training.

To get there, you would go through a slew of physical exercises known as "evolutions," where you and a team of other SEAL candidates would be timed on runs, swims, obstacle courses, or paddling a small rubber inflatable boat over huge breaking waves. This everyday competition was amazing because you would see other physically imposing guys decide to quit and leave their helmets and ring the bell. I began to take joy in watching others leave, as they did not have the same desire I had, and I thought only the best remained. This helmet became a symbol of my strength and resolve, but it was also a false idol. As the days of training turned into weeks, I thought everything would be fine, but in my foolishness, I had begun to create enemies with my attitude and started to gain the attention of the instructor staff. One fateful night, we were conducting a training exercise that resulted in a physical altercation between me and one of the senior SEAL instructors....

I entered the Navy thinking I would do this job until the day I died. However, I was quickly sent to a different unit and was never a combatant of war... I sat on the sidelines and watched my brothers go out and live out what I thought was my dream. A dream of false glory on a battlefield... a dream my ego invented.

The Lord had humbled me like I had never been humbled before... all these years of training would never be put to use. I struggled with this for a decade once I was out of the Navy. I did not realize it at the

time, but the Lord had better plans for me...ones that included life and not death on a battlefield. I thought my purpose was to die for my teammates in war. I thought John 15:13 was the greatest verse in the Bible, where it was said that "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." So I wandered for years after the Navy, thinking a higher education would help. Thinking that starting a business would fill that hole.

But I was blessed in another way, as an old buddy of mine in training would visit me periodically. His name was Paul; he was my swim buddy in BUD/S. He was a believer and still operational with the SEAL teams. He had a stronger walk with the Lord than me, and I used to look down on him in training as someone who was weak... But one day, he introduced me to a woman he had met, and this woman ended up becoming my fiancé, and she first bore me a girl whom we named Kezia. This name has biblical significance, as it was one of the daughters God blessed Job with after he was restored from his trials and tribulations. I found it only fitting to name her this after my own trials.

I was then blessed with another child...a boy named Ford. He was born on one of the most significant days the world has ever seen. He was born on June 6th... D-Day: a day that the Western world decided to stand up against tyranny and embark on freeing Europe from evil. On this day, my son was born, there were two earthquakes, and the Lord showed himself to me, and I was in awe of his glory. As I now know that all the glory in this world is to be given to God. I was then baptized after my son's birth on June 30th to show my commitment to the Lord for saving me from my previous life. His gift to all of us is eternal life. So I now live my life for Him.

I was fortunate enough to find a church to bring my young family to attend, and the Lord has been with us every step of the way. This church, Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach, also has a veterans group that meets on the last Saturday of every month, so I started to attend that as well.

Here I was able to meet veterans that spanned from a gentleman who was part of the fabled 10th Mountain Division in World War 2 (who happens to be 100 years old and a pillar of faith). To other vets that were in Vietnam who shared similar experiences with my grandfathers. These men are all heroes...you men and women veterans out in the audience today are all heroes. It doesn't matter what branch



Jason and some of his fellow veterans pose for photo at a Veterans Connect gathering at Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach.



The Murchison family.

you were in or what your job was in the military...because you are all equally important. From combat veteran to cook...what you did made a difference. I salute each and every one of you...and to the spouses

and families of these individuals, your sacrifice and support of these men and women was just as important...as they could not have done it without your love, support, and understanding.

We all gave so much... Do not ever minimize that. I was a member of Naval Special Warfare for a brief moment, but as Psalm 39:5 tells us, life is...

“No longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath.”

Meaning our time here is short, brothers and sisters; we should not waste it on foolish things but come to the Lord and ask him to guide us... Take refuge in the Lord, as he will save us. As it took me many trials and tribulations to become aware of this... I saw the power of the Lord, and he directed me away from evil and death. He gave me a family I never thought I would have... I thought my fate was to die. However, my purpose is to live with the Lord forever, and so is yours.

