



# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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### Veteran who helps others who served earns major honor

By DAVE MASON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

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Steve Baird knows what it feels like to lose everything.

With the help of New Beginnings Counseling Center, the Marine veteran got back on his feet and is now helping others who served their country.

His good deeds have earned him Landlord of the Year.

And now the man who once lost it all feels like a winner.

"What a tremendous award for being able to help and to be rewarded for that!" the Orcutt resident and native told the News-Press on Monday. "That's a double win!"

"My reaction was I was really humbled and just blown away," he said.

Mr. Baird received the award from New Beginnings Counseling Center during a luncheon March 25 at the Coral Casino Beach and Cabana Club in Montecito.

The Santa Barbara counseling center honored Mr. Baird for his work as operational director of Camp Flores, a home for veterans in Santa Maria.

He has helped close to 20 of the center's veteran clients, Michael Berton, the center's development coordinator, told the News-Press on Monday.

"He's a veteran himself. He really understands the unique challenges they go through," Mr. Berton said.

He added that the center is grateful to Fred Pratt, who owns Camp Flores and has been a mentor to Mr. Baird.

Mr. Baird leads Echo Group/Band of Brothers California, the nonprofit that operates Camp Flores and uses team sports to restore a sense of brotherhood that many veterans lose when they return home.

"We have a softball league, a bowling league, things like," Mr. Baird said.

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From left, Victor Virgen, program coordinator of Supportive Services for Veterans Families, stands with Steve Baird, Landlord of the Year, center, and Fred Pratt, property owner of Camp Flores.

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Mr. Baird served from 1994 to 1998 in the Marine Corps and left with the rank of sergeant.

He later worked as a lineman, safety supervisor and a quality assurance auditor at Pacific Gas and Electric Co.

"I became a whistle blower when they blew up the San Bruno pipeline," Mr. Baird said, referring to the 2010 explosion.

"I told the truth, and as a result, I lost my job," he said. "I lost my home and vehicle and everything."

Mr. Baird left PG&E in 2012. He moved back to Orcutt that year from Santa Rosa.

"I had a choice to make," he said about staying silent or losing his job. "As a result, it cost me everything, but at the same time, it gave me the credibility to help others."

Mr. Baird got help as a client of the New Beginnings Counseling Center's Supportive Services for Veteran Families. The program assisted him in finding housing and improving his sense of well-being.

Mr. Baird said Camp Flores helps veterans through a program run for them and by them. "Even the homeowner (Mr. Pratt, who served in the Marines) is a veteran."

Kristine Schwarz, the New Beginnings Counseling Center executive director, said partnerships with landlords and property managers are essential to the nonprofit's success in housing people across the U.S.

"We are grateful for their partnership and collaboration," she said in a news release. "We encourage and welcome others."

For more information or to make a donation, go to [www.sbnbcc.org](http://www.sbnbcc.org).

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