Press Release
IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Long Beach Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
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Naomi Rainey-Pierson, President
Long Beach Branch NAACP


The NAACP Long Beach Branch will conduct a special tribute to Veterans on November 12, 2017 at 3:30 PM at Ernest McBride Sr. Park, 1550 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd, Long Beach, CA 90801. Our program is Appreciation and Recognition of Veterans, with a reception. The program theme is a Tribute to our Veterans: Peace, Protection, Unity and Service. The 2017 honorees are Richard Conant, Walter Larkins, William Ward, Mike Murray, Ray Jones, LeVon Powell, Braden Phillips, Alexander Dixon Jr., Peter Gravett, Jack McDowell, Brenda Threatt, Gus Orozco, Willie Hose, Jesse Johnson and other nominated veterans.

Walter Larkins, from Fort Leonard, Missouri moved to Germany before the age of two. At 8 years old his family moved back to the United States, settling in Los Angeles. He attended West Point. Taking after his father, he served in Germany with the U.S. Army and after four years left the service as a captain, returning to the United States. Along with previously owning multiple businesses in health care technology, one of his other notable achievements is president of CDR Benefits, LLC, which provides health and life insurance. Larkins became a notable sales professional, entrepreneur and businessman, serving on multiple non-profit boards and commissions today.

Braden Phillips, [invited special guest] was accepted an appointment to the US Naval Academy and graduated from Annapolis as a member of the Class of 1968. He earned a BS in Engineering and was commissioned an Ensign in the US Navy. He also earned a Master of Science degree in Financial Management from the Naval Postgraduate School in 1975, and worked in the Office of the Navy Comptroller and on Capitol Hill with the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. In 1989 he commanded the USS Ogden (LPD-5), homeported in Long Beach, CA. Mr. Phillips has done much in the city, and today is still active in the community, serving in leadership positions including the Boards of the California for Equality and Justice (CCEJ), ChildNet Youth and Family Services, and American Red Cross to name a few.

Peter Gravett [invited special guest] served more than 20 years with the Los Angeles Police Department and simultaneously served with the California Army National Guard. Upon retiring from his law enforcement career he to active military duty rising thought he commissioned officer corps to the two star rank of Major General. In his final assignment he served as Commanding General of the 18,000 older 40th Infantry Division (Mechanized) becoming the first African American National Guard Division Commander in the 225 year history of the National Guard in the United States. He also served as a
Senior NATO Military Representative in Kiev, Ukraine. Upon retiring he served in Governor Brown’s Cabinet as Secretary of Veteran Affairs.

Jesse B. Johnson, Jr. is a United States Army Vietnam Era veteran, serving 1971-1973 as a Personal Specialist – Specialist 4th Class. Johnson founded the 100 Black Men of Long Beach, Inc. in 2008. He retired from the City of Long Beach as the City’s Diversity and Economic Opportunity Officer after serving 29 years. In this position, he ensured that diverse, local and other business enterprises were given an opportunity to compete successfully in providing goods and serves to the City of Long Beach. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in business administration from California State University, Los Angeles with honors and taught business classes as part of the California State University, Long Beach Small Business Certificate Program, and the American Contract Compliance Association Training Institute (Morgan State University). Johnson has many professional boards and affiliations, such as 100 Black Men of Long Beach, Inc., vice president of Long Beach Branch NAACP and Long Beach Certified Development Corporation Advisory Board to name a few.

Raymond D. Jones was born June 8, 1948 in Kansas City Mo. He attended Lincoln High School and in 1969 he volunteered to enter the United States Army to avoid the draft and risk of going to Vietnam. He completed his basic and advanced infantry training at Ft. Leonardwood, MO and he was then sent to Vietnam on February 18, 1970. Raymond remembers flying to Vietnam was his first airplane ride and the having ear of combat. He was stationed in Camrahn Bay South Vietnam. He achieved the rank of a specialist -4. Raymond served in the 3-62nd signal company and the 307th Signal Battalion where he delivered and set up of radio communications throughout the southeast Vietnam region including Nha Trang, Dalat, An Khe, Qui Nhon, PleiKu and Saigon. He received recognition as an expert with M16 and a metal of service for serving in the Vietnam War. Raymond served 15 months in Vietnam and was blessed to survive and the war and return to his family. Raymond graduated the head of his class in 2002 to become a Flight Attendant. He continues his passion a Flight Attendants today with Southwest Airlines. He also volunteers to read to the blind at the Long Beach VA and committed to assist veterans in learning about the benefits available to them through the Veterans Administration.

Brenda Threatt – Captain/Chaplain for the U.S. States Army Reserves and is the Executive Director, U.S. VETS – Long Beach.

Jack McDowell – First Sergeant, USMC for Original Montfort Point Marine for 23 years, serving in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. He also won a Congressional Gold Medal.

Willie House – Gunnery Sergeant, USMC for 22 years. He was the last African-American Platoon to graduate from Parris Island Korea.


Mike Murray – Lance Corporal, USMC serving in Vietnam. He is Chairman of U.S. VETS – Long Beach Advisory Council, an Educare Specialist for LBUSD, President of Long Beach Education Foundation, Board of Directors for United Cambion Community, and Chair of United Cambodian Community Advisory Council.
William Ward is the chair of the LB Branch NAACP's Veteran Affairs Committee. Bill Ward was drafted into the Army in 1962 and from basic training was assigned to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. From there Mr. Ward went to Saigon/Cholon, Vietnam, where he was involved in the overthrow of the Ngo Dinh Diem government. From manufacturing, he went to the City of Long Beach in purchasing. He received his master's degree from California State University, Long Beach in 1980 and started working for Long Beach Unified School District. In 1984 he also worked for the Los Angeles Olympic Committee at the Coliseum. Mr. Ward is involved at the American Legion 496 as a service officer. In addition, he also works with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 8615 in Long Beach. This post is recognized as All-American. Bill Ward can be seen in Veteran activities throughout the community, especially Veterans Parade.

The NAACP is inviting all veterans, family members and friends of veterans who served our country in the past or currently on active duty, to attend. The purpose of this event is to thank the men and women who served in the military to protect our country. The NAACP believes it is extremely important that we recognize our veterans, keep their stories, issues, and plight our veterans face every day in our conscience. The LB Branch NAACP also thanks the veterans and their families for the sacrifices they make for the security of our country.

Salute a Veteran by bringing him or her to the Long Beach Branch NAACP Veterans Recognition on November 12, 2017, 3:00PM to Ernest McBride Sr. Park, 1550 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd, Long Beach, CA 90801. This meeting is open to the public. The Long Beach Branch NAACP President in Naomi Rainey-Pierson.