



## WE HONOR VETERANS

On September 3, 2015, Mesilla Valley Hospice, a Level Four Partner held a ceremonial planting of Johnny's Cactus. Johnny's Cactus is the legacy of John Milton Risner. John had just joined the Marines



and was about to go off to Vietnam when his family went on a vacation in the mountains. John and his little sister Cynthia were on a walk in the forest and came upon a piece of prickly pear cactus. They knew it didn't belong there and would not survive the cold there. They picked it up and planted it at their home in Las Cruces, New Mexico. John told Cynthia it would be fun to see how big it was when he got home from Vietnam. John never made it home to see that cactus. He became the first young man from Las

Cruces to be killed in Vietnam. The cactus, however, thrived in their yard and became known as Johnny's Cactus. In the 50 years since his death, Cynthia has planted cuttings from that original cactus in every yard she has lived in. Cuttings have also been planted in Vietnam.

Mesilla Valley Hospice was fortunate to obtain two cuttings from her cactus and planted them in their Veterans Garden. Steve Pearce, the United States Representative from New Mexico's Second Congressional District served in Vietnam as a combat pilot in the Air Force. They were honored to have the Senator as a guest speaker at their event. The photo shows John Risner's brother Bob, his sister Cynthia, Kathy Olson, Program Coordinator for Mesilla Valley Hospice, Jean Briley, Executive Director and CEO of Mesilla Valley Hospice, and Congressman Pearce. The original cactus continues to grow in the yard where John, Cynthia and Bob grew up. A short animated docudrama is being made of Johnny's Cactus by a New Mexico film maker, Mary Darling. If you would like more information about Johnny's Cactus you can visit [www.johnnyscactus.com](http://www.johnnyscactus.com).

