



This article is an excerpt from the Southern California Sentinel, the Special Forces Association Chapter 78 monthly newsletter. To view the newsletter in its entirety visit www.specialforces78.com.

THREE GREEN BERETS HELP HOUSE VETERANS

While most people ate, drank and engaged in holiday merriment during the Chapter 78 Christmas party two years ago at the Bahia Corinthian Yacht Club in Corona Del Mar, unconventional soldier and entrepreneur Richard Simonian was engaged in an intense conversation about a topic near to his heart:

How could he and his company Santiago Communities Inc., help veterans find affordable housing? Not stick houses, but manufactured homes that are less expensive and easier to maintain.

Since that time, Santiago Communities Inc., has partnered with a non-profit organization, Affordable Community Living which offers the Veterans Affordable Housing Program and has provided over \$150,000 in funds for the program. The non-profit has also added two Chapter 78 members and Vietnam War Green Berets to its Board of Directors: Jim Duffy, who was wounded as the team leader of Detachment 109 in the Thong Duc District southwest of Da Nang, and John Meyer, who served two tours of duty with MACV-SOG.

Through Veterans Affordable Housing Program 70 veterans have been placed in manufactured homes throughout many of the 40 manufactured home communities that Santiago Communities oversees in five western states.

Sixty years ago, Richard Simonian completed training to become a Green Beret, dedicated to the Special Forces motto "De Oppresso Liber" – to free the oppressed. He dedicated three years of his life to that mission during those pioneer days of the Green Berets. Today, he and two fellow Green Berets, Jim and John are on another mission: *They are working together under Richard's leadership to place a roof over the heads of veterans who might otherwise end up homeless or living in less-than-desirable conditions with relatives.*

This new effort has been accomplished despite a languishing economy, unavailability of business credit and ever-increasing taxes. In the Green Beret spirit of adapting to changes, when the economy threw curses at Richard and his staff, they improvised and adapted to move forward.

"I simply wanted to make a difference in the lives of veterans," Richard said recently. "God has blessed me and I wanted to give something back."

Vietnam-era veteran Lorenzo R. Almada is one of the 70 veterans assisted through Veterans Affordable Housing Program. Lorenzo and his wife were living in a garage, having lost their home, their jobs, their car and all part-time income. "We were hurting," Lorenzo said, until a friend told him about the new affordable housing program for veterans. Today, Lorenzo and his wife live in a three-bedroom manufactured home in an Orange County.



"I was so impressed with the program, that I asked Richard if I could help him to get more veterans into it," Lorenzo said.

"What is truly unique about all of this is the fact that we have a for-profit company committed to helping veterans without any governmental programs," said Jim. "We always hear companies talking about helping veterans," said John. "Richard, in his SF spirit, gets it done and strives for more ways to help veterans."

That assistance comes in many different ways. After a woman's husband died suddenly, because she was living in a manufactured home community under the affordable housing program, staff assisted her in remaining in her home and helped her obtain food.

Such service to a widow is one more example of how Richard works to honor veterans and their loved ones.

**For more information about the
Veterans Affordable Housing Program**

888-923-VETS (8387)

www.VeteransAffordableHousing.org

