

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

SOUND OF FREEDOM



NEWS FOR THE LUKE COMMUNITY



Salute to SOLDIERS

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Bayou Bandits singer is a soldier first



Sound of Freedom is published bi-monthly by Times Media Group, a private publishing company. Times Media Group is in no way affiliated with Luke Air Force Base or the United States Air Force.



Brooke Christianson with her family, from left, Hayes, Skylar, Carter, Dakotah and Reggie. (Photo courtesy Brooke Christianson)



Fighter Country Employee Spotlight

Brooke Christianson brings years of experience to the charity

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO-KARASINSKI

Brooke Christianson has been Fighter Country Partnership and Fighter Country Foundation’s campaign coordinator and fulfillment specialist for two years.

Born in Mitchell, South Dakota, Christianson says she loves the people and the summers in her hometown, which houses the “World’s Only Corn Palace.” However, she was uneasy about the winters.

After graduation, she attended Dakota Wesleyan University and earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and business. After finishing college, she married her husband, Reggie, an Air Force maintenance officer and began her journey as an active military spouse.

For the next 20 years, she volunteered with numerous base agencies, spouse organizations, squadrons and youth groups. After nine military moves, six states and three countries, he decided to retire from the Air Force and transition to somewhere

they could call home.

The Fighter Country Partnership and Fighter Country Foundation’s staff says Christianson was a logical choice when it needed to add to its force. With her background, it’s easy for her to support the organizations’ mission of providing support for men, women and families at Luke Air Force Base.

Christianson enjoys being active in the capital campaign projects, which enhance the lives of the airmen on base. Her favorite project was the Flight Line Kitchen, which provides an air-conditioned facility for airmen to wash, eat and relax during their work shifts. It gets them out of the soaring Arizona temperatures.

“The project was close to my heart because I have worked hand in hand with many maintainers and I know their struggles firsthand,” she says.

The couple has four children—Dakotah, Hayes, Carter and Skylar—and a white boxer named Shiner. They have several other family members who call Arizona home.



Brooke Christianson has worked for Fighter Country Partnership and Fighter Country Foundation for two years. (Photo courtesy Brooke Christianson)

“The Air Force has provided many great opportunities and experiences for my family,” Christianson says. “I am delighted to be a part of Fighter Country, where I can continue working with and supporting our military.” ■

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Howler and Arizona Coyotes' CEO Ahron Cohen.

Photo by Pablo Robles



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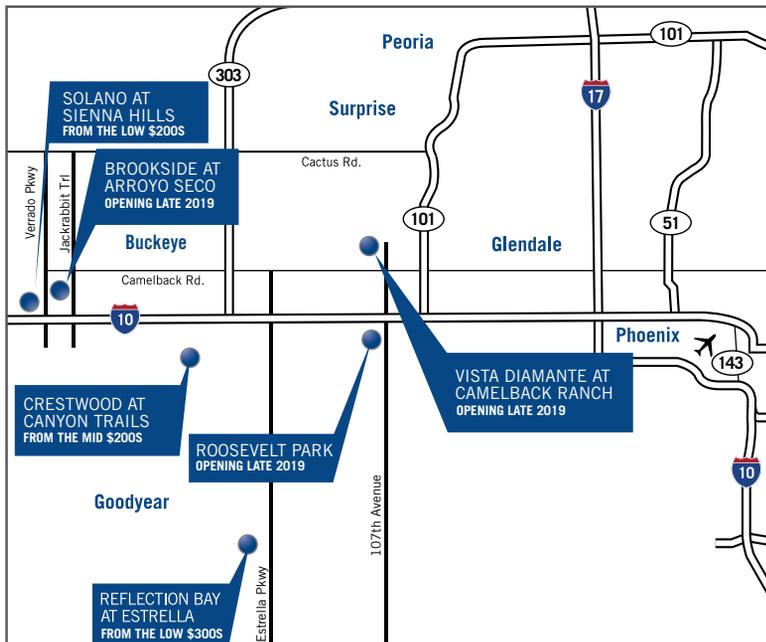
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Bernie Kendall, a veteran of the U.S. Army and Air Force, works on the new healing rose garden. (Photos by Pablo Robles)

Peace and Quiet

Glendale garden grows healing for veterans

BY TOM SCANLON

In wraparound sunglasses, a twisted goatee and black leather vest, the burly Bernie Kendall looks like a big, tough dude. Until Robert “Tiny” Hogan rolls up. Next to the hulking Hogan, tackle-size, shave-headed, flowing Viking beard, Kendall almost looks like a high school kid. Recently, these two Harley-riding, vest-wearing members of the Veterans IV Veterans Motorcycle Association rallied up to

Glendale—to hang out in a rose garden. It’s a healing thing. Candy Sheperd was there at Glendale’s Sahuaro Ranch Park, helping bring her vision to reality. “Years ago, God put it on my heart that I need to start a healing garden for veterans,” Sheperd says.

Two decades ago, she and her husband Bill were founding members of the Rose Society of Glendale. They ran their healing garden idea up the flagpole with the Glendale Chamber of Commerce, Glendale Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, Glendale Parks and Recreation and Mayor Jerry Weiers. Everyone loved the idea.

So, Sheperd called Tyler Francis of Litchfield Park’s Francis Roses. The rose guru of the West Valley came through, big time.

“He brought a bus with a crew of 52 people in December,” Sheperd says.

“They planted 1,587 roses in four hours.” The plants should be booming and blooming in the fall. But this is more than just an aesthetic boost for a Glendale park.

The team behind the garden invites veterans to come to the garden, especially at 9 every Saturday morning, when members of the as-



Julie Millis works on the rose garden at Sahuaro Ranch Park.

sociations will be on hand to guide newcomers and show them how to help prune, tidy and grow the garden.

Or leave them to enjoy the garden in solitude, as the case may be.

“A healing garden is a place where veterans can come and meditate, be with other like veterans,” Sheperd says.

She notes that the suicide rate among veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder is disturbingly high. And many veterans have a hard time “fitting in” when they leave the service.

“I wanted a place where they could meet, have a structured thing to do,” Sheperd says. “They can come enjoy other veterans and have a mission.



Jerry Richardson tries his hand at the rose garden.



Brendon Gearty shows Jemison Gearty, 5, how to work with roses. (Photo by Pablo Robles)

“Being outdoors and gardening is healing.” Hogan groaned at that.

“I joined the Army to get off the farm,” he growls, but with a grin. Seriously, though, he’s not into gardening.

“I don’t like plants,” he says. “And they don’t like me.”

So, what did he think when he heard about this healing rose garden?

“I was thinking I have a lot of people that would benefit from a place like this, where’s it’s a safe place,” he says.

He’s living proof you don’t have to be a rose buff to get something out of this garden.

“If they want to talk, they can. It’s a place to go. We have a lot of people that have a tough time leaving their houses,” says Hogan, a Desert Storm combat veteran who lives in Goodyear.

“There are days I don’t want to see nobody. Days I don’t like people.”

A few minutes later, Hogan had a rake in his hand and a smile on his face, as he helped prep the garden.

Kendall, a veteran of the Army and Air Force who lives in Peoria, was crouched with a clipping tool in his hand.

