



Assembly Member **SANDRÉ SWANSON**

News Release

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## Swanson's "Veteran Of The Year" A Tireless Crusader For Fellow Veterans In Need

(Sacramento) – Yesterday, the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee honored veterans across the state as part of the 2nd Annual "Veteran of the Year" celebration. Each Assemblymember selected an honoree from their district, who together attended a luncheon to celebrate the 80 honorees. Assemblymember Sandré R. Swanson (D-Alameda) honored Alex McElree, who is the founder of Operation Dignity, as the Veteran of the Year for the 16th Assembly District.

"I am honored to accept this recognition on behalf of everyone who has served their country without ever asking for recognition or thanks," McElree said. "My work with Operation Dignity is simply an effort to help my fellow veterans, who often fall out of sight and onto hard times once they return home. My goal is to put a spotlight on problems that so many choose to ignore."

McElree served three tours of duty in the Navy in Vietnam, but eventually found himself homeless and dependent on drugs and alcohol. A failed suicide attempt convinced him to turn his life around, devoting himself to other veterans who face similar challenges. McElree founded Operation Dignity in 1993, using his monthly social security check as start-up money. Initially securing a house and ten veterans, Operation Dignity now employs 70 staffers, with an annual budget of \$3.9 million.

The organization provides a continuum of care for homeless veterans and their families. Programs include mobile outreach and a drop-in center, as well as comprehensive support services, including case management, health services, transportation assistance, and food services. McElree's organization also runs transitional and permanent housing in both Oakland and Berkeley.

"Alex McElree served our country with honor. When he came home, his country turned its back on him. Through a feat of heroism that would do any soldier proud, he climbed out of terrible personal depths, devoting his life to helping fellow veterans suffering the same fate. It is a testament to his strength and generosity. I am pleased to honor him today for his service, both abroad and at home, and I hope that his example will highlight the drastic need to support those who fight for all of us," Assemblymember Swanson concluded.

To learn more about Operation Dignity, visit [www.operationdignity.org](http://www.operationdignity.org).



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