

PRESENTING THE COLORS

By Janet Clancy, Communications Officer,
The Elizabeth Hospice

Stephen Ko, a San Diego native, loves this country. His desire to keep people safe from near and foreign threats led him to enlist in the US Army when he was 19 years old. During his Vietnam tour of duty, he like many servicemen during that time was not welcomed home or thanked for his service. This experience led him to devote his energies after retiring from a 40-year career in the grocery industry to ensure that other veterans were acknowledged and honored for their role in defending our freedoms.

After exploring several ways to honor veterans, Stephen joined The Elizabeth Hospice's volunteer team. Although he had no prior experience with hospice care, he was drawn to the organization because of its commitment to providing medical and emotional support to veterans nearing the end of their life journey.

The Elizabeth Hospice is the largest independent nonprofit hospice provider in Southern California. The organization is dedicated to helping ensure that veterans are aware of their healthcare options, feel appreciated, and receive the medical support and attention they need and deserve. Care teams at The Elizabeth Hospice are trained to address post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, survivors' guilt, and soul injury and focus on providing experiences that bring meaning and peace to a person's life.



Stephen Ko

The Elizabeth Hospice has been recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization as a We Honor Veterans Level 5 Partner, the highest level of distinction in this national program.

One way that The Elizabeth Hospice expresses its appreciation to veterans is through pinning ceremonies. These events, officiated by the organization's

volunteers who are veterans or active-duty service members, bring together family members and friends to publicly celebrate and thank veterans for their military service. They are conducted at the bedside or in group events at senior residential facilities and community centers.

After attending his first community pinning ceremony with The Elizabeth Hospice, Stephen reached out to Lisa Marcolongo, Veterans Specialist at The Elizabeth Hospice, with a suggestion to add a color guard. "Stephen thought our veteran pinning ceremonies were wonderful but lacked color, music and marching," said Lisa. "He felt that an honor guard with its flag bearer and presence of colors would significantly enhance the experience, evoking positive memories for the veterans. He asked our permission to recruit color guard members to join him at these pinnings. The Elizabeth Hospice's first pinning ceremony with a color guard occurred at Cypress Court in Escondido in November 2021.2 It was spectacular."

"Before the color guard appears, I call the group to order with 'Ah-ten-HUT,' said Stephen. "The trumpet plays as the color guard marches in, wearing their full-dress blues. One member is toting the American flag; another is holding a parade rifle; while a third is carrying a sword. 'Eyes right' is announced. We see a sparkle in the veterans' eyes as the memories start flooding back. The experience is visual, auditory and emotional for the veteran, the veteran's family, the staff at the residential facility, and the team members at The Elizabeth Hospice."

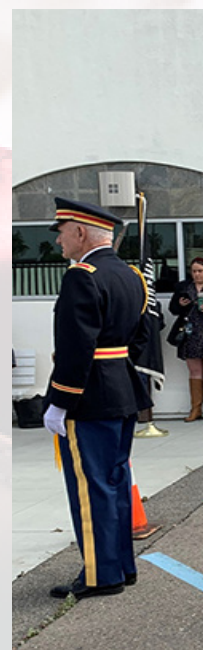
Stephen finds this volunteer experience to be highly gratifying. "This is very different from what I did in my professional career. I'm happier now than I've been my whole life," said Stephen. "I appreciate The Elizabeth Hospice for their dedication to serving those who served our country. And I appreciate the organization for allowing me and the other color guard members to let our veterans know that they are not forgotten and that America appreciates them."

"Stephen is a champion of our veteran program," said Lisa. "We are grateful to him for taking The Elizabeth Hospice's veteran pinning ceremonies to a higher level and creating lasting memories for our patients, the community and family members."

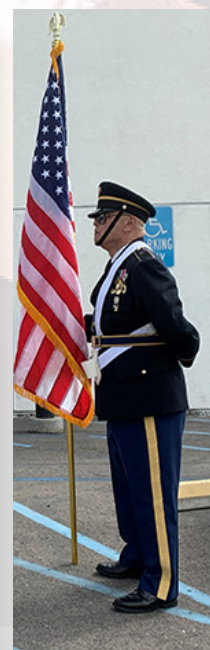
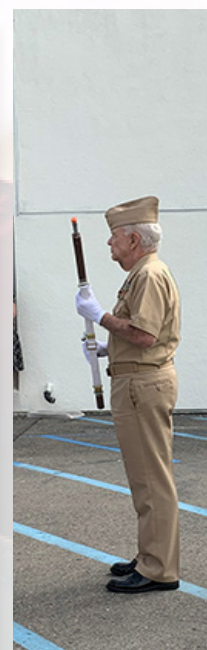
To learn about the many ways The Elizabeth supports our community's veterans, contact **Lisa Marcolongo**, Veterans Specialist, at Lisa.Marcolongo@ehospice.org or **760.644.4426**.



(L to R) Veteran volunteers Phillip Warlop, Leo Casiple, Stephen Ko, Vicky Aguila. Photo by Rugger Productions



(L to R) Veteran volunteers Phillip Warlop, Don Bundy, Stephen Ko



SAN DIEGO Veteran Resources

Navigating the resources available to veterans can be confusing, but San Diego Veterans Magazine believes no veteran should have to go it alone.

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