“Combat veterans very often suffer from PTSD,” Kendall says. “With this garden, they can learn about roses, learn how to deadhead them, learn how to prune.

“It takes their mind off things. They can relax.”

Unlike his buddy Hogan, Kendall knows his way around a garden.

“I’ve always loved roses,” Kendall says.

Sheperd believes that is what makes this place unique.

“There are a number of healing gardens around the country, but this will be the first one where roses are the primary focus,” she says.

“Most of the other healing gardens are vegetable gardens or plants.”

Though he’s not into most gardens, Hogan sizes this one up and decided it was a good place to be.

“It’s kind of isolated,” he says. “It’s a comfortable place to come sit.

“It’s relaxing, to me.”

And he had an invitation for other veterans, who might struggle with the idea of being in a strange place around strangers:

“Just come and relax and watch.” ■

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Welcome Home

Humana hosts Vietnam veterans pinning ceremony

BY MARINA RENNEKE

When Vietnam veterans returned to the United States after the war, they did not receive a warm welcome.

To remedy that, the Vietnam War Commemoration was founded. Authorized by Congress, established under the secretary of defense, and launched by President Barack Obama in May 2012, the Vietnam War Commemoration recognizes all men and women who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces from November 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975. About 9 million Americans served during that period, and the commemoration makes no distinction between veterans who served in-theater, in-country, or were stationed elsewhere during those 20 years. All answered the call of duty.



Maricopa County North Valley Justice of the Peace Gerald A. Williams, who also spoke at the ceremony, pins American Legion State Commander Ken Queen during the Vietnam War Commemoration Pinning Ceremony hosted by Humana and American Legion Earl E. Mitchell Post No. 29. (Photo courtesy Humana)

The health and well-being company Humana is a commemorative partner of the program. To support and salute Vietnam

Vietnam War-era veterans received the Vietnam veterans lapel pin as part of the Vietnam War Commemoration Pinning Ceremony hosted by Humana and American Legion Earl E. Mitchell Post No. 29. Those who served in the U.S. Armed Forces between November 1, 1955, and May 15, 1975, regardless of location, are eligible to receive the pin. (Photo courtesy Humana)

veterans, Humana recently honored Vietnam-era veterans with a pinning ceremony at American Legion Earl E. Mitchell Post No. 29 in Glendale.

More than 50 people attended the event and about 30 Vietnam veterans were presented with Vietnam veteran lapel pins. Those who served in the U.S. Armed Forces between November 1, 1955, and May 15, 1975, regardless of location, were invited to be pinned.

The event was emceed by Steve Stedman, Humana's Arizona Medicare sales director. Speakers at the event included Glendale Mayor Jerry Weiers and Maricopa County North Valley Justice of the Peace Gerald A. Williams.

The Humana-sponsored ceremony

SEE **PINNING** PAGE 12

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PINNING FROM PAGE 10

served as a “welcome home,” publicly acknowledging the military service and sacrifices made by these veterans and their families during the Vietnam War.

To reach the large numbers of Vietnam veterans, the Vietnam War Commemoration has enlisted the assistance of thousands of Commemorative Partner organizations at the local, state and national levels to conduct pinning events and activities.

As a Commemorative Partner, Humana has been hosting pinning ceremonies across the country. Humana has a longstanding relationship with the military and is committed to the well-being of all veterans.

Humana is a longtime partner of the Department of Defense’s TRICARE program, as it administers health benefits for close to 6 million active duty military and retirees as well as their families across 32 states. Through its Veterans Hiring Initiative, Humana has hired more than 4,400 veterans or spouses of veterans since 2011.

For more information, visit vietnam-war50th.com. ■



Glendale Mayor Jerry Weiers addresses the audience during the Vietnam War Commemoration Pinning Ceremony hosted by Humana and American Legion Earl E. Mitchell Post No. 29. (Photo courtesy Humana)



Maricopa County North Valley Justice of the Peace Gerald A. Williams addresses the audience during the Vietnam War Commemoration Pinning Ceremony hosted by Humana and American Legion Earl E. Mitchell Post No. 29. (Photo courtesy Humana)

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Special Visitor

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema tours Luke AFB and receives briefing from Canterbury

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO-KARASINSKI

Arizona senior Sen. Kyrsten Sinema visited Luke Air Force Base, where she met with Brig. Gen. Todd Canterbury, commander of the 56th Fighter Wing. They toured the base and discussed how to improve the health and welfare of the airmen stationed at Luke.

“Luke Air Force Base plays a critical role in keeping American families safe and secure, and I’m committed to protecting resources for the airmen at Luke and for servicemembers across Arizona,” Sinema says.

This year, Sinema secured \$5.3 billion for 60 F-35 aircraft at Luke Air Force Base in the annual defense budget, a \$1 billion increase from the administration’s request. Sinema also ensured that this year’s defense appropriations bill prioritizes funding for replacing



Arizona senior Sen. Kyrsten Sinema receives a briefing from Luke Air Force Base officials at Luke Air Force Base. (Photo courtesy Sen. Kyrsten Sinema)

the end-of-runway turnaround at the Gila Bend Air Force Auxiliary Field. Sinema is committed to protecting military resources by opposing cuts to military funds approved by Congress.

Earlier this year, Canterbury joined Sinema as her guest at the Congressional address by the secretary general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg. ■

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Initiative Launches

Acronis SCS unveils veterans training program

BY WAYNE SCHUTSKY

From Baltimore to Atlanta to the Flagstaff Unified School District, local governments and school districts of all sizes across the country are falling victim to cyberattacks at an unprecedented rate.

That is one reason Scottsdale-based Acronis SCS, a cybersecurity firm that serves the public sector, launched SCSVets, an initiative to give veterans the skills and certifications needed to obtain employment in the cybersecurity space.

“In launching this initiative, we’re doing our part to narrow the cyber workforce shortage while providing American veterans and their spouses with the skills they need to succeed in this demanding field,” Acronis SCS CEO John Zanni says.

Through its SCSVets Initiative, the company has committed to providing 300 veterans, active-duty military personnel and their spouses with the skills and certifications needed to begin a career in cybersecurity.

The program is part of the larger Arizona Roadmap to Veteran Employment program launched by the state in 2015.

Acronis SCS, which opened up shop one year ago, launched the initiative at its new headquarters in Scottsdale on October 8 with a standing-room-only crowd of Arizona business leaders and public officials on hand, including Sen. Martha McSally and Rep. Greg Stanton.

Scottsdale Mayor Jim Lane and Councilwomen Virginia Korte and Suzanne Klapp also attended the event.

The company also marked the occasion by holding an art competition showcasing work by local veterans, which will remain on display in the company’s headquarters.

John Fontana, a Navy veteran and 2017 inductee into the Arizona Veterans Hall of



Navy veteran John Fontana won the \$3,000 first-place prize for his painting “Always a Patriot” at the veteran art competition held by cybersecurity firm Acronis SCS during the launch of its SCSVets Initiative. (Photos by Kimberly Carrillo)

Fame Society, won the \$3,000 first-place prize for his painting “Always a Patriot.”

