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All veterans are reminded that the fastest way to inquire and secure the benefits they have earned is by visiting their local County Veterans Service Office. A listing of these offices is available at www.cacvso.org.

JUNE 2013

WOMEN VETERANS LEAD THE WAY

In partnership with Walmart, VetFund Foundation, Wells Fargo, PG&E and AMVETS, CalVet will host the Women Veterans Leadership Conference September 25-27, 2013 at the Mission Valley Marriot Hotel in San Diego, CA. Online conference registration is now available at www.calvet.ca.gov/Women/Conference.aspx.

The Women Veterans Leadership Conference will provide information and resources that encourage and empower women veterans to become self-sufficient, active members of their communities. Conference participants will learn how to start a business or nonprofit organization and how to become a community leader, activist or volunteer. Attendees will also have the opportunity to learn about their veteran's benefits, enroll in healthcare, file disability claims and speak with employers, college representatives, and veteran service organizations at more than 40 information tables.



The Conference will also include an evening reception to honor exemplary women veterans. Award nominations will be accepted until July 19 for the Woman Veteran Leader of the Year Award, the Lifetime Achievement Award and the Outstanding Volunteer Award. Nomination forms may be downloaded at www.calvet.ca.gov/women/Conference.aspx.

The honorary co-chairs of the Conference are California Assembly Majority Leader, Assemblymember Toni Atkins and Assemblymember Rocky Chávez. Assemblymember Chávez serves as Vice Chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee and Assemblymember Atkins serves as a member of the Committee.

The conference is made possible by private donations made through the VetFund Foundation, a 501(c)(3) corporation that promotes the interests and raises money in support of California veterans and active duty service members as well as assisting selected programs and services of the California Department of Veterans Affairs.

For more information, please email womenveterans@calvet.ca.gov or call (916) 653-1402.

INSIDE ➡

CalVet Resources Honored	p. 3
Young Vet Finds Healing	p. 4
A Father's Love	p. 10
Calendar of Events	p. 15

Secretary's Message

Greetings Veterans and Friends,

One of the greatest assets CalVet has is the dedicated team that works here. For that reason, it is hard when one of them retires. I wish to let you know that Robin Umberg, Undersecretary for Veterans Homes, has decided to retire in order to focus on her family and her health.

Robin spent the last two years dedicated to serving our veterans and implementing changes within the Veterans Homes of California that will stand long into the future. During her time at CalVet, she was a dynamic leader, initiating changes that will ensure our state veterans homes maintain a reputation for premier care and service to our veterans. She was also instrumental in ensuring the veterans homes are administered in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Robin has enriched CalVet by instituting a vision, policies and programs to create a cohesive system of long-term care across the eight Veteran Homes of California. This enormous undertaking was accomplished by setting staffing standards, fiscal efficiency goals, census targets and expansion of services. Under her leadership, CalVet implemented automation of an electronic health records system, pharmacy, policy tracking, admissions, and on-line training. Robin also looked to create public private partnerships to extend the service to veterans by utilizing available space in the veterans homes. Not only did she lead, but as a veteran, indeed a retired Brigadier

General, she connected with the residents we so proudly serve, even going as far as performing life-saving CPR at one time. Her dedication to our veterans should be an example for all of us. Robin will definitely be missed by everyone in CalVet and in the veteran community.

STATE CONVENTIONS

June is one of the busiest months for us at CalVet. We attend many veteran service organizations' state conventions, commemorate Flag Day, and welcome summer and 100 degree days.

This month CalVet staff attend state conventions of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, American GI Forum, Jewish War Veterans, and Marine Corps League. Kudos to the Military Order of the Purple Heart on their state convention held last month.

CalVet has enjoyed a wonderful relationship with veterans service organizations for many years. Just this past year, The American Legion's sizable donation to the Yountville Veterans Home now allows the residents and the community to enjoy a top-of-the-line RV and picnic area. They also donated funds to the Chula Vista Veterans Home to cover the travel expenses of two residents who went to the National Veterans Golden Games in Buffalo, NY. Thanks to donations from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, residents at the Lancaster Veterans Home have been enjoying a monthly barbeque for the

past four years.

