

CALIFORNIA VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION



THE ALLIANCE

1400 Easton Dr. Suite 102, Bakersfield, CA 93309 661-695-3626 www.cavaf.org

Winter 2013

WE ARE KERN COUNTY'S ONLY VETERANS SPECIFIC HOMELESS PROGRAM

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Every quarter the staff works hard at putting together amazing, heartwarming and truly inspiring articles for the newsletter of the veterans we work with, the agencies in the community that we collaborate with and our dedication to helping veterans throughout Kern County. The truth is, in spite of (and despite) all of the things we have accomplished, we still have a lot of work to do.

You may be asking what is prompting this new call to action. Three things:

- While conducting street outreach efforts a few weeks ago, Case Manager James Shepard called me and said that a veteran

who used to be in our program died from exposure. His name was "Mark". We have had many veterans named Mark come through the program...which one was it? When was he here? Why did he leave? All of these thoughts raced through our minds. I later found out it was a veteran that I personally engaged at an event called "Project Homeless Connect." Mark and his wife were living on the streets and told me they needed to get into a shelter right away. Several agencies surrounded them with services and we placed Mark at CVAF and his wife at the Homeless Center that day. Within 21 days he relapsed and left the program, back with his wife and back to the streets. He was **49 years old** when he died.

- Results of the Kern County Point in Time survey conducted on January 23rd

— **PRESIDENT**, continued on page 4

NEW CASE MANAGER DAVID ANINION JOINS CVAF STAFF



I have always been a person who enjoys helping and assisting the needs of others. After being hired on-board with CVAF, I have expanded my knowledge and understanding of really helping someone in need. Although it was second nature to me, CVAF has given me a much deeper and more fulfilling aptitude of helping others.

In my spare time I enjoy playing basketball and training in mixed martial arts. I enjoy having to run into a task or goal that test my ability to overcome it. Why? Because I believe we are built to adapt and overcome situations to gain

— **NEW MANAGER**, continued on page 4

CVAF RECEIVES SPECIAL RECOGNITION FROM MOPH "VETERAN ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR"



Pictured on left, (L-R): Retired 1st Sgt David Jackson, Heather Kimmel, Deb Johnson and Robert Fortner. Pictured on right, (L-R): Deborah Johnson, CVAF President and Heather Kimmel, CVAF Executive Director, proudly holding onto this year's MOPH "Veteran Organization of the Year" trophy.

The 3rd Annual Military Ball sponsored by Kern County Chapter 604, Military Order of the Purple Heart took place on February 16th at the DoubleTree Hotel. Over 200 guests and Veterans attended the event, which was highlighted with a speech given by James McEachin. Mr. McEachin is a successful Hollywood actor

and a Korean War vet where he received the Purple Heart and Silver Star. Mr. McEachin's speech to the audience excited the patriotism in all who had the fortune to hear it.

Chapter 604 recognizes individual veterans and veteran service groups each year with the Veteran of the Year award and Veteran Organization of the Year award. This year the California Veterans Assistance Foundation was recognized as the Veteran Organization of the Year due to their consistent efforts to keep veterans and their families away from homelessness and foster an environment for every veteran to be self-sustaining and independent. CVAF President Deborah Johnson and Executive Director Heather Kimmel received the award with Robert Fortner, Case Manager at the R&R Center, who was also in attendance. Leon Thomas was recognized as the Veteran of the Year for his tireless efforts to promote veteran

— **RECOGNITION**, continued on page 4

WOUNDED HEROES FUND HELPS VETERAN WITH A TRUCK



Approximately one year ago, Wendy Porter, Executive Director for the Wounded Heroes Fund asked CVAF President Deb Johnson if she knew a veteran that deserved a truck. A local man had died and left his property to Wounded Heroes with the stipulation that it should go to needy veterans. In addition to a house, furniture, clothing and a lot of household items, there was a 1977 orange Toyota pickup.

Immediately Lewis L. came to mind. He was a veteran that graduated from CVAF, and spends two to three days a week volunteering to inventory, shop and distribute food for homeless veterans. He also volunteers as a mentor for youth in his church, and helps run events for Growlin' Dogs Catering. He is dependent on the bus, borrowing a vehicle or asking for a ride. With that in mind, I asked

— **HEROES**, continued on page 4

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



Ben Patten (in center, holding blanket) with members of the Armed Forces Support Ride.

