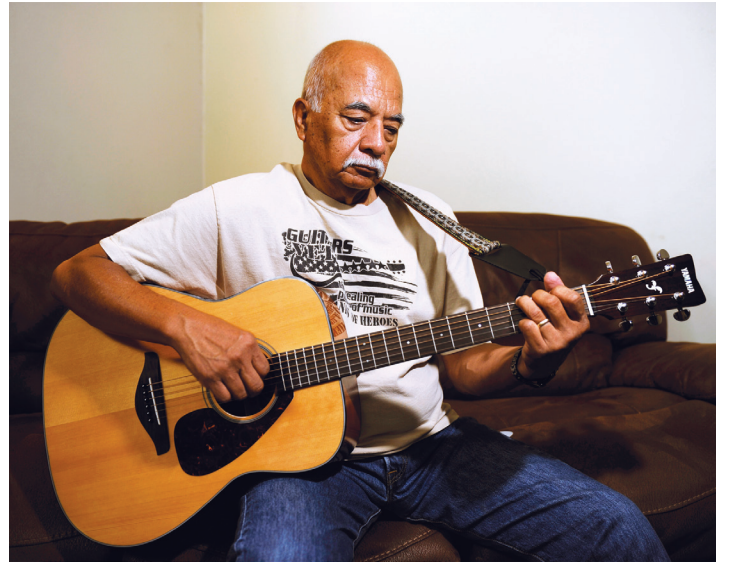




Giving Back to Those Who Served

San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs



Improving the Quality of Life for Veterans

San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs connects vets to benefits and innovative programs

by Evan Tuchinsky

Veterans deserve our gratitude.

Our nation expresses thanks through many benefits, including financial compensation, pensions, education and medical care. Many veterans feel these benefits are not why they served, but nonetheless, they can greatly improve their lives.

The San Bernardino County Department of Veterans Affairs provides access to these services as well as many innovative programs that have resulted from partnerships in the community. These programs range from equine therapy and neurofeedback training to collaboratives that help nonprofits better serve the veteran population.

Honorably discharged members of the military — even those who don't qualify for federal benefits — can find something useful at County Veterans Affairs.

"We recognize that just filling out the papers and sending them into the federal VA isn't really providing comprehensive services to our veterans and doesn't really put them in touch with organizations that deal with quality of life," says John Reynolds, staff analyst for San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs. "One of the vision statements of our county is to improve the quality of life of our citizens."

Toward that end, first and foremost, the county has established a network of offices so veterans don't have to travel far to seek assistance or file forms.

County VA is headquartered in San Bernardino, with satellites in Barstow, Fort Irwin, Hesperia, Rancho Cucamonga, Twentynine Palms and Yucca Valley. (The Loma Linda office will reopen after construction.)

"It's not practical to go to the federal building," Reynolds says, noting that the closest VA regional offices are in Los Angeles and San Diego. "To do it all by mail requires a veteran to know the intricacies of VA law.

"What we provide is a local portal. We have access, we have the training, we're closer to home, and we know of other benefits: the community partners, the county benefits, the state benefits."

State benefits include home loan assistance through CalVet; property-tax waivers, discounted fishing licenses and park passes for disabled veterans; and state-college fee waivers for dependents of disabled and deceased veterans. You can learn more about them through County VA.

In addition, County Veterans Affairs links veterans with local organizations such as Equus Medendi (horse-assisted therapy), the Trauma Resource Institute (PTSD therapy) and the Incredible Edible Community Garden (spearheading a work/training venture called Serving Proud Industries).

"The theme of all these programs is recovery and a return to as close to normal as can be," Reynolds says. "There's a stigma that goes along with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury that we would love to dispel: it's

born from the idea that you're broken and that recovery is not possible.

"You can get better."

Through community partners and with its experienced staff, County Veterans Affairs can help.

"We try to be the one-stop shop — we try to be the fixers," Reynolds says. "If a veteran comes in and has had an issue, we try to dispel the misconceptions and be the place that earns the veteran's trust."

★ ★ ★
"The theme of all these programs is recovery and a return to as close to normal as can be."

John Reynolds
Staff analyst, San Bernardino
County Veterans Affairs

VET TO VET

A letter from County Director of Veterans Affairs Bill Moseley

I am the father of three grown children, a husband, a son, director of San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs, and a person of faith. Beyond all that, I am a veteran of the United States Army 82nd Airborne Division, and proud of it.

Like many of you, I answered a call. And, whether you were drafted or enlisted, commissioned or non-commissioned, we are all veterans who have earned the respect and gratitude of our country.

How do we thank people we are grateful to? If someone does something nice, we may simply tell them, "thank you." The lady at the grocery store with a cart full lets you go in front of her with your two items. "Thank you." The man at the office holds the door open for you. "Thank you."

If someone does something special or extraordinary, however, we may feel the need to do more than say "thank you." When a young man or

lady steps up to defend your country knowing full well that it may cost them their life, how do we repay that generosity?

We thank these men and women by supporting the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and its work to repay those who have defended us. The portion of our taxes that goes to this essential program is a small price to pay for what veterans have done for us.

Some of us may feel hesitant to accept thanks or awards for doing something we felt called to do. Our hesitation, however, does not lessen the sincerity with which the gratitude is offered, nor does it diminish the selflessness of our actions.

As you read through the articles in this publication, please keep in mind that you or your family member earned VA benefits through service to our country. Your country wants to say, "thank you!" Please allow us to do so.



Richard Moseley and horse Sky have built a relationship of trust, which has helped the Iraq War veteran establish trust with other people in his life.
PHOTO BY MILKA SOKO



★ ★ ★
“Because of [Equus Medendi], I’ve kind of got a second chance at life.”

