

Serving

Those Who Served

INSIDE:

pg.
5

Health care
for veterans

pg.
6

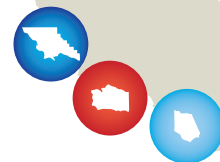
Benefits veterans
may be eligible for

pg.
8

How to get the
process started



VETERAN SERVICES OFFICES
Serving San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara & Ventura counties



Serving Our Nation's **HEROES**

Working together to give back
to veterans

by Mike Blount

Those who served in the Coast Guard, Navy, Air Force, Army, Marines, Reserves or National Guard are veterans and have made many sacrifices by serving our country. Now it's our turn to serve them. The Veteran Services Offices in Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties stand ready to help make sure every veteran gets the benefits he or she has earned.

Almost every county in California has a County Veteran Services Office with professionals ready and willing to provide support and aid to veterans as they file a claim to receive the benefits they rightfully deserve.

WHY FILE A CLAIM?

Veterans may not feel entitled to benefits after they are discharged. Pride may keep others from applying. Some veterans might not know they are eligible, or they may mistakenly feel like they are taking benefits away from servicemen and women who really need them. But everyone who served has rightfully earned these benefits, and their county Veteran Services Office can help them through every step of the process of applying for them.

Submitting a benefits claim without help can be intimidating. Veterans may be required to submit lots of paperwork, and following up on the status of claims can take a lot of time. Veterans claim representatives from the county Veteran Services Office will use their expertise to help navigate the system, making sure all paperwork is in order for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to process the claim.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN OFFICE VISIT?

Representatives from each county Veteran Services Office will refer the veteran to the closest office. A veterans claim representative will review discharge paperwork and help determine the benefits the veteran and his/her dependents are eligible for, including medical coverage, financial assistance and even a tuition-free education. Representatives are available to answer any questions and to follow up on the claim.



Veterans Claim Representative Arlyn Sandoval is ready to help veterans claim the benefits they've earned.
PHOTO BY BRADLEY POSEY

THREE COUNTIES, ONE MISSION

County Veteran Services Officers in Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties are dedicated to helping veterans and their dependents connect to state and federal benefits and resources in their communities. We provide a welcoming environment where veterans claim representatives will help determine the benefits each veteran is eligible for

and assist with the necessary paperwork to file a claim. Representatives will also be happy to answer any questions veterans or their dependents have and help them follow up on the status of their claim.

We are proud to serve our nation's heroes and their families, and we look forward to helping them access the benefits they have rightfully earned.



Santa Barbara County



San Luis Obispo County



Ventura County

Back from the **BRINK**

Vietnam veteran
gets treatment
for PTSD

by Lexi Brister

Larry Seguin experienced terrifying nightmares as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder from his service in Vietnam. Seguin was able to get treatment with the help of a Veteran Services Officer.
PHOTO BY BRADLEY POSEY

When Marine Sergeant Larry Seguin returned from Vietnam, he experienced nightmares that were so bad he would wake up screaming. Thanks to the help of his Veteran Services Officer and the support of his loving wife, 71-year-old Seguin was able to seek treatment for what he now knows was severe post-traumatic stress disorder. He is getting counseling and was awarded 100 percent service-connected disability. He is now sleeping through the night for the first time in over 40 years.

"I lived at the bottom of a bottle for 15 years as a functioning alcoholic," Seguin says. "If I could drink enough that I'd pass out, then the nightmares would go away."

He found sobriety 33 years ago. That was the good news, but once the drinking stopped the nightmares came back.

"If I had tried to stumble through that myself, there's no way I could've covered all those details."

Larry Seguin

Seguin was convinced at the time that he didn't have a problem. A combination of denial and pride, compounded with the many road blocks he had heard of in the veteran disability claim process, held him back from seeking the treatment he desperately needed.

Seguin thought that as a former Marine sergeant, he should be tough enough to handle the stress on his own, he says.

A few years ago after a particularly frightening flashback, Seguin's wife issued him an ultimatum. She

was in the car with him when it happened, and Seguin said his mind was back in battle where he was trying to kill the enemy.

"It really scared her, and she told me to get help or we were done," Seguin recalls. "That was a wake-up call for me."

That same night there happened to be a meeting of the Vietnam Veterans of Ventura County. Seguin attended, despite still being rattled. His fellow veterans told him that a lot of guys had been through this and gotten help.