SCSVets

The new SCSVets initiative will help inject much-needed talent into a cybersecurity workforce that is woefully understaffed.

McSally says there is a “growing threat in the cybersecurity space, not just from organized crime, but from sophisticated state actors, state-sponsored actors. They see this as another domain that they can disrupt our way of life.”

Stanton echoes those comments, saying the need for more trained professionals in

the industry is urgent.

“This is not hypothetical—major American cities have been held by ransomware... and so this deficit in talent that we have in this particular field, cybersecurity, our country needs to catch up and we need to catch up fast,” Stanton says.

According to Cyberseek, a project from the National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education, there were over 313,000 unfilled cybersecurity positions in the United States between 2017 and 2018.

In Arizona alone, over 7,000 cybersecu-




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ACRONIS FROM PAGE 16

rity positions were open during that time period, the bulk of which were located within the Valley.

Zanni says this shortage comes at a critical time as local governments across the country are facing imminent threats and are not prepared to protect their infrastructure.

“The other concern frankly is a lack of urgency in the public sector around this problem of cyber attacks...For some reason, they all think they’re immune or they’re too embarrassed to talk about being attacked,” Zanni says.

The reason for lack of action on the part of local governments can often be due to lack of funding and understaffed IT departments—a function of the overall worker shortage in the industry, Zanni explains.

The initiative is an attempt to meet that shortage problem and match veterans with high-quality jobs. Too often, he argues, veterans returning to the workforce are matched with positions that do not take advantage of their skills.

“There is a disconnect between the skills they’ve developed and the positions they, on the onset, really qualify for,” he says.

The current veteran unemployment rate of 3.2% in the United States is actually below the national unemployment rate of 3.7%, but Zanni says there is still an issue of veteran underemployment.

The SCSVets Initiative will also provide training for military spouses.

Active-duty military spouses had an unemployment rate of 24% in 2017, according to a report from the Department of Defense.

Zanni says cybersecurity jobs can often be performed from any location, making them ideal positions for military spouses who move often.

McSally says veterans are uniquely suited to enter the field of cybersecurity, because of the “nexus” between cybersecurity and national security.

“I think that mission focus that our veterans have to understand that they have to build skills (and) they’ve got to be in front of their opponent or the enemy and they have to be innovative and flexible to address this kind of a fluid battle space,” McSally says.



Sen. Martha McSally says there is a “growing threat” in cybersecurity.



Scottsdale Mayor Jim Lane was in attendance at Acronis SCS’ SCSVets initiative launch event.



Rep. Doug Stanton, D-9, speaks to the crowd at the launch of Acronis SCS’ SCSVets initiative.



Lucy Wong, a U.S. Navy veteran who participated in the veterans art competition at the SCSVets event, pictured with her quilt titled “Old Glory.”

McSally, an Air Force veteran, applauded Acronis SCS for its new initiative.

“This is a good challenge to have, because it will provide more opportunities to lift people out of poverty and provide for their families and actually have a good career that’s doing something meaningful,” McSally says.

Training

Zanni says the program’s initial commitment is to provide training and certification for 300 veterans, active-duty military members and spouses at a cost of \$15,000 per student.

The initiative is partnering with New Horizons Computer Learning Centers to provide training and nationally recognized certification for students in the program.

“Certification has to be nationwide and recognized, otherwise it doesn’t serve any purpose,” Zanni says.

The program will rely on the use of military-related benefits, such as those provid-

ed under the GI Bill.

Acronis SCS is also partnering with the nonprofit Arizona Coalition for Military Families to secure donations to offset costs not covered by those benefits.

The initiative is partnering with the Veterans Transition Mission to connect with veterans interested in the program.

Zanni says he has already secured funding for the first 100 students and that he is confident that the organization will raise enough money to meet its 300-student commitment and eventually train more veterans.

“I’ll make the 300 happen; let’s be very clear...I have no doubt about the funding and the response has been overwhelming,” Zanni says. “We just need to make sure people feel comfortable in the program so that their money is being put to good use.”

The 12-week program will include day-and night-class options.

The program will begin in January and the first class will graduate in April, Zanni says. ■

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Never Forgotten

The Paradise Valley DAR embeds with Wreaths Across America

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO-KARASINSKI

Kitty Woodward had chills the first time she saw the Wreaths Across America ceremony.

It was so moving she had to be involved. A member of the Paradise Valley National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, Woodward is the co-chairwoman of the Wreaths Across America campaign.

“It’s a project in which Christmas wreaths are placed on gravesites of veterans in honor of their service so they will be remembered,” she says. “It’s also to teach children the importance of freedom.”

Locally, the program is scheduled for 10 a.m. Saturday, December 14, at the National Memorial Ceremony of Arizona, 23029 Cave Creek Road, Phoenix. The cemetery has approximately 65,000 graves and each year more wreaths are placed as veterans are remembered for their service to our country, Woodward says.

First, DAR must recruit sponsors for the wreaths. The sponsorships are \$15 by emailing Woodward at kitfit2000@aol.com or by visiting wreathscrossamerica.org. The deadline for orders is November 24.

The goal of the local program is to lay wreaths on every veteran grave at the National Cemetery in North Phoenix. Many Phoenix residents may have relatives buried there who would love to know how to have a wreath placed.

Woodward sees the wreath celebration as a way to remember fallen veterans, honor those who serve, and teach children the value of freedom.

“Last year our chapter alone laid more than 400 wreaths on the graves of veterans in the



Paradise Valley National Society Daughters of the American Revolution members Kitty Woodward, left, and Mary Rank encourage the public to buy wreaths from Wreaths Across America. The wreaths are laid locally during a ceremony at 10 a.m. Saturday, December 14, at the National Memorial Ceremony of Arizona in Phoenix to remember veterans. (Photo by Pablo Robles)

National Cemetery in North Phoenix,” Woodward says.

The Wreaths Across America was founded by the Worcester family in Harrington, Maine. As a 12-year-old paperboy for the Bangor Daily News, Morrill Worcester won a trip to Washington, D.C., and Arlington National Cemetery.

He was moved by the trip. So in 1992, when his Worcester Wreath Company found itself with a surplus of wreaths, he and Maine Sen. Olympia Snowe arranged for the wreaths to be laid at graves in the older section of Arlington National Cemetery.

The tribute continued quietly until 2005 when photos went viral. Wreaths Across America was formed and in 2018 its national network for volunteers laid more than 1.8 million memorial wreaths at 1,440 locations worldwide. It was accomplished with the help of more than 3,270 fundraising groups.

“We want to have as many wreaths as possible,” Woodward says. “Last year we laid 5,800

wreaths. Our goal is to have 12,000 wreaths in the National Cemetery.”

The wreaths are \$15, if they are purchased from Paradise Valley National Society Daughters of the American Revolution—\$10 goes toward the wreath with the remaining \$5 earmarked for the organization’s Packages from Home campaign. Woodward says wreaths can be placed on specific graves.

At the ceremony, the Paradise Valley National Society Daughters of the American Revolution encourages children to attend.

“We get as many children as we can to these events,” Woodward says. “All the branches of the military are represented there.”