Richard Moseley
Equine therapy program participant

Mane Objective

Horses give veteran a second chance at life

by Evan Tuchinsky

Richard Moseley felt like he was leading a double life. As a police lieutenant and a master sergeant in the National Guard, he conveyed an air of authority. Underneath, he struggled with panic attacks and other effects of post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from 18 months in combat.

Moseley, 45, served in a transportation unit in Iraq, driving in convoys across the country. “Everywhere we were was the front lines,” he says. He returned home in 2004 and remained in the Guard until last year.

That’s when he reached his breaking point. Discharged due to his PTSD, Moseley also lost his law enforcement job. His marriage crumbled. He moved out of the house he shared with his wife and three daughters.

“I found myself in a real dark position,” he says, culminating in his commitment to a mental hospital.

Among the programs prescribed for him was animal therapy, including

an introduction to Equus Medendi, in which veterans work on their issues while working with horses. “Of all the other programs I’d been through,” he says, “that was the one that caught my attention.”

Equus Medendi — Latin for “the healing horse” — brings veterans to a ranch (either in Redlands or Yucca Valley) for therapeutic activities. They don’t ride the horses; rather, the horses and humans interact in a structured setting.

Moseley had “zero experience” with horses (“I’d only seen them in movies”). What he learned from the start was “recognizing the natural instinct of the animal and using it as a metaphor for your life.” For instance, he says, “I could see the horse didn’t trust me because I was apprehensive.”

After he rebuilt that trust, he grasped the potential for rebuilding trust with people in his life.

“From day one, we were already practicing practical applications I

could take out of there and use other places,” he says. “There was no doubt for me — it was immediate with the first exercise we had.”

Moseley went through the program last October and November.

“We could see a physical change with Richard at the end of each session,” says Angie Sheer, Equus Medendi president/founder. “He started to have a different posture; he started to smile; he was laughing. It’s almost like somebody woke him up, like a light came on. It was really incredible to watch him come full circle.”

Indeed, his life has totally turned around. Moseley has a new job as a county office manager, plus he made big enough strides in restoring his marriage and family relationships that he recently moved back home.

“Because of that program, I’ve kind of got a second chance at life,” he says. “I was literally a few seconds away from becoming a statistic.”



EQUUS MEDENDI

Equus Medendi has provided equine-assisted therapy to over 200 veterans since 2009. The organization started in Redlands and has since added a Yucca Valley location.

Following an orientation, participants come to the ranch once a week for six weeks for supervised sessions with horses, sometimes individually, sometimes with other veterans.

“Some [veterans] feel comfortable in a peer group where they can share with others,” says Angie Sheer, Equus Medendi president/founder. “Others don’t want to share with essentially strangers in the beginning and they’re better off on an individual basis [with the horse].”

Staff members include a clinical director, an equine specialist and two peer support specialists (both veterans).

The program is free to any veteran. Equus Medendi raises funds via donations, grants — including \$25,000 through San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs — and conducting sessions for non-veterans.

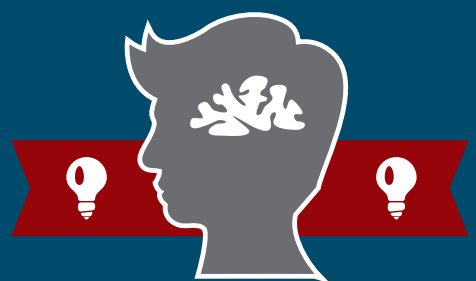
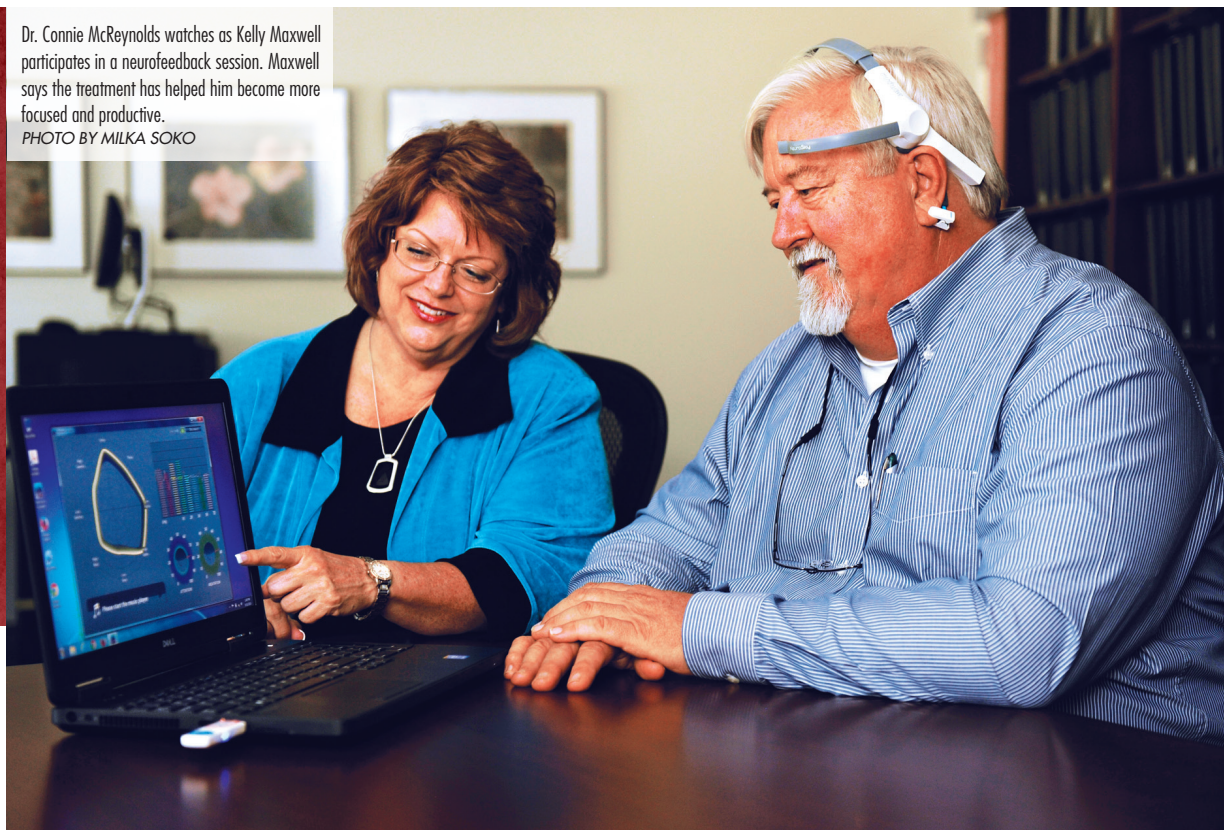
For more information, visit www.equusmedendi.com or call 951-941-0056.



