By Christine Clark   Nov 10, 2016

Frank Montoya. Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

UC San Diego Employee Who Served in Middle East Honored with Veteran of the Year Award

Decorated U.S. Navy veteran Frank Montoya of Housing, Dining and Hospitality to be recognized at Nov. 10 campus ceremony

Frank Montoya had been working at UC San Diego for eight years when 9/11 happened, a terrorist attack that shook the world, the nation and the campus community. For Montoya, the event would be especially life-altering because the Navy Reservist was recalled to active duty and mobilized to support military operations in the Middle East, leaving behind his family and job at the university.

"As a Navy Reservist, you know the potential to be called to active duty is always there, but it still was surprising," said Montoya, who has been at UC San Diego for a total of 23 years, most recently as

President of UC San Diego's Student Veteran Organization Seeks to Enrich Lives of Fellow Vets

Spring Keyzers-Flanagan, president of UC San Diego's Student Veteran Organization (SVO), has many goals for the organization, but her main priority is helping her fellow student veterans.

"I want to provide them with the resources and connections so they will be able to smoothly transition into a career upon graduation," she said. Keyzers-Flanagan has helped student veterans network by organizing events such as a "hack-a-thon," which was co-sponsored by Amazon.com, and a networking night that included employers such as Northrop Grumman and International Business Machines (IBM).

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superintendent for property operations and planning. "I am very grateful my family was supportive and so was the university. I was reassured my job at Housing, Dining and Hospitality would be here for me when I got back."

Montoya's 24 years of service in the U.S. Navy, including his 16 years in the Navy Reserves, will be recognized when he receives UC San Diego's Veteran of the Year award at a campus ceremony taking place Thursday, Nov. 10, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Supercomputer Center Auditorium on campus.

"I am humbled," Montoya said of winning the award. "I am proud to be a part of the UC San Diego community. I have worked at the university for most of my years in the Reserves, and this job has allowed me to have the best of both worlds: my Naval career and my career at UC San Diego."

He added that he can see that the university has implemented some valuable programs to support veteran students and staff.

Montoya first enlisted in the Navy at age 18. Although he spent a large part of his childhood in California, he had been living in Kentucky at the time and saw the Navy as an opportunity to return to the Golden State.

"I liked the idea of serving in the military and once I joined, I really enjoyed the professional environment," he said. "I was proud to be a part of what my country was doing globally. It felt truly worthwhile."

In his early years in the Navy, Montoya attended boot camp in Illinois, studied aircraft maintenance and was later assigned to a squadron at NAS Miramar, San Diego. Montoya and members of his squadron deployed aboard the aircraft carriers USS Enterprise and the USS Coral Sea in support of Navy missions in the Western Pacific. His squadron supported drug obstruction missions in the early 1980s and was responsible for tracking drug smugglers with the Coast Guard and Drug Enforcement Agency to intercept illegal imports at the height of the U.S. war on drugs.

"It was work that I felt was impactful and I hoped we were making a difference," Montoya said.

After eight years of active duty service in the Navy, Montoya decided to reenlist as a selected Reservist and was assigned to a fleet logistics support squadron in San Diego. He was soon also hired to work in UC San Diego's Housing, Dining and Hospitality.

He said the skills he learned in the Navy prepared him to thrive at UC San Diego.

"The discipline, training and leadership of the military have served me well," Montoya said. "I learned to live and work by the Navy core values of honor, courage and commitment."

Montoya was hired as a senior building maintenance worker at Housing, Dining, and Hospitality in 1993 and since then, his responsibilities and career has grown.

"My experience in aircraft maintenance operations, running maintenance crews and managing maintenance personnel prepared me – as it is essentially what I do here at UC San Diego," Montoya said.

Montoya earned several personal decorations while in the military, including the Enlisted Aviation Warfare Specialist Pin, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, the Navy Expeditionary Medal and others.

After he returned home safely from active duty and serving in the Middle East, he returned to work at UC San Diego. Five years later, the father of four decided to retire from military service to spend more time with family, many of whom will be at the Nov. 10 ceremony.

"I feel very fortunate to work at UC San Diego," said Montoya. "I feel part of a community. I have seen the tremendous growth of the campus during my time here and feel like I have grown with it and shared a small part in its success."

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