So if today my story and the Lord's love have affected you, please say this prayer with me.... “Dear Lord, please forgive me... I want to know you better. Show me your love. Help me change. Soften my heart and let me let go of any hate. Heal the pain in my mind. Let me focus on your goodness. I want to dwell in your house forever.” 🙏

## Meet Nick Saifan

Nick Saifan is the Chairman of Vendaval, Corp. He has been a licensed contractor and a developer of affordable veteran housing from 2017 to the present.

Nick started his journey when he joined the U.S. Navy straight out of high school at 18 years old. Nick then joined the US Army and retired in 2008 with 24 years of honorable service. Retirement was never on his mind. Nick opened several businesses and excelled in entrepreneurship. Giving back was always on his mind. After a successful business run in large and diverse fields, numerous certification programs, and three degrees (political science, criminal justice, and construction management), construction was always the best idea, and multi-use development is what he wanted to do.

Nick has spent years in his military career and civilian businesses, developing the skills to make developing affordable veteran housing with community programs and a sense of give-back to the community a reality. As a service-connected disabled veteran himself, Nick knows and understands the needs of veterans in all areas, from housing, job placement, counseling, transitioning, education, benefits, and much more.

Experienced in providing logistics and services in high-threat, non-permissive environments, Nick directed company operations at Camp Brooklyn at the Baghdad International Airport. He has many years of experience deployed to Europe, the Far East, and Middle Eastern nations in liaison, political-military, and security assistance postings, with a minimum of fifteen years of leadership experience as a member of a military or police special operations unit. As an active member of the U.S. Army, he has directed the operations of



military intelligence and special operations units. He has more than 24 years of experience with military special operations and intelligence activities and a minimum of nine years of experience working with both the military and the Department of State in special police and protective service operations. As a Middle Eastern specialist and Arab linguist, I have worked closely with DoD and State Department protective service activities. His experience spans more than sixteen years in country. He has an excellent command of the Arabic language and is fluent in Arabic (reading, writing, and speaking) and knowledgeable of most of the 18 regional dialects. 🙏





## AVAG Honors Veterans at the Brookhurst Community Center

Our recent veterans gathering at the Brookhurst Community Center in Anaheim drew an impressive turnout, reflecting the appreciation our community holds for those who have served. AVAG was proud to partner with Pam from the City of Anaheim's Recreation Department to host this celebration.

Together, we created a memorable afternoon filled with gratitude and connection. Thanks to the generosity of Children's Giving Gifts, veterans and seniors received thoughtful items such as blankets, watches, and sunglasses. Elizabeth Rocha from Congressman Lou Correa's office attended to present certificates of appreciation, adding a meaningful touch to the program.

Councilman Carlos Leon offered warm remarks and graciously assisted in distributing meals to attendees. Pam also honored each veteran personally by pinning a commemorative pin, making the moment even more special. In addition, a variety of resource tables were available to support veterans and their families.

Rounding out the event was lively music and dancing, which filled the room with joy and patriotism. It was a day of celebration, community spirit, and heartfelt recognition for our veterans—an occasion we were truly honored to share. 🦋







## AVAG Participates in Veterans Day Program at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library

American Veterans Assistance Group (AVAG) was honored to take part in the Veterans Day program at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in Yorba Linda. The event brought together veterans, community members, and supporters for a moving tribute to those who have served our nation.

On behalf of AVAG, Doreen Matsumoto was invited to arrange speakers for the program. She selected two U.S. Army veterans—Catherine Barrett and Ron Cabrera—both of whom have shared their experiences at past AVAG gatherings and bring a deep well of service and insight to every event they attend. Their sincere reflections resonated strongly with the audience.

AVAG extends its gratitude to the Library's staff for their gracious hospitality and for hosting such a meaningful commemoration. Following the ceremony, attendees enjoyed touring the Library grounds and exhibits, taking in the beauty and history of the setting.

The day also offered an opportunity for fellowship, as Doreen spent time with friends and supporters Mellissa Arriola Breunig and Mary Cruz. AVAG is grateful to everyone who joined in honoring our veterans and is proud to have participated in such a memorable and uplifting Veterans Day event. 🦋





## Never Forgotten: AVAG's POW/MIA Remembrance Day Luncheon in Costa Mesa



Attendees at the annual POW/MIA Remembrance Day Luncheon at Costa Mesa enjoyed guest speaker Nelson Cook's inspiring remarks.

