

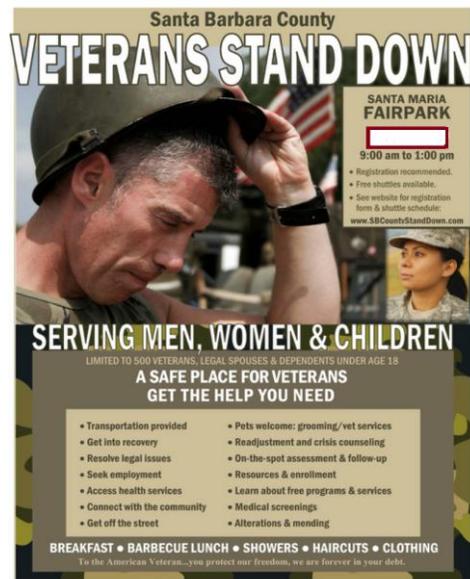
# VETERANS STAND DOWN

## Never Forget

### INTRODUCTION

The 2016-17 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) would like to join the public in recognizing the many veterans that reside in this County. Their courage and sacrifices should never be forgotten. This report highlights Santa Barbara County's involvement with the Veterans Stand Down, an annual event where the veterans receive goods and services.

For the past five years, Fifth District Santa Barbara County Supervisor Steve Lavagnino and his staff have organized a Veterans Stand Down. On October 15, 2016, a one-day event was held at Santa Barbara County Fairpark in Santa Maria. Like other Stand Downs across the United States, local organizations gathered to provide assistance with food, housing, clothing, health screenings, Veterans Administration (VA) and Social Security benefits, voter registration and counseling. Referrals were given to other necessary services such as legal advice, college programs, substance abuse treatment, and medical insurance. Businesses and County agencies came to recruit prospective employees. It should be noted that Santa Barbara County employees and representatives of 97 organizations donated their time to help the veterans. This report spotlights the care our community demonstrates for our local Santa Barbara County veterans, including homeless veterans.



### BACKGROUND

As described by the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) on their website, “The original Stand Down for homeless veterans was modeled after the Stand Down concept used during the Vietnam War to provide a safe retreat for units returning from combat operations. At secure base camp areas, troops could take care of personal hygiene, get clean uniforms, enjoy warm meals, receive medical and dental care, mail and receive letters, and enjoy the camaraderie of friends in a safe environment. Stand Down afforded battle-weary soldiers the opportunity to renew their spirit, health and overall sense of well-being that is the purpose of the Stand Down for homeless veterans, and achieving those objectives requires a wide range of support services and time. The program is successful because it brings these services to one location, making them more accessible to homeless veterans....”

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“In July 2002, the founders of Stand Down – Robert Van Keuren, Dr. Jon Nachison and Vietnam Veterans of San Diego – asked the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) to become the ‘keeper of the flame’ and provide national leadership for the movement. Since the first Stand Down in San Diego in 1988, the program has become recognized as the most valuable outreach tool to help homeless veterans in the nation today.”

The website for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs further explains, "Stand Downs are typically one- to three-day events providing supplies and services to homeless Veterans, such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings and VA Social Security benefits counseling. Veterans can also receive referrals to other assistance such as health care, housing solutions, employment, substance use treatment and mental health counseling. They are collaborative events, coordinated between local VA Medical Centers, other government agencies and community-based homeless service providers.” The Jury observed that many of these services were available to all veterans and their families.

The Stand Down Overview website reports that nationally: “In 2010, over 190 independent Stand Down events served over 52,000 veterans and family members. Over 27,000 volunteers participated in these events, providing services, logistics support, and companionship. Department of Labor-Veterans Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS) provided funding for 81 events in 2010 to help facilitate employment readiness and connectivity to employment and training services. DOL-VETS’ financial support is a critical component of Stand Down events and is the only Federal program devoted exclusively to supporting these initiatives in the community.”

### **METHODOLOGY**

Members of the Grand Jury attended the 2016 Santa Maria Stand Down. In addition to online research, the Jury interviewed Supervisor Lavagnino, his staff, veterans, active duty Air Force volunteers and volunteers from the community.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Any veteran can register to attend the Stand Down. Their families and even pets were invited. Both breakfast and a barbecue lunch were served to attendees and volunteers. In addition, 660 volunteers participated in the Stand Down. All food and services were donated. This year 13 Santa Barbara County Department sponsors and 175 community business partners gave their time and financial support to this event. A \$7,000 federal grant from the Homeless Veterans Reintegration



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Program was obtained by Supervisor Lavagnino to supply shoes, clothing, and supplies for homeless veterans who attended the event.

A total of 579 veterans attended, including 139 homeless men. Sixty-three female veterans attended, including 15 homeless.



### SERVICES OFFERED

The services and support provided to attendees included:

- New Clothing and Towels
- Hygiene Products
- Haircuts
- Flu Shots
- Chaplain Services
- Medical, Dental Vision and Hearing Services
- Social Services
- Mental/PTSD Counseling
- Legal Services
- Food
- Employment Counseling
- Pet Zone including medical, grooming, and care packages
- Entertainment
- Kids Zone for Veteran Families
- Transportation

For a complete list of services provided, see [www.sbcountystanddown.com](http://www.sbcountystanddown.com).

# **VETERANS STAND DOWN**

## **CONCLUSION**

The 2016-17 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury commends all those who participated in the 2016 Stand Down, including Santa Barbara County Fifth District Supervisor, Steve Lavagnino. The Jury found the event was a success. As Supervisor Lavagnino stated to the news media, “In 2012, we started with an idea and a handful of people and now we have a committee of more than 100. It’s a group of very talented people and everybody’s coming together to try and help veterans.”

Under *California Penal Code §933 and §933.05*, this activity report does not require a response.