



The Strawberry Gazette



*** Serving the 300,000 veterans living in greater Los Angeles ***

OBAMA TO END HOMELESSNESS FOR VETS BY 2015

by TERENCE LYONS

After a Memorial Day observation at Woodlawn Cemetery in Santa Monica, a retired admiral was overheard in conversation with another veteran talking about homeless vets. "I know you hear about homeless vets in the news," the admiral said, "but I don't believe there really are any. Veterans have too much discipline, too much training, and too much pride to become homeless. It's just an invention of the media to create sympathy for the people who are homeless—who are not vets."

The other vet, a Vietnam-era soldier who had himself been homeless, tried to gently suggest to the admiral that being homeless was a little more complex, and that homelessness among veterans was not only real, but a substantial national problem. But the admiral was firm in his mistaken belief.

Fortunately for veterans—and for the nation as a whole—General Eric Shinseki, President Obama's Secretary of Veterans Affairs, does not share the admiral's mistaken belief. Speaking in November 2009 at a National Summit on Homeless Veterans, he said, "We conservatively estimate that 131,000 veterans live on our streets—men and women, young and old, fully functioning and disabled, from every war generation, even the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan."

In fact, Shinseki said, "Veterans lead the nation in homelessness, depression, substance abuse, and suicides. They also rank right up there in joblessness." He observed that the estimate six years before had been 195,000 homeless vets, "so we are moving in the right direction." He quickly added, "But in these tough economic times, if we just keep doing what we've been doing for the past six years, the number of homeless veterans could increase by ten percent to fifteen percent over the next five years."

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STRAWBERRY FLAG IS A REVISIONIST VISION OF THE AMERICAN FLAG

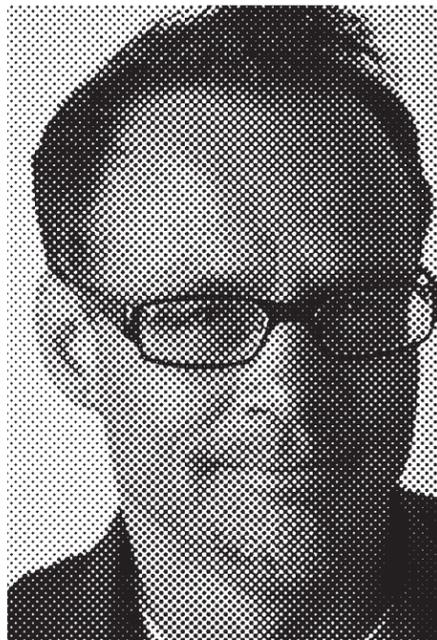
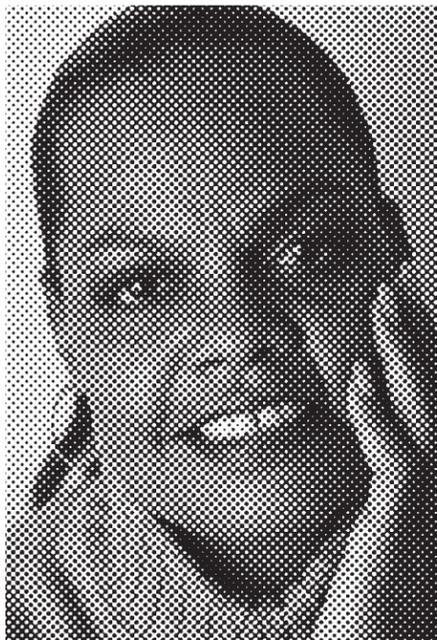
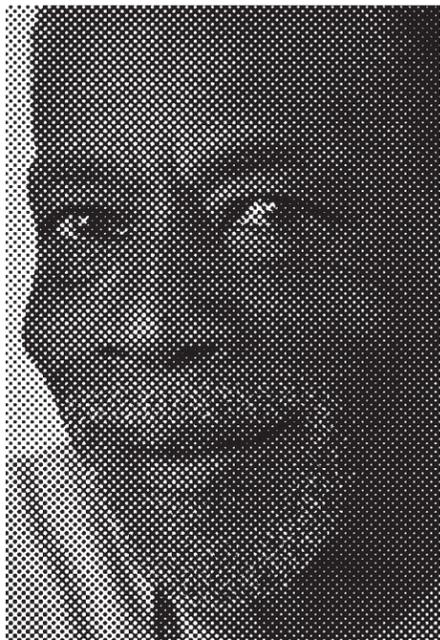
by LAUREN BON

Derived from the Greek word for change, "metabolism" is the process that maintains life. In continuous cycles of creation and destruction, metabolism transforms nutrients into energy and matter. Working to sustain these cycles, the Metabolic Studio transforms resources into energy, actions, and objects that nurture life. Led by Lauren Bon, the studio is a practice at the intersection of art and philanthropy. One of the Metabolic Studio's "Farmlab Agricultural Gardens"—otherwise known as FLAGS—*Strawberry Flag* is a revisionist vision of the American flag as a self-sustaining system.

An artwork in the form of a veterans' program, *Strawberry Flag* nurtures reclaimed strawberry plants. Although they can continue fruiting, strawberry plants are commonly plowed under after the first harvest. Having rescued the strawberries from a local farm, the Metabolic Studio "planted" them in *Strawberry Flag's* white "stripes"—conduits for flowing water in an aquaponic system that requires no soil. The water flowing through the stripes nurtures the plants. Trucked in from the Los Angeles River and stored on site in a military bladder tank, it circulates through the project's fish bins,

where fish provide ammonia and needed minerals. The power for the system comes from batteries that accumulate energy via stationary bikes as users pedal. Additional energy is supplied by solar panels that double as shade covers for each bike. The harvest will be used to make Veteran's Preserves. The preserves will be sold. All funds raised will be used to de-alienate places that are meant for healing on Veterans' Hospitals. Strawberries are a most lucrative cash crop. Almost every home in America has a jar of strawberry jam.

CWT Update: Strawberry Flag Hires Vets Story on Pg. 4





Only 8.25% of the total VA population is receiving VA compensation

20% of the total U.S. population are veterans or are dependants of veterans

Obama To End... continued »

At that November summit meeting, Shinseki outlined a plan to end homelessness among veterans within the next five years. “In the past, VA focused largely on getting

homeless veterans off the streets. This plan is different. It aims as much if not more on preventing as it does on rescuing those who live on the streets.” He called for “not only leveraging the full range of VA benefits,” but also “expanding our collaboration with our public and private partners,” including other federal agencies, state and local governments, veterans service organizations, and nonprofit service providers and community groups.

It has only been three months since that speech in Washington, D.C., but it may not be too soon to ask what the VA has actually done. And done here. On the ground. After all, speeches are only speeches. Especially in Washington, D.C.

Well, for one thing, the VA Greater Los Angeles (GLA) has entered into a pretty remarkable partnership with the Volunteers of America (VOA) to open two new transitional shelters in the area to be operated on a “harm reduction” model.

That model is based on the idea that if you cannot fully cure a disease, for example, it is nevertheless worthwhile to reduce the harm that the disease produces. If you cannot do something perfectly, it may still be worth doing as well as you can. Or, as the British writer G. K. Chesterton observed somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly.”

The shelters will not insist on alcohol/drug treatment as a requirement for a roof over your head. There will be no use or possession on the premises, but there will be no requirement of some period of sobriety for entry in the first instance.

The shelters, each with forty to forty-eight beds, will be opening “soon,” although definite dates have not been announced, according to VA GLA Recovery Coordinator Thomas Fletcher. Although partnerships between the VA and other service providers such as the Salvation Army are not a new concept, the opening of these programs in the Los Angeles area is a concrete step toward fulfilling the VA pledge to end homelessness among veterans.

These programs partnered with VOA represent the kind of collaboration with social service providers and community groups that Shinseki spoke about in November. And they represent a new outreach for the VA—to not “just keep doing what we’ve been doing for the past six years.” They have the potential to reach what are sometimes called “service-resistant” homeless veterans—people who may not be able to absolutely forswear an addiction, and maybe a few who simply have “too much pride” (to quote the admiral at Woodlawn Cemetery) to accept more traditional VA programs.

Another thing taking place “on the ground” at the VA GLA is happening at Fisher House. VA Chaplain Herman Kemp reports that one local Fisher House has been reuniting homeless vets with their families around the country.

Fisher Houses are comfortable, free accommodations for families visiting those in the hospital. The concept started on active-duty military bases and has spread to VA facilities around the country. Kemp says that the relatively new Los Angeles Fisher House located south of Building 500 near the Ohio Avenue gate works with the VA’s homeless outreach programs to contact and accommodate the families of homeless vets found on the streets and brought to the VA for medical treatment.

He told the story of such a veteran whose sister in New Orleans was brought to the GLA Fisher House so that they could be reunited after more than twenty years. And Kemp says that the story is by no means unique.

Strawberry Gazette hopes to bring more news of the VA’s response to homelessness among vets in the coming months. Shinseki said in November, “President Obama and I are personally committed to ending homelessness among veterans within the next five years.” The Greater Los Angeles VA is off to a good start.

BARBER OF DREAMERS

7 DAYS A WEEK 9AM- 7PM

MOVIE REVIEW

BROTHERS
BY LAURA SANDERSON HEALY

In this age of multiplex cinemas, the singular Aero Theatre in Santa Monica is an anomaly—a neighborhood movie house showing both new and old films. Built in 1939 (an age of neighborhood picture shows—my grandfather owned the Idlewild in Memphis, Tennessee’s Midtown) by the Donald Douglas Company for aviation workers, the Aero stands proudly lit up in 2010 as the real star of the boulevard, a bright intellectual spot on the trendy shopping thoroughfare known as Montana Avenue.

