

The background of the entire page features a close-up of an American flag on the left side, with its stars and stripes visible. On the right side, a wooden surface is shown, upon which a silver dog tag hangs from a chain. The dog tag has the San Mateo County seal on it, which includes a tree and the text 'COUNTY OF SAN MATEO CALIFORNIA'.

IF YOU SERVED, YOU EARNED

**How San Mateo County is
honoring veterans' service
by helping them thrive**

A HAND UP FOR EVERY VETERAN

San Mateo County takes a collaborative approach to helping all veterans



by Kate Gonzales



Whether a veteran is retired or recently discharged, civilian life can have its hurdles. Veterans can face challenges finding jobs, staying in their homes or accessing the benefits they deserve. In San Mateo County, veterans and their families have a place to turn.

The San Mateo County Veterans Services Office (CVSO) has been a resource for veterans for 70 years and works hard to raise awareness of these services to veterans. Once veterans contact the office, they can get one-on-one help applying for state and federal benefits for themselves and their families. As a program of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency, the CVSO is closely connected with social services and advocates for the well-being of veterans and military families. Thanks to a common referral system, a veteran can access the services they need through various entry points.

"It's really knowing what the right hand and the left hand are doing and being able to provide wraparound services to veterans," says County Veteran Services Officer Norman Aleman. Because the CVSO is part of HSA, coordination of services is made easier.

"Being part of the HSA gives us the upper hand in trying to help these families and those single veterans navigate social services," Aleman says.

"Being part of the HSA gives us the upper hand in trying to help (veterans) navigate social services."

**Norman Aleman
County Veteran
Services Officer**

The CVSO has also begun to recognize veterans in more creative and symbolic ways, thanks in part to a unique funding source.

In 2012, San Mateo County residents passed Measure A, a sales tax increase to

support vital county services. The county has allocated Measure A funding to veteran services, an example of its commitment to serving this population. These funds have allowed the CVSO to expand its staff, as well as launch the Veteran of the Year Award and county Veterans ID card programs.

Showing support for veterans isn't limited to county services — there are opportunities for anyone to help. Businesses can participate by offering benefits to veterans who have a CVSO-issued ID.

Every resident can help a veteran in small ways, such as thanking them for their service, or by educating themselves on veteran issues.

"Part of helping veterans is becoming aware of the complexities, the needs, the gaps and the readjustment issues the veterans and their family members may go through," Aleman says. "With every veteran, there's a family. Whether it's a spouse and children, certainly a mother, father, sisters and brothers — they've all made sacrifices."

Making a real impact in vets' lives

Here's how the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office (CVSO) has helped local veterans in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

3,380

The number of veterans that came through the CVSO's doors.

\$8.4 million

Department of Veterans Affairs monies awarded to San Mateo County veterans with help from the CVSO.

109

The number of college fee waivers issued to student dependents of veterans. This resulted in savings of \$511,014 in educational costs.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

Vietnam veteran reaches out to his peers to ensure they get the benefits they deserve

 by Anne Stokes



Vietnam veteran George W. Smith works with several groups, including the American Legion Riders, to ensure that veterans in San Mateo County are aware of the multitude of benefits and services available to them through the VA.
PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ

In 1969, 18-year-old George W. Smith was stationed at Chu Lai Air Base, just south of Da Nang. An enlisted Marine, he dealt with the ordnances — the bombs, Napalm and gun pods — for units flying missions over North Vietnam. The day after his discharge in 1970, Smith started college and a part-time job. Concerned about the adverse health effects he may have suffered working in close proximity to loud aircraft, he requested a hearing test shortly before leaving the service, but was denied due to his pending early discharge.

“I wish somebody would have said, ‘You should go to the VA and get signed up,’” he says. “Nobody said anything like that and it took me 35 years to find out.” Smith lived all those years with hearing loss as well as post-traumatic stress disorder before he realized he was entitled to benefits because of his disability.

While he now receives post-traumatic stress disorder disability benefits, he is *still* trying to get benefits for his hearing loss. But he’s no longer navigating the system alone — he’s getting help from the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office.

“I started with the VA and it was so complicated,” he says. “Your Veterans Services Office will sit down and work *with* you. They’ll explain

things to you and they’re working to benefit you, not to work against you.”

