



APRIL 2026 ★ VOLUME II ★ ISSUE II

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE

Friends,

With America's 250th Anniversary quickly approaching, and amid the uncertainty of current global conflicts, I find myself reflecting on the words first shared in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Those words did more than announce the birth of a nation, they affirmed ideals that continue to shape who we are today. Among them is the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech, a cornerstone of our democracy and a reminder of the responsibility we share to engage thoughtfully, respectfully, and openly with one another.

No matter individual politics or personal opinions regarding today's global conflicts, I remain deeply mindful of the courageous, volunteer-driven women and men of our military who protect, preserve, and defend the United States. Their service makes it possible for the freedoms we hold dear to endure, not just in principle, but in practice.



Leo Cuadrado, M.B.A.
Captain (Ret.), USMC
Executive Director

I am proud of my service to this country and I am proud to know our young women and men have the watch. Not only are these service members in my prayers, but so too are their families and loved ones, whose sacrifices are often carried quietly and with remarkable strength. Their collective commitment is a powerful reminder that the freedoms we enjoy come at a very real human cost.

As we look ahead, may we continue to honor our shared values, remain grateful for those who serve, and stay engaged in ways that strengthen our communities and our nation. Thank you for being part of this community and for taking the time to reflect with us.

With Gratitude, *Leo Cuadrado*

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6TH ★★

JOIN US WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, FROM 5:30-7:30 PM AS WE HOST A 'VICA AFTER DARK EVENT' WITH THE VALLEY INDUSTRY & COMMERCE ASSOCIATION.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORK, HEAR DIRECTLY FROM VETERANS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES AT NDVETS, AND CONNECT WITH OTHERS COMMITTED TO MAKING A MEANINGFUL IMPACT IN OUR COMMUNITY.

SAVE THE DATE!

**PLEASE CLICK OR SCAN THE QR
CODE BELOW TO REGISTER OR
CONTACT: OLIVIA RUSSELL
ORUSSELL@NDVETS.ORG
310-927-6645**



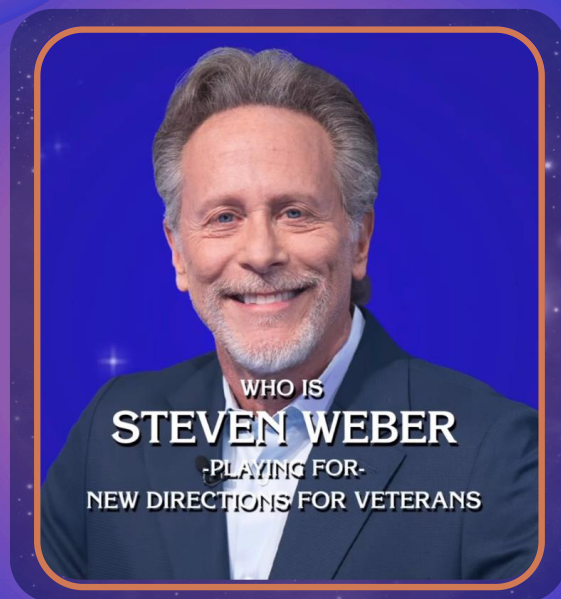
BUZZING

WITH PRIDE!

On March 20th, we were thrilled to see our good friend and long-time supporter, Steven Weber, appear on *Celebrity Jeopardy!*

Steven has proudly partnered with New Directions for Veterans for more than 10 years, generously lending his time, voice, and support to our mission. Over the years, he has also served as our Master of Ceremonies at our Honoring Our Heroes Gala on multiple occasions, helping elevate our events and amplify awareness for the veterans we serve.

We're grateful for his continued commitment and for representing NDVets on such a national stage.



**YOU CAN WATCH
CELEBRITY JEOPARDY
AT 8 PM PST
ON ABC / HULU
AND STAY TUNED
IN MAY AS STEVEN
REACHES THE
SEMIFINALS!**

PROFILES IN COURAGE

BERNARDO H.

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

“It’s an experience that can’t be duplicated.”

This is how Bernardo Hernandez describes his time spent in the Marine Corps.

A Chatsworth-native, Bernardo served in the Marine Corps from 1987 until 1991, with stations in Camp Pendelton, Italy, the Philippines and Okinawa, Japan.

“BERNARDO IS VERY FOCUSED. HE WANTED SOMETHING, HE FIGURED IT OUT, AND HE PURSUED IT.”

