

CALIFORNIA VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION



THE ALLIANCE

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

Fall 2009

WE ARE KERN COUNTY'S ONLY VETERANS SPECIFIC HOMELESS PROGRAM

NEW ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT



Sarita Esqueda

My name is Sarita Esqueda, and I'm a resident of Kern County, born and raised in Bakersfield, CA. I love spending time with my family, camping, off-road riding and watching football.

In 1997, I began my 12-year journey with Alliance against Family Violence and Sexual Assault, assisting those whose lives have been affected by violence. A recent change of

events has opened new doors for me, which have brought me to CVAF. Staff and residents have given me a long journey, welcome home feeling. I am very fortunate to be a part of CVAF and look forward to all the good things to come.

We welcome Sarita, and are pleased to have her as part of the CVAF staff. She is fitting in well here; her background in working with community resources is proving to be invaluable. We are pleased to have a hard working, compassionate and knowledgeable person on staff. Sarita has filled the seat of Heather Kimmel, who has now moved to the position of Operations Assistant.

THE POWER OF A VOLUNTEER



Pictured are CVAF volunteer residents Dennis Madrid, William Gannon and Clayton Halford, joining Marnie Heiter and Brenda Ratliff of the Volunteer Center.

The staff at CVAF challenged our residents to become more evolved in the community by volunteering in some way. A resident by the name of Chris R. took that challenge and found an organization in Bakersfield called the Volunteer Center. It was founded in 1972 by the Junior League of Bakersfield, and has been serving our community for the past 37 years. They have facilitated the community with \$42 million worth of volunteer services just this last year. There are 3,500 nonprofit organizations in Kern County that the Volunteer Center is able to work with.

Chris spoke with Marni Heiter, the Operations Director for the program. Marni explained to him that the volunteer center would soon be partnering up with Channel 17 News to hold their annual fan drive. She explained that they would need multiple volunteers throughout the day to accept the fans, as well as the next two days to distribute them. Chris brought this event

to the attention of the staff at CVAF and Debbie Johnson contacted Brenda Ratliff, Executive Director of the Volunteer Center, to coordinate dates and times. Meanwhile, Chris was telling other residents about this opportunity. By the time Debbie asked for volunteers, the list was 18 residents long.

On July 22, 2009 at 5:30 a.m., our residents started showing up at the Channel 17 news station parking lot in shifts of four to offer their services to the community. Throughout the day, they helped receive and assemble over 800 fans. The residents also helped inspire the CVAF staff to get involved, so after work, some of the staff came to assist in transporting the 800+ fans from the parking lot to the storage facility. Throughout the next two days, our residents returned to the Volunteer Center to assist in distributing the fans to low income households and to senior citizens.

Brenda Ratliff said, "It was a privilege to work with the residents and members of the California Veterans Assistance Founda-



Pictured are some of the fans collected for the drive.

tion. I truly enjoyed working with your organization and residents; they all have a heart for service. They were the most dedicated and hard working volunteers, and we look forward to working with you on projects in the future." Bakersfield is a cooler place this summer thanks to the Volunteer Center, Channel 17 news and the help of the CVAF residents and staff.

COMMUNITY GIVING BACK TO VETERANS

On Friday, July 3rd, the Olive Drive Church of Bakersfield held a Wounded Heroes Patriotic Concert. The church was kind enough to donate 10 concert tickets to the foundation; all 10 tickets were used by the veterans in our program. The residents who attended the concert were able to enjoy live music, a patriotic sing-a-long and a tribute to our troops. They also heard stories from wounded heroes, and a speech from Mayor Harvey Hall. Each

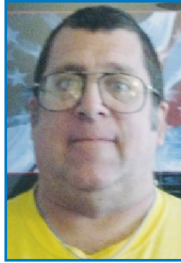
resident appreciated the gift, especially those who do not have an income at this time, and who would not have been able to attend without this generous donation.

One resident said that his favorite part of the concert was the confetti fireworks. CVAF would like to thank once again, the Olive Drive Church, for donating the tickets so the veterans could attend the concert and program events to help celebrate the 4th of July weekend.