On Friday, September 19, the Costa Mesa Senior Center was filled with veterans, community leaders, and patriots for our annual POW/MIA Remembrance Day Luncheon. This gathering paid tribute to America's prisoners of war and those still missing in action.

Guest speaker Nelson Cook offered inspiring remarks, while Douglas Zimmer delivered a moving POW/MIA presentation that reminded everyone of the enduring sacrifices made for our freedom.

Among the distinguished guests were Janet Brown and Max Madrid from Congressman Lou Correa's office; Council Member Arlis Reynolds; Cecilia Gallardo Daly, Interim City Manager of Costa Mesa; Alma Reyes, Deputy City Manager; Robbie LaBounty, District Representative for Supervisor Katrina Foley, 5th District; and Council Member Andrea Marr, a U.S. Navy veteran.

Special thanks go to Mellissa Breunig and Marla Ogelvie for coordinating the raffle prizes, and to the many organizations that participated and shared valuable resources, including Torres Mortuary, Heart of Compassion, Navy Federal Credit Union, Veterans Mechanical, Ekklesia Today, Coaches of Influence, and Regal Medical Group.

We are grateful to the Costa Mesa Senior Center for providing the venue and to AVAG for generously providing lunch. Finally, a sincere thank you to our volunteers for their hard work and dedication in making this remembrance event a success. ✈



Douglas Zimmer



A veteran in reflection at the Missing Man Table.



Guest speaker, Nelson Cook







# Honoring Heroes of the Korean War



On July 24, 2025, AVAG proudly participated in the 72nd Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice and the Inaugural Ceremony of the Korean War Veterans Association – Southwestern USA, held at Huntington Beach Church in Huntington Beach. This celebration was a beautiful tribute honoring the sacrifices of Korean War Veterans.

Commander Conrad Barrera and his wife Cindy from AVAG's Diamond Bar chapter, Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, and Chaplains Wayne and Marla Ogelvie were please to attend this moving tribute.

From the patriotic procession of veterans to stirring performances by the Arirang Choir and Reverend Paul Cheon, the event was a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by our Korean War heroes.

Special thanks to our fellow attendees from American Legion Newport Harbor Post 291 & Waterfront Events, the Vietnam Veterans of America, and national commanders for joining in unity and remembrance.

Group photos, a meaningful ceremony, and a shared luncheon made the day one to remember. 🦋









# Honoring Our Community Heroes: AVAG's Annual First Responders Luncheon

## Spreading the Word

In July, our AVAG Chaplaincy team devoted the morning to visiting local fire and police departments, delivering cookies and sharing the news about our upcoming First Responders Luncheon. It was a joy to meet these dedicated men and women face-to-face, to pray with them, and to remind them of just how vital their work is to our community. We are grateful to All We Print for providing our beautiful event flyers, which helped spread the word about this special gathering. 🙌





## Celebrating Our First Responders

In August, we were honored to host the Annual First Responders Luncheon, offering a complimentary meal to those who protect and serve our communities. The event was made possible through the generosity of AVAG, which provided fresh tacos, beans, and rice, by Los Mojico's Tacos, and Bracken's Kitchen, which donated delicious sides and desserts.

Our Chaplaincy team—Melissa Breunig, Marla and Wayne Ogelvie, Cheryl Rollins, Wendy and Tom Loveless—secured raffle prizes and organized an incredible group of volunteers who served, baked, and helped make the day a success. Children's Giving Gifts and Heart of Compassion contributed thoughtful items and snacks for the first responders to take home.

One of the most touching moments came as children passed out cookies and small gifts, bringing smiles all around. This special luncheon was a beautiful expression of gratitude and community spirit.

If you would like to support next year's luncheon by volunteering or donating raffle prizes, please contact Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto at [doreendabo@yahoo.com](mailto:doreendabo@yahoo.com). Together, we can continue to lift up and honor the heroes who serve our communities so faithfully. 🦋





# AVAG Partners: Working Together to Serve Our Veterans



## Backpack Giveaway at Diamond Bar Estates

Our after-school program at Diamond Bar Estates was extra special in August! Thanks to **American Legion Post 295 – Cypress**, the **Ladies Auxiliary Post 295**, and **Cottonwood Church** for donating backpacks and school supplies.