After retirement, Smith reconnected with his local veteran community by joining the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Marine Corps League and Vietnam Veterans of America. He currently serves as the American Legion’s district 26 second vice-commander and as president of his local American Legion Riders, a motorcycle group that provides escorts, flag lines and welcomes returning veterans home. Smith also works with the newly formed San Mateo County Veterans Commission to represent veterans issues.

Veterans of San Mateo County received \$67.7 million in compensation and pension monies during the 2015 fiscal year.

It is through these connections that he works to spread the word about the services and benefits available through the VA and that the Veterans Services Office is there to help. Especially considering the cold reception Vietnam veterans received when they returned home, he

is determined to help his fellow servicemen and women access the benefits they’ve *earned*.

“They put their time in, they served their country,” he says. “Less than one percent of the population does that, and I think those people deserve the gratitude of our nation for the freedoms that we have because freedom is not free. Those people sacrificed for that.”

Here to help

The Department of Veterans Affairs is a lifeline for veterans and their families, but navigating the system alone can be intimidating. Staff at the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office can help with claim preparation, submissions and appeals. Staff also provide referrals to a range of services and benefits.

Visit the County Veterans Services Office to get help with:

- › Service-connected disability claims
- › Non-service-connected pension claims
- › Medical and dental care
- › California State veterans benefits
- › VA life insurance
- › VA home loans
- › Vocational counseling
- › In-home care
- › College tuition fee waivers
- › Survivor and burial benefits

To see if you qualify for benefits, contact the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office at 650-802-6598 or visit hsa.smcgov.org/veterans.

VETERAN FORGES A NEW PATH

How the CVSO made a new future possible

by Matt Jocks

Navy Veteran Tiannia Romero had a hard time finding support after leaving the military. She found it in the County Veterans Services Office, and has begun to support fellow female veterans.

PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ

Through her up and down road since leaving the service, Tiannia Romero has come to realize what other veterans before her discovered.

Paper is important, but people can change lives.

When Romero left the military in 2012, her six years of Navy service had given her some skills. But the ability to deal with her own issues wasn't necessarily among them.

"Basically," she says, "they give you your papers and say, 'Have a nice life.'"

Romero settled first with her mother in Southern California, but the "nice life" part was sidetracked by health issues — lupus and multiple seizures each day. Due to the seizures, Romero lost her job as a restaurant server and was unable to find another.

Despite making contact with a veterans office in Southern California, she wasn't connected with the health care she needed.

Things didn't change until Romero moved north and decided to drop in on an informational town hall meeting conducted by Rep. Jackie Speier. Romero was directed to the County Veterans Services Office, met with Norman Aleman, County Veteran Services Officer, and was able to see a doctor within weeks.

"He was shocked that I had gone two years without getting the help I needed," Romero remembers.

"We're a band of sisters. We talk about what we're struggling with and how to fix it."

Tiannia Romero
Veteran

It was the first step on a path that would lead Romero to improve the life of fellow veterans. With Aleman's support, she became the assistant to the veterans coordinator at the College of San Mateo, helping veterans there access services and make the proper connections.

As a veteran and specifically as a female veteran, Romero is able to gain trust and build relationships with a population that is sometimes overlooked.

