

# SOUNDINGS

Silver Strand Chapter of Military Officers Association of America

February 2009

## Presidents Message MajGen Bob Butcher, USMC (Ret)

It is an honor to have again been elected your president. I honestly believe that the Board of Directors listed on Page Eight is the finest to have ever served this chapter. With volunteers like them, my job will be easy!

I am convinced that one of the major benefits the chapter provides our membership and the military community as a whole is our support for state and national legislative goals affecting retired, former and active duty military personnel. I've listed National MOAA's top ten legislative goals for 2009. Your chapter leadership will make support of these goals our top priority.

- Sustain defense budget to meet both personnel and weapons needs.
- Sustain military manpower increases.
- Gain additional wounded-warrior fixes.
- Resist shifting health costs to beneficiaries.
- Reverse Medicare/TRICARE payment cuts.
- Repeal SBP/DIC offset.
- Work for full concurrent receipt.
- Restore military pay comparability.

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**Jane Bergman, Veterans Home of California - Chula Vista Administrator**

Ms. Bergman is a graduate of the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL with a Bachelor of Science degree in Therapeutic Recreation. She also earned a Masters of Science degree in Exercise Science from Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, WA. Ms. Bergman spent 8 years working as a Department of Defense employee for the Department of the Army and Department of the Air Force before entering State service. She began working for the State of California in April 1995, and has been with the California Department of Veterans Affairs since July 1997. On December 7, 2007, Ms. Bergman began serving as the Interim Administrator of the Veterans Home of California in Chula Vista. On May 26, 2008 she was appointed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and sworn in by Secretary Johnson as the Administrator. She is currently responsible for the care of 320 Veteran residents, as well as the administration of 300 employees, 7 buildings of physical property located on 30 acres and an operating budget in excess of \$29 million.

**See Page 7 for more information on Chapter dinner Monday, 16 February**

# Legislative Update

**DoD Offers Expedited Disability Process** Earlier this month, the Pentagon established a new policy that allows the service secretaries to offer an expedited Disability Evaluation System (DES) process to service members who sustained catastrophic injuries or illnesses from combat or combat-related operations.

In a January 6, 2009 memorandum, the Defense Department outlined the new guidelines, expressing the Department's belief that "there must be a special process for those members who sustain catastrophic disabilities while participating in combat or combat-related operations, in contrast with those disabled otherwise."

However, the policy change also allows service secretaries the option to offer the expedited process on a case-by-case basis to catastrophically injured or ill members whose condition was not combat-related.

The new process is expected to offer a rapid transition of the next stage of a severely injured member's recovery process while providing quicker access to benefits, compensation, and specialty care offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Eligible servicemembers (or their designated representatives) will be given the choice to voluntarily waive the regular DES and opt for immediate processing to the Permanent Disability Retirement List (PDRL) with a 100% disability rating. The projected timeline from decision to departure on transition leave is expected to be less than 45 days.

**House Armed Services Committee List** House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) and Ranking Minority Member John McHugh (R-NY) have posted the list of HASC members for the new 111th Congress on the committee's web site.

Newly assigned Democrats to the committee include Reps. Jim Langevin (RI), Madeleine Bordallo (GU), Glenn Nye (VA), Chellie Pingree (ME), Larry Kissell (NC), Martin Heinrich (NM), Frank Kratovil (MD), Eric Massa (NY), and Bobby Bright (AL)

New Republican committee members include Reps. Rob Wittman (VA), Mary Fallin (OK), Duncan D. Hunter (CA), John Fleming (LA), Mike Coffman (CO), and Tom Rooney (FL)

**The Military Survivor Comfort Act (HR613)** The Uniformed Services Disabled Retirees (USDR) joins with the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) in supporting this legislation. Please send the following message to your Representative -- As a military retiree and on behalf of my potential widow, I urge you to co-sponsor and actively support HR 613, "The Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act," introduced by Rep. Walter Jones (NC). HR 613 would authorize the retention of the full final month's retired pay by the surviving spouse (or other designated survivor) for the month in which the member was alive for at least 24 hours.

It is current practice of the Department of Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) to immediately recover the last month's retired pay upon notification of the death. Most surviving spouses are unaware of this practice and will likely have already obligated some of that month's pay to the funeral expenses. Obviously such action could easily clear the account of any funds remaining whether they were retirement payments or money from other sources. DFAS then sends back a pro-rated portion of the payment based on when the retiree died.

