

# Vets center marks expansion

Veterans

11.13.12



Veterans Jerry Pitman, Phil Arro and Stan Yonemura raise the U.S. and POW/MIA flags, as the Santa Cruz County Vet Center reopening celebration gets under way Monday.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

## VA facility offers counseling, medical care

By CATHY KELLY

ckelly@santacruzsentinel.com

CAPITOLA — The Santa Cruz County Veterans Center celebrated the nation's veterans Monday and the recent expansion of the center that works to heal them.

The Department of Veterans Affairs facility at 41st Avenue and Jade Street offers a range of counseling services and some medical care. It opened in 1993 and doubled in size last year to its current 2,880 square feet.

The "grand reopening ceremony" was held Monday to accommodate Rep. Sam Farr, an instru-

mental supporter, and Veterans Day, said Dr. Lucretia Mann, the center's team leader.

Mann said the expansion has been wonderful.

"It's so much calmer," she said. "We're not elbow-to-elbow anymore."

### ONE MAN'S STORY

One veteran among the more than 100 attendees said it took him more than 30 years to seek help after serving in Vietnam.

Stan Yonemura of Soquel said he walked into the center about 10 years ago seeking a VA card

SEE VETS ON B3



The VFW Post 1716 Honor Guard fires a salute as new flags are raised over the Santa Cruz County Vet Center on Monday morning.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

## VETS

Continued from B1

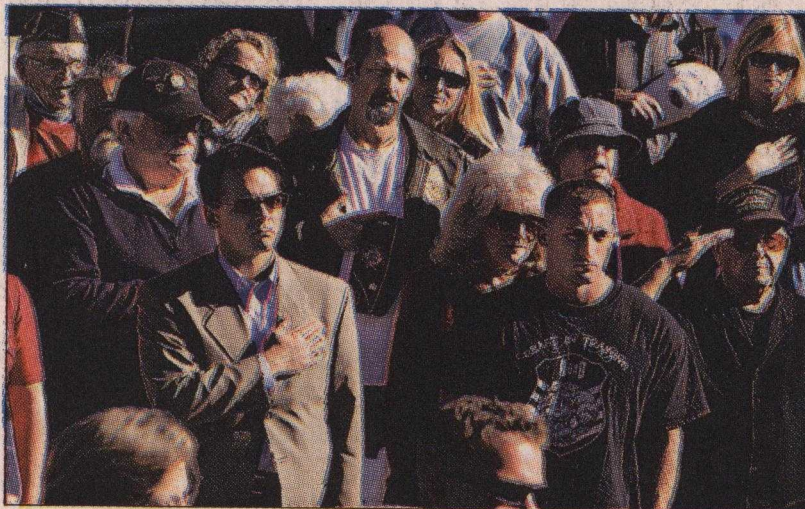
for prescription medication when a counselor asked to talk to him. When the man asked if there was anything that bothered him about his time in the service, Yonemura said the question brought tears to his eyes.

"I said 'Yes, what bothered me was the way we had to return home,'" he said.

Yonemura was medically discharged from the Marine Corps after "catching a bullet on the side of the head." He said it wasn't the injury that haunted him as much as the way he was transported from Travis Air Force Base to a military hospital in Oakland in a bus with blackened windows, as military officials tried to shield him and others from the hostility of anti-war demonstrators.

Yonemura was awarded the Purple Heart, and after rehabilitation, worked as a pump operator for the Soquel Creek Water District.

But he had nightmares, he said. "I thought that was just part of it," he said. "Part of what helps about the veterans center is we are able to open up and talk about things we can't talk about even with our family. A lot of it is how to cope in a civilian world."



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Veterans, their families, community members and public officials attend Monday's ceremony.

Yonemura mentors other veterans, but said it can take time for them to seek help and overcome the stigma attached to post traumatic stress disorder.

Farr, the keynote speaker, mentioned two young men he knew from Carmel High who were killed serving in Vietnam. One is still missing in action, he said.

### HEALING

He spoke of his ongoing efforts to get a military cemetery in Ford Ord and a Department of Defense Clinic in Marina. Clinic services will

now be seamless, without veterans having to apply to the VA and prove their military service, Farr said.

Speaker Jim Lieb, a deacon at St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Ben Lomond, said he served as an air traffic controller in Cam Ranh Bay during the Vietnam War.

Lieb spoke of the "ghosts" of terror, loss of comrades and the guilt in coming home when they didn't. Many veterans are homeless, and some "survived there only to die at their own hand here," he said.

"There is a lot of healing work to be done," Lieb said. "None of us are

home until all of us are home."

The event included a flag raising, posting of colors and rifle salute by the Honor Guard from Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1716, patriotic music from the Del Monte Brass Ensemble and a barbecue courtesy of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10110.

Mann presented awards to veterans Yonemura, Jerry Pitman, Ron Petty, Howard Althouse and Chuck Woodson and to center employees.

When the band played the national anthem, the crowd stood, hands to hearts. The veterans were apparent. Not because of their decorated caps and jackets, but because of how they snapped to attention, hands to foreheads in that ramrod-straight salute that seems second nature to them. The hand of one gray-haired man in the front row shook, but it seemed clear he would not drop it until the song was over.

One speaker, Steve Husong, a local Army veteran injured in Afghanistan, said there is something about that small percentage of the American population who join the military to protect others, signing up for a job that is "hard, dirty, emotional work."

And while he didn't put his finger on what that is all about, he said anyone who ever joined is worthy of respect.

"Veterans Day is for all of us," he said. "We're a lineage. And we need each other."