



COUNTY OF MONTEREY CAO Weekly Report

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SPECIALREPORT



Participants in the Victims' Dedication Ceremony release doves in from of the Government Center and watch as these symbols of love, peace and hope take flight.

County Notes

- > Don't forget Drug Take Back Day Saturday, April 29th. Details and how to find a location near you is [here](#).

Ceremony Offers Honor and Healing for Victims, Survivors

For the last 18 years, families and friends of crime victims have come together to honor their loved ones at the District Attorney's annual Victims' Dedication Ceremony.

This year's gathering was held April 7th in the Board of Supervisors Chambers. The event honors both victims and survivors of crime and is designed to allow attendees to share their grief or experience with others who understand. District Attorney's Office Victim Program Manager says more residents are



turning to this event for support - attendance was at an all-time high this year as was the number of survivors who came to take part. Patterson noted that there were more members of law enforcement at the event this year to support these residents.

The ceremony is held in conjunction with National Crime Victims' Rights Week and most in attendance had lost children, parents, siblings or other loved ones to violence. The ceremony included moving speakers, a slideshow honoring local murder victims, a time to allow survivors of homicide to announce their loved one's name and the event ended with a release of doves.



A family prepares for the dove release (top left). Attendees fill the board chambers (above left), a special display honors murder victims (above right). Probation Chief Marcia Parsons and District Attorney Dean Flippo (lower left) welcome families and friends. Service dogs Hope and Odie were on hand during the event to provide support (lower right).



New Military, Veterans Affairs Officer a Familiar Face

It has taken more than four decades but Wes Morrill, the County's new Military and Veterans Affairs Officer has come full circle in his relationship with the Military. In the 1970s, Morrill enlisted in the Army and served as a Culinary Specialist.



Wes Morrill.

Fast forward to 2017. Morrill now oversees the county office that serves our local veterans.

Morrill began his career with Monterey County in 1999 in the County Administrator's Office, moved to the Department of Social Services in 2002 and to the Military and Veterans Affairs Office in 2011. Some of the innovations Wes has championed at MVAO to date include being part of the core team that created the Monterey County Veterans Treatment Court; co-leading the first Monterey County Veterans Stand Down and providing ongoing support in the development of the California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery.

Here, Wes shares his story and why he thinks the MVAO is a critical resource.

Q. You have worked a variety of jobs in the county, but seem to have a knack for jobs that serve others.

A. Being able to recognize the value of being of service to others and seeing lives change has followed me since I was young; from being the batboy for the Washington State Cougars baseball team, to a stint as a PGA golf teaching professional, to my employee benefits consulting career and ultimately recruited to Monterey County.

Q. What is it about the work at MVAO that appeals to you?

A. I have a close connection to the military through my family history: my father's service in the Navy as a Pearl Harbor survivor, my grandfather was a colonel in the Army Air Corp and one of the first officers in the Air Force, my own Army experience and a very close friend who as a Marine died in Viet Nam. I immediately embraced the offer and couldn't be happier. Leaving Ft. Ord after my Army service, I never thought I'd be on the base again. I am now out there weekly, having more fun than any other position I've held over the years. I'm truly honored and humbled to serve in this position.

Q. What was it like as a 'culinary specialist' in the Army back in the day?

A. "Back in the day" like today, it's about multi-tasking. I was licensed to drive everything from a jeep to a two-and-a-half-ton heavy duty truck. We had to be qualified to operate multiple weapons including rifles, side arms, and for me, a rocket launcher! As for cooking, (we were called cooks but they've upgraded our title to "Culinary Specialist"), there were ever-present challenges of ordering, quality control and knowing that "the Army runs on its stomach." If meals weren't prepared correctly or safely, we could be the reason for a failed mission! I still love to cook!

Q. You have had some successes at MVAO. What are some projects you'd like to see in the future?

A. I believe there are multiple challenges veterans of all eras face. Stable housing and employment are mandatory to form a foundation for all else that life presents. Underserved sectors, especially female veterans, are in serious need of better access and education about benefits to which they are entitled through their military service. Suicide rates among our veterans present terrible statistics. To those ends, we must find resources at state and federal levels to better focus on these needs. Locally, we will continue to the best of our ability to provide stability and benefits.

Q. Why is the MVAO is so important for our local vets?

A. MVAO is the crucial link between the veteran and the VA for access to healthcare, disability benefits, supplemental income, referrals to community resources, and to support for surviving family members. Through the great work of our military and veterans affairs representatives and administrative staff, statistics for 2015 show that close to \$30 million was put back into the local economy through our submission and VA awarding of disability and other types of benefits.



Annual Tostada Bar Delivers for Relay

Relay for Life gets a lot of support from county employees, but few fundraisers for this worthy cause are as popular as the annual Tostada Bar offered by the Auditor Controller's Office.

Spearheaded by Payroll Manager Idalia Ow, this event has become a staple at the Government Center each year.





Idalia has personal reasons for this fundraiser.

“I participate in Relay for Life to honor my brother-in-law, Jesus Aguayo, who passed in 2013 and to celebrate those cancer warriors who continue to fight this dreaded disease.”

This year’s food fest took place Friday, April 21st and drew a hungry crowd eager to build their own tostadas. By the end of lunch, \$800 was raised for the cause.

“A big thank you to my colleagues in the Auditor’s Office who donated the ingredients and our awesome payroll team who served as cooks and set up crew,” she says. “I could not do it without them.”

The Relay for Life Walk will take place May 19th and 20th.

Enjoying plates loaded with tostadas and all the fixings are Supervisor Luis Alejo and aide Javier Gomez (left). Previous page: Jonabel Perez, Eden Braganza, Sunny Haight and Luis Hueso really enjoyed this tostada party (left) and organizer Idalia Ow dishes up the good stuff for the crowd (right).