



# THE NVF NEWS

*THE LIFELINE FOR AMERICA'S VETERANS*

*Veterans Day 2024*

## Breakthrough in the Fight to End Veteran Homelessness



*Shad with Mark Rosenbaum, lead attorney for lawsuit*

On August 5th, 2024, NVF Founder Shad Meshad took the stand in an LA courtroom to testify in a suit against the VA for failing Veterans in Los Angeles County. Shad, whose personal history includes an early stint with the VA, was in his 39th year of fighting the issues this case was brought to address. He was on the stand for over two hours. At the end of it, the defense for the VA declined to cross examine. That says a lot.

Federal Judge David O. Carter walked the extensive grounds of the West LA VA campus and interviewed homeless Veterans before he ruled to hold the VA accountable “for failing to honor its obligations on the West Los Angeles VA campus.” He ordered that the

campus be used to provide housing and healthcare to disabled veterans, as originally intended.

The lawsuit was filed by Public Counsel. The NVF was asked to participate as a plaintiff organization along with Veteran plaintiffs who were homeless, disabled or both. We were hopeful that this lawsuit would prevail. In 2015, the unlawful land-use issue was the topic of much discussion and planning. The VA promised to build 1200 housing units then. We're still waiting.

Judge Carter's order voided significant land-use leases held by UCLA, Brentwood School, Safety Park and Bridgeland Resources, an oil company, and requires 1800 units of permanent housing for disabled Veterans. It also requires 750 temporary units on West LA VA grounds within 18 months. Of great importance to us because of the NVF Street Outreach program, was his declaration that disability payments not be included as income, a discriminatory practice that kept many disabled Veterans from eligibility for affordable housing. This part of the ruling was a huge success in disabled Veterans' struggles to find housing nation-wide.

In addition to that, Carter's ruling mandated that all VA permanent supportive housing services meet evidence-based standards and requires increased staffing and improved effectiveness in its housing voucher program. Carter named John C. Hueston as monitor to “ensure timely and comprehensive compliance with his order. Hueston said, “It is a tremendous amount of work and responsibility...I think this is a historic and sweeping ruling that is attempting to right a very deep wrong against our veteran community.” We couldn't agree more. On behalf of those we serve, we express our gratitude to Public Counsel for their perseverance, and to Judge Carter for his wisdom.

**The Lifeline for Veterans • 888 777-4443 • [www.nvf.org](http://www.nvf.org) • [vetsupport@nvf.org](mailto:vetsupport@nvf.org)**

Monday - Friday 6am - 5pm Pacific Standard Time • If you know a veteran or family who needs help, contact us today.

5777 West Century Boulevard Suite 350 Los Angeles, California 90045-5656

## NVF Celebrates 39 years of Service



*Board Member Rick Seaman thanked by Shad for substantial contributions in support of the NVF.*

and Rick Seaman were in attendance along with former Board Members Eric Lardiere and Doug Garnee. NVF's special friend and Honorary Director Dan Lauria was there. Dan narrated *Captain for Dark Mornings*, Shad's Vietnam memoir for us (available on Amazon).

Under the main floor's historic murals, guests mingled and enjoyed cocktails and other beverages along with delicious passed hors d'oeuvres from Mr. Ardi's Catering. The son of Alpha Dog Debi Ardi, Mr. Ardi has catered for the last two Anniversary events for us. The Roast took place in the 500-seat auditorium upstairs and opened with a photo montage of Shad's career and history.

On August 4th, 2024, we gathered at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall in downtown Los Angeles, to celebrate our 39th Anniversary in a novel way: a Roast of our esteemed Founder. The brainchild of our team of intrepid volunteers, the Alpha Dogs, the event was anything but stuffy.

The roast began at 3PM with guests arriving in Hawaiian-themed dress, Shad's sartorial choice on most days. Board Chair Carole Bionda flew down from Napa, and Board Members Travis Mills and Dan Wierichs flew in from Colorado. Local Board Members Jim Watson, Dave Culmer, Dave Clanton



*HOO-RAH! Shad and Board member USMC Vet Dave Culmer.*



*Board Member Travis Mills, Melinda Meshad, Shad and Board Member Dan Wierichs..*

Football great Rocky Bleier, an Honorary NVF Board Member for over 30 years, sent a moving video message of congratulation and support with just a hint of roast. Joe Mantegna roasted Shad while praising the NVF. Alpha Dog volunteer Steve Mann opened the event. He was joined by Veteran Marc Thurston from Jewish War Veterans Los Angeles. Melinda Meshad performed her original song written for the occasion to honor the "Mad Man," Shad. Long-time Board Member Rick Seaman was honored for his outstanding contributions supporting the NVF over many years.

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Afterward, we enjoyed Mr. Ardi's cupcakes to honor Shad's 80th birthday. Many voices were raised in song as we sang "Happy Birthday" to Shad. It was an outstanding double celebration.