RACING TOWARD THE FINISH LINE

Veteran William G. has been a resident of CVAF since December of 2008. He served in the Navy and was honorably discharged in 1974. Despite his life's past struggles, which includes the passing of his wife in 2007, and thereafter becoming homeless, we would like to recognize William for his accomplishments.



Since entering in the program, he has become a positive role model and has shown self-determination in many areas of his life, which in turn has helped him to overcome his depression. William has received his AA degree in Accounting on August 23, 2009; the anniversary date of the passing of his wife. He is recognized as a responsible resident driver, and has recently signed up as a volunteer at Consumer Family Learning Center where he is seeking on-the-job training for future employment.

We congratulate William on his accomplishments!

CONSTRUCTION ZONE

Recently, while Cal Trans was conducting maintenance work on Decatur Street near our site, Lewis L., a resident, suggested that we ask them for leftover pavement to repave our front driveway. Lewis wanted to help, but because of medical reasons, was unable to.

So case manager, Thomas Cole, approached residents Robert C. and Rick H. and asked if they would be willing to help. They both went out and talked with a

Cal Trans employee, who willingly poured extra asphalt down and explained to them the process of paving the road. Although the Cal Trans employee could not physically help our residents, he did lend them tools and gave them tips along the way.

Robert and Rick spent a whole day repaving the driveway because they wanted to give back to CVAF. Great job, guys! The driveway update looks fantastic – all your hard work is deeply appreciated.



News from Inside the Trenches

This article is a great opportunity for the residents to think about the things that they have been working on and the positive impact CVAF is having on their lives. I could ask the case managers for information about what our residents have been doing, but I want to know from them what they feel is important and what they wish to share. Every resident's goals are different and their program is tailored to assist them in accomplishing their diverse ambitions. These goals range from obtaining employment or income through VA compensation, pension or Social Security. They can also include receiving medical/mental health treatment, dental care, eyeglasses, driver licenses or going back to school. Several residents are enrolled in college; two residents attend Bakersfield Junior College. One resident is working towards a degree in marketing and another for an electrician's certificate. Two residents have enrolled in Universities to obtain Bachelors of Science degrees; one in Human Services and another in Health Care Management. There is one resident who has success-

fully completed his AA degree in Accounting while living here at CVAF.

A constant requirement for the residents who are able is to find gainful employment. Several of our residents have done so, but the most recent places of employment are Barnes and Noble and Account Control Services. Those who are not yet employed are on a continuous search. Others who are not able to find employment, are seeking retirement or disability benefits. One resident just qualified for a pension; before entering CVAF, he didn't think he would be eligible.

We encourage all of the residents to do volunteer work while striving to reach their goals. There are many forms of volunteerism and each person needs to find what suits them best. One resident chose to volunteer at Terreo, providing physical therapy to disabled children. Another resident gives his time to the Thompson Law office, while yet another volunteers his time here at CVAF by assisting in the set up of the new computer lab at one of our properties. With all of their appointments and obligations, it isn't easy tracking

down the CVAF residents, but they are all working in the right direction to successfully transition back out on their own.

A little excitement was experienced at our Buena Vista Street site; on the morning of September 10, 2009 one of our resident managers, Rick C., was starting his inspections when he smelled smoke. He went to investigate and found that it was coming from the backyard of the neighbors to the south of our Buena Vista property. He looked over the fence and found that an old car in their yard had caught on fire; Rick reacted quickly and grabbed a garden hose. At the same time, resident Harrell C., who lives in the apartment closest to the neighbor, noticed and grabbed a second hose. They started dousing the flames and the fence that connects the two properties. At that time, two other residents Joe M. and Reginald A. went into action. Joe untangled the hoses so the line would go farther and Reginald called 9-1-1. By the time firefighters arrived on the scene, the CVAF residents had successfully extinguished the flames and prevented any further damages to the property.

