INSIDE Swords

Veterans Community Center Opens
Welcome to the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community
Maceo May Apartments Grand Opening
The work we do cannot exist without the support of our diverse partnerships. Donors, volunteers, resource providers, and advocates have all made their own unique contributions to our organization and we celebrate their commitment to serving the veterans in our collective community. We were able to honor one of our strongest supporters, Jon W. Paulson, at the dedication of the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community in May. Jon’s commitment to his fellow veterans was unwavering and inspires our organization to continue to bolster the “vets helping vets” model of care.

As we celebrate our wins, we strive to increase our reach among Bay Area veterans. Building strong and genuine relationships within our community is key to supporting veterans motivated to transform their lives. I thank you for your solidarity with our mission.

Warmly,

MICHAEL BLECKER,
Executive Director
Vietnam Combat Infantry
U.S. Army 1967-1970

2023 has started off strong at Swords to Plowshares. Since the New Year, we have opened the Veterans Community Center and our newest permanent housing site, the Maceo May Apartments. These milestones have been years in the making, and we were fortunate to celebrate them with our dedicated supporters. These new opportunities bring us closer to ending homelessness and poverty among Bay Area veterans.

This newsletter will give you a glimpse into our work and the experiences of veterans involved with our services. We share in-depth perspectives from Maceo May resident, Mike Bartell, who has become a community leader on Treasure Island and serves as an inspiration for our continued commitment to permanent supportive housing initiatives. In the East Bay, we continue to strengthen our relationship with senior veterans by creating social activities and support groups that reduce isolation and provide opportunities for them to access veteran-specific resources.
San Francisco veterans in need will benefit from the Center’s expanded hours, nutritious meals, and community-building activities: another important step in honoring our sacred duty to care for those who served our country.

On April 11th, we proudly hosted passionate members of our community, including Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Veterans Community Center (VCC). The VCC, located on the third floor of our San Francisco Drop-In Center, will offer extended opportunities for veterans and their companions to connect with resources and build relationships.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony included remarks by Swords to Plowshares’ Board member, Del Seymour, Executive Director, Michael Blecker, and Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, whose support made this project possible.

"Under the patriotic leadership of Michael Blecker, Swords to Plowshares has long been a pillar of health, housing, and hope for Bay Area veterans," Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi said.

The new Veterans Community Center, assisted by Community Project Funding we secured from Congress, will help Swords to Plowshares continue to serve thousands of our most vulnerable heroes.

The VCC reimagines Swords to Plowshares’ decades-old Drop-In Center. With an additional 5,000 square feet and evening and weekend hours, we can provide increased services, including daily meals, transportation, support groups, and wellness programming such as art therapy and yoga. The goal of the VCC is to expand services and address issues including isolation, food insecurity, and access to critical services for senior veterans, unhoused veterans, and those with disabling conditions.

The funding for the VCC was made available thanks to Congressional Community Project Funding supported by Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi and contributions from San Francisco Human Services Agency, Bothin Foundation, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and William G. Gilmore Foundation.
Welcome to the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community

When we lost our friend, Jon W. Paulson, in 2016, we knew we had to cement his legacy with something monumental.

Jon was a Vietnam veteran who served on Swords to Plowshares’ Board of Directors and Advisory Board for over 20 years. He was fiercely committed to helping his fellow veterans. Swords to Plowshares worked closely with his loving wife, Dianne, in developing a renovation and dedication project to uplift our housing site in the Presidio to preserve Jon’s legacy and continue the impact he made on the lives of Bay Area veterans. After a 6-year-long process, all improvements of the site’s two buildings have been completed, and the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community welcomes a new era for its residents to live in dignity.

Swords to Plowshares opened the Presidio housing site as the Veterans Academy in 2000. It was the first veteran-specific permanent supportive housing program in the United States. The buildings were converted from two Army barracks into 108 units where veterans would have a place to live and also receive on-site supportive services such as case management, therapy and counseling, and communal activities. This model of care prioritizes the needs of the veteran residents, many of whom have disabilities and health conditions that challenge mobility. Additionally, the housing site’s location in the Presidio is integral to the recovery process of its residents.

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All of the residents have histories of homelessness and once lived on the streets or in blighted areas of the city. Having the chance to build a home in a peaceful national park setting has provided these residents with the opportunity to heal and thrive.