Fully restored and operational thanks to the preservation efforts of the heroic American Cinematheque group (which also owns Hollywood’s Egyptian Theatre, one of the last of the American picture palaces), the Aero reopened in 2005 and is steadily supported by its dedicated movie-loving community.

The Aero marquee has long enticed me with lures like Marx Brothers and W.C. Fields comedies or live lectures by film directors and actors alongside screenings of their work. One recent Friday evening the Aero featured a double-bill of director Jim Sheridan’s new drama *Brothers* and his earlier autobiographical *In America*, with Sheridan himself “live, in

Healing Our Troubled Vets

Suicide, homelessness, stress disorders — caring for today’s veterans will be a long-term and costly commitment.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES
NOVEMBER 11, 2009

The public is kinder to its veterans today than it was during the Vietnam War, when soldiers risked their lives overseas only to face scorn from antiwar activists when they got home. Yet veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan may be having a harder time readjusting to civilian life than previous generations of warriors.

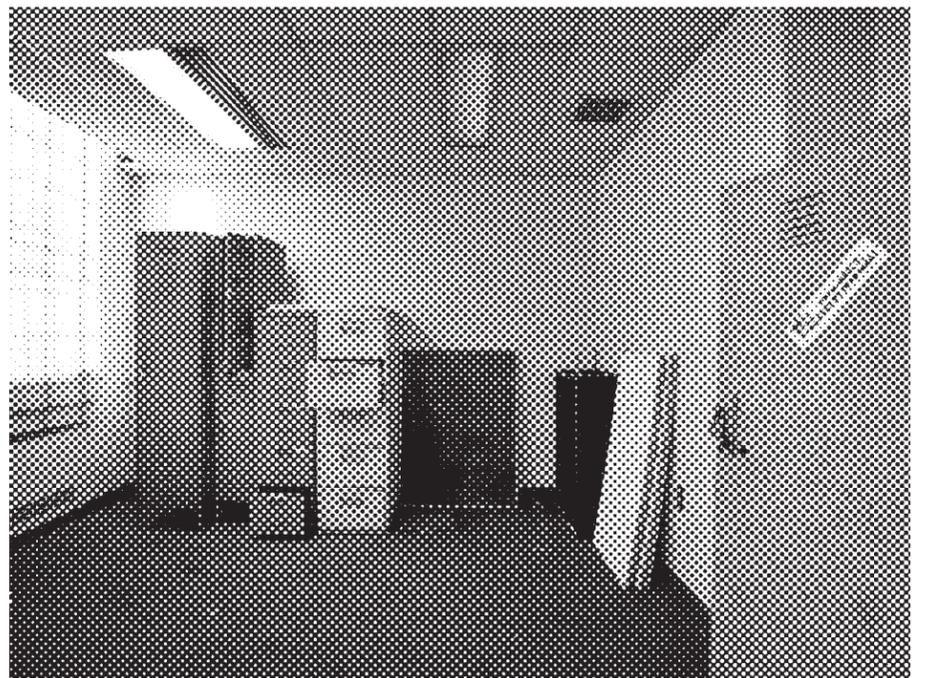
Recognition and treatment of combat-related mental health problems have greatly improved over the years, so it’s impossible to compare historical rates of, say, post-traumatic stress disorder. But the statistics that do exist are troubling. Military suicides are soaring — last year, the Army

reported a record 133, and the suicide rate among soldiers in Iraq is 11% higher than in Vietnam. A Rand Corp. study last year found that almost 20% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans report PTSD or depression. And homelessness may be on the rise; a report from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America suggests that Vietnam vets who became homeless didn’t end up on the streets until, on average, five to 10 years after they returned to the United States, while veterans of today’s conflicts are turning up in shelters 18 months after leaving the service.

It doesn’t help that soldiers are coming home in the midst of a recession. High rents and a lack of job prospects can send those already struggling to cope with war-related stress over the edge. But the likeliest explanation for these troublesome trends is that the military is stretched too thin. In order to fight two Middle Eastern wars, troops have been forced to serve multiple deployments, and reservists who thought their

combat days were over have found themselves on the front lines.

As Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates pointed out last month at a mental health summit held by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the war in Afghanistan has surpassed the Revolutionary War as the longest conflict ever fought by this country with an all-volunteer force. The resulting strains have been cited as a factor in last week’s shooting rampage at Ft. Hood, Texas, though it’s too early to tell whether institutional stresses, cultural conflicts or personal demons caused the suspected killer, an Army psychiatrist, to snap. What’s clear is that neither the men and women fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, nor the American people as a whole, will be finished paying the cost of these wars even after the last U.S. soldier has left. Treating their invisible wounds — mental disorders, substance abuse and traumatic brain injuries — will take many decades.



Let us join together
to end human-centered
behavior

between-film discussion. *Brothers* (rated R, 104 minutes) is a remake of the Danish film *Brødre*. It tells the story of a career U.S. marine who leaves his family for another tour of service in Afghanistan, this time with dire consequences. When his helicopter is shot down and he is presumed dead, his family grieves and holds a funeral. In reality, he survived the crash but was captured and held by the Taliban along with one of his men.

Before I saw *Brothers*, I only knew that the story dealt with the present war—that the protagonist was lost and then found. But this is a devastating and shocking tale that focuses intensely on family relation-

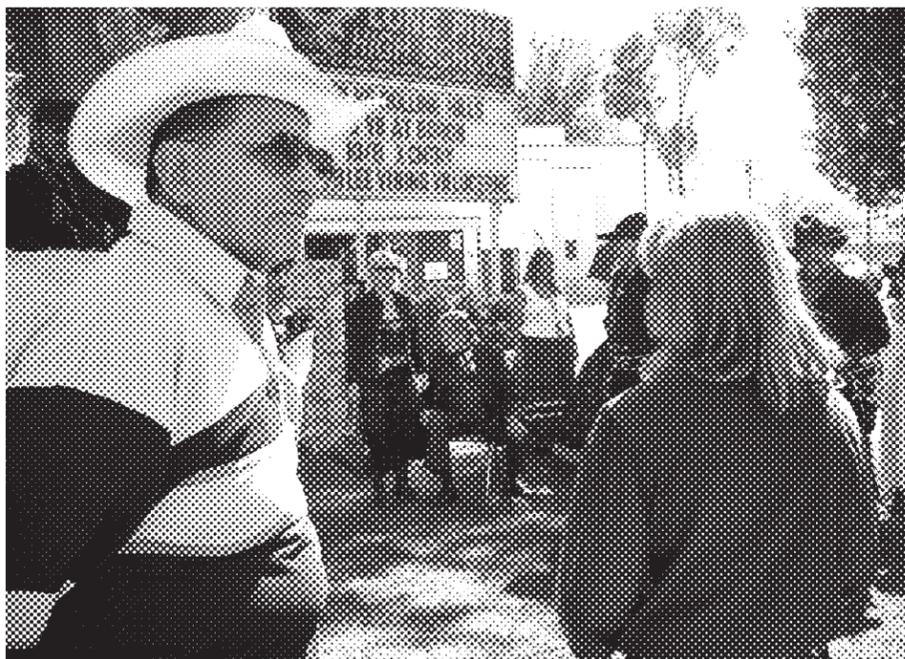
ships and the nightmares of war, its aftermath, and the ubiquitous post-traumatic stress disorder that is so tragically experienced by troops who do come home. There are master strokes of writing, cinematography, acting, and Sheridan’s incisive directing, but it’s an eye-ful at times, more than my brain could take. I was not at all prepared for the violence in this film, and would not have gone to see it if I had known what it involved; I had to hide my eyes for two scenes in particular. In synopsis: Tobey Maguire, brave and strong as Captain Sam Cahill, is called back to duty on the other side of the world. Before he leaves, he collects his black sheep

The two neighborhoods

in Los Angeles with the largest percentage of veterans are Gramercy Park, east of Inglewood and Bel-Air, both with 13%

It is about community

and communication. It has always been, and all human history will always be about that.



Two Communities, Mysterious to Each Other, Find They Are Not So Different

By CHRIS LANGLEY

Communities of people share one strong commonality: they are all unique. When Lauren Bon and the Metabolic Studio introduced the communities of Silver and Water/ Growers Group to *Strawberry Flag*, it seemed nice. “Nice” is an innocuous word that means to be polite but reflects little sense of relevance.

The *Strawberry Flag* project, and all the other work at the Veterans Hospital in Westwood, as we became aware of it—first while honing our glass harp skills, and later transforming into a Growers Group—was interesting but difficult to relate to our lives in the colonies in any concrete way.

When we were invited to the second High Tea, the Growers Group was intrigued; first because few of us had ever been to a high tea. We may have on occasion been

high on life, and we live relatively high in elevation, and most of us have had tea, but as with so much of the work at the Metabolic Studio, we were puzzled and attracted to the playful aspect. A bus could be provided, but our community style and busy lives make using a bus more of a challenge than a service at times, so we organized in various vehicles,

leaving at various times, to go to all the wonderful events that were scheduled.

Because of my previous commitments, I could only attend the High Tea and not the other events at the Studio. My wife and I found our way through the metropolis and the maze of staid and serious buildings that make up the hospital complex, and were greeted warmly. I have nicknamed the personnel of the Studio “Metaboliques,” and so now I will call them that. They are imbued with powerful positive energy that gives them an inner grace.