The kids had a great time choosing their backpacks, playing bingo, winning prizes, and enjoying snacks and games led by our youth volunteers, Sophia and Bella.

Big thanks to **David and Mellissa Breunig**, and our Bible study friends **Julie Saczawa** and **Dennis** for helping make it all happen! 🦋



## AVAG & Cottonwood Church Partner to Support Local Communities

In August, AVAG teamed up with **Cottonwood Church's Outreach Team** to distribute nearly 500 bags of food and Brawny paper towels to families and seniors in need.

With the help of our amazing volunteers—**Wayne and Marla Ogelvie**, **Mary Cruz**, **Frank A. Waldrop**, and **Paul Buron**—we loaded and



delivered every bag, starting with **Sequoia Plaza Mobile Home Park in San Bernardino**, where 100 bags were handed out in 100° heat. Later in the month, we continued our outreach at **Casitas La Verne Mobile Home Estates**, bringing smiles and relief to local seniors.

A huge thank-you to **Natalie Favela**, **Ibeth Figueroa**, and **Cottonwood Church** for their incredible generosity and partnership in serving our communities. 🦋





### Supporting Heart of Compassion Distribution at American Legion Post 295

At **American Legion Post 295** in Cypress, the community came together to support **Heart of Compassion Distribution**, raising \$1,000 for the organization. The event featured generous raffle prizes, including a 52-inch TV donated by **Beth and Scott Moore**, won by **16-year-old Noah**. **Lana Martinez** won the “dollar bucket” draw-



ing, and **Perry Howard** earned the Best Bike trophy, selected by **Tim Walker** and **Lyndon John Catbagan**. Guests also enjoyed a baked potato bar prepared by the **Sons of the American Legion**.

A few days later, **Perry Howard** donated another \$1,000 to AVAG. **AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto** personally delivered the donation to **Heart of Compassion**, where **Army Veteran Pastor Eric** expressed deep appreciation for the continued support. 🦋



### AVAG Appreciation Dinner for the Marine Riders

AVAG hosted a special dinner to honor the **Marine Riders**, featuring a delicious meal by **Jason Cruz of Meals on the Grill** and desserts by **Bonnie**.

**Congressman Lou Correa's Veterans Liaison, Elizabeth Rocha**, presented certificates of appreciation and shared her military experiences. Volunteers **Mary, Tita, Cheryl, and Bonnie** helped make the evening run smoothly, and the **Surfing the Nations** building provided a wonderful venue.

Guests enjoyed fellowship, raffles, and a message about the gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Response cards showed strong appreciation from all who attended. 🦋



