

## Respected Air Force spokesman and community leader mourned

by **Dennis Anderson**

special to Aerotech News

The Antelope Valley military community, veterans and civic groups and scores of friends were shocked and saddened Aug. 20, 2024, by the sudden, unexpected death of Air Force public affairs chief Danny Bazzell.

Bazzell, a civilian Air Force employee and Army veteran of the Cold War, died Aug. 19, apparently a suicide, according to Air Force officials who communicated with a local veterans service organization.

News of his death hit the Valley's military, veteran and civic community like a shock wave. His wife, Sandee Jo, a nurse at the Neil A. Armstrong Flight Research Center, shared a brief statement.

"Danny was the kindest, most compassionate person that I ever had the honor to know," she said. "He helped everyone in any way that he could ... Heaven has gained a saint. He is surely in the arms of our Lord."

Bazzell, 63, was a public personality in the Antelope Valley known in an array of spheres for more than 20 years, ranging from civic, political and fraternal, to the military and veterans communities.

"He was such a great brother, and such a great resource to us," said Pastor Ken Hart, a Vietnam War veteran who encountered Bazzell on a weekly basis at the veterans gathering known as Coffee4Vets where dozens of veterans attend weekly.

Hart, a decorated combat veteran, added, "Twenty-two veterans a day take their life. That is why we are here for each other."

Along with fellow pastor, Steve Baker, a Navy veteran of the Vietnam Era, the clergymen called the Tuesday gathering in prayer for Bazzell.

Addressing dozens of veterans and supporters, Hart added, "These battles that are going on in our minds ... We need to have tight fellowship, and we need to connect with each other. My heart breaks for Danny's family. Please, reach out and keep them in prayer."

Baker shared how everyone at Coffee4Vets looked forward to seeing Bazzell. He would show up with guests from the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and



Danny Bazzell at Coffee4Vets.

other Allied forces working at Edwards. He also was instrumental in arranging tours of the base for veterans, said Juan Blanco, President of Coffee4Vets.

"This is devastating," Blanco said. "We are in shock." He added, "Danny has been an integral part of all that we

have done here. I loved the man. He was kind, generous, considerate." Bazzell worked as a kind of "Swiss Army knife" in a range of civic functions, friends said. He worked in the State Senate office of the late Sen. Sharon Runner. He worked as General Manager of the Flight Test Historical Foundation, was a past president, vice president and secretary of the Edwards Air Force Base Civilian-Military Support Group, and he belonged to the Army veteran organization, Brotherhood of Tankers. Col. Douglas P. Wickert, 412th Test Wing commander at Edwards AFB, Calif., released a statement in remembrance. "I'm saddened to report the passing of Mr. Danny 'Sketch' Bazzell. Danny supported me and Brig. Gen. Matt Higer in an exceptional manner as the Commander's Community Adviser for the past 5 ½ years with utmost skill and dedication as our Public Affairs Chief of Community Engagement.

"Danny was the face of Edwards to many of you, as well as to visiting leaders and influencers from throughout our nation and the world," Wickert stated.

"An enthusiastic student of history, he led hundreds of fascinating base tours for students, local and national leaders and technical professionals. He was also a talented portrait artist, avid outdoorsman, an advocate of supporting our veterans and was especially proud of his status as a former U.S. Army tanker." Wickert concluded, "In the spirit of the third verse of the Air Force song, 'Here's a toast.'"

Whether he was arranging an Air Force base tour for veterans, or a recognition ceremony for a brother Army tanker catastrophically wounded in the Iraq War, Bazzell was always energetic and cheerful about service.

He shared with friends that he experienced difficulties with depression over years, and he was open about encouraging others to seek treatment for mental health challenges. Among his organizing activities he brought mental health professionals out to the base to share with active duty personnel and leaders.

Bazzell is survived by his spouse, Sandee Jo, a wife from previous marriage, and two sons, Kevin and Sean.

Wickert said more announcements on arrangements would be made as they became known.



Left: Coffee4Vets VP Tony Tortolano, RAF personnel with Danny Bazzell, and Coffee President Juan Blanco

Courtesy photographs







Air Force photograph by Christian Turner

# Additional T-7A, BTX-1 aircraft arrive at Edwards AFB

An additional T-7A Red Hawk and BTX-1 prototype aircraft arrived at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., on Aug. 21, 2024, to enhance the overall T-7A flight test program. 416th FLTS Commander Lt Col. Charles Brantigan and T-7A Integrated Test Force Director Lt Col. Jonathan Aronoff accompanied Boeing test pilots in ferrying the aircraft from the manufacturing site in St. Louis, Mo.

## When we lose a friend to suicide, some myths and facts

*Editor's Note: This Op-Ed column follows the recent death by suicide of Edwards Air Force Base spokesman Danny Bazzell, who was an Army veteran of the Cold War.*

by **Dennis Anderson**

Special to Aerotech News

When we lose friends to suicide there is often that nagging question: "Why would he — or she — do such a thing?" Followed by another equally unsatisfying query: "Didn't our friend realize how many people loved him (or her)?"

Usually, the answers in whatever form they take are unsatisfying. It often translates to "How could he (or she) have done this if they knew how much pain they would cause?"

Writing with 10 years in the field as a mental health professional, every incidence of a friend or relative's suicide is different. But it rarely has much to do with whether that person was loved, or liked, by many, or their intimate partners.

In the moment of the self-destructive act, the suffering person lacks capacity to grasp that they are loved, supported or cherished. The person is at the edge of an abyss because they are experiencing incomprehensible inner torment and simply wish to escape the painful demon's seductive, siren song.

Many of us in the Antelope Valley who both liked and loved our friend Danny Bazzell, the spokesman at Edwards Air Force Base, are shocked, and mystified. Many accepted our friend's cheerful demeanor, and kind and friendly nature.

People who knew Danny a bit better listened to him describe a depression that stalked him most of his life. When it comes down to it, he did the best he could. He sought and obtained therapy. He helped others with mental health struggles by encouraging them to seek help. He brought me to the base to discuss suicide prevention.

Suicide is a leading cause of premature death in America, exceeding the number of car accidents in recent years. Women are more likely to attempt death by suicide, and men are more likely to complete the act. Women are more likely to use drugs, and men favor firearms.

It is myth that people who talk about it do not follow through. Yes, they do. And some who never disclose their thinking, they also leave life through suicide.

Professionals share there is no certainty in prediction. People considering suicide sometimes reveal a plan, and sometimes conceal their thinking or planning, and some just go in the moment of dreadful impulse. The best question is the most direct: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" Or, "Are you thinking of suicide?"

The myth is that will plant the idea. The reality is that the direct question provides relief because the subject is out in the open.

Paradoxically, some become cheerful, and this is deceptive because the mood elevation flows from arriving at a decision. Be wary if friends are giving away cherished items or good stuff, or when they share they are planning to be away.

Men are more likely to use firearms, and military veterans more likely to have ready access and knowledge. In veterans' psych practice, trigger locks on guns are a life-preserving tool. Even when someone is planning to kill themselves, anything that slows down the impulsive act is a protective factor.

A gunshot suicide leaves such a shocking and ugly aftermath that people often respond with revulsion and a judgmental, angry response. This is understandable, but it is worth considering the suffering individual lacked the capacity to consider the aftermath, the inevitable mess the living must deal with.

When we are the decent, caring people we aspire to be, we understand the importance of supporting surviving family and friends. One way is to set judgment aside, and just be kind to the bereaved.

Another idea is to set aside that game of "telephone," the news that is transmitted and ultimately devolves into gossip. It's understandable. Each of us fear death in our own ways, and talking about it may help reduce that fear, but it does not help the survivors.

A way to regard the person who felt no way out might be to shift to compassion rather than anger, anger usually being handmaiden to fear. Compassion for survivors, and compassion for the person who, in the moment, saw no other way to escape the miseries they lacked capacity to manage in this life.

In the case of our public man, Danny, no one can truly grasp the burdens he experienced or judge him on the race against death he lost earlier this week.

Many who suffer experience shame and guilt that would mystify others who believe they know their friends. Pity, dread, and anger in response to a suicide may feel natural, but compassion and kindness are the currencies that may ultimately offer comfort to survivors.

Many years ago when I faced a life-threatening struggle, a wise friend advised me that depression is a deceptive illness that fools the suffering person into believing circumstances are much worse than they are in reality. That illusion of delusional thinking can lead to destruction of the self.

In her book, "Everyday Zen," author Charlotte Joko Beck wrote of a friend who killed himself after years of talking about it and concluded, "It was not a surprise, but it is very sad because a human life is such a rare thing to have."

Among the many resources, someone considering suicide, or friend or relative of such person, can call 911. Anyone in suicidal crisis can call 988, the National Suicide Hotline.

Dennis Anderson is a licensed clinical therapist at High Desert Medical Group. An Army veteran, he served on the Los Angeles County Veterans Advisory Commission and works on veteran issues and community health initiatives.



