

## Social Service Commitment Strong

### Menlo Park V.A. Program

# Army Under ‘Umbrella’ with Clara-Mateo

by Judy Vaughn –

There is much talk in social service circles today about agencies putting aside their institutional boundaries and working together much more closely to address the needs of the community as well as the individual client. In the Golden State Division, a new shelter illustrates what can happen when the words become reality.

In Menlo Park, Calif., the Clara-Mateo Alliance is an umbrella organization created to offer “a comprehensive approach to self reliance for homeless clients and families...” It is a remarkable coalition.

The Salvation Army is managing an innovative, 45-bed community shelter on VA grounds with coordinated VA vocational training, sheltered workshop, employment and medical services. These are primarily but not exclusively for homeless mentally ill substance abusers, many of whom are veterans. Single men and women, as well as families with children, will be accommodated in separate wings of the facility.

The program’s supporters—those who struggled to make it a reality—include The Salvation Army, the Veterans’ Workshop and the Veterans’ Palo Alto Health Care System, Studios Architecture, the Housing Industry Foundation, Design Response, Inc., and representatives from all local government groups.

City and county governments are contributing to the operating costs, along with private corporations and foundations. These include a major donation by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and participation by Santa Clara and San Mateo counties as well as the cities of San Jose, Redwood City, Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

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The Army's divisional headquarters and Redwood City office have worked closely with many community groups to develop this project. Under the direction of Lt. Colonel Jerry Gaines, Divisional Social Services Consultant Pat Eberling and Envoys Ron and Roberta McKinney from Redwood City were the prime movers from the Army's offices.

The Redwood City Corps has been delivering The Salvation Army's spiritual message to the Menlo Park Veterans Administration facilities since 1991. The League of Mercy program meets bi-weekly at the VA campus with an average attendance of 40 to 50. On-call counseling is provided, one-on-one visitation, monthly group recreation activities and transportation to corps services on request. In the shelter program, Envoy Ron McKinney will have primary responsibility for assuring a spiritual emphasis. It was apparent on dedication day that the Army was a well-respected leader in the planning efforts.

Speaker after speaker talked about federal, state and local entities fighting "not over territory, but to make something happen." Jurisdictional barriers were broken down in favor of a "model of regional planning, collaboration and a continuum of service for the client."

Among all the words from government officials, however, it was those from Walter Bal of the shelter staff which perhaps had the most dramatic effect. "After 38 years on the street," he said, "I thank The Salvation Army and the shelter system for saving my life, for giving me purpose... This will be more than a place to lay your head. It will be about dignity and respect. I have been privileged to have the chance to work here. Can you believe it? They took me along to ask for money. And people listened. We're talking about \$100,000! And they listened!"

In the audience also were vets suffering post traumatic stress disorder from Vietnam, from Desert Storm—some who have been on the streets as long as Bal, many who have been in and out of detox situations for years. Their presence was a testimony to the work that still needs to be done.

Statistics indicate that there are 250,000 homeless vets in the United States. The obvious need is for housing—along with jobs, training and support services. But until the houses are built, until the jobs come through, until mental health and substance abuse problems are stabilized, until the training takes hold, until self respect is a reality, transitional housing programs continue to be critical.

"What kinds of volunteers do we need? It may not seem very glamorous, but it's what we need—someone to clip the toenails and scrub the bunions of homeless men," said A/Captain Patrick Granat, director of the Lifeboat Lodge Shelter