

Nevada Appeal staff report

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103-year-old WWII veteran receives much needed dental care



Frank Minervini poses with Advanced Dentistry by Design staff and Assemblyman P.K. O'Neill, second from right.

World War II veteran Frank Minervini is celebrating his 103rd birthday with much needed dental work provided by Randy Wright, DDS at Advanced Dentistry by Design in Carson City after a series of communications that began with a single email to Assemblyman P.K. O'Neill, who represents District 40 including Carson City and parts of Washoe County.

A family friend of Minervini reached out to the assemblyman requesting help for Minervini, an O'Neill constituent, on Dec. 7, the anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

"This man served our country in World War II," O'Neill said. "It's time we served him back. We owe something to our elder population, veteran or not, to make sure they're taken care of."

O'Neill forwarded the request to Matt Morris at the Office of the Governor and the state Aging and Disabilities Services Division. Morris reached out to Kat Miller at the Nevada Department of Veterans Services, who contacted Linda Haigh of the Community Health Alliance, a federally funded health center in Reno, who agreed to help Minervini through the Adopt a Vet Dental Program founded by Haigh. AAVD placed Minervini on a waiting list for service.

A few days later, O'Neill went to Wright's office for a routine cleaning, and told him Minervini's story.

“Dr. Wright volunteered to do the work, and sooner rather than later,” O’Neill said. “I’m very impressed and happy with the way the governor’s office, the Adopt a Vet Dental Program and Dr. Wright responded to help Frank out. The best part of my job as an assemblyman is helping my constituents like Frank, and being able to put the right people together.”

Minervini joined the Navy at 17, traveling the world as a machinist repairing ships. In 1944 a ship he was repairing was torpedoed by the Japanese. Minervini survived in the water for two days with a shattered knee before being rescued.

Following his 20 year service in the Navy, Minervini continued to travel, summering in Tahoe and wintering in Arizona well into his 90s, working at national campgrounds through a federal program that exchanged campsite stays for work in the parks. Seven years ago, Minervini was placed in a group home in south Reno.

AAVD is the only program of its kind in the country, providing dental care to veterans who don’t have the resources to obtain dental care. The program recruits dental professionals to donate their services and raises funds to offset dental lab and emergency dental care costs.

“There is so much need and long waiting lists,” Linda Haigh, founder of the AAVD, said. “In some cases these vets go 20, 30 or even 40 years without help, so each case takes months to resolve.”

AAVD received the Newman’s Own Award, a national honor for select non-profits for innovative programs to improve the lives of veterans and military personnel in 2014.

“The most rewarding part of the Adopt a Vet Dental Program is seeing firsthand how grateful our low-income veterans are for an opportunity to get their teeth fixed,” Haigh said. “We know that once Frank’s restoration is finished he, like all the veterans we serve, will be able to eat and digest his food properly and be pain free from abscesses and infections because he could not afford to go to a dentist.”

Jim Snyder, a veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps and volunteers with the Adopt a Vet Dental Program, said the hardest thing for a veteran is to ask for help. Snyder received help from AAVD when a disease affecting his teeth, jaw and nerves caused his teeth to crack.

“I was on the wait list for the program for 18 months and when my time came it was hard for me to accept that something good was about to happen,” he said. “I also had a hard time asking for charity, as I had worked hard all of my life. It is truly exciting to see Frank get the help he needs from Dr. Wright so quickly.”

Wright has pledged his support to AAVD for future patient care.

“I had no idea AAVD existed before this,” Wright said. “I’ve helped people in need throughout my practice one by one, but AAVD gives me a better platform to help identify needs, especially with our veteran population who may be without care or resources.”

In a dental office decorated for the holidays, Minervini, who was born in 1912, replied to the question of what he wanted for Christmas with a grin and a twinkle in his eye, “Whatever they’ll give me.”

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