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# Edwards Senior NCOs pay respects for loss of veteran AF Spokesman

by Dennis Anderson  
special to Aerotech News

One of the key veteran gatherings in the Aerospace Valley received a solemn visitation by the top enlisted leadership of Edwards Air Force Base to pay respects for a fallen brother.

There were almost too many stripes to count in the big dining room on Tuesday (Aug. 27). The uniform of the day was dress service uniform, Air Force (and Space Force) blue, with awards and decorations.

It was Command Chief Master Sgt. Justin Stoltzfus who brought a delegation of the most senior NCOs of "Aerospace Valley" out to Coffee4Vets, the weekly veterans gathering at Crazy Otto's restaurant on Avenue I.

Representing the Commanding Officer of Edwards Air Force Base, Col. Douglas P. Wickert, Stoltzfus noted they were there on a solemn occasion, to offer condolences to the veterans in the recent death of former Army Sgt. Danny Bazzell, a senior civilian spokesman for Air Force Public Affairs at the base.

Speaking for Wickert and the 412th Test Wing, Stoltzfus said, "You lost a teammate, and we lost a teammate."

He added Bazzell was "a shining light for Edwards Air Force Base who knew so much about Aerospace Valley history."

Stoltzfus recalled he had last spoken with Bazzell within the past two weeks, "And so help me God, his last words to me were 'You've got to get out to Coffee4Vets.'"

In the Air Force, a Command Chief Master Sgt. is equivalent of a Command Sgt. Major in the Army, a Master Chief Petty Officer, Navy, and Sgt. Major in the Marine Corps.

It is all the same, the rank of the senior most enlisted non-commissioned officer, in charge of all matters pertaining to enlisted personnel in a battalion, or ship, a squadron, or a base, all the way up to the service chiefs at the Pentagon.

It is a rank that requires respect from the lowest enlisted to the top officers in the chain of command.

In Bazzell's case, he was also in the fraternity of service NCOs. He had served as a sergeant, and vehicle commander of an M-88 tank retriever at Fort Lewis,



Photographs by Dennis Anderson  
Command Chief Master Sgt. Justin Stoltzfus pays respects to veterans in recent loss of Edwards AFB spokesman Danny Bazzell.

LEFT: Tribute table for Army veteran Danny Bazzell, Edwards Air Force Base spokesman.



Command Chief Master Sgt. Justin Stoltzfus makes small uniform adjustments for Chief Master Sgt. Eric Tabbs.



Coffee4Vets President Juan Blanco, Army veteran, pays tribute to loss of Army vet brother Danny Bazzell.

now Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

Bazzell died, another tragic case of suicide that most veterans account as the "22 Veterans a Day" phenomenon. The causes of all deaths by suicide are complex, as are the origins and motivations of the deceased, but the grieving remains the same.

"The burden is carried by the ones left behind," noted Army veteran Juan Blanco, president of Coffee4Vets.

Bazzell was a reliable guest at Coffee4Vets, bringing with him officers, NCOs, and foreign visiting military like the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy

personnel working on the F-35 test team at Edwards.

So his loss cut deep, both with Team Edwards, but also Coffee4Vets, and also the Edwards Civilian-Military Support Group, which Bazzell served as president and vice president.

Stoltzfus continued, "Teammates who are our brothers and sisters lost to suicide just break my heart."

In addressing the older veterans crowd, the chief said, "Coffee4Vets is not just about coffee. It is about camaraderie, and being there when it counts the most."

Stoltzfus concluded, "Please take care of each other. Let us know when you need help. Thanks for what you are doing."

Pastor Steve Baker, Navy veteran of the Vietnam War era, stepped up to offer prayer.

He added to the list of recent losses, his veteran buddy Joel, who died within a couple of days after an accident, a Coffee4Vets regular who like many of those gathered was older, and more fragile than their youthful days of ruck marches, flying, sailing, and sometimes fighting on foreign shores.

The Edwards delegation included Chief Master Sgt. Eric Tabb; 1st Sgt. Earl Mata; Master Sgt. Yamil Romanrivera, Tech Sgt. Thomas Nugent; 1st Sgt. Timothy Anderson, and Senior Airman Cameron Dager.

Blanco noted when friends see someone struggling "to please point them in the direction where they can get help."

One of those directions include 988, the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. No need to be a veteran. We are all struggling at one time or another. Being open to receiving help is a lifesaver.

*Editor's note: Dennis Anderson is a licensed clinical social worker at High Desert Medical Group. An Army veteran who covered the Iraq War for Antelope Valley media, he works on veteran issues and community health initiatives and has served on the Los Angeles County Veterans Advisory Commission.*



# Southern California student wins NASA scholarship

by Jay Levine  
NASA Armstrong

Sabrina Redifer, a 2024 graduate of Quartz Hill High School in Lancaster, Calif., won a NASA College Scholarship Award.

Redifer plans to major this fall in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology at the University of California, Los Angeles. She earned a 4.0 grade-point average — a weighted GPA of 5.29 — and ranked fourth academically out of a class of 794 students.

“My dream of becoming a physician stems from a love of science, innovation, and equality,” she said. “I want to develop new treatments through molecular and cellular research, and I want to make those treatments accessible to all people, regardless of their economic status or where they live.”

Redifer won the scholarship following an agency-wide application for NASA employee dependents planning to pursue a science, technology, engineering, or math degree. The scholarship is \$2,000 per year for up to four years.

She is the daughter of Matthew Redifer, who is X-59 aircraft flight systems

lead at NASA’s Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif., and Saynne Redifer, of Palmdale, California.

“I didn’t think I was going to win,” Sabrina Redifer said. “I was super excited when I did!”

Sabrina Redifer is a valedictorian, received a 2023 and a 2024 Advanced Placement Scholar Award with Distinction, and the Advanced Placement Capstone Diploma, a special two-year course conducted in tandem with Advanced Placement classes.

Redifer was president of Quartz Hill High School’s National Honor Society, the varsity girls golf team president, and co-president of the Asian Student Union. She qualified for California Interscholastic Federation golf tournaments multiple times and ranked top six in the Golden League all four years.

In her community, she volunteered for two years at the Antelope Valley Medical Center in the gift shop and emergency room and at the Quartz Hill Food Pantry, where she helped pack food for distribution. In addition, she shadowed physicians this summer, following and observing as they met with patients.



NASA photograph by Steve Freeman

Brad Flick, center director at NASA’s Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif., presents a 2024 NASA College Scholarship Award to Sabrina Redifer. From left to right are Sabrina Redifer’s parents Matthew and Saynne Redifer, Flick, Sabrina Redifer, and her sister Samantha Redifer.



Pastor Paul Chappell



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# NASA's X-59 progresses through tests on path to flight

by NASA Armstrong

The team preparing NASA's X-59 continues through testing in preparation for the quiet supersonic aircraft to make its first flight. This includes a trio of important structural tests and critical inspections on the path to flight.

The X-59 is an experimental plane that will fly faster than the speed of sound without a loud sonic boom. It will be the first of its kind to fly, with the goal of gathering sound data for NASA's Quesst mission, which could open the door to commercial supersonic overland flight in the future.

Because of its unique design, the X-59's engineering team must do all it can to predict every aspect of it before it ever takes off, including how its fuselage, wings, and the control surfaces will behave together in flight. That means testing on the ground to give the team the data



Lockheed Martin photograph

NASA Life Support Technician Mathew Sechler provides support as the X-59's ejection seat is installed into the aircraft at Lockheed Martin Skunk Works' facilities in Palmdale, Calif. Completion of the seat's installation marks an integration milestone for the aircraft as it prepares for final ground tests.

it needs to validate the models they've developed.

"The testing not only tells us how structurally sound the aircraft is, but also what kind of

forces it can take once it is in the air," said Walt Silva, senior research scientist at NASA Langley in Virginia. Silva serves as the structural lead for the X-59.

The X-59's structural tests provide the team with valuable feedback. From 2022 to 2024 the engineers collected data on the forces that the aircraft will experience in flight and the potential effects of vibrations on the plane.

"You do these tests, you get the data, and things compare well in some areas and in other areas you want to improve them," Silva said. "So, you figure that all out and then you work towards making it better."

Earlier this year, the X-59 underwent structural coupling tests that saw its control surfaces, including its ailerons, flaps and rudder, moved by computer. It was the last of three vital structural tests. In 2023, engineers applied "shakers" to parts of the plane to evaluate its response to vibrations, and in early 2022 they conducted a proof test to ensure the aircraft would absorb the forces it will experience during flight. This year the X-59 ejection

seat was installed and passed inspection. The ejection seat is an additional safety measure that is critical for pilot safety during all aspects of flight.

With structural tests and ejection seat installation complete, the aircraft will advance toward a new milestone, starting up its engines for a series of test runs on the ground.

Also ahead for the X-59 is testing the airplane's avionics and extensive wiring for potential electromagnetic interference, imitating flight conditions in a ground test environment, and finally, completing taxi tests to validate ground mobility before first flight.