Greeted by them in their bustle to get ready—in its uniqueness and rarity—alone makes the trip down to L.A. worthwhile.

The Flag was wonderful and strange; part machine, part living thing, part playful landscape. When Lauren told us about how they grow strawberries and quickly abandon the plants for the next generation without so much as an appreciative “thankyoumaam” or “byyourleave,” this Flag became a rehabilitation center and an orphanage for the abandoned. Serve us loyally, plants, but then be gone!

brother Tommy (Jake Gyllenhaal) from jail, where he has finished serving time for an attempted bank robbery. This simple act will influence the plot in a crucial way. Others in the cast are Natalie Portman as Sam’s stunning wife Grace—his high school girlfriend and now-devoted partner and mom to the two young Cahill daughters (Bailee Madison and Taylor Geare). Sam Shepard plays the brothers’ father, a hard-bitten old serviceman, with Mare Winningham as his wife, a doting step-grandmother to Sam’s girls.

The story hinges on Sam’s disappearance, and his family back home trying to come to

terms with what they believed was his death. The feckless Tommy wrecks Sam’s car, turns up drunk without notice, and calls Grace for collection from a bar in the wee hours (she has to bundle her little girls into the car for the trip), all the while engaging and enraging his hate-spewing father. Soon, though, Tommy begins to stand upright and tries to fill Sam’s shoes in spite of himself as he sees Grace and her girls also mourning his brother. He even helps Grace realize her “dream kitchen” by getting his beer buddies to help paint and build cabinets as haplessly as the Three Stooges (though they do complete the task). His nieces grow to love

their Uncle Tommy as he frolics with them on ice-skating forays, and naturally, Tommy and Grace become closer emotionally.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to his family, the forgotten Sam and his colleague are being starved and tortured in Afghanistan by their cruel captors. Sam is made to witness several propaganda video shoots and killings by the Taliban of both their own and U.S. troops. Finally, he is pushed and taunted by the sadistic warlords and forced to commit an unspeakable act, a gun held to his head. By the time Sam is rescued by U.S. forces, he has been so traumatized that he can only be recognized by his uniform. Bearing

The tea was set beautifully, with crystal, little breads, and hosts and hostesses. They dressed in High Tea outfits and aprons, handsome gentlemen and gracious ladies, and we were transported back to another age, and just perhaps forward to the next age. They were organized to shift tables in a silent minuet, moving from table to table not like a mad Carrollian Wonderland tea party but like the human clockwork of a master watchmaker.

With each stop, they shared their part in the whole installation/performance and their personal, unique perspective. Our understanding blossomed among the scones, jam, and tea.

It is about community and communication. It has always been, and all human history will always be about that.

Then I got to go back to the Veterans Hospital to help make Irish Tea Bread for another High Tea. Sadly again, my schedule did not allow me to be part of the actual tea, but with Jules as my guide, I got to see behind the scenes. I saw the Veterans Hospital as a community. A hospital is always (or should always be) a healing community, and I began to see the parts of this healing community cohering. In this healing community, the healers and the healees are interchangeable, and as well as healing, there is the drive to wellness itself.

Our hands were in the flour, kneading and talking and bonding and playing. The loaves, reminiscent of cow-pies in shape (How organic! Sir!), blossomed and cooked, filling the area with wonderful bread aromas, dark and light flours, butter and buttermilk. There was a rhythm to the kitchen, a rhythm of discovery and sharing.

When some visitors, reps of the Veterans Administration, came in, things got a little bit more serious and instead of playful community building, the emphasis switched to communication. But there was bread and jam and sitting around the large table. Flowers to balance the flours. Tentacles of real life and real life responsibilities, children, traffic, and business extended outward. A complex net of connection grew. (Only connect, E. M. Forster said.)

Continued on Pg. 4

Strawberry Pound Cake—a la Deborah

1 cup unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1 2/3 cups granulated sugar
1 teaspoon salt
4 eggs
1 cup strawberries, pureed and sieved to remove excess moisture
2 teaspoon orange extract
2 cups flour, sifted
1 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 300 degrees, then increase to 325 degrees.

Work pieces of butter with wooden spoon in large bowl for five minutes to form a mass. Add sugar, salt, and cream together until well mixed.

Separately beat eggs (one at a time) until pale yellow. Add eggs to butter/sugar mixture to form a batter.

Separately, mix strawberries with orange extract. Add the flour to the batter 2 teaspoons at a time, alternating with the strawberry mixture. Mix well, then add vanilla to the batter.

Pour the batter into a buttered/floured 9 inch pan. Bake at 325 degrees until a toothpick inserted comes out clean, and then bake an additional twenty minutes for about forty minutes total. Voila!



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unhealed emotional scars from the horrors he has witnessed and experienced, shell-shocked and emaciated by the deprivation he has endured, Sam is returned home a shadow of his former self.

The fact that Sam has survived against all odds is a miraculous and unexpected surprise to his family. They all gather to meet him at the airstrip, but the returning hero is not—and cannot be—the person he was before. No one understands what he has gone through, and he cannot speak about it. His behavior begins to worry Grace as she sees him patrolling the perimeter of their yard at night with a gun, lost in paranoia. Sam becomes obsessed with

the idea that Tommy and Grace may have slept together, and he quizzes them sharply about their relationship while withdrawing from both. The pressure on the entire family becomes unbearable at a birthday party for one of Sam’s daughters, where Sam explodes and his children act out. Later, the climax of dramatic events is unnervingly nightmarish in its tension.

This film ultimately becomes the drama of a soldier coming home and the process of healing. The thought I took from it is this: our war veterans need to be carefully looked after and assisted in their readjustment to civilian life. No one can know what they have had to endure.



Strawberries earn more money for growers than any other fruit except apples. That profit is based on strawberry preserves, which are America's choice for something sweet.

Like a traditional American flag, this flag has 13 stripes made of reclaimed strawberries with friendly and inviting walking paths.

From Volunteerism to Statism: Taking Care of Disabled Union Veterans After the Civil War

By JANET OWEN DRIGGS

Veterans today expect medical care and even housing assistance from the government to which they gave their military service, and so they should. But what is now the Department of Veterans Affairs was born in an age that did not favor such expectations.

Metabolic Studio's Janet Owen Driggs explores what was, for its time, the extraordinary development by which veterans' care was established in the United States.

When you walk along the corridors of a Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital, no matter the building's actual age, you are treading on foundations built during the American Civil War. Crafted in response to the needs of Union veterans, and hewn from a rock face of opposition to "big government," it is a foundation built on the ideal of "home."

Disabled veterans experienced hardship from the earliest days of the Civil War. As an army of volunteers, they were ineligible for the federal pensions awarded to the regular army. Initially a patchwork of family care, philanthropy, and volunteer efforts covered most needs. But by 1865, as more than 280,000 wounded Union soldiers returned home, the patches were in tatters.

In a world where most work required physical labor, destitute veteran amputees abounded. And what was to happen in the future, when the boy soldier aged and less-visible wounds—tuberculosis or the post-combat trauma that was then called madness—asserted themselves? Something had to be done.

Meeting the Challenge

On March 3, 1865, Congress established the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NADVS). Rather than a single unit, it was a network of institutions. The first opened in Maine in 1866, quickly followed by facilities in Wisconsin and Ohio in 1867. By 1901 there were nine institutions, including the Pacific Branch in Los Angeles, which opened in 1888.

Although the federal benefits catalyzed by the Civil War were not extended to the Confederacy until 1958, they were expanded to cover veterans of subsequent U.S. conflicts in the interim, and veteran affairs became both extensive and extensively entangled.

The system as we know it today emerged in 1930 when Congress determined to "consolidate and coordinate Government activities affecting war veterans" by placing all branch sites and their assets, including their substantial land holdings, under the new VA, which became the cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989. In consequence, the Pacific Branch is now the "VA West Los Angeles Healthcare Center," the Eastern Branch is now the "Togus VA Medical Center," and so on.

Rewarded for Defending Hearth and Home

How did this happen in Victorian America? How is it that a benefits system with cabinet-level status, which serves 26 million veterans, originated in such a free-trade age of rugged individualism?

Military service has traditionally bestowed citizenship rights on immigrants. In post-Revolution America, where soldiering was inextricably linked with national identity, the "martial citizen" accrued pensions and land. Forty years after winning their war, for instance, 17,000 Revolutionary War veterans were still receiving pensions, while 60 million acres of public land had been distributed to veterans of all American wars by the 1860s.

In other words, Victorian America accepted awards to an honored sector of the population, the martial citizen. What it did not accept before the Civil War, however, and what became so crucial as a result of the Civil War, was the provision of institutional care.

Institutional Critique

Institutions were expensive to maintain, they suggested such unsanitary royal organs as the French Hôtel National des Invalides, and, by compromising his "manly independence," they could infantilize the once-mighty warrior. Further, from the

Continued on Pg. 8

Two Communities... continued »

The two communities, the Veterans Hospital and the little rural town of Lone Pine, share much. They cohere for survival and wellness, and play with communicative socialization. There is a continuing struggle for security.

Each community of humans, however, is very different. Each is unique. There are unique members that share a unique history. Each community has a unique personality and unique connecting forces, and at the center there is a unique yet strange attractor. Communities are in transition, either through cooperative decision-making and action or through accident, shaping and being shaped by environment, and the vagaries of historic

events. Lone Pine and the *Strawberry Flag*/Veterans Hospital both mean to be Transition Towns in the formal sense. As "mulling" communities, each is awakening to this fact in its own unique way. While awakening, however, they continue to dream. (And, of course, eat strawberry jam on delicious scones, washed down with teas nurtured by the *Metaboliques*).



