



Veterans and artists march in an Independence Eve stationary parade at the *Strawberry Flag* in front of Building 209 on July 3, 2010.

VA Makes Progress on Settlement Deal

As reported in the last issue of the *Strawberry Bullet*, published to mark the 127th anniversary of the Deed of March 1888 granting the West Los Angeles property as a veterans home, and elsewhere in the media, the VA in January announced the settlement of the *Valentini* lawsuit brought to enforce the terms of that deed. Thus far, the VA has met each of its obligations under the settlement agreement. Specifically:

- On February 13 it issued its “written veteran homelessness strategy and action plan for Greater L.A.” The detailed plan commits the VA, for the first time, to providing permanent housing on the West L.A. campus.

- Well in advance of the June 15 deadline, Secretary McDonald named Vincent Kane of the VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans (NCHAV) in Philadelphia as his expert on homelessness for the settlement projects. Kane has spent considerable time in Los Angeles since at least early March. On May 14, he spoke to a town hall meeting in the Wadsworth Theater and said, “There was a breach of trust” and that his job is to fix the problems at the West L.A. campus.

- In early April, the VA issued a solicitation for proposals to prepare a new master plan for the West L.A. campus. The solicitation docu-

ment reflected a strong commitment to permanent housing on the campus and to making the campus a true and vibrant “home” containing much more than just housing and a hospital.

- On June 8, VA announced the selection of a team comprised of HOK, a global design, architecture, engineering and planning firm, Walsh Group, and Core Companies to assist VA and the community in developing a new Master Plan for the West L.A. VA Campus. HOK has extensive global experience with strategic medical campus and facility planning projects. With the announcement of the selection of an urban planning firm, VA is on schedule to develop and release a new Master Plan by October 16, as required by the *Valentini* settlement agreement in January.

After coming to Los Angeles on January 28 to announce the settlement, Secretary McDonald returned to the West L.A. campus on June 4 to open a Welcome Center in Building 257 north of Wilshire that will serve as a portal to services: a one-stop shop for assistance to veterans. That day, he also opened the gates on Wilshire Boulevard and dedicated Building 209 as reported elsewhere in this issue.

Opening the Gates

After being chained and padlocked for decades, the gate to the West Los Angeles VA campus’s Grand Lawn was re-opened June 4, with Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald presiding over a ceremony that included Carolina Winston Barrie, great grandniece of one of the 1888 donors of the land.

“There have been a lot of things going on over the last few years on this land that have not benefited veterans,” McDonald said, standing in front of the wrought iron gate between the intersection of Wilshire and San Vicente Boulevards and the veterans campus lawn.

As part of the VA’s new attitude following the settlement of the *Valentini* land-use lawsuit in January of this year, the plaques which flank the gate are being replaced. The bronze image of a federal eagle was originally accompanied by the words “National Soldiers Home”; some years ago, new plaques reading “National Soldiers Park” were installed when the VA entered into a land deal with the Veterans Park Conservancy (VPC), a non-veteran nonprofit, to establish a public park on the land.

The VPC agreement was among those struck down by the court in the *Valentini* case, and the new plaques (made from melting down the bronze of the VPC ones) will return the “National Soldiers Home” designation.

VA officials said that the gates will now remain open during the day, but will be closed at night for safety and security reasons.

SPECIAL BULLET ISSUE FOR INDEPENDENCE DAY 2015

Lauren Bon and the Metabolic Studio, who installed and maintained the *Strawberry Flag* project at the West Los Angeles VA in 2009/2010 and more recently published the *Strawberry Bulletin* newspaper for military veterans and the arts community in 2011/2013, present this one-shot, one-sheet *Strawberry Bullet* in celebration of Independence Day 2015.

Since the *Bulletin* ceased regular publication in 2013, the Studio has published occasional *Bulletins* from time to time. This month there is much to report, as a new independence may be dawning on the campus.



Our Town

The National Soldiers Home held in trust as a home for veterans in perpetuity is currently managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the second largest cabinet department in the United States, smaller only than the Department of Defense. The West Los Angeles property is the most valuable real estate in the VA network, one which has regarded its health care responsibilities as its main, even sole, function. The *Strawberry Bullet* is communicating to the constituents for whom the property is a home not a hospital. The passages listed here occur in the lives of some of the citizens of this place we claim as Our Town.

March 2015: Metabolic Studio celebrates the 127th anniversary of the Deed of 1888 at *Arcadia's Garden* on the West L.A. campus and distributes strawberry ice cream and *Strawberry Bullets* throughout the north campus and into Brentwood.

