



Supplies, food and shelter provided to homeless veterans of Orange County

By [ROSS WATTERS](#)

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Three year Navy veteran Anthony Wilder who served in Desert Storm / Photo by David Muñoz

Fresh showers, clean clothes, sharp haircuts, hot meals and warm smiles were all on the menu at the first annual [Orange County Stand Down](#) event for homeless veterans at Santa Ana College this weekend.

In what looked like a military base camp, the two-day event provided hundreds of homeless veterans of Orange County a cot on which they could rest their heads for 36 hours. The clothing was provided by [Working Wardrobes](#), a nonprofit organization in Costa Mesa that provides those in need with career development and wardrobe services.

The Orange County Stand Down event was sponsored by [Veterans First](#), which helps homeless and disabled veterans in Orange County, and the Rancho Santiago Community College District. This was the first Stand Down event in Orange County.

The model has been used all over the nation in multiple cities to help the nearly 200,000 homeless veterans in the United States. There are 4,600 homeless veterans in Orange County alone.

Shaun Tucker, 43, a veteran and volunteer, served in the Air Force in the first Gulf War from 1986 to 1992. He said he knows what it is like to serve and then feel forgotten.

"Veterans lose their way and become homeless when the government forgets about them," said Tucker. "They should be loved."

Tucker, who became homeless after his time in the Air Force, is now on the right track and loves to help people in need by working for Habitat for Humanity and building houses.

"I made some bad choices after the service that led me to become homeless," Tucker said. "But I thank God now to be in the position I am and to be able to help others. It is rewarding."

During the opening ceremonies, California State Assemblyman Allan Mansoor addressed the veterans.

"Thank you to all of you who served in our armed forces and fought to protect our freedoms," said Mansoor.

Veterans were escorted by volunteers to receive services such as dental exams, vision exams, medical treatment, Social Security assistance and employment assistance.

One veteran said after his shower and gifts that he felt "blessed and appreciated."

Adam Farris, 19, a fire science major at Santa Ana College, jumped at the chance to volunteer to help out the veterans.

"(Veterans) gave so much to us and they fought for us; this is the least we can give them," said Farris.

Dave Mason, who served in the Army and was stationed in Savannah, Ga. from 1979 to 1983, hopes there will be many more Stand Down events in Orange County for years to come.

"I hope it gets another year," said Mason. "Not as many veterans turned up because they didn't have the transportation or just didn't hear about it."

Jesse Holmes, 48, a veteran who served in the Navy from 1984 to 1992, believes events like Stand Down can help people like himself get back on track.

"I just got out of prison and I am getting ready to go back to school," said Holmes. "Life is hard as a convicted felon and a veteran."

Gerald Jennings, 50, a veteran who served in the Navy from 1978 to 1981, shared Holmes sentiments.

"Things were tough for me after the service," said Jennings. "I suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome and that set me back for a long time, but now because of events like this one and the Veterans First organization, I have an interview next week and things are looking up."

Deanne Tate, the president and CEO of Veterans First, hopes the event will bring light to the homeless veterans throughout Orange County.

"I hope the event brings awareness to the needs of the veterans and what we need to do to take care of our own," said Tate.

The next Stand Down event will be held in Compton between Sept. 24 and 26.