Over the years, the need for renovations at the housing site became apparent. The most obvious was the lack of elevators. The 3-story flight of stairs in each building made it difficult or impossible for residents with significant mobility challenges to leave their rooms. The 2016 rehabilitation project motivated by Jon W. Paulson’s memory aimed to install elevators, build new roofing, and beautify the buildings. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed a lot of the initial progress, and the elevators were officially usable in the fall of 2022.

With all the project goals now completed, we are able to celebrate the work put in to making this housing site more accessible. Many of its residents see their current home as the place they will live in for the rest of their lives, and these improvements were integral to ensuring we maintain a space that respects and addresses each veteran’s needs. Along with the renovations, a bronze statue by sculptor and veteran, Rolf Kriken, will stand outside in memory of Jon Paulson and the lives lost in Vietnam. There are many supporters, advocates, and donors who made this possible, and we thank all who had a hand in making the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community a better home for its community.

Bottom left: Longtime supporter Dianne Paulson stands in front of the sculpture honoring the life of her husband and Vietnam veterans.
On May 18th, Swords to Plowshares, along with Chinatown Community Development Center and San Francisco Mayor London Breed, celebrated the Grand Opening of Maceo May Apartments. Located on Treasure Island, the permanent supportive housing site holds 104 affordable units for veterans and their families as the first project in the city’s Treasure Island Redevelopment Plan to go vertical. We enjoyed commemorating this beautiful, brand-new home with supporters, project collaborators, and residents.

The six-story modular construction building (104,500 sq. ft.) has multifamily units (studios, 1-BR, and 2-BR), on-site residential services, property management offices, a community room, laundry, parking, bicycle storage, common outdoor areas, a forested healing garden, a playground, and a roof deck.

This housing site serves in memory of Swords to Plowshares’ first-ever Housing Director, Maceo May. A Vietnam combat veteran, Maceo was a trailblazing advocate for homeless veterans and worked tirelessly to increase public understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He joined Swords in 1988 as a counselor and made strides in reducing homelessness along with his Vietnam peers and other veterans. As the need for veteran-specific housing became clearer, Maceo rose quickly into the role of housing director and oversaw the expansion of Swords’ housing program from 15 units to 200. Maceo retired from Swords in 2000 and served on our Board of Directors from 2004 until he passed away in 2014. His life’s work has made a lasting impact on our organization and generations of veterans in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Thank you to our generous funders and key project partners:

Funders
- Ally Bank
- California Community Reinvestment Corporation
- California Department of Housing and Community Development
- California Department of Veterans Affairs
- Citi Community Capital
- Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco
- Home Depot Foundation
- LISC-NEF-Build them HOME Fund
- Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development
- MetLife Foundation
- Northrop Grumman
- Raymond James Tax Credit, Inc.
- San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (Continuum of Care Program)

Key Project Partners
- ACC Environmental
- Arthur J. Gallagher & Co
- Cahill Contractors (General Contractor)
- California Housing Partnership
- Cox Castle LLP
- Design Studio Gonzalo Castro
- Gubb & Bashay LLP
- Mithun (Architect and Landscape Architect)
- One Treasure Island

Building features
- six-story modular construction building (104,500 sq. ft.)
- Multifamily units (studios, 1-BR, and 2-BR)
- on-site residential services
- property management offices
- community room
- laundry
- parking & bicycle storage
- common outdoor areas
- forested healing garden
- playground
- roof deck
"Moving into this brand-new building gave me a new lease on life," says Mike Bartell, pointing to the Maceo May Apartments, Swords to Plowshares’ newest permanent supportive housing facility located on Treasure Island. Mike, a native San Franciscan, returned to the Bay Area after serving in the Marine Corps for 4 years from 1969 to 1973. Orphaned at a young age, his return home was not smooth. Without connections and job skills, he did odd jobs here and there but each one not for very long. He recounts, “I made many bad life choices and ended up homeless for almost 5 years out in East Bay.”