Please enjoin your colleagues to support this important legislation. Your support will help end this onerous practice. It is the right thing to do.

## Silver Strand Supported Units Flex Their Muscles

Each year Silver Strand MOAA financially supports two local Navy JROTCs – Mariner Company from Mar Vista High School in Imperial Beach and Islander Company from Coronado High School. Perhaps members that make contributions on behalf of these two units may at times wonder how effective the schools are in the application of these monies. A visit to Ramona High School on Saturday, January 17 would have provided the answer. On that day, an Area 11 NJROTC Drill and Field Meet competition was held with 16 teams competing for top honors. In a day that was certainly remarkable for its gorgeous weather, it will be even more memorable for two schools. Mar Vista took home the first place trophy, while Coronado's Islander Company finished second! The combination 1-2 finish is truly a remarkable demonstration of the competitiveness and proficiency, and pursuit of excellence of these two schools.



*Cadet LTJG Stefanie Paredes  
CO Mar Vista HS NJROTC*



*Cadet/LCDR Melissa Silverthorn  
CO CHS HS NJROTC*

Mar Vista is the more established and larger of the two units and consequently success is not new to them. First established in 1975, they have been crowned Area 11 champions several times and even traveled to the National Championships within the last decade. So far this year their 150 cadets have placed first in all three local drill meets they have attended. Clearly they are a "cut above." They excel in the areas of drill, personnel inspection, Color Guard and fitness. Coronado on the other hand was established much more recently in 2003, has but five years of experience and 102 cadets. In that short time, they have become a force to be reckoned with at local competitions. In the current year they have garnered fifth, third and now a second place finish. Coronado's strength are in the areas of academics, personnel inspection and fitness, although their drill and color guard teams are showing continuous improvement as their chase Mar Vista for Area 11 honors. Both teams are looking forward to this year's championship meet which is to be held at Santa Ana High School in Orange County on March 7. Stay tuned for news on that in a future newsletter!

Congratulations to both schools for their dedication and hard work! We look forward to continuing our support of both school's NJROTC programs.

### **"Taking Chance"**

Lance Corporal Chance Phelps, USMC was killed April 9, 2004 by hostile fire in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. Phelps was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star with Combat Distinguishing Device for his heroic actions during the ambush that led to his death. LtCol Michael Strobl, USMC volunteered to serve as the uniformed escort to ensure that his remains were transported with proper respect and safeguarded to their final resting place.

The HBO film *"Taking Chance,"* starring Kevin Bacon is a moving presentation of the events and reaction of Americans during the transportation and funeral of Phelps. HBO will broadcast the movie Saturday, Feb. 21 at 8 p.m. HBO has posted a 1:53 preview clip of the movie on its web site: <http://www.hbo.com/events/takingchance/>

***Recommend All See This!***

*Continued from page 1*

- Secure Guard and Reserve retirement and Health upgrades.
- Improve military family support.

I have learned that the only thing that really counts with most elected officials is the number of votes we represent. There is going to be incredible pressure to reduce the defense budget – especially that portion supporting “people” programs. Your membership is important as we represent you and the currently serving service members to resist those pressures.

If you haven’t already done so, renew your membership by completing the form on Page Seven and mailing it with your check for the appropriate amount. The new five year membership is a great value.

Mark 21 through 24 October on your calendar. MOAA will be holding their Annual Meeting in San Diego – at the Coronado Island Marriot!!

EVERY MEMBER RECRUIT A MEMBER. Don’t be reluctant to ask your officer friends if they belong to MOAA and our chapter. You’ll be doing them and your chapter a favor. MOAA has instituted a special rate to assist our chapter recruiting. Call me (435-6979) or Kathy Bruyere (409-9505) if you have any questions.

Warm personal regards, Bob Butcher

### **Silver Strand Chapter MOAA Board 2009**

Col George Swick, USAF (Ret) spoke and installed the new Silver Strand Chapter MOAA Board at the Chapter dinner on December 2 at Coronado Yacht Club. Col Swick, CAL-MOAA Director, Area 8 discussed the contributions CAL-MOAA makes to our members and outlined their initiatives in 2009. In the picture below, outgoing Chapter President CAPT Jim Cahill transfers the President pin to incoming President MajGen Bob Butcher.