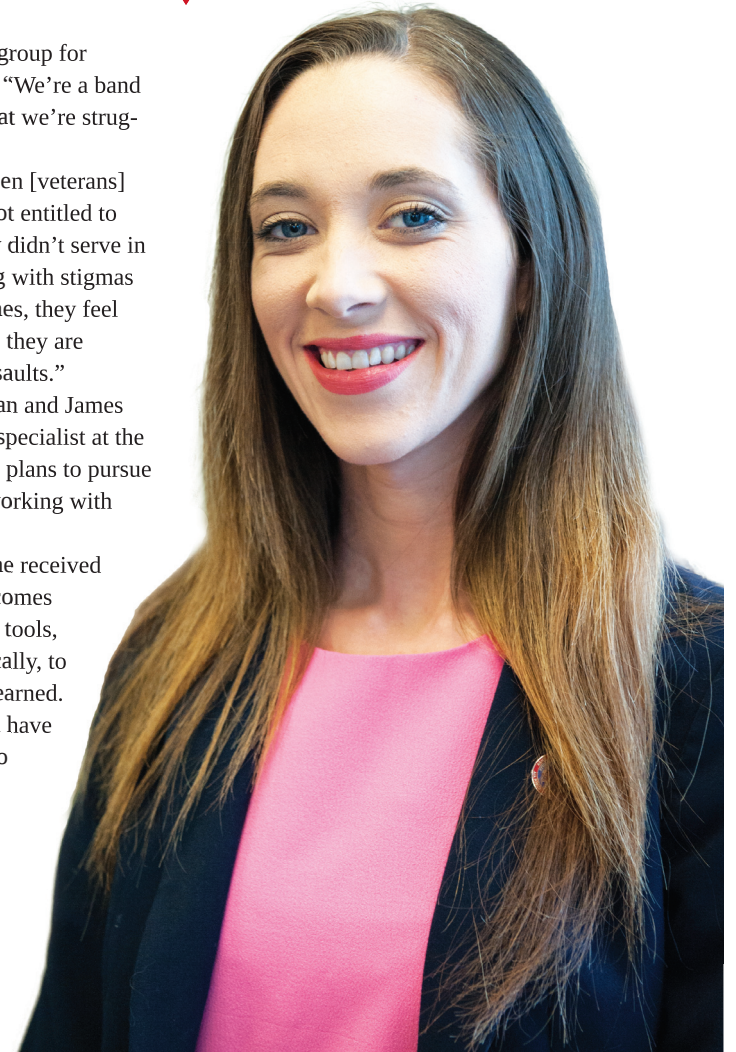
"We have a counseling group for women veterans," she says. "We're a band of sisters. We talk about what we're struggling with and how to fix it."

"There are a lot of women [veterans] who kind of think they're not entitled to all the benefits because they didn't serve in combat. And they're dealing with stigmas and stereotypes. A lot of times, they feel overlooked. Or, God forbid, they are dealing with issues from assaults."

Romero points to Aleman and James Howard, veterans outreach specialist at the college, as role models. She plans to pursue a career as a psychologist working with veterans.

For Romero, the help she received and the help she passes on comes down to giving veterans the tools, logistically and psychologically, to access the benefits they've earned.

"It's the old saying, you have to be the change you want to see," she says.



**We want
YOU!**
**(to get what
you've earned)**

Did you know that the population of female vets is growing? Did you also know that too often, female veterans do not apply for the service benefits they have earned? Although women have only recently been allowed into combat roles, they are integral to our armed forces.

Female veterans make up 10% of the veteran population nationally and 20% of post-9/11 veterans.

Female veterans are more likely to have a service-connected disability, but less likely to use VA medical services.

Female veterans are more likely to have been military officers, but also tend to have higher unemployment rates than their male counterparts.

Female veterans are more likely to experience military sexual trauma (MST).

Encourage the female veteran in your life to connect with the CVSO at (650) 802-6598 or hsa.smcgov.org/veterans.

CALLING ALL PROPERTY OWNERS AND MANAGERS

Landlords can play a key role in honoring those who have served our country



by Matt Jocks

A few years back, George Silva rented a storage unit. He wanted to hang on to his stuff and there was no other place for it to go.

What he didn't know was that eventually, that unit would become a place to rest his head.

Silva, who spent 40 years in the Marine Corps Reserves, was one of an estimated 5,600 unsheltered homeless veterans in California during the 2016 Point-in-Time count — a snapshot of homelessness in the state on a given night. After losing his house during the Great Recession, he spent time in veterans medical facilities and on friends' couches before he had to live on the floor of the storage unit.

It took a trip to the doctor and a casual mention of his living arrangements to start the chain of events that has led Silva to his own apartment.

"I mentioned where I was living and the doctor said, 'Oh, hell no,'" Silva remembers. "He was offended by it."

Silva was directed by the doctor to a veterans facility in Menlo Park and eventually connected with the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office.

The CVSVO guided Silva through the multitude of veteran resources, including federal, state and county programs, as well as nonprofits.

The list of programs and acronyms, the various eligibility requirements and paperwork can be daunting. There's a lot of work behind the scenes that goes into finding veterans a home, including the efforts of LifeMoves and Veteran Resource Center Supportive Services for Veteran Families programs, Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) and a variety of other programs supported by San Mateo County Human Services Agency, including shelters and specialized outreach teams.

Jessica Silverberg of the Human Services Agency points to two guiding philosophies to get their clients into homes.