"First flights are always very intense," said Natalie Spivey, aerospace engineer at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center at Edwards, Calif. "There's lots of anticipation, but we're ready to get there and see how the aircraft responds in the air. It'll be very exciting."

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# B-2 returns to Edwards on 35th anniversary of first flight

by Nicolas Cholula and Mary Kozaitis

Edwards AFB, Calif.

Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., revisited a significant chapter of aviation history with the return of the B-2 Spirit on July 17, 35 years since its first flight from Air Force Plant 42, in Palmdale, Calif., to Edwards.

The Spirit of Pennsylvania returned to the heart of the Aerospace Testing Universe where many firsts for technological advancements take place.

The reintroduction of the B-2 to a test environment is not only nostalgic, but a careful first step toward new experiments and technological upgrades that will ensure it remains a vital asset in the U.S. Air Force's fleet.

In addition to functional upgrades, a focus for the new campaign will be testing the integration of open mission systems architecture, known as Spirit Realm 1.

Assistant Director of Operations with the 419th Flight Test Squadron, Maj. Stephen Henderson, flew the B-2 back to Edwards on its anniversary.

"This is the first time that we are going to do agile software development with Spirit Realm, so that is a big change for us," he said. "We are projected to work on that heavily this fall."

Spirit Realm 1 provides mission critical capability upgrades to the communications and weapons systems via an open mission systems architecture, directly enhancing combat capability and allowing the fleet to initiate a new phase of agile software releases.

"Regenerating flight test is an exciting time for the



Air Force photograph by Christian Turner

The Spirit of Pennsylvania B-2 Spirit assigned to the 419th Flight Test Squadron flies over Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., prior to landing, July 17, 2024.

B-2 as we begin fielding new capabilities through the B-2 Spirit Realm software factory ecosystem and work hand in hand through the Combined Test Force," said Jerry McBrearty, vice president and B-2 program manager, Northrop Grumman. "The agile framework methodology within SR 1 directly supports the Air Force's initiative to adapt new capabilities in the aircraft, executing the mission today."

Improvements to aircrafts position the U.S. at a stronger stance to defend the nation as it continues to face challenges in an era of Global Power Competition. The B-2's return is also a symbolic commitment

to maintaining technological superiority. Upgrades and future tests will ensure that the aircraft remains competitive in modern warfare.

"It's a very big deal that higher levels in Air Force leadership decided we would be able to get the test jet back because the B-2 has a small fleet dynamic," Henderson said. "So the fact that they were willing to give up one of their jets to do test really speaks to the importance of what we are looking to accomplish and hopefully get those new capabilities out to the warfighter as quickly as possible."

Execution of test will be led by a Combined Test Force consisting of the 419th FLTS, Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center, and prime contractor Northrop Grumman Corporation.

"Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center is excited to have the B-2 on-station once again," Col. Joseph Little, commander of AFOTEC Detachment 5 at Edwards, said. "This aircraft enables Operational Test to integrate test points alongside our 412th TW and 53rd WG teammates and serves as another opportunity to conduct integrated test. It is imperative that we continue to modernize, survive, and test that aircraft up until it is formally relieved from that obligation."

The CTF will also continue to partner with the Defense Contract Management Agency in support of the B-2 Phase Depot Maintenance program at nearby Air Force Plant 42. As the world's only operational long-range penetrating bomber, the B-2 Spirit has a strategic commitment to the United States for years to come.

## Edwards' Airmen teams up with Royal Air Force to honor a fallen allied hero

by Laisa Leao

Edwards AFB, Calif.

The Blue Eagles Honor Guard at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., provided a first-of-its-kind support to a British World War II Allied Veteran who had recently passed away.

The Blue Eagles trained two members of the Royal Air Force to properly conduct a flag-folding ceremony in honor of Stella Brecht, who had served as a radar technician and mechanic in the RAF Women's Auxiliary Air Force during World War II.

"I studied the British regulations on flag folding and obtained a recording of the British version of Taps, the 'Last Post,' to understand the similarities and differences. The flag folding is almost identical, except it is done in the opposite direction," said Tech. Sgt. Derek Day, who manages the Edwards Blue Eagles Honor Guard program.

Brecht resided in Whittier, Calif., about 100 miles south of Edwards, the current home of the Royal Air Force's No. 17 Test and Evaluation Squadron. Stars seemed to align, and the family's request was able to be fulfilled.

Senior Airman Kendall Waterfield and Airman 1st Class Nathalia Batista da Silva, from Edwards' Blue Eagles Honor Guard, trained Sgt. Karina Fernandez and Sgt. Rachel Douglas, from the Royal Air Force, on flag folding techniques.



Courtesy photograph

"It was a great opportunity and real privilege to work with our allies," said Batista da Silva.

They met the family at the Queen of Heaven Cemetery & Mortuary in Rowland Heights, California, and helped honor Brecht and lay her to rest. Reverend (Squadron Leader) Alice McDermott, British Forces Chaplain (USA) and Warrant Officer Engineering Anthony Fisher, Royal Navy were also in attendance.

"As a female Royal Air Force chaplain, it was a privilege to be involved in honoring our veteran, Stella, despite her funeral being far from the UK where she served her King and country during WWII," said McDermott.

LEFT: Edwards Air Force Base's Blue Eagles Honor Guard trained two members of the Royal Air Force to properly conduct a flag-folding ceremony in honor of Stella Brecht, a British World War II Allied veteran who had recently passed away.



Air Force photograph by Laisa Leao

Members of the Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., Blue Eagles Honor Guard train two members of the Royal Air Force to properly conduct a flag-folding ceremony in honor of Stella Brecht, a British World War II Allied veteran who had recently passed away.

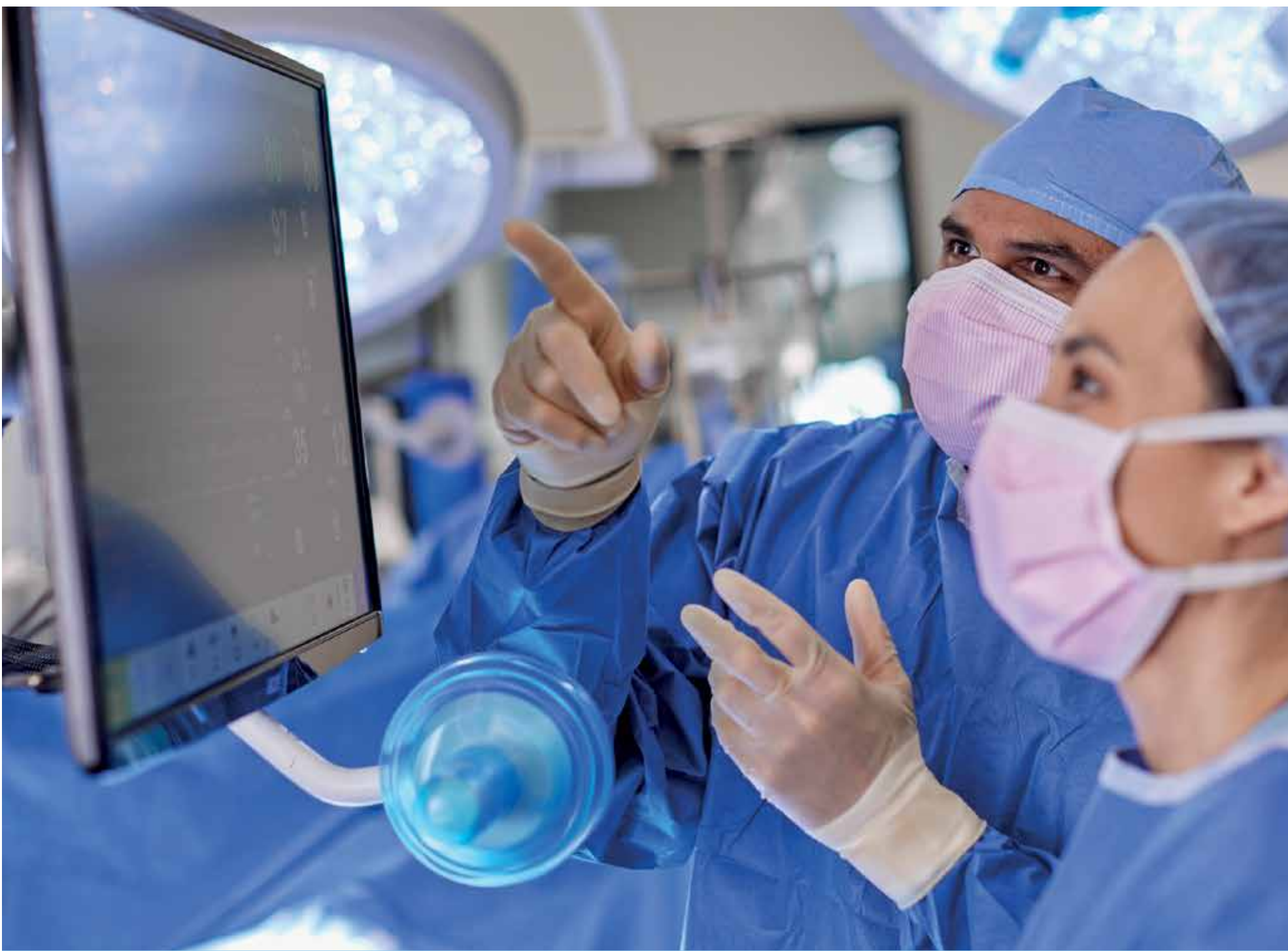
Brecht was born and raised in England and was only 15 years old when WWII commenced. She worked at a manufacturing plant's chemistry

laboratory, strengthening aluminum for combat aircraft. At the age of 17, she joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, a branch of the British Royal Air Force, as a radar technician and mechanic. She was working in an underground bunker on D-Day, June 6, 1944, when the Allied Forces — American, British, Canadian and French — invaded Normandy to fight against the Nazi occupation. Signals from the aircrafts flying overhead overloaded her radars.