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CWT UPDATE

Strawberry Flag Hires Vets

ORIGINALLY POSTED, FEBRUARY 1
ON WWW.CWT.VA.GOV

Only the grounds and housekeeping departments served more CWT vets through regular assignments over the course of the last six-month period, Fierro said. Those departments have employed sixteen and fourteen CWT workers respectively. *Strawberry Flag* just hired Ray Rodgers, its tenth CWT employee, who will work in the print studio and on the systems for the *Strawberry Flag* living artwork. The project is also looking to hire another vet to assist in the kitchen while Deborah,

the current kitchen director, goes back to school and decreases her hours to part time.

The *Strawberry Flag* CWT veterans have accomplished the following:

1. Succeeded socially—three have graduated from programs at the Dom and New Directions, moved into their own apartments or sober living situations, bought cars, and enrolled at Santa Monica College or vocational training courses.
2. Maintained sobriety
3. Learned responsibility
4. Found competitive employment—two veterans have become consultants to the *Metabolic Studio* and doubled their income.

THIS MONTH'S CARTOON



...but just think Bob...without V.A. Healthcare, you'd be in real trouble!

— Art Pena, Los Angeles California —

OBITUARIES

CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS— WORLD FAMOUS ANTHROPOLOGIST

Claude Levi-Strauss died at age 100 on October 30, 2009.

Claude Levi-Strauss revolutionized the discipline of anthropology. Before his studies—in France and other countries around the world—anthropology was thought of as no more than drab lectures in small, dreary halls, and the compilations of feathers and fish hooks as the remains of old-fashioned divergences of the earliest human tribes. The Frenchman made anthropol-

ogy as sexy as poetry and philosophy, both of which he used throughout his ethnographical works. The correct way to study humankind was through its hunting techniques and the raw paintings on the body—naked—not through the study of war and economics.

An avid supporter of Rousseau's ideas, Levi-Strauss watched humankind from a distance. Even in Brazil in the 1930s, where he spent most of the time he needed to do his fieldwork, he never remained too long or got too close. By choice, he only learned a couple of words of the various languages and steered clear of individual

characters. He preferred to view people like an insect colony. He watched them, didn't interact with them. In this way, he unearthed their deep-seeded patterns in life. As a result, Levi-Strauss was able to declare that all tribal myths could be reduced to one principle: all human thought was built from binary opposites such as big and small, old and young, raw and uncooked, night and day. Societies were organized around these concepts.

In Levi-Strauss' *La Pensee Sauvage*, it was clear that he saw nothing primitive in regard to the tribes he researched. For instance, he thought totemism an

incredibly complex system. Within tribal myths, diverse elements (for example, the significance of the black arrows) were revealed to have a mission to discover objective origins and wisdom as acute as any Western quests. The difference between the two was that his tribesmen stayed within their boundaries, they put together their materials in new ways, like handymen. Contrarily, "civilized" people attempted to defy his limitations and change the world with brand new inventions, like engineers.

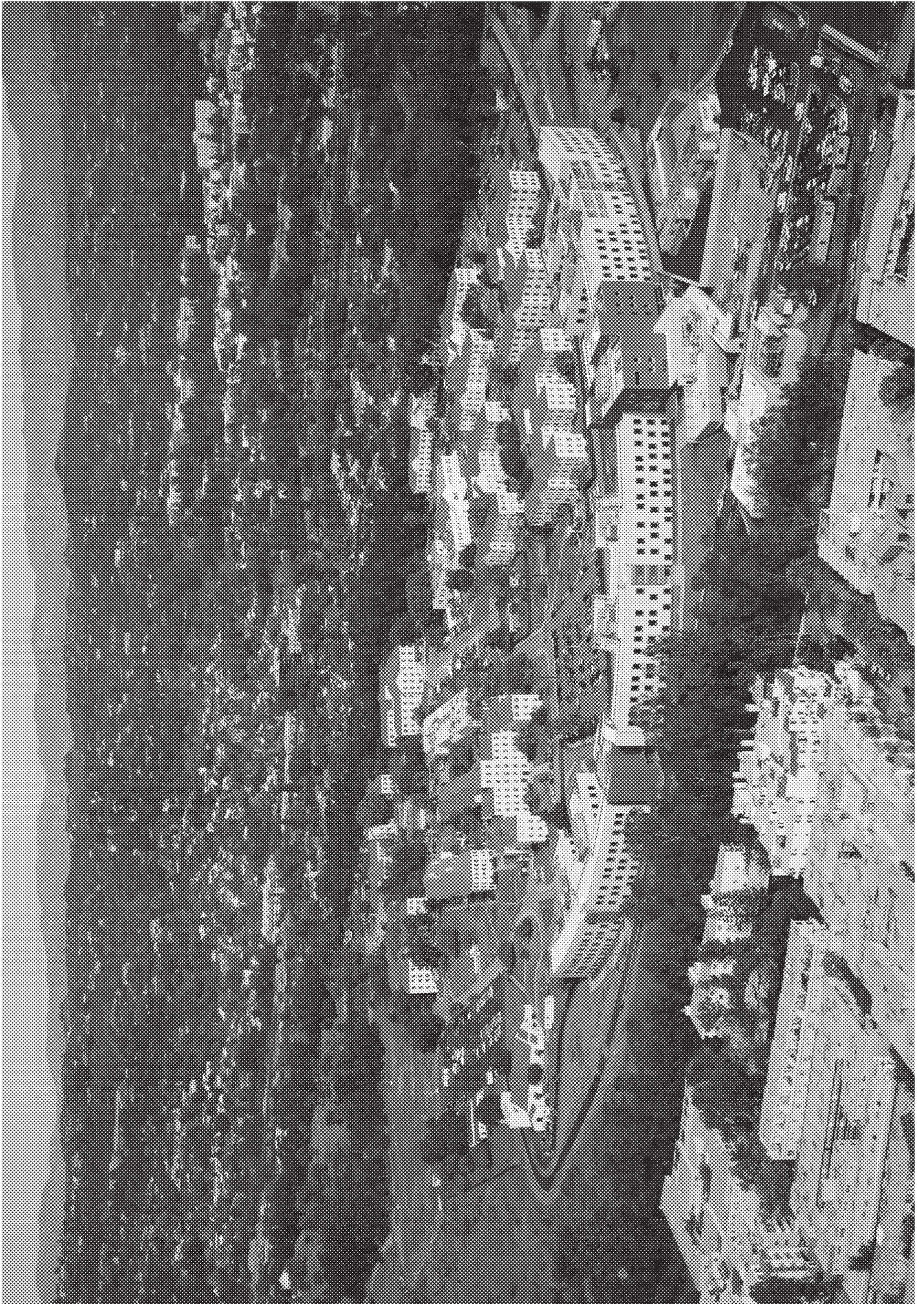
Our world needed both, according to Levi-Strauss. He embodied both. He bounced

