



# Teamsters Local 63

Secretary-Treasurer Randy Cammack

Summer 2010

## Wounded Veterans Honored



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# More Than Just A Job

## Secretary-Treasurer's Message By Randy Cammack

When I look at the members of Local 63, I see strong unionists and dedicated employees. Our local, and the Teamsters as a whole, have the most committed and hard working members out there. I realize, however, that life does not revolve strictly around our jobs. As well as being union members, you are citizens and family people. Your families, community, and country are huge parts of your lives, and we are proud to recognize these achievements in this issue.

We can look to the past and see Local 63 retirees who have served our country well in the Armed Forces. Many of them, including the three you will read about in this issue, were injured while protecting the freedoms we enjoy. It's the right time to recognize and honor these heroes, who have inspired others to serve as well.

If we look at the present, we see members very active in the community, especially the current effort to get kids into supervised boxing as way to keep them healthy, competitive



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*Randy Cammack*

and fired up about their achievements. It takes a world of adults to make this happen for kids, and our members have stepped up big-time to help young people like the terrific Joseph Diaz of South El Monte, who has trained with our members' help for many years.

Finally, the future belongs to our children. Here you read about a young fellow, son of Local 63 member Gary Bryant, Sr., being encouraged in track and field, who performed with outstanding skill in his age group at the 800-meter distance run. What better way to shape a kid's outlook than help him work through the practice and drills, and then cheer him on to a great outcome?

What we see in these stories about our members and their families is the same kind of energy shown by every Local 63 union member who participates, organizes, votes, and cares. We recognize them and hold them up as an example to all the rest of us, with our great appreciation.

# Stories of the Wounds of War: Three Members Recall the Past



*Richard Castro, Larry White and Joe Hernandez*

The men and women of the United States Armed Forces put their lives at risk every day to protect the rights and freedom of all Americans. Sometimes these soldiers are killed or wounded in battle, the ultimate sacrifice they can make for their country. In cases such as this, the soldiers are awarded the Purple Heart medal.

These are the stories of three current and former Teamsters Local 63 members who were wounded in battle while serving our country. While only two received Purple Hearts (due to a technicality) all three are heroes. They all put their lives on the line, and almost lost them, in the name of freedom and democracy.



## **Richard Castro Retiree, Driver, Heart Land Dairy**

It was 1969, two days before Christmas, and Richard Castro was stationed in the jungles of Vietnam with the First Cavalry Division.

He was a Sergeant and Combat Engineer, whose job it was to ‘blast stuff.’ But on this day, his only concern was staying alive.

“We were getting hit really heavy at a landing zone,” remembered Castro. “Lots of mortar rounds were landing around us and some guys got hit. I took my squad to go help them and that’s when I got hurt.”

Two mortar rounds landed near Castro and his men, one in

front of him and one behind him. The second one landed close enough to lift him off his feet and toss him forward. When he regained his senses he realized that shrapnel from the explosion had hit him in his back. For sustaining these wounds from a hostile force, Castro was awarded the Purple Heart.

The wound still gives him pain over 40 years later, but from his point of view it’s all a part of war. “I was just a kid at the time, and life goes on after,” he said. “I met a lot of good guys when I was in the Army, so it wasn’t always bad. But when it was bad, it was bad.”

The Veterans Affairs office has been helping Castro since

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he left the service in 1970. His claim is still open and he receives a disability pension. Despite the injury and other life-altering experiences from Vietnam, he holds no hard feelings or grudges against the men he was fighting against.

"I don't blame anybody," explained the 33-year Teamster. "I can't blame the other side, they were just kids like me. They had no choice, just like us."

Over the years, Castro has stayed modest when it comes to discussing his time in the military. A lot of his coworkers never knew of his service or injuries, and he preferred it that way. One person who seems to have picked up where Castro left off, however, is his son, who is a Master Sergeant in the US Marine Corps.

"He has been in the service for 18 years and done two tours in Iraq. He's a career military guy," stated a proud Castro. "For a father it's a lot more emotional when it's your son rather than you out there. He's back home now and I couldn't be more proud of him."



**Jose Hernandez  
Retiree, Driver, ABF**

The story of Jose Hernandez' time in the military spans the entire gamut of emotions — from heroism to tragedy, and eventually to forgiveness and recognition.

Hernandez volunteered for the US Army in 1966, when he was only 16 years old. By the time he was 17, after going through basic training, jump school, and jungle training, he was deployed to Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division. It didn't take long before he was experiencing the worst that the confusion of battle can bring.

