



# California LEGIONNAIRE

INSIDE



Governor donates \$250k



Skully the voice of homeless vets

FEBRUARY 2022

Official Publication of The American Legion Department of California

CALEGION.ORG



Barbara Lombrano (Photo: Jeff Daly)

## Adjutant stresses community involvement in growing The American Legion

By Bruce Martin  
The American Legion

As adjutant for the Department of California, Barbara Lombrano helps veterans throughout the Golden State get connected with American Legion service officers.

To Lombrano – a member of Post 502 in Moore Park – community

involvement is one of the most important aspects of The American Legion. That has been one of her main missions since she became department adjutant in January 2021.

“It’s been important for me to make sure the Legion is out in the community to make sure the community knows what we are about, and we are out

there helping those in the community,” Lombrano said at last September’s Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey. “As important as membership is, we have been able to connect veterans with our department service officer for services they need to get their benefits in filing claims.”

According to Lombrano,  
**See GROWTH page 3**

## COMMENTS ON WEST L.A. VA DRAFT MASTER PLAN



American Legion national staff tour the West Los Angeles VA during a “System Worth Saving” site visit on Thursday, Feb. 7, 2019. (Photo: Justin L. Stewart/The American Legion)

Larry Van Kuran  
L.A. Region Chair,  
WLA VA Community-Veterans Engagement Board

The currently proposed Draft Master Plan (DMP) for the West Los Angeles VA campus has been under continuous, detailed planning and close scrutiny for the past four (4) years or more. Recently, the plan was presented in detail multiple times to local Veterans in the WLA VA catchment area (i.e., to WLA VA Veteran “customers”), to local residents as well as to the general public for their review and comments.

During this lengthy planning and review process, the Master Plan has been updated and modified continuously, based on frequent input from national Veterans Service Organizations, local Veterans and residents in the area. The plans are still evolving today, as they

**See VA PLAN page 16**



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## Applebee’s Grill hosts Post 603 ‘Flapjack Fundraiser’

By Nestor Aliga  
Post 603

Applebee’s employees and Post 603 Legionnaires are all smiles after their successful fundraiser.

Applebee’s Grill & Bar is a Veteran-friendly restaurant chain known for serving de-licious lunch and dinner meals. But they also have a Flapjack breakfast program that encourages non-profits to

use a restaurant for fund-raising during non-operating hours.

On Jan 15, the Applebee’s in Vallejo hosted another win-win breakfast fund-raiser for The American Legion Manuel L. Quezon Post 603.

Post 603 Commander Arles De Mayo and Vice-Commander & Event Chair Raymond Hart presented to Malia Fiso, Lauren Adams, and their crew a certificate

**See GRILL page 9**

## ‘Vulnerabilities’ plagued VA’s community care program: Report

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

In a Government Accountability Office report released last month, “vulnerabilities” were detected in the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Veterans Community Care program that allowed hundreds of “potentially ineligible providers” to remain in the VA’s referral

system. The Veterans Community Care program allows veterans who cannot easily receive medical treatment from VA medical facilities—usually because of extreme distances—to visit eligible care providers instead.

However, the VA is still responsible for ensuring that community providers are “qualified and

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- Photos should be sent at the highest resolution possible
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- All submissions become the property of The American Legion Department of California. All submitted material is subject to edit, rework and omission. We are not responsible for lost items or misplaced material
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## A month to recognize Black contributions to America

**By Autrey James**  
Department Commander

As we enter this February, a month designated as "Black History Month" I urge us all to rethink this month. I think of it as celebrating the contributions of Black Americans to American history. I want us all to think of this month as a way to celebrate the service of Black Americans who have fought and died on foreign soil and on American soil to make sure the America we love, lives up to the ideals of our founding fathers.

As a Black American Veteran, I know that I stand on the shoulders of giants who have paved the way for me. I am both grateful for the path they have laid and aware that it is my responsibility to pave the way for others who come after me.

As a Black American and a Veteran, I know that deeply ingrained in us are both the horrors we have endured in America and the pride in which we have continuously and faithfully served her. The history of my own family is but one example.

My grandfather answered the call to arms when his nation, no, our nation needed him. James Waiters

Sr. of New Orleans Louisiana was enlisted into the United States Army and went overseas for his country during World War I.

He never got the opportunity to fight for his country because at the time our country denied him that opportunity.

At that time our young country still had much to learn about living up to the ideals upon which it was founded.

My Grandfather served honorably, came home after the war, found work, took a wife and raised a family.

My grandmother's youngest brother, Raymond Williams, also served our country when he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and trained at Montford Point making him one of the first Black Americans to integrate the United States Marine Corps. He also served honorably, returned home and raised a family.

Both of these men raised families that contributed to this nation in the armed services, then continued to serve as police officers, teachers, peace corps volunteers and many other ways. My family is no different than many other American families in its commitment to service to this nation.

The difference may be that my grandfather and great uncle proudly and willingly served our nation in spite of the treatment towards Black Americans, particularly, but not exclusively, in the southern United States.

These men instilled in my family the love of country, people, and service to this nation. They believed that their service would pave the way towards making equality a reality as opposed to an idea.

Black Americans like my grandfather and great uncle have long believed that service to this nation in time of need would force America to live up to the ideals that its founding fathers wrote of but did not implement in their time. The men of my family believed that war and service would be transformative for America. After all, how could any nation expect its citizens to go abroad and fight for democracy and then continue to deny democracy to those very citizens who risked their lives for the "American" way of life. My grandfather and great uncle were right. Their service was transformative for America but what they did not realize was though the fight over there was over it

**See HISTORY page 15**

## NEW LAWS ON THE BOOKS TO BENEFIT CALIFORNIA VETERANS, FAMILIES

by Jeff Jardine  
CalVet Public  
Information Officer

Some new California laws will offer the state's 1.6 million veterans more of what they need in life and also what they might want afterward.

More veterans can now obtain a CalVet Home loan at lower, more competitive interest rates. Disabled veterans' estates will have an easier time securing local property tax exemptions. And finally, deceased veterans can have an American flag with them when cremated.

These are among the laws Governor Gavin Newsom signed in 2021 to take effect in 2022:

CalVet's century-old Veterans Home Loan Program got a legislative facelift that will allow the program to better serve a broader population of California veterans.

The changes also will allow CalVet Home Loans

to offer more competitive market rates, which both increases the veteran's buying power by lowering monthly payments, and helps to retain existing veteran borrowers by allowing them to refinance at rates closer to those offered by private sector lenders.

Another new law allows the executor, administrator or other legal representative of a living veteran's estate, or a trustee of a deceased veteran's trust, to file for a disabled veterans property tax exemption with the county assessor.

And a U.S. military veteran can now be cremated with an American flag.

The request to the crematorium must be made by the person or persons with the authority to dispose of the veteran's remains.

The new law exempts the process from the United States Code, which otherwise dictates the protocol involving the retirement or disposal of an American flag.

## Growing an organization

From GROWTH page 1

many veterans are often afraid or hesitant to request all of the benefits they are entitled to because they are under the impression, they will have to hire an attorney.

That is where The American Legion comes in.

