



HUNNEMAN: A life spent around the military

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In the 15 years I've known John Stryker "Tilt" Meyer, he has always spent time helping military veterans.

A former newspaper colleague, Tilt – a nickname earned from his pinball playing days growing up in New Jersey – is a former Green Beret who brought a world of first-hand experience to the military beat he covered and columns he wrote for many years.

These days, his newspaper days well in the rearview mirror, Tilt spends time serving on a number of advisory boards in the San Diego area; all of them with the goal of helping veterans find housing, get health care and receive the benefits they've earned.

He is also member of the board of directors of the nonprofit Veterans Affordable Housing Program where he serves as "the outreach guy," he says, traveling across Southern California and speaking to veterans service organizations about the assistance the program can offer.

The group assists low-income veterans, and those having financial difficulties and credit problems, in finding affordable housing.

Recently, on his way home to San Diego — after a day spent in both San Bernardino and Palm Springs meeting with veteran's organizations — we met in Temecula for coffee and conversation.

The affordable housing program was started in 1997 by Richard Simonian, an Orange County businessman and former Green Beret, and founder Santiago Communities, a firm that has built or acquired about 40 manufactured home communities across the West.

"He's a guy who has seen it all and now he's helping veterans," Tilt said.

Many of the veterans Tilt works with are of the Vietnam Era, most now in their 60s and 70s, who are on fixed incomes with no retirement or pension, other than Social Security.

"We work with a lot of veterans who have little or have lost everything," he said.

The program offers down payment assistance, rent subsidies and helps in building ramps, wheelchair lifts and other accommodations in the homes of veterans with disabilities.

Find out more at www.VeteransAffordableHousing.org.

Tilt served two tours of duty in Vietnam with Special Forces – including covert missions into Laos, North Vietnam and Cambodia – and has written two books about his experiences.

Those books, "On the Ground" and a recently updated and re-released "Across the Fence," tell stories about operations that were so clandestine the men who carried them out were prohibited from discussing them 20 years after they took place. Both books are available at Amazon.com.

Tilt is also the president of the Special Operations Association, a national non-profit group of veterans of those elite units of all military branches who have served from World War II to the present.

The organization — www.specialoperations.org — is a place for veterans to share memories and also honor their brethren who gave their lives and also remember POW/MIAs still unaccounted for in our nation's wars.

While Tilt certainly can relate to veterans of his (and my) generation, he also is aware of the difficulties military personnel of more current conflicts face.

His stepson suffered injuries while serving in Iraq.

"One of the things I enjoy about this job is I never know who I'm going to meet," he said.

And, in Tilt's case, who he gets to help.