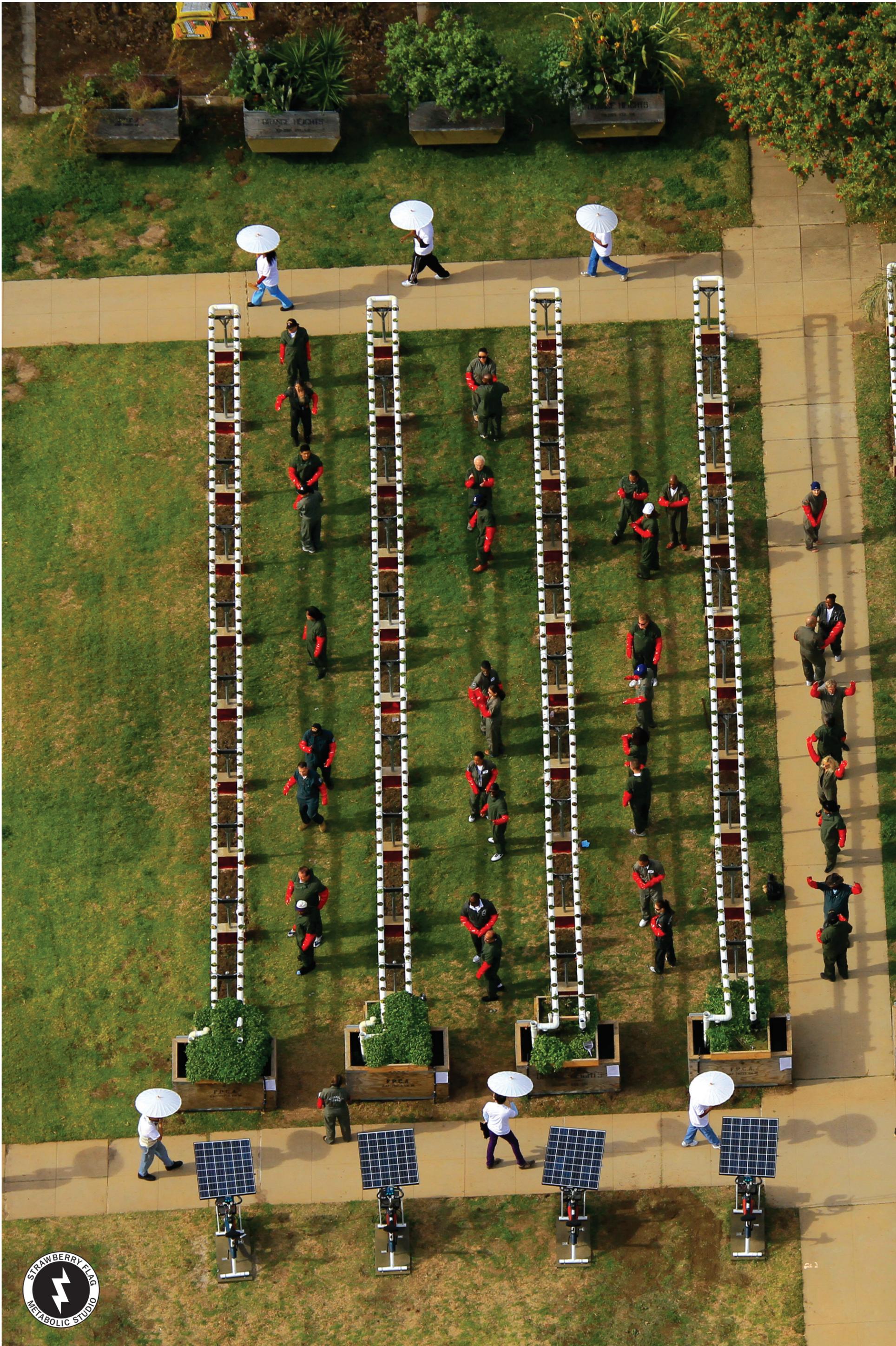
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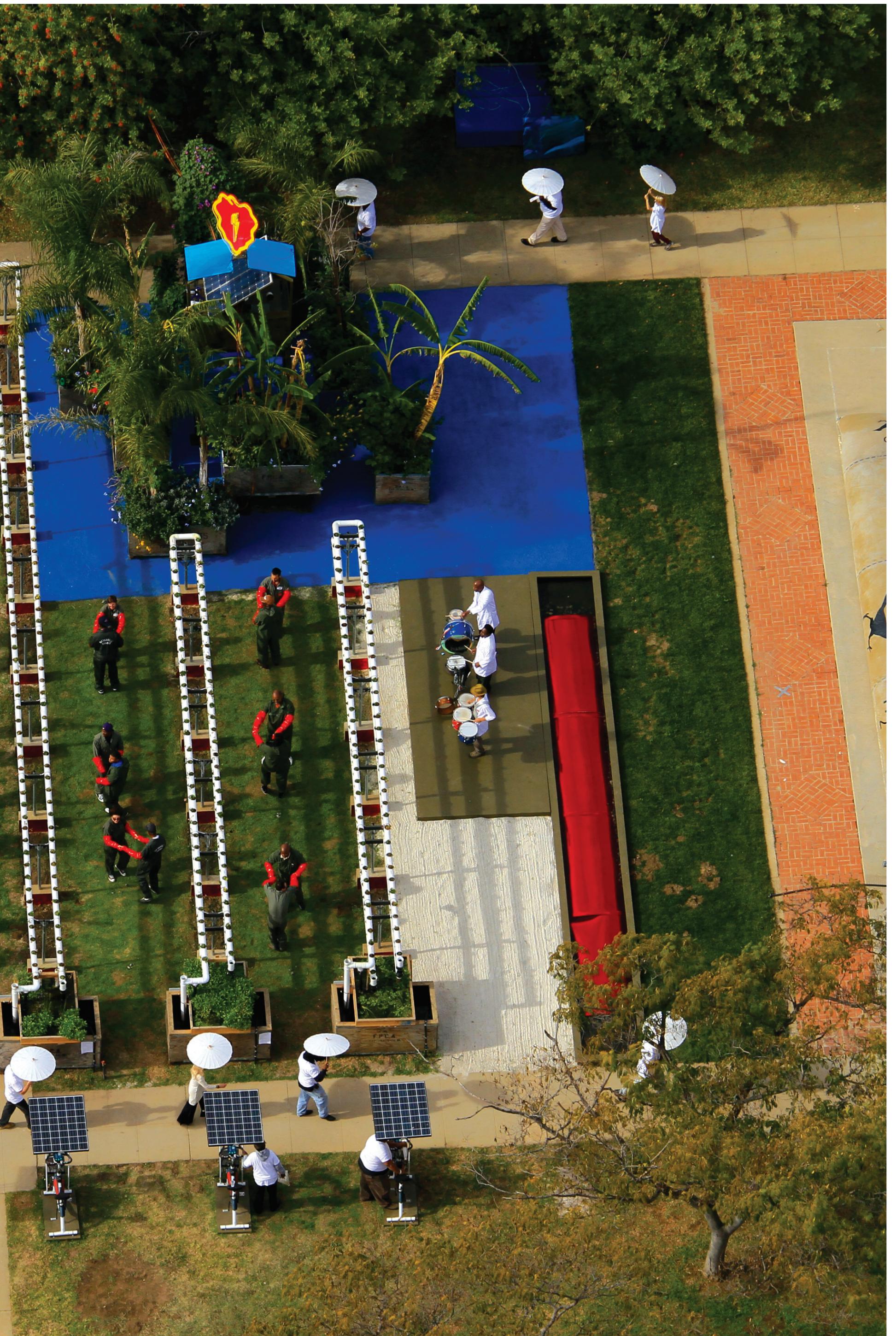
The old soldier's home now
under construction at the VAWLA represents the
largest investment in veteran homes in California
and the largest state veterans home project in the
nation, \$300 Million.

**Whatever resolves uncer-
tainty is information.**

—Buckminster Fuller, *I Seem To Be A Verb*









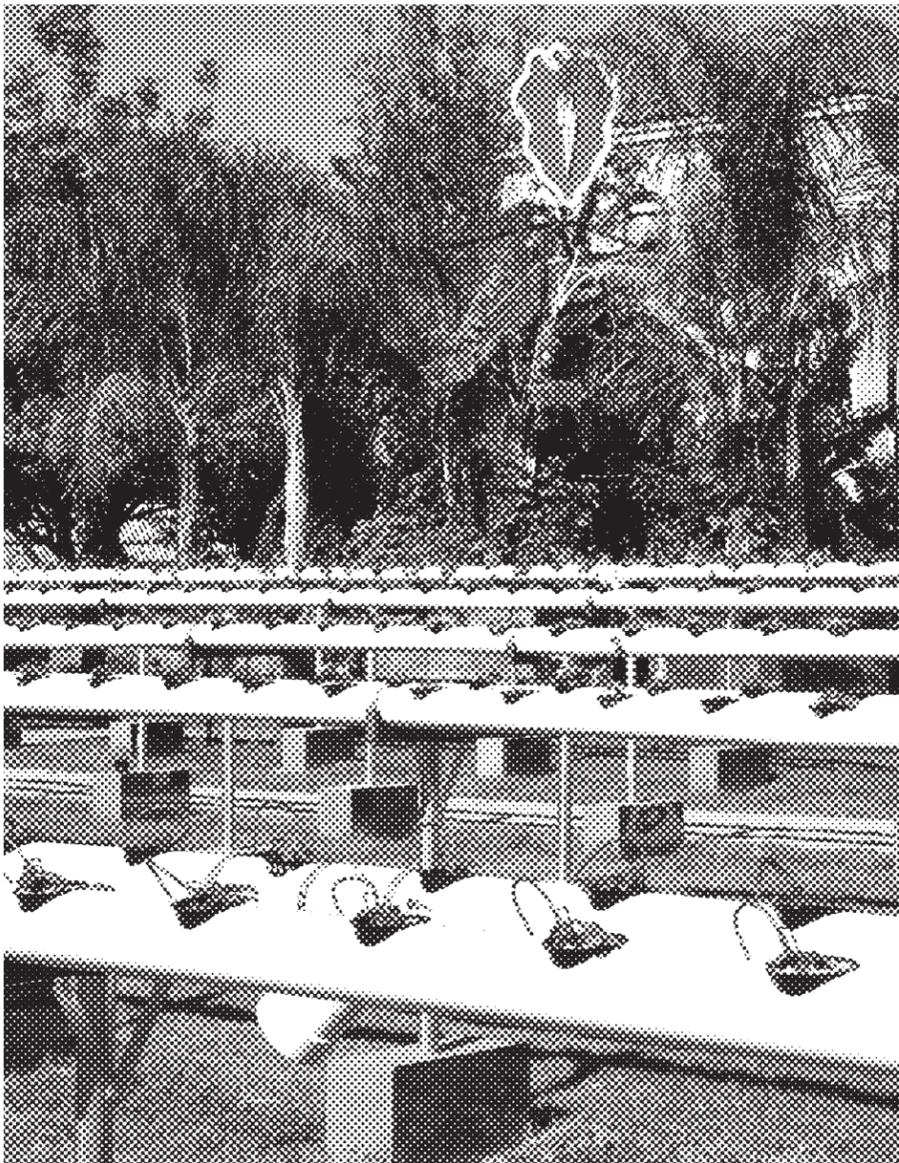
Strawberry Flag represents a unique preservative whose time has come.

—Rick Cluchey

It is notable that, until 1873

when Congress realized its error and changed its “National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers” to the “National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.”

The Strawberry Gazette aims to deepen compassion and evoke collective memory by communicating the interconnectedness of all living things.



From Volunteerism continued »

veteran’s perspective, institutional welfare was powerfully associated with those paupers and lunatics to whom, whether “feckless” or “innocent,” stigma attached.