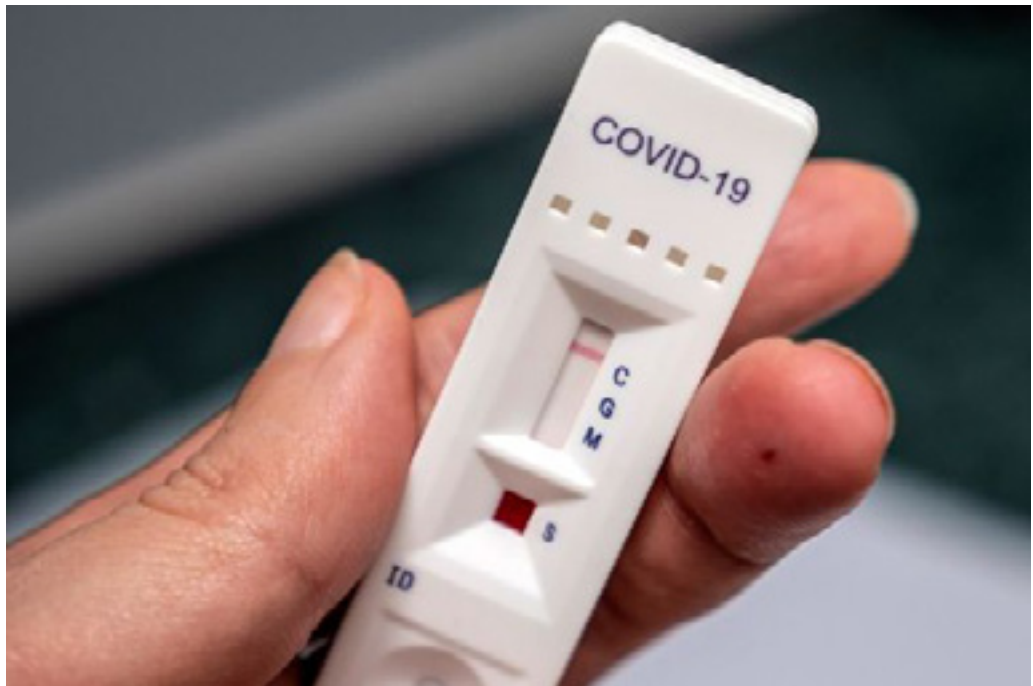
"They ask us, 'What does the Legion charge us to do it?'" Lombrano continued. "We charge them nothing. I was a veteran service officer through the Legion in the Los Angeles area. Our service officers are able to connect them with the resources and help them file their disability claims, or maybe they have already had a service-connected disability and they have

never filed for some things or get an increase in their rating or different things like that. And, their family members, too."

Being a veteran and a member of the Legion is something that gives Lombrano great pride. It's part of her family heritage.

Her grandfather served in both world wars. He was a "Doughboy" in the Army during World War I and a Seabee in World War II. Both of Lombrano's parents served in the Navy, where they met and were later married. Every one of her mom's brothers were involved in the service, including one who was a Green Beret in Vietnam.

Lombrano's son served in the U.S. Army for six years



## Order your free at-home COVID-19 test kits

The Biden administration's new at-home COVID testing program launched in recent weeks, allowing people to order the tests online.

"I just ordered mine,"

said American Legion member Marilyn Rideaux. "It will take 7-12 days to receive but they are free."

By visiting COVIDtests.gov, a kit of four free at home COVID-19 tests

can be ordered and will be delivered through U.S. mail.

The program limits the number of orders to one per household, or four testing kits.

and is now a trauma nurse.

Lombrano joined the Navy from 1983, when she started on the USS Jason as the yeoman for the Engineering Department. Some routine dental work put her on a different path when one of the dentists talked her into becoming a dental technician from 1984-1988. She came off active duty at the Coronado Naval Base and entered the reserves.

She was later recalled when the Gulf War began in 1991. Lombrano became a hospital corpsman and went over to the Middle East with the Marines for nine months.

She has 13 years of active duty all together and has taken that experience to The American Legion.

"At that time, what females were allowed to do in the Legion was very limited," Lombrano said. "It's come a long way, but in regard to females, it has a long way to go. We need to do better getting more females involved in the Legion. Even for myself, when I was in the military and got out, I didn't

consider myself a veteran. Everyone when they think of a veteran thinks of a male sitting in the bar telling war stories.

"In the Legion itself, we are trying to rebrand ourselves. There is nothing wrong with sitting in the bar having a drink and that comradery, but we are so much more than that. To me, it's very important for us to be out in the community, for them to see what our missions are. We need to get better at patting ourselves on the back and say this is what we are doing for our citizens and youth, Americanism, all of these different things."

Lombrano, along with many other members of The American Legion at national offices and the various departments around the world, hope to encourage younger veterans to become members.

"We have to have things that are more family oriented," Lombrano said. "The younger veterans have families and are working trying to raise their family. They want stuff to do. They don't want to just come to

meetings. We need to have more events that interest them and collaborate with these other service organizations.

"We also have to become more diverse. It's very important. Just like anything else, diversity is what helps grow membership. Anything in life, the more diverse you are, the better solutions you come up with. We need to be more diverse."

The State of California is rich in diversity with a strong military history. Lombrano believes there are many veterans within the massive state that could help the Legion grow, simply by becoming members.

"Here in California, we have so many veterans and so many military bases that it astounds a lot of us how many veterans we could be reaching out to that we could get them involved in becoming members," she said.

—Read the full article:  
[www.bit.ly/legion-growth](http://www.bit.ly/legion-growth)  
first published on  
[Legion.org](http://Legion.org)



## The big sky race: A brief history of The American Legion's 'Aerial Round-up'

By Kevin Burns  
Chair  
Aerospace Commission

I recently, received a message from the Department Historian, Fred Shacklett, as he had been contacted by a family member of Dr. Charles Curtis "CC" Wallingsford who had found a certificate identical to the one in the picture.

The Department Historian found the certificate shown in this article at the Department Headquarters, and it is made out to Ralph Heywood, former owner of Heywood's Dry Goods Store in Avalon and a member of the Catalina Island American Legion Post.

They were looking to know what the story behind the certificate was.

The American Legion Aerial Round-up started as part of a four-part membership drive program in 1930, but didn't become official until Eddie Rick-enbacker restarted the Aeronautics Commission in 1932.

The American Legion Aeronautics Commission had run into a brick wall in trying to get congress to fund aviation for defense and the voice of the Legion had been weakened when the American Legion airplane had crashed and the race to Paris was won by Charles Lindbergh.

The National Aerospace Commission went for three years without a Chair, and the Department Commissions had looked inward for their aviation activities.

In the 1930s, there were four major phases to the American Legion membership program; the annual telegraphic roll call held at the November conference in Indianapolis, the December 31st Christmas cleanup featured by about a third of the Departments, an annual radio round-up in March climaxed on the 18th of that month with a national radio celebration



of the Legion's birthday, and the annual aerial round-up on May 1st when membership cards were brought to national headquarters in Indianapolis by airplanes.

The aerial round-up, was the most dramatic phase of the Legion's membership campaign.

At dawn early in May, airplanes soared into the sky at Portland, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and New York City, with membership cards and dues obtained since the March radio round-up.

As the airplanes flew towards Indianapolis, they picked-up at designated stops the reports of other Departments.

Many of the Departments located centrally sent their reports in their own planes.

Thus in the early years of the program, dozens of planes arrived in Indianapolis where they were met by Legion National officers who took charge of the reports.

By the fourth year of the program, the aerial round-up netted approximately 35,000 new members in 1934 and was seen as a tremendous success.

Since the very beginning of the American Legion, Legionnaires had worked to promote aviation, not just in the military services, but in the civilian sectors also.

Thus, when Department Aeronautics Commissioners approached the military leaders and aviation industry in their states, they were eager to help.

By 1936, airlines like TWA and Eastern were transporting Aeronautics delegations to the round-up, as well as Army Air Corp and National Guard units.

In addition to the Department Commanders and Aeronautics Commissioners, additional seats to the annual round-up were offered to Legion leadership that attained the highest goals for the drive.

Each year the annual round-up surpassed the goals and set new records for membership; and this was through the worst years of the depression.