"Using neurofeedback, we can monitor their brain waves and identify the exact areas that are not tuned up to the right levels."

Dr. Connie McReynolds
Director of the Institute for Research,
Assessment and Professional Development

Dr. Connie McReynolds watches as Kelly Maxwell participates in a neurofeedback session. Maxwell says the treatment has helped him become more focused and productive.
PHOTO BY MILKA SOKO



NEUROFEEDBACK

Normally, a person has no awareness of the electrical activity patterns in his or her brain. But using a computer interface and wireless headset that provides real-time, instantaneous feedback on screen, veterans can learn how to influence and change their brainwave patterns to function optimally. Once participants have tuned their brains through neurofeedback, changes can be maintained.

Neurofeedback is non-invasive and involves no medication or revisiting traumatizing memories, making it extremely useful in helping veterans cope with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Typically, veterans suffering from PTSD live with increased anxiety, depression and other symptoms. Neurofeedback helps these veterans learn to train their brains to a more calm and relaxed state.

Through a partnership with San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs, the Institute for Research, Assessment and Professional Development at California State University San Bernardino can provide neurofeedback sessions to veterans suffering from PTSD or emotional distress.

For more information on neurofeedback at the Institute for Research, Assessment and Professional Development, visit neurofeedback.csusb.edu.

Personal Brain Training

Neurofeedback helps veterans cope with PTSD

by Mike Blount

It looks like a video game. You sit in front of a computer monitor wearing a headset while looking at a virtual barrel on screen. Using only your mind, you focus on the image as a bar fills at the bottom of the screen. The more attentive you are, the faster it fills. Finally, the bar fills completely and the barrel explodes.

While the exercise sounds like a fun distraction, it's actually training your brain to be more attentive using a process called neurofeedback. For veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), neurofeedback has had dramatic results in relieving related symptoms, including depression and chronic pain, greatly improving their quality of life.

Dr. Connie McReynolds is the director of the Institute for Research, Assessment and Professional Development at California State University San Bernardino and oversees the program. McReynolds says neurofeedback is effective in helping veterans cope with PTSD because it trains their brains to operate at the maximum potential.

"PTSD is a label for a variety of symptoms, but it doesn't really tell us

exactly what is happening with that person," McReynolds says. "Using neurofeedback, we can monitor their brain waves and identify the exact areas that are not tuned up to the right levels. The computer provides coaching, and over time, we can make their symptoms better."

Though the neurofeedback program at CSUSB has only been around for about four years, demand for sessions has drastically increased through word-of-mouth. Currently, McReynolds says her department is doing about 90 sessions a week for anyone from a child with Attention Deficit Disorder to veterans with PTSD.

"We've just had such incredible feedback from our participants," McReynolds says. "Not only are we hearing from them, their family members are also reporting positive changes."

One of the early participants was Kelly Maxwell, an Air Force veteran and firm believer in neurofeedback. Maxwell says the sessions have dramatically improved his life. Prior to his first treatment, he had trouble focusing on anything for more than a few minutes. He also suffered from

PTSD. After more than 20 sessions, Maxwell says he now has much less anxiety and he's much more productive.

"I didn't have a driver's license for the last two years because I kept putting it off," Maxwell says. "I just got my license back and there's a variety of other long-term goals that I've been able to complete because of neurofeedback."

Maxwell is encouraging more veterans suffering from PTSD to get neurofeedback training through his nonprofit, the Orenda Foundation Veterans Project. The organization helps veterans recovering from substance abuse re-achieve self-sustainability.

"A lot of our veterans tend to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol or both," Maxwell says. "They are sometimes homeless and need a lot of support. What we try to do at Orenda Foundation is give them that support. I believe neurofeedback can help them get to a better place so they can get back on their feet faster."

For more information on the Orenda Foundation Veterans Project, visit www.orendafoundation.com or call 760-962-1212.

Finding the ‘Middle’

Trauma resiliency therapy gives veteran a tool for
avoiding the highs and lows of PTSD

by Evan Tuchinsky

When Frank Edwards heard about trauma resiliency therapy, he envisioned a means to help others deal with violence in his San Bernardino community. Turns out, the first person he helped was himself.

A veteran of the Vietnam War, Edwards served in the U.S. Air Force for four years, starting fresh out of high school in Beaumont, Texas. He worked air freight — in Vietnam, he’d load and unload aircraft, commonly in combat zones without weapons support.

The duty was somber as well as dangerous: “I shipped home a lot of mothers’ children in body bags and coffins.”

Edwards, now 68, completed his service at Norton Air Force Base, then transitioned to the civilian sector. After six months with a construction firm, he got a job with General Telephone (now Verizon), where he stayed until retiring.

Now, he adds, “fortunately I have a wife who keeps me grounded.”

Frank and Jeranice Edwards recently celebrated their 30th anniversary. She’s been a source of support, and she supported his involvement in the trauma resiliency program.

The Trauma Resiliency Model (TRM) teaches survivors to regulate their reactions. It’s not “talk therapy” — it doesn’t draw out old experiences. Rather, TRM helps people learn how the body responds to stressors and acquire a means of restoring equilibrium.

