

**County of Santa Clara**  
**Office of the County Executive**  
70 West Hedding Street, East Wing 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
San Jose, CA 95110  
(408) 299-5119  
www.sccgov.org



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Contact:** Gwendolyn Mitchell/Laurel Anderson  
Office of Public Affairs  
(408) 299-5119

**County Honors Vietnam Navy Veteran  
as 2008 "Friend of the Veteran"**  
*Mountain View Resident Volunteers at VA Palo Alto Hospital*

SAN JOSE, CALIF. — Walter Dillard is a familiar face to veterans around Santa Clara County, helping patients at VA Palo Alto Hospital, participating in parades and ceremonies as a member of the honor guard, and leading Bingo nights for veterans. Today, the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors honored Dillard as the 2008 "Friend of the Veteran."

"Walter richly deserves this honor for his exceptional commitment to helping his fellow veterans," said Supervisor Pete McHugh, Chairperson of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors.

A Navy veteran, Dillard served from Feb 1, 1967 to Oct 17, 1970, including duty in Vietnam from 1967-1968 aboard the aircraft carrier USS TICONDEROGA. He was a plane captain on the flight deck, performing pre- and post- flight checks to ensure the aircraft had fuel and ammunition, and securing the pilot in his seat. During the rest of his time in the military he served aboard the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.

A Mountain View resident, Dillard has volunteered for the past five years at the VA Palo Alto Hospital. Dillard dedicates himself to sight impaired, wheel chair, and spinal cord injured veterans. He often partners with sight impaired veterans serving as their sighted guide. He accompanies 30 wheel chair vets each year to the Encinal Yacht Club Regatta in Monterey. In the spinal injury unit, particularly, his bingo night every Thursday has become a tradition that no patient wants to miss. He prepares refreshments, sets up bingo games and wheels in patients every Thursday night for a lively night of bingo.

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When the games are over, he works with the clean up crew. During his first three years at the hospital, Dillard attended veterans for about 30 hours per week. In 2007, he received a special pin honoring him for 2,500 hours of volunteer service.

"Volunteering has made me a better, more thoughtful person," Dillard said. "When I see people with spinal cord injuries, and the courage they have to live their lives, it makes my problems seem minimal."

He remembers the time when he didn't have a car and had to ride his bicycle to the VA Hospital to volunteer. "At first I complained because I got caught in the rain," continued Dillard. "However after thinking about the situation, I was ashamed because I was going to a place where men and women would love to be able to ride a bike."

Dillard is active in Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) chapter 3982. He serves as junior vice commander Military Order of the Cootie, assisting hospitalized veterans. He escorts vets through the hospital to their appointments, serves refreshments, and delivers newspapers. He writes get well cards for the chapter, and condolence notes to the widows of deceased members. He was awarded the gold filled Booster Maltese Cross button in recognition of his exceptional service to the chapter.

"Walter is generous, selfless and dedicated," said County Executive Pete Kutas. "His devotion to helping veterans in the community is admirable."

Dillard also serves as Chaplain for the Vietnam Veterans of America, VFW and the United Veterans Council. He is a member of the council representing American Legion Post 881. Besides his voluntary services to veterans, Dillard participates in parades and ceremonies as a member of the honor guard. Serving as captain of the American Legion Post 881, he was appointed to establish, recruit and drill the chapter's honor guard. He gets involved in the Memorial Day ceremonies at the Field of Honor, Oak Hill Cemetery and Moffett Field.

"Walter Dillard is a true friend of veterans," said Ken Kershaw, Acting Director of the Santa Clara County Office of Veterans' Services. "We are proud to present him with the 2008 Friend of the Veteran Award."

The Office of Veterans' Services established the "Friend of the Veteran Award" in 1991 to recognize community members for their outstanding support and dedication to veterans in Santa Clara County. The Office of Veterans' Services was established in 1944 to assist veterans, military retirees, and their families in obtaining benefits and services accrued through military service.