More and more events were planned for around the day of card delivery, and so many planes flew in that thousands thronged to the Indianapolis airport to see the planes circle

overhead and land.

By the end of the decade, around 100 military, commercial, and private planes were converging on the Indianapolis municipal airport bearing cargoes of membership cards.

The National Commander sponsored an annual banquet at the Indianapolis Athletic Club for all those flying in to deliver cards, and famous pilots and aviation industry leaders were invited as guest speakers.

On 7 April 1940, the round-up had restored the American Legion to the coveted million member mark.

The ninth annual aerial round-up in 1941 landed on a day with perfect weather for flying and huge crowds went to the airport to see the event.

In addition to the usual trophies and other awards, there were many friendly side wagers between department commanders as to who could surpass membership goals by the widest margins.

California often got the trophy for having flown the most miles on their trek to Indianapolis; zigzagging

across the country to pick-up membership cards from other Departments.

The National Aerial Round-up was suspended during the war (1942-1945).

But in 1946 the successful program was quickly restored and it tripled the membership of the American Legion, surpassing three million members.

By this time, legionnaire Harry Truman was the president of the United States, and he personally got involved with the round-up signing the card of the member who broke the three million mark.

After World War II an Air Force was created, something that the American Legion had fought for during the previous decades, and military National Guard and Reserve units were formalized with tight controls.

The commercial sector was the success that the Aeronautics Commission had also promoted during the lean depression years prior to the war, and it became less feasible to divert airplanes and aviation resources to the annual membership round-up.

The "National Aerial Round-up" program ended in 1949, with the "National Air Mail Round-up" starting in 1950; although many Departments continued the "Aerial Round-up" within their states while participating in the "National Air Mail Round-up."

Here are photos of some of the various cap pins that were awarded during the programs.







Maj. Devon Meister, pilot, and Maj. Ashley Lundry, aerial reconnaissance weather officer, are members of the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, referred to as the Hurricane Hunters, which is a unit in the Air Force Reserve's 403rd Wing at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Heather Heiney)

## VA's community care

From CARE page 1

competent.”

In California, the Community Care Provider program has been beneficial to veterans living in more rural communities between major VA medical centers.

After investigating a sample size of 800,000 community care providers from across the United States, the GAO uncovered roughly 1,600 providers that were either deceased, barred from working with the federal government, or had lost their medical license. In one case, for example, a care provider had been granted admission into the program despite losing their medical license in 2019 and documentation noting that the provider “posed a clear and immediate danger to public health and safety.”

Moreover, the investigation found that while the VA and its vendors have a system in place to remove potentially ineligible providers after a disqualifying event, these “existing controls missed some providers who could have been identified with enhanced controls and more consistent implementation of standard operating procedures.”

Despite the large number of ineligible providers, however, the GAO’s Jan. 13 report does not list any instances where the VA recommended veterans to unqualified or incompetent care providers.

Additionally, the GAO learned that the Community Care Provider program’s applications process may be vulnerable to fraud.

Readers can read the full GAO report as well as the department’s recommendations here:

<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-103850.pdf>

## SURVEY SEEKS WOMEN VETERANS NOT USING EARNED BENEFITS AND SERVICES

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

The Center for Women Veterans is conducting an anonymous survey of female veterans who aren’t using their earned VA

benefits and services.

The survey takes 5 minutes and is anonymous, said Renee Andreassen, Women Veterans program manager for the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, in an email. The survey includes

questions mostly about demographics and whether women veterans feel they have access to a nearby VA health facility.

The Center for Women Veterans is charged with ensuring Department of Veterans Affairs programs

designed for female veterans adequately serves them. To learn more, visit [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet).

To participate in the survey, visit [survey.voice.va.gov/cwv-women-veterans](http://survey.voice.va.gov/cwv-women-veterans).

## CAMPAIGN TO CREATE FIRST CALIFORNIA LICENSE PLATE HONORING WOMEN VETERANS IN FINAL STAGES

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

Assuming one last hurdle can be cleared, the California DMV will begin offering a new license plate honoring women veterans, the first of its kind in the state.

The move comes after the Foundation for Women Veterans successfully petitioned the California Department of Veterans Affairs to include a special plate specifically honoring women veterans among its offerings.

The only remaining step is for the foundation

to receive at least 50 paid applications for the special plate, after which the DMV can then begin offering the plate to eligible applicants.

Applications cost \$50 plus \$2 for a processing fee and can be found here: Woman Veteran License Plate – Foundation for Women Warriors

Currently, California only offers a general license plate honoring all veterans.

Provided that the Foundation for Women Warriors reaches the proper threshold, California will join 18 other states

and territories offering a license plate that specifically honors women veterans.

Foundation CEO Jodie Grenier says, “this is not an initiative to say women veterans need their own

thing.

But until we get there until society realizes that women are veterans as well, this is just another way that we can honor the service of these women.”



A rendering of the first California license plate honoring women veterans created by U.S. Air Force veteran Jan Kays. (Photo: FoundationforWomenWarriors.org)



# CALEGION CALENDAR

Visit [caLegion.org/calendar](http://caLegion.org/calendar)



### Feb. 12 - Four Chaplains Day Service

A service will be held in Sanger to honor The Four Chaplains on Saturday, Feb. 12 at 12:30 p.m. Reception will follow with light refreshments. RSVP to Department's Programs and Fundraising Coordinator, Cheryl, at [cheryl@calegion.org](mailto:cheryl@calegion.org) or (559) 875-8387 by Feb. 2.



### Feb. 17 - DEC Meeting

The Department of California Executive Committee will hold its monthly meeting online at 7 p.m. on Feb. 17.



### Feb. 27 - Oratorical Contest Finals

Post 29 in Martinez will host the Department Oratorical Contest Finals. For more information, visit [calegion.org/oratorical-contests](http://calegion.org/oratorical-contests).

### March - Victory 360 Fundraising

Victory 360 is the Department of California's direct mailing campaign company. Be on the lookout for another fundraising campaign in March. In November, the Department awarded \$7,000 in sweepstakes winnings to eight lucky participants.



### March 11-13 - Spring DEC Meeting

The Department of California Executive Committee will hold its Spring meeting in person at American Legion Post 56 in Santa Maria March 11-13. For more information, and to download the flier, visit [calegion.org/calendar-events](http://calegion.org/calendar-events).



### March 26 - Dept. Commander Dinner

The "Teamin' 23rd" District will host its annual Commander's Dinner on Saturday, March 26 at American Legion South Gate Post 335. The guest of honor and keynote speaker will be Autrey James, commander of The American Legion Department of California.

Dinner is \$30 per person. Social hour begins at 5 p.m. with dinner at 6 p.m. Buy tickets online: [www.bit.ly/d23-dinner-2022](http://www.bit.ly/d23-dinner-2022).

Contact Marilyn Rideaux: (310) 293-1246 or [aide\\_deptcmdr@att.net](mailto:aide_deptcmdr@att.net). Should the need arise to cancel this event, all tickets will be refunded.



### April 15 - Golf Tournament by the Sea

American Legion Post 512, Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA is hosting its First Annual Charity Golf Tournament on April 15 at Pebble Beach's Old Del Monte Golf Course.

For more information, visit [post512golf.com](http://post512golf.com) or contact John Wickham: [johnwvtech@gmail.com](mailto:johnwvtech@gmail.com) / (408)315-5320.



### April 18 - DEC Meeting

The Department of California Executive Committee will hold its monthly meeting online at 7 p.m. on April 18.



### May 14 - Armed Forces Ball

The 6th District will hold its 1st Annual Armed Forces Day Ball on the evening of Saturday, May 14 at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. The proceeds from this black-tie gala will benefit the American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors program.