Brecht married a U.S. Army Air Corps soldier stationed in England and together had a son. When the war was over, they sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States on the Queen Mary and settled in Fresno, California.

"As a female officer in the RAF, I am always grateful for those that were in the WAAF, who marked the beginnings of our journey, especially because they did so at such a challenging time. I am pleased we have managed provide RAF representation at the funeral, it is important that we mark and celebrate the lives of those who served in the RAF," wrote Air Commodore Nikki Thomas, OBE Air and Space Attaché, British Defence Staff at the British Embassy, wrote in a condolence letter to Brecht's daughter.





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# Plans for major new VA Clinic unveiled

by Dennis Anderson  
special to Aerotech News

Leadership of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System announced plans for the largest expansion of VA medical resources in the Antelope Valley set for next year.

By summer of 2025, VA officials said, a new clinic that will double the size and scope of services should be open for veteran care.

Responding to persistence and pressure from veterans themselves, and a full court press by congressional representatives, the VA has committed — See **CLINIC**, on Page 18

Responding to persistence and pressure from veterans themselves, and a full court press by congressional representatives, the VA has committed — See **CLINIC**, on Page 18



Photographs by Dennis Anderson

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Systems Director Rob Merchant announces plans for expanded VA Clinic in Antelope Valley next year.



Hundreds of veterans packed the Elks Lodge in Lancaster to hear about plans for new VA Clinic in Antelope Valley.

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# Veterans awarded keys to 'American Dream'

by Dennis Anderson  
special to Aerotech News

With each of the six veterans who mounted a stage, there were sometimes tears, smiles, and gratitude as they were awarded ceremonial large silver keys to what officials called their realization of "The American Dream."

"It is humbling," said Marine veteran Tony Tortolano, who received the key to his new home in the Antelope Valley community's "Veterans Enriched Neighborhood."

The ceremony to usher a half dozen American veteran families into official homeownership represented a key milestone in a non-profit housing development built as a result of public financing, private sector volunteering, and a vision that no veteran should be denied to opportunity to own a home of their own.

The head of California's Department of Veterans Affairs, joined by key state and Antelope Valley leaders turned out Saturday to mark a major progress milestone in building a "Veterans Enriched Neighborhood" for low-income veterans who would be shut out of an overheated housing market.

Six families received ceremonial keys and were welcomed to their new homes built by volunteers, and backed by donors and state funding and the City of Palmdale, and developed by the Homes4Families veterans building nonprofit.

Saturday's event, Palmdale Mayor Austin Bishop noted, marked a significant milestone with 30 homes completed in the Veterans Neighborhood, and 26 more to go. In all, Homes4Families has completed 124 homes for low-income entry market veteran families in Southern California.

Lindsey Sin, Secretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs, flew in from Sacramento, to attend.

"This is a tremendous moment of celebration for all of us," said Sin, a Post 9/11 Navy aviation veteran. "At CalVet we are working every day to make sure the 1.6 million veterans of California are the most connected, most protected, and most respected."



Members of the public and local veterans were on hand when Marine veteran Tony Tortolano received the keys to his new home in the Veterans Enriched Neighborhood

In addition to City of Palmdale leaders, Sin was joined by Assembly members Tom Lackey, R-Palmdale, and Pilar Schiavo, D-San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, and representatives for Congressman Mike Garcia and Assemblyman Juan Carrillo.

Six veterans who served in all branches, different eras, active and reserves, were joined by family, small children, and elder parents. In turn, each of the six veterans who went through rigorous screening and a "sweat equity" education and engagement program, ascended to a small stage to receive their ceremonial keys.

The keys, Secretary Sin said, "represent not just a home, but a brighter future."

Among those officially receiving ownership Saturday was Marine veteran Tortolano, Palmdale's 2023 Veteran of the Year. Tortolano was bestowed the honor last year for his activities in a full spectrum of community volunteering for an array of veterans service organizations.

Wearing his red-and-gold Marine Corps League 930 regalia, Tortolano saluted, and said, "It's hard to believe that a year ago I was standing here by a pad, and now it's a reality."

The veteran thanked "all of my military and veteran families," which, he said, included Coffee4Vets, AV Vets4Veterans, Veterans Information Center, Patriot Guard Riders, Marine Corps League, Bombshell Betty, and "also my family



Vet of Year Tony Tortolano tours new home with CalVet Secretary Lindsey Sin.

family," his mother, and sister, and his son, Ryan who could not attend due to illness.

Supervisor Barger pressed for Los Angeles County to contribute nearly \$1 million to the development, which is built on the Habitat for Humanity model, with volunteer labor. Assemblyman Tom Lackey was instrumental in recent years in securing \$2.7 million in state funding for the project, which is underwritten by CalVet and City of Palmdale.

"The word homeless and veterans should never be used in the same sentence," Barger said, adding, "I am proud to say that in Los Angeles County the number of homeless veterans has gone down while it has re-



Photos by Dennis Anderson  
Palmdale 2023 Veteran of Year at his new home in Veterans Enriched Neighborhood.

mained about the same in other counties.

Mayor Bishop said that "I counted," and 125 non-profit and business organizations, including the Boeing Co., Lockheed Martin, High Desert Medical Group, Lou and Joyce Gonzales of Antelope Valley Chevrolet, and many more contributed to the project's success.

"Government alone cannot do this," Barger said. "That is why the work done by Homes4Families and others is so important, to provide homeownership and the American dream to those who otherwise could not afford it."

Lackey, a longtime Palmdale councilman and career California Highway Patrol officer

before his election to the Assembly, said the Homes4Families project enables the community to participate along with veterans in a tradition of service.

"Recipients of this great project embody service and sacrifice," Lackey said. "This program works because of continued service and sacrifice." He added, "It's shameful we are still struggling with homelessness, and even more shameful those who risked their lives still suffer in that situation."

As she prepares to retire, the field of officials, veteran homeowners and volunteers congratulated and thanked the nonprofit's CEO Donna Deutchman, for her drive and ingenuity in propelling the project forward through many years and hurdles.

Barger said, "Donna's words, 'Will the veterans please stand to be recognized.' This is more than a project for you, Donna. This is a passion. Thank you for your vision, and your sacrifice."

Dellayna Cleveland (CQ), director of Family Services, for the non-profit introduced each of the veterans and their families as they received their keys. Christine Ward, representing Congressman Garcia, added that each family would receive a flag flown over the nations' Capitol.

Joshua Gutierrez, a veteran homeowner who received his key stood alongside his family, thanked everyone, and added, "It's hard not to get a little emotional."



CalVet Secretary Lindsey Sin welcomes six veteran families to their new homes in Palmdale's Veterans Enriched Neighborhood.





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# Nellis maintainers rescue five lives from Zion flash flood

by Staff Sgt. Jose Miguel T.

Tamondong

Nellis AFB, Nev.

What started out as a normal hiking trip to Zion National Park for seven Airmen from Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., turned out to be a life-changing moment, not only for them but for the group of hikers they saved on Aug. 17, 2024.

Airman 1st Classes Will Martin, Dmarqus Norman, Maximos Olade, Jacob Stillwell, and Rony Lopez-Aguilar, plus Airmen Andres Parra and Christian Reyes, all assigned to the 857th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, were making their way along a popular hiking trail when AIC Martin noticed signs of a potential flash flood.

"We saw the water rise and turn brown at the time and there were a bunch of sticks coming out," said Martin, a Tomahawk Aircraft Maintenance Unit F-16 crew chief. "We then sprinted to the highest point we could get to because the water was rising very quickly."

Amidst the ongoing flash flood, Olade spotted a woman's floating body being dragged by the river's current. Upon closer inspection, Norman saw that the woman's face was blue, and she looked as if she was on the brink of death. This compelled Norman to jump into the water to save the woman's life.

"I looked around and thought that nobody else can get into the water and withstand the pressure of the current, so I ran in there and grabbed her by her arms," said Norman, a Tomahawk Aircraft Maintenance Unit F-16 crew chief. "Luckily, I didn't grab her by the stomach because I didn't know she was pregnant at the time."