From left: MajGen John Stihl, USAF (Ret), Col Jim Strickland, USAF (Ret), Col Fred Allega, USMC (Ret), BG Don Mahue, ARNG (Ret), CAPT Kathy Bruyere, USN (Ret), CAPT Jim Cahill, CAPT (Ret), MajGen Bob Butcher, USMC (Ret) and Installing Officer Col George Swick, USAF (Ret)

### **TAPS**

**CAPT Tom Bruyere, USN (Ret)**

## **Letters to the Troops 2008**

The Silver Strand Chapter MOAA sponsored the “Letters to the Troops” project for the tenth year in a row. Six Coronado schools participated this year and wrote over 840 letters that were sent to deployed Sailors and Marines from the local area. Young students from the Early Childhood Development Center also created over 50 pictures for the troops. We have seen this program expand year after year as students from kindergarten to high school expressed their support and thanks to deployed uniformed service men and women. This year’s letters were particularly difficult to judge due to the quality of each one of them. As usual, board members who read and rated the letters were impressed with the ability of students at each level to express their appreciation and concern for military members who are in harm’s way. The Board selected first and second place winners from each school and awarded them \$30 book gift certificates for 1<sup>st</sup> place and \$20 for 2<sup>nd</sup> place. Coronado Middle School received a \$50 donation for writing the most letters. This was a rewarding and emotional experience for those who participated. The winners from each school are:

**Christ Church Day School: First Place, Katy; Second Place, Brooke**

**Silver Strand Elementary School: First Place, Daniel; Second Place, Rachel**

**Village Elementary School: First Place, Katy; Second Place, Mary**

**Coronado Middle School: First Place, Kara; Second Place, Lindsay**

**Sacred Heart Parish School: First Place, Eduardo; Second Place, Tyler**

**Coronado High School: First Place, Emiko; Second Place, Samantha**

Each letter started with the greeting, Dear Service Member. First place letters follow:

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I just wanted to say thank you for all the work you’ve done – or you will do – for our country. You are making sure that America has a safe and protected environment, and I respect that. Wherever you are, you represent America. You save lives, risk your lives, and enlighten other lives throughout your work. No matter what you’re doing, I want to say good luck because you deserve it. America supports and admires what you do. All around the world when someone whispers “America” they are thinking of people like you. You are one of the many stitches in Old Glory, one of the letters in the American legend. I hope you will have some form of Thanksgiving overseas. The holidays always cheer me, wherever I am. Katy, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Christ Church Day School

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Thank you for your service in the military. Thank you for keeping our country safe. I think being an American is great because we have a free country and you are the ones who keep it safe and defend it. America is one of the finest countries in the world and I am proud to live here. Thank you for taking your time to fight in the military. I hope you have a great Thanksgiving and Christmas. Daniel, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Silver Strand Elementary.

*(Letters are continued on Page 6)*

First, I want to tell you that I know how much you have to give up when serving in the armed services. I'm sorry you miss holidays. This must be hard for your family and friends. If you have a pet, they must miss you very much. You must miss your favorite food. I'm sorry that you had to leave your home. You also put yourself at risk by defending America's freedoms. Your life is at stake. Watch out for being captured. If you're injured or sick, get well soon. Thank you for all that you do! You fight to keep our country safe. You protect our freedom. Even though I don't know you, I have gratitude for what you do for me. Katy, Village Elementary School

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Your faith and willingness to protect our country is amazing to me. You were willing to leave your everyday life, your family, your everyday culture, your friends to protect the rights and freedoms found only in America. I'm not sure I could be as brave and fierce to make a choice like that. Not only am I impressed, but your family must be as well. They can proudly say that you are sacrificing your own time to keep us from losing our crucial unalienable rights. It does not matter where you come from or what you have; it is really what you give and what you do. You have sacrificed so much to save those whom you don't even know, but still care so much about. The values that you have shown make you a true American – one who won't stand down and is willing to serve the general good of the people no matter what they may lose themselves. Thank you so much for what you do every single day. It may not seem like very much to you, but in the end, it is vital to all of us in America. Lindsay, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Coronado Middle School

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I wanted to say thanks for making me feel safe every time I wake up and come to school. It is something few other people can do. You have served this country to protect it and I thank you for that. I hope you are with your family soon. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't feel the same way every day. Thanks for what you have done. Many people may think that what you do is easy, but they are wrong. You put your life at risk for me and you don't know how thankful I am. I am going to pray for you every day. I admire what you do everyday because you do it without concern for your personal well being. It takes a real heart to serve a country. Being away from your family must be really hard but it is for a good cause. You do make a change in the world. To know you are only a few years older than me really makes me admire you. It must be really hard being at war and being away from your friends and family. You are a true hero and I admire you very much. Just remember, I will always pray for you. Eduardo, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Sacred Heart Parish School

