

CALIFORNIA VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION



THE ALLIANCE

729 Decatur Street, #1, Bakersfield, CA 93308 661-399-2490 www.cavaf.org

Spring 2012

WE ARE KERN COUNTY'S ONLY VETERANS SPECIFIC HOMELESS PROGRAM

VETERAN AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATE REMEMBERED

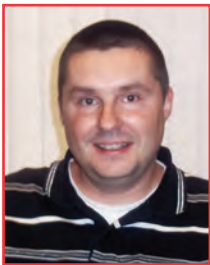
Throughout Bakersfield and Kern County, Vietnam veteran Vernon Valenzuela was a person that once you met him, you would always remember him. Dressed in his typical Hawaiian shirt and shorts, sporting a fu manchu mustache and a grin from ear to ear, Vernon exemplified what many try their lifetime to achieve...respect. On March 26th, Vernon, who spent most of his adult life helping struggling combat veterans as a MFT coun-



selor, lost his battle with cancer.

What many people didn't realize was that Vernon didn't just advocate for veterans, he also helped children in the community with caps and gowns for graduation, clothing, ——— **VERNON**, continued on page 4

MICHAEL STABILE, CVAF'S NEW OPERATIONS ASSISTANT



Hi! My name is Michael Stabile and I am the new Operations Assistant here at CVAF. In my spare time I enjoy spending it with my family. I have two lovely children: Skye and Sage. I am also an army veteran of which my most memorable part of my military career was my deployment to the U.S./Mexican bor-

ders. I am very grateful to receive the position here at CVAF and look forward to doing what I can to help fellow vets.

Michael has proven that he is a fast learner and eager to assist in any aspect of the program where he is needed. His persistence and passion to work for CVAF has earned him the respect of staff and residents alike. We have high expectations for him as he grows and learns in his new position. Welcome Michael, we are proud to have you on board.

STREET OUTREACH – THE KEY TO HELPING OUR HOMELESS



Rhonda Starr, Andrae Gonzales, Tom Sprain and James Shepard (CVAF).

CVAF staff and residents have teamed up with Flood Bakersfield Ministries and Stewards, Inc., to conduct "street outreach" to reach the most disadvantaged population who are surviving without adequate food and shelter throughout Bakersfield.

This is one of the many ways the partners of the Kern County Homeless Collaborative has been trying to reach the estimated 833 unsheltered homeless throughout Kern County (2011 PIT Survey).

——— **OUTREACH**, continued on page 4

NEW PROGRAM DIRECTOR APPOINTED

I am honored to have been given the opportunity to advance my position at CVAF to Program Director. I look forward to learning even more and educating myself and others on how to help fellow Veterans get their lives on track. Knowing what it's like, firsthand, to be on the street with no place to rest my head, CVAF has given me the opportunity to be all I can be, starting out as a resident of the program and going through the process of overcoming addictions and barriers to employment.



CVAF further helped me by hiring me as a case manager at our Buena Vista Program site. There I learned how to open doors for Veterans that would otherwise be closed, to help them become independent

——— **DIRECTOR**, continued on page 4

RESOURCE DAY

KERN VETERANS STAND DOWN AND RESOURCE DAY



Thursday October 11, 2012
Stramler Park
3805 Chester Avenue
(Near Sam Lynn Ball park)

Gates open from:
8:00am to 3:00pm

FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is hard to believe that we are in the middle of May, tax time has come and gone and summer is quickly approaching.

Our Kern County Veterans Collaborative is starting out strong. Project Homeless Connect is coming soon, and the Kern County Veterans Stand Down will be here before we know it.

We say a fond farewell to one of our staff members, Sarita Esqueda, and welcome Michael Stabile as our new Operations Assistant at the Decatur facility. Dennis Madrid has been promoted to Programs Director and Ron Hernandez will change his title to Job Developer. Case managers James Shepard and Tunisha Crite, along with several residents, are active in street outreach activities, and Nancy Price has done an outstanding job keeping us all in order. Heather Kimmel

is now the CVAF Executive Director and I know she will excel in this position.

