

FALL 2021



# INSIDE SWORDS

PG 4

**BUILDING BACK  
OUR COMMUNITY**

PG 10

**TRAINING & EMPLOYING  
VETERANS**

PG 6

**TRANSITIONING &  
HOUSING VETERANS**

PG 12

**PARTNER WITH US**

PG 8

**INTRODUCING  
TOOLBOX.VET**

PG 14

**A VIETNAM VETERAN'S  
LEGACY OF SERVICE**

[WWW.SWORDS-TO-PLOWSHARES.ORG](http://WWW.SWORDS-TO-PLOWSHARES.ORG)





## A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Dear Friends, Supporters & Neighbors,

I hope you and your loved ones are healthy and safe. As we prepare this update for our community, we reflect on our nation's years at war in Afghanistan and the pain and loss veterans and the people of Afghanistan continue to experience. The wounds of war certainly do last beyond the battlefield, and we are ready to support our community of veterans as the tragedies unfold.

With nearly 500 veterans residents living with us, unhoused veterans sheltering in place in San Francisco and Oakland hotels, and many other veterans seeking support services, our focus is heavily on keeping our communities safe as the pandemic continues. The past 18 months have been incredibly trying, but what we've had to face has made us a much stronger organization.



Despite food donations dwindling, PPE donations drying up, and COVID emergency support dollars rapidly being distributed, we are still very much responding to the impacts of COVID. We need our supporters to continue giving generously so that we can keep veterans in emergency housing, address food insecurity, and be prepared for staffing challenges as we navigate the Delta variant.

Thank you for standing with us and investing in our mission.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Blecker  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
VIETNAM COMBAT INFANTRY  
U.S. ARMY 1967-1970

***We learn more every day; we are more adaptable and responsive than ever before; our staff are deeply committed; and our supporters are more gracious and understanding.***

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2021

# Veterans Day Celebration

25 YEARS HONORING VETERANS

[SWORDS-TO-PLOWSHARES.ORG/VDD](https://SWORDS-TO-PLOWSHARES.ORG/VDD)



# Building Back our Community

Edwin M. Lee Apartments **Grand Opening & One Year Anniversary**

At Swords to Plowshares, we have learned that our services cannot wait for a pandemic to end. For many of the veterans we serve, the global pandemic has brought new issues and emboldened existing ones. Building back our community from the first wave of COVID-19 has been measured by all sizes. The grandest of all was the opening of the Edwin M. Lee Apartments in Mission Bay. Developed in partnership with the Chinatown Community Development Center, the facility now houses 62 previously homeless veterans and 56 low-income families. The belated grand opening was a celebration a year in the making. Though it was limited in size, the event marked a beautiful milestone in honoring the resilience of veterans and those on the frontlines of COVID-19.

***We are especially grateful to Mayor Breed and Speaker Pelosi for joining us to celebrate.***

We continue to provide safe homes for veterans in our eight different housing sites and move unhoused veterans off the streets and into emergency housing in a rapid and safe fashion. Our service centers continue to be a refuge for our clients. While adhering to the latest health and safety protocols, we are introducing expanded hours for both our San Francisco and Oakland Service Centers. Here, veterans can access various resources, such as needs assessment, community referrals, case management, and counseling.

While many of our in-person support groups remain on hold due to COVID-19, no appointments are required at either location to access available services.



Left to right: Vito Imbasciani, London Breed, Anita Lee, Hon. Nancy Pelosi, Margie T., Michael Blecker, Malcolm Yeung

“Welcome to our home, **don't be a stranger!**”

Margie T.  
EML Resident  
US Army 1980 – 1990





# Transitioning Veterans from Emergency Housing to Permanent Housing

During the last 18 months of COVID, Swords to Plowshares provided shelter for well over 600 unhoused veterans in emergency housing facilities. While having shelter during the pandemic is necessary, making the transition from emergency to permanent housing is a critical step for veterans on the path to changing their futures. We are pleased to report that throughout COVID, we helped 189 veterans staying in emergency housing transition to permanent homes in San Francisco and Oakland.