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I appreciate all of your hard work and devotion to our country. I know you may think this another mindless thank you note from a random person, but I truly and gratefully for you and your fellow soldiers risking your lives to protect millions of people. Every time I wake up I think of the men and women trying their best to keep America safe. Thank you so much. And I am very sorry you can't spend this holiday season with your family. Emiko, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Coronado High School

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### ***Silver Strand Chapter 2009 Dues Are Due Now***

Your Board has approved a new dues program whereby a member can pay four years dues at one time and get credit for five years dues. In other words a \$40 payment for regular members and a \$20 payment for auxiliary members will result in extending their membership through 2013. We recommend you consider this offer. You can use the dinner reservation form on page 7 of this newsletter to pay 2009 dues.

## Silver Strand Chapter MOAA Dinner Meeting

Date: Monday, February 16, 2009

Jane Bergman, Administrator, Chula Vista Veterans Home

Where: Coronado Yacht Club, 1631 Strand Way

When: 1800: Social Time

1900: Dinner

1945: Program

*Slow Roasted Prime Rib w/ Peppercorn Au Jus & Creamy Horseradish, or  
Bacon Wrapped Fresh Salmon w/ Fresh Mango Salsa, Apple Cider Reduction  
Pre-Set Spring Salad, rice, vegetables, desert, rolls, coffee, tea; \$30 per person*

Use the coupon below for:

- February 16 Dinner Meeting Reservation
- Pay 2009 Dues
- Donate to NJROTC & Naval Sea Cadets
- Donate to MOAA Scholarship Fund

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### Chapter Meeting Monday, February 16, 2009

Mail to: Silver Strand Chapter MOAA  
P.O. Box 180043  
Coronado, CA 92178-0043

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Reservations must reach our PO Box by **Noon, Friday, 13 February (Firm)**

Indicate your choice (s) of entrée \_\_\_\_\_

Number attending dinner \_\_\_\_ X \$30 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

**2009 Dues (\$10 for members, \$5 for Auxiliary)** \$\_\_\_\_\_  
**(\$40 for 5 years) (\$20for 5 years)**

Donation to NJROTC (Coronado and Mar Vista High Schools) \$\_\_\_\_\_

Naval Sea Cadet Corps, Coronado Battalion \$\_\_\_\_\_

MOAA Scholarship Fund \$\_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$\_\_\_\_\_



## Silver Strand Chapter Board of Directors

President	Bob Butcher, MajGen, USMC, (Ret)	435-6979
First Vice	Nancy Owen, CAPT, USN (Ret)	437-0542
Second Vice	Kathy Bruyere, CAPT, USN (Ret)	409-9505
Secretary	Jim Strickland, Col, USAF (Ret)	435-6608
Treasurer	Tom Bernitt, CAPT, USN (Ret)	424-6365
Air Force Rep.	John Stihl, Maj Gen, USAF, (Ret)	435-4155
Army Rep.	Don Mayhue, BG, ARNG (Ret)	435-7400
Marine Rep.	Fred Allega, Col, USMC (Ret)	429-4282
Navy Rep.	Jim Cahill, CAPT, USNR (Ret)	435-8077
Legislative Chair	Tom Bernitt, CAPT, USN (Ret)	424-6365
Newsletter Editor	Jim Strickland, Col, USAF (Ret)	435-6608
Personal Affairs	Joan Thomas, CDR, USN (Ret)	435-3812
Chaplain	Tom Johnson, CAPT, USN (Ret)	435-3408
TOPS	Tom Bauer, CAPT, USN (Ret)	437-6689
Auxiliary Liaison	Kathleen Prout, Auxiliary	435-6623
NJROTC Liaison	Lee Pontes, CAPT, USN (Ret)	435-2658
Past President	Jim Cahill, CAPT, USNR (Ret)	435-8077

## Dates to Remember 2009

### Chapter Meetings

**February 16**  
**April 20**  
**June 15**  
**August 17**  
**October 21**  
**December 8**

### Board Meetings

**January 20**  
**March 17**  
**May 19**  
**July 21**  
**September 15**  
**November 17**

### SOUNDINGS

Silver Strand Chapter  
 Military Officers Association of America  
 P. O. Box 180043  
 Coronado, CA 92178-0043

Return Service Requested

**TIME DATED MATERIAL**