So Seguin spoke to Veteran Services Officer Mike McManus, and three days later, he was registered.

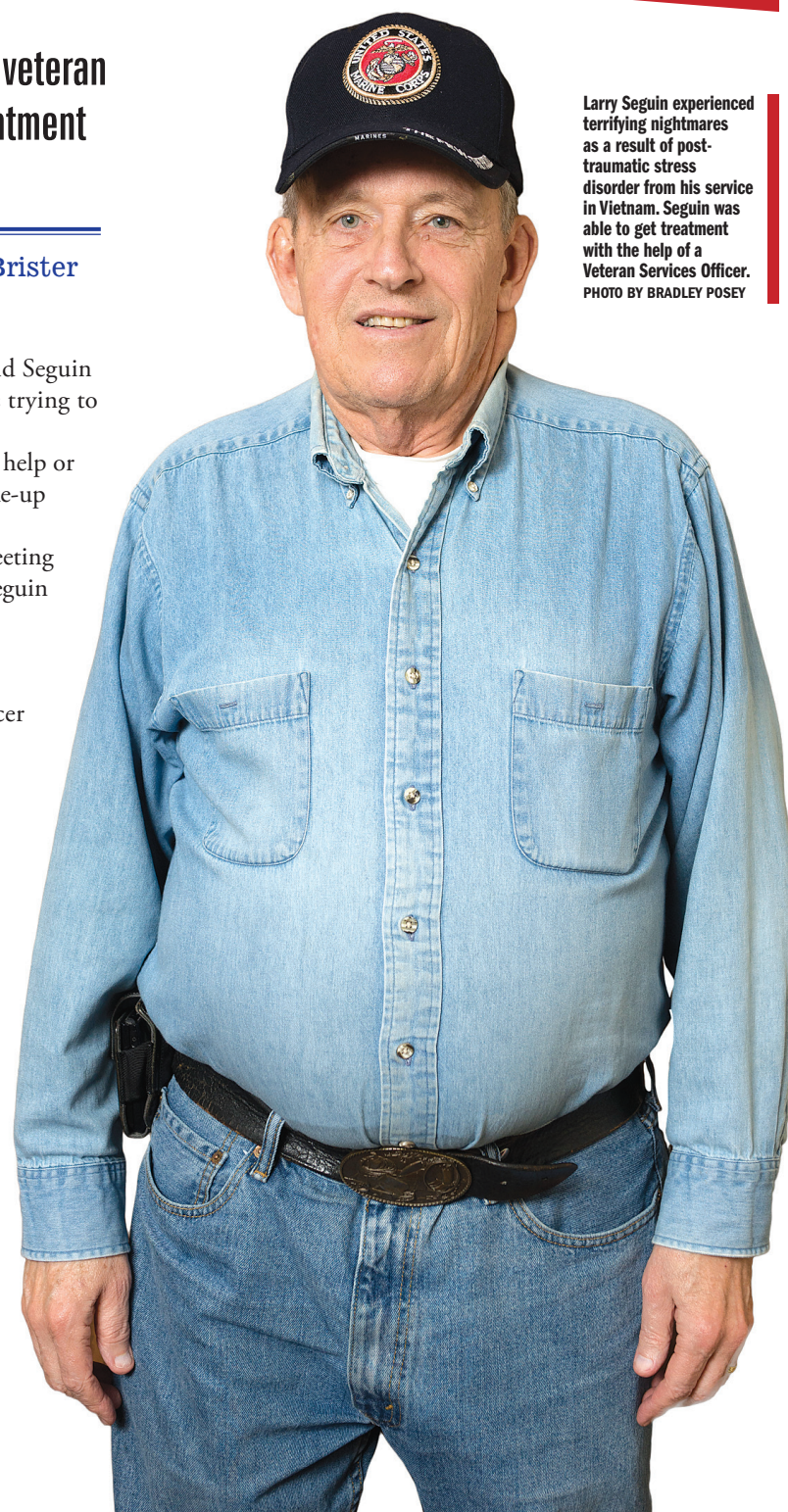
It wasn't instantaneous, Seguin said. He waited almost two years before receiving his full 100 percent coverage and had to see a variety of medical professionals for evaluations during that time.

McManus was involved every step of the way.