With all of the staff changes, you would think we could take a little break. Not even close. CVAF was awarded a grant by HUD through our local Continuum of Care to provide 10 units of permanent supportive housing to low-income, disabled veterans and their families in Bakersfield. We thought long and hard for a name, so we put the staff to the test. JR Browning came up with the winning entry, "Rally Point", which will be a scattered site housing program with case management services. In addition, CVAF wrote for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families grant, has two Stand Down grants in the works, as well as the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program and a new grant and per diem grant opportunity in the wings.

Sometimes told that I am an over-achiever, I am proud to Chair the newly formed CVAF Women Veterans Advisory Committee, am Chair of the Kern County Veterans Collaborative, Vice-Chair of the Kern County Homeless Collaborative Steering Committee, Co-Chair of Project Homeless Connect and was recently re-elected Post Commander of VFW Post 1468. I daresay that although I may be busy, it is through the hard work and dedication of the staff of CVAF that makes it all possible. To all of my staff I say with the wisdom of Franklin D. Roosevelt, "When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on."



Deborah Johnson
CVAF President

KERN COUNTY VETERANS COLLABORATIVE LAUNCH WAS A SUCCESS!



CVAF President Deborah Johnson leading one of the Break Out brainstorming sessions.

It is no secret that Kern County is passionate about veterans and veteran's issues. Several veterans' organizations in Kern County had expressed a need for a collaborative to address this passion to serve those who served, to educate the uninformed and focus on the veteran's families.

It took Vernon Valenzuela, the former team leader of the Bakersfield Vet Center, to finally call these organizations together

to develop the steering committee of the Kern County Veterans Collaborative. After months of planning and development, from deciding on a logo to a mission statement, the collaborative was finally ready to launch on March 22, 2012.

At the first meeting Steve Sanders, Chief of Staff, Kern County Superintendent of Schools, presented the Steering Committee's strategic plan and the five priority goals we would like to accomplish. Brief presentations were given by the Veterans Service Office, CVAF, Wounded Heroes, Bakersfield Vet Center, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Military Order of the Purple Heart. The meeting broke for brainstorming sessions, where all of those in attendance could provide input to the collaborative. There were five topics that addressed ways to improve the services available to our veterans, and each member of the meeting was able to choose which topic they felt most passionate about. With over 100 participants at the first meeting, the KCVC is picking up momentum, and will be able to reach out to those local veterans and families

to assist them with the information they have earned and deserve.

The general collaborative meetings will be held the fourth Thursday of every month at 2800 Gateway Avenue at 10:00 a.m. If you would like additional information, please submit a request to info@cavaf.org



CVAF Executive Director Heather Kimmel giving a presentation to the Collaborative.

CVAF FOOD WAREHOUSE VOLUNTEER CREW



Lewis Lowe, Krista Hoffman and William Aldright.

Managing CVAF's food warehouse and distribution schedule can become a daunting task and we needed additional assistance above and beyond what our staff could coordinate. This task includes cleaning and maintaining the facility, weekly inventory and grocery shopping.

CVAF turned to the community for support, and three phenomenal individuals rose to this challenge. These individuals show up every week, without fail, and provide a service to the veterans of our program that is critical.

Lewis Lowe is the Food Warehouse lead volunteer and has been volunteering in this position since 2009. William Aldright approached CVAF with an interest in serving the veterans of our community in the beginning of 2011 and Krista Hoffman joined the team shortly after that.

CVAF would like to express our deepest gratitude to these outstanding citizens; without their hard work and dedication, a large component of the program would not be as successful!

From the Trenches



FINDING EMPLOYMENT

A recent survey of program participants showed over 33% of them are looking for private sector employment. In a community where unemployment is 15.5% (Feb 2012), it is imperative that anyone looking for work must set themselves apart from other job seekers. CVAF case managers have focused their daily living skill classes on employment, and encourage the residents to use every community resource, such as Employers' Training Resource and the Employment Development Department. Here is one resident, Brian H.'s, story:

"When I first started my job search I had to re-evaluate how I was coming off, what I was doing wrong. From some of the living skill classes presented by the program, I made some adjustments. I learned from prior mistakes and took appropriate steps to correct them. I learned how to interview and how to present information to an employer. I learned how important it is to have the right documents upon job search, such as a DMV printout, picture ID card and a list of accurate dates of employment. CVAF helped in both areas and is very helpful in my job search."

