

july 2008

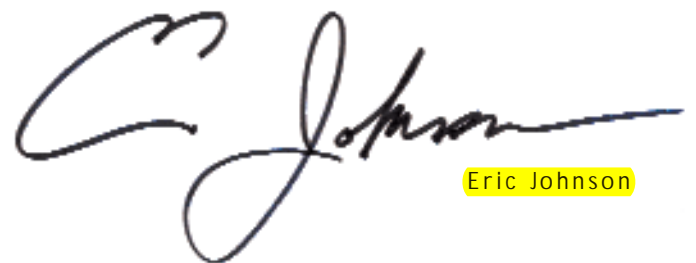
FROM THE PUBLISHER

INDEPENDENCE & OPPORTUNITY

Really, they go hand-in-hand. In the historical perspective, when we think of independence we think of the birth of our nation; breaking the bonds of British rule and proclaiming ourselves a sovereign people. Since then and throughout our history we have relied upon individuals who placed themselves in harm's way. This month, in an article by Anita Venezia, we take a look at East Bay Stand Down, where good people gather to support our veterans in need. Then, in another story by Michael Copeland, you'll read about ex-federal agent, Ben Tisa, a man whose daily work was "to protect and to serve." Both stories are good reminders that a price has been paid for the freedoms we enjoy.

How we value our independence and freedom might be measured in what we *do* with it. That brings us to our other "theme" this month—opportunity. We are pleased to present the stories of four unique individuals who have made the most of their freedom and independence: television star Alan Thicke, ex-football players and businessmen Brent Jones and Steve Wisniewski, and business leader Norm Kizirian. All of these men worked hard to realize their full potential and set themselves apart as leaders in their respective industries. Their stories remind us of what is possible and inspire us to reach higher.

Please, enjoy this issue of ALIVE as you reflect upon what it means to be free. Opportunities abound in this great nation. Let's remember that they are made possible by the heroes who serve. And when opportunities unfold before us, let's appreciate them and be unafraid to act, remembering that the belief of "I can do it too" is made possible by those who stepped out, often alone, to succeed before us.



Eric Johnson

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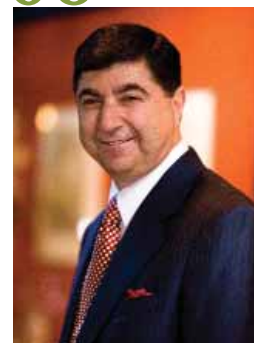
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The Cover



To appreciate an outward appearance of beauty is easy. To discover the deeper beauty that lies within each person, however, requires effort and patience. Take the time to discover the real, lasting beauty in others.

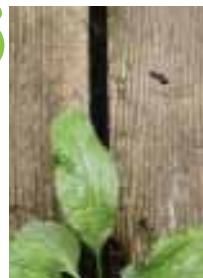
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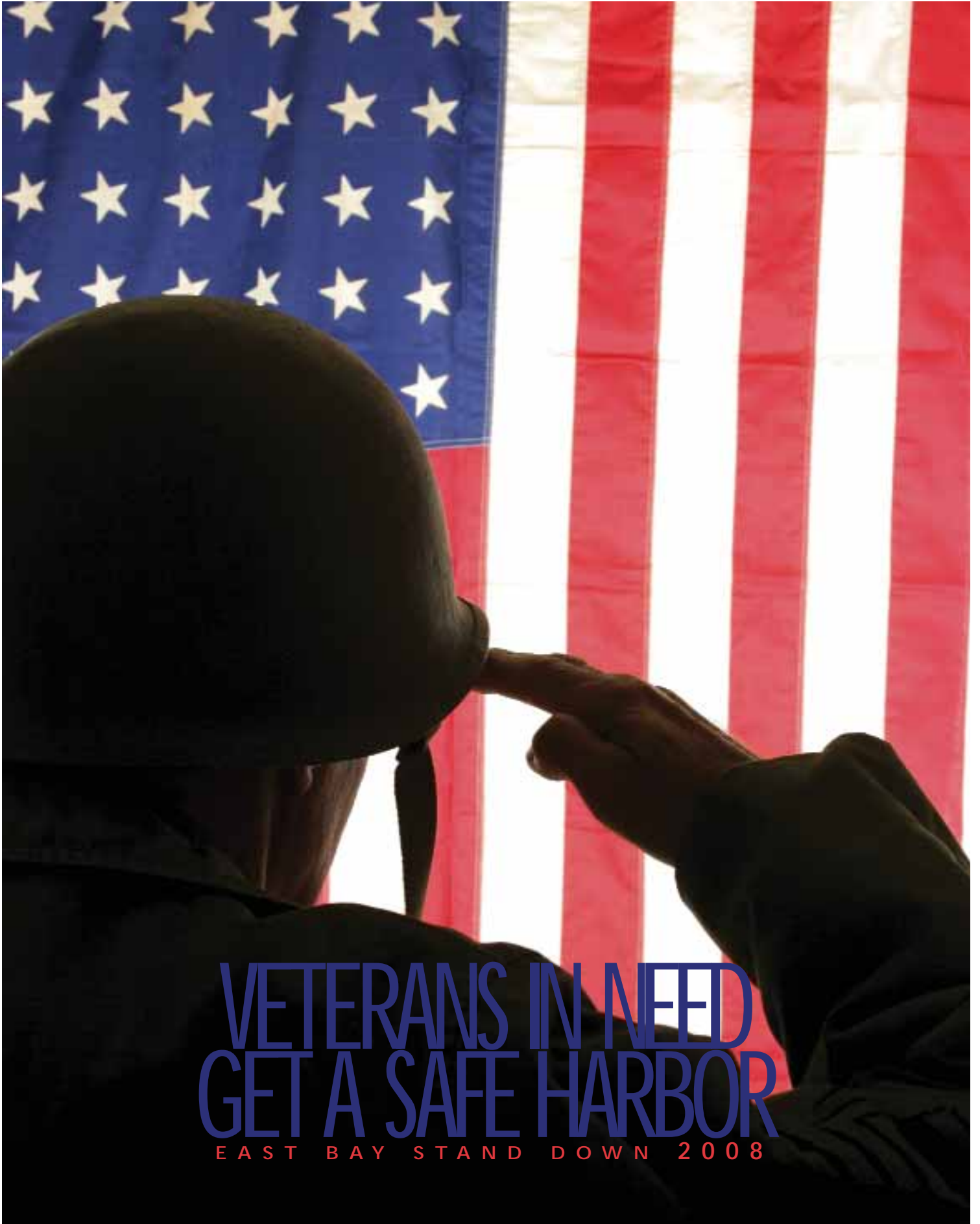


