

VA Sonora Clinic Dedication

Speech by Frank Smart, Life Member, VVA-391

Good morning and thank you for being here on this momentous occasion for our community's veterans.

First, I would like to thank Kerri Childress of the VA for allowing me to be a part of this ceremony.

Secondly, I need to do something that will save me some money. In the audience is Doug Duffield from Sonora Regional Community Center and he is also president of the 49er Rotary Club of which I am a member. If I don't mention the 49er Rotary Club, he will fine me heavily at next Thursday's meeting. Thank you.

I have always been proud of my seven plus years of active duty in the Army. I am doubly proud to have served my country during a time of crisis served with the famed First Cavalry Division Airmobile as a combat reporter/photographer in the Republic of South Vietnam from April 1968 to April 1969. Thanks to a benevolent God for bringing me home limbs intact, relatively unscathed.

Thirty-three years later, health issues stemming from my duty in Vietnam surfaced. I was diagnosed with Type II Mellitus Diabetes and later on with a mild to moderate case of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

My first visit to the Livermore VA Hospital was eventful and eye-opening for me. Like other veterans, I had heard some horror stories about treatment of veterans at the VA Hospitals. I walked into the building with a chip on each shoulder, daring anyone to treat me discourteously or disrespectfully. The courtesy and professionalism I received really disarmed me. And, they have continued their excellent treatment of me and my family over the years.

This clinic, since its inception in 2002, has also been exceptional. From the time you enter the front door and encounter Bonnie and Robin, you are treated with kindness and respect. The nurses Nancy, Freda, and Judith are exceptional health care professionals and obviously love their work and their clients. And despite the fact that going to see Alicia in the Plebotomy Clinic is sometimes a bit painful, her relaxed and friendly personality makes a distasteful chore bearable. The doctors, Dr. Su, Dr. Brochinni, and my doctor, Dr. Rochelle Valenzuela are top of the line as far as I am concerned. And, by the way, welcome to the new doctor, Dr. Mathu. These doctors practice preventive medicine which is important to me and despite the fact that they are often dealing with hard-headed, macho veterans, they manage to help us in spite of ourselves.

And on the mental health side, our good friend and ardent supporters Pat Noonan and Paul Simmonds have their hands full treating that unseen malady which affects so many combat veterans, PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Their understanding of that condition and their genteel caring ways, go a long way in helping our veterans live full and productive lives.

So, kudos to the health care professionals at this clinic and throughout the VA medical care system.

And, kudos to the Patterson brothers, Scott and Mark, for bringing this building along so fast. We are pleased that the VA has seen fit to continue giving us bigger, better, and more modern treatment facilities in the foothills.

And speaking of the Patterson brothers, who are, by the way, sons of a deceased World War II veteran; they asked me if I could assemble a project to turn this flagpole into a memorial. The VA, of course, required a flagpole on this location. We are currently nearing the end of the design phase of the project and are very near to having complete cost estimates.

The way we are financing this memorial to all generations of veterans is through commemorative bricks. The bricks are an excellent way to honor the service of a loved one, or even your own service. The standard 4s8 brick requires a \$50 donation and the 8x8 paver requires a \$100 donation. There is a table set-up by the flagpole and people are on duty to take your brick order today. We recommend you hurry because as of this morning, we only have 120 bricks left. We have sold 600 bricks and the area will only hold 720 bricks.

The memorial has been designed by well-known local artist Gereon Rios, a Vietnam Veteran, and I have been assisted by Vietnam Veterans John Bright, Dave Bonnot, George Eldridge, Bill Chamberlain, and several others. I thank them for their help and concern over getting this beautiful, brushed stainless steel monument built.

And with that, I say thank you and good day.