These are but a few examples of the generosity of the different veterans service organizations. Many thanks also go to the local posts and chapters of the veterans service organizations for their many, many donations to our veterans homes throughout the state. These donations are numerous and would fill a couple of pages to list.

Finally, on June 14th, please remind your family and friends to treat our nation's flag with respect, for it represents the best country in the world. This incredible melting pot brings together the best from around the world, making our country strong and resourceful.

Sincerely,



Peter J. Gravett, Major General (Ret)
Secretary, California Department of
Veterans Affairs

CALVET VETERANS RESOURCES HONORED

For their quality, reach and impact, three of CalVet's veterans resources were honored by the California State Information Officers Council (SiOC) at its "Excellence in State Government Communications" awards ceremony on May 14, 2013. The annual statewide competition honors the best of the best in communications efforts by State agencies in writing, reports, publications, audio-visual productions, graphic and photography, special projects, media relations and internet & social media categories.

In the Special Report category, the CalVet Enterprise Strategic Plan 2012 received a SiOC Silver Award. In the Special Publication category, the California Veterans Resource Book 2012 received a Gold Award. In the Feature Writing category, an article titled, "Agent Orange: One Veterans Story," and written by Carolyn Ballou, received a Gold Award. That article recently received a similar award from the California Association of Public Information Officers.

"CalVet works hard to reach veterans and their families so we can get them connected to the benefits and services they've earned through military service," said CalVet Secretary Peter J. Gravett. "To know that our communication efforts are



so well regarded by communications industry professionals is truly an honor."

Independent judging for the awards was provided by prominent Sacramento-area public relations, media, and design professionals, who are neither members of SiOC, nor associated with the Council.

SiOC is a nonprofit organization offering professional development and networking opportunities for those who work as and with State information officers throughout California. In addition to its annual communications awards competition, SiOC provides scholarships for CSU, Sacramento college students majoring in journalism, communications, and public information management.

For a full list of 2013 Excellence in State Government Communications awards winners and information about SiOC membership, go to www.ca-sioc.org.

"BIG SUNDAY" EVENT AT WEST LA VETS HOME

As part of the City of Los Angeles' annual "Big Sunday" community outreach day, about 40 volunteers participated in mural painting and tree planting at the West Los Angeles Veterans Home. Among the volunteers were UPS employees who donated and planted over 20 trees! West Los Angeles Veterans Home Director Louis Koff pitched in to dig holes and help plant new trees. Volunteers also took time from their busy activities to have lunch with West Los Angeles Veterans Home residents. The Veterans Home of California—West Los Angeles sends it sincere appreciation to all of the friendly, enthusiastic and talented individuals who participated.



YOUNG VET FINDS HEALING

By Lynn Scott

Michael Johnson was the kind of son any father would be proud of. In high school, he was strong, competitive and excelled in fast-paced sports such as basketball, track and water polo. With his natural gusto and patriotism, people saw Michael as a role model and leader. He enlisted in the Army in 1989 at the age of 19. He said, "It is important to love your country and, if necessary, to put your life on the line." And he did.

During 4 ½ years in the Army, he did a 7-month tour in the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Storm. Michael was part of the elite front-line reconnaissance unit, the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, in what the Military Channel described as "The last great tank battle of the 20th century," The Battle of 73 Easting.

The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment was responsible for clearing a path through Saddam's Republican Guard for VII Corps' advance into Kuwait. American recon, armored, air, and artillery forces clashed with hundreds of Iraqi tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and artillery batteries. The Americans were heavily outnumbered and outgunned as the armored melee with the Iraqis commenced.



Anthony Saldana, Barstow Veterans Home Food Manager (L), Michael Johnson (R)

Michael experienced fierce, continuous fighting and exposure to neurotoxic chemicals including Sarin and VX gas. Inside his state-of-the-art German-built M93 Recon Fox, Michael's unit formed one of three prongs on the front-line of the 2nd Armored, tracking and reporting chemical exposure levels and identifying fortified enemy positions. Michael said, "The Iraqi tank and artillery shells exploded against the sides of the better-armored Bradley fighting vehicles, and Abrams tanks during the assault—usually with little damage. Even as the battle began to turn, the Iraqi Republican Guard fought to the death." The battle was the first ground defeat of

the Republican Guard. Subsequent combat operations resulted in the defeat of Saddam's army and the liberation of Kuwait.