CVAF RECEIVES GRANT FOR PERMANENT SUPPORT HOUSING IN BAKERSFIELD

The Kern County Homeless Collaborative will be receiving \$2.8 million in new funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This new funding is in addition to the \$2.3 million that the collaborative has already received to combat homelessness in our community.

Among the newly-awarded programs is a permanent supportive housing program named "Rally Point". This new program will be operated by CVAF, and will create an additional 10 housing units to place single veterans, and veterans with families, into permanent housing. The supportive services will be provided by a case manager on a continual basis until the veteran no longer qualifies for the program.

This program is expected to be operational this fall. CVAF is excited to branch out into new housing options for the veterans in Kern County, and to continue the partnership with the Homeless Collaborative, and all of the participating agencies.

A VERY GENEROUS DONATION

The Wounded Heroes Fund (WHF) is a local nonprofit organization that focuses its assistance on returning wounded post 9-11 veterans, and has been an ongoing supporter of the California Veterans Assistance Foundation.

WHF had received a donation of a residential property, including all the belongings inside. They graciously extended their good fortune onto CVAF and turned over all the clothing, cleaning supplies, hygiene

items and paper products found inside the home to our program.

In most situations a regular household would include a limited supply of these items; however, this donation involved three vans and a pickup truck to deliver all the items to our program.

The California Veterans Assistance Foundation would like to sincerely thank the Wounded Heroes Fund for this most generous contribution.

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



Joe H.

Joe H. recently joined our residents at CVAF and from his outward leadership, was already asked to volunteer his time as resident house manager. Joe completed the domiciliary program in Los Angeles, California where he was looked upon as a role model for other residents. When approached for our news article, Joe made this statement:

"I believe I released a lot of emotions being around other veterans. It is a positive experience, it brought out my personal experiences and the ability to pay it forward. As resident manager, I've utilized my skills with veterans, I have been involved in veteran outreach projects, recruited other veterans from Los Angeles, California to come to CVAF and for the most part, they are adjusting well; this alone motivates me to move forward. My future goal is to maintain contact with the veterans, continue with outreach projects, and possibly develop a career in this field. I am very happy with the program at CVAF and the opportunities it has afforded me."



Darold C.

There was a time when Darold C. found himself homeless and so hopeless, he actually planned to end his own life. But thanks to the intervention of friends and the folks at several member agencies of the Kern County Homeless Collaborative (KCHC), he has found housing in a stable environment, is enjoying life and beginning to give back to the community that helped him.

Darold, 64, and originally from Northern California, is a U.S. Army veteran who worked primarily as a delivery driver until his early fifties, when a drug charge cost him his job and apartment in Sacramento. He had some friends in Bakersfield who invited him to come and live with them, he said, but they had ulterior motives: "They

were only my friends because I had money and drugs. When the money and drugs stopped, they kicked me out."

Despondent and feeling utterly alone, Darold drove his car out to a rest stop along Interstate 5. He had a jar of pills and every intention of taking them, but then his cell phone rang. It was a friend he had not heard from in years, whose mother worked in mental health services. She helped Darold get into the Mary K. Shell Mental Health Center until his suicidal crisis was under control. While there, he was referred to Kern County Mental Health Department's Kern Linkage Program, which provided him with linkage-oriented case management and intensive therapeutic treatment.

Thanks to Kern Linkage, Darold was able to obtain housing in the Green Gardens Supportive Housing Program, but he lost that housing when he got into a fistfight trying to defend two fellow female residents from an attacker, who was also a resident. Later, while keeping an appointment at the local Veterans Clinic, Darold found out about California Veterans Assistance Foundation, which provides housing and supportive services to homeless and at-risk veterans. He lived at CVAF's Decatur street facility for about a year and a half, until CVAF President Deb Johnson found out about Golden Empire Affordable Housing, Inc.'s new Haven Cottages, affordable rental homes for homeless individuals with mental illness. "She put my name in," Darold said, and he was the very first tenant when Haven Cottages opened in the fall of 2011.

"You can't imagine what it feels like to have the key to the front door of your own place," Darold said with tears in his eyes at a recent meeting of the Kern County Homeless Collaborative. Several of his listeners not only cried with him, but elected him as a fellow voting member of the 2012 Steering Committee of the KCHC. Darold's voice of experience – as a consumer of homeless and mental health services – is a great asset to the Homeless Collaborative.

