

Stand Down proves to be a success

The Veterans to Veterans Outreach '09, A Stand Down in the Foothills, sponsored by Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), Chapter 391 on September 10-12 proved to be an even bigger success than the first one according to Frank Smart, event chair. The Stand Down was held at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds and aimed at helping homeless veterans. There were 27 homeless veterans attending the Stand Down. The youngest was 26 and the oldest was 65. One of those attending was the wife of a deceased veteran. The 50 volunteers put in over 600 hours.

According to Frank Smart, chairman, "We helped 27 veterans this year as opposed to 13 last year and we had more benefits available to them." The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) was present in force to help the veterans access the benefits they earned through their honorable military service.

The main thrust of the Stand Down was to empower veterans to resolve issues which contribute to the cycle of homelessness. Representatives from Rep. George Radanovich, State Senator David Cogdill offices, and County Supervisors Bass and Morrison visited the event.

The term 'Stand Down' was used in Vietnam to describe bringing an infantry unit in from the jungle and 'standing them down' from combat operations for a period of 10 days to two weeks. This time was used to re-equip, attend to minor wounds, train new personnel and allow the troops the opportunity to get showers, hot food, and cold drinks. It was a time to rejuvenate body and mind before returning to combat operations in the jungle. The term 'Stand Down' was first used for the homeless 21 years ago in San Diego. "We're trying to help our less fortunate brothers and sisters break the cycle of homelessness and we were prepared to help women veterans and dependents and we had several show up," Smart added.

There were five homeless veterans from Calaveras County, two from Mariposa, 16 from Tuolumne, and four from other areas. The veterans were picked up by the Sierra Bible Church and LinkLine Company, and private vehicles.

Two of the most popular services at the Stand Down were the Vision Services Providers van from Sacramento. The volunteer crew of optometrists and assistants examined 21 veterans and issued 19 pairs of free prescription glasses. The van was provided free of charge to the VVA-391 Stand Down organizers.

Another popular service was the Access Dental Van which was staffed by local dentist Rick Emery and retired dentist, Dexter Quiggle from South Lake Tahoe. The doctors were aided by dental techs Ericka Hagstrom-Dossi and Lisa Harry. Hagstrom-Dossi runs the Smile Keepers program for the County Superintendent of Schools and was the dental coordinator for the Stand Down and Harry works for Dr. Larry Moe. The dental van, which cost the event \$1,500 a day, performed dental services for 15 veterans which included extractions, cleaning, x-rays, fillings, denture realignment and cleaning, and general dental health care.

The Sonora High School ROP Hairstylist class, under the direction of Kelli Slater, gave the veterans haircuts as they did last year.

The veterans, volunteers, and service providers were provided eight meals during the 2½ days by the 49er Rotary Club, the Twain Harte Rotary Club, retired Army veteran Jerry Tannenhouse, former U.S. Marine Clinton Sontagg from Black Oak Casino, the Sonora Kiwanis Club, the Associates of Vietnam Veterans Chapter 391, Seventh Day Adventist Church and Lighthouse Ministries, and Navy veteran Kim Sundelis, owner of the Moonshine Café in Coulterville.

The Groveland Kiwanis Club provided two winter coats for each veteran attending as they did the previous year. The veterans were given civilian and

surplus military clothing, sleeping bags, sleeping mats, blankets, and other cold weather gear which was all coordinated by co-chair for logistics, Hank Medina and Jim Litke from Groveland. Toiletries, non-perishable foodstuffs and other items were distributed to the veterans to make them safer and more comfortable during the winter months. The military surplus clothing came from Department of Defense Surplus Warehouse in Pennsylvania and shipped free of charge.

Four of the homeless veterans may be qualified to participate in the VA Homeless Veterans Rehabilitation Program. This is a live-in, domiciliary program designed to help the veteran overcome the issues which contribute to their homelessness and assist them to re-enter society living independently. "This was one of the more encouraging aspects of the Stand Down," said Smart.

Doctors, nurses, and administrative personnel from the Sonora VA Medical Clinic were on hand to provide medical examinations and advice as were medical, mental health, and counseling professionals from the VA and from the

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