Michael was honorably discharged from the Army at the age of 24. He returned to the workforce without major adjustment problems but had never asked nor was ever told about the possible after effects of war. He just wanted to get on with his life and not look back at the violence he had witnessed. However, the past was about to catch up to him in ways he could not have imagined. Gradually and then increasingly, he started to experience joint and muscle pain that, on some days, was so severe he

HEALING, page 5 >>

<< HEALING

could barely get out of bed. As an athlete, he had always had a sense of physical well-being. Now he felt increasingly hopeless and confused about his physical deterioration. The pain was accompanied by severe fatigue, restless nights, nightmares and frequent flashbacks. While he kept working, he continued to decline. He started drinking as a way to self-medicate. He suffered two marriage failures, and due to the poor economy, the company he worked for had a 90% reduction in its workforce and Michael lost his job. It was not long before Michael was homeless.

Seeking help, he turned to the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center and was in the process of filing a claim for disability benefits, but misfortune struck yet again when his car was stolen along with all of his possessions and the supporting documentation he needed. He said, "At that point I had nothing; all I could do was cry."

Now age 43, Michael was running out of options, but he saw one last ray of hope. Having previously worked in Victorville, he knew that there was a Veterans Home in Barstow, so he reached out for help and called the Home. His call was transferred to Bill Rigole, Chief of Social Work Service. Bill took an immediate interest in Michael and coordinated a rapid admission. Now Michael had a place to call home.

Soon, he started attending regularly scheduled counseling sessions with

Bill to help treat his depression. Together, while they worked through Michael's problems and the effects of the war, Bill pointed him toward the future and what he might do with the rest of his life. With the strong support and understanding of other vets, Michael learned to manage. He still has chronic fatigue, almost constant muscle and joint pain and sinus problems. "Some days," he says, "I physically feel like I have been run over by a truck. But I am willing to work through the pain to better my life."

Two Barstow employees, Anthony Saldana, food manager and Julie Pellman, RD, Assistant Director of Dietetics, helped to improve Michael's diet. He gained some of the weight he had lost and started to feel better. Thanks, in part, to his improved sense of health and well-being, he was able to take on a new challenge. He is taking a full load of classes at the neighboring Barstow Community College, working to become a recreation therapist. He said, "I want to help people and, in particular, I want to help veterans." Michael is getting all A's and B's in his classes. In addition, he is now the Vice President of the Barstow Community College Veterans Center, a safe and non-judgmental environment where veterans come together, share experiences, and offer each other support and guidance to transition back into civilian life.

"One of the things the Army taught me in Recon was no matter what happens, you get up, you adapt and

you overcome. Still, no matter how tough you think you are, transition is hard. I don't know what would have happened to me without the Veterans Home and the people who have helped me. They have gone above and beyond the call of duty; they have changed my life. What I want to do now is something Bill Rigole kept telling me ... "Pay it forward."

Later, Bill Rigole reflected on the services CalVet Homes provide, "The CalVet Homes provide excellent rehabilitation and re-integration opportunities for younger, homeless veterans and those having readjustment problems complicated by disabilities incurred during time of war. The Homes care for disabled and ill veterans, but aging is only one of the challenges our veterans share. War trauma requires a full spectrum of care and service to those who bore the battles. That is why we are there."

Lynn Scott is Assistant Deputy Secretary for the CalVet Veterans Homes Division.

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON VETERANS SPRING UPDATE

The Governor's Interagency Council on Veterans (ICV) has released a summary of its efforts to date. The Spring 2013 ICV Update can be viewed at www.icv.ca.gov/media.html.

The ICV, established by Executive Order in August 2011, works to identify and prioritize the needs of California's veterans and to coordinate the activities at all levels of government in addressing those needs.

In February of 2012, the ICV convened at a two-day conference during which attendees of the Employment, Education, Housing and Health Workgroups participated in a guided facilitation focused on identifying and prioritizing the current needs of California veterans. Along with a list of Workgroup-specific priorities, attendees identified five top priorities for the Council: Funding, One-Stop Hubs, Public Relations/Outreach, Data Capture and Sharing, and Improvement of Transition Programs. For more information, you may read the February 2012 ICV Conference Summary at www.icv.ca.gov/files/CRB_022212.pdf.

