

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Veteran promotes healing through music

By SARA BUSH NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT



Arthur Petersen, left, a member of the 101st Airborne Division during World War II, salutes during last year's Memorial Day ceremonies at Santa Barbara Cemetery.
THOMAS KELSEY / NEWS-PRESS FILE

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A local veteran and musician is using his talents to help fellow service men and women struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder and other neurological injuries.

Victor Hurtado's nonprofit organization, Center for American Military Music Opportunities, aids in music therapy research and provides training in the music media arts for service members.

The nonprofit is run by veterans who want to help fellow veterans through music therapy, Mr. Hurtado said.



Victor Hurtado
COURTESY PHOTO

"Music can be very therapeutic," he said. The therapy includes song writing. "They are able to write about their experiences and see something come to fruition," Mr. Hurtado said.

Mr. Hurtado's own musical career began in 1986 while he was in the Army and served as the assistant director on the United States Army Soldier Show, using his talents to boost the morale of his peers.

After six years he left the military to pursue his education. In 1994, while attending law school in Santa Barbara, he heard about the local charity Christmas Unity, which provides services, toys and food to families in need. Because he did not have much money, he wrote the song called "Give Them Back Their Christmas," and sold tapes to raise money for the cause.

Not only did he raise \$1,000 for the charity, he was asked to perform the song on the annual Unity Telethon. His work on the telethon lead to opportunities including the chance to work as an associate producer on a CD, "Sounds of Christmas Unity," featuring Kenny Loggins and other artists.

Mr. Hurtado also has devoted his time to developing military talent. He helped military members

competing on shows like "America's Got Talent," "Nashville Star" and HGTV's "Design Star," and founded the Operation Rising Star competition. He will be bringing some of the military's top talents to Santa Barbara for the Pierre Claeysens Veterans Foundation's Memorial Day Ceremony.

In addition to the special musical element, the one-hour Memorial Day service will include an address from Vandenberg Air Force Base commander Col. Keith Balts, and will end with a flyover of vintage warplanes. The service will be held at 10 a.m. at the Santa Barbara Cemetery, 901 Channel Drive.

Also on Memorial Day, Solvang's VFW Post 7139 and American Legion Post 160 will conduct a special Memorial Day Ceremony and Plaque Dedication to honor the 18 Santa Ynez Valley residents who died while serving in World War I through the Afghanistan War.

The event, set for 11 a.m. at the Solvang Flag Pole, will include a flyover of World War II aircraft, and followed by a barbecue hosted by the Solvang Vikings Club.

For more information on the Pierre Claeysens Veterans Foundation's Memorial Day Ceremony, visit <http://www.pierreclaeysensveteransfoundation.com/memorial-day-2015>

To learn more about Mr. Hurtado's nonprofit organization, go to <http://cammomusic.org>.

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