

From the battlefield to the park

It's not easy to get Tony Molina to talk about himself. He'll shyly admit to pride in his years of volunteer work, military service and legacy as an advocate for veterans, but if you really want to get him talking, ask about his wife, Sue Bradle Molina, with whom he shares four children, 11 grandchildren and a new great-grandbaby.



THINK PAWSITIVE
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BY GRETCHEN AMMERMAN

"We'll be married for 50 years this July 4," Tony said. "She's an inspiration to our whole family. When I volunteer she's usually right beside me; we're a good team."

An Olympics hopeful in speed skating until an injury forced her to retire young, Sue has stayed fit. While I was sitting down with Tony, she was on a four-day solo hike along the Rogue River.

Though marrying Sue was the best decision of his life, little else has defined Tony as much as his service as an encryptor from 1967 to 1969 during the Vietnam War.

"I was assigned to the 595th Signal Company at Phouc Vinh," he said. "We supported the Big Red One Infantry. I experienced the TET Offensive and later was assigned to Bac Lieu."

His discharge came after being transferred to the 7th Special Forces at Ft. Bragg, California and for a little while he stayed in the state working as a data specialist for a telephone company.

A few years later, his company transferred him to Newport and he and Sue happily



Molina's family gathers at the memorial he spearheaded at Newport's Don Davis Park

settled outside of Siletz and began to raise a family.

But soon, Tony found himself troubled because, though his wartime experiences were similar to many, his willingness to be open about them was different.

"I met parents who had lost sons in Vietnam that didn't want to talk about it. I made friends that served there and didn't tell me for a long time. On my trip home after my discharge, people yelled at me and said hurtful things and it was awful, so I can understand. Many Vietnam veterans had an especially hard time readjusting to civilian life because of these experiences."

With a desire to create some healing, Tony asked the City of Newport to create a memorial for Vietnam War casualties from Lincoln County.

"They said if I raised \$50,000 they would match it," he said. "I raised \$60,000. [Former City Manager] Don Davis teased that I was a conniver because I had said all we need is 20x20 space and we ended up with a whole park."

The park, now named after Davis, is located south of Nye Beach along W Olive Street. The memorial features a wall of names and a poem written by Tony, "The Poem for Hope and Healing," etched into a large slab

of marble.

"When we dedicated the memorial, people came that had protested the war," Tony said. "Some told me it helped them remember that those they protested against were people too, many of whom had been drafted and they asked for forgiveness. It was pretty moving."

Formally retired in 2003, Tony has kept busy with projects like a soup kitchen he and Sue started in Siletz and helped run for seven years, serving as post commander of VFW Post 732 and as president of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 411. In 2008, he accepted a part-time position as veteran representative for the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

One of his favorite events held by the tribe is the Celebration of Honor at the Chinook Winds Casino Resort, which honors veterans and active-duty service men and women and includes a tent with information about PTSD and agent orange support and other critical information.

"It's neat to see young veterans come into the tent," Tony said. "Seeing them get the help they need makes the celebration well worth it."

Tony's healing began when he came home to a friend made during the war.



"When I was on base, we had a puppy named Itty Bitty," he said.

"I pestered my platoon leader to let me send her to my parents for her safety. He finally gave in and we headed for Saigon. The person in charge of flights laughed and said no way was I getting on with a dog but when the next chopper came in, a lieutenant colonel and a captain said we could take their place. We made it to Saigon and instantly a Vietnamese cab driver came over and asked about her."

When told the story, the driver offered to take them at no charge to a Vietnamese veterinarian who had studied in the US.

"He could fix it so I could avoid quarantine, but it would cost 200 dollars," Tony said. "That was exactly how much I had, so I gave it to him and headed back to base. When I came back to the US, my mom said she knew exactly when I landed. 'All of the sudden Itty Bitty got more excited than I've ever seen her,' she said. 'And I knew right then you were safe.'"

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