### May 19 - DEC Meeting

The Department of California Executive Committee will hold its monthly meeting online at 7 p.m. on May 19.



### June 18-25 - 2022 California Boys State Program

For more information, visit [calegion.org/boys-state](http://calegion.org/boys-state).

### June 23 - Pre-Convention DEC in Visalia

### June 26 - Post-Convention DEC in Visalia



## NEW VA POLICY WOULD ELIMINATE COPAY FOR MENTAL HEALTH VISITS FOR VETERANS AT HIGH RISK FOR SUICIDE

By **Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

The Department of Veterans Affairs last month announced that veterans identified as high risk for suicide by a VA clinician will no longer be required to pay a copayment for outpatient mental health treatment if a newly proposed policy is adopted by the VA after public review.

Additionally, copayments for medications prescribed to veterans at high risk for suicide will be reduced and medications associated with overdosing will be prescribed in smaller amounts to limit overdose risk. In an example given by the VA, caregivers would “prescribe a seven-day supply of medication with four refills rather than prescribing one 30-day supply of the medication.”

Currently, veterans have to pay either a \$15 or \$50 copayment per mental health visit regardless of their risk for suicide.

As of yet, the VA has

not commented on how significant the copayment reduction would be for medications.

Research shows increased frequency of outpatient mental health encounters for high-risk Veterans reduces their risk of suicide,” VA Secretary Denis McDonough said. “Through these efforts, VA will continue to address this national public health crisis by further eliminating financial burdens on veterans which may negatively influence their engagement in mental health treatment and their critical medication availability.”

The proposed policy is currently awaiting public feedback via the Federal Register through March 7.

Readers can view the entire policy change proposal here.

Additionally, free resources on veteran suicide prevention can be found here: [www.va.gov/health-care/health-needs-conditions/mental-health/suicide-prevention](http://www.va.gov/health-care/health-needs-conditions/mental-health/suicide-prevention)



According to CalVet, Native Americans serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at a higher rate than any other demographic. (Photo: CalVet.Ca.Gov)

## VA: PARTNERSHIP RENEWED WITH INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE ACCESS FOR NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

By **Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

The Department of Veterans Affairs renewed its partnership with the Indian Health Service to improve access to healthcare services for the 145,000 Native American veterans living across the United States.

Together, the two departments aim to improve overall access and quality of healthcare, improve ease of enrollment for eligible veterans, better integrate electronic records, and increase department cooperation in areas such as “technology, partners, training, human resources, services, facilities, communication, and reimbursement.”

As part of the deal announced in November, the VA and IHS will also work together on the newly announced Rural Native Veteran Health Care Navigator Program.

The VA says the program is intended to help Native American veterans living in rural communities—approximately 50% of the total population, according to U.S. Census data—overcome obstacles to health care by “coordinating care” and better facilitating resource sharing among federally recognized tribes, IHS, and several unnamed state and federal agencies.

### NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS IN CALIFORNIA

Preliminary data from the 2020 U.S. Census

indicates that California is home to more Native American veterans than any other.

Additionally, the California Department of Veterans Affairs notes that Native Americans serve in the U.S. Armed Forces at a higher rate than any other demographic.

Despite this, a disproportionate percentage of Native American veterans are homeless or live below the poverty line.

In addition to the programs offered by the VA, CalVet offers several programs intended to improve quality of life for Native American veterans.

Readers can reach out to California American Legion for free help with VA services and benefits.



The VA is considering a new policy that would reduce copayment for certain medications for veterans deemed to be at high risk for suicide by a VA clinician. (Photo: Olga DeLawrence)

## VETERANS EMPLOYMENT PILOT PROGRAM

The Department of Labor announced on Jan. 11 that it is adding eight off-base locations, including centers in Los Angeles and San Diego, to an off-base, pilot version of its existing Veterans’ Employment and Training Service, or VETS program.

The purpose of VETS is to help assist active duty service members, veterans,

and spouses in transitioning to the civilian job market.

The off-base version of VETS is set to begin on Jan. 18, 2022, and has already secured five years of funding. This specific program offers “10, two-hour, instructor-led employment skills and workforce development workshops” for veterans and their spouses.

Additionally, veterans currently serving in the National Guard or Reserves are still able to participate.

The department says the eight locations were chosen because they are “areas where large veteran populations face high rates of unemployment” according to data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

—**Christian Southards**



## NEW SCAM TARGETS VETERANS

By **Janice Bowman**

Military & Veteran Affairs  
Battleship IOWA

Friends, I was almost scammed recently. BE AWARE and do not fall for it! \*\*Small (just to get home) money request scams\*\*\*

I received a call from a VA SSVF provider asking me if I could help a marine veteran with a wife and 3 year old child who were stranded at a train station in Fresno and needed a little bit of money for train

tickets to get back home to Oklahoma.

After hearing the heart-breaking background story about the veteran, I agreed to reach out to my contacts and find out what I could do to get this veteran, wife, and child home safely. Keep in mind that when the SSVF person called me, I had assumed they had already vetted the veteran (confirmed this persons military background), however, I learned later she had not.

So, I called the "vet" and he picked right up. He

confirmed the story that the SSVF provider shared with me: he was stuck at the Fresno train station, had slept there for 3 days with his wife and 3 year old child, needs to get home, came to CA for a funeral, never intended to stay as long as they did....

The "vet" explained to me that he had already been able to receive \$150 from the local VFW 8900, had \$64 of his own, and only needed an additional \$51 (not including food) to purchase his train tickets and get home. His

VA disability does not get direct deposited but gets mailed to his home in OK. He doesn't have a bank account and only has access to a pre-paid card that is attached to a Cash-App account. Venmo would be an acceptable form of payment because he could transfer the funds to his Cash-App / pre-paid card that way.

Of course I'm thinking that this was going to be a pain trying to get a vet and his family to coordinate a financial assistance pick up in Fresno especially since they don't have access to a car and are limited in their funds. Also, how much time and effort do I really want to put into this when the request isn't for that large of an amount... maybe I can save time and hassle by just sending him my own money and get back to what I was doing....

Well... that's the scam. People are banking on YOU not feeling like putting the effort out to do the vetting process needed to confirm military history and going through the application process needed to obtain financial assistance.

They know they can get a couple of people like me or

the SSVF provider to send the \$51 or more and be done with it.

How did I find out? I called my buddies in Fresno and the surrounding area. Thanks to James JD Bennett for letting me know about this well-known scam that has been spreading like wildfire up in the Fresno area. Thank you, Commander Autrey James for sending me contacts for other posts nearby and suggestions for who else to call.

Turns out that there are multiple people making calls to many non-profits, most of them veteran service orgs but also to senior centers and other social service orgs who all have similar stories. VFW Post 8900 answered their phone for me and the man who answered confirmed he gave the "vet" money out of his own pocket (not post money). It wasn't the amount that my vet told me he received and he was also using a different name and was wearing Navy fatigues. The name my "vet" gave me was never used at VFW 8900. In the end, do your vetting if you can and don't fall for a sob story. Be aware of this scam and require proof of service.

## GAO: OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO IMPROVE VA ACCOUNTABILITY AT COMMUNITY LIVING CENTERS FOR ELDERLY VETERANS

By **Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

In twin reports made publicly available on Dec. 30, the Government Accountability Office found several opportunities, some of which address a lack of transparency and efficiency, to improve care and accountability at Department of Veterans Affairs Community Living Centers, or CLCs.

The first GAO report found that the VA lacks a clear system through which veterans or loved

ones can lodge complaints at CLCs.

