

El Bissarra, USN

Elmer 'El' Bissarra enlisted in the United States Navy from his home state of Hawaii in 1966. He is a graduate of the Hospital Corpsman school, and from there he was assigned to the Naval Hospital Philadelphia where he worked as a Physical Therapy Technician helping to reintegrate amputees who had been wounded in Vietnam.

In Yokosuka, Japan he was assigned to the Triage Clinic where he prepared wounded Marines for transportation back to various hospitals the United States. El was discharged from the Navy in 1969, as a Hospital Corpsman Second Class, in San Diego where he made his home.

From there El joined the Imperial Court de San Diego, becoming a Prince for Life in 2013. He is a familiar face in many organizations with ties to the San Diego LGBT Community including Being Alive San Diego, where he continues to contribute 32 hours a month. He is active in the broader community, volunteering for the color guard with the American Indian Warriors Association where they open and close Pow wows in San Diego County.

He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Behavioral Sciences, and put his training to use at the Asian Pacific Islander Community AIDS Project and the San Diego American Indian Health Center where he served as a Case Manager and Substance Abuse Counselor. He also started the Native American Sobriety Group Sweet Grass meetings that he still helps lead.

Recently El earned a Master's Degree in Non-Profit Management at the age of 64.

Barbara Jean Crusberg, USMC

Barbara Jean Crusberg was in the first group to be honored on The San Diego LGBT Community Center's Community Wall of Honor in 2004. She was an active member of the LGBT community from her arrival in San Diego in 1975 until her death in 2002.

Born in 1938, she enlisted in USMC at the age of 18 in 1956. However, her military service was brief as she was confronted by her superior officer and when asked, admitted to being a lesbian and so left the military.

Her involvement with the San Diego LGBT community started when she moved here from LA in 1975 and served as a member of the Board of Directors of Mama's Kitchen, AIDS Walk, the Metropolitan CC, Diversionary Theatre, and the Greater San Diego Business Association. She was also one of the first women to be recognized by the Imperial Court.

She helped to bring the AIDS Quilt to San Diego in 1993, and co-chaired the Gay and Lesbian Advisory Board under Major Maureen O'Connor. She was the first openly gay city commissioner, serving in that capacity for 4 years.

Other awards and recognition include "Businesswoman of the Year," "Outstanding Female Citizen," several Nicky Awards, Ms. Gay Pride 2000, and 2001 Grand Marshall of San Diego Pride Parade.

She was well respected in the whole San Diego Community and was always a strong advocate for Women's Rights. She died in April 2002 from cancer and now joins fellow military as the first female USMC member on the San Diego LGBT Veterans Wall of Honor.

Lynn Pender, USN

Lynn Pender was raised in North Carolina and served in the United States Navy from September 1993 to September 1995 as a Logistics Technician Seaman. Drawn to the opportunities a military enlistment offered, Lynn found camaraderie and pride in the tight knit experience that military life brings. Aware of the Department of Defense policy regarding LGBT service, known as Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Lynn was determined nevertheless to serve her country. She left the Navy to embrace her life as a lesbian. From there she immersed herself in the San Diego LGBT Community.

Lynn's presence in the community has been felt through her involvement in the Stonewall Citizen's Patrol, where she has served as a Patrol Volunteer contributing hundreds of volunteer patrol hours and a member of the Board of Directors. She is an active member of America's Finest City Softball League for the past twenty years. She has also volunteered countless hours with San Diego Pride.

Her contributions to the San Diego Community take the form of participation in 'Operation Courage is Beautiful' where she secures donations and goods for active duty deployed women in the form of the iconic 'Care Package from Home.'

Lynn works as a Protective Services Worker within the Indian Specialty Unit of Centralized Child Welfare Services unit of the County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency. Because of the stresses COVID-19 has placed on families, she has seen her workload increase significantly. Her devotion to her mission enhances the well-being of us all in San Diego.

Jose Rivera III, USN

Jose Rivera III served in the United States Navy from 1991 to 1995. Jose enlisted due to a strong belief that all Americans should be allowed the opportunity to enlist and serve the Constitution of the United States. An interest in science helped him achieve the top of his class in the Hospital Corpsman school, where he earned the rate of Hospital Corpsman. Departing the Navy as a Third Class Petty Officer, he used his GI Bill to pursue further study in science.

Soon after leaving the Navy Jose began to immerse himself in the San Diego and regional LGBT Community. He actively participates in America's Finest City Softball League, Front Runners, Varsity Gay League Volleyball, the Different Strokes Swim Team, and the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus. His talents in dancing, set design and construction have greatly enhanced the reputation and professionalism of the chorus.

Jose works for Scripps Hospital Laboratory in the Microbiology Clinical Lab where the lab has teamed and partnered with labs worldwide to research and address the epidemiological origins and characteristics of the COVID-19 virus. Through his and colleagues' contributions, science is adding valuable research findings to the body of knowledge about the virus.

Jose's commitment to San Diego and the region extends to teaching 8th grade in Coachella Valley Unified School District, the San Diego School District, and King Chavez Preparatory Academy where he teaches students proper laboratory procedures, and the fundamentals of chemistry and physics.

Tristan Sotomayor, USN

Born in Dublin, Georgia, Tristan Sotomayor started life dedicated to athletics and academics. Attending Georgia College and State University, he graduated with a bachelors' degree in history, concentrating in historic preservation where he worked in Macon, researching historic homes and writing articles about those involved in preservation of historic structures.

Enlisting in the US Navy at 25 years of age, Tristan earned the rating of Aviation Structural Mechanic. His first assignment was the anti-submarine warfare squadron VP-30 in Jacksonville, Fl. Tristan serviced and repaired the squadron's P-8 Poseidon, a military variant of the Boeing 737. From VP-30 Tristan was assigned to HSM-73 in San Diego where he worked on the H-60R helicopter. Entrusted with leading 37 young Sailors, he supervised the day check crew, led trainings, and directly mentored 17 Sailors. He managed all daily maintenance actions, helping new Sailors navigate the transition from civilian to military life. Under his leadership, Tristan was responsible for 100 % of his Division advancing for two years in a row, an accomplishment seldom achieved in the fleet. For this he was awarded the Navy and Marine Achievement Medal.

In April of 2019 due to the change in policy toward Transgender troops service in the armed forces, Tristan made the difficult decision to leave the Navy to embark on his authentic life. Accepted to the University of San Diego's Clinical Counseling Mental Health program, in March of 2019, Tristan started work to become a licensed therapist. While at USD, Tristan founded an organization called C.A.P.E (Counselors Advocating & Pursuing Equity), a space for new therapists to discuss the barriers underrepresented communities face as counselors. He has dedicated over 160 volunteer hours to The San Diego LGBT Community Center's Youth Centers from March of 2019.