*Seated, Rick Seaman L-R Dan Wierichs, Shad, Travis Mills and Eric Lardiere*



*Past NVF Vet of the Year Wendell Guillermo with his son*



*Honorary Board Member Dan Lauria and Shad*



*Jackie "Pink Lady" Goldberg and NVF Board Chairman Carol Bionda*



*USMC Vet Jesse Acosts with friend and Shad*

## Meet New Board Member Josh Dittebrand



*Josh Dittebrand*

Joshua Dittebrand is a native Californian and the son of Mitch and Misty Dittebrand, both U.S. Navy Service members. “Growing up in a military family allowed me to experience and understand the many cultures that exist in our world. In 2004, I chose to stay in the ‘family business,’ enlisting in U.S. Marine Corps as an Infantry Assaultman. In 2005 while assigned to the 1st Battalion 5th Marine Regiment, I was deployed to Ar-Ramadi, Iraq. I also deployed with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit from Okinawa, Japan from 2006 to 2007. My final deployment was with the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit from 2007 to 2008. Since the end of my active service, I have been working the fire service at various agencies and have held such roles as Firefighter/EMT and Firefighter/Paramedic. My current role is Lieutenant/Paramedic and EMS Training and Services Division Coordinator for our agency.”

When Josh is not working in the fire service, he’s Adjunct Faculty at Colorado Mesa University, where he teaches in the Fire Sciences program. Otherwise, he can generally be found at home with his wife and their four dogs, training Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu at a local gym, or just riding around on his Harley Davidson motorcycle. In this last regard, the Harley, he’s a wonderful fit for the NVF. Both our Founder and long-standing Board Member Dave Culmer rode Harleys. Welcome aboard, Josh!

## NVF’s Gerald Hillard Honored for Service to Veterans



*Gerald Hillard Jr. Honored*

On July 31, 2024, the organization Veterans Stand Together hosted an Appreciation Dinner to recognize and honor the contributions of people who work tirelessly in the veteran social services space, serving the veteran community. The NVF proudly announces that our own Gerald Hillard, Jr. was one of the Awardees honored that evening. NVF Director of Ops Melanie Alvarez introduced Gerald to the attendees and presented a certificate of recognition to him.

Award recipients were a mix of both veterans and non-veterans. Gerald has served the veterans services community for over 16 years. He’s widely known for his extensive knowledge of services and resources available for Veterans, and for his sunny disposition and compassion toward the people we serve.

Veterans Stand Together was created by veterans to empower veterans as well as the communities they serve. VST helps in the fight against homelessness, PTSD, and substance abuse by directing Veterans into positive outcomes and preventive measures.



*Some of Gerald's previous awards*

## Introducing a Partnership with USC School of Social Work



*Kimberly Chavez*



*Brian Cardona*



*Frances Spivey*

The NVF is partnering with USC's Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work to provide internships for graduate students. Our first two interns arrived April 30 and will complete their internships in early December. Our newest intern began her internship in September with a visit from DC to our office in LA.

**Kimberly Chavez** is in her final semester of school, pursuing a Master of Social Work (MSW). She works in micro and macro level work and research dedicated to supporting the Veteran and Military Community. Throughout her career, she has trained, supervised, and supported diverse teams including service members, their families and civilians. A Marine Corps Veteran, she worked in several roles within Supply and Logistics improving the productivity and reliability of supply sections supporting their mission. As a victim advocate, she provided crucial support to active and reserve Marines and Sailors. Although she "hung up my uniform in 2019," her husband will serve in the Marine Corps until his retirement in 2028. The Chavez family currently resides in Eastern North Carolina with their two children.

Kimberly's future research interests include exploring gaps in care for Veterans, the challenges faced by transitioning servicemembers, and the unique experiences of those with intersecting identities, such as being both a mother and a servicemember. She's also interested in studying the dynamics of dual military couples, the impact of military service on families and children,

and the importance of trauma-informed care in supporting veterans in crisis.

**Brian Garcia Cardona** is a proud Marine Corps Veteran and current Master of Social Work (MSW) student at the University of Southern California. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Brian now calls California home, where he balances his academic and professional pursuits with his role as a devoted father to his six-year-old son. He also enjoys the company of his two-year-old Cane Corso, who keeps him active and grounded.

Driven by a passion for mental health and social justice, Brian aims to become a licensed therapist, focusing on supporting those within the prison system and mental health facilities. His experiences in the military have fueled his desire to provide compassionate care and advocacy, especially for individuals navigating complex personal challenges. Brian is committed to using his skills and knowledge to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

**Frances Spivey** is a dedicated MSW student at the University of Southern California. She earned her BA in Leadership in the Public Sector from North Carolina State University, laying a solid foundation for her commitment to public service. With 15 years of experience in the North Carolina Army National Guard, Frances brings a wealth of discipline and leadership to

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her role as an intern. Her military background informs her passion for supporting fellow service members and their families. She supported Operation Enduring Freedom as a medic in Afghanistan.

