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Historic Quilt and Memorial Wall Honor Vets

The City of Perris will become the new home to a hand-fashioned quilt bearing the names of 247 local World War II veterans, including those from prominent pioneer families and one who later went on to become the mayor.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch accepted the historic quilt during a ceremony this week that also featured the dedication of a memorial wall created by a once-homeless Army veteran who is rebuilding his life and has qualified for permanent housing.

The quilt consists of blue stars and red lettering on a white background and stitched by the wives, girlfriends, mothers and sisters of Perris Valley men who enlisted in the military during World War II. For years it was housed in American Legion Post 595 in Perris before local historian Iral Evans decided to donate it to the City.

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Perris Mayor Daryl Busch chats with artist Tony Serna, who conceived and created the mural at a veteran's memorial wall.

The names include members of Evans' family and other pioneers who helped put Perris on the map-- Coudures, Van Houten, Mora and Villegas. Evans bothers, Leon and Raymond, have their own stars. So does Norman Hughes, a former pilot who survived the war, returned to Perris and in 1957 served as the City's mayor.

"It's a piece of history," Evans said.

In comments made at the dedication at the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce office, Busch—a former Navy shipboard radar operator—praised the courage and sacrifice of all men and women who wear a military uniform.

"We owe these people our freedom," he said. "It's important to honor the people who have served our country who have given their time and their commitment. Some never came home."



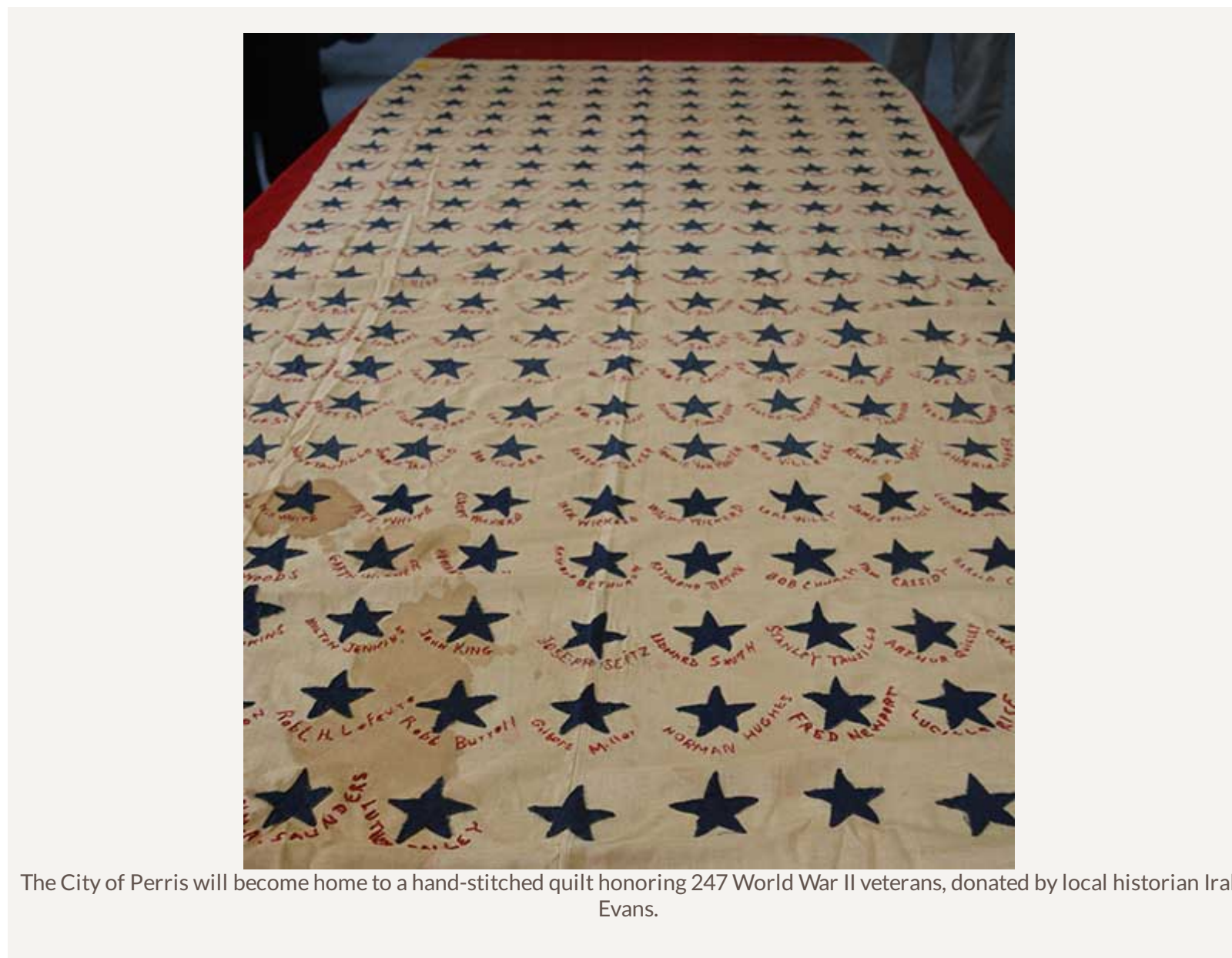
Army veteran Tony Serna stands in front of the mural at the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Busch highlighted the efforts of U.S. Vets, which works with homeless and discouraged veterans to return them to productive lives. Based near March Air Reserve Base, U.S. Vets will be expanding with a new campus that will include a three-story building with apartments, educational, counseling and employment services, Busch said. Ground-breaking is set to take place later this year.

"U.S. Vets is an organization dedicated to getting veterans into the mainstream of life," Busch said.

Army veteran Tony Serna created the memorial wall. The mural depicts an American eagle, his head lowered as he rests on the helmet and boots of a fallen soldier. The mural also includes the inscription "Salute to the Fallen but Never Forgotten."

Serna said the American eagle is revered by Native Americans as a symbol of strength and dignity—the same qualities he believes the military exemplifies. Serna said during his 13 years in the military, he traveled the world four times. But he always returned with a deep love for America and now calls Perris home. Serna was homeless when a City police officer contacted him and steered him to programs aimed at providing housing and services to veterans.



The City of Perris will become home to a hand-stitched quilt honoring 247 World War II veterans, donated by local historian Iral Evans.

With the proper counseling and support, he hopes to expel the demons that led to his becoming homeless.

"I believe there is not enough focus placed on the sacrifice veterans make," Serna said. "It's taken for granted!"

He said he was pleased at the enthusiastic response his artwork inspired.

"I am very pleased that people appreciate it," Serna said.

Besides Mayor Busch, Perris City Manager Richard Belmudez and Michael McDermott, Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager also attended the dedication ceremony.



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