

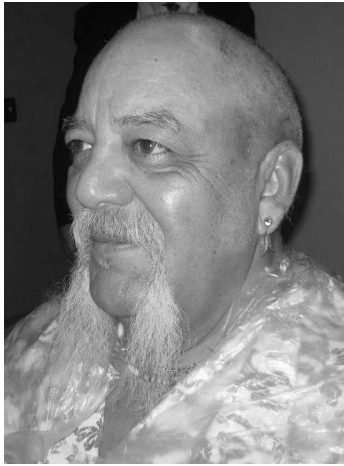


Proposal to Name the Bakersfield College Veterans Resource Center

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Recommended by President, Sonya Christian

Prepared by Professor Paul Beckworth, Faculty Director, Veteran Services and Professor Olivia Garcia, History Faculty



He was seen as a visionary by community leaders and veterans alike. The impact of his life has been profound, not only by enhancing the story of student veterans but by serving as a tremendous and understanding representative of all veterans throughout Kern County.

Vernon Valenzuela has left a lasting legacy, not only as a Vietnam combat veteran but also as the critical force in helping veterans transform their lives once returning home.

Although the Bakersfield native wasn't welcomed with open arms or droves of supporters, the Purple Heart recipient was prepared for the next milestone in his life: **his education**.

Vernon enrolled at Bakersfield College in 1970, becoming the first in his family to attend college. Seeing the need to serve others just like him, this newly minted Renegade quickly founded the Associated Veterans Student Club and this is when his veteran advocacy began. Never ceasing, his desire to serve continued to grow and Vernon continued to flourish as he became the BC Student Body President.

"I don't know if there was ever really a decision (to become a veterans' activist)," Vernon said in 2011. *"When I got out of the military – Vietnam was a very confusing time for me, and for many people. And I went to Bakersfield Community College and got involved in the vets club up there; I just got involved in it, and never really got away."*

Vernon went on to earn his AA in Psychology and transferred to CSUB. After earning his Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, he earned his Master's Degree in Counseling Education in 1977. By 1979, he was licensed in Marriage & Family Therapy, specializing in the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. For Vernon, this career allowed him to continue helping veterans as they made their own transitions from life in combat to life back home.

Vernon's heart was at 1801 Panorama Drive, returning to campus to serve as an assistant to the Office of Veteran's Affairs branch at BC, and then as a counselor to war veterans in Kern County and Los Angeles.

"Vernon was determined to try to do something for all veterans in Kern County and in the United States," said Kern County Superior Court Judge Michael Lewis in 2012. *"Vernon understood them. That, I think, is the big difference."*

Lewis, a Marine veteran, shared these sentiments while he reflected on Vernon's life after a long battle with cancer in 2012. He was 63.

Another colleague of Vernon's, Jenny Frank, described him as a "visionary" and many would agree, adding that Vernon dedicated his life of service of others.

He counseled veterans over the decades, from Vietnam veterans to Iraq, Afghanistan, and all in between. Through his sheer force of will and desire to do more, he was instrumental in getting a Veterans Center built here in Kern County in 2010. This place of hope now serves as a place for combat veterans and their families to get the help that Vernon's generation never had access to. He, and others also established the Veterans Justice Program, to ensure veterans receive access to mental health and substance abuse programs.



Over his four decades of service, Vernon touched the lives of many at Bakersfield College, in the city of Bakersfield, the county of Kern and his legacy ripples throughout our state continuing to support and transform veterans. Some of the young veterans he touched work at Bakersfield College today, now helping their fellow veterans, just as Vernon would have wanted.

Rarely is a name mentioned that evokes such an emotional response and rarely is someone as selfless and as serving as Vernon Valenzuela.

It was for this reason that Congressman Kevin McCarthy paid tribute to him on the floor of the United States House of Representatives in March 2012 commenting that, *"His selflessness, perseverance, and service-minded dedication will continue to serve as an inspiration in our community and remain a constant reminder we must all continue to have of our commitment to the men and women in the Armed Forces who bravely serve our country."*

Vernon never stopped serving and even after his death, his legacy remains as strong as ever, ingrained in the many lives he touched and mentored. As he himself said, *"Serving your country has no discharge date."*

A year before his death, he wrote *"Veterans continue to serve our community, often quietly, not seeking any recognition, simply content to do the right thing."*

Today, let us honor someone who was often quiet, selfless, yet passionate doing the right thing for our veterans.

Kern Community College District Board of Trustees:

A new center is being built as we speak.

It is a center dedicated to the education, hopes, and transformation of our veterans who have served us faithfully.

As befitting a lifetime of service, it is my honor and privilege as President of Bakersfield College to respectfully request that the new Veteran Resource Center be named the Bakersfield College Vernon Valenzuela Veteran Resource Center.

It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

