

CALIFORNIA VETERANS ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION



THE ALLIANCE

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

Fall 2010

WE ARE KERN COUNTY'S ONLY VETERANS SPECIFIC HOMELESS PROGRAM

FROM THE PRESIDENT



I would like to recognize the activities and achievements of several members of the CVAF Board of Directors.

Keith Wilson received a commendation from the Department of the Army for distinguishing himself while serving as a Management Analyst for the Joint Service Records Research Center (JSRRC) during the period January through April 2010, while performing research to corroborate veterans' medical disability claims submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs. His responsibilities include

"I feel that the greatest reward for doing is the opportunity to do more."

—Jonas Salk

documenting information supportive of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) claims for members having served in the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

Michael Hikel, a formerly homeless veteran of the CVAF program and member of the Board of Directors, has just received his General Contractor's license issued by the State of California Contractors State License Board (CSLB). This agency protects consumers by licensing and regulating

the California construction industry.

President Deborah Johnson has just been elected as the Sr. Vice Commander of Pvt. Harold Brown, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1468 in Bakersfield. This position assists the Post Commander and presides in his absence. She will hold this position until March of 2011, when the new nomination of officers will take place. Private Harold Brown received the Distinguished Service Cross when he volunteered for a fatal mission to establish liaison with forward troops in the Argonne Forest in WWI and was from Bakersfield.

Deborah Johnson, CVAF President

COLLABORATION IN ACTION



Pictured on far right, CVAF's Heather Kimmel speaking to Clinica Sierra providers.

On September 24, 2010, Operations Director Heather Kimmel was asked to speak to providers from Clinica Sierra. She was accompanied by CEO Robert Piaro and met with seven of the staff operating the Kern Lifeline Project here in Bakersfield and in Delano.

CVAF has recently partnered with Kern Lifeline to provide outpatient treatment to residents with substance abuse issues. Clinica Sierra Vista has become a vital resource for CVAF not only in the field of substance abuse treatment, but also for medical, dental and mental health needs. Heather Kimmel stated, "It is an honor to be asked to come in and speak on behalf of the Foundation. I look forward to opportunities to educate the community on the resources available to veterans and what CVAF has to offer."

KERN COUNTY VETERAN STAND DOWN



Pictured is the Board of Directors overseeing the staff members as they man the CVAF booth at the Stand Down.

On October 7th the Kern County Veteran Service Department hosted the 12th annual Stand Down at Stramler Park. Veterans were able to attend homeless court, receive showers and haircuts, obtain clothing and



CVAF residents, Tony K., Mark H., David M. and David S. volunteered their time serving beverages and doughnuts to the vets and providers at the event.

medical assistance, including flu shots. Community service providers were also in attendance to raise awareness about benefits available to veterans within the community. — **STAND DOWN, continued on page 2**

HONOR A HERO HIRE A VET

Carrier Service Center held their 2nd annual "Honor a Hero Hire a Vet" job and resource fair on September 13, 2010. Over 60 employers came to recruit employment among the veterans of Kern County.

CVAF participated in the event to offer assistance to veterans in any way possible. We were able to give out information to those who were at risk of becoming homeless, and direct other veterans in the right direction to obtain various community resources.

The event started at 8:30 a.m. with an opening ceremony and speech presented by Mayor Harvey Hall. During his speech he made an official proclamation that September 13th is "Honor a Hero Hire a Vet" day in Bakersfield. Throughout the day, CVAF was able to assist many veterans, and also helped several residents fill out their job applications before turning them back in.

We look forward to continuing to be a part of the official "Honor a Hero Hire a Vet" day next year.

MEETING OF THE MINDS



Pictured, front row, L-R: Deborah Johnson, CVAF President; Bob Piaro, CVAF/VAF CEO; and Smoki Bikakis, CVAF Treasurer. Back row, L-R: Michael Hikel, CVAF Secretary; Keith Wilson, BOD Development Committee Co-Chair; Donnie Waak, BOD Development Committee President; and Chuck Bikakis, BOD.