William Wagner, a 73-year-old Air Force veteran, has seen the significant impact of securing a reliable home. From Chicago, IL, William joined the Air Force in 1968. After exiting the military, he moved to San Francisco and worked in the healthcare industry. William has a blood disease that causes clotting and strokes, which resulted in the amputation of his left leg. When Swords' staff connected with him during the pandemic, he was

experiencing housing instability, and his prosthetic leg was not working well. We quickly found an emergency shelter for William in November 2020. The period between landing emergency housing and transitioning to permanent housing can be tedious, and William unfortunately experienced bureaucratic complications with his housing voucher. For William, this time also tragically included the passing of his daughter, whom he was excited to be closer to once permanently housed.



Overcoming challenges and loss, William finally secured a one-bedroom apartment in May 2021, which was retrofitted to accommodate his disability. Swords' staff helped move his personal items from storage into his new home, brought him a set of pots and pans, and secured him a new wheelchair. Although he says living alone can be isolating at times, he looks forward to life with his friends and family nearby. Of Swords' staff, he said, "they seem like my best friends at times. They helped me out quite a bit."

*“There is no social or moral justification for **lack of housing**.”*

— Pope Francis

# Introducing Toolbox.vet

Visit the site  
[www.toolbox.vet](http://www.toolbox.vet)

There are approximately 18 million veterans according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and they make up about 7 percent of the total U.S. population. Accessing benefits and services for veterans can be confusing and mired in bureaucratic red tape. Swords to Plowshares has developed Toolbox.vet, an online library of accessible resources, to better equip advocates and providers with the tools they need to assist and connect with veterans of all ages.

Funded in partnership with the Walmart Foundation, Toolbox.vet blends written content with podcast audio and video conversations with real veterans and advocates. Nationally recognized for our decades of experience and leadership in building comprehensive programs for veterans, Swords to Plowshares is uniquely positioned to present this curriculum for social workers, counselors, educators, employers, health care professionals, government workers, advocates, providers, and community leaders.

Toolbox.vet covers a variety of issues that underlie the diverse experiences veterans face once their service ends. The library provides advice for veterans from other veterans as well as informational tools and perspectives that are useful for community partners. Topics covered have included veteran mental health and trauma-informed care, military-veteran culture, and navigating education benefits.

## CHAPTER 7

### Insights on Mission-Driven Veteran Housing

Toolbox.vet blends written content with an audiobook and podcast from real veterans and advocates. So, while you are reading content online, you can also hear real people talk about the issue at-hand.

Listen to the chapter using the podcast player on the bottom of the screen or press the button to be redirected to Anchor.fm.

Listen to the Chapter →



## CHAPTER 9

### What You Should Know About Veteran Employment Services

Toolbox.vet blends written content with an audiobook and podcast from real veterans and advocates. So, while you are reading content online, you can also hear real people talk about the issue at-hand.

Listen to the chapter using the podcast player on the bottom of the screen or press the button to be redirected to Anchor.fm.

Listen to the Chapter →



## Listen to our podcast

While you are reading content online, you can also hear real people talk about the issue at-hand.





# Training and Employing Veterans

As economic fallout from COVID-19 continues to hit lower-income Americans the hardest, our Employment and Training team has an important task of providing job opportunities to unemployed and

underemployed veterans during the pandemic. Since January of 2021, we have assisted over 150 veterans who were seeking employment, a 10% improvement from the previous year.

## Power Pathway Training FOR VETERANS

Powered by  **PG&E PowerPathway**



## PG&E Power Pathway

PG&E Power Pathway partners with Swords to Plowshares to offer a training program that provides six weeks of classroom training and two weeks of on-the-job training to cohorts of fifteen veterans each session. Job placement is guaranteed

upon successful completion of the training course and exam. Veteran graduates have direct placement with PG&E or contractors of PG&E, where the starting salary for those placed is \$38/hour.



One Treasure Island Graduate, Joel Peterson

## One Treasure Island

In partnership with One Treasure Island, we also provide opportunities for veterans to jumpstart their career in construction. This free construction training and certification program allows participants to receive a stipend, work clothes, computer for online

classes, transportation vouchers, paid union dues, and other supportive services. The graduates of this program also receive connections to open positions and long-term employment opportunities on new housing developments on Treasure Island.