REBUILDING TOGETHER SACRAMENTO HELPS LOCAL VETERANS

By Katy Zane

Rebuilding Together Sacramento

Established in 1974, Rebuilding Together has become the largest non-profit, volunteer home rehabilitation organization in America. The Sacramento affiliate was launched in 1991 as a barn raising activity to help low-income homeowners in need of home repairs. Twenty-two years later Rebuilding Together Sacramento (RTS) has helped improve close to 4,500 homes, 85 community facilities and has utilized over 303,000 volunteer hours! RTS' mission is to preserve and revitalize homes and communities to ensure that homeowners who are low-income, elderly, disabled or families with children live independently in comfort, safety, health and efficiency.

Reaching out and giving back to veterans is one of RTS' key goals. Thanks to a grant from Sears "Heroes at Home," two veterans will be the lucky beneficiaries of major home repairs and energy efficiency upgrades this month.

- Kenneth and Emma, both 86 years old, have lived in their home for close to 50 years. Kenneth served from 1944 - 1946 on the USS Whitley naval ship - serving time during World War II and being present at the Battle of Iwo Jima.
- Virginia, now 84 years old, has lived in her home 51 years. Following in her dad's footsteps, she wanted to join the navy but instead enlisted in the United State Air Force.

With mounting repairs, both homeowners were thrilled to hear that RTS will be providing home repairs, safety measures and energy efficiency upgrades. Close to 100 skilled and unskilled volunteers will spend two days this June to provide painting, landscaping, new carpeting, new efficient appliances, a walk-in shower, grab bars, new doors, roof repair, new flooring, and much more. Through additional support from Dignity Health and Intel, these homeowners will be able to pick up the pieces and move on with their lives.

If you want to learn more about Rebuilding Together Sacramento, visit www.rebuildingtogethersacramento.org.



Chris Bingham is Sonoma County's Veterans Service Officer
Photo by: Christopher Chung/The Press Democrat

CHRIS BINGHAM: LOOKING OUT FOR VETERANS

By Asa Hess-Matsumoto
The Press Democrat

In his six years as the county's lead veteran services officer, Chris Bingham, 61, has helped thousands of Sonoma County veterans get the help they need.

In the past fiscal year alone, Bingham's efforts connected servicemen and women with approximately \$8.2 million in new and retroactive benefits, helping hundreds every month pay for everything from hearing aids to hospital visits.

While many veterans across the nation get caught waiting for as long as 3 to 5 years in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' backlog, Bingham and his staff continually pass claims in a fraction of the time – once in as little as nine days.

A naval aviator and retired Air Force officer, Bingham continues his commitment to look out for the troops, long after they've come home.

How is your office so successful with helping veterans process their claims?

If you can get all the evidence upfront that you can obtain and lay out the case, the VA puts it into a fast-track process. Our goal is for every claim

that goes out of here to be fully-developed – not always possible, but we file about 95% of our claims as fully-developed at this point, and this is working really, really well.

If this is available to everyone, why the backlog?

It's a really complex federal process. The Veterans Administration (VA) does a very marginal job of assisting veterans in obtaining benefits – it's pretty convoluted.

It's a very legal process, and unfortunately most veterans come into it from an emotional perspective. They hurt, they have injuries from their service, they need help, they think that 'if I file a claim to the VA, they will pay me my benefits.' But because it's a legalistic process, it's not quite that easy.

We have to transition the veteran from the emotional side of their perspective to the side of 'what does the VA need' in terms of evidence, to grant that claim.

Why is an emotional perspective not compatible with the legal perspective in filing a claim?

In the past and many places currently, someone will just file a claim – I mean, it's perfectly good to do that – but the VA's going to come back and say, 'give us evidence from military service to prove it.' That's where the rub comes from. Did the guy ever go to sick call in the military? Is there evidence that he was hurt? Is there evidence that it was a chronic injury? The burden

<< **BINGHAM**

of proof essentially still falls on the veteran, unfortunately.

Occasionally it's really easy because the military medical records show proof of surgery or bedrest – some kind of documentation. But in many cases you know, veterans are tough guys and gals, so it's like, 'hey I'll walk it off or my buddies might pick up the load for me while I'm limping around.' Well, unfortunately, they don't get evidence that they were treated, or even had the injury.