The CVAF Board of Directors met on October 9, 2010 to determine short-term and long-term goals within the organization and program. A committee was established to research grants and fundraising opportunities with Donnie Waak as the chair. The discussion included “going green” and energy conservation, as well as future transitional housing and permanent housing strategies. The next quarterly board meeting will be January 29, 2011 in Bakersfield.

CHANGING CURRICULUM

Classes at the CVAF can seem to get boring from time to time, so it's necessary to spice things up. Well that's exactly what the staff has done adding new and exciting classes to the repartee, things like anger management, added by Case Manager Joe Sanchez and Alcohol and Drug Awareness, added by Case Manager Lee'o Whisenant.

Anger Management classes provide residents with the skills necessary to deal with life's little hiccups and the big curve balls of stress and anxiety.

Alcohol and Drug Awareness classes are designed to facilitate a place where the recovering veteran and the veteran who has never had issues with drugs or alcohol can come together and begin to understand one another. The drug and alcohol classes are designed so that things like relapse can be addressed openly and allow for a stronger bond between the veterans of the program to flourish in an atmosphere of care and concern.

Case Manager Whisenant hopes that these classes will give the veterans of the CVAF a better chance of staying clean and putting their lives in order.

END OF THE SUMMER CAR AND BIKE SHOW



On a warm, sunny day in Bakersfield, Set Free Ministries, a local Christian Ministry, celebrated life and recovery by having a car and bike show at Stramler Park.

The day began early for Case Manager Lee'o Whisenant and residents Manuel V. and Eugene B. The air was filled with fun, laughter and the smell of hot dogs. Miracles of metal, rubber and leather sprawled out across the park as it filled with cars, trucks and motorcycles.

The sparkle of chrome, the sound of Christian rap and praise for the Lord all



twisted together to develop into a wonderful atmosphere for the CVAF to spread the message that Homeless Veterans in Kern County had a place to go – a place to be safe.

In the end, the CVAF residents and staff talked to various people in the community – some veterans, and some service providers. It was a wonderful success and one that will be repeated often, as we at the CVAF continue to ensure that any Veteran in Kern County that isn't aware that the CVAF is here – will know we are here when we are needed.

HOW MANY MEN DOES IT TAKE TO STAKE A TREE???

Several residents at the Buena Vista program site pitched in together to do some property maintenance this fall. There are always some willing residents to help with some of the small yard projects that arise.

The grounds were purposely planted with many trees, shrubs and flowers not just for their beauty, but so the residents can enjoy the many birds, butterflies and other creatures that occupy the gardens.



STAND DOWN, continued from page 1—

munity such as VA enrollment, state and federal benefits, employment, housing, social security, child support, substance abuse counseling, mental health services, Red Cross services, and many more.

Volunteers ensured that a full breakfast, deep pit BBQ lunch, and sack lunches were available to all. This year's Veterans Stand Down was a huge success; providing benefits to approximately 225 Kern County Veterans.

Prior to the Stand Down, Chuck Bikakis, Director of Veterans Services met with CVAF President Deborah John-

son to discuss the possibility of handing over the Stand Down to CVAF in the future. Mr. Bikakis stated that the Kern County VSO is the only one in the nation to put on a Stand Down event. Typically they are hosted by nonprofit organizations like CVAF.

During the Board of Directors meeting on October 9th it was decided that CVAF will host the Kern County Stand Down beginning in 2011. President Deborah Johnson, with the support of the CVAF staff, accepted the challenge. CVAF plans to follow in the footsteps of the CVSO and continue to provide much needed services to the veterans in our area.

HIGHLIGHT A VETERAN



By Ricky S.,
CVAF Resident

In the past I have always been a blue-collar worker and I have always done pretty well for myself. I have gone through the ups and downs of the economy and recessions and always weathered the times. I have rarely ever had to go more than two weeks without being able to return to work – until lately.

