

East Bay Stand Down helps veterans get back on their feet

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Photos by - Anda Chu / Bay Area News Group – Contra Costa Times



A temporary courthouse is setup for veterans at the East Bay Stand Down held at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, Calif., Sept. 13, 2014. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)



Veteran Garry Glasper, of Morgan Hill, left, stands before Alameda County Superior Court Judge Larry Goodman to deal with old traffic tickets and legal fines in a temporary courthouse setup at the East Bay Stand Down held at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, Calif., Sept. 13, 2014. ...



Veteran Garry Glasper, of Morgan Hill, Alameda County Deputy Public Defender Seth Morris and Chief Assistant District Attorney Kevin Dunleavy, from left, stand before Alameda County Superior Court Judge Larry Goodman in a temporary courthouse setup at the East Bay Stand Down held at the Alameda ...



Alameda County Deputy Public Defender Seth Morris shakes hands with veteran Garry Glasper, of Morgan Hill, from left, after helping Glasper deal with old traffic tickets and legal fines in a temporary courthouse setup at the East Bay Stand Down held at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, ...



A row of tents setup at the East Bay Stand Down held at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, Calif., Sept. 13, 2014. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group)

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PLEASANTON -- A court appearance is a bother for many people, but for Garry Glasper, it was a new lease on life. Glasper, 64, had eight outstanding traffic infractions and two unpaid fines from a pair of old misdemeanors. But having lost his job and his home during a bout with drug addiction, these minor problems had kept him from renewing his driver's license -- and so from being able to find a job.

On Saturday, at the biennial East Bay Stand Down encampment at the Alameda County Fairgrounds, a public defender, a prosecutor and a judge collaborated to vacate the cases against this Air Force veteran so he can move on with his life.

"Thank you so much!" Glasper, now in Morgan Hill, exclaimed while enthusiastically pumping Alameda County Judge **Larry Goodman's** hand.



A row of tents setup at the East Bay Stand Down held at the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, Calif., Sept. 13, 2014. Hundreds of homeless, needy and displaced military veterans are connected with services ranging from medical, housing, legal, employment and other services over the four-day event. Veterans are required to register in advance, and live on site in a tent city for the entire event. (Anda Chu/Bay Area News Group) (ANDA CHU)

Deputy public defender **Seth Morris** said help like that given to Glasper "is a small remedy for a lot of people, but for these clients it can be life-changing."

That's the idea behind East Bay Stand Down, which works to connect down-on-their luck veterans with services to help get them upward bound again.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates there are more than 7,000 needy or homeless veterans in the nine-county Bay Area and more than 250,000 nationwide, many of whom grapple with health, mental health or addiction problems. The first Stand Down -- a military term describing the removal of combat troops from the field to provide for their basic needs in a safe area -- was held in San Diego in 1988, and the movement has expanded to more than 200 locations since; the first East Bay Stand Down was in 1999.

Vets are required to register in advance and to live in the event's tent city for the entire four-day duration, a reminder of the discipline and dignity that went with their military service.

Hundreds of vets like Glasper met with attorneys, judges and court staffers about minor, old legal problems keeping them from driver's licenses, jobs or other needs. Elsewhere, vets were cycling through tents offering services in job training and placement, housing, health -- even haircuts and shiatsu massage.

One booth offered to help veterans locate and contact relatives. Another offered chaplain's services. Everywhere, veterans mingled with volunteers and current military service members, each looking at the others with admiration and appreciation.

Dental coordinator **Bob Sada**, a retired Danville dentist, said he expected his staff of volunteers would help more than 200 vets, either in one of the three mobile dental units set up at the site or at one of 40 off-site dental offices in the East Bay that offered free services.

"The dental needs are grave, and our ability to treat them is somewhat limited," he said, with priority given to cases with acute pain or infection. Still, he said, the veterans "are just absolutely ecstatic, appreciative of what's being done for them."

Elsewhere, 16-year-old **Chris Behring**, of Blackhawk, was videotaping veterans for the **Library of Congress' Veterans History Project** as part of his community service project to attain his Eagle Scout rank. He also raised more than \$11,000 to buy hundreds of sleeping bags for vets attending the event.

Virgil Owens, 71, of San Francisco, reclined on his cot in his assigned tent as Saturday's baking midday sun beat down. The Vietnam-era Navy veteran said this is his third time at the East Bay Stand Down, and although he came to have some legal issues addressed by a judge, he was there just as much to spend some time among vets who have walked a similar path.

"It helps, we can share stories," he said.

For Glasper, who's clean, healthy and recovering with help from the VA and Narcotics Anonymous, having his record cleared and getting his driver's license back means being able to return to work as an X-ray technician.

"I get to be productive and work," he said. "I get my life back."

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For more information about East Bay Stand Down, go to www.eastbaystanddown.org.

Josh Richman covers politics. Follow him at [Twitter.com/josh_richman](https://twitter.com/josh_richman).

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*Forwarded / Shared & reposted by the **VietNam Veterans of Diablo Valley** – a major sponsor of the **East Bay Stand Down***