“We always have at least one children’s group involved—the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, groups like that. They sing and read poems. I think we had 3,000 people last year. The children learn how important it is. These men and women died for our country. We want them to understand these veterans are never forgotten.” ■

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ARIZONA COYOTES

Arizona Coyotes President and CEO Ahron Cohen and mascot Howler sit rinkside at Gila River Arena. (Photo by Pablo Robles)



Salute to Soldiers

Arizona Coyotes support the military on and off the ice

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO-KARASINSKI

Ahron Cohen looks up at the scoreboard at an empty Gila River Arena and back down at Howler, the Arizona Coyotes' mascot. The two are ready to walk out on the ice, freshly smoothed by a Zamboni, for a photo shoot.

It was October 1 and that could only mean one thing: Hockey season was

about to start. But while the 'Yotes have a limited schedule, there's something that Cohen—the team's president and chief executive officer—and his team do year-round: support veterans.

The Coyotes' mission goes beyond the very visible Seats for Soldiers, a Dickey's Barbecue Pit-sponsored program that honors service members during each home game. The Coyotes also regularly provide free or discounted tickets to veterans, soldiers and first responders.

"First and foremost, giving back and supporting and impacting this community is one of our core pillars," says Cohen, in his newly remodeled conference room.

"Giving back to veterans and the armed

services is just so important because we're so thankful for everything they do for our community and keeping all of us, as Americans, safe."

Two years ago, the Coyotes built an outdoor DEK hockey rink, next to the fitness center and pool grounds, at Luke Air Force Base. The project, which cost \$200,000, was unveiled in April 2017.

"The impetus for that was people are coming from all over the country and the world to Luke Air Force Base," he says. "Maybe they miss playing hockey and there's not a rink close by. We wanted to create a good opportunity for them and their families to be physically active and be able to play hockey. I know they have a



The Arizona Coyotes—of which Ahron Cohen, pictured, is president and CEO—supports veterans in various ways. (Photo by Pablo Robles)

SPECIAL EVENTS

This Veterans Day and beyond, the Arizona Coyotes are continuing their mission.

Dickey's also supports the military rush, when all active and veteran military personnel with identification can purchase up to two select upper-level tickets for \$15 each or two lower-level tickets for \$30 each for Sunday to Thursday games, except November 21, December 12 and January 12. The same offer is available for Military Appreciation Night, presented by USAA, on Saturday, November 9.

All season, Fighter Country Partnership receives a \$50 donation from Mountain America Credit Union for each goal the Coyotes score.

For information about Arizona Coyotes promotions, visit nhl.com/coyotes.

lot of fun out there.”

Cohen has personal reasons for supporting the military: his grandfather, 1st Lt. Robert Greene, who served in the U.S. Army in World War II and the Korean War.

“One of my favorite memories was when they retired down in San Antonio,” Cohen says. “I went down there and went through his military gear and I saw different pictures of equipment. I really grew up with a tremendous respect and reverence for the military and all the people who serve.”

A Minnesota native, Cohen was in high school when 9/11 happened. As a student at Bowdoin College, he saw his football teammates head to officer candidate school. After Bowdoin, he graduated from ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor Law School. He long admired Pat Tillman.

Last fiscal year, the Coyotes put \$3.4 million back into the community. Cohen is proud of that contribution, but in addition to that, his staff performed 2,000 hours of community service—many of which were spent with veterans. They've also assembled packages to be sent to soldiers overseas.

Cohen recently initiated a mandate for all Coyotes employees to volunteer at least

15 hours of community service.

“Last year, we went off campus and on Veterans Day we volunteered at the Veterans Day Parade downtown and at a couple of other Veterans Day activities,” Cohen says.

“We have a lot of young people within our organization, and I see it as a really good opportunity to show them what service is all about and to be really thankful to those who kept us safe and continue to keep us safe.”

The volunteerism goes beyond his staff. Team captain Oliver Ekman-Larsson leads the charge with players who volunteer.

“We're very fortunate because we have some great people on our team,” Cohen says.

“They're not just great hockey players. I've never once heard them complain about any community engagement. In fact, they're the ones who are encouraging that and asking for more of it. It just shows you the power of sports.” ■

Senior Airman Tyler Salter, 56th Equipment Maintenance Squadron conventional maintenance crew chief, inspects a GBU-12, an aerial laser-guided munition at Luke Air Force Base. The 56th EMS assembled over 24 inert GBU-12s as part of the "Panther Beast" competition, where F-35A Lightning II pilots faced off to test their accuracy in dropping munitions. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jacob Wongwai)



Ammo, Maintenance and Pilots

Many airmen contribute to an F-35A Lightning II strike mission

BY AIRMAN 1ST CLASS LEALA MARQUEZ
56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Mission success depends on a smooth transition from every required task from building bombs to maintaining the jets to flying them. For a strike mission, the whole process starts with building the munitions.

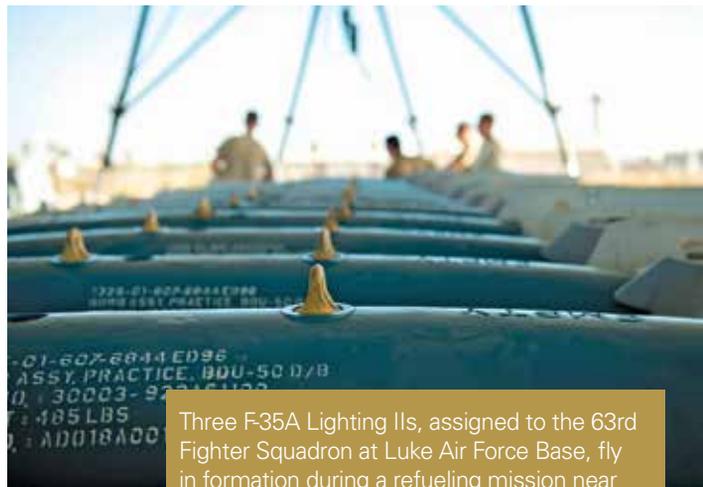
"There's a lot of prep work that goes into building a munition," says Staff Sgt. Noah Dankocsik, 56th Equipment Maintenance Squadron conventional maintenance crew chief. "It requires reading through multiple steps in our technical data to properly putting it together. To build munitions, you have to put on tails and noses, and you have the bomb body itself to prepare."

Once munitions are built, they are put on a trailer and the Airmen from the line delivery section pull the trailers of bombs to the flight line to transfer to the weapons

load crews. Weapons then take those bombs and load them onto the jets, Dankocsik says.

In addition to having the weapons loaded, F-35s are inspected and prepped for flight.

"Our crew chiefs perform 'before operation servicing' (BOS) inspections to ensure aircraft are serviced and ready for flight," says Master Sgt. Micheal Whitehead, 63rd Aircraft Maintenance Unit (AMU) F-35 lead production superintendent. "Crew chiefs, avionics, weapons, autonomic logistics information system expeditors will



Three F-35A Lightning IIs, assigned to the 63rd Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, fly in formation during a refueling mission near Phoenix. A KC-135 Stratotanker, assigned to the Arizona Air National Guard, 161st Fueling Wing, refueled six F-35s. During a refueling mission, the boom operator extends the boom to make contact with the aircraft and, once in contact, fuel is pumped through the boom to the aircraft. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman Brooke Moeder)

SEE **AMMO** PAGE 26



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Three F-35A Lightning IIs, assigned to the 63rd Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base, fly in formation during a refueling mission near Phoenix. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman Brooke Moeder)

AMMO FROM PAGE 24

then review aircraft forms and clear any discrepancies. The production superintendent will perform a forms review and a walk around of the aircraft, (prior to) releasing it for flight.”