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ANITA VENEZIA

East Bay Stand Down, an event to help the displaced and homeless veterans, will convert the Alameda County Fairgrounds into a two-acre sprawling tent city. The completely self-contained event will take place August 7th through the 10th and is made possible with the generous sponsorship of many corporations, clubs and the caring community.

Stand Downs came about during the Vietnam War when combat troops could take a break to get a shower, shave, clean clothing and other comforts during a safe time and in a safe place. The East Bay Stand Down 2008 (EBSD) is partly sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans of Diablo Valley, the Concord Vet Centre, the Ladies Auxiliary VFW Antioch Post 6435, the Danville-Sycamore Valley Rotary Club, California Department of Veterans Affairs, Fremont Elks Lodge 2121, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory Armed Forces Veterans Associations, and other generous donors.

The Stand Down is organized and set up by the Department of Defense and is used as a training exercise for members of the military. The logistics of converting the bare grassy field of the fairgrounds into a working Tent City takes a full blown military task force to bring in electrical power generators, pump in water for kitchens and showers, set up communication centers and computer stations and all the support systems necessary to turn a blank space into a small self-contained city.

About 500 veterans are expected to participate and close to 1,500 volunteers will be on hand to provide the services for the four day event. About 25 sleeping tents will be set up each housing 20 vets and two tent leader coordinators for the 3 night 4 day event. Other tents for activities will be set up and all can be sponsored by a corporation for \$1000 and by individuals or non-profits for \$500. Placards with sponsors' names will be placed in the front of the sponsored tent and separate units will be available for the vets' families and children.

A movie theater tent will feature newly-released films and an arts and crafts center encourages vets and their families to create projects and decorate their tents.

Meals are served three times a day and include some donated gourmet meals prepared by white uniformed chefs from some of the Bay Area's best restaurants. Organizations and groups also commit to donating and serving meals and snacks for the participants.

Those veterans who have become displaced or homeless are actively sought out by several agencies such as the County Veterans Service Office (CVSO), California Vet Centers and Health Care for Homeless Veterans with the Veterans Administration. The agencies work diligently to help get the vets in need affordable housing, job training and social services programs.

All veterans are pre-registered prior to the Stand Down event and are bused from seven Bay Area counties to the Alameda County Fairgrounds for the voluntary four day stay. At arrival they are given a new set of clothes and shoes. Their own clothes are laundered and returned to them upon departure. Each participant is assigned a tent and a tent coordinator upon arrival and medical and dental services are offered free of charge. Psychologists and therapists are available for mental health care and there are daily AA and NA fellowship meetings for those vets with alcohol or drug problems.

A multi-jurisdictional "Superior Court" tent is set up for the participants who need legal assistance that may clear up any outstanding misdemeanors. Judges, attorneys, prosecutors and law students are on hand pro bono to help with legal issues. The participants may have their misdemeanors cleared with "sign offs" and could leave the event with a clean slate. There are no arrests at Stand Down events.

Basic camp rules apply and the event is maintained as a safe place for the participants and the volunteers who can relax and enjoy the camaraderie with true community esprit de corps. The once-brave and daring veterans are given a hand up to get them back on their way with dignity and gratitude for having given so much of themselves for their country.