Among the findings, the GAO says, "most complaints are likely not documented" and that the VA has no structure in place to send critical complaints to top VA leadership, meaning all complaints are handled at the CLC level with no oversight.

Additionally, GAO says "that CLC residents and their representatives do not receive accurate and complete information about how to file complaints," with the

report noting that this violates the VA's mandate and objective to be "transparent and openly accountable."

Lastly, the investigation found that CLC staff do not always follow existing policies for accommodating complaints.

The GAO does not offer specific numbers, however.

The second GAO report similarly focuses on CLC care, first noting that between 2015 and 2019, overall quality of care improved. Roughly 55% of CLCs reported fewer

issues, about 10% reported the same number of issues, and the remaining 35% noted more issues.

One possible detriment to improving care: the second report says that the VA does not currently survey CLC residents about their quality of care, though the VA plans to do so in the future.

The GAO also notes that the VA does not explicitly address where VA policies supersede state mandates for quality care, possibly allowing some veterans to receive care not up to the VA's standards.

Above all, neither GAO report indicates which CLC locations experienced more complaints or issues. However, the VA's own public rating system—which is updated quarterly—suggests that CLCs in California are largely well-reviewed.

Of the 11 CLCs in California, all but three locations had fewer than five stars (the best score). CLCs in Martinez and San Francisco both had four stars, while the CLC in Menlo Park, CA only scored three out of five stars.



# Flapjack Fundraiser for Veterans

From GRILL page 1

of appreciation that states, “We are grateful to Applebee’s of Vallejo for today’s fund-raising breakfast because the proceeds will be used for various events that honor our local Veterans. We also thank Applebee’s restaurants across the country for serving over 10.3 million free meals since 2008 on every Veterans Day in honor of our country’s heroes.

“We are sincerely appreciative of Applebee’s loyalty, dedication, and respect for all current and former members of the United States Armed Forces, our families and friends, and for our great Nation.”

As reported in [www.TimesHeraldOnline.com](http://www.TimesHeraldOnline.com), Applebee’s General Manager Malia Fiso stated, “We



couldn’t have this event in 2020 and 2021.

“It’s good to have this event back because it

makes it seem like things are going back to normal a little. I really love this event and so does the rest of the

crew. It’s quite special and this and Veteran’s Day are two of my favorite days of the year. We go all out

and have a whole section decorated in tribute to the veterans. I’m tearing up just thinking about it.”

## NORTH KOREA OPENS THE DOOR FOR A FORMAL END TO THE KOREAN WAR NEARLY 70 YEARS AFTER ARMISTICE

By **Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

South Korean President Moon Jae-in recently announced that South Korea, North Korea, the United States and China have all agreed “in principle” to formally end the Korean War.

The move comes nearly 70 years after the war

unofficially ended in an armistice.

President Moon later noted that South Korea would continue to seek a formal end to the war even as North Korea signaled it would only agree if the United States ceased its policy of “hostility,” likely referring to longstanding U.S. Armed Forces stationed in South Korea

as well as its pursuit of a denuclearized North Korea.

### THE KOREAN WAR

The Korean War has roots in World War II, when Korea was occupied by Imperial Japan for much of the early 20th century. When Japan was finally defeated in 1945, Korea was divided into two nations along the 38th parallel by the United States and the Soviet Union.

Five years later, and after frequent border skirmishes, North Korea invaded its southern neighbor. Within a month, U.S. and United Nations forces began pushing back against the invading force while the Soviet Union and China provided the North with limited materiel

support. While U.S. and allied forces were able to successfully push the North Korean Army out of South Korea, and nearly to the Chinese border, this progress was lost when Chinese forces supported by the Soviet Air Force joined the North Korean war effort.

U.S. and U.N. forces were in turn driven back to the 38th parallel where the remainder of the war saw limited gains for either side; although, South Korea’s capital—which had twice been taken over the course of the war—was eventually recaptured for a final time by allied forces.

In 1953, and with neither side willing to risk escalating the conflict, a ceasefire agreement was reached. A demilitarized zone was

created along the 38th parallel and the war has been without an official end since.

### KOREAN WAR MEMORIAL IN ORANGE COUNTY

During the war, 36,492 U.S. servicemembers were killed, including 2,611 Californians.

This past Veterans Day, the city of Fullerton held a dedication ceremony for the first Korean War memorial listing the name of every U.S. servicemember that gave their life defending South Korea.

The memorial was funded by the government of South Korea and public donations, and organized by the Orange County Korean War Memorial Committee.





## CALIFORNIA VETERAN'S PODCAST WINS INNOVATION AWARD

The American Legion Tango Alpha Lima podcast, co-hosted by California American Legion Membership Director Jeff Daly, won the Innovative Communication Program Award from the Indiana Society of Association Executives (ISAE) on Dec. 2.

The award recognizes "any improved or innovative tactic your association has used to communicate to its membership."

Specifically, Tango Alpha Lima was awarded for the ambitious 20-20-20 series, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks. American Legion National Media &

Communications Chairman Dave Wallace praised the effort. "This series demonstrates the value of the medium in being an effective tool in communicating with members and extending our reach to other veterans," he said. "Even though Tango Alpha Lima has only been around for 20 months, its growth in popularity and performance have demonstrated just how valuable it is."

Judges noted the effort, saying, "This was an extraordinary effort that began in April as the idea was conceived. Not only did the effort produce compelling interviews with unique guests, it



*This very obvious photo illustration adds Tango Alpha Lima podcast co-host Jeff Daly on stage during an award presentation by the Indiana Society of Association Executives.*

drove metrics to new heights. While the stories were sometimes tragic and heart-breaking, the

experiment illustrated the power of the medium as the team continues to find innovative ways to reach,

build and maintain its audience."

*Article originally published on Legion.org.*

## Who is Helmets for Heroes mascot 'Major Change'?

By John "Durk" Durkin  
Globex Branding

Everyone has been asking who this dashing young, suave and debonair man in uniform is.

Well, let me introduce Major Change. The Major was born out of a desire for the Ways and Means Commission together with the CAL-VAR Foundation to place a spokesman into the forefront and begin representing our VSO program through the Helmets for Heroes (H4H) campaign.

The campaign was designed to support our VSO Program which has been lacking greatly and for years has had to rely heavily on the Department for its support and limiting other programs from the budget.

Since the beginning, the Department's front man representative was Chuck "Bulldog" Camarato.

Helmets for Heroes was Chuck's idea and he is the one who initially launched that vision by patenting the name and design of mini helmet "piggy" banks to be placed at local businesses across California for donations.

Knowing it is not a single person project, the board began looking for ways to market outside the box and cover all the possible avenues in reaching the public for help.

So, we were sure we could somehow improve on our overall outreach, with a branded spokesperson who was not only as good looking as Chuck but could also be in multiple locations at the same time while delivering our H4H message and required needs.

In fact, we are just wrapping up a couple more items that need to be in place, and we will be launching an online campaign early this year.

The placement of helmets in businesses and attending special events will also ramp up as the weather warms up and hopefully this pandemic lightens up.

After giving it a lot of thought, coupled together with long discussions and debates, we decided what better representation could we possibly have on staff than a walking talking helmet called Major Change.

The team decided in all fairness, he should after all, favor the softer side of Chuck in honor of his pioneering the project.

So my company, Globex Branding, tried our best to find Chuck's softer side (a near impossible task), but we feel we accomplished that goal; and thus we now have Major Change. The board originally wanted to call him Capt. Change, but due to a slogan Jere Romano came up with for the campaign — "You bet your change will help a

vet" — we decided to give our captain a promotion up to Major and begin calling him Major Change, thus allowing his name and message to truly broadcast how major your personal participation represents when you support this vital campaign.