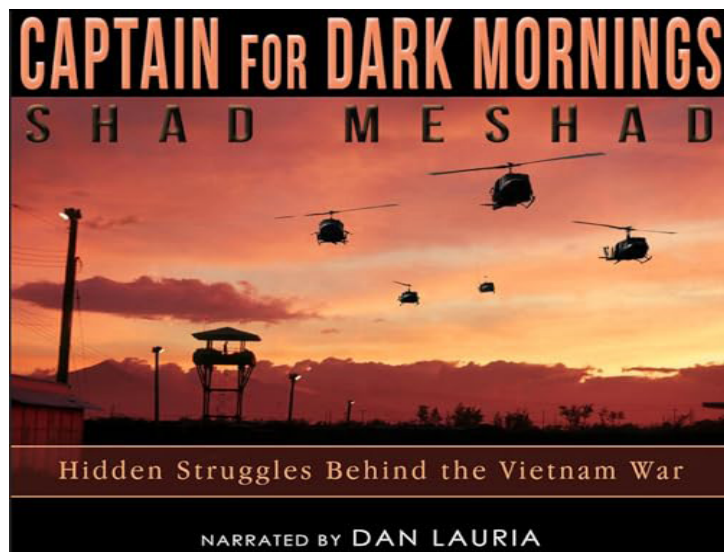
Frances is married to an active-duty Marine, and together they embrace family life with her stepchildren. In their free time, the family enjoys exploring the great outdoors.

The interns work closely with Board Member Kristine Stanley and with Director of Ops Melanie Alvarez on macro and micro projects along with engaging callers on our Lifeline for Vets. Training includes engagement, warm hand-offs, de-escalation and trauma-informed engagement. They also discuss cases they have collaboratively with the clinician working with the NVF.

Alvarez says, “I am here to talk about clinical issues, other approaches of psychotherapy such as CBT, motivational interviewing, and diagnoses such as anxiety and depression. Our goal is to help them develop tools to use on the hotline and in other settings. We also discuss various avenues of social work, paths that they can take in their careers.”

Melanie approves their hours, meets with their USC instructors, and looks over their reflective summaries, a part of the intern requirement with all universities. For their part, the interns bring new skills to us, and a high level of enthusiasm, commitment and dedication to the work we all do.

## Dan Lauria Reads *Captain for Dark Mornings* by Shad Meshad



Longtime NVF Supporter and Honorary Board Member, actor Dan Lauria, volunteered to be the “voice” for *Captain for Dark Mornings*, Shad’s memoir of the Vietnam war. First published in 1982, the new edition is available at Amazon in print, on Kindle and as an audiobook on Audible. A fine actor, Lauria brings to life Meshad’s experience as a psych officer in Vietnam—all the chaos, grief, pain and absurdity. If you don’t know about the mustache case, you should!

Special thanks to filmmaker Scott McCullough for the dazzling jacket design. All proceeds from the book support the NVF. It’s winter...curl up with a copy or better, send the audiobook as a gift!

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--Charity Navigator.org

*The NVF is proud to have earned  
five 4-star ratings  
from Charity Navigator*

Since 1985, The National Veterans Foundation (NVF) has been a leading resource for more than 450,000 Veterans and their family members. Our experienced team of trained professionals includes Veterans of Vietnam, the Cold War, Iraq and Afghanistan who understand first-hand the issues facing today’s Veterans and their families. Our sole purpose is to help you get the help you need as quickly as possible.

### **MISSION OF THE NATIONAL VETERANS FOUNDATION**

To serve the crisis management, information and referral needs of all U.S. Veterans and their families through:

- Operation of the nation’s first vet-to-vet toll-free helpline for all Veterans and their families.
- Public awareness programs that shine a consistent public spotlight on the human needs facing American Veterans and their families.
- Ongoing outreach to connect homeless and low income Veterans with food, clothing, transportation and other essential resources.

*The National Veterans Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.  
All contributions are fully tax deductible.*

### **OUR TEAM**

**Shad Meshad, MSW, LCSW, CTS, TFTdx:**  
President

**Melanie Alvarez:** Director of Operations

**Cathie Sandstrom:** Director of  
Communications/Editorial

**Micheal Washington:** Resources Coordinator

**Gerald Hillard II:** Resources Specialist

**James “Sneaky” White:** Prison Outreach

Coordinator

**Rich Rudnick:** Information Services

**Louis Geiger, Jr.:** Information Services

**Markham Anderson:** Information Services

**Kathleen Reilly:** Information Services

**Ernest Harmon:** Information Services

**Steve Duby:** Information Services

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