-VANESSA ALEXANDER

Since he was 13, Bernardo had always set his sights on being in the military, “I’ve always wanted to be a positive part of something bigger than myself, so the Marine Corps chose me.” He genuinely enjoyed his time and the camaraderie of service, even having the opportunity to meet Pope John Paul II as a member of George H.W. Bush’s security detail on a diplomatic trip to Italy.

After the Marines, Bernardo dreamed of joining the Long Beach Police Department. In the service he found himself drinking often with his fellow Marines, still able to perform duties after a night out. However, what was once a military pastime, quickly turned once Bernardo was back in civilian life. “In the military you’re always given instruction, when you are back home you have to figure everything out on your own and that’s where I had a hard time. After run-ins with the law and a car accident that resulted in severe injuries, joining the police force was no longer a viable career.



Pictured Left:
Vanessa and
Bernardo

Today, Bernardo is “grateful to be alive.” He moved into our Sepulveda PSH in 2023 and is “staying on the straight and narrow.” With the help of Resident Service Coordinator Vanessa Alexander, he spends his days working through the VA’s Compensated Work Therapy (CWT). In addition, he acts as a mentor to fellow veterans, “planting seeds” of advice ranging from job searching to spirituality, to his passion for lifestyle and fitness. “I just try to talk to them and let them know that if they need anything, I will do my best to help.”

Despite life’s trials and tribulations, Bernardo is proud of where he is today. A father of two, his children have gone on to graduate from prestigious universities, and he has even inspired his nephew to join the Marine Corps. He continues to focus on his faith, health, and discipline. He plans to one day become a personal trainer, imparting the lessons he has accrued so that others may share in the personal growth he has achieved.

“I COULDN’T HAVE DONE ANYTHING WITHOUT GOD IN MY LIFE. THAT’S BEEN THE BACKBONE OF EVERYTHING.”

VETERAN RESOURCE FAIR

WE'RE HONORED TO BE FEATURED ON LA THIS WEEK, HIGHLIGHTING THIS IMPACTFUL DAY. YOU CAN WATCH THE SPECIAL FEATURE [HERE](#).

On March 12, in partnership with LA City Councilmember Traci Park (CD11) and the LADWP VALOR Program, we proudly hosted a Veterans Resource Fair at the Veterans Rose Garden on the West LA VA Campus.



More than 300 veterans joined us and received Ralph's gift cards, essential clothing, critical resources, and access to care. Participating organizations included:
Semper Fidelis | American Legion Palisades Post 283 Auxiliary | Brentwood School | LA Care | The Vet Center | Blue Shield California | Patriot and Paws | End Overdose | LA Metro | Redondo Beach Elks Lodge #1378 | Veteran Family Wellbeing Center | LADWP

A special thank you to Blue Shield Promise for the generous gift of \$2,500 and your continued support of veterans in our care.

WE'RE GRATEFUL FOR A BEAUTIFUL DAY OF COMMUNITY; BRINGING VETERANS TOGETHER AND CONNECTING THEM TO THE RESOURCES THEY NEED AND DESERVE. RESOURCE FAIRS LIKE THIS ARE ONLY POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE DEDICATED ORGANIZATIONS THAT SHOW UP, SERVE, AND MAKE THIS WORK MEANINGFUL.



COMMUNITY CORNER

OPERATION BLANKETS OF LOVE



Eileen, Brad, and their rescue Molly

“IT GREW FROM A SIMPLE IDEA TO A NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ANIMAL WELFARE AND EMERGENCY RELIEF ORGANIZATION”

We are endlessly appreciative of the work that our staff and volunteers do each and every day. But often we are unable to express our gratitude to the community partners who are committed to working with us to enhance the lives of veterans. Operation Blankets of Love (OBOL) have done just that. Founded by Eileen Smulson, she shares our belief that healing and stability often grow from acts of compassion.

Recently, we were inspired to meet with Eileen and her husband Brad Smulson, who tirelessly work to provide advocacy and essential supplies for veterans, vulnerable communities, and animals in need.



Eileen, a New Jersey native, worked over 30 years in the nonprofit sector as a fundraiser. Her experience lent itself to founding OBOL. Prior to establishing the organization, Brad spent a career in media. Together, what started from their home in the San Fernando Valley, has become a national resource.

The Smulson's established OBOL in 2008. Eileen has always loved animals and frequently stopped by the West Valley Animal Shelter in Chatsworth. "I saw the puppies freezing and hatched the idea to create Operation Blankets of Love."

