Every now and then, as mortals, we have the extraordinary opportunity to encounter and witness the greatness of a true giant. Larger than life, mover of mountains, yet humble with a heart as big as all outdoors.

Vernon Valenzuela was a giant of a man. Not sidelined by his experience in Vietnam, he entered Bakersfield College where his lifetime of selfless service planted its roots. Along the way, Vernon became a Marriage and Family Therapist, sharing his gift of healing with innumerable veterans, undoubtedly saving the lives of many.

Parallel to his efforts of helping veterans and important stakeholders understand and cope with PTSD, Vernon moved into action as an advocate for the youth of Kern County.

My serendipitous moment occurred when Vernon chose me as his assistant on what would be one of his greatest and most lasting accomplishments, the founding of the Bakersfield Vet Center. Through this journey, Vernon created a mecca for veterans who were mentally broken and in need of a light in their darkness. He called to the table a community of dedicated colleagues to create the Kern County Veterans Collaborative, which continues and is thriving today. He, with his knack for moving those mountains, created the Veteran Justice Program on a simple handshake.

These acts are only a minute sampling of the legacy Vernon left to us. He has so moved the people he mentored with his vision that the roots planted years ago at BC continue to grow in all who knew him, even in his absence. Some of those roots have even come full circle, returning to BC, giving Veterans who never even knew Vernon the benefits of his compassion.

There is NO ONE more deserving of the enduring honor of this dedication, etched upon what will be Bakersfield College's mecca for student veterans and there is no community more fortunate than ours, to have called him our own.

HE and we are BC!