Recently, all the cohesion and cooperation between these units came together during the “Panther Beast” 63rd Fighter Squadron competition.

Competing pilots flew 50 miles to acquire and destroy six to 12 targets over a

45-minute period in hopes of becoming the winners of “Panther Beast,” says Lt. Col. Curtis Dougherty, 63rd Fighter Squadron commander.

“After landing, the tape review will reveal the truth, and we’ll celebrate the victors at a fighter squadron and aircraft maintenance unit awards ceremony,” Dougherty says.

Airmen from multiple units worked together to build the munitions used, maintain the aircraft and fly the jets. Dougherty says it was their cooperation that made the competition possible.

“The work started weeks before weapons hit targets,” he says. “Our AMU has been hard at work loading aircraft with external pylons that we’ve never flown with before at Luke. Ammo has spent countless hours building more weapons than we’ve ever dropped in this squadron’s history. The pilots have spent that time planning: determining which targets and attacks will challenge the squadron’s instructors and ensuring everyone has the knowledge requisite to succeed. On the day of the mission, it all comes together.”

While the competition is a special event, maintenance, ammo and pilots work together to perform these tasks frequently. Dougherty says it’s this synergy that allows the Air Force to be an effective fighting force.

“To succeed, we rely on the world’s finest maintenance professionals to care about the small details so that all of the critical aircraft systems work at their peak capability and weapons function the way they were intended,” he adds.

“We ask our pilots to prepare and brief with diligence to be ready to execute at the highest levels. The team environment and esprit de corps that extends across our aircraft maintenance unit and fighter squadron inspires the finest our airmen have to offer.” ■



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Gil Felix works in the GCC Veteran Services Center so he can help other vets take the critical first step. (Photo courtesy Glendale Community College)



A Big Step

GCC's Veteran Services Center makes the transition to college easier

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO-KARASINSKI

Gil Felix was active duty in the U.S. Army for six years, reaching the rank of E-4. His final duty posting was in Upstate New York's Fort Drum, where he remained for several years after his discharge.

He enjoyed New York and living near base and his active-duty friends, but the call of the desert was too strong for Felix, who grew up in the West Valley and attended Cactus High School. When it came time to make life changes he returned to Arizona, and one of his first stops was Glendale Community College's Veteran Services Center.

Longing to be a nurse, Felix was aware of GCC's highly respected nursing program.

"Robert Cavan in the GCC Veteran Services Center eased my transition into GCC and the nursing program," Felix says. "Without his guidance and knowledge, I would have taken some of the wrong classes, costing me valuable time and money.

"I didn't know where to start, and Robert showed me the way."

Taking the first step to enter college after serving in the military can be daunting, if not terrifying.

"After leaving the service, I wanted to go to college, but I was scared to take the first step," Felix says. "A buddy picked me up one day, took me to campus and made me enroll."

Felix now works in the GCC Veteran Services Center so he can help other vets take the critical first step.

With his job, Felix talks to vets who feel the same way he did.

"Most of the veterans I talk to are terrified to return to college for the same reasons I was," Felix says.

He was afraid of being too old to go to school, and after six years of being told what to do he was overwhelmed by making his own decisions.

Felix wants to help the community by becoming a nurse and encouraging veterans to enroll in college. He is motivated to help because he experienced the fears and lack of confidence. He also wants veterans to understand the benefits they've earned by serving the United States. He concedes that assimilation into civilian life and college can be difficult; however, he says GCC and the on-campus Veteran Services Center are dedicated to serving those who served our country. ■

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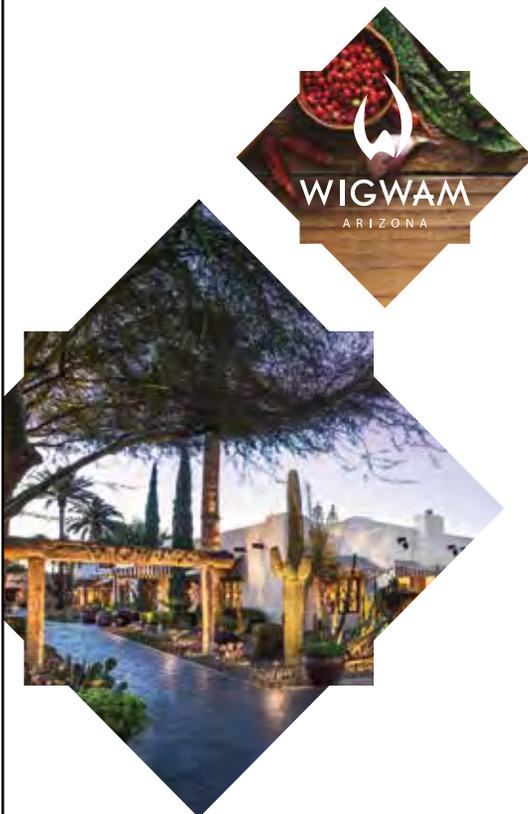
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Adrenaline JUNKIE

Craig Jackson jumps at the chance to ride in an F16

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO-KARASINSKI

Craig Jackson is an admitted adrenaline junkie.

So when Jackson—the “Jackson” in Barrett-Jackson Auction Company—was asked if he wanted to fly in an F16, he jumped at the opportunity.

The opportunity came about after Barrett-Jackson sold a charity car from Sanderson Ford, whose CEO, David Kimmerle, is on the board of Fighter Country Partnership/Foundation.

“It’s one of our favorite charities here at Barrett-Jackson,” Jackson says. “He wanted to sell a 2018 Ford Mustang Cobra Jet. When we sell our charity cars, we don’t take commission. Whoever buys the car writes the check straight to the charity.”

The 50th anniversary Cobra Jet was serialized and the auction went well.

“A couple months later, David Kimmerle



Barrett-Jackson’s Craig Jackson accepted an invitation to fly in an F16 after working with Fighter Country Partnership and Foundation during his auto auction. (Photo courtesy Craig Jackson)

asked if I would be interested in going up in an F16. I said, ‘Are you serious? I’m an adrenaline junkie. Sign me up.’

“Because of the sacrifice they make, we’re always raising money for the military—present or veterans. That’s an honor. We make it as easy on everybody as we can.”

The day before the flight, Jackson underwent survival training, including how the ejection seat works and what to expect.

“I was very well prepped for the flight,” he says. “I knew what was coming up and I really enjoyed it. My main thing was, ‘Don’t throw up.’

“He gave me a good ride. He was very conscientious about how I was feeling. The first time he hit it hard, he said he was going to give me a couple Gs. He said, ‘That was a 5

SEE **JACKSON** PAGE 32



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Craig Jackson, left, shown here with his Luke Air Force Base team, landed safely after a tour around the Valley. (Photo courtesy Craig Jackson)

JACKSON FROM PAGE 30

right there.' That was more than 'a couple.'"