Local Veteran Ben Patten, who is a United States Army veteran that served his country during the Vietnam era, is a true advocate for veterans and active service members alike. Like most veterans, he did not find his calling immediately after being released from active duty. He worked several odd jobs, including several years in the car business. He eventually found his calling working for a Harley-Davidson dealership after purchasing a new bike from them. He is now the Manager of the dealership, which has led him to making connections with many of the motorcycle enthusiasts in Kern County.

Six years ago a former co-worker contacted Ben and asked him to put something together for his son who would soon be leaving for boot camp. Ben immediately sent out e-mails and phone calls to put together a ride. Ben stated, "We had 25 bikes, but not a clue what we were doing." This ride marked the formation of the Armed Forces Support Ride. Two weeks after this first ride, Ben received a call from a recruiter for the Marine Corps, asking if they could put together a ride



for some of his recruits. Today, there are approximately 300 members and each ride averages about 30 people. Ben stated that the most important accomplishment in his life is his two sons, both of whom served our country. His youngest son, Sean, is still on active duty and Ben couldn't be prouder. "Every time we send off a new recruit, I think to myself, 'Wow! I wish my boys would have had this.'"

The Armed Forces Support Riders not only provides this service, but supports any veteran in need, in any way they can. They want to help "fill the gaps" for veterans in our community. CVAF recently housed a female veteran who was expecting her first child. She did not have a single item for the baby she was expecting in less than one month. Ben called on his fellow veterans, his fellow bikers and anybody else in the community who would listen. His efforts resulted in an outpouring of support for this young veteran and a mountain of donations including diapers, car seats, blankets, clothing, a changing table and many other baby items. This donation even spurred a local television station to come out and report on the generous outpouring of support.

Ben Patten, you are the definition of "veterans helping veterans" and CVAF would like to thank you for your continued support for the veterans of Kern County.

DOWNTOWN BAKERSFIELD BLOCK PARTY



Business owner Vanessa Maryanski and CVAF ED Heather Kimmel.

Local shop owner of Rockabilly Swag, Vanessa Maryanski, decided to rally the troops (other local business owners)

and coordinate a fundraising event to support homeless veterans; however,

they didn't know of any organization in the area that would accept their donation. That's when they found the California Veterans Assistance Foundation. "It was important to the business owners that the funds raised go to help veterans in our community," stated Vanessa.

The event was held on October 27, 2012 and was set up as a street fair in downtown Bakersfield. The festivities included live music, a classic car show, a raffle and a



A classic car show was part of the festivities.

pin-up girl modeling contest. As the word spread about this event and its cause, local bands wanted to show their support, as well. After the street fair ended, all patrons were invited to an after party benefit concert.

CVAF would like to thank all the business owners, bands and especially Vanessa for planning this event and including our organization.

TIP – TRANSITION IN PLACE



CVAF President Deborah Johnson, veteran Sean P. and Case Manager Caroline Twocats-Romero.

The California Veterans Assistance Foundation is one of 32 programs across the nation to be awarded the Transition in Place (TIP) grant through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This program takes the concept of traditional transitional housing, where the client is provided housing, case management and supportive services, but with one major difference. At the end of the case management period, when the client is able to obtain independent housing, instead of the veteran transitioning from the program, the program transitions away from the veteran. The goal is that the veteran will take over the lease on the apartment they are living in while enrolled in the TIP program.

CVAF has already placed two veterans into this program since January 21, 2013. The first veteran that was placed into this program was recently separated from the Navy, had a wife, a two-week-old daughter and no place

TIP, continued on page 4

KERN COUNTY RODEO



On November 3, 2012 twenty residents of the California Veterans Assistance Foundation were able to attend the Professional Bull Riders event at Rabobank Arena in Bakersfield, California. This was possible because of

a generous donation of entry tickets and meal tickets provided by Pacific Gas and Electric Company. One veteran from the transitional housing program, who was in attendance stated, "I enjoyed the excitement of the professional bull riders and the crazy antics of the show-stealing clowns."

CVAF Executive Director Heather Kimmel stated, "The veterans in our program work diligently every day to accomplish their goals in obtaining income and independent housing. It is not often that they have the opportunity to enjoy the types of events that go on in our community. I am so glad that the veterans were able to enjoy themselves with an evening out."

Thank you, PG&E; without this donation,
— KERN RODEO, continued on page 4

From the Trenches

WHAT THIS PROGRAM MEANS TO ME



Leonard F.

