President Sonya Christian’s Recognition of Paul Beckworth
Veterans Resource Center Grand Opening | December 10, 2019

Today’s opening of the Vernon Valenzuela Veterans Resource Center marks a major milestone in the history of Bakersfield College. As I stand in front of this amazing facility, I am touched in so many ways. I am touched over this early dream that began with our beloved Vernon Valenzuela, who dreamed of a home for our student veterans. I am touched by the countless volunteers who rallied behind Measure J, and I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the support from our community who said “yes to BC; yes, to our veterans” when they voted for passage of Measure J. Finally, I am touched by our veterans’ services staff who, day in and day, spend countless hours advocating, assisting and helping our student veterans reach success. Most importantly, I would be remiss if I did not highlight one person in particular who has been the anchor for our ship. This person is Paul Beckworth and today, I’m honored to present him the President’s Leadership Award.

Since the time he joined our BC family as a history professor in 2010, he has advocated on behalf of veteran needs. It is probably no surprise for many of you. After all, Paul is a proud veteran himself. He enlisted in the Navy when he was 17 years old. Of course, his parents had to sign for him, which they did reluctantly. But it marked a brave, unforgettable new chapter in Paul’s life, something that remains close to his heart to this day. After finishing boot camp and training at Hospital Corps School, and Field Medical Service School, this young Visalia teenager was stationed at National Naval Medical Center (now Walter Reed) in Bethesda, Maryland. Being stationed right next to D.C., he was able to indulge in all the history he wanted as well as meeting his dad’s family for the first time. Paul was later attached to Marine Wing Support Squadron 273 in Beaufort, South Carolina and then station at Camp Pendleton’s 1st Marine Division where he served as a field corpsman with Weapons Platoon, Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, 5th Marine Regiment.
Some of Paul’s military memories include landing in in Saudi Arabia on Christmas day in 1990 in support of Operation Desert Shield, which turned into Desert Storm a few weeks later. At 19 years of age, Paul had treated his first combat casualties and experienced his first rocket attacks.

Another military memory for Paul is landing in Somalia on December 9, 1992, commencing Operation Restore Hope. The battalion performed a number of missions all over the country, from Mogadishu to Baidoa and other places.

Paul remembers the return home was a thrilling experience as he and his comrades received accolades that Vietnam veterans did not receive. He also remember his mother making him his favorite dinner, enchiladas with rice and potato salad. Then, closing this chapter and ready for a new one, Paul was honorably discharged in 1993 and became in his words, “a civilian.”

And just like what many of our student veterans are doing today, Paul enrolled at a community college, College of the Sequoias, and eventually, Paul and his soon-to-be bride Sandra drove across the country so he could attend Toccoa Falls College in Georgia, where he also joined the Army National Guard. Toccoa, Georgia is 90 miles northeast of Atlanta, at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains; living in a town of 5,000 people in the Deep South was quite a culture shock for two Mexicans from Central California, but he enjoyed his experience. Paul would earn his bachelor’s degree in secondary education/history in 2000 and later earned a graduate degree in history at Clemson University in 2004. Then, in 2009, Paul returned to California and was hired as an adjunct professor by his former school, COS; he was also named Adjunct Professor of the Year. Life changed for him again in 2010 when he found his new home at Bakersfield College.

That same year, student-veterans resurrected the BC Veterans Club. Paul soon jumped in and was involved at the ground floor as the college worked on, then opened, the Veterans Lounge in 2011. He held a number of administrative and faculty roles, and his most recent efforts as the faculty director of Veteran Services witnesses the culmination of the grand opening of the brand new, stand-alone, 4,700 sq. ft., Vernon Valenzuela Veterans Resource Center. Thanks to the passage of Measure J, BC’s student-veterans and dependents will now have a one-stop shop to assist them in their passage to student success.

So today, we commemorate the opening of this very special center and we honor a very special person who, because of his love for teaching, will be returning to the classrooms this spring.
(One of his greatest childhood memories was obtaining his first library card and he used it to spend hours reading history books.)

President George Washington once said in November 1781 during the American Revolution, “It follows then as certain as that night succeeds the day, that without a decisive naval force, we can do nothing definitive, and with it, everything honorable and glorious.”

Paul, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for your passion for helping student veterans and dependents and thank you for always being our force.