March: The Executive Director of the American Legion comes from Washington D.C. for an unprecedented town hall meeting at the historic Hollywood Legion hall concerning land use at the West L.A. VA and the recently announced *Valentini* settlement.

April: John E. Gagen, a 21-year Army veteran, dies. He served in the Vietnam War and was a member of the 101st Airborne Division, 82nd Airborne Division, and Special Forces units. A winner of the Bronze Star medal, SFC (Ret.) Gagan retired from Special Forces in 1978.

May: *Art and Other Tactics: Contemporary Craft by Artist Veterans* opens at the Craft and Folk Art Museum on Wilshire Boulevard. This group exhibition of contemporary craft works by artist veterans tackles the personal and political outcomes of war and military service. It runs through September 6.

June: Replacement plaques for the VA gates (see page 1 story "Opening the Gates") are to be struck from a mold created by veteran Clark Acton, an employee of Vets Corps (aka Green Vets), who created the mold and the temporary SOLDIER'S HOME plaques in time for the ceremony.

June: New Directions announces an all-veteran talent show with cash prizes planned for Saturday, July 25 on the VA campus. Sign up or get information, contact rchambers25@hotmail.com or 562-645-3327.

June: Warriors and Wolves, a nonprofit veterans' animal rescue program, plans bar-b-ques at Serenity Park parrot sanctuary on the West L.A. campus for both Memorial Day and later Independence Day, but has to cancel both for failure to secure the necessary VA permits to conduct the events.

Strawberry Bullet

Published by the Metabolic Studio, Los Angeles
metabolicstudio.org

Lauren Bon, Editor-in-Chief

Terence Lyons, Veterans correspondent

Rochelle Fabb, Contributor

Jen Curtis, Production design

Edition of 1,000



Veteran Graeme Wior and wolf Rider bonding at Metabolic Studio in April 2013. Rider was the special ambassador wolf representing the Warriors and Wolves project of the Lockwood Animal Rescue Center.

Westside Urban Forum Honors VA Settlement

The Westside Urban Forum (WUF) this year presented its John Leighton Chase Legacy Award to a group of people who contributed to the VA's new commitment to put its West L.A. campus to use for permanent housing—"for their efforts in support of the most ambitious plan yet to reduce homelessness and make the Westside a more humane place."

The Forum is a group of real estate businesses, professionals, academics, and government officials who are dedicated to "smart growth" and the improvement of land use and quality-of-life. Each year it presents the Legacy Award to "community-building, place-making projects, programs, or initiatives that make a difference in the lives of Angelenos." This year WUF broke with its history of naming a single person or project and presented the award to:

Carolina Winston Barrie, activist Robert Rosebrock, Dr. Jon Sherin, artist Lauren Bon, *Valentini* plaintiff Vietnam Veterans of America, Bobby Shriver, and VA Secretary Robert McDonald.

For the cause of veterans' housing to be recognized by such a prestigious organization should bode well when it comes to "selling" the plan to the community at large.



Building



Watchdog

We are delighted to report that Building 209 has opened and there are actually veterans living there as you read this.

On June 4, VA Secretary Bob McDonald presided over a "Grand Opening and Ribbon-cutting Ceremony" in front of the building that serves as a "compensated work therapy and transitional residence (CWT/TR) housing unit for chronically homeless veterans" in VA-speak.

"We're going to return this property to what Carolina's family had in mind," McDonald told the audience, referring to Carolina Winston Barrie, a great grandniece of Arcadia Bandini deBaker, who together with Sen. John P. Jones gave the land in 1888 "to locate, establish, construct, and permanently maintain" a soldiers home. The VA's use of land for non-veteran-related purposes had been the subject of years of litigation before McDonald's appointment.

Regular readers of this column may recall that when we began in March 2011, we expressed frustration that despite a 2007 promise from then-Secretary Nicholson to renovate Buildings 205, 208, and 209 for homeless veteran housing, no hammer had yet been lifted four years later. We promised that the Building 209 Watchdog "will keep you posted." For far too long, we had nothing to report and could only howl at the empty promises. And so it was with genuine delight that we stood in the audience and listened as Secretary McDonald said, "We're here to open Building 209—and I would have to say—*finally.*"

And what of Buildings 205 and 208? In May of this year, the VA announced that it had completed a Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment covering Buildings 205 and 208, and it set May 23 as the public comment deadline. Funds for Building 205 have been approved by Congress in the 2015 budget, which shows construction is scheduled to begin this month and completed November 2016. Funds for Building 208 are in the President's proposed 2016 budget, and if approved construction is scheduled to begin January 2016 and completed June 2017.

The Building 209 Watchdog will keep you posted.