This program has definitely been a blessing to me. I found myself without a place to live and a nurse at the VA clinic told me about a program that helps assist veterans. Then I made a phone call to the CVAF where I spoke with a woman named Rosemary. I told her about my situation of needing a place to stay and that I was homeless and needed assistance for someplace I could stay – ASAP!

She set me up with an appointment for 8:30 in the morning the next day at CVAF here in Bakersfield. A friend of mine who I met at the career resources center (Dana Christensen), who also is a veteran, came to my rescue and put me up in a hotel overnight until the next day, where I met Rosemary at Golden State Highway. When I met her, I could see the love, compassion and integrity that she expressed during our conversation over the phone.

Right away, she began interviewing me to get accepted into a program. She then got on the phone with Dennis, who set up a meeting for me at CVAF. In a matter of maybe, a couple of hours, I was introduced to a young man by the name of David who began processing me into the program there. The rest is history! This program has, without a doubt, been a blessing to me; not only because of the resources this program provides, but also the workers here who help run this program. Their love, compassion and integrity are unparalleled.

I can say that this program has truly been a blessing to me. I was introduced to a man named Rick, who I became friends with from the start. As we talked over a cup of coffee, I learned that he was a man of God, which brought us even more close together. We would **start a church** right there in our apartment that we both called home. I learned that a blessing is not a blessing until you share it.

I am telling my story because I am sure someone out there needs to hear it – that someone might be you!

A THANKSGIVING FEAST TO REMEMBER!



The food was plentiful and the residents thoroughly enjoyed it!

Thanksgiving was a momentous date, embarking on yet another year for CVAF giving back to our veterans. The staff team was more than eager to begin the cook off. Turkeys and hams roasting in ovens in two apartments, side dishes from mashed potatoes and gravy, to the oh-so-sweet cranberry sauce. It was a feast to remember! All members of the CVAF team began serving our fellow veterans, as plates became mountain tops.

What a great way to spend the holidays by giving back to our fellow vets who helped served this country with courage and pride. One by one, words of gratitude filled the air. We all can share and say, “What a grateful moment it was to spend with our Veterans.”

VETERANS DAY 2012



The California Veterans Assistance Foundation participated in a true Bakersfield tradition, the 93rd Annual Veterans Day Parade. The day was filled with patriotism and an appreciation for everything our veterans have sacrificed to keep our homes safe.

The events began with breakfast prepared by local law enforcement at The American Legion Post 26; then a traditional flag-raising ceremony at the Veterans Memorial on Truxtun Avenue, which kicked off the parade.

As residents of the program, staff and family joined together at the CVAF entry, everyone looked on with anticipation as they waited for the parade marshal to start the event.

One participant, who had walked the parade route in previous years, looked very stoic, as he commented, “I can’t wait to shake the hands of the veterans in the audience.” CVAF Program Director Dennis Madrid stated, “I felt a sense of honor to give back, even for a brief moment, to those who gave for me.”

CHRISTMAS JOY AT CVAF!



Joseph D. and Peter T. enjoy the cards given to them from the American Red Cross.



The Christmas spirit was all around at the warm gathering at the Easton Office where the residents of CVAF were greeted with gifts and Christmas cards adorning each table. This was an opportunity for the staff and residents to spend time together, while words of appreciation from our donors warmed the hearts of everyone, ending the year 2012 with an abundance of great and wonderful memories.

We would like to thank the following people and organizations for the amazing gifts and goodies:

Krista Hoffman

Gingerbread soldier pins

Wayne and Linda Gibson

Fleece jackets and desserts

Dona Baker/American Legion Auxiliary #26

Handmade lap blankets

VFW Post 10859 Ladies Auxiliary

Financial gift

American Red Cross

Christmas Cards

After the residents grabbed their gifts, leftovers and headed out the door, Dona Baker with The American Legion Auxiliary made the comment, “I was sitting next to one of the veterans who had a stack of Christmas cards at his table. He opened every one and read them, laughing and smiling at the words a young child had written. Thank you, for letting me be a part of this special occasion.”

PIGGY BANK DONATION



On a quiet afternoon in December at the Decatur program site, a mother and her two kids (son and daughter) approached the front gate. She stated that she would like to drop off a donation. Little did the CVAF staff know the monetary donations in the piggy bank were from her children.

