

VETERAN OF THE MONTH

San Diego - May 2021

By Holly Shaffner



Sallay Kim, Major, U.S. Army (retired)

Our Veteran of the Month can be defined as a trailblazer, and leader. Not only has she served her country for over 20 years (Enlisted to Officer), served in overseas assignments including in Iraq, but now she serves as the President and CEO of the Miramar Cemetery National Support Foundation and is the first woman in that position. We congratulate Major Sallay Kim on being this month's selectee as Veteran of the Month.

It all started in 1989 when the daughter of West African immigrants knew she would need to find a way to pay for college. She researched the military branches and chose the Army so she could "be all that you can be." She had a goal early in her career to get educated and as a young Non-Commissioned Officer, she stood 12-hour shifts and took classes to chip away at her associates degree. Just like many young military men and women, she didn't know where the hard work would lead her, but now looking back, she was setting herself up for success.

The Army recognized her potential and selected her for a degree completion program for her bachelor's degree and then for Officer Candidate School. She was designated as an Engineer and was assigned to Army Intelligence.



She had several tours as an Intelligence Officer including a tour in Iraq while the U.S. was helping to rebuild the country. She cannot tell us everything she did in the sandbox, but she provided daily intelligence briefings to the most senior leaders in the region.

Fast forward to retirement from the military and how do you know what your second career should be? For Sallay, she read some books, had some self-reflection on what she is good at and enjoys doing, and set her next goal on a master's degree in Event Management.

She enjoys being a problem solver and credits all those military briefs and planning exercises which led her to next chapter.

She now owns her own event planning business called, Serenity Event Solutions, a company that plans and manages events in Southern California where her clients get "peace of mind, every time." She uses her event planning skills and leadership experience in her volunteer work as well. Sallay has volunteered in many organizations over the years and currently gives her time to three local organizations. She volunteers with Military in Transition Firefighter for a Day which is for military members leaving active duty who want to see what it is like to be a firefighter, Veterans Association of North County where she helps to coordinate a monthly food distribution and then delivers food to her military brothers and sisters, and Miramar National Cemetery Support Foundation.

Sallay has been volunteering with the Foundation since her arrival to San Diego in 2015. She wanted to find a cause that gave back to veterans and this organization was a perfect fit as veterans go to their final assignment. The mission of the Miramar National Cemetery Support Foundation is to preserve the rich memories of our fallen brothers and sisters while beautifying the sacred land upon which they rest. She joined the nonprofit organization after she was recruited by the (then) President of the Board of Directors. She has risen through the ranks handling tasks from event planner to fundraising, secretary and Vice-President of the Board of Directors to President.

"It is an extreme honor to continue my service to San Diego military veterans and their families," said Sallay Kim. "I enjoy giving back to my community and it is a labor of love."



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Sallay has an ambitious goal during her two-year tenure – If she can get the newly designed Armed Forces Memorial Amphitheater at Miramar National Cemetery funded, and through the Veterans Affairs approval process, she will consider her tenure a success. She will need to raise about \$600,000 to build permanent bench-like seating.



This seating area will allow for hundreds of visitors seeking a place to rest during veteran's events (currently visitors stand or sit on foldable chairs for ceremonies). The successful addition of amphitheater seating will benefit tens of thousands of veterans, their families, friends and the general public in future years. There is no federal funding for this project so the foundation must raise the funds through donations.

The Foundation also hosts a Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremony every year. This year's theme for Memorial Day is "Dear to My Heart: Honoring Military and VA Nurses" and will feature Brigadier General Jeannine M. Ryder, the Chief of the Air Force Nurse Corps. Due to the pandemic and restrictions on crowds, the event will be all-virtual with the recorded ceremony being posted on the Foundation's website before Memorial Day.

As Sallay moves to the next chapters of her life, she hopes to get more education and find some fun things to do like yoga in Hawaii, more rounds of golf, and making her Mother's recipes come to life. She will continue to give back to her community and hopes to be a mentor for young girls who look like her. She believes that "all things are possible" and will continue to spread that message.

We have no doubt that Sallay will continue to inspire her community and will find innovative ways to fund that amphitheater for her military brothers and sisters – after all, she is a problem solver!



For more information about the Miramar National Cemetery Support Foundation or to donate to the amphitheater project, follow the organization on Facebook@MiramarCemetery or visit www.miramarcemetery.org