Jackson says it gave him insight into the military and what pilots and soldiers have to do to stay in condition to fly the fighter planes.

"This is all second nature to them," Jackson says. "They're more worried about their ord-

nances. It's a lot of pressure. As sophisticated as their planes are, there are still humans who have to make the call.

"I thoroughly enjoyed it. The pilot told me something: The ride was going to hit me hard. He wasn't kidding. I went home and slept for three hours. I had to constantly keep myself together. I had to stay focused and it wore me

out. I'm usually full of energy all day long. I haven't taken a nap in ages."

The trip was the perfect fit for Jackson.

"I love everything fast," he says. "I'm going to bring my Bugati for the air show and race an F16 with it. I do not skydive. Why jump out of perfectly good airplanes? I like fast cars and boats. I gave up fast motorcycles." ■

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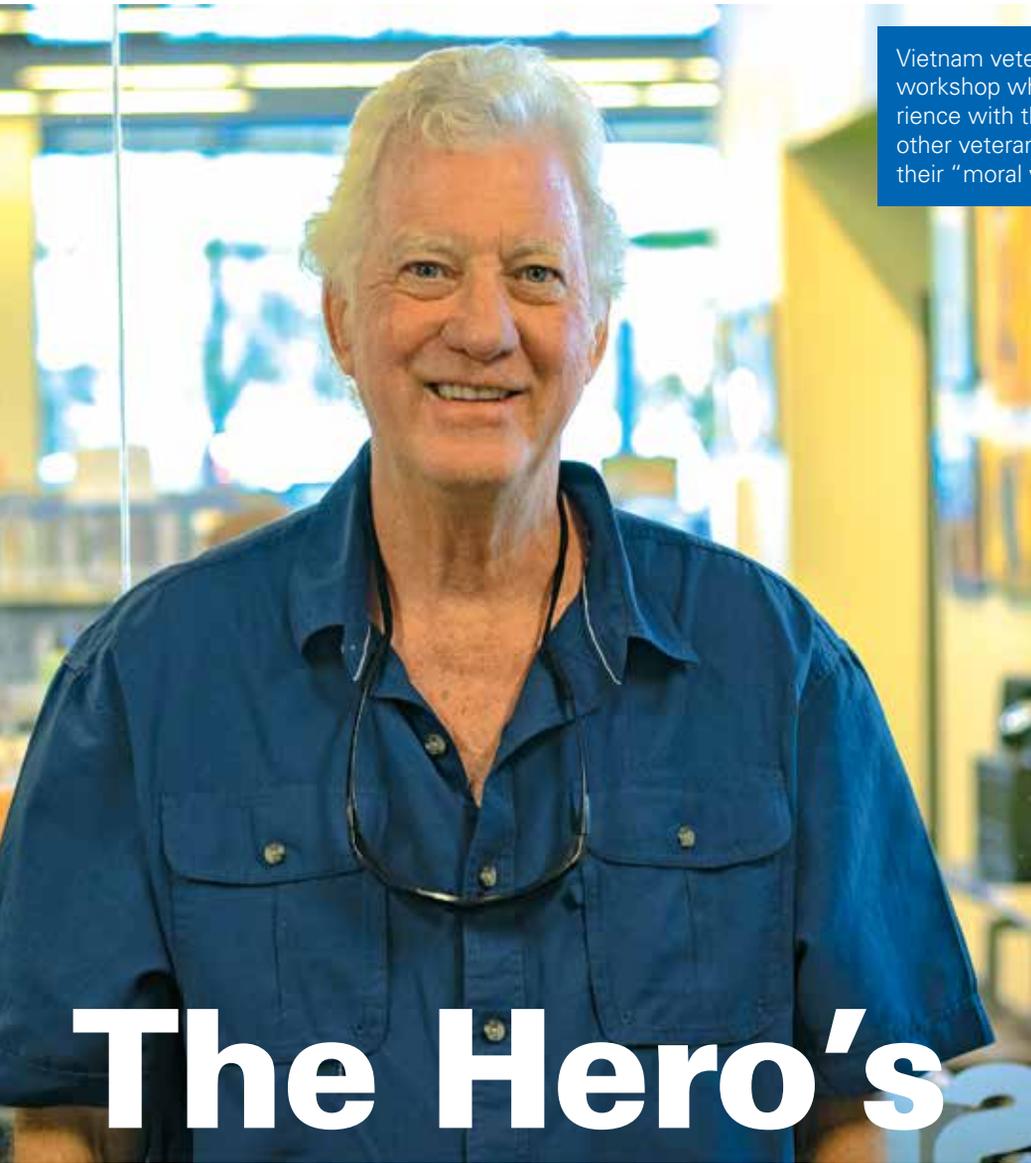
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Vietnam veteran Joe Brett will host a workshop where he will discuss his experience with the war. He wants to inspire other veterans to learn how to overcome their “moral wounds.” (Photo by Octavio Serrano)

The Hero's Journey

Vietnam veteran holding workshop to discuss PTSD

BY OCTAVIO SERRANO

After battling in Vietnam, Joe Brett was ready to fly home, but something about the pilot made him reconsider.

“I was going home, and I switched pilots because I didn’t want to fly with this particular pilot,” Brett says. “The pilot did a stunt on take-off and killed both him and the guy. I watched them both being put into body bags.”

Brett believed it should have been him in that accident, and it caused what he calls a “moral wound.” Now he wants to share his ex-

perience and help other veterans.

He will lead The Veterans Path Home, a four-part series during which he shares his experience to help fellow soldiers cope with the emotional scars of war. The workshop is weekly, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesdays from November 12 to December 3 at the Goodyear Library, 14455 W. Van Burn Street, Suite 101.

“There’s new thought about ‘moral wound,’ it’s a new term,” Brett says. “We’re just wanting to bring the people who come to our classes an awareness of what that means, where it came from and how veterans and their families, and us as a society, can think differently in order to get different outcomes for our veterans.”

Brett grew up in Watertown, New York, where veterans, primarily from World War II, were idolized.

“I grew up a Baby Boomer, and we were always in awe of the World War II veteran and people who served,” says Brett, 73. “It was just something we all knew we were going to do at some point in time and so I did. I was in ROTC at college.”

He attended St. Bonaventure University before he was commissioned at 22. He served two years of active duty and then earned a master’s in education and administration from Winona State University and a master’s in public administration degree from Harvard Kennedy School with a focus on international development.

While he was commissioned with the Army, he went to artillery school and became a forward observer. In Vietnam, he directed the artillery attacks on the enemy.

“A forward observer is out in the front lines with the infantry and he’s calling in this artillery to support the infantry soldiers,” Brett says. “The military has these huge weapons that drop big bombs on the enemy.”

“That was the hairy part of the mission—putting yourself at risk. When you’re 23 you don’t think about it, and it’s kind of what you do.”

Before his stint in the military, Brett saw war as black and white: good guys against bad guys. He soon realized, however, it isn’t quite so. Soldiers can find themselves going against their “moral code.”