Each year they save every penny to donate to a charity of the children’s choice. The little girl suggested homeless veterans. Not knowing where to start, their mother searched for a foundation online and found CVAF. She called a random number (the President) and informed them of the donation, finding

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PRESIDENT, continued from page 1 —

and 24th showed a 22% decrease in unsheltered homeless veterans. On the flip side, there was a dramatic increase in homeless veterans residing in Eastern Kern County in the City of Mojave. Outreach efforts must be increased in our rural areas.

- Six unsheltered homeless female veterans have been identified...one of them is pregnant and living on the streets. Two weeks ago we housed a pregnant female veteran, but it isn't the same one. How many are out there? How are they receiving medical care for themselves and their baby? How can we find them again?

These questions bring us back to strategic planning for the year and a new sense of purpose. The search for new programs, more funding and ways to engage homeless veterans in this county will continue to be our priority until we have zero homeless in our community.

Deborah Johnson
CVAF President

NEW MANAGER, continued from page 1 —

insight and be proficient. Challenges are what I call our sculpting tools to be the best we can be. I enjoy hiking, sitting on the beach enjoying the scenery and spending time with family and friends.

Ultimate goal in life: travel the world.

Welcome to the CVAF team, David. Your desire to assist the veterans in Kern County was apparent from the day you interviewed for a position on our team. Your ambition and drive to go above and beyond the call of duty to get the job done is greatly appreciated, and we look forward to watching you grow as a case manager with CVAF.

RECOGNITION, continued from page 1 —

issues both locally, at state level and at federal level.

The Military Ball is an annual event designed for veterans and civilians alike. Its goal is to renew the bond of camaraderie for veterans of all eras and to promote patriotism. This year, Chapter 604 celebrated Korean War veterans. There were over twenty veterans of our nation's "forgotten war" who received special recognition from Assemblywoman Shannon Grove.

Great going, gals! Your hard work and creativity have made CVAF what it is today. We are so proud of your achievements; you've done CVAF proud!

HEROES, continued from page 1 —

Lewis if he would like to get the truck, which of course he said, "Yes".

It took several months for mechanics to look over the truck, get it smogged, two trips to the DMV and finally, on February 8th, Lewis was handed the keys, a full tank of gas and \$500 by Wendy Porter and Erica Schaubsluger. Lewis was speechless to say the least, with a grin from ear to ear.

Thank you, Wounded Heroes, for this amazing gift to a very deserving veteran. Your organization goes above and beyond the call of duty helping CVAF and the veterans we serve, from backpacks for Stand Down to the gift of this truck!

TIP, continued from page 2 —

to go. Sean came to CVAF asking temporary assistance with a hotel voucher, not realizing that he would be leaving our offices with an apartment to call his very own. "I was in the service for many years. I thought I had a good plan for when I left the Navy, but oh how wrong I was. When I was discharged, my cousin offered for me and my family to come and live with her; but after a short stay, they told me I had to leave."

As the case managers at CVAF began working with Sean and his family, they quickly realized that he did not have enough items to properly care for his infant child. CVAF President Deborah Johnson sent out an email to local veteran service organizations, asking for donations of baby items. Within 24 hours, Sean received his first donation and donations are still being dropped off to support this family.

If you would like to make a donation to support this family, or any of the other veterans in our programs, contact Heather Kimmel at 661-695-3626.

KERN RODEO, continued from page 2 —

these veterans would not have been able to have this enjoyable experience. Entertainment and outside activities are so important to our Veteran residents, helping them to take their minds off of their problems and giving them a break from their everyday program requirements.

BANK, continued from page 3 —

themselves here in Decatur eagerly waiting to drop off their donation.

The family chose to stay anonymous, so we were not able to get more information.

CVAF truly appreciates every donation that the community is willing to give, but this one will be remembered by residents and staff alike.

IN MEMORY

Rest easy, sleep well my brothers.
Know the line has held, your job is done.

Rest easy, sleep well.
Others have taken up where
you fell, the line has held.

Peace, peace and farewell...

Virgil "Paul" Smith
01/01/57 - 12/10/12
U. S. Army

Mark Allen Wheeler
03/30/63 - 01/11/13
U.S. Navy

*The above veterans were
presently or previously
a resident in the California
Veterans Assistance Foundation.
Thank you for your service!*

**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.**
1400 Easton Dr. Suite 102
Bakersfield, CA 93309

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.