Before 1865 these anti-institutional attitudes were so deeply embedded in American society that perhaps only the cataclysm of civil war could have shaken them. As it was, a conjunction of post-war factors rapidly rewrote the cultural narrative concerning institutions.

First, the veterans’ plight could not be ignored. Thirty-seven percent of military-age males fought for the Union at a time when technological advances not only wounded but saved more soldiers to live on disabled. It was impossible to miss the agony of returning neighbors, friends, husbands, and sons. Second, in fighting for their cause, Union soldiers had saved the nation through their sacrifice. Cognizant of a debt that could never be repaid, Senator Henry Wilson introduced the NADVS as “a little bill to which there can be no objection.” It passed into law without debate. Third, Union veterans did not wait to be gifted with an expanded welfare system. Rather, organizing into the “Grand Army of the Republic” in 1866, they lobbied aggressively for veteran rights.

Local sympathy, gratitude, obligation, muscle—these factors account for the birth of the NADVS in a particular post-War moment. What they don’t explain, however, is its later growth. Why didn’t the system wither as the Civil War population died off? The most likely single reason is an ingredient that historian Patrick J. Kelly describes as “the familiar and soothing discourse of Victorian domesticity.”

Coming Home, Becoming Home

Domesticity—the model of the home as society’s primary unit—was a familiar virtue to Victorian America. With woman as nurturing guardian of the hearth and man as its defender, national morality was thought to be insured.

Although it tethered many women to their “natural” place, this discourse actually supported social activism for some. For, in nurturing beyond their own walls, “benevolent ladies” were seen to be spreading morality abroad.

Presaging the NADVS, Union and Confederate philanthropic women opened local “soldiers homes” during the Civil War. As described by its lady managers, for example, the Wisconsin Soldiers Home tried to “approximate as nearly as possible in its comforts and pleasures for the inmates the true Christian Home” while, reassured by the notion of a home earned with honor, veterans entered its walls without shame.

It is notable that, until 1873 when Congress realized its error and changed its “National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers” to the “National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers,” the NADVS board of managers intentionally called their institutions “homes” in press materials, even in one case utilizing new print technologies to disseminate literature to this effect.

By positioning their system inside the institutional discourse pioneered by female philanthropists, Kelly argues, the managers were able to diminish “laissez-faire resistance to state formation” while simultaneously establishing a “conceptual framework within which a generous institution...could be built and governed” into the future.

Putting it rather more personally, in 1875 historian J. C. Gobrecht wrote:

The Soldiers’ Home is a “living monument”; one upon which the war-worn veteran may gaze with pleasurable emotion as he proudly contemplates it and exclaims, “I live in the hearts of my countrymen!”



Obituaries continued »

back and forth from topic to topic. He stopped studying law out of intense boredom, gave up preaching socialism when it bored him. He turned to anthropology to quell his insatiable thirst. The forward-thinking engineer went to the College de France, and was the chair of social anthropology from 1959 to 1982. It was here that he wrote *Mythologiques*, comprising four giant volumes.

Levi-Strauss’s life had an element of chance: the Second World War exiled him to New York, which in turn led him to Jakobson, where he met Andrew Breton and Max Ernst.

In 1955, he wrote in *Tristes Tropiques* that “events without any apparent connection, and originating from incongruous periods and places... suddenly crystallize into a sort of edifice conceived by an architect...”

During his retirement, Levi-Strauss wanted to be remembered for his work that explained the systematizing of societies as profoundly as Freud had done for dreams. His critics—mainly existentialists, and all those who believed humanity should be examined in terms of individuals—berated him constantly. However, he dismissed their claims standing strong, believing in his life’s work.

Before his monumental age transformed him into a treasure for intellectuals of all kinds, greens claimed him and he was content. He was saddened by the disappearance of the “primitive” man who was no more pure than he; however, they were connected in a sense that he did not find in the “civilized” world. He mourned the vanishing of the tribes, the vanishing of the Native American clad only in a loin cloth, quietly and stealthily trailing a doe along a forest path.

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Jerome, a veteran of the first Gulf War, is developing the print studio that makes maps of the VA campus and will supply the jam jars with labels featuring vets.

Deborah, oversees the kitchen where veterans make the preserves and prepare for daily teas.



Strawberry Flag Project

Greater Los Angeles Veterans Administration Healthcare Campus

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST
JANUARY 6, 2010

(CWT Workers from June 2009 to the Present)—
Article from United States Department of Veterans Affairs Compensated Work Therapy Section

More than a dozen veterans in the Veterans Administration's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program and veterans of different wars from the past 60 years are at work raising a flag at the Greater Los Angeles Veterans Administration (GLA VA) Campus—a "Strawberry Flag."

The *Strawberry Flag* is the brainchild of L.A.-based artist Lauren Bon and GLA VA Associate Chief of Mental Health Dr. Jonathan Sherrin working in collaboration with GLA VA CWT Chief Joe Ciccone. CWT participants are working on nearly every part of the *Strawberry Flag* sculpture with Bon and her Metabolic Studio team. Bon has crafted a "strawberry flag" by using reclaimed strawberries from a farm in nearby Rosemead, California. The CWT veterans have worked with Bon and her team to bring in water from the L.A. River to irrigate the flag. CWT veterans have also been hired in the SF garden to

work tending to the strawberries, which are growing in rows of raised white pipes—part of a hydroponic system forming the stripes of the flag.

Reclaimed trees and other plants form the flag's blue upper left corner (the stars section) and create an open-air area where visitors can sit, drink tea, relax, and/or meditate. CWT veterans have also been hired to work in the recently renovated *Strawberry Flag* kitchen preparing the tea and making jam in weekly jam sessions, where all veterans and staff on the GLA VA campus are invited meet and dialogue with each other.

Bon feels the veterans are the stars of the project and applauds the extraordinary discipline and dedication of the CWT workers on *Strawberry Flag*.

Bobby, a Korean War veteran, carefully checks each strawberry plant and the pond every day. The project and the CWT workers have helped breathe new life and energy to the GLA Vets Campus.

Every weekday afternoon, tea and bread with treats including strawberry jam or sausage rolls are served at the flag. Twice a month high tea is held, and veterans and visitors come together to talk and enjoy—literally—the fruits of their labor.

Another veteran, Deborah P., oversees the kitchen where veterans make the pre-

serves and prepare for daily teas. Until the flag's own strawberries are mature enough to harvest, the veterans are using berries from the VA farmer's market and getting help from a local jam company.

Jerome L., a veteran of the first Gulf War, is developing the print studio that makes maps of the VA campus and will supply the jam jars with labels featuring vets.

The "Veterans Preserves" are for sale online to raise money for the veterans. Back at the flag, a Vietnam veteran leads spin classes on the eight stationary bikes. The spin bikes have been placed alongside the flag to pedal the solar-powered bikes to pump water into the tubes holding the strawberries.

The flag began with a few CWT veterans and has expanded to more than a dozen, plus volunteers, says project coordinator Rochelle Fabb. She notes the parallel between the flag and the veterans—the workers are reclaiming the flag's strawberries, and the veterans are reclaiming their lives.

The *Strawberry Flag* project has drawn the attention of chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans Affairs Congressman Robert Filner, who has met with Bon and the CWT veterans at the Flag. California Secretary of Veterans Affairs Roger Brautigan has also visited.

In addition the *Strawberry Flag* project has an Internet radio show on Blog Talk Radio, a Facebook page (*Strawberry Flag*) for veterans to friend, and a Twitter page (*Strawberry Flag*) to help veterans follow the progress of the project. In November 2009, the project and the CWT members were featured in USA Today.

Ciccone says the project has enabled the CWT vets to acquire a new transferable skillset that has better prepared them for the increasingly competitive labor market that confronts everyone in today's challenging economy. They are working on a project that has a direct focus on green technology and pays particular attention to solar power and the importance of recycling plants and water.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

Art Pena Has Peace of Mind

by TERENCE LYONS

Art Pena has a roof over his head, a job, and—most important, he says—"peace of mind."

Pena was a resident of the Domiciliary on the West Los Angeles VA campus from March to October of last year, where his sometimes strange but always cheerful sense of humor brightened the lives of vets on the third floor of Building 214. When he graduated from the program in mid-October, he moved to the sober-living Barham House in Glendale. Each of the eight residents there has his own room in the 1885 house located near shopping, bus lines, and Pena's church.

Pena is a musician, chef, and artist (he drew the *Gazette* cartoon for this issue) who is now working part time cooking breakfasts at the Hot Spot in Glendale. He believes there will be "more hours to come" on the job. Between October and starting at the Hot Spot in January, Pena did volunteer work at the Media City Church in Burbank, feeding the homeless, playing guitar, and generally helping out. He also practiced his art "every day."

Pena says his plans include going back to college to study computers, getting schooling to become an x-ray technician, and following "wherever my art will lead me." When asked if he had any advice for the veterans at the VA today, Pena says, "Stay focused" and "Keep seeking God, because without Him I wouldn't have been able to make it."

HOROSCOPES

ARIES (March 21–April 19)
You are enjoying your privacy a lot lately. You are even a bit on the withdrawn side, Aries, but that is totally all right. Take the time to reflect and rejuvenate because if you don't consciously make the decision, the world might force you to do so! Helping a loved one in your life is another great way to spend your time. Keep your ears open to perhaps hearing a special secret at some point in mid-March.