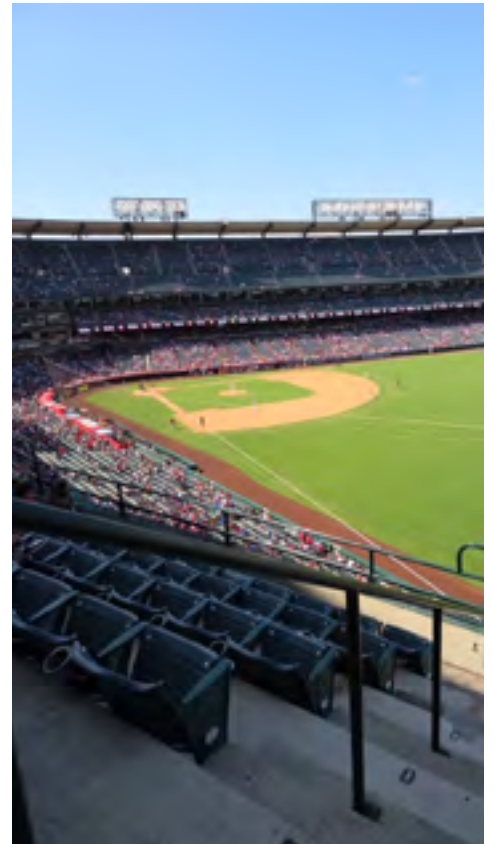
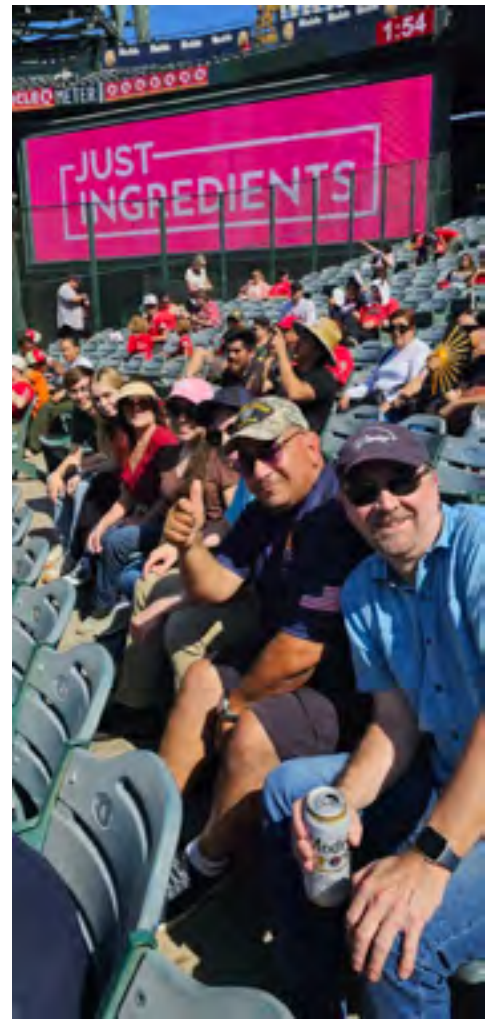


## AVAG Veterans Enjoy Los Angeles Angels Games Thanks to Generous Ticket Donations

AVAG is grateful to our community partners for their generosity, which allowed our veterans to enjoy Los Angeles Angels baseball games this season.

Thanks to **Sal and Chris Shandra**, eight tickets were donated, giving **Commander Conrad Barrera** and seven other guests the opportunity to attend a thrilling Angels game. Additionally, **Anthony Garcia** donated four tickets to a Sunday game, which were enjoyed by Air Force veteran **Brian Williams and his son**, as well as **Marine Corps veteran Wayne Ogelvie and his wife Marla**. During the games, attendees connected with our Commander and fellow guests, sharing in the excitement of the event.

AVAG sincerely values the support of our community partners, whose generosity helps create memorable experiences for the veterans we serve. ✈️





## Cory Vigil Awarded the President's Volunteer Service Award

U.S. Navy veteran Cory Vigil, Service Office of American Legion Post 291, an AVAG partner, was recently honored with the President's Volunteer Service Award, a civil award bestowed by the President of the United States. Established by executive order under President George W. Bush, the award recognizes volunteers who dedicate hundreds of hours each year in service to others. This award for Cory recognizes his outstanding dedication to veterans and military families. The award reflects years of service both in uniform and throughout his continued community work.

Cory served eight years in the Navy, deploying in support of Operation Desert Strike, Operation Southern Watch, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Across two enlistments, he filled two demanding MOS specialties—Aviation Boatswain Mate (ABE) and Hospital Corpsman (HM) (FMF)—reflecting his versatility, skill, and commitment to supporting those around him.

Cory's dedication extends deep into the veteran community as well. For the past eight years, he has served as the Post Service Officer for American Legion Newport Beach Harbor Post 291, offering invaluable support to veterans seeking assistance with VA programs, benefits, homeless outreach, and re-entry or diversion court services. His work has earned him numerous honors, including the PVSA Gold Award, multiple Orange County Veteran of the Year recognitions, and the Assembly District 74 Veteran of the Year award. He also remains actively involved as a member of the Anaheim Veterans of Foreign War.

Cory has been a strong supporter of AVAG, encouraging his American Legion post to donate scooters, wheelchairs, and other essential items, to help advance our mission.