One Treasure Island Graduate, Reginald Mosley

We continue to seek meaningful partnership opportunities with companies that have hiring initiatives for veterans.

Contact [jobsforvets@stp-sf.org](mailto:jobsforvets@stp-sf.org) for more information.



## Partner With Us

A new 2020 study by Fidelity Charitable shows that 66% of donors decreased or stopped volunteering in 2020 because of COVID-19. At Swords to Plowshares, we have experienced the impact of this reality firsthand. We had to pause our monthly breakfast service for our housing residents, and beautification projects with our corporate volunteers stopped. Even during this bleak time, however, we had a few exciting volunteer events to support and enhance the quality of life for our veterans.

In April, the members of Palo Alto Networks' veteran employee resource group hosted a virtual volunteer event to assemble over 200 care packages for our veterans that contained handwritten cards of encouragement and appreciation. We received these items along with a generous \$5,000 donation from the company.

“**Thank you to the team at Swords to Plowshares for the great work you do. It's an honor to give back to those who deserve it most.**

*Tory Woods, coordinator of PAN VetsNet virtual volunteer event*

In May, the Golden State Warriors partnered with Hennessy to host a “Honor Your Heroes” event, during which they recognized the work we do at Swords to Plowshares while assembling care packages for the veteran residents at Edwin M. Lee Apartments in Mission Bay. The Warriors have also invited their veteran neighbors to numerous outdoor entertainment events, such as watch parties and movie nights.

Wooden Boats for Veterans Foundation (WBFV) collaborated with us in August to take three veterans on a wonderful sailing trip around the Bay. Unique experiences, such as these, take veterans out of their daily routine and provide emotional and mental restoration while helping them feel a sense of belonging to their larger community.

These opportunities and resources are available to us only through the generosity of our community partners. We hope for more robust engagement opportunities with our corporate and community partners as we look to the future while navigating through COVID. Please contact Soo Kim at [communications@stp-sf.org](mailto:communications@stp-sf.org) for more information.





## A Vietnam Veteran's Legacy of Service: Paul Cox

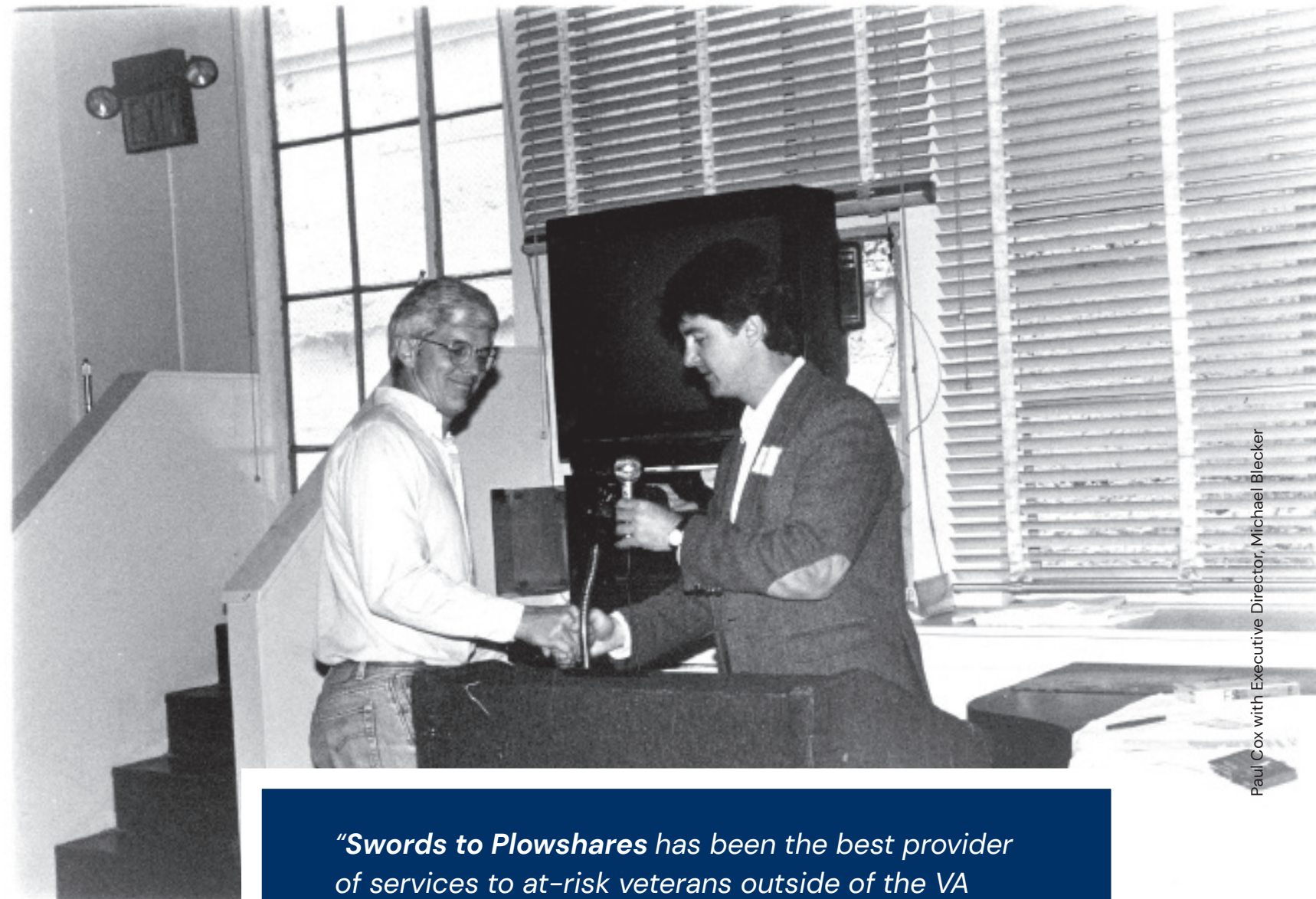
When Paul received his draft notice in 1968, he didn't think much of the politics of war. "I had no consciousness about the war. I wasn't against it or for it, but I thought I had a duty to my country," he remembers. Paul traded in his 2-year draft and enlisted for four years in the U.S. Marine Corps.