A year ago, I found myself in a predicament I never thought would happen to me. I had no job, no money, no food and no place to live. I was depressed and confused about what had happened to me, and to many others in all walks of life. I never gave up, but I did slip into neutral for a short while. I then was brought to the California Veterans Assistance Foundation, which makes me feel very fortunate.

CVAF lets me take care of myself and present the best I can be to get back into the work force. One of the program requirements is to sign up at ETR. After doing this, I got accepted in the Industrial Technician Mechanic Program. I also feel very fortunate to be in this training because after completing it, I will receive a certificate that will help me stand out. I will then be able to compete with out of town, out of state and the 25 million out of country positions everybody in Bakersfield is competing for.

I hope to apply my new certificates to the Water Transfer Program and get on as a full mechanic or even as an apprentice. None of these opportunities would have become available to me if it wasn't for the direction I received from the staff at the California Veterans Assistance Foundation.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

CALL TO HONOR



It was a normal workday; meeting with residents, scheduling appointments, responding to e-mails and answering incoming calls. Little did the staff know that the next call they would receive was from an organization with a true heart for giving back to the heroes who served for our country.

Officer Armando Robles with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) began the call with, "Does your organization accept donations?" Of course, CVAF accepts donations in all forms, but we had no idea what Officer Robles and his coworkers had planned. He then proceeded to explain that they were planning a barbecue to feed 200 homeless or needy veterans and wondered if they could host the event at CVAF.

Heather Kimmel jumped at the opportunity and promptly scheduled the event for August 21, 2010 at 5:00 p.m. In the weeks that followed, and several e-mails later, all the details were worked out. CVAF had reached out to the community, inviting veterans from the Bakersfield Rescue Mission, the Veterans Service Office, former and current residents and their families. CDCR raised over \$3,000.00 in cash, merchandise and gift card donations. All the



proceeds went into the event.

The first volunteers arrived at 11:00 a.m., bringing their truck and BBQ System. Next, the tables and chairs arrived. Our facility slowly began its transformation into the "Call to Honor Our Military Veterans" BBQ Event.

By 5:00 p.m., there were 60 volunteers on site and over 100 veterans, plus their families. The volunteers served the tables and made sure everyone had plenty to eat. During the event, Captain Joe Belmontez presented CVAF President Deborah Johnson with \$1,150 in gift card donations. Not only was the food amazing, but the selfless acts of 60 volunteers to give back to those who gave for us was inspirational.

When asked how CDCR decided to contact CVAF the answer was, "We looked through the phone book and found you." The partnership was meant to be. Plans for next year's event have already begun; we hope to be able to reach out to even more veterans and become more successful each year.

Thank you, CDCR, and all the volunteers who came and served for those who served!

From the Trenches



Written by Samuel B. and Jerry F.,
CVAF Residents

CVAF takes a comprehensive approach in helping veterans put their lives back in order. Residents in the program learn to take responsibility for eradicating the causes of their homelessness. CVAF helps

veterans become aware of the many resources and services available locally, including VA health care, job placement services and HUD assistance.

Samuel B. describes how he puts these community resources to use. "Presently, I am receiving unemployment and looking for a job. My primary resource has been the Career Service Center; there I work with my Veterans' Representative, Thomas Cole. He has been helping me a lot; he has set me up with a Veterans' Rep at the Veterans Service Office. Her name is Sandra Witcher. She enrolled me into a resumé writing class, and I have to say my resumé is "Primo!" I also use the resource room at the Career Service Center to go onto the

CalJobs Web site in order to do my job search. In addition to that, I do a lot of footwork around town in popular shopping centers and malls looking for employment. Hopefully, I can find something in the restaurant or food industry as I plan to go to school, maybe Bakersfield College, to learn Culinary Arts."

Jerry F. stated, "As a CVAF resident veteran for the past six months, I am grateful to Robert Piaro for founding this program and the staff who make it happen on a daily basis. Thanks to Bob, the CVAF staff, the VA health clinic and the many groups and individuals who make contributions that keep the CVAF program operating successfully."