AVAG congratulates Cory on receiving this prestigious national honor and thanks him for his unwavering dedication to the veteran community. 🦋





## Community Foundation of Orange Awards AVAG a Field of Valor Grant

AVAG is proud to acknowledge the Community Foundation of Orange (CFO) as a valued partner in our mission to support veterans and their families. This year, AVAG was deeply honored to be selected as a Field of Valor grant recipient — a meaningful contribution that directly strengthens the services we provide across our communities. We are profoundly grateful for this investment in our work and for CFO's ongoing commitment to local veterans.

The Orange Field of Valor, now in its 11th year, stands as a powerful patriotic tribute to honor all Veterans and Active Duty Military personnel for their steadfast dedication and service to our nation. More

than 1,200 full-size American flags were displayed at Handy Park, each dedicated in honor or memory of a loved one. In fact, each one of our AVAG veterans received their own personal flag. The installation serves as a place of remembrance, reflection, and healing, while also raising vital funds to support veterans' organizations like AVAG.

Our AVAG Commanders proudly represented our organization at this year's Field of Valor, reaffirming the strong relationship between AVAG and the Community Foundation of Orange. We value this partnership and the vital role it plays in helping us continue our mission.

Proceeds from sponsorships and individual flag tributes not only fund critical support for veterans' groups but also sustain CFO's educational outreach to school-aged children—ensuring that the service and sacrifice of veterans are honored and understood by future generations. 🇺🇸







## Quilts of Valor Honors an Air Force Vietnam War Veteran

Southern California Quilts of Valor recently honored Pedro Aguirre, an Air Force and Vietnam War veteran (1965-1969). His future son-in-law, Frank Sanchez Sr., requested a surprise Quilt of Valor presentation. The family was present on the day of the presentation.

### Meet Pedro Aguirre

Pedro served in the U.S. Air Force from 1965 to 1969. He was deployed to Vietnam from January 1967 to August 1968. His primary location while in Vietnam was Tan Son Nhut Airbase with the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). During his time in Vietnam, he worked with the delivery of the mail, ammunition, and medical supplies in C-123 and C-130 aircraft to other U.S. airbases.

He told the story of how one day, while working on an airbase, he heard his name being called out. When he turned to see who was calling him, he recognized an uncle who happened to be passing through the same base. What are the odds of such a chance encounter?

Pedro liked being in the Air Force and traveled to Taiwan and Bangkok. At the end of his enlistment, Pedro had considered reenlistment but found out that his next deployment was scheduled to be to Greenland. With this knowledge, he opted for discharge as a Senior Airman E-4. ✈





# AVAG In Action



Roof during repair



In August, AVAG delivered critical support to veterans' widow, Eleanor Finneran located at Sequoia Plaza MHP in San Bernardino. Her mobile home required various repairs, including: roof demolition and new roof installation with 30-year warranty, skirting repair and, exterior, paint building, new steps at the front of her home. 🦋



Roof after repair

AVAG was able to help Jack Krajczar, a veteran of Santiago Palm Vista in Hemet, who needed help with his yard landscaping, and rocks put onto his driveway. The beautiful results put a big smile onto his face.

AVAG extends his thank you to our community partners from American Legion Post 200 of Lake Elsinore, and Rick Sapiro, the S.A.L. Commander, who generously donate \$500 towards making this work possible. We are so grateful for amazing people that want to be part of what we do to help Veterans. 🦋







On Halloween, AVAG presented a mobility scooter to Nathan Hernandez, a Korean War Navy Veteran. Pictured above with Wayne and Marla Ogelvie, Nathan expressed excitement upon receiving his scooter and looked forward to using it, appreciating greater independence he would enjoy. This scooter features an array of accessories, including a cover, phone holder, and cupholder. How cool is that? 🦋

AVAG completed critical repairs for veteran's widow Judy Hourt, including deck material removal, steps and landing framing repair, and decking reinstallation, significantly enhancing her stair safety.


**Stairs before**

**Stairs before**

**Stairs after**

## Veterans Helping Veterans

AVAG offers multiple avenues for sponsoring veterans.