So our job is to take them from the emotional perspective of 'I've been hurt,' and to essentially guide them as their legal advocate and help them in gathering the types of evidence to present to the VA to give them the best shot at getting the best outcome.

Does the 'tough guy' mentality hinder the process in other ways?

Some veterans are brought in kicking and screaming by their spouses. The older generation in particular

is reticent to seek care, even if they have all the documentation. They have the mentality of 'there's someone else out there who needs it more than I do, I'm fine.'

I have to coach them all in saying, 'the first step is the hardest step to take.' The fact that they've made that step in coming here is exemplary of courage. In coming here, it's not a sign of weakness – it's actually a sign of strength in acknowledging the issues they're facing and having the strength to come forward and face them.

What can your office expect in the future, now that there is a whole new wave of veterans from recent conflicts returning home?

I really encourage veterans to check in with our office periodically to see if there are any benefits they aren't taking advantage of.

Most of the younger guys don't immediately seek us out. There's a pattern of when veterans come home after military service

where they want to see that life disappearing from their rear view mirror as quickly as possible. So they go home with great aspirations: they use the GI bill, they want to get done fast so they max out on classes full time or more, but then they start struggling.

In struggling, they may not recognize right now that it may be related to their military service, but often it is. Most of the new current conflict people I see went to the SRJC, struggled, failed a few classes, withdrew from classes, may have incurred some debt, or may have relationship/employability issues. That should be a signal to some people that 'hey, maybe there's something going on and maybe I should ask for some help.'

We've got a lot of broken vets out there and our job is to help them navigate through the process to ensure that they get the benefits that they've earned through our service to our nation.

The Press Democrat



CYCLE FOR SIGHT/ ROTARY RIDE FOR VETERANS A SUCCESS!

With the help of sponsors, volunteers, donors and participants, the 2013 Cycle for Sight/Rotary Ride for Veterans hosted over 2,500 guests, raised more than \$233,000, and realized more than \$167,000 in net proceeds. Those monies will be used to support The Pathway Home's residential recovery program for veterans and Enchanted Hills Camp for the blind and visually impaired.

PROGRAM HELPS VETS PURSUE NURSING CAREER

A new federal program will help veterans with military health care experience or training, such as medics, pursue nursing careers. The program is designed to help veterans get bachelor's degrees in nursing by building on their unique skills and abilities.

Administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration at the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, the Veterans' Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program will help veterans find jobs, increase the nursing workforce and expand Americans' access to care. The program will fund up to nine cooperative agreements of up to \$350,000 a year. Funding of \$3 million is expected to be awarded by September 30, 2013.

"A program grant given to schools in California would enhance the State's ongoing efforts to ensure that veterans get transferrable credit for their military training and experience," said CalVet Secretary Peter J. Gravett. "That's key since getting or resuming their education and finding a job are typically a returning veteran's highest priorities. This program could jump start that

effort for veterans who want to become nurses."

One of the priorities being addressed by the California Interagency Council on Veterans (ICV), established by Executive Order in August of 2011, has been the issue of providing veterans appropriate academic and employment credit for education and training they received in the military. The ICV has already been successful in getting State agencies, like the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services and the Contractors State Licensing Board, to offer priority services to veteran applicants by evaluating transferable skills and using them to help the veteran meet minimum requirements for state licensure.

ERRING ON THE SIDE OF VETERANS

Have you ever wondered what happens when a veteran's eligibility is unclear when applying for benefits? Here is your answer.

It is the defined and consistently applied policy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to administer the law under a broad interpretation, consistent however with the facts shown in every case. When, after careful consideration of all procurable and assembled data, a Reasonable Doubt arises regarding service origin/connection, the degree of disability, or any other point, such doubt will be resolved in favor of the veteran/claimant. Reasonable Doubt means one which exists because of an approximate balance of positive and negative evidence which does not satisfactorily prove or disprove the claim. It is a substantial doubt and one within the range of probability as distinguished from pure speculation or remote possibility.