// You experience these things that challenge your moral fiber. You do these things that you were never going to do. You're there to do good, to support your guys, and all of the sudden you're doing something, or something happens, that is shocking to your system."

"You experience these things that challenge your moral fiber," Brett says. "You do these things that you were never going to do. You're there to do good, to support your guys, and all of the sudden you're doing something, or something happens, that is shocking to your system."

When he witnessed his colleague die after he switched pilots with him, he was shocked.

"I was shattered. That should've been me. If I hadn't switched the flights, I would've been dead," Brett says.

But Brett says he continued in the war and pushed his feelings aside. It wasn't until he returned home from the war that his "moral wound" caught up with him.

"I was having these dreams about being zipped in a body bag and I was still alive, and I couldn't let anybody know," Brett says. "I didn't assume that it was because I saw my colleague

being bagged up in a body bag."

Brett turned to alcohol to deal with the pain. At the time, posttraumatic stress disorder wasn't a known ailment, and the resources weren't available. Eventually, he got help and found the right path home.

"(My problems) were stewing all the time, and I finally came to terms and I got into what I'm teaching now," Brett says. "I got into the hero's journey."

The Surprise resident says warriors train for combat, achieve their purpose and return home. The military doesn't pay attention to the return home, and soldiers are often left to fend for themselves when they try to adapt to civilian life.

During his workshop, he wants to shed light on this problem and the "moral wounds" left by war.

"We're raising awareness among our citizens and among our veterans that there's a way out, that there's knowledge out there and that people are not alone," he says.

The Veterans Path Home is a way for soldiers to discuss and share experiences. Brett will talk about his demons in the hopes it will help others.

"The way you think about coming home and what you think about when you get home is going to determine the happiness for the rest of your life," Brett says.

"You have to engage the instrument of your fate. Take the darkest moment of your life and face it and you will find fellows along the way who can help you unlock that and lead you to a better, bigger reality and a more fruitful life. That's the message." ■

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Lending a Hand

Baby shower to support female soldiers and veterans

BY SUSAN KERESKY

When veteran Kathleen Laurier and her sister, Barbara Klinedinst, founded VA Maternity Outreach for Moms in Phoenix, they realized the gifts they gave new moms were the only unused items they had for themselves and their newborns.

The women will speak during the Jewish War Veterans Post 619's baby shower to benefit new moms at Sun Lakes Country Club at 9:30 a.m. Sunday, November 17. It is open to the public, and refreshments and snacks—coffee, bagels and pastries—will be served.

Guests are asked to bring new and unwrapped gifts. Suggested items



Veteran Kathleen Laurier and her sister, Barbara Klinedinst, founded VA Maternity Outreach for Moms in Phoenix. (Submitted photo)

for baby gifts include baby clothes up to 12 months; baby care items such as thermometers, hairbrushes and nail clippers; disposable diapers; bath towels and bathing supplies; bottles and bottle brushes; blankets and children's books.

Gifts for moms (also new) can include shampoo, conditioner, lotion, combs and brushes, flip flops, slipper socks, nursing supplies, candles and bath poufs.

Veteran moms will not attend the event. Gifts will be given to Laurier and Klinedinst for the MOMS gifting program. Their gifting program has been so successful that it has spread to other states and Puerto Rico. The two women also created a program to follow female veterans throughout their pregnancy and after delivery. This tracking program is now a national VA requirement.

JWV Post 619 members participate in philanthropic activities to help Jewish and non-Jewish veterans in Arizona.

Members do not need to be veterans or Jewish. The Post donates about \$34,000 per year to help local Arizona veterans through a variety of programs. During the past 25 years, JWV Post 619 has held parties at the veterans homes and hospitals, served refreshments at VA clinics, supported Fisher House in Tucson, refurbished rooms at the Arizona State Veteran Home, and sold poppies at supermarkets to support injured and homeless vets.

They've also supported veterans who've returned from the Middle East with significant problems and purchased a van and bicycles to assist veterans with transportation to the VA Hospital.

Post membership is open to veterans and nonveterans. The Post meets at 9:30 a.m. the third Sunday of every month in the Sun Lakes Country Club, Mirror Room. Meetings feature speakers focused on supporting veterans. For more information, contact Cmdr. Robert Brooks at 480-688-1827 or email linbob72@wbhsi.net. ■

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Bayou Bandits singer Joshua Strickland sees himself as a soldier first, then a musician. (Photo courtesy Blushing Cactus Photography)



A New Mission

The Bayou Bandits' Joshua Strickland remembers late soldier on album

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO-KARASINSKI

Joshua Strickland sat down at his house and thought about his time with the U.S. Army. The missions in Kandahar City, Afghanistan, and the camaraderie between he and his fellow soldiers.

He couldn't forget his Army buddy, someone who, as Strickland says, "lost his battle with PTSD." The lead singer/songwriter for The Bayou Bandits, Strickland wrote a song called "Kandahar," set to appear on the Valley band's self-titled debut album due out in November.

"Whether you're a veteran or soldier or

not, this still resonates," Strickland says solemnly. "Everyone can relate to that sentiment of losing someone close to them or someone who's dealing with depression."

"Kandahar" includes the line: "Most of us, we made it home/but we never came back."

"After I wrote it, I knew what I was trying to say, but when I sang it and people heard it, the message was conveyed perfectly," he says. "Someone recorded it at an open mic night, where I was just hanging out. When they posted it on YouTube, it's since been viewed 3,000 times."

But before it officially hits the streets, Strickland did his due diligence. He ran it by the soldier's family and his fellow soldiers.

"I called all the members of my old team I was with in Afghanistan," Strickland says. "I wanted their input on it. It's such a close-to-home subject. I didn't want them to think I was trying to exploit the tragedy."

"I got his wife's blessing, too. The first copy goes to her. It's a common occurrence with a lot of soldiers and service members coming home from the war. There aren't a lot of resources out there to get the help they need."

Not everything on "The Bayou Bandits" is down key, though. The band has already released the single "Take Me Back," which has received airplay locally. Then there's "Kiss My Dixie ..."

"That was a song we wrote for some of our critics," Strickland says with a laugh. "I'm a straightforward type of dude. That was a song about my upbringing. I'm a true Louisiana man."

The album crisscrosses genres, with some songs taking listeners back to the swamplands of Louisiana, while others delve into Southern rock.

Strickland balanced his day job as a registered nurse with the recording sessions.

"I'd get off work at 6:30 p.m. and go straight to the studio and stay there until 10," he says. "Then I'd go back to work at 6 a.m. It was horrible. It was worth it, though."

"Having that single out for a while, it was building up anxiety from fans asking when were we going to release a record. That was really our next step as a band. It's one thing to play covers and make a lot of money doing it, but it's a completely different sense of euphoria whenever we get to play our own music in front of people."

"The first time I heard the final mix of the songs, my first thought was, 'That's sexy. That's the real job right there. Those are my words.' It's cool to see it brought to life."

The Bayou Bandits have made a name for itself already through its cover shows, but now Strickland and his bandmates—Jeremy Madig, Paul Williams and Jason Pataska—really have something to wrap their instruments around.