"If I had tried to stumble through that myself, there's no way I could've covered all those details," Seguin says of the support McManus provided. "Mike made sure I had everything I needed and that it was 100 percent done properly."

Not only have Seguin's nightmares abated thanks to the psychiatric care he is now afforded by the VA, but he has also been able to get treatment for high blood pressure and hearing loss — all related to the claims he filed.

"I'm glad my wife loved me enough to make me get help," Seguin says. "Her love and support is what keeps me strong."



☆☆☆
**SERVICE
CONNECTED
DISABILITIES**
☆☆☆

Disability compensation is a tax-free monetary benefit paid to veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury related to their active military service. Compensation may also be paid for disabilities that arise after service if they are presumed to be related to military service.

Veterans claim representatives submit disability claims for many kinds of conditions including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, hearing loss, bodily injury and certain cancers.

"Anything that can happen to the human body both physically and psychologically, we've made a claim for it at some point," says Veteran Services Officer Mike McManus of Ventura County.

Even if a disability arises after service, Veteran Services Officers are knowledgeable of conditions that may actually result from military service. For instance, Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and later develop certain cancers are assumed to have those cancers as a result of their service.

A Promise FULFILLED

★ Benefit helps surviving spouse
receive care at home ★

by Mark Lore

It's been a difficult transition for Donna Gallagher, adjusting to life as a caregiver for her ailing 91-year-old mother, Alleen Hattem.

A vibrant woman who raised two children with her husband Maurice — a World War II vet — Alleen was the picture of health until a few years ago. She developed neuropathy in both of her feet and legs, which makes it difficult to get around, and also suffers from a form of dementia called small vessel disease. Knowing Alleen could no longer care for herself, Gallagher decided to bring her mother to live at her San Luis Obispo home.

"I promised her. I did tell her I would take care of her at home," Gallagher says.

**"I promised her.
I did tell her I
would take care
of her at home."**

Donna Gallagher

And thanks to her county Veteran Services Office, Gallagher will likely be able to make good on that promise. With their help, Gallagher discovered that her father's time in the Navy made it possible for her mother to receive a survivor pension and additional money to pay for a caregiver.

"This was a little benefit I wasn't aware of," Gallagher says.

Many families aren't aware of the resources available to help them claim

benefits. And sadly, some veterans are even under the assumption if they didn't actually see any combat, they don't qualify for aid.

That's not the case, says Dana Cummings, the Veteran Services Officer who helped Gallagher obtain this benefit.

"As far as I'm concerned, the day you raise your hand and say you'll die for your country makes you a vet," he says.

Through the VA pension aid and attendance benefit, lower-income and elderly veterans and surviving spouses can qualify for financial assistance, which goes directly to them. Cummings added that there are factors — length of service, when a vet served, disposable income and net worth — which will determine the amount of aid one receives.

In the case of Gallagher and her mother, Alleen, it could mean approximately \$1,100 per month to cover the cost of a caregiver. It not only ensures Alleen will receive the care she needs, but also takes some of the stress off of Gallagher from having to be the sole care provider. It also keeps them from having to consider an elderly care facility.

That's important to Gallagher, who says her mother enjoys a comfortable, quality life where she belongs — at home.

"Here, she's with family. She's got grandkids. We take her for walks. She loves my dogs, she watches old movies," Gallagher says. "We threw her a 90th birthday party, and she was so cute, and smiling. In a nursing home, she'd probably hardly get visitors."



Donna Gallagher, at right, has found help caring for her ailing 91-year-old mother Alleen Hattem, left, at home thanks to a benefit Donna's father earned through his military service.
PHOTO BRADLEY POSEY

SURVIVOR PENSIONS

Pensions are available for veterans and surviving spouses. One benefit available to pensioners is aid and attendance — which gives veterans and/or surviving spouses extra income as a result of a disability. Filing a claim for aid and attendance can be complicated. Veteran Services Officer Dana Cummings says he and other veterans claim representatives can walk veterans and family members through the process at no charge.

In addition to forms, veterans and surviving spouses need to provide their income and assets (the good news is that owning a home does not count as an asset). Veterans also need to provide information showing that they can't perform acts of daily living, such as cooking, paying bills or monitoring medications. The program is set up for those in the most need — the elderly and those with disabilities.