The Helmets for Heroes Campaign is designed to raise the funds needed to help our veterans struggling with their paperwork and communication with the VA, by providing highly trained advocates to represent them, cut through the red tape and get them the benefits they not only deserve but have also earned.

The Department of California does not charge our veterans for this service. You can learn more at: [www.helmetsforheroes.org](http://www.helmetsforheroes.org).

Feel free to click on the donate button and make a healthy contribution and support our cause,

because we all know it really is a "Veterans Supporting Veterans" organization; and you will be the one who will make the difference.

We also need help with volunteers as well, see the contacts below and get involved:

— **John "Durk" Durkin**, [globexbranding@gmail.com](mailto:globexbranding@gmail.com)

[www.Globexbranding.com](http://www.Globexbranding.com)  
Internet Marketing & Graphic Design — Janice Somers

Chair, Ways and Means Commission, [janicesomers@charter.net](mailto:janicesomers@charter.net)

— **Jeff Freeman**, chair, Helmets for Heroes Committee, a subcommittee of the Ways and Means Commission, [candjf@future-tek.com](mailto:candjf@future-tek.com)

— **Bill Bryant**, a real go-getter who leads by example in placing helmets in businesses and attending special events throughout Northern California to collect funds, and contributing to the Helmets for Heroes Campaign; [btbryant@comcast.net](mailto:btbryant@comcast.net)







“Veterans Row,” pictured here in May 2020, was cleared in early November by the city of Los Angeles and volunteers, but nearly 4,000 homeless veterans are still living in the city. (Photo: John Sequeira)

## GAO REVIEW SUPPORTS VA’S CHANGES TO VETERAN FAMILIES PROGRAM, LIKELY ENSURING NEW POLICY WILL BE UPHELD

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

The Government Accountability Office recently released a report supporting the Department of Veterans Affairs changes to its Supportive Services for Veterans Families, or SSVF, program.

As previously reported by California American Legion news, the changes essentially allow the VA to cover a higher percentage of rent costs for veterans living in high-cost markets, such as in Los Angeles or San Francisco, California.

Before, SSVF grants would pay for up to 35% of a veteran’s “reasonable rent,” however, the VA’s new policy increased the maximum rate to 50%, in addition to lengthening the maximum number of

days homeless veterans and their veterans can stay in emergency housing to 60.

The program was allowed to bypass requirements set forth by the Congressional Review Act, which would have required a 60-day hold so the legislature or other governing bodies could review said changes before the program could become effective.

However, the VA contested that the delay “would have significant negative health consequences to homeless and at-risk veterans” and issued the policy changes as an interim final rule.

GAO reviewed this ruling, including the VA’s estimates of the economic impact of increasing funding for the SSVF program, and found both to be satisfactory.

### VETERANS HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The VA is currently working to house over 500 Los Angeles-area veterans before a Dec. 31 deadline set by Secretary Denis McDonough.

In early November, the VA cleared the veterans encampment popularly known as “Veterans Row” outside its West Los Angeles medical facility.

Most veterans removed from the camp are currently living on the facility’s campus in temporary housing. The VA has not released regular updates on the effort’s progress.

Current estimates suggest between 3,000 and 4,000 homeless veterans are living in Los Angeles alone.

## GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY FOR ORANGE COUNTY VETERANS CEMETERY HELD IN ANAHEIM

By Christian Southards  
Staff Writer

Elected officials, representatives from local veteran service organizations, and California veterans held a groundbreaking ceremony on Dec. 8 for a proposed veterans cemetery that’s now slated to be built in the Gypsum Canyon area of Anaheim Hills.

As reported by The Orange County Register, several dozen veterans and officials spread a 30-by-60-foot American flag over the hill to commemorate a long anticipated step in the process.

Earlier that day, State Senator Tom Umberg (D-Santa Ana) amended a bill allowing the California Department of Veterans Affairs to consider Gypsum Canyon as the final location for the cemetery. However, the bill will not be discussed by the State Senate until January and it remains possible for CalVet or other parties to object to the location.

In a Dec. 8 press release,

the Senator says, “after discussions with CalVet, it has become clear that any new potential site will need a thorough state examination and analysis. I’m thrilled the County has made a financial commitment towards this process and our veterans and I’m happy to use SB 43 for this feasibility study.”

According to the Voice of Orange County, Irvine Councilman Larry Agran, who has previously opposed building the cemetery at the Gypsum Canyon site, held a press conference proposing the construction of a veterans memorial at Great Park if the location is no longer being considered for the cemetery. Agran later noted that the memorial could eventually incorporate a veterans cemetery if the Gypsum Canyon location falls through. It’s unclear if the memorial has state or city support yet.

Great Park was one of the three sites originally debated for the veterans cemetery.



Orange County’s veterans cemetery may now have a new home after a groundbreaking ceremony in Anaheim Hills and proposed legislation from a state senator. (Photo: Supervisor Don Wagner, Facebook)





## CALIFORNIA AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

**Ed Benes**  
Chairman  
California America Legion  
Baseball Commission

Your California Legion baseball program took a huge step forward in 2021 by moving the State Championship Tournament from Yountville, CA, to the Clovis/Fresno area. While Yountville has been a wonderful tradition for many years, Fresno provided many improvements, such as better housing for players, more affordable hotels for families and friends, central location and proximity to Department Headquarters, and a quality baseball field.

Raising the bar on the baseball experience necessarily raised the cost. Thanks to Former Department Chairman Bob Boyd, Tournament Director Ray Flores and Donation Coordinator Judy Leonardi, and Area Commissioners, a first class tournament was

held at Buchanan High School in Clovis, with the Petaluma Leghorns emerging victorious. Several major financial sponsors and a partnership with the Clovis Veteran's Memorial District were key to meeting budget and planning expectations.

Our goal is to grow American Legion Baseball in California back to its former pinnacle as the best youth sports program available. No doubt our baseball program has molded and shaped countless young people into respectful and patriotic citizen athletes over the years. But there is more work to be done. Past years has seen the number of Legion teams declining due to costs, competition from other sports, particularly Travel Ball. Your help is needed.

How can you help? Each District, whether it has teams playing Senior (19-U) or Junior (17-U)

ball, should plan on providing financial and physical support to its District's, or the Department's, baseball program. Funds should be budgeted to offset team's insurance, uniform, travel, and equipment costs. Consider this seed money . . . if the seeds aren't planted, there is no crop. Reaching more youth through more teams is our crop. Area teams need help from each District. As more teams are added, more will follow. If you do not have a team playing Legion ball in your District, at least contribute to your Area's budget or Department's.

Our youth are our future. Let us be good supporters. For more information, contact Judy Leonardi at: [contributions@ald22baseball.org](mailto:contributions@ald22baseball.org) or your District Financial Officer.

*Ed Benes is chairman of the California America Legion Baseball Commission.*

## Famed L.A. Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully is now a voice for homeless veterans

By **Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

Ventura County-based Gold Coast Veterans Foundation announced on Dec. 11 that former Los Angeles Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully would be taking over as the voice of their organization, which is dedicated to ending veterans homelessness in California. Scully, who recently retired after a 67-year career, is also a U.S. Navy veteran. Volunteering his time, Scully is now recording radio PSAs and other works for the organization.

Currently, Gold Coast Veterans Foundation's chief objective is to get its Veterans Village project off the ground. The VSO says the project will, rather than find housing for homeless veterans in the region, literally build affordable units from the ground up. Additionally, the campus will provide "supportive services" for veterans in need.

Gold Coast Veterans Foundation says the project will be a "viable,

cost-effective, sustainable model of care for veterans."

Since 2019, the VSO has rescued 85 veterans at its existing service center, Veterans Connection, which provides mobile outreach, financial coaching, and more to struggling veterans.