The first Stand Down Event was held in 1988 in San Diego and has since taken place in over 200 cities. More than 100,000 veterans and their families have benefited from Stand Down Events which have proved to be effective in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

The first Stand Down Event in the East Bay took place in 1999 as an annual event and now takes place bi-annually. Stand Downs provide many avenues of assistance and have helped the veterans who went from the frontlines to the breadlines and finally to the lifelines provided by diligent volunteers who are dedicated to getting them back on track.

It is estimated that there are 15,000 in need and homeless veterans in Northern California with a national total of 250,000. The mission of the Stand Down organizers is to help the veterans in need to access the services that are available for them.

The Stand downs also bring public awareness to the plight of the many veterans who were once the point men soldiers who trained to the highest possible pitch when they did their duty for their country, but when they rotated out of the service there was no field manual for their transition and re-entry into the unstructured civilian life. >

For monetary or in-kind donations or to volunteer visit:

www.eastbaystanddown.org

Mail: East Bay Stand Down

P O Box 2196

Danville, CA 94526

ONE COURAGEOUS VETERAN AMONG MANY

Many veterans who return from the various conflicts around the world often bear wounds that cannot be seen on the outside. They bear wounds in the heart and are sometimes afflicted with anxiety and uncertainty. After a period of intense sharp-edged military training and soldier-to-soldier camaraderie with their band of brothers in the field, they return to a public wrought with antipathy and the perception that the country doesn't give a damn about them and some get lost along the way.

I spoke with a 45 year-old army veteran named Charles, who saw action in both Panama and Iraq. He was in a Special Ops and Service-to-Air unit who put down the ground crew in helicopters. When I asked him to describe his experience he asked me one question, "Did you see 'Blackhawk Down'?—well that's what I did."



I was sensitive about asking him personal questions, but he was willing to share the frustrations that vets go through after rotating out. He stated how much he wanted to do to help other vets who were in dire straits.

Charles joined the Army when he was 'very young' to give a better life to his family. While he was away he was driven by the thoughts of his wife and children and his love for them gave him the reason to be in the army 'defending his country.' The thought of his kids kept him going through the hard times in Iraq. He conditioned himself to keep on going knowing he'd soon be home with his wife and children.

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When he returned home he was shocked to find out his wife had been taken care of by a "Jodie," the term used for someone who moves in on someone else's family. Charles was hurt, disappointed and despondent. It all went bad from there and the beginning of the long spiral down followed by restraining orders, child support garnishments, loss of jobs and the devastating loss of the family structure. I could hear the pain in his voice as he recounted the frustrations of the hurt and disappointments in his life.

"Everything I knew was taken away. I hit the ground hard in a negative way. My whole psyche was that I was away defending my country and not defending my family." Charles' voice trailed off. There was a long pause while I took it all in. He told me he was speaking from his heart and I heard the anguish as he recounted the hard times he had and how bad it had become. "They garnished my wages for two other kids who weren't even mine and it took them 8 months to straighten it out." By that time Charles was in real trouble. "The foundation that keeps you alive while you're away is

Down event that got him back on track. He found a lifeline with vets helping vets and the camaraderie of his peers whose slogan rings true "we don't leave our wounded behind."

"I promised myself I'd help others the way I was helped and I now volunteer for the Stand Downs." Charles told me "I am a tent coordinator for the vets. I'll be there to hold someone else's hand during their hard time. We're there for one another, we're there to lift up a veteran and let them know the doors will not keep closing. If a vet cannot ask for help he cannot help himself." "I'll look for you at the August Stand Down." I told him, "I want the honor of shaking your hand."

Charles lit up when I asked him about his family. "My 25-year-old just had a baby, my 24-year-old is going to ASU to get a Masters, and my youngest helped clean up New Orleans after Katrina and he was accepted to UCLA. My kids have really rewarded me," he said as the pride swelled in his voice. "I am really blessed"



stolen right out from under you. The service to my country—that I was protecting with all my heart and providing for my family - was all gone when I returned. I had nothing." "It's hard to be trained in Special Ops flying in helicopters, being a Communications expert and then not even able to get a job in the Post Office. Few jobs are available for vets; even all the security jobs were taken. With all that training I had no merit when I got back to civilian life."

Charles talked about his second wife and the merry-go-round of red tape and administrative paper shuffling to get her papers finally in order. Charles explained his further hardships and his determination. He then told me about his introduction to a Stand

In true courageous veteran form, even though the path was beset by obstacles, Charles has decided to give back and share his experience, his pain and frustrations along with his successes with others who may need a shared blessing of just one helping hand up to set them back on the right path.

The Stand Down Event 2008, with true American spirit, forges forward with fortitude and goodwill to give their brave fellow service men and women a little help with dignity and honor in their darkest hours. The services that are offered will help them on their way to a new beginning with family and friends who have deep gratitude for the veterans' services to their country.