A Better Way to **LIVE**

Veteran didn't know
she was entitled to
health care benefits

by Lexi Brister

Stacy Moody, 45, is a combat veteran who once believed she would have to spend the rest of her life in pain.

Moody's service in the Gulf War had left her with blinding, unpredictable migraines as well as nightmares and a variety of physical ailments. And she had no idea that affordable care was available — all she had to do was claim it. With help from her local Veteran Services Officer, Moody got the treatment she needed to lead a happy, healthy life.

"I honestly thought the VA was there for home loans," Moody says of her initial shock at learning she was eligible for health care.

She had already given up the medication she had been taking for her migraines because she couldn't afford it.

After 12 years with no health care, Moody described her VA benefits as a blessing.

The Santa Barbara County Veteran Services Officer Rhonda Murphy helped her track down the paperwork she needed and get registered.

"I thought that because I had lost my DD-214 after my divorce, there was nothing I could do," Moody says.

"Rhonda helped me get a copy of it and it was like the angels started singing."

With Murphy's help, Moody quickly learned how to use the VA's online health care portal to track her claims' progress.

"I'm taking medication for my migraines, and I don't have to worry about whether or not I can afford it."

Stacy Moody

"The website is literally a gateway to everything," she says. "The VA has spent a large sum of money on being brought up-to-date technologically, so the claims process is much faster than it used to be."

Moody said that not only has she had nothing but positive experiences in seeking care, but that the care she has received has been top-notch.

"They have really taken care of me," she says. "I've gotten physical therapy for my back and my carpal tunnel. I'm taking medication for my migraines, and I don't have to worry about whether or not I can afford it."

At the same time she started using VA health care, Moody had been laid off from her construction job. She had no idea how she was going to make ends meet until she saw an opening for a medical consultant on another VA website.

When she was interviewed for the job, she was asked why she thought she deserved it.

"I told them honestly that I wouldn't say I was better than anyone else, but that as a combat veteran myself I spoke the language," Moody says.

Moody describes being a medical support administrator as incredibly rewarding because she gets to help veterans get the care they deserve.

"I'm the front line, I'm the first person they see when they walk in the door," Moody says. "It is so important that these people understand that if you're a veteran, these are your benefits — you've earned this."

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

There are many health-related benefits available to veterans regardless of how long it's been since they've served or how severe a need may be. These services include:

- Dental care
- Vision and hearing services (insurance coverage available)
- Homeless aid through the VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH)
- Women's Wellness
- Cancer treatment
- Addiction rehabilitation
- Psychological treatment (for ALL aspects of mental health)
- Weight management and exercise programs
- Education and vocational training
- Heart wellness

Stacy Moody got help signing up for health care benefits through the VA. Now she helps other vets access health care as a medical support administrator.
PHOTO BY BRADLEY POSEY



A supplemental outreach and education guide

APPLYING FOR BENEFITS



County veterans claim representatives aim to make applying for benefits as easy as possible. Here's what veterans, their spouses and their dependents can expect when coming into an office:

1

Veterans will need to bring discharge paperwork (DD-214 form). Contact your County Veteran Services Officer for other documents to bring, such as marriage certificate, children's birth certificate or death certificates for the deceased veteran.

2

A veterans claim representative will go over the paperwork and help determine which benefits and services to apply for.

3

Additional paperwork, including medical or financial records, may be required to finish filing a claim.

4

Veterans claim representatives will file claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

5

Veterans, their spouses or their dependents can follow up on claims by contacting a veterans claim representative, who will assist in explaining the VA decision and, if needed, help with any appeal.



More BENEFITS

Additional resources for veterans, spouses and dependents ★ by Mike Blount

Veterans and their families may be eligible for more than pensions and disability compensation. Here is a list of some additional benefits or resources veterans claim representatives can help veterans or their dependents with:

- **Burial and plot-interment allowances** to cover partial reimbursements of an eligible veteran's burial and funeral costs
- **College fee waivers** for spouses, registered domestic partners, children or unmarried surviving spouses covering tuition to University of California, California State University or California community colleges
- **Educational benefits** through the GI Bill to advance the education and skills of veterans and service members
- **Vocation rehabilitation**, including job training, employment accommodations, résumé development and job search coaching
- **Home loans** that offer below-market interest rates with low or no down payment requirements for veterans
- **Home foreclosure assistance** for veterans at risk of losing their home through foreclosure
- **Motor vehicle registration waiver** for Medal of Honor recipients, American ex-prisoners of war and certain disabled veterans
- **Property tax exemption** for the home of a 100 percent disabled veteran or an unremarried surviving spouse of a deceased disabled veteran
- **Voluntary dental insurance** purchased through Delta Dental and MetLife at reduced cost
- **Life insurance benefits** purchased through the VA to give veterans the peace of mind that comes with knowing their family is protected
- **Aid and attendance** added to your monthly pension amount for veterans or dependents who require the aid of another person in order to perform everyday functions, such as bathing or paying bills
- **Housing assistance** for homeless veterans through the VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH)

GIVING BACK

to Veterans

by Mike Blount

PHOTOS BY BRADLEY POSEY

Meet your county's
veterans claim
representative



Ventura County

JOHN JACKSON

In his nine years in the Navy, John Jackson was a salvage diver searching for aircraft and equipment at the bottom of the ocean. Today, he searches for every benefit available for his fellow veterans filing a claim.

What do you enjoy about your job?

I love helping veterans, but I also love helping their dependents, too. We want to make sure they are covered financially and that they have medical coverage. Their kids can go to a two-year college or four-year university completely tuition-free. There are many things we can help dependents with as well.

Why is your job important?

They put their lives on the line to defend our country. It's up to us to make sure they get all the benefits they deserve. For deceased veterans, we can help their spouses and children, too. My job is to do all the paperwork and help them navigate the system.

What are some key things veterans should ask you?

What am I eligible for? The best thing is to come in and see us. We'll be happy to explain their benefits to them and answer any questions they may have.



San Luis Obispo County

WENDELL WELTER

When Wendell Welter was laid off from a lucrative job in aerospace engineering in 2010, he wasn't sure what he would do next. While filing for unemployment benefits he connected with a veterans claim representative and found his calling.

Why do you enjoy your job?

When I worked for the Welcome Home Program, a veteran thanked me for helping him get a pair of glasses. That was an epiphany for me because I realized that there's people out there that need help and I can help them. The job has its rewards and it is in getting to help people.

Why is your job important?

Because I get what needs to be done to file a claim with Veterans Affairs. I know what papers need to be filed and what needs to be done to keep the claim moving.

What are some key things veterans should ask you?

It really depends on the veteran. If you were in Vietnam, you should be asking about Agent Orange exposure. You should come to us so we can help you find out what you are eligible for with our expertise.



Santa Barbara County

ARLYN SANDOVAL

Arlyn Sandoval loves being a veterans claim representative because she appreciates being able to give back to fellow veterans. The four-year Air Force veteran says applying for benefits can be intimidating, but she's happy to help navigate the process.

What do you enjoy about your job?

This is my third job. In the military I was a medical technician, then I worked at FedEx, and now I work as a veterans claim representative. In all three jobs, I worked customer service. We're the vessel that allows the VA to help people.

Why is your job important?

Most people do not know what they are eligible for. I have World War II veterans coming into our office for the first time. I'm able to get them benefits. As a non-combat veteran, I thought I wasn't entitled to any benefits myself. But I've gone through the process and I know it on a personal level, as well as a professional one.

What are some key things veterans should ask you?