While living in the streets of Concord, he met someone who introduced him to Swords to Plowshares, and at the San Francisco Drop-In Center, he signed up for a transitional home on Treasure Island. After completing 6 months of various classes on money, health, and wellness management, he was offered a permanent home at the Fairfax, a Swords to Plowshares’ permanent housing site located in the Tenderloin. However, after living there for a year, Mike jumped at the chance to return to our Treasure Island housing (which had been converted into permanent housing) in 2016, where he felt most at home. 2021 to 2022 was a hard year for Mike as he dealt with bad health and a difficult roommate situation. While waiting for the completion of the new apartment building and a knee replacement, he felt frustrated and neglected at times. But he remained hopeful, continuing to volunteer at the San Francisco Food Bank on the island, distributing food to other island residents every Tuesday – as he has done for the past 7 years. Finally, when the Maceo May Apartments became available, he quickly moved into new housing. He beams with joy as he says, “It’s like I am given a room at a mansion!”

Mike has a great big smile and an undeniable positive aura about him. He says now with the new residence, he can call Treasure Island his forever home. He knows everyone on the island, and everyone knows him. With new veterans moving into this 104-unit apartment building, he has new neighbors to befriend. He says, “I have had many new starts in life, and I feel like this is another new start given to me at age 72. I want to bring smiles back to people’s faces! I am the happiest I have ever been in my life with this new home!”

Meet the vet from Maceo May Apartments

I am the happiest I have ever been in my life with this new home!

— Mike Bartell
We work to ensure that the veterans we serve feel like they are part of a community that prioritizes their overall wellbeing. This includes organizing enriching educational and social activities for veterans to participate in. Here is a glimpse of the community-building and wellness programs we offer.

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<tr>
<th>Programming that Works</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Garden class at EML</strong></td>
<td><strong>2. Computer class</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. Beach outing</strong></td>
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<td>Gardening is a great therapeutic activity for residents to get their hands dirty and connect with their home in a physical way.</td>
<td>We partner with the San Francisco Public Library for introductory computer skills courses for residents in our housing sites.</td>
<td>Swords' Oakland outreach has built a strong relationship with senior veterans in the community through support groups and taking them on trips.</td>
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<td><strong>4. Warriors game</strong></td>
<td><strong>5. Giants outing</strong></td>
<td><strong>6. Barbecues</strong></td>
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<td>Go Warriors! Our Mission Bay neighbors donated a pregame tour of Chase Center and tickets to their game against the Nets.</td>
<td>The SF Giants continue to be a committed supporter of Swords to Plowshares. They have donated over 100 tickets this year so our staff and housing residents can enjoy a day at the ballpark!</td>
<td>Providing hot, fresh meals is an easy and accessible way for staff to connect with residents, and it creates a welcoming environment for new residents joining the community.</td>
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Recognizing our Partners

Do you work for an organization who would like to partner with us? Reach out to development@stp-sf.org for more information.

Swords to Plowshares benefits immensely from a variety of volunteer partnerships and generous donations. We enjoy creating opportunities for organizations and companies to connect with the veterans we serve and educate participants on the specific issues facing Bay Area veterans.

Thanks to Wells Fargo for making JWPVC beautiful for its residents.

Serving breakfast is always popular with housing residents. Thank you for your help, Pinterest!

We celebrated Safeway’s $500k milestone in 17 years of giving to Swords to Plowshares.

Games at Thumbtack’s retreat led to 250 hygiene kits for East Bay veterans experiencing homelessness.

New Faces of Leadership

We welcome new board members to our team of changemakers leading us towards ending veteran homelessness and further expanding our resources in the Bay Area.

1. Diane Williamson is a veteran rights advocate, nonprofit leader, and former client of Swords to Plowshares who worked hard to get back on her feet. Now, Diane is passionate about assisting fellow veterans currently facing the challenges she did. Diane serves as chair of the Alameda County Veterans Affairs Commission and leads the Veterans Community Media Network, a nonprofit focused on helping veterans access benefits.

2. Barbara Saavedra joins the Board of Directors to continue her work advocating on behalf of veterans. She has had a prolific relationship with Swords to Plowshares, serving as a senior staff attorney in the Swords Legal department and as Interim Legal Director. She is currently a permanent clerk for Justice Kruger on the California Supreme Court.

3. Seth Steward is Chief of Staff for Oakland City Councilmember Dan Kalb. Prior to his current position, Seth worked as an Assistant District Attorney for over a decade in the San Francisco District Attorney’s Office. Seth also teaches criminal law at City College of San Francisco. He is a veteran of the United States Air Force where he served for eight years as a Flight Engineer on a Combat Search and Rescue helicopter in the 129th Rescue Wing, California Air National Guard.
Thank you for standing with us and investing in our mission.