During the rescue attempt, Norman was hit by a wooden log on the back of his leg which knocked him off-balance. To keep the woman safe, he used his knees to guide himself until eventually finding his footing again. Standing up, he carried the woman out of the water with the help of Stillwell, an impressive display of heroism that did not go unnoticed by Norman's fellow Airmen.

"If Norman wasn't such a unit, we never would have reached her," Martin said. "He was the only one big and strong



Air Force photograph by Airman 1st Class Brianna Vetro

Airmen pose for a photo with coins received from Chief Master Sgt. Adrienne Warren, the 99th Air Base Wing command chief master sergeant, during a coining ceremony at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 26, 2024. In their efforts, the Airmen saved the lives of a pregnant woman and her companions during a flash flood at Zion National Park, demonstrating exceptional Airmen readiness and unwavering commitment to their core values.

enough to save her so I'm really glad that he was there at the right place and the right time."

Stillwell managed to contact a rescue helicopter but was told they needed to move to a place where an air evacuation was possible. The woman, whom the Airmen were able to resuscitate, identified herself as Natalie Halcomb, and revealed that she was six weeks pregnant and was hiking with three others including her husband, sister- and brother-in-law.

Norman's group then traversed down the canyon and reunited Halcomb with her husband. They encountered Halcomb's sister-in-law on the other side of the river who seemed fine for the most part. However, Halcomb's brother-in-law was also on the other side of the river but had a badly broken knee.

The Airman worked collectively as a unit to form a human chain to get Halcomb's brother-in-law across the river, and transport all the flood victims to the air evacuation site where they were finally rescued.

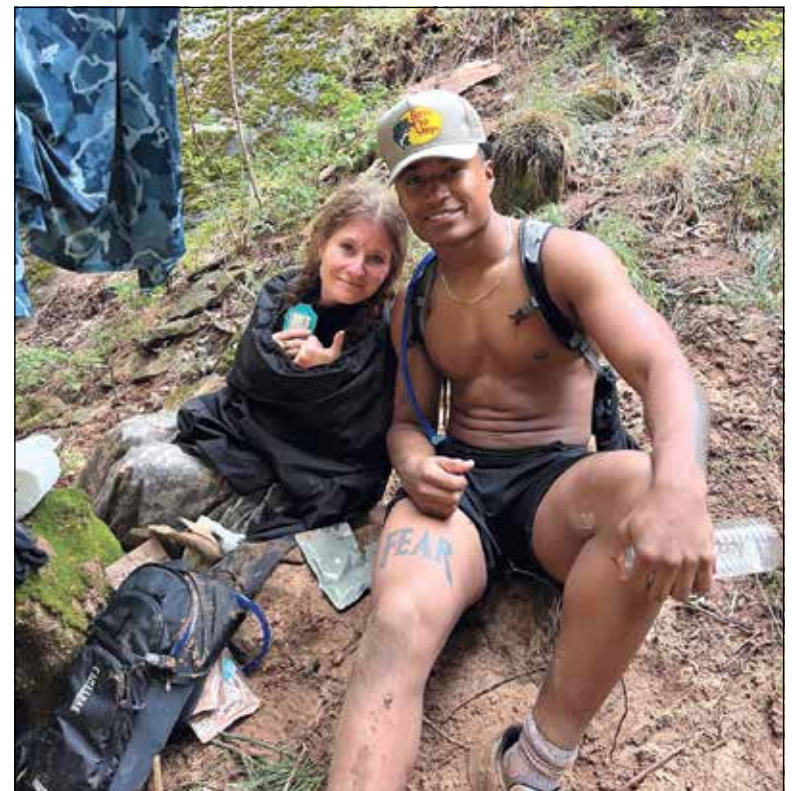
"I feel like we all came together instantly because of that military mindset that we have of working as a team," said Norman. "It reminded me of basic military training where we were trying to get through tough times together."

Halcomb, a resident of Denver, Colo., was overwhelmed with gratitude after the life-threatening ordeal that lasted approximately two-and-a-half hours and had the following words for the seven Airmen that saved her life.

"I want to personally thank Dmarqus and the rest of the team for taking the risk to save somebody you didn't know and for jumping into action in the way that you all did and to help me not only get out of the water and actually save my life," said Halcomb. "I don't think there's anything I can do that's big enough to show them how grateful I am because they did not just save me. I'm pregnant and there's so much gratitude with everything that you did for me and my family that day."

The Airmen were honored in a coining ceremony for exemplifying the Air Force's core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do.

"What happened that day in Zion is something that we cannot teach. It is fight or flight at its most raw time and the acts from our Airmen that day make me incredibly proud and humbled to have the opportunity to lead and learn from them in these early stages of their careers," said Chief Master Sgt. Cody Maskell, the 857th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Toma-



Courtesy photograph

Airman 1st Class Dmarqus Norman, right, an 857th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Tomahawk Aircraft Maintenance Unit F-16 crew chief, poses for a photo with Natalie Halcomb at Zion National Park, Utah, Aug. 17, 2024. Norman, along with six other Airmen assigned to Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, worked together to rescue Halcomb and her family after getting stuck in a flash flood while hiking at Zion.

hawk AMU superintendent. "I think their choices made that day solidify that our core values were ingrained in them long before they enlisted. These Airmen are dedicated to their core and because of that will continue to do great things in

their communities and for the U.S. Air Force."

The seven Airmen, all of whom are junior enlisted, have only been in service for less than a year but have already exemplified what it truly means to be an Airman.



# Maj. Gen. Christopher Niemi assumes command of USAFWC



Air Force photographs by Airman 1st Class Elizabeth Tan

Gen. Ken Wilsbach, commander of Air Combat Command, passes the guidon to Maj. Gen. Christopher Niemi, incoming commander of the U.S. Air Force Warfare Center during the USAFWC change of command ceremony at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 2, 2024. The symbolic flag indicates all the authority of the incoming commander, who then assumes command. Before coming to Nellis, Niemi served as director of plans, programs and requirements at Air Combat Command.

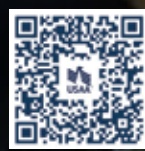


Airman 1st Class Jarelle Caradine sings the U.S. national anthem as a prelude to the U.S. Air Force Warfare Center change of command ceremony at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 2, 2024. The USAFWC conducts operational testing and tactics development programs for advanced training schools, exercises and venues.

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# 432nd ACMS Airman Wins 40 Under Forty Award

by Senior Airman Victoria Nuzzi  
Creech AFB, Nev.

The first general program-mable electronic digital computer was invented in 1943 at the University of Pennsylvania and was used during World War II to calculate ranges for artillery.

The computer had to be programmed by plugboards and could take hundreds of hours to program manually. Since then, computers have advanced at lightning speed to what we know today, where they can complete tasks on demand. They have inspired generations, grabbed people's attention, and even set their lives on the path of innovation.

One of these people who was so inspired and curious about the technology around him was Senior Master Sgt. Anthony Colón. He joined the U.S. Air Force to pursue the cyber path that would eventually lead him to win a prestigious award.

The Armed Forces Communication and Electronics Association presents the 40 under Forty award yearly to 40 individuals under forty years of age for their significant contributions to a technical science, technology, engineering or mathematics by providing innovation, thought leadership and support to their clients or organizations using information technology. Colón was one of four winners from the Air Force, as well as the highest-ranking enlisted member recognized.

Currently, Colón is the Operations Superintendent for the 432nd Aircraft Communications Maintenance Squadron at Creech Air Force Base, Nev. Under his leadership, the 432nd ACMS delivers world-class satellite communications and maintenance for the MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft in support of the 432nd Wings mission to deter and defeat America's adversaries.

"Senior Master Sgt. Colón's role is imperative to ensuring that production superintendents are tracking MQ-9 ground control stations maintenance requirements and that they are prepared for



Air Force photograph by Senior Airman Victoria Nuzzi

Senior Master Sgt. Anthony Colón, 432nd Aircraft Communications Maintenance Squadron operations superintendent, performs maintenance on an MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft ground control station, Creech Air Force Base, Nev., Jun. 13, 2024. Colón was awarded the 40 under Forty award for his exceptional service to the 432nd ACMS and the Air Force during his 20-year career.

day-to-day flight operations," said Chief Master Sgt. Brandon Arenibar, senior enlisted leader for the 432nd ACMS.

While assigned to Creech his accomplishments include spearheading an Air Force-wide course of action development working group to increase the retention rate of first-term airmen in cyber career fields. He offered his communications expertise to 30 maintenance and cyber functional leads from across the Air Force. The working group then developed four lines of effort which enhanced retention and mission alignment for 1,800 maintainers and 300 cyber airmen across the RPA enterprise.

Additionally, Colón was the cyber lead of the 432nd Wing's re-missioning task force. The task force conducted the 25th Attack Group's site survey to codify and prepare main-

tenance and cyber support requirements for Air Combat Command funding. This led to the priming of two squadrons to execute the Joint Chiefs of Staff combat mission tasking.