Reasonable Doubt is not a means of reconciling actual conflict or a contradiction in the evidence. Mere suspicion or doubt as to the truth of any statements submitted, as distinguished from impeachment or contradiction by evidence or known facts, is not justifiable basis for denying the application of the Reasonable Doubt Doctrine if the entire complete record otherwise

warrants invoking this doctrine. The Reasonable Doubt Doctrine is also applicable even in the absence of official records, particularly if the basic incident allegedly arose under combat or similarly strenuous conditions, and is consistent with the probable results of such known hardships.

There must be evidence in any claim to the USDVA. The veteran must gather hard, written, documented, evidence of some type. The more evidence a veteran supplies, the less Reasonable Doubt is applied. When the veteran has sufficient evidence in favor of their claim, the veteran may have evidence that is beyond a reasonable doubt.



A FATHER'S LOVE

By Carolyn Ballou
CalVet Veterans Services Division

Kevin Graves is a Gold Star father. Like any Gold Star parent, that's a distinction he desperately wanted to avoid. Kevin is a Gold Star father because his only child, U.S. Army SPC Joseph A. Graves—a child he raised as a single parent—was killed during his military service in Iraq.

Speaking with Kevin about the loss of his son is confusing at first because he seems so filled with joy. "Every parent says their kid is the best there is," Kevin says with a chuckle, "but Joey really was exceptional." Kevin, a self-described hard-driving Type A

personality, credits Joey with making him a better person.

Joey came to live with his father when he was just nine years old. Without a second thought, Kevin devoted his life to his son. "We did everything together," Kevin said. "I coached his sports teams and led his youth group. If there was a dinner or something, Joey was my date. We even went to Europe together."

Joey was a great student and tenacious, but—even at 9 years old—laid back.

Without realizing he was doing it at first, Kevin allowed his relationship with his son to become the

focus of his life. Kevin enjoyed a lucrative career in the construction industry. Without concern for the advancement of his career, Kevin took positions that allowed him flexibility to take an active role in Joey's life.

At 17, when Joey announced his plans to join the military, his father was supportive. Even still, Kevin invited the recruiter to their home and then grilled him for three hours about what his son could expect and what would be expected of him in return. Satisfied, Kevin signed Joey's delayed entry papers. That recruiter later told Kevin he had never met anyone who wanted to join the Army more than Joey.

For the year before he turned 18 and could actually serve in the Army, Joey trained with the recruiters at the Antioch Recruiting Office and other recruits from the area. By the time he started his military service, he had learned so much, gained so much experience, and distinguished himself so clearly that he entered the Army as an E3, Private First Class.

Six weeks before leaving for Iraq, Joey married his high school sweetheart. They looked forward to starting a family together when he returned. Joey saw serving in the military police as a springboard to becoming an FBI agent.

In Iraq, Joey was assigned to the 110th Military Police Company, 720th MP Battalion, 89th MP Brigade. According to Kevin, it was Joey's

<< LOVE

"laid back" personality that made his military career so successful. He took the time to understand what a command meant before acting on it. Those in his Company learned to respect and follow Joey. "He was a quiet leader; he led from the back," Kevin said. "And he was resourceful, always watching out for his guys, making sure they had what they needed." Joey was up for Sergeant.

No one is quite sure how he did it from Iraq, but Joey amassed a catalog of 1100 movie DVDs that he lent out for free. The soldiers he served with called him "Blockbuster."

Tragically, Joey's dream of working as an FBI agent never came true. Nine months after arriving in Iraq, he was killed in action when his convoy escort was ambushed in Baghdad. He was just 21 years old. Kevin learned only after his death that Joey had re-enlisted in the Army.

Like any parent who loses a child, Kevin was devastated. He struggled to find his way through the grief, the pain, and the void he felt every single day.

Eight months after Joey was killed, Kevin was invited to go to a Gold Star Parents Honor and Remember event. "I went kicking and screaming," Kevin admitted. But while he was there, he met and began collaborating with another Gold Star father on the Gold Star License Plate Program to honor the parents of fallen soldiers. Kevin seemed to catch fire.

He began to immerse himself in military culture, attending military memorials, parades and pro-troop rallies. He spoke at public events, advocated for Gold Star license plates, and traveled the nation to visit the young men who had served with his son in Iraq.