“If a vet gets triggered, when he can pay attention to that and know that sensation, then he has a choice ... and can override the physiological sensation of distress,” explains TRM co-creator Elaine Miller-Karas, executive director of the Trauma Resource Institute in Claremont. “Many say, ‘Now I can be in charge of these sensations instead of these sensations being in charge of me.’”

Edwards has found TRM invaluable. When “stuck on high” or mired in “those lows in your life,” he’ll seek “the resilient zone, that place in the middle.” Significantly, he’ll address minor issues before they snowball. He plans to use this training to reach people who have been impacted by the trauma of violence in his community.

“TRM is boundless,” he says. “It meets everybody at their point of need.”

TRAUMA RESILIENCY THERAPY

Trauma resiliency therapy offers veterans dealing with the effects of combat, including PTSD, a way to manage stress reactions and restore a sense of balance. Through the Trauma Resiliency Model (TRM), veterans learn to recognize how the body reacts to emotional triggers and how they can respond.

“It can be life-changing,” says TRM co-creator Elaine Miller-Karas. “They often tell me, ‘I used to be triggered constantly, and now that doesn’t happen to me in the same way, because if I do, I know I can use one of the wellness skills.’”

Those skills include grounding (focusing on the body — now) and resourcing (evoking a memory bringing strength/peace/joy).

Training is offered through the Trauma Resource Institute, which has a TRM smartphone application called iChill (material is also accessible online at www.ichillapp.com).

For more information about trauma resiliency therapy, visit www.traumaresourceinstitute.com or contact San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs.

★ ★ ★
“Looking back, I can
see a lot of issues
and a lot of folks not
knowing how to deal
with PTSD.”

Frank Edwards
Trauma resiliency therapy participant

Accorded the same poor reception as most Vietnam veterans, Edwards didn’t discuss his service much. For many years, he wouldn’t even watch war movies.

“I remember bits and pieces of Vietnam,” he says, “but it’s like the mind has shedded out things. There are big time gaps I don’t remember. Sometimes I would like to know, other times I don’t know if I would really want to know.”

Only in the past few years has he come to realize he’s carried the weight of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He’s seen some things in a new light, including his tendency toward isolation and his two divorces.

“Looking back,” he says, “I can see a lot of issues and a lot of folks not knowing how to deal with PTSD.”



Vietnam War veteran Frank Edwards says trauma resiliency therapy has helped him deal with how his body responds to post-traumatic stress disorder.
PHOTO BY MILKA SOKO

When Frank Aragon was 17 years old, he left school and enlisted in the Navy to fight in World War II. In 2012, Aragon received his high school diploma through Operation Recognition Veterans Diploma Project.
PHOTO BY MILKA SOKO



Recognizing His Service

Veteran awarded high school diploma through program by Mike Blount

Frank Aragon was just 17 years old when he left the 11th grade in San Antonio, Texas to enlist in the Navy. A little over 70 years later, he earned his high school diploma through the program Operation Recognition Veterans Diploma Project.

Aragon says he was motivated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's call for able-bodied men to join the armed forces. After basic training, he became part of the crew of the USS Cowpens, a heavy cruiser converted to an aircraft carrier that played a pivotal role in the Pacific Theater during World War II.

kamikaze and torpedo bombers. More than anything, they wanted to get the carriers out of the way."

The USS Cowpens continued providing aircraft support throughout the war, and in July 1945 became part of the final assault on Japan. Aragon's ship was the first to enter Tokyo Harbor and men from the ship were the first Americans to set foot on the Japanese mainland. As a result of their service during World War II, the ship and its crew were awarded a Navy Unit Commendation and 12 battle stars.

After he left the Navy, Aragon learned about a government program that provided veterans coming out of the service with on-the-job training in specific industries. Aragon ended up learning how to upholster furniture and got a job in a furniture shop in San Antonio, Texas.

"I was never idle for very long and I wanted to keep busy," Aragon says. "I wanted to continue with school, but I got pretty good at upholstering and stuck with that. I had a family and we started having children. I just didn't have time to go back to school."

Aragon stayed in upholstery until he retired, even owning his own shop at one point. But he says he always felt a void from not finishing school. When he learned about Operation Recognition Veterans Diploma Project, he was happy that he could finally get his diploma. Aragon graduated from the 2012 class of Operation Recognition Veterans Diploma Project.

"I was just so thrilled and I appreciated it very much," Aragon says. "It had been in the back of my mind for a long time. To me, it's a great accomplishment and I hope more young people take advantage of the ability to go to college because education is important."

★ ★ ★
"I was just so thrilled and I appreciated it very much. It had been in the back of my mind for a long time."

Frank Aragon
Operation Recognition Veterans
Diploma Project recipient

"We left San Diego and started island-hopping through all the islands in the Pacific," Aragon says. "We were part of the strike on Wake Island and Iwo Jima. We saw a lot of action from

DIPLOMA PROJECT

Through a partnership with San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs and the county superintendent of schools, Operation Recognition Veterans Diploma Project awards veterans of World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, as well as those interned in camps by federal order in World War II, with their high school diplomas. The program also posthumously awards family members the diplomas of service members who died in combat. Applicants must have been enrolled in high school prior to their military service or internment in a World War II relocation camp.

For more information on Operation Recognition Veterans Diploma Project, visit <http://vdp.sbcss.k12.ca.us> or call Stacie Diaz at 909-386-2412.



Jeff Allen was among a group of veterans who built an aquaponics facility behind the San Bernardino County Museum. Through Serving Proud Industries, Allen hopes more veterans will learn agricultural entrepreneurship skills. PHOTO BY MILKA SOKO



Putting Roots in the Community

Agricultural skills give veterans opportunities, help with reintegration

by Evan Tuchinsky

Since retiring from the Army in 2003 following two decades of active duty, Jeff Allen has helped start a series of programs through the VA hospital in Loma Linda and San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs. His volunteer efforts have yielded horse therapy, scuba training and acrobatic sail-plane rides.

