

The California Chaparral Institute

P.O. Box 545
Escondido, CA 92033

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Contact: Richard W. Halsey, Director, (760) 822-0029
Chuck Winant, VVAW-San Diego: neoludd@earthlink.net

County refuses to help US Marine veteran keep his home

Veterans group joins effort to assist as fire district ignores letters and emails from citizens requesting justice

SAN DIEGO, *Calif.* - Despite receiving many pleas from concerned citizens, San Diego County has thus far refused to help Vietnam veteran Joseph Diliberti keep his home of thirty years. It will be sold at public auction over a questionable "brush abatement" lien placed on the property in 2004. Although the county is attempting to develop a regional fire authority, officials have indicated they do not have jurisdiction over the matter. They claim it is the San Diego Rural Fire Protection District's (SDRFPD) responsibility. The fire district has failed to respond to a stream of letters and emails over the past two weeks from citizens requesting justice.

In 2004 the SDRFPD allowed a private contractor, Fire Prevention Services (FPS), to clear native landscaping from Mr. Diliberti's property without adequate notice and while he was away on vacation. A \$25,000 lien was then placed on the property for clearing less than one half acre of shrubs. With fines and penalties, the lien has grown to over \$63,000. The property is scheduled to be sold at public auction after July 1, 2010 to obtain payment. "I've tried to just pay my property taxes, but the county told me I couldn't," Mr. Diliberti said. "They said I had to pay the whole thing."

FPS conducted inspections of all properties within the fire district, looked for violations, issued brush abatement notices, and performed the work. Due to citizen complaints, the district no longer has a contract with FPS.

County Supervisor Dianne Jacob's office suggested Mr. Diliberti collect money from his friends to pay the lien. In fact, several generous benefactors have stepped forward to help him do so. Although humbled by and grateful for the generosity, Mr. Diliberti feels strongly that paying anything to the county sends the wrong message. "It's not about money," he said. "It's the principle that's important here. It's wrong for the government to take a citizen's home because bureaucrats have decided to devalue nature and dismiss our civil rights."

“We don’t understand how Mr. Diliberti’s government representatives can be so callous,” said Richard Halsey, director of the California Chaparral Institute. “He is living an incredibly productive life and provides hope to all of us that the creative spirit cannot be broken. He does not deserve the treatment he is receiving.”

The Institute is joining with Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) to help coordinate the effort to preserve Mr. Diliberti's rights and prevent the county from taking his home. "This is yet another example of the vast gulf between what government representatives say about supporting our veterans and individual rights and what they actually do," said Chuck Winant, the local representative for VVAW. "They abandon both when it is convenient to do so."

Mr. Diliberti's home is a tree house and a group of handmade, ceramic structures formed from local clay. Dedicated to living lightly on the land, he lives without electricity in the rural backcountry of San Diego County. “I just want to be left alone so I can live in peace, enjoy nature and share its truths with anyone who wants to listen,” Mr. Diliberti said.

For a short video clip of Mr. Diliberti discussing how a warrior deals with the horrors of war, please view the following file. This clip includes graphic language and may not be suitable for younger audiences:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhNB8dR_uqU

For additional information on this matter please visit:

<http://www.californiachaparral.org/helpjosephdiliberti.html>

The California Chaparral Institute (CCI) is a non-profit science and educational organization dedicated to promoting an understanding of and respect for Mediterranean-type ecosystems, helping the public and government agencies create sustainable, fire safe communities, encouraging citizens to reconnect with and enjoy their local, natural environments, and preserving healthy native habitats for all living things. www.californiachaparral.org

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in 1967. Today, many veterans are denied justice -- facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are being cut back or eliminated. VVAW believes that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. www.vvaw.org



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