After 18 months of combat in Vietnam, Paul's view of the war changed. He left Vietnam the summer of 1970 angry – angry at himself, at the Marine Corps, at the American people, and at the U.S. government. He had two years left of his service and was determined to do what he could to support his fellow GIs returning from Vietnam disenfranchised and conflicted.

Paul lived up to his commitment and devoted much of his adult life to actively supporting veteran causes and promoting peace and nonviolence. In 1983, Paul co-founded Veterans Speakers Alliance in San

Francisco, which later became a chapter of the national Veterans for Peace. In addition to serving on Swords' Board of Directors, Paul joined the Veterans Legacy Circle in 2021 by bequeathing a portion of his estate to Swords to Plowshares.

We are deeply grateful for Paul's dedication to veterans and commitment to our work. You, too, can join the Veterans Legacy Circle, leaving behind a legacy of support for veterans in our community. For more information on how to join the Veterans Legacy Circle, please contact Maggie Finnegan at [development@stp-sf.org](mailto:development@stp-sf.org) or (415) 252-4787 x 318, or visit us online.



Paul Cox with Executive Director, Michael Blecker

*"Swords to Plowshares has been the best provider of services to at-risk veterans outside of the VA for 45 years. But it will not be able to continue the wonderful work it does into the future without support from people like us—veterans, families, clients, and anyone who understands that the cost of war does not end when the war ends. In addition to the financial support we give each year, after I am kaput, my family will continue to support Swords through its planned giving program."*

Paul Cox





## STAY CONNECTED

### OUR OFFICES

#### ADMINISTRATIVE

401 Van Ness Ave, Suite 313  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 252-4788

#### SF SERVICE CENTER

1060 Howard Street  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
(415) 252-4788

### CONTACT INFORMATION

#### EMAIL US

[supportvets@stp-sf.org](mailto:supportvets@stp-sf.org)

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

 [/swords-to-plowshares](#)

 [/vetshelpingvets](#)  [@vetshelpingvets](#)

[WWW.SWORDS-TO-PLOWSHARES.ORG](http://WWW.SWORDS-TO-PLOWSHARES.ORG)

PRESORTED  
U.S POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 316  
SACRAMENTO, CA



**Thank you** for standing with us and investing in our mission.