"We were stationed in the North of the country, what was called I Corps," explained Hernandez. "One day we were pinned down and taking heavy fire, so we called in air support. The jets came in and shot too early and ended up hitting us."

His unit lost 68 men during that 'friendly fire' incident. Another 72 were wounded, including Hernandez. "I took three rounds to my legs," said the 37-year Teamster. "I'm just really lucky that they didn't hit any higher."

Hernandez was transported to the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital in Da Nang. He was patched up by Army doctors and amazingly went back into the field after three weeks. "I didn't like the hospital food," he joked.

In a sad twist, Hernandez and the other soldiers who were wounded by friendly fire that day were not awarded Purple Hearts. His commanding officer thought at the time that it would be bad for morale to award the medals after being shot by their own planes.

On top of that, Hernandez was denied benefits from the

Veterans Affairs office for 42 years after the war. "When I enlisted I was only 16 and not a citizen," he said. "They didn't have any records of me being there."

Recently, with the help of the Internet, Hernandez started to get in touch with men he had served with. One of these men was his lieutenant from Vietnam, who remembered the "crazy little guy" who would later be nicknamed Rambo. "He went to the VA and told them I had served, that he remembered me, and demanded that they give me my benefits," Hernandez explained. "It's a really good feeling to finally be recognized."

As for never receiving a Purple Heart for suffering wounds in battle, Hernandez isn't angry or bitter. "I know what I did and I know where I was, and no one can take that away from me," he emphasized. "It was an honor to work with the best in the service."



**Larry White  
Retiree, Driver,  
Pacific Motor Trucking**

For US Army veteran Larry White, his time spent as a 'grunt' in Vietnam had a profound effect on his view of life.

A member of the 25th Infantry Division from 1968 until 1970, his was with his unit operating in the area around Duc Pho when they engaged

# Membership Meeting

the enemy in a firefight. A grenade exploded near White and a piece of shrapnel hit him in the face, just under his eye. Six days later he was back in the field.

When reflecting on his wartime experiences, White maintains a very positive outlook. "When I look back on Vietnam I think about the people I served with," he said. "We depended on each other for our lives. It was a really positive bond we had."

After his time in the military ended he didn't need help from the Veterans Affairs office. "I only recently started going to the VA," explained White. "I had great medical coverage for all these years as a Teamster."

In May of this year, White traveled to Washington, DC, and visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial for the first time. "I went by myself and walked the wall in both directions," described White. "It was very surreal and I'm glad I finally got to go and see it."

Since leaving the military, White has lived with an appreciation for life and has valued every minute since his return to being a civilian. "I look back and realize that a lot of people didn't make it home and realized that I'm lucky," he added. "War made me value life, but not just my own. I learned just how fragile life really is."

*General Membership meeting are held the last Saturday of the month at the Rialto Union Hall, 379 West Valley Boulevard. The meeting begins at 9 a.m.*



# Young Runner Finishes Fast at USA Junior Olympics



he finished second place in the final race that needed finish-line technology to determine a winner.

In the end, after the judges scrutinized the photo finish, both he and the first place runner finished with a time of 2:20, only one second behind

A long and competitive track and field season recently ended for Gary Bryant, Jr., with an impressive showing at the USA Track and Field Junior Olympics.

The nine-year-old Bryant, son of Local 63 member and Ralphs employee Gary Bryant, Sr., almost broke a world record for his age group on his way to a photo finish in the 800-meter race.

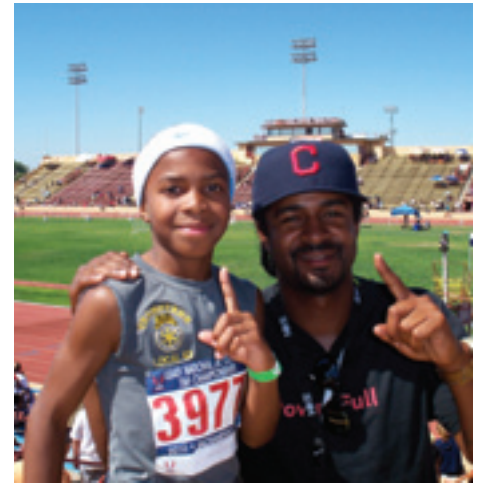
The meet, held in Sacramento, was the culmination of a six-month-long qualification campaign. Multiple rounds of regional qualifying events preceded the Junior Olympics, and the younger Bryant has been more than impressive throughout the season.

He ran to a second-place finish at the Las Vegas Regional competition to book his place in the Championship, where

the Bantam age group's world record set by Obea Moore in 1989.