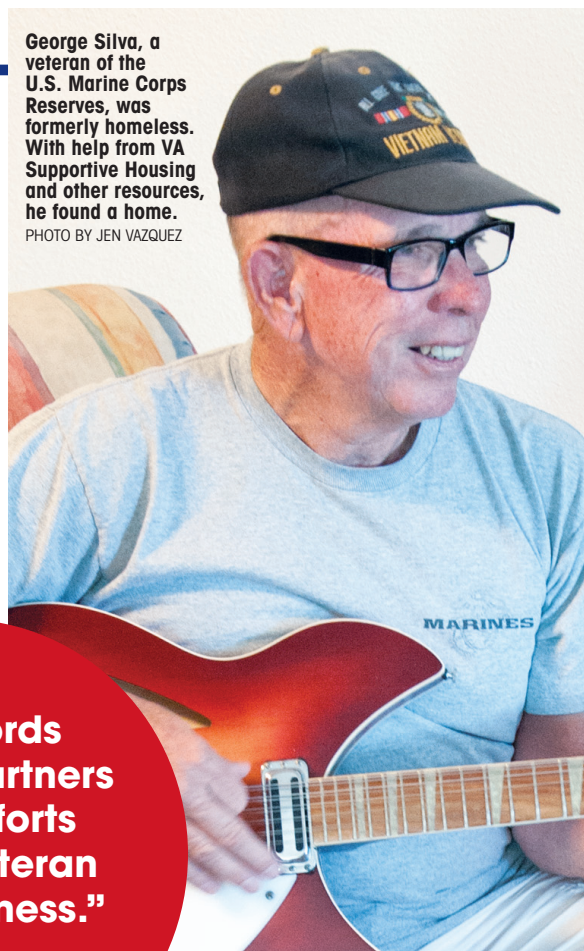
One is "no wrong door," meaning that there are various entry points for a client to access services. The other is "housing first."

"The objective is to get them into housing, even if they are still facing other challenges," Silverberg says.

No veteran should experience homelessness and landlords can make a meaningful difference.

George Silva, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves, was formerly homeless. With help from VA Supportive Housing and other resources, he found a home.

PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ



"Landlords are key partners in our efforts to end veteran homelessness."

Jessica Silverberg
Human Service Agency

"Landlords are key partners in our efforts to end veteran homelessness," Silverberg says.

Helping homeless veterans get into stable housing allows them to live better lives and even work to uplift others.

Silva has become so engaged that, through the American Legion, he now helps other veterans while pursuing an education.

It's an unlikely outcome, but not the first for a rock 'n' roll drummer who only joined the Marines for one year and wound up staying for 40.

"I realized I just fit in somewhere," he says.

And that somewhere was never meant to be a storage unit.

"You know, I wasn't the only [veteran]. There was a former Air Force captain living in one of the units," he says. "A lot of guys are just afraid of [the system]."

Why you should rent to a veteran

The San Mateo County Department of Housing has launched an aggressive recruitment effort to bring more landlords aboard in an effort to get eligible veterans who received a HUD-VASH voucher into permanent housing. Landlords retain their rights in the tenant selection process and get to give back to the community, but those aren't the only incentives.

Tephiny Jones, management fellow for the Human Services Agency, says the key is to make sure landlords know that the program is here to help them too, with a majority of the rent guaranteed by the County Department of Housing, hands-on support from the VA and other community providers. The incentives offered make renting to HUD-VASH tenants the sensible thing to do.

Those incentives include:

- › **New Landlord \$1,000 bonus.** A one-time bonus available to landlords who are either new to rental subsidy programs or have not participated in rental subsidy programs for at least three years.
- › **The "No Loss" bonus.** Covers the period from the time the County Housing Authority receives the Request for Tenancy Approval until the start of the Housing Assistance Payment contract. This prevents the landlord from losing potential income during the processing period.
- › **Landlord Continuity bonus.** Covers one month rent payment for landlords who rent to another program participant within 60 days after the previous program participant left the unit.

Landlords — help a vet today!

Visit housing.smcgov.org or call Katie Fantin at Abode Services 650-381-0950.

HELPING MILITARY FAMILIES FLOURISH

The CVSO connects families to benefits

★
by Matt Jocks

Much of Buddy Zimbelman’s story will forever remain untold. But because of the work of the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office, the late veteran’s story will not go unrecognized.