After meeting Mitchell Mack, a veteran in Gardena, Lilly Green, a member of our AVAG San Bernardino chapter, became very concerned for his welfare. She encouraged him to get in touch with Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto, and gave him her contact details. He did contact Doreen to ask for help, following Lilly's advice.

Mitchell Mack had served in the U.S. Navy for four years at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, as a Fireman/E-3. He is currently looking for a downstairs apartment due to his disability, which makes navigating upstairs difficult. But his immediate request was straightforward: a donation of pants. Doreen forwarded his request to our Navy veteran and retired Chaplain Patrick Duffy, who kindly donated a \$100 Walmart gift card.

Doreen delivered the gift card to Mitchell, and he was ecstatic. 🦋





## From James Lewis: Gratitude and Appreciation

Recently, I was blessed to receive generous support from the American Veterans Assistance Group for much-needed repairs to my family home. Their help made it possible to restore and improve several important areas, including painting the exterior, repairing siding, replacing worn eaves, painting patio and carport covers, and refreshing trim, doors, and soffits. They also helped replace an outside faucet, making the home both safer and more comfortable for my family.

I am deeply grateful for this assistance. The improvements have not only strengthened the structure of my home but also brought peace of mind and renewed pride in the place where my family gathers. On behalf of myself and my loved ones, I extend heartfelt thanks to the American Veterans Assistance Group for their commitment to honoring and supporting veterans. Their generosity demonstrates the same values of service and community that I carried with me during my years in uniform.



### About James Lewis

I proudly served in the United States Air Force from March 1980 to March 1992, attaining the rank of Technical Sergeant (E-6). My career began at Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, California, where I was trained and served as a C-141A/B Instructor Loadmaster and TALCE Loadmaster. In this role,

I was responsible for critical aircrew operations, including cargo transport, weight and balance, and inflight emergency procedures.

As part of the Tactical Airlift Control Element (TALCE), I deployed to Army, Navy, and Marine bases, where I managed remote airfield operations and joint-service personnel in support of military aircraft cargo load planning. I coordinated the deployment of aircraft, cargo, and personnel worldwide, reporting directly to the Air Force Military Airlift Command at Scott AFB.

Throughout my 12 years of active service, I accumulated more than 3,300 flight hours, performing numerous successful airdrops using C-141 A/B aerial delivery systems. My assignments gave me the privilege of working alongside fellow servicemen and women across the globe and taught me the importance of leadership, precision, and teamwork under demanding conditions. ✕





# AVAG's Veterans Connect:

## Monthly Gatherings at Hope Chapel

Veterans Connect meetings at Hope Chapel Huntington Beach have become a vibrant gathering for veterans. Meetings are held every fourth Saturday of the month from 12 noon to 2:00 p.m. at Hope Chapel, located at 715 Lake St., Huntington Beach. Veterans Connect brings together veterans from all walks of life, providing a supportive environment for connection and fellowship.

The group has been studying Operation Timothy, Book 4. All are encouraged to participate.

Meetings are characterized by celebrations of milestones and support for those who have experienced loss. This group consists of remarkable individuals who have served our country and are invested in our community. We invite our veterans to be part of this exceptional group.

These gatherings are opportunities to connect, and our dedicated volunteers always provide a delicious lunch. Lunch is followed by a raffle. Thank you to Mellissa and David Breunig for their charitable donation of gift cards, which are used as prizes in our raffles.

**Join the community!** AVAG's Veterans Connect is a great opportunity to meet fellow veterans and for spouses to connect with others, share stories, and be inspired. *We look forward to seeing you at the next meeting!* 🦋





# AVAG Communities Celebrate Halloween

## Diamond Bar Estates

In October, the children attending the AVAG afterschool program enjoyed an afternoon filled with seasonal spirit as members arrived in creative Halloween costumes, bringing color, humor, and plenty of fun to the afternoon. The costume contest quickly became the highlight of the gathering. The kids brought their best costume to win gift cards, and as you can see some took home Chick-fil-A card, a MasterCard, and one for Albertsons. They also played bingo and won various prizes. They had plenty of snacks and had an overall great time with each other. 🦋