"It was an honor just to be there," said the elder Bryant, who also serves as his son's coach and trainer. "There are so many talented kids running in California, we feel that just making it to the finals was a great achievement. Gary is really excited with how well he ran."

Bryant, Sr., had special praise for his fellow Local 63 members at Ralphs for helping



his son reach his racing goals. "I passed a hat around the warehouse and people donated whatever they could," he explained. "Big Dog gave my son a Teamsters patch that he wore on his jersey and warm-ups, and the Local sponsored us. Without the Teamsters, both at Ralphs and at the Local, we wouldn't even have been up there."

Now that the season is over, will Gary Jr. be resting his legs in preparation for next year? "He's like a typical nine-year-old," laughed his father. "Once one thing ends he's already moved on to the next thing. Now it's time to go back to school and start playing football."

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[www.teamsters63.org](http://www.teamsters63.org)

# Teamster Youth Boxing Club Member Wins National Title



*Joseph Diaz Jr.*

Joseph Diaz, Jr., a member of the Teamsters Youth Boxing Club in South El Monte, has won the senior division national title.

The 17-year-old South El Monte High graduate, who has been training in the Teamsters program for over seven years, traveled to Colorado Springs recently to compete in amateur boxing's National Championship.

Ben Lira, the head trainer at the Teamsters Youth Boxing Club, had nothing but praise for the young pugilist. "He is a very talented young boxer," said Lira, a former boxer himself [local legend]. "To do so well in the

senior division at only 17 is remarkable. To win the title is amazing."

Lira also had high praise for Teamsters Local 63 and Joint Council 42, who have been supporting the youth boxing club for over 13 years. "Boxing is an expensive sport. These kids need gloves, bags, equipment and a ring," he explained. "Then there's the travel. The kids go to competitions throughout the country, and the Teamsters help pay for it. It really couldn't be done without

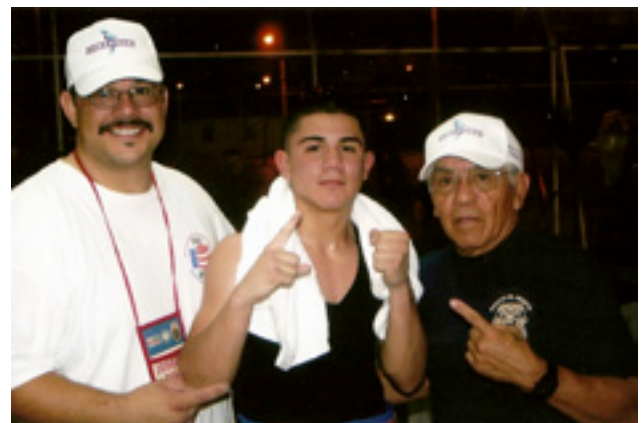
them."

Local 63 Secretary-Treasurer and Joint Council 42 President Randy Cammack, who helped start the program in the late 90's, feels proud that a member of the Teamster-backed club has turned into such a talented athlete. "We originally started this program to help get these young people get off the streets and do something productive," Cammack

declared. "We quickly began to realize just how good they all were, and to have one of them win the national title is no surprise."

Diaz, despite his obvious talent, isn't going to rush into professional boxing. "By winning the national title, he gets to fight for the national team," Lira added. "As of now, his focus is set on training hard and getting to the 2012 Olympics in London."

Next time you hear Joseph's name, he may have a gold medal hanging around his neck.



*Joseph Diaz Jr., with his father, left, and trainer Ben Lira*

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# Teamster Local 63

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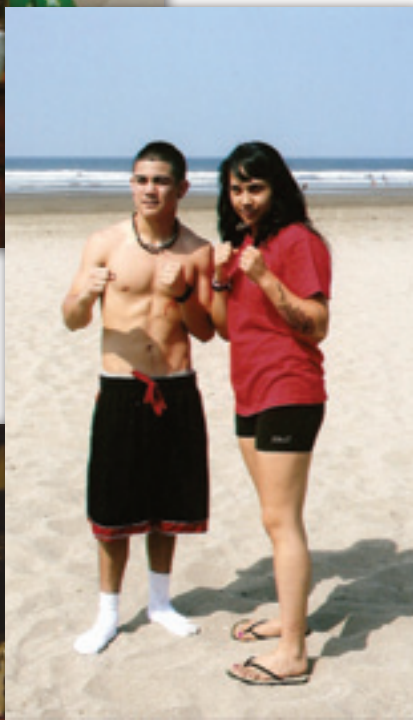
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