### CALIFORNIA VETS HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is one of the biggest issues affecting California veterans as a whole. In Los Angeles alone, estimates suggest there are upwards of 4,000 veterans living on the street. San Francisco, Sacramento, and many other California cities also have sizeable populations of homeless veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs lists veterans homelessness as a priority and has recently improved its efforts to mitigate the crisis, including raising rent grants for veterans living in high-cost rental markets as well as announcing that it plans to house over 500 veterans living in Los Angeles by Dec. 31, 2021.



Vin Scully (Photo: Dodger Insider)



# 4 THINGS TO DO IF YOUR EMAIL IS HACKED

**By Alex Brandon**  
Assistant Adjutant  
California Sons of  
The American Legion

Emails or IMs appearing to be from Sons of The American Legion California Detachment Commander Jim Eubanks asking to contact him confidentially, or asking for gift cards or other funds are scams.

His address book has been (or continues to be) hacked.

And his is not the only one lately.

These are common phishing and scam emails.

This happens in emails, on Facebook and other social media.

Like COVID, these hacks can lead to others in your address book being “Infected.”

Here is an article from Internet security company Norton on steps to take if you have been hacked.

Wondering what to do when your email is hacked? Here are four steps you can take right now to regain control of your account, banish the hacker, and help protect yourself in the future.

## 1. CHANGE YOUR CREDENTIALS

The first step: take back control of your account. If the hacker has locked you out, you may have to contact your email service provider for help. You will probably have to provide an array of information to prove your identity and regain control of your email.

If you do still have access to your account, make these changes right away:

Get a new username and password. Choose a strong password. Secure passwords or passphrases should contain at least 12 characters, including numbers, symbols and a mix of capital and lowercase letters. Use a unique password for every account.

Password managers offer an easy and secure way to create complex passwords and to keep track of your login credentials.

Change your security questions. The hacker may have gotten access to your account by guessing the answers to security questions. They could hack your account again if you don't change these questions and answers. Avoid choosing questions with answers that can easily be guessed or found online. For example, don't choose “what's your mother's middle name?” If your mom routinely uses her first, middle, and last name on social media.

Turn on two-step verification. Also known as multifactor authentication, this extra security measure typically requires you to enter your username and password along with a temporary passcode to get into an account. For example, the service provider may send the one-time passcode to your phone

each time you try to log in. Without your phone in hand, a hacker will be much less likely to gain entry into an account that has two-step verification turned on.

## 2. WARN YOUR CONTACTS

Tell the colleagues, friends, and family in your email contact list that your email has been hacked. Warn them to delete any suspicious messages that come from your account. Also tell them not to open applications, click on links, share credit card information, or send money. It can be embarrassing to let your contacts know you've been hacked, but the warning may save them from falling for a scam.

## 3. LOOK FOR SIGNS OF TROUBLE

Hackers may make changes to allow them to get into your account again or even to continue to scam people after you've taken back control of the account. To prevent this, you should take these steps:

Check your settings. Hackers who gain access to an email account may change settings to further compromise your security. Check your email signature to make sure it doesn't contain any unfamiliar links. Look to make sure your emails aren't being auto-forwarded to someone else. And get tips from your email service provider on any other ways you can make your account more secure.

Scan for trouble. Look for signs of a computer virus on your computer, phone or tablet. These signs may include strange pop-up windows, slowness, problems shutting down or restarting, and unfamiliar applications on your device.

## 4. PROTECT YOURSELF FOR THE FUTURE

Finally, you can put a few simple measures in place to make it less likely that your email account gets hacked again. Here's what to do:

Get up to date, frequently. Make sure you are running the latest versions of your apps, browser, operating system, and software. The newest versions often contain patches to fix security flaws hackers can exploit. You may also want to delete any apps you don't use or that aren't being updated regularly by their developers.

Add security software. Get security software from a reputable company and install it on all of your devices. If you already have security software, make sure you've got the latest version and run it to check for malware, spyware, and viruses.

Now that you know what to do if your email account is hacked, you can put a plan of action in place in case you ever do get the dreaded “you've been hacked” message from a friend.

That will allow you to regain your account and your peace of mind more quickly.



## Tell Your Story

Whether you've got an interesting military history or a fun story about why you joined The American Legion, we want to read it. Share your story by emailing [editor@caLegion.org](mailto:editor@caLegion.org) or mailing it to Department headquarters:

1601 7th St., Sanger, CA 93657 \* Don't forget photos!

## Sponsors

Do you own a business or know someone who does? We're looking for sponsors for the California Legionnaire. We're looking for like-minded businesses to highlight in upcoming issues and on our website, [caLegion.org](http://caLegion.org).

Email [editor@caLegion.org](mailto:editor@caLegion.org)





## WHAT MAKES THE AMERICAN LEGION FAMILY GREAT?

**James Eubanks**  
Commander  
California Sons of  
The American Legion

Have you ever given any thought about what makes The American Legion a great organization?

If I was to list all the accomplishments and accolades of this organization, you would be amazed.

I'll get to the basics of what makes this organization what it is today.

This organization owes its greatness and success to its members — members that give up countless hours of their time to see that the job gets done. Regardless of their affiliation, Legionnaire, American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, Legion rider or whether retired or still working, these amazing

individuals always find the time to serve a greater good.

There is no task too small or too big for our members, there is always someone to see that the task is done.

Do not underestimate the importance of a single member, whether they just pay their dues or are active within the post.

Without membership dues, it would not be possible to support our programs.

We all have a part to play and no one member is more important than another.

The mission of this organization is vastly misunderstood by those outside of it, but I can tell you those we help understand us and are grateful for that helping hand that was extended during their time of need.

With the recent

disastrous tornadoes in the Midwest, the Legion's National Relief Fund is a life saver.

All of the families this Christmas that have received assistance through our many Christmas assistance programs: Secret Santa, Toys for Tots to name a few understand what we stand for. There are many more programs, too many to mention.

It is the membership of the Legion family that makes it possible to have these programs and in turn, it's the membership that make this organization great. Thank you to all our members and I am grateful for all your hard work, you make me proud to be a Legion Family member.

James Eubanks is commander of the Sons of The American Legion Detachment of California 2021-2022.

## IN MEMORY OF REY RUIZ, VETERAN AND AMERICAN LEGION RIDER

It is my duty, and with the heaviest of hearts to report Rey Ruiz, junior past president of American Legion Riders, Department of California, Post 328/Chapter 328 Norco, California, died on Jan. 19, 2022, at 0153 hours and was transferred to Post Everlasting.

Rey impacted everyone he met.

His presence and leadership will be greatly missed.

On a personal note, I had the distinct pleasure of getting to ride and work with Rey.

I will miss him greatly. Please keep his wife, Ida and son, Gabriel in your thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.

Funeral details and arrangements will be shared by the family.

—**Mike Smith** is state director for the American Legion Riders, Department of California



Rey Ruiz

Words alone cannot adequately capture what Rey's service has meant to the Department of California and specifically the Riders.

He will be truly missed.


I greatly appreciate Director Smith's statement about Rey and I offer condolences and prayers for Rey's family on behalf of the Department of California.

—**Autrey "AJ" James** is commander of The American Legion Department of California

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## Former governor donates \$250,000 to build homes for 25 veterans



Former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger

By **Christian Southards**  
Staff Writer

Actor and former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced that he donated

\$250,000 to Village for Vets to build homes for 25 Los Angeles-area veterans.

The “tiny shelters” have already been purchased and built, and are currently housing 25 veterans on

the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center campus.