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



James S., originally from North Carolina, came into the CVAF after he attended the Veterans Stand Down where he met some of the CVAF staff. James decided to start a referral into the program and was admitted in October of 2008.

While James was a resident he did countless things to go above and beyond his program requirements. He chose to do this by helping CVAF with transportation and maintenance. James volunteered to help, because he felt like it was one way he was able to give back. James started by being a resident driver for CVAF, and would take other residents to medical appointments, job interviews, as well as other scheduled runs. Since James excelled at whatever he did, we thought we would ask him to assist in odd jobs at the different sites. His first big project was helping another resident, Reggie A., paint all the Buena Vista Street apartments. He then cut new blinds for those apartments and did countless other maintenance jobs. James also left his mark on CVAF by implementing a recycling system and used the money to start a tobacco fund for residents with no income. No matter what was asked of him, if he had the ability to take care of the problem, he gladly did so.

James Stokes has since transitioned out of the program and is working for Anne Sippi Clinic as a maintenance person. Although the staff is very happy to see James doing so well, we certainly miss him...not only because of his desire to give back, but for his personality and spirit. James is a joy to be around and his time at CVAF touched every person in one way or another. James joins the ranks of those many CVAF residents who have successfully completed and reached their program goals, and have gone out to start their new life. Thank you, James, for all that you have done – we will miss you greatly!



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

CAPITAL DENTAL ORTHODONTICS

A local orthodontist named Wade Logan, D.D.S. (Capital Dental Orthodontics) has offered his full services to serve one veteran per month to the California Veterans Assistance Foundation. All CVAF Case Manager's have been referring all our residents to the VA for dental assistance; but because of long waiting lists, it takes a few months for the residents to be seen by a dentist. After outreaching to the local community for months, a local orthodontist has finally taken notice of the sacrifices that veterans have made for this country and has responded to our plea. Dr. Logan has offered full dental care from root canals, cavities, implants, dentures and a wide



variety of other services. Let's give appreciation to Dr. Logan for his very generous offer of his services to the deserving veterans of our program.

FOOD MAXX

Each week, CVAF grocery shops at a local Bakersfield grocery store called Food Maxx. When going on our weekly Wednesday shopping trips, one staff member, along with two or three of our resident veterans, purchase all our dairy, produce and canned goods for all our program sites. After years of many shopping visits, grocery store manager Robert Woods has offered CVAF a store discount of 5% off their wholesale price. Mr. Woods has also been kind enough to established a system in which the program



sends their list of dairy and produce items, via fax, the day before, and the store employees package all the items and have them waiting for us – at no extra cost to the foundation. When we arrive at the store for our weekly grocery shopping, we save an hour of shopping because we have our entire dairy and produce packaged and ready for pick up. Here is another example of a good independent American company contributing to the local veterans for their services to this country.

HAMMONS MEAT SALES

CVAF's programs are unique in that, instead of providing the standard "institutionalized" meals provided in other programs across the country, our veterans are responsible for preparing their own food. Veterans fill out a food list on a weekly basis, which is filled by volunteers of the



program on "grocery day." This requires the program to maintain an inventory of food, which at times can be very challenging when you need to feed 51 men – 3 meals, 3 times

per day.

In March 2009, CVAF contacted Hammons Meat Sales, a local supplier located in Bakersfield to provide quality meats and seafood for the program. They have been in business since 1975 and offer our program wholesale prices and will deliver. The owners of Hammons Meats, Kim and Craig, have not only given CVAF excellent prices on their products, but have been able to donate meat to the program, as well. They are community-minded and work with other organizations that provide meals to the homeless and underprivileged of Bakersfield.

Hats off to Hammons Meats for their quality products, excellent customer service and donations to the veterans of our programs!

CVAF 2009 WISH LIST

Personal Care Items:

Toothbrushes & Holders
Toothpaste
Dental Floss
Foot Powder
Shampoo
Conditioner
Disposable Shavers
Shaving Cream
Bar Soap
Bar Soap Holders/Containers
Lotion
Liquid Hand Soap
Fingernail/Toenail Clippers
Deodorant
Baby Oil
Vaseline
Denture Bath, Cleaner & Adhesive
Toilet Paper
Tissues

Clothing:

Good used clothing is fine.