Like many combat veterans, Zimbelman was reluctant to discuss his experiences in the Korean War, even with those closest to him. That reluctance was one of many factors that kept Zimbelman from receiving the full benefits he was entitled to in his retirement. That changed after San Mateo County Veteran Services Representative Megan Finau got on the case.

Aided by Zimbelman’s family, Finau navigated the Veterans Affairs process to get him the medical and psychological evaluation he needed to receive a 100 percent service-connected disability rating.

Zimbelman was partially disabled due to a back injury he suffered while on the submarine USS Medregal. His post-traumatic stress disorder, the result of a harrowing battle in the Bay of Wonsan, had gone undetected.

As a result, Zimbelman received the care he needed in the final year of his life — he died in March — and his family received the full benefits.

“We got the appointment with the psychiatrist,” says Mamie Zimbelman, Buddy’s widow. “He was hesitant. ... We said, ‘This is the only way to get this done. They need to know what happened.’”

The path to get the Zimbelman family their full benefits was an extended one. The family

effort included extensive research by Zimbelman’s children, Charles and Patricia.

They found a great resource in Finau.

“I have to say she was like a pit bull,” Charles Zimbelman says. “She locked on to it and stayed on that job until it was done.

“When we talked to her, it didn’t feel like we were talking to a bureaucrat. It really felt like we were dealing with a close friend or someone in the family.”

As her husband’s health declined, Mamie says Finau’s accessibility and compassion was a relief.

“We had a lot of questions and she told us to come back whenever we needed to,” Mamie says. “She’s so well qualified. Everything I asked, she had the answer or would get it.”

The Zimbelman family has volunteered for veterans-related issues for more than 30 years. Mamie still tends the flowers at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System site. She knows there are more veterans who could benefit from the CVSO.

“I would say to all military families to get the help,” she says. “One of the times there, I saw a man going into the office. And he sure wasn’t smiling. I waited for almost an hour and when he came out, he had a smile on his face.”

“It really felt like we were dealing with a close friend or someone in the family.”

Charles Zimbelman
Son of a veteran



As family members of a veteran, Mamie Zimbelman and her son, Charles, received help from the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office to get the full benefits they were entitled to.

PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ

Supporting veterans and their families

Veterans’ benefits not only cover those who have served their country, but their families as well. Whether your family would benefit most from health care assistance, higher education or vocational training, home loans or burial benefits, staff at the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office can help determine what benefits and services you qualify for, including:

- › Survivors’ pension
- › Health care, dental care and mental health care
- › Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), for spouses and parents
- › Dependents’ Educational Assistance
- › CalVet college tuition fee waivers
- › VA home loans
- › Burial benefits

Contact the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office at 650-802-6598 or visit hsa.smcgov.org/veterans.

GIVING VETERANS A VOICE

Commission advocates for veterans' issues

by Anne Stokes



PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ

The San Mateo County Veterans Commission works to represent the estimated 33,000 former servicemen and women who live in the county and to address the varied issues that affect them. Comprised mainly of veterans themselves, the commission works with organizations and agencies to determine veterans' needs and to bring recommendations before the county Board of Supervisors. Based on the results of the 2014 Needs Assessment survey, the commission has been charged with several priorities, including:

- Access to benefits and services
- Housing and homelessness
- Mental and behavioral health
- Employment and training
- Criminal justice
- Education
- Women's needs

"We looked at those and said, 'How can the commission work in unison with the agencies that already exist who are working to try and resolve those things?'" says Francisco Oliva, commission chairman. "How can we be supportive of them?"

One of the ways the commission brings visibility to veterans' needs is by recognizing those who support them. This year, the inaugural Veteran of the Year, Patriot of the Year and Enterprise Support Partner of the Year awards will do just that. According to Hank Scherf, commissioner and vice-chairman, it's vital to highlight such efforts, not just to distinguish

those community members and businesses that serve veterans' needs, but to inspire others to get involved as well.

"We wanted to recognize not just veterans but people who are out there supporting veterans," says Scherf. "We want to raise the level of awareness within the community about our veterans who are here."

**"We
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veterans but people
who are out there
supporting veterans."**

**Hank Scherf
San Mateo County Veterans
Commissioner and vice-
chairman**

The awards ceremony is slated to be held annually in November to coincide with Veteran's Day. Nomination for veterans, civilian patriots and businesses can be submitted online.