Colón also served as a Professional Military Education Instructor and was tasked with teaching leadership concepts at the non-commissioned officer academy. Also as the Learning Management System administrator, he wrote two computer scripts that automated the creation and population of virtual classroom environments which supported 3,400 students. The automation saved the environment build time by 66% and saved the schoolhouse 15,000 annually.

"We had been using Blackboard and Canvas for classroom environments," said Colón. "We had to manually create all the classrooms and that took up a lot of manpower

and time. Seeing the problem I wrote a script that would just need a document with all the personnel attending the class and the modules needed for the class. The script would combine them in seconds and automate the task."

He then developed a digital instructor evaluation system, streamlining the qualification process for 23 instructors within the schoolhouse and eliminating the use of legacy paper forms and filing systems. Both of these solutions were channeled to the Air Force Barnes Center and then adopted for Air Force-wide implementation across 76 schoolhouses, supporting 500 cadre and 400,000 students.

"Traits of a strong work ethic include dedication, reliability, integrity and discipline," said Arenibar. "Colón believes in and exhibits every one of these traits. In addition

to being a great Airman, he takes pride in being a great husband and father of three boys and hopes he can be a good model for his boys and teach them the value of having a strong work ethic.

Colón is originally from Brooklyn, New York, and joined the Air Force in 2003. He has been stationed at Creech Air Force Base twice with the first time being from 2013- 2017. He then recently returned in 2023.

His love of technology started in high school, where he took multiple computer courses. He loved computers because they had advanced from taking over entire rooms to screens that could fit in a classroom. He said the advancement made computers seem like a new magical device with the world at your fingertips.

"Computers have always been a passion of mine," said Colón. "When I enlisted I did extremely well on the electronic portion of the ASVAB and I wanted to pursue that route so I enlisted as open electronics. I received a cyber operator job when I arrived at the Military Entrance Processing Station."

Outside of the Air Force, Colón's love for the cyber industry continued, resulting in him earning a bachelor's degree in IT Management and Project Management in 2023 from the American Military University. He also instilled a love of STEM into his three children.

"Technology is something I love and enjoy," said Colón. "I try to push my children to be involved in STEM because I think it is really important," said Colón. "It is where our world is going and I want them to have a bright future and be a part of the future that humanity seems to be going towards"

Colón plans to finish his career in the Air Force and then find a role in the civilian world as a project manager in the cyber industry.

"This award encapsulates all my achievements during my Air Force career," said Colón. "It is a very proud moment for me and my family. For my children, I am glad that I have shown them that what you can do does matter and I am happy I can be a role model for them."



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# First ACC EA-37B delivered to Davis-Monthan AFB



Air Force photographs by Senior Airman Andrew Garavito

An EA-37B Compass Call takes its first official flight at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., Aug. 28, 2024. The plane was officially brought to DM and is now an operational asset to installation capabilities.

by Capt. Barrett Schroeder  
Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.

Air Combat Command received its first EA-37B Compass Call, aircraft 19-5591, for pilot training Aug. 23, 2024, at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz.

The EA-37B, a wide-area airborne electromagnetic attack weapon system using a heavily modified version of the Gulfstream G550 airframe, was delivered by Gen. Ken Wilsbach, Air Combat Command commander, along with Lt. Gen. Thomas Hensley, 16th Air Force commander, and Col. Mark Howard, 55th Wing commander.

“For a pilot, there is nothing better than picking up a brand new aircraft from the factory and delivering it to the warfighters. For those of you who are going to get to fly it, it’s going to be amazing,” said Wilsbach. “We are on the cusp of delivering advanced capability, especially in electronic combat, and today is an exciting day for Air Combat Command.”

Aircraft 19-5591, now assigned to the 55th Electronic Combat Group, will be flown by the 43rd Electronic Combat Squadron and maintained by the Contractor Logistics Support Aircraft Maintenance team at Davis-Monthan AFB. The aircraft will give ACC aircrews their first opportunity to begin pilot mission planning and training.

Although located at Davis-Monthan AFB, the 55th ECG

reports to the 55th Wing at Offutt AFB, Nebraska. The group is the sole operator of Compass Call aircraft in worldwide contingency operations.

“The EC-130 has served its purpose for years, but this new airframe and its delivery mean that we have a combat-credible threat,” said Howard. “The EA-37B, with its increased range, speed and agility, will allow Airmen onboard the aircraft to make real-time, adaptive, agile decisions for airpower.”

The aircraft sustains joint force military advantage in the electromagnetic battlespace and builds a more lethal force by modernizing electromagnetic attack capabilities to deny peer competitors’ tactical networks and information ecosystems.

Additionally, the aircraft denies, degrades and disrupts adversary communications, information processing, navigation, radar systems and radio-controlled threats. It also employs offensive counter-information and electromagnetic attack capabilities in support of U.S. and coalition tactical air, surface and special operations forces.

“The EA-37B is the right choice right now because as we continue to pivot toward Great Power Competition, we have adversaries that are developing long-range kill chain ecosystems and anti-access area denial capabilities,” said Hensley. “The Compass Call will allow us to do things in the non-kinetic spectrum as well as the



Lt. Col Tray Wood, 55th Electronic Communications Group commander(Right) and Lt. Col Kais Heimburger(Left), 55th ECG integration office program director performs a pre flight check at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., Aug. 28, 2024. The EA-37B Compass Call was a wide-area airborne electronic attack weapon system.

electromagnetic spectrum to give us the advantage and not them.”

As the Air Force’s newest electromagnetic attack platform, the EA-37B will replace the legacy EC-130H as a more modern, and cost-effective, commercial derivative aircraft. Nine of 14 EC-130H aircraft have been divested to date.

“The EC-130 has been one of the flagships of Davis-Monthan since the early 1980s, and the arrival of the EA-37B along with

the stand up of 11th Air Task Force shields a new era for Davis-Monthan AFB,” said Col. Scott Mills, 355th Wing commander. “As we look to take on the growing threat, the bottom line for the Airmen of Davis-Monthan and the 55th Electronic Combat Group is we are ready today to face that threat.”

Wilsbach also extended his gratitude to the citizens of Tucson. “This community is so sup-

portive of Davis-Monthan and our mission here, and I can’t let a ceremony like this pass without thanking you,” said Wilsbach. “You make it special for the Airmen and the families that serve here, and certainly you make it capable for us to work on our readiness, to train, and to be prepared for whenever we get called.”

A second aircraft is expected to be delivered for training to Davis-Monthan AFB by the end of 2024.



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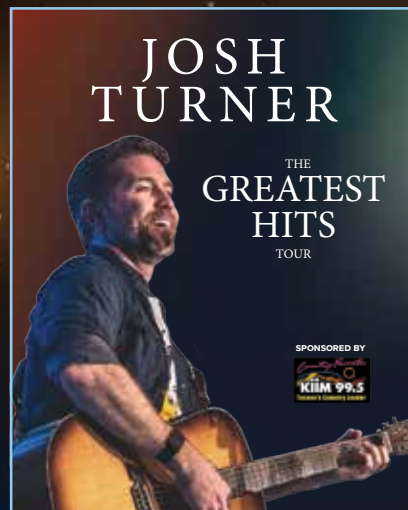
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# Aeromedical Nurse Practitioner ensures fliers are fit to fight

by Airman 1st Class William Finn V

Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.

Maj. Michael Jensen, 355th Medical Group Aeromedical Nurse Practitioner, has spent his career taking care of a variety of patients. When the Air Force initiated an innovative solution to operationalize the Nurse Practitioner, he jumped at the chance to become an ANP.

While relatively new to the Air Force as a career field, ANPs serve a vital purpose by providing care to Airmen who take part in flying missions, thereby keeping them fit to fight.

"I was stationed at MacDill Air Force Base [Florida] and I did two years of family medicine and family health where my youngest patient was 8 and my oldest patient was 99," said Jensen. "I then moved over to operational medicine where I was a primary care manager to the maintenance squadron at MacDill."

During his time as a family nurse practitioner, Jensen's frequent interactions with Flight Surgeons sparked his interest in the service they provide to the Air Force.

"In my conversations with flight medicine, I was always intrigued by their capabilities and the kind of multi-tool kit that they offer to the clinic," Jensen said. "Not only do they take care of fliers, they also do deployment clearances and this kind of broad spectrum of taking care of a total force."

When Jensen was selected to be part of the Flight Medicine mission, he reported to the United States



Air Force photograph by Airman 1st Class William Finn V

Maj. Michael Jensen, 355th Medical Group aeromedical nurse practitioner, poses for a photo at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., Aug. 14, 2024. As an ANP, Jensen provides care to Airmen who take part in flying missions, ensuring they are fit to fight.

Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, to begin ANP training.

"We went through a variety of different trainings," Jensen said. "It's the exact same course that the flight surgeons and aeromedical physician assistants go

through, so we go through school and graduate with them as well."