He even joined the California State Military Reserve (CSMR). When asked why, Kevin said, "I'd sometimes see family members wearing their veteran's cap or shirt at a parade or other public event. I didn't feel right doing that. I felt like I needed to earn the right to wear the uniform of our country, the uniform Joey had worn."

In the CSMR, Kevin works as a chaplain's assistant one weekend a month and one week a year. He works as a force multiplier to the California National Guard providing spiritual and moral support to the troops.

In his son's memory, Kevin founded [Some Gave All](#)--The Joey Graves Foundation to honor the fallen, support those who fight, and serve their families. Years later, Kevin learned that Joey's 4th grade teacher has quietly been donating \$500 a year to the TOSCA Foundation establishing a scholarship in honor of Joey's sacrifice. Similarly, Kevin learned that his son had inspired his 7th grade teacher so much, she named her own child after him, long before Joey's death. Yes, Joey was exceptional!

Kevin also established [The Next Challenge](#), a website created to encourage veterans to seek help when they need it and to offer the resources veterans need.

Currently, Kevin works a Local Interagency Network Coordinator (LINC) for the California Department

LOVE, page 12 >>



<< LOVE

of Veterans Affairs. Serving one of 9 LINC territories in the State, Kevin works to assess the needs of individual veterans, educate them about the benefits and services available to them, refer them to appropriate service providers, and network with other providers to determine veteran outreach best practices. For Kevin, working as a LINC, no two days are alike. "The range of questions and pleas for help I get from and on behalf of veterans is all over the map," Kevin said.

Kevin has learned to turn a life of pain and grief into a life of celebration and respect. "Oddly enough, Joey's death has given me peace," Kevin said. "I don't feel like I have to be right all the time. I could spend the rest of my life giving to others. Joey taught me that."

Last month, on Memorial Day, our nation honored soldiers, like Joey Graves, who in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "gave the last of full measure of devotion" for their country. This month, on Father's Day we will honor fathers, like Kevin Graves, who shows love, honor, and respect for his son with everything he does.

To register as a Gold Star Family, to pay tribute to or to search for a Gold Star Family, go to www.goldstarfamilyregistry.com. To learn about Gold Star Family license plates and other license plates that honor veterans, go to www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/LicensePlates.aspx.



LANCASTER HOME HOSTS PRIDE OF THE NATION EVENT

On Saturday, May 18, 2013, California Veteran Home Lancaster veterans participated in the annual "Pride of the Nation" tribute held at H.W. Hunter Pavilion, Antelope Valley Fairgrounds to honor veterans. This year's theme was "A Nation Carved by Heroes." The event is held annually and was started and presented by the History Classes of organizer Jami Goodreau from Lancaster High School.

The event has two goals; for the community to come together to extend gratitude and appreciation to the men and women who served the country in the United States Armed Forces and for the history students to get a personal view of the history that they were studying. The event has met its goals as hundreds attend and donate in support of both veteran and active service members and students are taking a greater

role in the community in support of Lancaster's veterans and military. This year, the annual Armed Forces Day Dinner, Dance & Tribute celebrated 10 years of honoring veterans.

All veterans who attended were given medals honoring them for their service. Several veterans from the Lancaster Veterans Home attended and were seated in the two front-center tables and given special recognition for their attendance and service. Organizers provided home members with five tickets and discounted other tickets for Veterans Home members so that they could attend.

Proceeds from Pride of the Nation are donated to charities that support our service men and women, their families, and veterans. To date, donations have totaled over \$30,000.

USDVA BRIEFS

2012 REPORT OF THE GULF WAR VETERANS' ILLNESSES TASK FORCE

VA seeks comments on draft Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force report that aims to redefine how care and services are provided.

<http://bit.ly/ZVvcyh>

VA MANDATES OVERTIME TO INCREASE PRODUCTION OF COMPENSATION CLAIMS DECISIONS

As part of its ongoing effort to accelerate the elimination of the disability compensation claims backlog, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced that it is mandating overtime for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices. This surge, which will be implemented through the end of fiscal year 2013, will be targeted to eliminating the backlogged status of claims.

<http://1.usa.gov/11Fc8L6>

DEPARTMENT OF STATE PARTNERS WITH VA ON VETERANS EMPLOYMENT

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Employment Services Office signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Department of State (DOS) on April 10, 2013, to provide

DOS with access to the VA for Vets high-tech, high-touch career readiness services to increase Veteran employment in the DOS workforce.