TAURUS (April 20–May 20)
Your professional life may be a bit demanding this February. But this will be very rewarding, so never fear. Your boss is putting more faith in your abilities. Your closest friends and family are enjoyable to be around. New ideas will come your way if you surround yourself with people who have the same dreams as you. A useful connection might be on the horizon February 7–9, and expect some exciting news regarding your love life on February 27 or 28.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)
Career matters are exciting this month, dear Gemini! Although you can't say your professional life isn't time-consuming, you are going to find multiple opportunities to blossom and grow in this area. Shoot for the stars, be intuitive, and listen as your inner faith is reinforced in the coming weeks. February 13 and 14 are wonderful days for starting some really positive thinking because your heart and mind are open.

CANCER (June 22–July 22)
Career developments are ahead, Cancer, as you sit and analyze your professional life. This March or April, matters will begin to accelerate with a possible raise in the future. Your love life hasn't been easy lately, and unfortunately will continue to perplex you until the end of the month. There is a chance for you to have some adventurous fun from the 7th to the 9th, the 14th through the 16th, and the 27th and 28th. Some Cancers will have the chance to travel too.

LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)
You are very popular with people this month, Leo, even if you remain a tad emotionally distant. Your dearest friends and family may notice your distance, but it's an essential time in which to analyze what is working in life and what isn't. You are very attentive to the desires of loved ones this February too. Fantastic financial luck is on the way from the 13th to the 15th and the 27th through the 28th.

VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22)
This February is an especially wonderful month for your love life! You are very willing to please and your partner is in the same mood. You are patient with others, and this will improve your relationships immensely. Your professional life is solid after recovering from instability at the beginning of January. The 13th–17th and the 27th–29th are great days for you in general.

LIBRA (Sept. 23–Oct. 23)
You are going to set the world on

fire this month! Even though life may have been full of setbacks recently, the first weeks of February will bring fantastic changes that you will enjoy. Not a soul will be able to ignore your confidence this month. 2010 will prove to be a crucial year for you, Libra, and this is just the beginning! The world is going to be seeing more of you!

SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)
Problems you are experiencing with your career will clear up mid-March, dear Scorpio. Keep your head up this month because it's only a matter of time! Go through the motions for the time being, you will regain your zeal and a sense of direction in March. You will find a balance between your love life and work in the near future too. The 13th through the 15th are great days for creativity and romance. You will get more time for recreation the last week of February as well.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22–Dec. 21)
More attention is being paid to your personal life than your career

this month. Honing in on your intuition and emotions, rather than what everyone surrounding you wants, proves to be helpful. February's first two weeks are chock full of errands and learning. No worries—family and friends will prove to be incredibly helpful. If a friend is being difficult, listen carefully because he/she may have a point. The 27th and 28th hold a professional surprise for you, Sagittarius!

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)
Honing in on realistic matters this February keeps you focused on comfort. You have multiple ideas for the immediate future and it is difficult to pick just one. Although this isn't an ideal month for implementing your ideas, continue to mull them over and take action a bit later. The 28th will be a day for learning and teaching too.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)
This month is fantastic for your finances, Aquarius! You might get a special gift between the 13th and the 15th and the 28th. Individu-

als are quite focused on you this February. Even though you might still be having trouble with your romantic life, take heart because next month holds some possible solutions. Mid-month is a great time for inner renewal.

PISCES (Feb. 19–March 20)
February starts out slowly but picks up speed toward the end of the second week, when you will be experiencing attention and activity. Gifts might be flowing. It's a strong period for your professional life, Pisces—so take advantage. You get good news on the 13th or 14th, and a partner helps you out on the 28th.





Empty rooms, once used by mentally unstable veterans, are now full of bird feathers and random sets from past film shoots.

Veterans have been proudly engaged since the project's earliest stages—from completion of the infrastructure to the preparation, planting, harvesting, processing and jarring of the strawberries.

STRAWBERRY FLAG RADIO INTERVIEWS FILNER

The first Strawberry Flag Radio newsmaker interview featured Congressman Robert Filner, Chairman of the U.S. Congressional Committee for Veterans Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives.

This transcription segment was created from September 28, 2009, episode of Strawberry Flag Radio.

CUE 14:29

Cinny Kennard: Once home from the battlefield, both of these veterans have at times struggled with the frustrations of the VA bureaucracy. They have many questions about this system, and so do we. So we at Strawberry Flag Radio decided to go to the top and talk to the Chairman of the Congressional Committee for Veterans Affairs in the U.S. House of Representatives—Congressman Robert Filner.

Cinny Kennard: Congressman Filner, thanks for joining us today.

Congressman Filner: Thank you.

Cinny Kennard: Can you bring us up to date on measures that are being taken to clean up what some consider a mess?

Congressman Filner: I think you're right, and so for so many of our veterans, first of all, I'm going to say that although the war in Iraq and Afghanistan has been pretty divisive in American society and Congress, we are united as a nation and as a Congress to say that every young man and woman who comes back from that war should get all the care, the love, the attention, the honor, and the dignity that the nation can give. So that is our basic assumption. Now we start off with a budget, and I have been chairman of the Veterans Committee for three years

and each of those years we had a significant increase of the budget—in fact, the total increase is 60 percent over those three years, almost twenty billion dollars. You know, the official injury list that's put out by the Pentagon says there are about 35,000 injured. I mean, that is so understated, not even just an accounting error, it's a factor of ten or more that we're misstating—and that's purposeful; they don't want to admit that people have been especially mentally wounded in the war, so they don't count those in their official statistics. And yet, as you've said, hundreds of thousands of young men and woman have PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. They may have TBI, traumatic brain injury, which affects so many because of the blasts that went off in Iraq and that are going off in Afghanistan. So we have to get them into the system. Claims are backlogged for months and months, sometimes years. I have proposed some new ways that just break through that red tape and bureaucracy, just by actually accepting the claims and auditing them later so that these young men and women can get checks and help rebuild their lives right away. So, you know, we have our work cut out for us, and we are heading in the right direction, but we've got more to do. We have begun to look at that claims process to try and break through it. I think we've had quite a few successes, but, you know, we have to concentrate on where we have to go yet. I'll just give one interesting new thing that we have to start looking at. This war has of course involved women—women in combat roles to a significant degree—much higher, of course, than any previous situation. Yet the Veterans' Administration healthcare system was built for men, so a female veteran can walk in, and from the catcalls that can be heard in the lobby to doctors who don't understand that women are serving in combat roles to not having childcare facilities for single moms when they have to bring their kids in... It's just a cultural change that has to be done, and yet that's going along at a slower pace than it should be.

Cinny Kennard: Let's bring this discussion back to L.A. County. What kinds of challenges are related to dealing with this enormous concentration of veterans in this county?

Congressman Filner: You know, L.A. as you say has a scale of challenges that most areas don't have; the homeless problem in L.A. is enormous, and if we can help the cities in the L.A. area by dealing with half of the issues—probably half of the homeless



are veterans—then we greatly decrease the kinds of problems that the cities and the county have to deal with. The VA facilities in L.A. have to also undergo a change in what they need, and yet some of the buildings—especially on the West L.A. campus of the Veterans Administration—have been seen to be sort of extraneous, and some of them have been rented out and leased, and some people want to sell them. I say no, we have to transform those buildings to meet the new needs, not just because they can't meet—we don't need them for the old needs—doesn't mean we should get rid of them as our property.

Cinny Kennard: Well, what is it there, because, frankly, as I mentioned, *Strawberry Flag* is a project underway right now on parts of the over 300 acres of land there, and people come through and find this so perplexing, and some are even furious that this campus has abandoned buildings at the basis of being utilized. I mean, what is wrong here?

Congressman Filner: They should be furious. Because you have a giant bureaucracy that doesn't seem to move very quickly and does not adapt to new situations very rapidly, so you have to tell them what to do and then hopefully it gets done. I mean, and part of the problem, Cinny, is that the VA has somehow become very resistant to outside help. I mean there's community groups—and you in particular, for example—who are trying to do things that are creative, that are interesting, that are healing, and somehow the bureaucracy says "No, we can do it" and doesn't invite outside groups to participate. And yet that's what we should do; not only can we not do this job alone, but to be able

to harness the energy of people all around our nation who care about our veterans would be a great thing. And we should be doing that a lot more.

Cinny Kennard: There's millions of veterans in this country who don't even know what's being offered to them. Why, in this age of Internet and Facebook and social networking and extraordinary technology that we lead the world in, why isn't there a way that communications are getting through to veterans so that they know what is going on? And is that a priority of the committee?

Congressman Filner: Sure, I mean it's a priority of the committee. I don't think it's a priority of the VA itself in that they feel so overburdened and so stressed out now [that] they don't want to invite new people in yet, but that should be their goal, right? That should be their job. Bring everybody in, and we as a committee, as a Congress, as a people, have to provide the resources. But they feel so stressed out now that they don't want to do more outreach, they don't want to give themselves more work. I find that extremely upsetting and tragic. So we're trying to give people the resources they need so that they can in fact expand the job that they're doing and reach out to veterans—to all our veterans.

Cinny Kennard: Thank you, Congressman, and have a good day.

Congressman Filner: Thank you so much for what you're doing, Cinny.

OUT CUE 21.45



STRAWBERRY UPDATE

WITH JOHN HOBBS

Strawberries earn more money for growers than any other fruit except apples. That profit is based on strawberry preserves, which are America's choice for something sweet.

Eighty percent of American households have at least one jar of strawberry jam in their pantries. States where strawberries grow best are important electoral states—California, Texas, and Florida. *Strawberry Flag* is interested in the product potential that might be generated from this metabolic sculpture. To learn about what

we could achieve in our first growing season with an experimental aquaponic strawberry farm, the project team (under John Hobb's direction) is running each stripe of the flag with a different experiment, and the results of each experiment are being carefully invigilated.