At the School of Aerospace Medicine, Jensen gained experience in multiple facets of flight medicine including flying inside of an aircraft doing different maneuvers to gain an understanding of the physiological stressors his patients experience as well as participating in an aircraft mishap course.

"There's a mishap course that's a part of the training," said Jensen. "So if a plane crashes, we know how to respond and how to properly manage that kind of situation."

After graduation Jensen was sent to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., as a fully-fledged ANP. In this capacity, he has a broad range of responsibilities: taking care of fliers' Mental Health Assessments and Periodic Health Assessments, managing sick call arrivals, and inspecting various squadrons' work safety and occupational health exposures. He also performs deployment clearances and visits with commanders to discuss the readiness of their Airmen.

"This is one of the reasons I fell in love with flight medicine," said Jensen. "It's not only just taking care of patients, it's also managing and making an overall healthy force."

As the Air Force missions grow and change, the needs of the Airmen change. ANPs are multi capable providers serving on the multidisciplinary aerospace medicine team. ANPs ensure the overall health of the flying community and are capable of adapting to any mission.

## CLINIC, from Page 8

ted to double the size of the outpatient clinic the Department of Veterans Affairs has operated for decades in Lancaster.

More than 300 veterans and their supporters turned out early and packed the meeting room of Elks Lodge 1625. There were so many that Elks Veterans Coordinator Glen Campbell had to give directions to the exits.

"Be sure that if we have to evacuate that you don't run over the veterans in the wheelchairs," advised Campbell, a retired Air Force veteran.

As the meeting opened, volunteers were still carrying chairs into the meeting room, and still more veterans came.

It was a triumph of veterans making their needs known and not giving up, said Christine Ward, veterans assistance deputy for Rep. Mike Garcia, himself a veteran retired Navy fighter pilot.

That was the group of veterans and supporters who turned out to meet with VA officials including Rob Merchant, executive director of VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare, joined by Alan Trinh, head of ambulatory care and others.

"We are here because we need to meet with this community," Merchant said. "We want to hear from you, and we want to let you know that you have been heard."

Detailed plans for an expanded VA Outpatient Care Clinic to be located in

downtown Lancaster were announced, with construction to start soon after permits are approved by City of Lancaster. Merchant said Lancaster has been moving with urgency to move the project forward.

Currently, a VA contract facility of about 10,000 square feet operates on Avenue I. The new facility, which will be near Antelope Valley Medical Center, is scheduled to open next year.

"September 2025," Merchant said. "We will be opening the doors in summer of 2025, thirteen months from now."

The crowd of veterans applauded, but also had pointed questions.

"I will believe it when I see it," veteran Glen Cantrell said. "If you cannot staff all the services needed at VA Sepulveda, how will you staff this clinic?"

Cantrell, a 30-year veteran, noted that when the current Community Based Outpatient Clinic opened on Avenue I in Lancaster that the facility had difficulty in staffing, and that veterans never had consistency in meeting with a primary care doctor.

"If you don't have primary care physicians who live here, it's going to be a disaster," he said.

Merchant acknowledged "the number one complaint has been turnover and lack of consistency in primary care physicians."

He added "We are recruiting staff now, to start seeing veterans as soon as possible, and not wait until the clinic opens."

Cantrell said, "If you have a plan to provide care in this community, I'll give you a hug."

Merchant responded that one reason staffing will be more achievable for the expanded clinic is that many VA employees reside in the Antelope Valley already. Employees who have to commute to work in the west San Fernando Valley or west Los Angeles will be able to work close to home in the Antelope Valley, Merchant promised.

Additions in services to the new facility, Merchant said, will include dental services, optometry, a women's clinic, cardiology, and expanded mental health services. The new facility will be staffed by VA, not a contract-operated clinic, Merchant said.

"We listened to what you, the veterans, told us were your needs," Merchant said.

He added that when the new facility opens next year, the additions of services will increase over time, depending on needs. But staff recruitment is already beginning, he said.

Post 9/11 Army veteran John Parsamyan who runs a training program with Antelope Valley Vets4Veterans asked if VA planned to expand counseling services to prevent homelessness. Merchant said "Yes."

Iraq War veteran Earle Potot asked about VA Care in Community, and why there was a disconnect on getting necessary prescriptions refilled. Merchant got Potot and other veterans in the room

connected with a VA "Patient Experience" representative.

The Urgent Care at High Desert Medical Group is a certified VA "Care in Community" provider for veterans who are signed up for VA Healthcare benefits.

Merchant thanked Chris Ward, veterans aide for Rep. Mike Garcia, for her work in keeping north Los Angeles County veterans "top of mind" and on the VA radar.

He also lauded the efforts of local groups including Los Angeles County-operated Veterans Peer Access Network, also Coffee4Vets, Vets4Veterans, AV Veterans Community Action Coalition, and particularly the VA-operated Vet Center in Palmdale.

Vet Center Director Dalia Sanchez shared with the room "We have counseling services for PTSD, for TBI. We are all combat veterans and qualified to provide therapy services."

Merchant, an Iraq War veteran, encouraged veterans to engage with local veterans service organizations in addition to seeking VA healthcare and benefits.

"We are all part of the solution," he said.

*Editor's note: Dennis Anderson is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at High Desert Medical Group, a certified VA Care in Community Provider. An Army veteran, he works on community health and veterans initiatives.*



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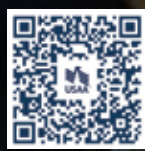
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# The follow up notifications tell a story

by Bob Alvis  
special to Aerotech News

In my first installment of the story of World War II missing in action bombardier 2nd Lt. Russell Godde last month we followed Russell's experience in North Africa.

Russell was a member of the Pyramiders flying B-24Ds — serial # 42-61483, 415th Bomb Squadron, 98th Bomb Group (Heavy)

Russell was lost over Ploiesti, Romania, Aug. 1, 1943, in one of the 17 B-24s lost on that mission over the target.

When I ended part one, I left you the readers with the information up to the point on that Aug. 1 morning when his B-24, the Yen Tu, lifted off the desert floor and headed off with a date with destiny in the Romanian countryside.

The story of the Ploiesti Raid has been told many times over and I myself I have shared much speculation as to how that mission played out for Russell from the crew reports that were shared during mission debriefings about the demise of the Yen Tu and what may have happened to the crew.

But this time, having some personal aspects to reflect on, I believe the best way to share the mission in a unique way, and thanks to permission from the family, I will let the letters from the War Department tell the story as it played out for over a year. These letters were the last line of hope between the family and a lost son and brother, and it unfortunately was not going to end up with any type of closure from the military and leaving a family with more questions than answers.

The government did its best during the time when thousands of these type letters were being sent to homes across America, but it did little to ease the pain of the family that had no answers to a loved one's demise.

Now from a closed footlocker, seen for the first time by the public since the 1940s, here is the correspondence that one American family was burdened with to make sense of it all.

And yes, there will be a part three to this series next month and with that we will not be able to bring closure, but we will share this second to the last chapter of the legacy of Russell Godde and how his final resting place in an unmarked grave somewhere in the world may bring some much-needed understanding of what the significance is of a Black MIA/POW flag)

For now Bob out ...



Courtesy photograph

LEFT: Russell's personal effects shipped home during the war with his issued Purple Heart.

HEADQUARTERS  
NINTH U. S. AIR FORCE

AFPO 696, c/o Postmaster,  
New York, New York,  
15th September, 1943.

Dear Mr. Godde,

In recognition of the heroic action of your son, 2nd Lt. Russel H. Godde, reported missing in action on 1st August, 1943, after the attack on the Roumanian oil refineries, it is with heartfelt gratitude that I send you a copy of a letter from General H. H. Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, commending the officers and men of the Ninth U. S. Bomber Command who participated in this attack for their gallantry in action against the enemy.

To the words of General Arnold, neither General Brereton nor I can add further praise for the courageous action of your son. General Brereton, all officers and enlisted men of this Air Force join me in extending to you our deepest sympathy and in expressing our mutual pride in having served with one who has rendered such heroic and unselfish service to our country.

Sincerely,  
V. H. Strahn  
V. H. STRAHN  
Brig. General, U.S. A.

HEADQUARTERS, ARMY AIR FORCES  
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

September 29, 1944

My dear Mr. Godde:

With deep regret I have learned that an official determination has been made of the death of your son, Second Lieutenant Russell Herman Godde, who has been missing in action since August 1, 1943, in the Middle Eastern Area.

The enviable reputation of Lieutenant Godde as a cadet and as a bombardier has been called to my attention. His training record clearly shows that he was determined to succeed by earnest application and serious performance of duty. Following graduation at Williams Field, he displayed promise of developing into one of the most capable officers in his unit, and his value as an airman was indicated by the important missions to which he was assigned.

I know the outstanding achievement for which your son was awarded the Distinguished-Flying Cross is a source of great pride to you, and I hope the knowledge that he made the supreme sacrifice for his Country will be a comfort in your bereavement.

I offer my heartfelt sympathy to you and other members of the family.

Very sincerely,  
H. H. Arnold  
General, U. S. Army,  
Commanding General, Army Air Forces.