"I want any veteran who wants to do anything fun — from flying in the sky to diving deep in the ocean to anything in between — to get the chance," Allen says. "But I've always had to do it first ...

"If it's something that interested me, then surely it would interest someone else."

Serving Proud Industries, a new agriculture entrepreneurship program, fits that mold. In partnership with the Incredible Edible Community Garden (IECG), veterans learn agricultural techniques and business skills; in turn, they establish gardens where they tend crops. Ultimately, they may launch their own ag-sector businesses.

"Veterans are a remarkable resource," says Eleanor Torres, IECG's co-executive director. "It's very appropriate: Veterans are all military trained in nation-building skills — they take those skill sets and help us build community."

Allen agrees. SPI also fulfills the aim

of programs that "try to get veterans out of their homes and stop the isolation process, which is really unhealthy."

Particularly for soldiers just back from war, "there's always this struggle to try to reintegrate back into the [civilian] community," Allen says. "This was an effort to provide a way to do that. They may not choose to have careers in the agriculture industry, but this can give them an opportunity to get a feel for working together in a team in a civilian setting."

Allen, 54, a Tennessee native, served in Iraq in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. He retired out of Fort Irwin and began volunteering at the Loma Linda VA hospital. He got appointed to the San Bernardino County Veterans Advisory Committee, which he now chairs.

His introduction to IECG came at Cal State San Bernardino's Veterans Success Center, where IECG planted trees.

Talk of aquaponics — a new generation of hydroponic growing — piqued his interest. Instead of using soil and fertilizer, aquaponic farmers plant their seedlings in clay pellets and irrigate with water from fish tanks. The process takes less water than traditional agriculture and, unlike hydroponics, doesn't require chemicals.

A dozen veterans, including Allen, came together to build an aquaponics facility behind the San Bernardino County Museum. They've also worked on a community garden at Nicholson Park in San Bernardino. Soon, they'll expand to the High Desert with a second aquaponics farm.



"If we can build a nation, we can build a park or a garden."

Jeff Allen
Veteran participant in Serving Proud Industries

"Food is a real need in our communities," Torres says. "These projects are all about the future. We love the fact that the veterans understand this."

Says Allen: "If we can build a nation, we can build a park or a garden."

SERVING PROUD INDUSTRIES

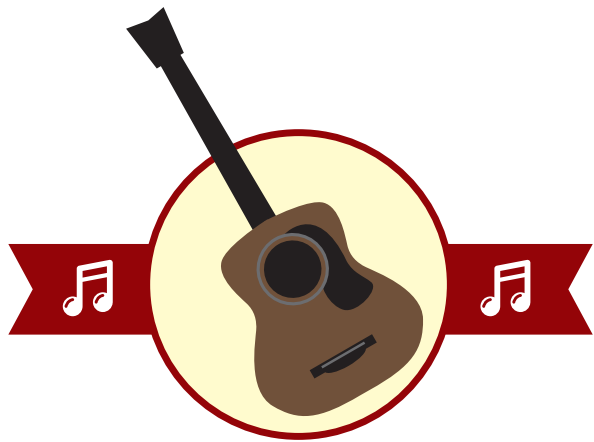
Serving Proud Industries is a partnership between the Incredible Edible Community Garden — an Inland Empire nonprofit — and local veterans. Launched in late 2013, it's a volunteer organization that has filed for 501(c)3 status but currently operates under the auspices of IECG.

The initial group of a dozen veterans received training in farming techniques, including aquaponics (irrigation via fish tanks). The veterans worked with the architecture firm Integrated Infrastructures on an aquaponic facility in San Bernardino, completed in February, and will build another in either Barstow or Apple Valley.

Several veterans have received jobs since participating. Others are developing business ventures related to gardening or agriculture, supported by grants and local groups.

"It's really, really clear that there's a lot of opportunity to get the veterans out there, having their own businesses or starting businesses with other people," says Eleanor Torres, IECG's co-executive director.

For more information, contact IECG through www.iecgarden.org.



The Healing Power of Music

Program gives free guitar lessons to veterans by Mike Blount

After James Robledo retired from the military, there were many nights when the Vietnam veteran would wake up, unable to go back to sleep. Robledo has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for many years. But things changed once he learned how to play the guitar thanks to the Guitars for Vets program. Now, he falls asleep — with a guitar on his chest.

Robledo had always wanted to learn guitar because his father was a musician, so he signed up for the program after his counselor recommended it.

“When my father passed away, he left his guitar to me,” Robledo says. “He was a combat veteran in World War II, and when he was in Germany and he would find a guitar or a piano, he would play for the other troops.”

After learning how to play the guitar, Robledo says he is much more relaxed and focused.

“The way you can feel the vibration of the notes against your chest — it’s very relaxing,” Robledo says.

At every Guitars for Vets graduation, each veteran performs a song of his or her choice in front of other members of the class and their families. For his graduation, Robledo performed Jimmy Buffet’s “Margaritaville” to loud applause and cheers.

“It felt rewarding to play that song in front of people because I worked hard on it,” Robledo says.

Darnell Fall, coordinator for the Guitars for Vets Loma Linda chapter, says the program covers one 45-minute lesson a week for 10 weeks. Veterans are each given a loaner guitar at first. After they graduate, they are given a brand new guitar. So far, Fall says his chapter has graduated 77 veterans, averaging about 36 students a year. It costs about \$200 per student, and each chapter relies completely on donations to operate.

Fall says he hopes that more chapters will open because of the enormous benefit to veterans who were in combat and suffer from PTSD.

