

Judge Pregerson Receives Award from Department of Veterans Affairs

A long-time Los Angeles advocate for the homeless, Circuit Judge Harry Pregerson was honored recently by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for his work toward improving the lives of homeless veterans.

The Award of Appreciation was presented at a presentation January 16, 2000, at VA headquarters in Washington, D.C. by acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Hershel Gober. "Few, if any, Americans have done as much to improve the lives of our fellow veterans," Gober told the crowd in attendance.

Judge Pregerson, at 77 years of age, is the oldest active judge in the circuit. Since 1972, he has been instrumental in creating organizations that provide housing, employment and rehabilitation services for homeless vets. Judge Pregerson, a war veteran himself, was severely wounded in the battle of Okinawa during World War II.

While a U.S. district court judge in Los Angeles, Judge Pregerson ensured construction of 3,800 affordable housing units to replace homes removed to make way for the Century Freeway. He oversaw the housing program under a consent decree from 1972 to 1995. The Century Freeway Housing Program provided funds to acquire the Westwide Residence Hall that houses 500 formerly homeless veterans and is the largest housing and employment center for homeless vets in the country.

His work with homeless vets continued in the 1980's, when in 1988, he founded the Bell Homeless Shelter at a federal supply center in southeast Los Angeles County. One-third of Bell Shelter's clients are veterans. But he didn't stop there. In 1989, Judge Pregerson partnered with charities, veterans groups, labor organizations, the federal General Services Administration and then Mayor Tom Bradley to start the Westwood Transitional Village, which provided furnished apartments for homeless families, with preference given to veterans.

In 1994, Judge Pregerson helped start the Salvation Army's Haven Program, which arranges housing and provides support services for homeless vets. Recently, he helped bring together judges, law enforcement and county officials to create a "homeless court." The court can clear an offender's record of minor violations, providing an incentive to complete a rehabilitation program and return to a productive life.

During the battle of Okinawa in World War II, Judge Pregerson received severe wounds. He became an active member of the Disabled American Veterans organization. A native of East Los Angeles, after military service the judge completed a bachelor's degree at the University of California at Los Angeles. He received his law degree from the University of California at Berkeley.

Pregerson had a private law practice before joining President Lyndon Johnson's presidential campaign in 1964. He served as a judge of the Los Angeles Municipal Court and Superior Court before Johnson appointed him in 1967 to the U.S. District Court.