BEAUTIFUL BAKERSFIELD



Every year, the Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce holds an awards ceremony to honor businesses, organizations and citizens for their contributions to the people and image of Bakersfield. The Beautiful Bakersfield Awards Banquet is a gala evening celebration where our community has an opportunity to publicly applaud the positive work that people

and organizations put into making Bakersfield a wonderful place to live.

Marla Maples, wife of CVAF Board of Director member Tim Maples, and President of VFW Post 10895 Ladies Auxiliary, nominated CVAF for this honor. Marla nominated CVAF in the All-America City Tradition – Civic/Nonprofit category because she feels that our efforts have enhanced the quality of life for residents of Bakersfield.

The awards ceremony will be held on June 2, and will be broadcast by KGET-TV 17.

OUR FALLEN COMRADES

The following veterans were past or present residents of CVAF



Rick D.
12/26/52 to 1/29/12
U.S. Army Veteran



David M.
06/07/59 to 04/08/12
U.S. Army Veteran

VERNON, continued from page 1 —

and was always there to give you support when you needed it the most.

What CVAF will remember him for is that Vernon and Chuck Bikakis were the two local Vietnam veterans who approached Robert Piaro, CVAF/VAF CEO, in Washington, D.C. back in the fall of 1999. The two men said there were homeless veterans in Kern County, and could Bob come out and see if they could start a transitional housing program for them in Bakersfield, like the one (VAF) he had already established in Wisconsin. Twelve years later, CVAF has three (3) transitional housing programs and a Resource and Referral Center for veterans. This year, CVAF was just awarded a HUD Continuum of Care grant to establish a 10 unit permanent supportive housing pro-

OUTREACH, continued from page 1 —

Having a diverse outreach team can facilitate the crucial first step from the street to independent living. This work is challenging and requires the workers to be

gram named “Rally Point”.

In the months before he passed, I had the privilege of being one of the recipients of Vernon’s e-mails titled “Thoughts from the Ledge”. Without even realizing it, he gave all of the people copied on those e-mails hope, laughter, sadness and inspiration. One of the most memorable statements he made was “Never doubt your ability to make a difference or the importance of your pursuit; we are not powerless unless we quit.”

Remnants of Vernon’s life have touched us all. From the candlelight vigil, the flyover from the helicopter that medivac’d him out of Vietnam, the articles, speeches, congressional recognitions, to the V2 tattoos his family and friends etched on their arms.

Farewell, dear friend. The staff and veterans served by our programs are forever in your debt.

attentive, proactive and persistent to understand the individual needs of each person they make contact with. Street outreach teams gradually build up relationships of trust and offer support to encourage the movement into positive lifestyles.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Providing services takes money; foundations and corporations fight hard for a share of big federal and state grants. The California Veterans Assistance Foundation relies on the generosity of people like you to help end the national disgrace of homeless veterans who are (MIA) missing in America.

Please send your tax-deductible donations to:

**California Veterans
Assistance Foundation, Inc.
729 Decatur Street, # 1
Bakersfield, CA 93308**

Please help us to continue our efforts to help those veterans who need a “hand-up and not a hand-out.”

CFC Donation

94262 California Veterans Assistance Foundation, Inc. EIN #30000186044

Transitional housing programs with supportive services that assist veterans in identifying, treating and diminishing the issues that lead to homelessness.

Toll-free: 888-805-2490

CVAF MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to help veterans or at risk of becoming homeless veterans, regain, maintain, and improve their status in society by providing an alcohol and drug-free, secure environment through which a wide array of human services can be accessed in an atmosphere of dignity and mutual concern.

DIRECTOR, continued from page 1 —

with their lives, and how to teach them the living skills needed to make it in today’s society. Learning the tools while in the program has taught me the skills to advance in life and at work. No one said it would be easy and, it’s not, but I’ll never forget where I’ve been and I’ll always keep my eyes focused on what is right for me, CVAF and our fellow Veterans.

We are so proud of all that Dennis has accomplished during his time at CVAF, and look forward to watching him continue to excel. Dennis is a true leader and has exhibited those qualities from the very beginning. Under his guidance the program will only grow and become stronger, and the services available to the veterans will surely continue to improve. Way to go, Dennis; congratulations!