“The men and women in this program are just so grateful for the power of music as a healing force,” Fall says. “It’s improved their lives and their relationships with their family. It’s just a wonderful program.”

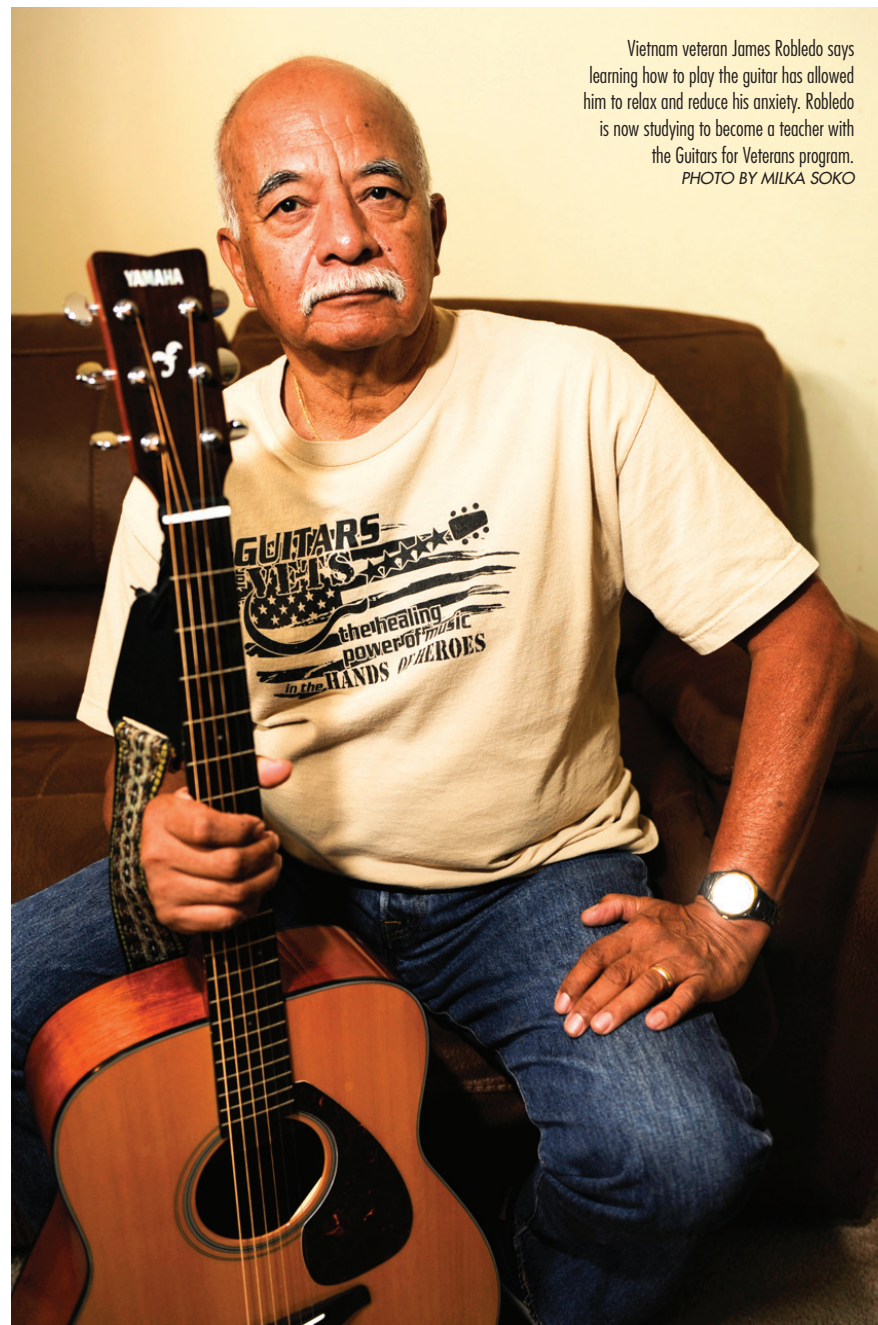
Guitars for Vets is a nonprofit that helps veterans with PTSD or emotional distress by teaching them how to play the guitar. Currently, the program operates more than 42 chapters across 15 states, including one in Loma Linda.



“The way you can feel the vibration of the notes against your chest — it’s very relaxing.”

James Robledo
Vietnam veteran and Guitars for Vets graduate

Vietnam veteran James Robledo says learning how to play the guitar has allowed him to relax and reduce his anxiety. Robledo is now studying to become a teacher with the Guitars for Veterans program.
PHOTO BY MILKA SOKO



GUITARS FOR VETS

Guitars for Vets was born in Milwaukee, Wis., in 2007 when guitar instructor Patrick Nettesheim met Vietnam veteran Dan Van Buskirk and started teaching him how to play guitar. Nettesheim immediately noticed how playing guitar seemed to soothe Buskirk. The two decided to start a nonprofit to get guitars in the hands of more veterans. In just under seven years, the program has sprouted 42 chapters across the country.

Upon signing up for lessons, veterans are each given a loaner acoustic guitar. After they graduate from the program, veterans are presented with their own acoustic guitar so they can continue playing. The lessons and guitars are provided to veterans free of charge through donations and the hard work of volunteers across the country.

For information on how you can donate, volunteer or sign up for Guitars for Vets, email Darnell Fall at G4V.LLVAMC@gmail.com.

Members of the Inland Empire Women's Veterans Collaborative meet to network and learn about issues important to female vets.
PHOTO COURTESY COUNTY VA

Working Together



★ ★ ★
"Sharing resources bridges the gap between various agencies and allows you to work more closely with local communities."

Linda Umberg
Local interagency network coordinator with the California Department of Veterans Affairs

Collaboratives tackle veterans' issues in the community by Michelle Carl

There's strength in numbers — anyone in the military knows this. Bringing together a large group of stakeholders to focus on veterans' needs has been particularly effective in San Bernardino County.