## Santiago Creek Orange Estates

At the October AVAG chapter meeting, led by Commander Glenn Williamson, members enjoyed fellowship and special Halloween themed deserts. The group was preparing for their special event scheduled for November 1. The chapter's Commander would be speaking and sharing his thoughts on being a Vietnam veteran and receiving two Purple Hearts. 🦋



## Cherokee Mobile Home Park

The October AVAG chapter meetings at Cherokee Mobile Home Park, on the last Thursday of month as usual, was filled with seasonal spirit as members arrived in creative Halloween costumes. The costume contest was the highlight of the gathering, adding a playful energy that everyone enjoyed. We also extend our appreciation to Karta Motorwerks for generously sponsoring our luncheon, helping make this festive October meeting even more memorable. 🦋







## Pacific Palms MHP

The Halloween bingo potluck party at Pacific Palms has a significant attendance. A special thank you to Virginia Martinez, who provided tacos, beans, and rice, and to all who brought additional side dishes and desserts. It was delightful to see people dress up in costume and rediscover their youthful spirit. \$25 gift cards were awarded to the winners of the bingo games and the costume contest. 🦋



## Santiago Palm Vista

Sunday was a fun day, which brought a significant turnout to our AVAG luncheon at Santiago Palm Vista in Hemet. The event featured bingo games with gift card prizes. Special gifts were distributed to meeting attendees, and they enjoyed a delicious lunch, courtesy of manager Roxann. Janice contributed a variety of desserts. Attendees were encouraged to dress up for Halloween, and one couple did, looking charming. 🦋

## Sequoia Plaza MHP

Sequoia Plaza's Halloween costume contest was an enjoyable experience, with our veteran's kindly judging the event. A baby pumpkin took first place, a little Snow White princess secured second place, and the Power Ranger came in third place. Each child was presented with gift cards to Chick-fil-A, Little Caesar's Pizza, and Domino's. The atmosphere was lively, with everyone cheering on the kids and savoring candy. October birthdays were also celebrated, acknowledging Michael Goens, Cindy Wheeler, and Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto. The event was topped off with cake, ice cream, and a delicious potluck. 🦋



# In Memoriam



## Patrick Duffy

It is with sadness that AVAG has learned of the passing on November 20th of U.S. Navy Veteran, Patrick Duffy who served as a Chaplain with American Veterans Assistance Group. Patrick struggled with health issues over the past four years, which became acute during the last few months of his life. He was known for his cheery outlook on life and his

love of the Bible. The AVAG Chaplains offer their condolences to his many friends, fellow veterans, and his family.

Patrick's service will held on January 2, 2026, at Hope Chapel in Huntington Beach. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested donations to AVAG. The next edition of AVAG News will highlight Patrick's life of service to others. 🦋



## Donna Atkinson

From AVAG Chaplain Doreen Matsumoto: "I was invited to share the message at Donna Atkinson memorial at Creek Orange, where she was an original member of our Bible Study group.

She actively participated in our AVAG meetings, food distribution efforts, and cleanup initiatives led by Cottonwood

Church, which frequently visited her residence. She was a kind-hearted lady with numerous friends within the community." 🦋



## Edward Stanley Kerwinski

Edward Stanley Kerwinski, affectionately known to all as "Dusty," was welcomed into heaven on August 2, 2025.

Dusty proudly served in the U.S. Navy. He enlisted in 1973 and served aboard the USS Haleakala (AE-25), an ammunition supply ship in the Pacific. As a Fireman Apprentice (FA) in the engineering department, he

helped operate and maintain shipboard machinery, worked with steam propulsion systems, and supported firefighting and damage control duties. He achieved the rank of Seaman Apprentice (E-2), received the National Service Medal, and was honorably discharged in 1974.

Services for Dusty were held at the Riverside National Cemetery. The deeply moving tribute was made possible by the Patriot Guard Riders of Southern California in partnership with AVAG. The sight of the Patriot Guard Riders standing watch with majestic flags served as a touching reminder of the respect and gratitude Dusty earned through his service to his country.

He will be deeply missed and forever remembered. 🦋

