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Waves of patriotism

Flag provider offers banners for flying high on all occasions

By Lillian Cox
SPECIAL TO TODAY'S LOCAL NEWS

CARLSBAD — Last fall Richard Dinse started a business doing what he loves.

The retired Marine and Vietnam veteran choreographs flag displays for military, veteran, law enforcement and fire department events from weddings to funerals.

He also provides flag arrangements for political fundraisers, conventions and meetings, as well as church, civic, school and Scouting events.

"You can liven up a banquet room with table decorations, but when you use a flag display it creates an atmosphere participants can relate to," he said. "Flags send a powerful message that is interpreted differently by each person."

Dinse has an inventory of 400 flags that includes indoor and outdoor flags representing the nation, its 50 states and five territories.

He has flags of all the armed forces as well as special ensigns representing military service in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

He also has religious flags representing many faiths, from Catholic and Episcopal to Jewish and Buddhist. And, he recently ordered 16 Olympic flags.

Dinse said he paid between \$180 and \$225 for each flag with a stand.

"A flag display with 50 states costs a customer about \$550," he said. "That's about \$10,000 worth of gear."

Dinse approaches each project by looking at the venue and designing a configuration to fit both the location and the occasion.

For a funeral, he might create a biography of sorts, using state flags to represent where the deceased was born, lived and died. If the person was a veteran, the flags from the states where the person was stationed may be included.

"My goal is to foster excitement and motivation created by the presence of flags at an event," Dinse said. "Their presence, regardless of the venue, adds a special touch and meaning."

Dinse said he is filling an important market niche.

"Shops won't rent flags because they get damp, dirty and torn," he said. "If you can control inventory, you can keep your flags secure and in good condition."

He said he guarantees 100 percent customer satisfaction.

"We hired Richard for a celebration of the 233rd Birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps last fall," said David Nydegger, CEO of the Oceanside Chamber of Commerce. "He took a look at the site, and the arrangement was beautiful. All of the flags were neat and crisp. He said he would do it perfectly, and it was."

Dinse said he's seen an increase in regard for the American flag since 9/11.



In addition to providing flags of many states and countries, Flagkeepers offers displays for funerals. In November, flags lined the aisle of Faith Lutheran Church in Vista during a memorial service for a retired Marine. Richard Cook



Flagkeepers

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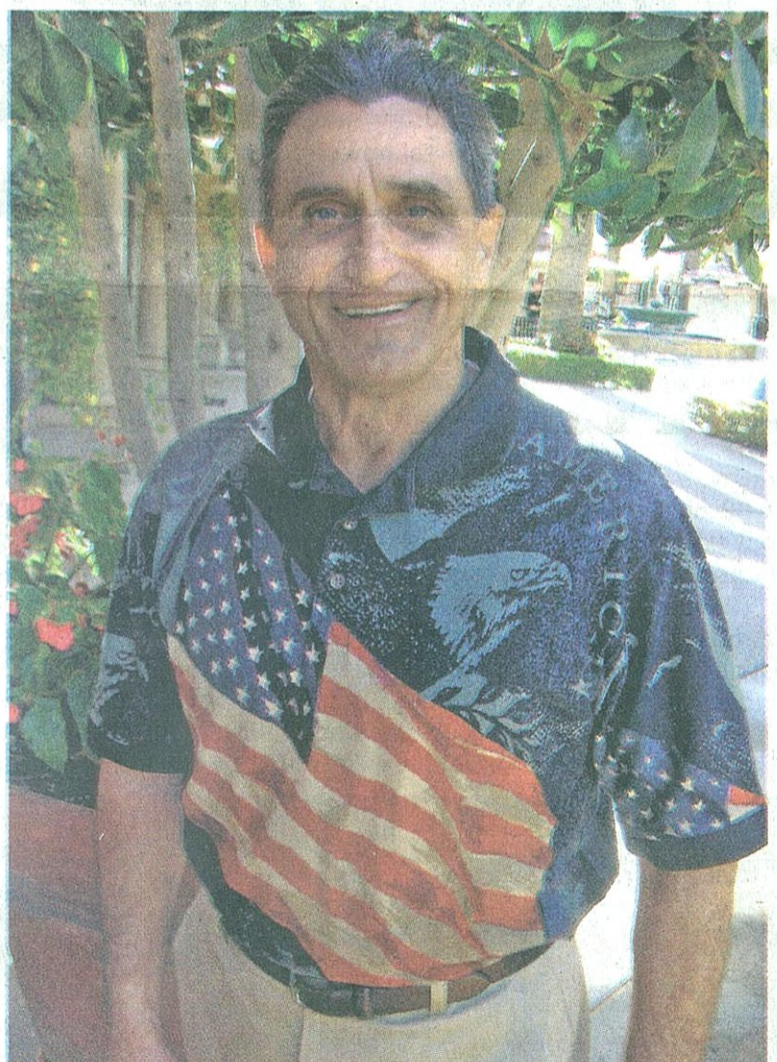
INFO (760) 583-3087 or Richard@flagkeepers.us

"To me, the flag provides a special meaning of the service I provided to the Marine Corps and the other people I served with," he said. "It's a reminder of my service and that of those who didn't make it back."

Dinse is careful to observe flag protocol. An American flag always flies above other flags in an arrangement. If a flag is flown at night, it is lighted. If a flag is worn, discolored or tattered, it is considered unserviceable and is destroyed.

He said he is saddened and frustrated when he sees tattered flags flying or ones that are left out overnight without being lighted.

"That simple piece of cloth — whether it represents the nation as a whole, a state, a U.S. territory, a branch of our military, a religion, a sport or an organization — that single symbol has captured the will and determination of generation after generation of its followers," he said.



Carlsbad resident Richard Dinse, a Vietnam veteran and retired Marine, says his flags can add a special touch to weddings and funerals as well as bring color to military events. Lillian Cox

Lillian Cox is a freelance writer who lives in Encinitas.