DONALD WAAK JOINS THE CVAF BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Donnie is a 100% disabled Vietnam Veteran who was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division and USARV in Vietnam and the 6th Infantry Regiment in Berlin, Germany.

He also served in the U.S. Navy from 1974-1985 as an Aviation Electricians Mate First Class, assigned to various helicopter squadrons and ships worldwide.

Donnie worked for CVAF as a volunteer from 2001-2005 and also served on the VAF Board of Directors during that timeframe.

He is instrumental in getting the transitional housing programs for veterans in Bakersfield “up and running” at the early stages of program development. His personal and professional knowledge as a Counseling Tech and Program Assistant at several Texas Vet Centers has benefited veterans of the program, as well as served as a teaching tool for fellow staff members.

Donnie’s professional affiliations include: Alamo Area Vietnam Veterans, Texas State Council, Vietnam Veteran Foundation of Texas, National Board of Directors, Vietnam Veterans of America, Life Member and VFW Post 76.

PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

It is hard to believe that three fourths of the year is over already and we are now looking at the holiday season ahead. This time of year happens to be a busy and heart-breaking time for many people, let alone veterans of our programs.

Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s are fast approaching; Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s are usually holidays spent with families or friends and often brings unwelcome guests – stress and depression. There are a lot of demands that can take the peace and joy out of the holiday season. In addition, facing holidays without friends and family can be tough and leave you feeling lonely and sad. With the stress of relationships, finances and physical demands, being exhausted increases stress. Make sure to exercise and sleep and follow these 10 basic steps:

1. Acknowledge your feelings. If you can’t be with loved ones, realize that it’s normal to feel sadness and grief. It’s okay to take time to express your feelings.
2. Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events.

3. Be realistic. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change. Hold on to a few, but try to create new ones.
4. Set aside differences. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don’t live up to all of your expectations. Set aside differences for a more appropriate time.
5. Stick to a budget. Decide ahead of time how much you can afford to spend on gift and food shopping. Don’t try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.
6. Plan ahead. Set aside days for shopping, baking and visiting friends.
7. Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. People will understand if you can’t participate in everything.
8. Don’t abandon health habits. Don’t let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.
9. Take a breather. Make some time for yourself, even if it is 15 minutes.
10. Seek professional help if you need it. If your feelings of stress and depression last a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

CPR TRAINING



American Red Cross

The Kern Chapter of the American Red Cross has been providing CPR and first aid training to residents and staff of CVAF regularly since 2009. Our most recent class was held on July 26th at our program site on Decatur Street. The American Red Cross sent an instructor to our facility and taught a 6-hour CPR and First Aid class. At the end of an entertaining and informative session, each participant received their certification.

Some of the services provided to veterans include free classes, emergency communication, support for the sick and wounded at

military and veterans hospitals, and assistance in obtaining emergency financial support. Each and every day, more than 700 Chapters and 36 Blood Services regions of the American Red Cross provide assistance and resources to communities across the United States.

To get information on veteran’s services through the Red Cross call 1-800-498-4882 or go to www.kernredcross.org

Pictured are residents of the program trying to perfect their newly-learned CPR skills.



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.

VISN 22 HOMELESS SUMMIT

On September 28th and 29th, the VA Long Beach Healthcare System hosted its 1st Annual Homeless Summit. Betty Zamost, Deputy Network Homeless Coordinator and Pete Hauser, VISN 22 Mental Health Program Coordinator, facilitated the two-day program whose purpose was to provide up-to-date information on VA federal, state and community resources available to homeless veterans to clinical staff, physicians, nursing, social workers, psychologists, other health personnel and service providers.

Those in attendance from Washington, D.C. were Pete Dougherty, Director of Homeless Veterans Programs and Roger Casey, Director, Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program. Col. Rocky Chavez, Undersecretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs, discussed the proactive approach the State of California has implemented to help the 30,000 returning veterans to return to civilian life each year.

For more information regarding California’s Operation Welcome Home, go to www.veterans.ca.gov