<http://1.usa.gov/18DjMqO>

WOMEN VETERANS CALL CENTER

On April 23, 2013, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched its new Women Veterans hotline—(855)-VA-WOMEN—an incoming call center that receives and responds to questions from women Veterans, their families, and caregivers across the nation about available VA services and resources.

<http://1.usa.gov/Y48uZ7>

NEW PROCESS CUTS POST-9/11 GI BILL CLAIMS PROCESSING TIMES

As part of its ongoing transformation from paper-based to electronic claims processing, the Department of Veterans Affairs has continued to improve the automated payment of benefits for Veterans participating in the Post-9/11 GI Bill education program. As a result, VA is now providing benefit payments to currently enrolled students in an average of six days – cutting by more than half the processing time experienced during the spring enrollment period last year.

<http://1.usa.gov/Y8RvPK>

VA ANNOUNCES NEW GRANTS TO HELP END VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced two new grants to support Secretary Eric K. Shinseki's goal of ending Veterans' homelessness in 2015. Under these new programs, homeless providers can apply for funding to enhance the facilities used to serve homeless Veterans, and acquire vans to facilitate transportation of this population.

<http://1.usa.gov/186FMHV>

VETERANS, ESPECIALLY FIRST-TIME HOME BUYERS, CAN GET ONE OF THE BEST HOME LOAN VALUES IN CALIFORNIA



The CalVet Home Loan is the best loan on the market especially for veterans purchasing their first home in California. Competitive interest rates and low down to no down payment will help you qualify for a higher loan amount while keeping your monthly payment affordable.

For more information contact the
California Department of Veterans Affairs Home Loan
Program at (800) 952-LOAN (5626) or visit us at
www.calvet.ca.gov/homeloans



The Veterans Home of California—Barstow is a 400-bed, long-term care facility located on 22 acres with a panoramic view of the Mojave River Valley.

The Home offers three levels of care that provide continuity in the lives of Veteran residents in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.

1. Domiciliary Care (Independent living) for Veterans who are self-sufficient and do not require assistance with activities of daily living.
2. Intermediate Nursing Care for Veterans requiring some nursing assistance to perform activities of daily living.
3. Skilled Nursing Care for Veterans who require a higher level of nursing care and require assistance with many activities of daily living.

Amenities include: room and board – three meals plus snacks; medical care and medications; optical care, dental care and podiatry services; transportation services to all medical appointments and off-campus activities; and much more.

Spouses are also eligible to apply with the Veteran.



For admission information, contact:

Veterans Home of California—Barstow
100 E. Veterans Parkway
Barstow, CA 92311
(800) 746-0606, ext. 1
www.calvet.ca.gov

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JUNE 6

Vet2Vet Empowerment Connect Meeting
3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Contact: (909) 801-5762

JUNE 13

Veteran Career/Education/Resource Fair
Commerce Hotel and Casino
6131 East Telegraph Road, Commerce

JUNE 13

Veterans Job and Resource Fair
VFW Post 1981
2026 N. Granada, Madera
Contact: Charles Hunnicutt
(559) 240-2970

JUNE 20

RecruitMilitaryVeteran Career Fair
11:00a.m.-3:00p.m.
Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles
Pre-Register: <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/los-angeles-veteran-job-fair-june-20-2013>

JUNE 21

VA and CalVet Health and Resource Fair
3:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Veterans Memorial Building, Visalia
Contact: Curtis Johnson
(559) 225-6100 ext. 5196

JUNE 26

**California State Assembly
Veterans Recognition Luncheon**
11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Sacramento Convention Center
Contact: Pete Conaty (916) 492-0550

JUNE 27

Agency on Aging Senior Resource Fair
10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Oak Terrace Senior Apartments, Oakhurst

JUNE 29

American Heroes Air Show
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Hansen Dam Sports Complex, Lake View Terrace
Free admission and Parking

JUNE 30 – JULY 7

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Reunion
Union Square, San Francisco
Register: <https://reunion.vhpa.org>

Note: To view full calendar, visit www.calvet.ca.gov/Files/Events_Calendar.pdf

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