Bon Voyage Henry Espinosa

Henry Espinosa is trading his County badge for stamps in his passport.

He is retiring after 35 years of County service, nearly all those years in Social Services where he most recently has been serving as Acting Director.

“I started as an Account Clerk in the Health Department, transferred to Social Services as an Eligibility Worker and also had a brief stint with Public Guardian,” explains Espinosa who says he grew with the County. “I am
grateful for the many opportunities and experiences I have had working for the county these past 35 years. I’ve met amazing people and look forward to lifelong friendships.”

In an interesting twist of fate, Espinosa’s professional career began in the place it is ending, a piece of serendipity he explains as he looks back at his County service, the importance of Social Services and the Department’s hardworking staff.

Q. How has Social Services in Monterey County evolved over 30 years?
A. We have become a strength-based organization with greater clarity about our purpose as a safety net for the county’s most vulnerable population along with a customer/client focus. The concept of being a data-driven organization continues to evolve as well.

Q. What advice do you have for new workers in this field?
A. The constant in Social Services is change…one must remain flexible and open to new ideas and approaches. Never forget that the DSS core mission is to serve and protect our community.

Q. People have different perceptions of Social Services. What would you like the community to know?
A. DSS staff are caring, dedicated and hard-working; this applies both internally and externally. Our work is challenging, but rewarding, and occasionally emotionally complex. The DSS organization has a big heart and we strive to provide caring services to those in need. We serve nearly one in two county residents through the many programs we administer.

Q. Looking back, is there someone who has been a pivotal person in your career and why?
A. I currently work in the Life Foundation Building on South Main in Salinas. Being a life-long county resident, I have memories of Salinas and other areas as they were many years ago. My first paid job at age 16 was for the Sears department store. Some may know that the Life Foundation Building housed the Sears store at that time...so you could say that I started my work life and ended my work life in the same building! There were a lot of other work locations between my first job in 1979 and my assignment in 2019, so I really didn’t work in the same building for 40 years! My first supervisor at Sears, Joan Binder, taught a very young 16 year old how to have initiative and pride in your work. I have carried this with me throughout my work life. There have been other county staff who have contributed to my success. I appreciate everyone’s support.

Q. What's next?
A. My wife of 36 years, Emilie, and I love to travel. We have visited nearly 50 countries and still have several more on our bucket list. We have one daughter, Christina, whom we plan to spend more time with. I also plan to spend some time volunteering and believe in life-long learning, so there may be additional educational experiences in my future. Best wishes to all.
MVAO: Small Office, Big Results

The Military and Veterans Affairs Office may be small but its annual report shows big results.

The MVAO focuses on veterans and their families, providing information about benefits, filing claims and assisting through appeals to help obtain them.

“We are a team of ten serving roughly 40,000 veterans and their dependents,” explains Director Jason Cameron. “This last year, our office brought in over $12 million in benefits and assistance. Most are in the form of monthly compensation payments which increases the income and well-being of our local disabled veterans.”

Veteran’s families are also served, for instance, by connecting dependents of disabled veterans with college tuition waivers.

“Each of the services increases the income and resources available to our veterans which has a ripple effect throughout the entire county,” explains Cameron.

The office also contributes to veterans through the VA Van Ride program and the Homeless Veterans Stand Down.

MVAO staff work one-on-one with veterans and the work often requires some sleuthing to get the client the right benefits, such as this story from Military and Veterans Representative Doug Chandler who was assisting a World War II veteran.

“The veteran had a 10% VA rating for a knee condition (the rating determines compensation), which provided about $140 per month,” explains Chandler. “In exploring the client’s situation, I found out the knee condition worsened and was causing secondary conditions such as back problems and arthritis. We were able to get appropriate increases and the secondary conditions approved by the VA, increasing this veteran’s rating to 90%, which increased his monthly benefit by nearly $1,850.”
Teachers, Charities Benefit from Surplus Give Away

During a special event this week, local non-profit agencies and teachers were able to browse through the County surplus warehouse and take items at no cost.

Old bookcases, unneeded telephones and leftover office furniture and supplies will have a new purpose in the community instead of ending up in a landfill.

Contracts and Purchasing holds these special events a few times a year.

This time, teachers with school ID’s were allowed to participate and there was a great turn out. In all, nine non-profit organizations and nearly two dozen teachers from seven local school districts were able to get much needed supplies for classrooms and offices.

Lisa Wichael-Loomis, Operations Manager from the International School in Monterey talks about how the items she was able to get will be put to use including supporting a student art show.

Community Homeless Solutions and Peacock Acres were among the non-profits receiving surplus items.