"People are interested in what I have to say," Strickland says. "They want to hear the message I'm conveying. It's not just me

SEE **BAYOU BANDITS** PAGE 42

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BAYOU BANDITS FROM PAGE 40

covering someone else's songs. Don't get me wrong. We love doing it. We made a lot of money doing it. But it's not the same.

"We put our thoughts, our feelings and our emotions in these songs."

That especially applies with "Kandahar."

"We went through everything together," he says. "We ran missions every single day and every single night together. We were closer than brothers. He came back and fell on hard times. When you lose hope, you lose everything. He wasn't able to get the help he needs, unfortunately, and couldn't see another way out. He left behind a wife and four kids. At least, mentally, he's at peace." ■



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Arts in Service

Mesa residents to honor art teachers for work with veterans

BY CONNOR DZIAWURA

Artist and Mesa Arts Center teacher Agustin Vargas feels the venue's Arts in Service program can do a great deal of good for the veterans who take its classes.

"I think this is an opportunity for some of them to have something in their lives, to have some happiness," explains Vargas, who heads the drawing, painting and printmaking department. "Sometimes they are depressed, and they can put all this sadness or depression in a piece of art or something to pull their mind out of the regular daily environment."

Launched just two years ago, the program provides a variety of free arts classes to U.S. Armed Forces veterans and service members who present a DD214 or veteran-designated driver's license.

Now, Northeast Mesa residents and artists Susan Paige and husband Lt. Col. Barry Rosenblatt are planning "Luminescence," an exhibit to honor the work Vargas and lead metal sculpture instructor Matt Smith have done with veterans.

The free exhibit at downtown Mesa's OneOhOne art gallery will showcase the works of Vargas and Smith, beginning with an opening reception from noon to 7 p.m. Saturday, December 7. The exhibit will remain on display from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays for the remainder of December. The public is invited.

According to Paige, who along with her husband has studio space at the OneOhOne gallery, Smith will create a large installation as a centerpiece to the exhibit, with the surrounding walls adorned by Vargas' artwork.

The idea came from Paige's and Rosenblatt's past experiences learning from the two teachers. Rosenblatt has taken classes taught by Smith; Paige took painting classes from Vargas, albeit separate from Mesa Arts Center's Arts in Service program. Though she calls her husband—a stroke survivor and retired veteran with 20 years of service—a positive person, Paige says the classes have brightened his life.

"We just wanted to give back (to Vargas and Smith) because they put so much effort and they're so kind and patient with all the veterans," Paige says. "That was the inspiration—to honor them for all they do for the community."

Though Vargas admits he was hesitant to participate in the exhibition when first asked by Paige—because he likes to be selective of where he displays his works—he ultimately gave in due to the importance he feels his work with veterans holds.

"To see these guys completely happy and proud, that's amazing. It's



Mesa Arts Center's Arts in Service program features a variety of free classes targeted at veterans, including belly dance, beadmaking, ceramics, printmaking and photography. In December, Northeast Mesa residents Susan Paige and husband Lt. Col. Barry Rosenblatt will honor two of the teachers—Agustin Vargas and Matt Smith—with an exhibit to showcase their works. (Photo courtesy Mesa Arts Center)

a great, great experience," Vargas says of instructing veterans, many of whom he says enroll in his classes with zero painting experience.

Launched just two years ago, the Arts in Service program is supported by The Boeing Company, the Arizona Department of Veteran Services and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

"We knew that there is a significant military population in Arizona, and our longtime partner The Boeing Company in Arizona shared with us that one of their priorities was to serve veterans and support programs that assist with veterans and service members reintegrating post-service," explains Laura Wilde, studios manager and program leader.

"Mesa Arts Center created Arts in Service to address this need and support the population, as arts classes can provide an opportunity to build work-related skills, stress-relief benefits and social connection. ... The more we learned through the program, the more we realized the critical value of arts experiences and programs like this to service members and their families."

Vargas and Smith are just two of many teachers who support the program at the Mesa Arts Center. The fall season is already underway with subjects including belly dance, beadmaking, ceramics, printmaking, photography and more. Sessions vary in length. Vargas is not teaching any Arts in Service courses this season; Smith is teaching welding.

At the end of each season, the Mesa Arts Center holds a celebratory exhibit featuring Arts in Service participants' work. The next one will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, December 19, in the arts center's drawing and painting studios.

"Every time we finish the session of these classes, we collect all the art and we organize this big exhibition for all the students. It's really, really nice," Vargas says. "They really love it. They are waiting during the season to finish and have all their work ready to be exhibited. They feel so proud to be there."

For more information about the Mesa Arts Center's Arts in Service program, visit mesaartscenter.com/artsin-service. For more information about OneOhOne, visit oneohone101.com. For more information about "Luminescence," email susanpaigeomc@yahoo.com. ■

Atlanta Falcons visit Luke Air Force Base

(Photos by U.S. Air Force photographer Airman 1st Class Leala Marquez and the Atlanta Falcons)

While in town to battle the Arizona Cardinals, the Atlanta Falcons visited Luke Air Force Base to show their appreciation for the military. On their day off, the team learned about parachute packing and participated in simulations. They also held a meet and greet for airmen and their families.



Grady Jarrett, Atlanta Falcons defensive tackle, experiences a parachute simulator at the Aircrew Flight Equipment facility.



Danny Etling experiments with equipment at Luke AFB.



Kenjon Barner, Grady Jarrett and Sharrod Neasman get to know what it's like at Luke AFB.



Matt Bryant, Jacob Tuioti-Mariner, Josh Harris, Grady Jarrett, Christian Blake, Sharrod Neasman, Tyeler Davison, Kenjon Barner, Jamon Brown, Brandon Powell, Danny Etline, Wes Schweitzer and Sean Halow.



Tyeler Davison greets the military at Luke AFB.



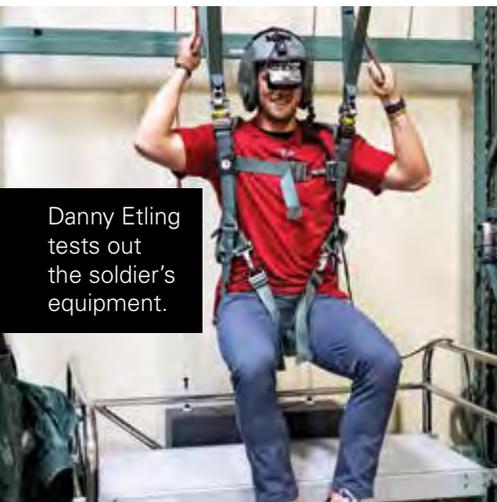
Kenjon Barner, Atlanta Falcons running back, signs memorabilia during a tour of the 56th Operations Support Squadron Aircrew Flight Equipment's facility.



Danny Etling, Atlanta Falcons quarterback, converses with fans during a team meet and greet at the Bryant Fitness Center.



Grady Jarrett and Kenjon Barner meet and greet with Luke AFB families.



Danny Etling tests out the soldier's equipment.



Tech. Sgt. Christopher Dorr, 56th Operations Support Squadron Aircrew Flight Equipment lead trainer, discusses the capabilities of the F-35A Lightning II to members of the Atlanta Falcons during their visit to the AFE facility.



Josh Harris signs autographs for fans.

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