Since Nov. 1, the campus has been home to around 40 veterans who previously lived outside the VA Medical Center in a

now-defunct encampment popularly known as “Veterans’ Row.”

The encampment was cleared as part of a Department of Veterans Affairs initiative to house roughly 550 Los Angeles-area veterans before Dec. 31 this year.

It is unclear how many, if any, veterans are currently living in temporary tents versus the Village for Vets shelters on the medical center’s grounds.

After Schwarzenegger announced the donation, Fox 11 Los Angeles reporter Elex Michaelson tweeted that Village for Vets had received “dozens” more donations and that “more vets will soon be getting homes.”

Readers can visit Village for Vets’ website to donate as well:

[www.villageforvets.org](http://www.villageforvets.org)

According to the veterans organization, every \$10,000 buys one “tiny shelter for a homeless veteran.”

### LOS ANGELES IS GROUND ZERO FOR VETERANS HOMELESSNESS

In October, the VA announced that it would be focusing on Los Angeles as part of its overall strategy to combat veterans homelessness in the United States.

California is home to the largest population of homeless veterans, with Los Angeles alone accounting for approximately 4,000 of the total number.

The VA has yet to announce the status of its end-of-year goal to house 550 Los Angeles veterans.

### From HISTORY page 2

was just beginning at home.

The great fight for civil rights in America, one of America’s greatest fights, began as a result of Black Americans who after serving abroad in the most elite fighting force the world has ever known, came home after both WWI and WWII and were denied the democracy in their own country. After both World War I and World War II for Black Americans, merely wearing their uniform could get them killed or maimed for life, not by an enemy but by other Americans. Those acts and the understanding that America could not go back to what it was but must move forward was the catalyst for men like Charles Houston, Medgar Evers, Ralph Abernathy, and many, many other icons of the civil rights movement who served in uniform to organize and fight not just for themselves but for the soul of America itself.

The men and women who fought for civil rights for all Americans, believed in and loved America in spite of her faults. These men

and women fought, for the democracy that America believes in and cherishes.

Those who fought for civil rights felt called to action to defend their country.

When those whose minds they sought to change took up arms against them, they did not run from the fight. They forged ahead.

The battles these Veterans fought, eventually won over the hearts and minds of their adversaries and in 1964 the Civil Rights act was signed into law followed in 1965 by the Voting Rights Act.

This is but one example of how Black Americans have continuously fought for America. The truth is Black Americans like my grandfather and great uncle have always fought for our country. In the Revolutionary War 8,000 men of African descent fought alongside the Patriots.

During the Civil war some 200,000 Black Americans fought on the side of the Union. Black Americans fought alongside Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War. They fought in the Indian wars, in Vietnam, and in every other conflict



Raymond Williams is one of about 20,000 African-Americans who were trained as Marines at Montford Point between 1942 and 1949. In November 2011, the Montford Point Marines were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal -- the highest civilian honor bestowed by Congress for distinguished achievement -- for service that led to minorities and women being integrated into the Marine Corps. (Photo: Army)

this young nation has been engaged in.

My grandfather never saw the results of his struggle as he died in 1950. My great uncle however lived until February 2020. My great uncle lived long enough to see the fruits of their labor. He lived long enough to be recognized by a grateful nation with a Congressional Gold Medal

for his service to the fight for democracy and equality within this country. He lived long enough to see his sons, nephews, great nieces, and great nephews serve this country with honor, distinction and love of this country and all of its people. I am grateful to both of these Black Americans for their contributions not to Black History but to

the history of our nation. I am proud to be Black and proud to be an American and I am grateful to my grandfather, great uncle and others who lifted us all up to make this a better America. God bless America and all its people.

—Article originally published in the February 2021 issue of the California Legionnaire.





West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs campus

## WLA VA DRAFT MASTER PLAN

From VA PLAN page 1 should (e.g., addressing the “wet” utility (water, sewer, drainage) infrastructure to support the entire plan, etc.). The inherent nature

of all long-term Master Plans, such as that being proposed for the WLA VA campus, is that things will inevitably change over the 5-10 year implementation window.

Thus, the Plan must come with the commitment that it remains flexible, subject to continuous review and modification, which this plan does.

This is a requirement for all Master Plans of any merit, be they public, private or those being conducted by the Veterans Administration.

With that said, the concepts of common sense prioritization and dual-track or parallel planning come into play: Whether to hold up beginning to implement the entire Master Plan in favor of completing plans for services that can be addressed in parallel (i.e., simultaneously) while the initial Master Plan begins to be rolled out.

Good examples here would be the proposed Town Center and Enterprise Center, which can both be handled on a separate and simultaneous planning track, without delaying the entire Master

Plan start-up itself.

At this point, the Draft Master Plan (DMP) for the West Los Angeles VA campus should be implemented as presented for the benefit of homeless Veterans and Veterans in general.

Further and continuous review will simply delay the availability of needed services for those in most need of that assistance.

To paraphrase the judge in the original 2015 settlement of the ACLU vs VA lawsuit: The review could continue for years but, during all that time, the only ones to suffer would be the homeless Veterans themselves who are most in need of services.

That sentiment directly applies to the potential hold up of the Master Plan today.



### LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP: 2022 APPLICATION OPEN FOR MILITARY CHILDREN OF THE FALLEN, DISABLED

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship 2022 application is now online.

The scholarship is available to children whose parents lost their lives while honorably serving on active military duty on or after 9/11, as well as children of post-9/11 veterans with a combined VA disability rating of 50 percent or higher, are eligible to apply for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship.

Eligible applicants can apply online here: [www.legion.org/scholarships/legacy](http://www.legion.org/scholarships/legacy)

The application deadline is April 15.

Since the Legacy Scholarship's first grant in 2004, more than 430 military children of the fallen and disabled have received over \$3.7 million in aid.

## Compton's Crystal Casino donates \$10,000 to support veterans

By Tanner Kelly  
Elevate Public Relations

In a huge boost to support efforts to engage veterans in critical services throughout Los Angeles County and across the State, Crystal Casino donated \$10,000 to the California American Legion Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (CalVAR).

All funds go directly to helping veterans through the service officer programs of the American Legion's Los Angeles County Council and the Department of California.

The California American Legion Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation is an organization whose purpose is to provide services to veterans throughout the State. Its focus is to enhance the well-being of America's veterans, their



From left: Jere Romano, Edward Padilla, Jennifer Campbell, Haig Kelegian Jr., Nick Rosa, Janet Reynolds, and LeoChu (Photo: Tanner Kelly/Elevate Public Affairs)

families, and the community.

“I want to express my gratitude to Crystal Casino for their generous donation as it will critically help Los Angeles County veterans and their families access benefits and services they need, including VA disability benefits, referrals and resources on education, employment and business, death benefits and more,” said Jere Romano, Los Angeles County Council Commander

of the American Legion. “Veterans continue to face challenges in accessing resources and receiving benefits. This contribution will go a long way in addressing inequities among our veteran community.”

The American Legion supports efforts to improve services, advance research, and provide compassionate treatment to veterans. They serve veterans with special needs, veterans experiencing

homelessness, those who suffer from traumatic brain injuries, mental illness, and multiple combat injuries.

“Crystal Casino is proud to stand with our veterans and help ensure they have access to the services and resources they need,” said Haig Kelegian Jr., President and CEO of Crystal Casino. “This contribution is our way to thank our veterans for their sacrifice and service.”

Since 1997, Crystal

Casino has been a staple of the Los Angeles community and economic engine in the City of Compton. Pre-pandemic, the casino has annually generated over \$102 million in economic activity for the Los Angeles region and provided over 560 well-paying jobs.

They are committed to investing in services and programs that improve the local community and serve vulnerable populations.