Nomination forms can be found at hsa.smcgov.org/veterans-publications. For more information, call 650-802-6598.

AN ALTERNATIVE FOR VETS

Treatment Court connects veterans to resources in lieu of jail

by Anne Stokes

According to a 2008 RAND Corporation study, over a third of the approximately 1.64 million servicemen and women return home suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or a traumatic brain injury. These conditions increase the risk of psychological problems, including suicide and unhealthy behaviors like substance abuse. Employment and relationships with families can suffer. Sometimes these issues can result in criminal charges.

San Mateo County's Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) recognizes that veterans deserve special accommodations in the criminal justice system. Rather than impose punitive measures,

they're connected with resources and wrap-around services such as counseling, rehabilitation and medical care through the county as well as Veterans Affairs.

"We try to give back to them instead of throwing them in jail," says Andrew White, case manager and assessment specialist with San Mateo County. "A vast majority have co-occurring disorders, meaning they have substance abuse as well as other mental health disorders, so that takes a special kind of care to treat both of those issues. The judge and everyone else on the treatment team understand that."

That treatment team combines the efforts of the District Attorney's office, Private

Defender Program, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Probation and the VA. The goal is to improve outcomes through substance abuse counseling, mental health treatment, health care, housing or employment assistance.

VTC eligibility requirements include:

- Current or prior military service.
- VA benefits eligibility.
- A diagnosis of PTSD, TBI, sexual trauma, mental health and/or substance abuse issues stemming from military service.
- Probation eligibility (subjects can't be considered a danger to the community).

Participants who successfully complete the program can have their fines reduced, probation terminated early or have their records expunged. Participation requires regular court appearances and can include counseling, medication monitoring and other forms of intensive probation supervision.

"Of course feeling healthier and being more active in the community is rewarding in and of itself," says White. "A lot of veterans also connect with their families better once they can be more comfortable with themselves."

For more information, visit probation.smcgov.org/veterans-treatment-court.

EVERYONE CAN HELP A VET!

San Mateo County prides itself on being a region that truly cares for its vets. Are you willing to step up to help the veterans in your community?

The San Mateo CVSO means business when it comes to helping veterans:

- › Staff are accredited through the California Department of Veterans Affairs and the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.
- › Staff can explain, complete and submit claims on behalf of veterans and family members.
- › They can help veterans and their families apply for state and federal benefits and access social services.
- › The CVSO wants to see every veteran walk through its doors, and you can help.

Let the veteran in your life, whether it be a spouse, child, sibling, friend or neighbor, know about the life-changing services offered by the San Mateo County Veterans Services Office today!

San Mateo CVSO

400 Harbor Blvd., Building B
Belmont, CA 94002
(650) 802-6598

Monday – Thursday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m., closed from 12-1 p.m.



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

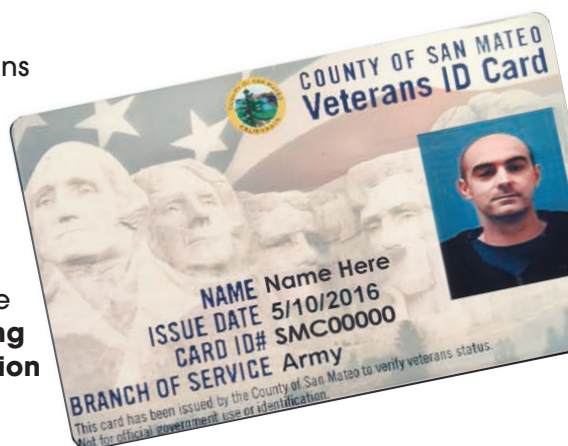


PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ



Get your **FREE** Veterans ID Card!

San Mateo County veterans who were honorably discharged are eligible to receive a free Veterans ID Card at the CVSO office. The process is quick and easy, and benefits include **discounts at participating merchants** and **recognition of your service** from your community.



What should I bring?

When you visit the CVSO for help applying for benefits, the process will be easier if you bring the following documents:

- › Form DD-214 discharge paperwork
- › Names and addresses of all non-VA doctors
- › Valid ID
- › Medical history
- › Documents reflecting past claims
- › Death certificates
- › Current marriage certificates
- › Social Security award letter for non-service-connected claims
- › Birth certificate for children under 18
- › Divorce decrees for all marriages of veteran and current spouse
- › Social Security documents for all dependents