Since 2010, collaboratives — networks of public and private organizations — have helped more veterans connect to services as well as raised awareness of the unique issues veterans face in the community. These issues include homelessness, mental health and employment.

"There's a wide range of veterans organizations partnering with other agencies to get the word out and share information to improve the quality of services," says Linda Umberg, a local interagency network coordinator with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet).

Umberg helps unite these collaboratives and says they strengthen the services provided to veterans.

"Sharing resources bridges the gap between various agencies and allows you to work more closely with local communities," she says.

The Inland Empire veterans collaboratives bring together groups including the VA Loma Linda Medical Center, CalVet, Cal State San Bernardino and San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs. Collaboratives may organize conferences, workshops and informational sessions as well as hold regular meetings to discuss ideas and share information.

Inland Empire Women's Veterans Collaborative

The first collaborative formed in 2010 was the Inland Empire Women's Veterans Collaborative. Umberg says the collaborative arose from female veterans who missed the camaraderie they had during military life, as well as the need to do outreach on topics of particular importance to female vets.

"Women veterans are dealing with various issues, everything from child care, health issues, military sexual trauma, employment, education," Umberg says.

The collaborative helped organize the CalVet Women Veterans Conference in 2011. It also holds regular networking events where female vets can connect and hear speakers.

Inland Empire Veterans Mental Health Collaborative

This collaborative, created in 2012, has sought to increase awareness of the mental health issues veterans face, including social isolation and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Meetings are held quarterly and include mental health professionals who have an opportunity to learn more about specific issues facing vets as well as promising new treatments like neurofeedback.

Inland Empire Veterans Collaborative on Homelessness

Formed in 2011, this collaborative includes representatives from homeless shelters and homeless service providers, such as The Salvation Army and Catholic Charities. The collaborative discusses the resources available and raises public awareness of this issue.

"We want to ensure [homeless veterans] do receive housing and they're off the streets — that they're being taken care of," Umberg says. "The collaborative is pulling agencies together to address those needs, sharing the resources and addressing [the VA's] 5-year plan to end homelessness."

Inland Empire Veterans Collaborative on Education

This collaborative includes staff, administration and teachers representing local universities and community colleges. Informational sessions on military life and education benefits help schools better serve veterans.

"Quite a few [campuses] have veterans resource centers or success centers, where veterans can go to get services and information, as well as a place to get away from the noise and hurry of the campus and be around other veterans," Umberg says.

THE INLAND EMPIRE VETERANS COLLABORATIVE

The Inland Empire Veterans Collaborative (IEVC) is a network of public and private organizations that share ideas, knowledge and resources to improve the access to and quality of services for veterans, military personnel and their families, and to increase public awareness of the unique needs of this special segment of our population.

For more information on joining a collaborative, regular meeting times or attending events, contact Linda Umberg at 909-387-5986 or linda.umberg@calvet.ca.gov. Or visit <http://hs.sbcounty.gov/vac/ie>.



A Helping Hand

Advocate helps Vietnam veteran through the claims process by Mike Blount

In 1965, Enoch “Mac” McClain enlisted in the Marines to serve his country and was sent to fight in the Vietnam War. He was first attached to a rocket launcher squad, but was eventually promoted to a section leader for three different mortar teams. Throughout his five and a half years in Vietnam, he was exposed to Agent Orange, saw fellow soldiers die in combat and nearly died himself after an enemy rocket exploded near his position — the latter causing him to partially lose hearing in both ears.

Many of these events went undocumented to his superiors at the time. McClain saw fellow soldiers losing limbs and dying every day — he felt like reporting a ringing in his ears or a rash on his skin would seem like he was complaining.

Enoch “Mac” McClain served in the Marines during the Vietnam War. Thanks to the help of a veterans service representative at San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs, he received benefits for negative health effects from exposure to Agent Orange.
PHOTO BY MILKA SOKO

And back then, no one knew the consequences of being exposed to Agent Orange, a chemical used by the U.S. during the Vietnam War to clear brush for troops.

“We used to go on these patrols and the jungle was so thick,” McClain says. “We had to cut through with machetes to get through it, so when they told us they had this stuff that they could drop that would kill everything, we thought it was the greatest thing since sliced pie.”

Scientific research later linked exposure to Agent Orange to various nerve, digestive and respiratory disorders, as well as increased rates of cancers including Hodgkin’s and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, prostate, lung and colon cancer.

McClain left the Marines in 1970 and joined the Los Angeles

Police Department, where he worked for the next 30 years. By the time he retired in 2001, he was feeling some of the health consequences from his military service.

“I filed a claim for PTSD and Agent Orange [exposure] in 2001,” McClain says. “They denied both claims and I appealed that decision. It was a long and frustrating process. I spent 10 years going back and forth with them. Thankfully, I have Rachel to help me now.”

Rachel Hay is a supervising veterans service representative at San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs who helped him fight to get his maximum benefits. When McClain first came to Hay in 2012, she thoroughly went through his military service and health records to determine the benefits he would be eligible to receive.

Around that same time, McClain suffered a heart attack. Back in 2000 when he first filed a claim, heart disease was not linked to exposure to Agent Orange. But Hay knew that it was now covered.

“It’s part of my job to know when those laws and regulations change so I can help veterans reopen or appeal decisions,” Hay says. “Having an advocate is vital, and Mac’s situation paints a clear picture of that.”

McClain received a larger compensation package, thanks to Hay’s help in filing new paperwork. He says he might not have even filed again had he not met Rachel, but he’s thankful that he did.

“I want veterans to know that they can get the help they need,” McClain says. “Don’t get frustrated. You just need an advocate.”



AN ADVOCATE FOR YOU

San Bernardino County veterans service representatives are trained to help you get the maximum benefits you deserve. Each representative is accredited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to assist you through the claims process and keep you informed if changes to your eligibility for benefits occur.

