



Perris Press Release

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Perris Volunteers Bring Holiday Cheer to VA Medical Center

A contingent of Perris volunteers paid a visit to the Jerry L. Pettis Memorial VA Medical Center to provide holiday aid and comfort to dozens of veterans needing some Christmas-season cheer.

The group was led by Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans, a former Marine who for years has visited the Pettis hospital with goody bags for the 25 former soldiers, sailors, Marines and Air Force personnel—some who are in the 90s suffering from dementia, others who are much younger and being treated for chronic and long-term injuries.

"These folks always have great stories to tell," Evans said. "It's neat to be able to talk to them and listen to their experiences. These are the people who fought for our freedoms and it's important to not forget their sacrifices. It's awesome to get the chance to visit with them."

Evans was joined on the day-long excursion by her husband, Iral; Jim and Jennifer Bieger, members of American Legion Post 595; Perris City Clerk Judy Haughney and her husband, Shawn; Bernie and Connie Foley, also members of the American Legion Post; Betty Kay, Helen Bedford and Miranda Faith and Anna Larson, the latter Paloma Valley High School students.

They carried with them bags full of homemade scarves and blankets, stuffed animals, socks, toiletry items, oranges, bananas, cookies and candy. They spent hours calling Bingo for the 25 or so veterans, many who have difficulty seeing, hearing and moving.

They wished each veteran a happy holiday season and said they were grateful for their service in uniform.

"We want you to have a blast," Evans said. "have fun!"

Jim Bieger says the trip to the veterans' hospital is what the American Legion is all about.

"We're all about doing what's good and doing what's right," he said. "That's why I signed up to serve."

Bieger said one year the Perris contingent brought lollipops for the veterans.

"You would have thought they were eating filet mignon with Portabella mushrooms," he said.

Hospital therapist Aaron Hunt, who works with many of the veterans visited by the Perris group, said the interaction with visitors serves as a tonic, even for those elderly residents who are shut in and seldom leave the hospital grounds.

"A lot of them do not get a lot of visitors," Hunt said. "Visits from outside groups are wonderful. They help with rehabilitation, not only of the body but of the mind and soul."

Veterans like Jim Knight echo that sentiment. Knight served in the Army from 1980 to 1986 and spent eight months this year battling an attack of flesh-eating bacteria.

"It highlights your whole day," said Knight, 49.

Former military police officer Wendy Escoto, 37, said the visitors make the hospital residents feel important. She is undergoing therapy for what she calls service-related carpal tunnel syndrome and lupus. Escoto's service includes tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Having people volunteer their time at this hospital makes us feel loved—and special," she said.

World War II Paul Mitnik, 87, served in the Navy and supported the landings at Anzio and Normandy. He too said he was grateful for the chance to spend a few hours playing bingo and chatting with people who made him feel important.

"It was very nice," he said. "Everything was very nice."



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans helps Korean War veteran Thomas Mowcomber as he plays Bingo during a recent visit to the Jerry L. Pettis Memorial VA Center in Loma Linda.



Jennifer Bieger, a volunteer from Perris American Legion Post 595, looks over the shoulder of Navy veteran Robert Hoover as the Bingo numbers are called.



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans displays a handmade blanket to a veteran during the recent excursion.



Paul Mitnik, 87, a World War II Navy sailor, shows his appreciation for the Perris volunteers.