The next year, it obtained its non-profit status, and for 18 years has been a leading organization in the scope of animal welfare and emergency relief. The network they have developed enables them to receive an abundance of essential items for the unhoused and a bevy of items for pets that include blankets, food, supplies, and medicine. OBOL serves as a strength of support to community partners and animal shelters to ensure items are provided to the most vulnerable.

Their support of veterans, unhoused community residents with pets, the elderly, disabled, and high-risk shelters, is an act of human kindness that each of us should aspire to.

“We’ve helped over 120 organizations and donated to over 1,000 animal rescue groups food, pet beds, carriers, toys, care and comfort supplies. We even distribute supplies to rescue groups in Baja, Mexico.”

Their commitment to our community has led to recognition in the national spotlight, broadening their already vast network. OBOL has been featured in numerous newspapers and magazines, garnered 51 recognition awards, and has been featured on broadcast media several times.

Despite all of the accolades, what truly matters to the Smulson’s is the impact they make in the community and the well-being of our most vulnerable. 🐾

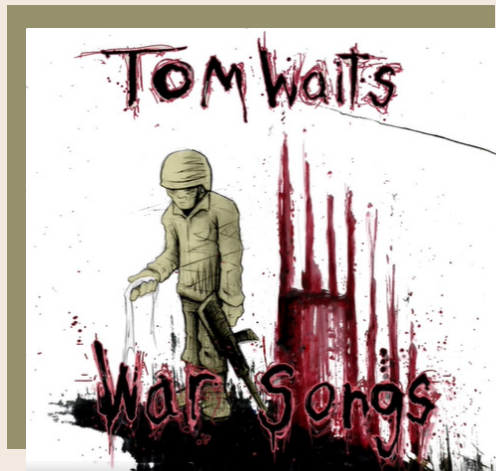


“IT HAS BEEN SO HEARTWARMING TO HELP PEOPLE AND ANIMALS. IT’S A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE EVERYDAY TO HELP, AND SUCH A GIFT THAT WAS GIVEN TO US.”

Tom Waits War Songs ★ ★ ★

On March 20th, we were honored to attend the debut of Tom Waits War Songs. Created and produced by Michelle McGregor, this powerful live musical and visual concert reflects on the cost of war, set to music written by Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan.

It was truly a moving experience and what makes this production, spanning 3 weekends, even more meaningful is that 50% of proceeds will be donated to New Directions for Veterans. We look forward to furthering our partnership with Michelle, and continuing to support our local creative community and the veterans we serve.



FIELD DAY AND FELLOWSHIP

On Thursday, April 9th, veterans in our clinical treatment program enjoyed a Field Day full of connection and camaraderie organized by Brentwood School's Veteran Center for Recreation and Education (VCRE).

From pizza and popsicles to softball and pickleball, it was a day full of fun, laughter, and time spent together in the sun!

The annual Field Day offers veterans an opportunity to strengthen relationships, foster well-being, and reminds them that they are surrounded by a community that values and supports them.



AS WE COUNT DOWN TO THE HISTORIC MILESTONE OF JULY 4TH, WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US IN REFLECTING ON OUR NATION'S JOURNEY. TOGETHER, WE WILL HONOR THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ALL AMERICANS AND LOOK FORWARD WITH PURPOSE TO THE FUTURE WE HOPE TO CREATE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.



MEMORIAL DAY | MAY 25TH



MEMORIAL DAY, WHEN WE HONOR THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY, IS FAST APPROACHING. WE INVITE YOU TO SUPPORT A FELLOWSHIP AND WELL-BEING EVENT FOR VETERANS LIVING IN OUR TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM. YOUR GENEROSITY HELPS ENSURE OUR VETERANS FEEL RECOGNIZED, VALUED, AND REMEMBERED FOR THEIR SACRIFICES.

★ WE ARE HIRING! ★

DISCOVER OUR OPEN OPPORTUNITIES AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF VETERANS AT NDVETS.ORG/JOBS

SIGN UP TODAY!

SHOP. SAVE. SUPPORT VETERANS.

Did you know you can support New Directions for Veterans every time you shop at Food4Less?

By enrolling in the Food4Less Community Rewards Program, a portion of your purchases will directly benefit our programs and the veterans we serve.

HOW TO ENROLL:

Visit <https://www.food4less.com>

- Log in to your Food4Less account (New users will need to create an account using email address and a rewards card.)
- Search for NEW DIRECTIONS FOR VETERANS
-You can find us by name or using ID AF797
- CLICK ENROLL

That's it! Your everyday shopping can make a meaningful difference in supporting our veteran community.