Mr. Anthony F. Godde,  
R. R. #2, Box 498,  
Lancaster, California.

WAR DEPARTMENT  
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

AG 502 Godde, Russell H.  
(2 Aug 44) PO-8

2 August 1944.

Mr. Anthony Frank Godde,  
R. R. # 2, Box 498,  
Lancaster, California.

Dear Mr. Godde:

Since your son, Second Lieutenant Russell H. Godde, C-73975, Air Corps, was reported missing in action 1 August 1943, the War Department has entertained the hope that he survived and that information would be revealed dispelling the uncertainty surrounding his absence. However, as in many cases, the conditions of warfare deny us such information. The record concerning your son shows that he was a member of the crew of a Liberator bomber. On 1 August 1943, he participated in a bombing raid on the oil refineries at Ploiesti, Roumania. His plane was last seen as it was approaching the target area.

Full consideration has recently been given to all available information bearing on the absence of your son, including all records, reports and circumstances. These have been carefully reviewed and considered. In view of the fact that twelve months have now expired without the receipt of evidence to support a continued presumption of survival, the War Department must terminate such absence by a presumptive finding of death. Accordingly, an official finding of death has been recorded under the provisions of Public Law 490, 77th Congress, approved March 7, 1942, as amended.

The finding does not establish an actual or probable date of death; however, as required by law, it includes a presumptive date of death for the termination of pay and allowances, settlement of accounts and payment of death gratuities. In the case of your son, this date has been set as 2 August 1944, the day following the expiration of twelve months' absence.

I regret the necessity for this message but trust that the ending of a long period of uncertainty may give at least some small measure of consolation. I hope you may find sustaining comfort in the thought that the uncertainty with which war has surrounded the absence of your son has enhanced the honor of his service to his country and of his sacrifice.

Sincerely yours,  
J. A. Ullio  
J. A. ULLIO  
Major General,  
The Adjutant General.

1 Incl.

October 9, 1944.

My dear Mr. Godde:

At the request of the President, I write to inform you that the Purple Heart has been awarded posthumously to your son, Second Lieutenant Russell H. Godde, Air Corps, who sacrificed his life in defense of his country.

Little that we can do or say will console you for the death of your loved one. We profoundly appreciate the greatness of your loss, for in a very real sense the loss suffered by any of us in this battle for our country, is a loss shared by all of us. When the medal, which you will shortly receive, reaches you, I want you to know that with it goes my sincerest sympathy, and the hope that time and the victory of our cause will finally lighten the burden of your grief.

Sincerely yours,  
Henry L. Stimson

Mr. Anthony F. Godde,  
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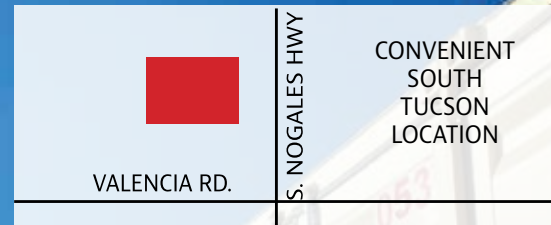
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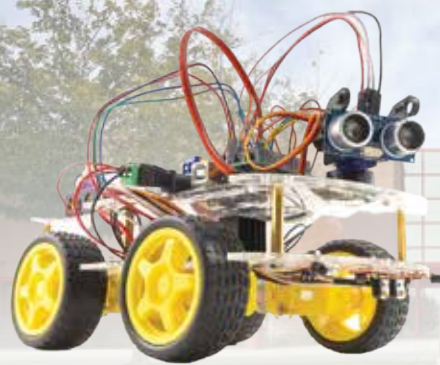
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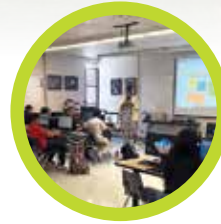
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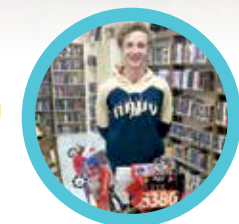
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Amphitheater

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**NOTICE OF PUBLIC LIEN SALES**

**Business & Professional Code Section 21700-21707**

Notice is hereby given by the undersigned that a public lien sale of the following described personal property will be held at the hours of **12 noon on the 18th of September 2024** or thereafter. The auction is being held at **www.selfstorageauction.com** by competitive bid. The property is stored by **Nova Storage located 16488 Adelanto Rd. Adelanto, CA 92301.**

The items to be sold are generally described as follows:  
Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- G50 Brown, Porsha
- B09 Brownlee, David
- F30 Arriola, Robert
- E37 Mehegan, Patricia
- I15 Rodriguez, Sergio
- I14 Gillies, Amber
- F17 Espinoza, Nadine
- C03 Taylor, Rickeishia

Date: August 27th, 2024 Signed NOVA STORAGE  
This notice is given in accordance with the provisions of section 21700 et seq. of Business & Professional Code of the Sate of California. The owner reserves the right to bid at the sale. All purchased goods are sold "As Is" and must be paid for and removed at the time of sale. Sales subject to prior cancellation in the event of settlement between owner & obligated party. Auctioneer: Nova Storage

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The items to be sold are generally described as follows:  
Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- 0090 Long, Jessica
- 0304 Ramirez, Dominic
- 0447 Harris, Shaquita
- 0478 Miller, Cary
- 0427 Gonzalez, Gabriella

Date: August 27th, 2024 Signed NOVA STORAGE This notice is given in accordance with the provisions of section 21700 et seq. of Business & Professional Code of the Sate of California. The owner reserves the right to bid at the sale. All purchased goods are sold "As Is" and must be paid for and removed at the time of sale. Sales subject to prior cancellation in the event of settlement between owner & obligated party. Auctioneer: Nova Storage

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The items to be sold are generally described as follows:  
Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- E371 Castillo, Margarita
- E367 Gonzales, Jennifer
- E416 Smith, Shautonya
- E407 McBride, Heather
- E298 Smith, Michael
- E297 Smith, Michael

Date: August 27th, 2024 Signed NOVA STORAGE

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The items to be sold are generally described as follows: Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- 7024 Hernandez, Juan
- 1039 Diaz, Doreen
- 1118 Villeda Galindo, Christop
- 4047 Tellez, Natalie
- 6041 Pouncil, Anthony
- 5022 Akiyama, Glen
- 6021 Votava, Elizabeth

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The items to be sold are generally described as follows: Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- P40 Clay, Ramon
- O14 Townsend Jr, Francis
- P28 Locke, Eric
- C08 Gillard, Dakarai
- S07 Harbin, Renia
- K02 Ncham, Fidelia
- H09 Trotman, R Shawn Ragus Group LLC
- M28 Salazar, Shiann
- V18 Arias, Ana

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The items to be sold are generally described as follows: Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- A057 Mendoza, Mia
- H256 Mickel, Shirley

Notice is hereby given by the undersigned that a public lien sale of the following described personal property will be held at the hours of **12 noon on the 18th day of September 2024** or thereafter. The auction is being held at **www.selfstorageauction.com** by competitive bid. The property is stored by **Nova Storage located, 5951 East Firestone Blvd., South Gate, CA. 90280**

The items to be sold are generally described as follows: Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- 0470A Velasquez, Pablo
- 0509 Linares, Alexander
- 3516 Mendez, Marco Antonio
- 3332 Barton, Jessica Marie
- 2430 Ojeda, Jose R
- 2333 Sandoval, Susana
- 0427A Izquierdo, Jesus

Notice is hereby given by the undersigned that a public lien sale of the following described personal property will be held at the hours of **12 noon on the 18th day of September 2024** or thereafter. The auction is being held at **www.selfstorageauction.com** by competitive bid. The property is stored by **Nova Storage located 13043 Foothill Blvd Sylmar, CA 91342**

The items to be sold are generally described as follows: Furniture, clothing, tools and or other household items stored by the following persons.

- 0284 Feshi, Muhamad
- 0358 Zamora, Michel
- 2332 Guevara, Tatiana
- 0115 Yanes, Shirley
- 0264 Cruz, Maria
- 0646 Pinuelas, Michael
- 0152 Small, Dorothy
- 3405 Sanchez, Luz
- 3221 Dugal, Stephanie
- 0700 Gomez, Joshua
- 3501 Sierra, Felix
- 3030 Carder, James

Date: August 27th, 2024 Signed NOVA STORAGE This notice is given in accordance with the provisions of section 21700 et seq. of Business & Professional Code of the Sate of California. The owner reserves the right to bid at the sale. All purchased goods are sold "As Is" and must be paid for and removed at the time of sale. Sales subject to prior cancellation in the event of settlement between owner & obligated party. Auctioneer: Nova Storage



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Spazmatics**

Thursday, Sept 26th



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**MURS**

Friday, Sept 27th



**WALKER  
HAYES**

Special Guest  
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Saturday, Sept 28th



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Castro**  
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Miribans**

Sunday, Spet 29th



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Sept. 25th – 29th, 2024





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