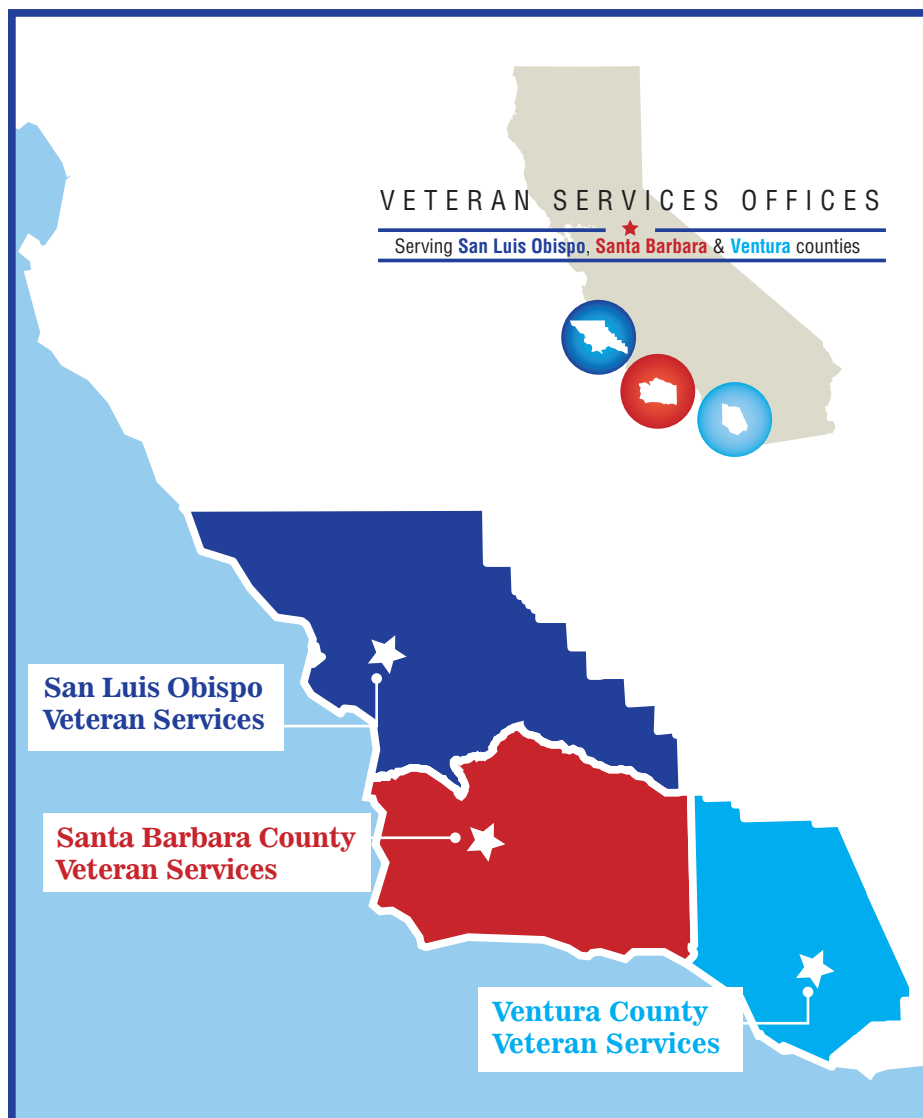
The first thing you should ask is, "What am I eligible for?" We'll take a look at your separation paperwork and go from there. I try to cover everything — from a tuition-free college education for your children, to home loans to medical benefits.



Get the BENEFITS YOU DESERVE



If you served in the military, you or your family may be eligible for benefits. You served your county. You earned them. Your County Veteran Services Officer can help you access these life-changing benefits. Don't wait — contact your county Veteran Services Office today.



★ GET STARTED! ★

Visit these locations to connect with a veterans claim representative today:



Santa Barbara County



Rhonda Murphy,
U.S. Navy, ret.
County of Santa
Barbara, Veteran
Services Officer

511 E. Lakeside Parkway,
Room 47
Santa Maria, CA 93455
Phone: 805-346-7160

315 Camino Del Remedio,
Bldg. 3, Room 251
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
Phone: 805-681-4500

401 E. Cypress Ave., Room 101
Lompoc, CA 93436
Phone: 805-737-7900

Web: <http://cosb.countyofsb.org/ttcpag/vetservices.asp>



Ventura County



Mike McManus,
U.S. Air Force, ret.
County of Ventura,
Veteran Services
Officer

855 Partridge Drive
Ventura, CA 93003
Phone: 805-477-5155
Fax: 805-477-5418
Web: www.vchsa.org/veterans

Field offices (call for addresses and hours):

Camarillo, Moorpark, Oxnard,
Santa Paula, Simi Valley,
Thousand Oaks and Ventura



San Luis Obispo County



Dana Cummings,
U.S. Marine Corps,
ret. County of
San Luis Obispo,
Veteran Services
Officer

801 Grand Ave.
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408
Phone: 805-781-5766

1070 Southwood Drive
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
Phone: 805-782-9101

Web: www.slocounty.ca.gov/veteran.htm

By appointment only:

Paso Robles Vets Hall,
240 Scott St., Paso Robles

Nipomo Library,
918 W. Taft St., Nipomo

Atascadero City Hall,
6500 Palma Ave., Atascadero



Produced by:
(916) 498-1234 | www.nrpubs.com