STRIPE ONE

A drip line system with fish and no watercress; watering interval one time every ten minutes

STRIPE TWO

Pump, no fish, worm droppings, and watercress; watering interval one to five times per day for thirty minutes

STRIPE THREE

Pump, fish, and watercress;

watering interval twenty-four hours/continuous

STRIPE FOUR

Pump, no fish, and watercress, with cap to control airflow; watering interval seven times a day for ten minutes

STRIPE FIVE

Pump, no fish, and watercress; watering interval seven times a day for ten minutes

STRIPE SIX

Pump and fish, no watercress; watering interval three times a day for thirty minutes

STRIPE SEVEN

Pump, fish, and watercress; watering interval three times a day for thirty minutes.

The number of U.S. troops

in Haiti reached about 10,000 within approximately a week to help transport emergency supplies, provide security, and clear debris.

The responding group

included a unit of U.S. Air Force Special Operations forces with airmen and equipment for temporary air traffic control systems as well as search-and-rescue experts, said CNN.



U.S. MILITARY RESPONDS TO HAITI

by TERENCE LYONS

The readiness of the United States military was tested in January as American forces were called upon to respond to the devastation left by the January 12 earthquake in Haiti.

With the first of its flights touching down in earthquake-devastated Haiti late Wednesday afternoon, January 13, the United States began deploying military planes, ships, and ground troops to the Caribbean nation, CNN reported. One of two planes carrying a 30-person assessment team arrived at Port-au-Prince airport that day to assess what Haiti needed to cope with the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

One of the team's first jobs was to get the airport working to a point where it could handle all the flights coming in from around the world, filled with people and supplies to help the victims of the quake.

The U.S. Southern Command led the Department of Defense's response. General P. K. Keen, deputy commander of the Southern Command, was in Haiti when the quake struck and saw the situation at the airport.

The responding group included a unit of U.S. Air Force Special Operations forces with airmen and equipment for temporary air traffic control systems as well as search-and-rescue experts, said CNN.

The U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* steamed toward Haiti from its position at sea near Virginia when the quake hit. The *Carl Vinson* "had a very small complement of aircraft on it when it was at sea," General Douglas Fraser, head of U.S. Southern Command, told reporters at the Pentagon. "[As] it passes through or by Mayport [Florida Naval Station], we're going to provision it with as much capability as we can, primarily looking at helicopter capacity... because we need to be able to get around the country."

Time magazine reported that dozens of U.S. military helicopters began arriving in

force on Friday, January 15, using the *Carl Vinson* a few miles offshore as their base, and delivering of food, water, and medical supplies. "We're still running out of water faster than we can deliver it," Marine Major Will Klumpp told *Time* above the deafening roar of copter rotors. "But at least we feel like we've started to keep up with what the Haitians need now."

The joint relief campaign began dispatching troops from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division to allow for more orderly delivery of relief supplies, said *Time*.

One week after the earthquake pulverized Haiti, emergency supplies of water, food, and medicine were beginning to reach large numbers of the country's desperate survivors, said the *Wall Street Journal*.

The number of U.S. troops in Haiti reached about 10,000 within approximately a week to help transport emergency supplies, provide security, and clear debris.

The media reported that elsewhere in the world, some even complained that the U.S. response was almost too fast—so rapid that it monopolized relief efforts.

I want to thank Lauren and her team, The Metabolic Studio Team because they're doing things that nobody else is doing. And Lauren is pointing the finger at this building, these series of buildings, which don't need renovation, they need people to be in them, living in them, not in the streets downtown.

I appreciate working with Lauren and Metabolic Studio. Walter does... Everyone I talk to about this... It's a very well-kept secret by the way. Well kept.

Rick Cluchey
Krapp's Last Tape Q&A 1.28.09

Krapp's Last Tape to be performed by Rick Cluchey and Directed by Walter Asmus

Entering the building you find piles of litter from once-occupied and now-forgotten places in this large, empty structure on the quad where *Strawberry Flag* is planted. A working elevator, stripped bare, takes you up to the second of three floors. The cold and damp of the building feels constitutional—this place has been unoccupied for a quarter of a century. Long-empty rooms, once used by mentally unstable veterans, are now full of bird feathers and random sets from past film shoots. One room with fairly new carpet has been chosen by visiting director Walter Asmus for a special performance of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. This play is about an old man alone in a room with a hanging lamp and a reel-to-reel tape recorder, listening to a much younger version of himself.

The actor playing Krapp is Rick Cluchey. Although not a veteran, Cluchey has been haunted. He began working on Beckett plays while serving time in San Quentin prison for kidnapping and robbery. He persuaded the authorities to let the prisoners perform Beckett plays—which they did, in a studio theatre in what used to be the prison's gallows room. The plays made such an impact on the prisoners—who immediately saw similarities between themselves and Beckett's characters—that they were repeated over and over. The word got out and reached Beckett in Europe. Beckett and Cluchey met and began

a long and important relationship.

Cluchey extended the gift of performing Beckett to the veterans at the West Los Angeles VA Healthcare Center in a one-time-only performance. The performance was recorded and is offered to the public via the Internet. Cluchey is one of the only living actors to have been personally directed by Beckett, who directed him in the role of Krapp.

Cluchey's talent (and Beckett's recognition of it) gave him another chance in life. It is in the spirit of extending the gift of "being seen for who he really is" that Cluchey offered *Krapp's Last Tape* from a forgotten room in an all but invisible place on the north side of the VA campus.

An excerpt from "SGT. SHAFT" SHAFT NOTES

FROM THE WASHINGTON TIMES
JANUARY 6TH, 2010

The Greater Los Angeles Veterans Administration Healthcare Center has an innovative project and flag deliciously titled *Strawberry Flag* on a grass quadrangle on its West Los Angeles campus. The strawberries in this project are real.

Artist Lauren Bon and a team from the Metabolic Studio are working with Veterans Affairs mental health personnel and veterans to create a beneficial clinical project for veterans and a project to profit our planet, and the results are starting to show their powerful stripes.

The American flag is centrally located on the northern side of the VA campus. It is as large as a football field, but it smells far better than a football field. Veterans have been proudly engaged since the project's earliest stages—from completion of the infrastructure to the preparation, planting, harvesting, processing and jarring of the strawberries.

Like a traditional American flag, this flag has 13 stripes made of reclaimed strawberries with friendly and inviting walking paths. On the top corner is a blue field, shaded by existing trees, made of an edible herb called borage and white star-shaped flowers. *Strawberry Flag* renews strawberry plants that otherwise would have been discarded.

"The *Strawberry Flag* project has generated a number of recover-oriented clinical opportunities for veterans and the general outpatient sector at [West] LA. These opportunities derive from the construction of a dynamic art object, maintenance of the object, nurturing of the strawberry plants, training in innovative greening technologies, hands-on production of jam, and mastering the print-making process," said Dr. Jonathan Sherin, Associate Chief of Mental Health.

Strawberries are fragile, but this flag will remain strong in years to come. Let's not forget what the Beatles once sang: *Strawberry Fields Forever*.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW

KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

By LAURA SANDERSON HEALY

NOT SO ABSURD: Samuel Beckett's one-act play *Krapp's Last Tape* was performed in a long-forgotten upstairs room of an abandoned building at the VA's West Los Angeles Healthcare Center on January 28, 2010, before a group of veterans and friends. Artist Lauren Bon and the Metabolic Studio organized this production in less than a week as an adjunct to their *Strawberry Flag* art installation in a disused quad on the campus. The play starred American actor Rick Cluchey and was directed by Walter

Asmus, both of whom have worked closely with Beckett. Cluchey discovered Beckett's work as an inmate at San Quentin State Prison, developed theater there, gained his release, and went on to direct and act in the Irish playwright's work in Europe as well as write plays of his own such as *The Cage* (about his time in prison).

At a Q&A after the performance, Cluchey thanked Bon for "pointing the finger" with the *Strawberry Flag* project, which looks at the vast VA space and shows what can be done with effort to honor the veterans of war. Asmus recalled Beckett as "a poet, not a dramatist; often a naïve artist," and remembered him

as easygoing when not piqued by, say, a Hollywood director's misinterpretation of his work.

"Fuck Broadway!" Beckett once screamed, jumping up from a meeting in a Paris café after listening to inane ideas about putting stars in his work to bring in the masses.

Asmus categorized Beckett's work as a "stream of frustration," which was well shown in *Krapp's Last Tape* ("a very realistic story") as a man reflects on his life and losses, listening to tapes he has made of himself and making new ones, reviewing his years. He recalled Edward Albee as part of the "absurdity crowd" Beckett found himself in (i.e., the

Theater of the Absurd), and noted how Albee's *Zoo Story* was often part of a double bill with *Krapp's Last Tape*. "These were just their drawing room pieces," Asmus said of the short works, which exemplified the thesis of "less is more" and embodied "the art of crafting theater by reduction."

"There were no curtains—that was a breakthrough," Asmus said. "He [Beckett] was a poet, and his work speaks the universal language of our lives—as studied by an Irishman." Often in rehearsal, Asmus would see Beckett speak the lines he had written and give line readings, standing in for one of the actors playing Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*.

"Poetry and drama are adverse, opposing forces," Asmus said, eliciting a snort from the actor Cluchey, a living treasure when it comes to performing Samuel Beckett's intense characters.

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except for February 2 |
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