House Slippers, new (Sizes 8-13)
Shirts & T-shirts (S, M, L, XL, 2XL)
Underwear, new (S, M, L, XL, 2XL)
Socks – Athletic, new (Sizes 8-13)
Men's jeans (Waist sizes 32 to 42)
Shower shoes/flip flops, new (M, L, XL)
Tennis Shoes, new (Sizes 8-13)
Winter Hats, Gloves & Coats/Jackets

Laundry Items:

Fabric Softener Sheets
Laundry bags (mesh type)
Sewing Kits
Laundry Detergent
Hangers, plastic

Recreational Items:

Movies, DVD/VHS
26" Tire Tubes and Repair Kits
Bicycles
Bike Rack
Puzzle books
Greeting Cards
Pens, pencils
Envelopes
Stamps
Stationery
Books
Patio Mister
Patio (outside) Ceiling Fan

Household Supplies

(new or gently used):

Coffee Mugs
Coffee Pots
Bakeware
Silverware
Pots & Pans
Pillows (standard)
Blankets, twin
Comforters, twin
Bath Towels/Washcloths
Toasters & Irons
Kitchen Utensils

Food Items

(cases only, please):

Coffee
Canned Meat/Fish/Poultry
Kool-Aid/Iced Tea Mix
Canned Chili/Stew/Pasta
Canned Veggies/Fruits
Canned/Bottled Fruit Juices
Fresh Produce

While donations of any kind are always welcome, please call the Center at 661-399-2490 before making any donations of the above listed items. Cash donations are always needed and welcomed. As always, the residents and staff thank you for your kind thoughts and generous support.

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."

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.

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY'S VETERANS

The Veterans Assistance Foundation (VAF) of Wisconsin, a sister company to the California Veterans Assistance Foundation (CVAF), is celebrating its 15th year of service to our country's homeless veterans. The Veterans Assistance Foundation was founded by Robert Piaro and incorporated January 25, 1994. Mr. Piaro has been President of both VAF/CVAF since their inception. As one of the premier homeless programs in the country, Robert was asked by Chuck Bikakis of the Kern County Veterans Service Office to bring his expertise on veteran's homelessness to Kern County. Starting the project in 1999, the California Veterans Assistance Foundation was established, obtained its 501(c)3 status and VA Per Diem Grant funding and was incorporated on May 15, 2003.

To commemorate the 15 years, on August 29th, a catered BBQ was served to the VAF/CVAF board of directors, VAF staff and their families, and to the resident veterans of the program. The semi-annual VAF/CVAF B.O.D. meeting, which rotates between Bakersfield and Tomah, was held in Tomah at that same time, so they could be part of the celebration. A softball game, in which the Tomah residents challenged the VAF staff and board members, followed the event. Using the newly-donated equipment and the practice before hand with the residents, proved to make for a very interesting game.

AN UNUSUAL RESIDENT???

One sunny, warm spring day in March, there was a tiny cry for help outside the office door. Trying to ignore it at first, the crying got louder and louder, until finally we had to open the door to see what was going on. Robert Piaro, President of CVAF did some unique outreach work that day and assisted in the admittance of a new resident. This particular resident was different from all the others for many reasons. Among those reasons were the fur coat, walking on all fours and the long tail. This new resident is a kitten, of course, who was very thin and very hungry.

The kitty promptly moved into one of the apartments, where the residents named it *Sassy*, thinking it was a girl. After *Sassy's* first veterinarian appointment, however, it was discovered that "she" was in fact a "he," so his name was changed to *Sassy Boy*. *Sassy Boy* was only about eight weeks old when we adopted him and since then, many residents have been able to enjoy his company. *Sassy Boy* has become a therapy cat to the residents, giving them an outlet to help cope with their loneliness and all the changes they are going through. He has now transitioned to a Step Up house, but continues to help countless residents who are in the program.