GET ASSISTANCE WITH...

- Medical benefits
- Educational benefits, including the California College Fee Waiver Program
- Compensation for service-related disabilities
- Burial benefits
- Military Survival Benefits Plan (SBP)
- Pension for veterans with non-service connected disabilities
- Government life insurance
- Pension for non-service related deaths
- Proceeds of government life insurance
- Home loan benefits (application and information)
- Medical treatment at VA Medical Centers (application and information)
- Education benefits and vocational rehabilitation (application and information)

For more information, visit <http://hss.sbcounty.gov/va> or call 909-387-5516 to locate the Veterans Affairs office nearest you.



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Enoch “Mac” McClain
Vietnam veteran



Frequently Asked Questions

San Bernardino County
Veterans Affairs

Why should I visit a county veterans affairs office instead of filing my claim myself?

The number and complexity of available veterans' benefits can make it difficult for veterans to access them — if, that is, they know of their existence.

In response to this possible disconnect between veterans and their benefits, trained professionals at the local level were first introduced in California in 1926 to help veterans in the community identify, apply for and obtain all benefits to which they are entitled. County Veterans Affairs employees are professionally trained and sit for an extensive U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs accreditation examination before being allowed to help clients obtain benefits. County VA employees also stay current with ever-changing veterans' benefits laws through a continuing education program.

Does it cost anything?

All County VA services are provided free of charge. Always.

Who is eligible to live in a California Veterans Home?

Veterans who are age 55 and older and discharged from active military service under honorable conditions are eligible to apply for admission to a CalVet Home. The age requirement is waived for disabled or homeless veterans needing long-term care. California Veterans Homes are located in Yountville, Chula Vista, Barstow, West Los Angeles, Ventura, Redding, Fresno and Lancaster.

I'm very proud of my son's military service. Can I get a veterans license plate even though I'm not a veteran?

The California Department of Motor Vehicles issues veterans license plates to any interested party. There are more than 100 military- and veteran-related logos to choose from. Visit www.cacvso.org and follow the "Veterans License Plates" link for more information and to see all the available veterans license plate logos.

I served during peacetime — do I qualify for any benefits?

Many benefits are available to veterans who served during peacetime.

You served your country on behalf of all its citizens. Whether you served during war or peace, whether you were injured or unscathed, you owe it to yourself and your family to receive all the benefits to which you are entitled.

Visit your nearest County Veterans Affairs office to see if you qualify and apply for your benefits.

I didn't join the military to receive veterans' benefits. If I file a claim, won't I be taking benefits from someone more deserving than I?

Filing a claim for the benefits you earned does not deny another vet his or her benefits. Accepting benefits from the VA is a way of accepting your country's grateful thanks for a job well done.



Why I'm glad I went to San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs

"I have been represented by San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs for nearly 10 years. They were very efficient and helpful in filing my disability claim after my laryngeal cancer was diagnosed. The professionalism and dedication that was shown towards me and my family has always been a great comfort to us. As a whole, I would describe the County Veterans Affairs offices as being one of the most professional and caring systems I have ever worked with."

David B., Gulf War Veteran

San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs

Serving veterans through advocacy, outreach and education

Veterans are not alone.

With a robust network of services and unique partnerships, San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs is proving that we are stronger together.

If you or a loved one served, contact the county VA office today to determine eligibility for programs and services including:

- Veteran ID Card
- Disability claims
- Pension
- Health care



Office locations

San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs has eight locations to serve you.

San Bernardino

175 W. Fifth St., 2nd Floor
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0470
Phone: (909) 387-5516
Fax: (909) 387-6090
Hours: Mon.-Thu. 8:30-4:30; Fri. 8-4

Rancho Cucamonga

8575 Haven Ave., Ste. 160
Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730
Phone: (909) 948-6470
Fax: (909) 948-6475
Hours: Mon.-Thu. 8:30-4:30

Hesperia

15900 Smoke Tree St.
Hesperia, CA 92345
Phone: (760) 995-8010
Fax: (760) 995-8020
Hours: Mon.-Thu. 8:30-4:30

Barstow - Veterans Home of California

100 E. Veterans Parkway
Barstow, CA 92311-7003
Phone: (760) 252-6257
Fax: (760) 252-6333
Hours: Mon. & Thu. 8-4:30

Fort Irwin

ACAP Building 111
Ft. Irwin, CA 92310
Hours: 1st and 3rd Tue. 8-12 & 1-4

Twentynine Palms

73629 Sun Valley Drive
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277
Phone: (760) 361-4636
Hours: Wed. 8:30-12

Village Center Bldg. 1551, MCAGCC
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277
Phone: (760) 830-6344
Hours: Wed. 1-3

Yucca Valley

56357 Pima Trail
Yucca Valley, CA 92284
Phone: (760) 228-5234
Fax: (760) 228-5289
Hours: Tue. 9-3

San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs

<http://hss.sbcounty.gov/va> | 866-4SB-VETS (866-472-8387)
175 West Fifth St. Second Floor, San Bernardino, CA 92415-0470



GET THE CARD

Veterans

Veterans can show they served with a county-issued Veteran ID Card. San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs issues these cards, which serve as a valid form of identification and proof of service. Use your card to patronize merchants that offer military discounts. Get a discount and help support a vet-friendly business. Apply in person at the County VA offices in Hesperia, Rancho Cucamonga or San Bernardino or fill out the application online by following the link at <http://hss.sbcounty.gov/va>.

Businesses

Say "thank you" to a veteran by offering a military discount. Merchants can offer anything from a discount to a free gift to customers who show their county-issued Veteran ID Card. Become part of the Veteran-Friendly Business network and receive a 3-inch or 8-inch vinyl window cling for your business. Call 866-4SB-VETS or visit <http://hss.sbcounty.gov/va> and follow the merchants link.

