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Veterans Rose Garden Opens

Local veterans now have a spacious garden area nearby to conduct Tai Chi, meditation and other healing arts. A ceremony to celebrate the completion of the historic Women Veterans Rose Garden at the Los Angeles National Veterans Park was held Dec. 5.

Well-known community leaders and philanthropists Peter and Merle Mullin led the event, a joint effort of the Veterans Park Conservancy (VPC), which raised more than \$1 million to restore the World War II era garden as a healing environment, working with the Veterans Administration's Greater L.A. Healthcare System.

The garden is the VPC's first major project since the group removed rusted chain link fences and installed major perimeter fencing with pilasters around the VA property and the National Cemetery. It is also a key component of the VA's new Integrated Health Initiative, Patient-Centered Care, which among other aspects, provides alternative therapies to veterans such as Tai Chi, yoga, meditation and other treatments to help veterans through their healing process.

Peter Mullin said thousands of veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq now have a "tranquil and wonderfully peaceful place for recuperation." He reported that this site is one of only four prototypes in the entire VA system nationwide. The garden is also the first phase of the VPC's ambitious plans for the park—an outdoor amphitheater, various activities, a running track, volleyball court and other activities and veterans tributes.

"We are breaking new ground here, literally and figuratively," Mullin said.

"Not only is the approach to healing different, but the sheer number of veterans in need is staggering—several hundred thousand,



WOMEN VETERANS ROSE GARDEN—From left, the Leadership Chairs of L.A. National Veterans Park Peter and Merle Mullin, Director of Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare Center Donna Bieter, Actress Debbie Reynolds and Director of Veterans Park Conservancy Richard Anderson celebrate the completion and opening of the Women Veterans Rose Garden at the L.A. National Veterans Park in West L.A. .

a great many with physical, emotional and other severe disabilities."

Merle Mullin introduced the legendary Debbie Reynolds, who gave an emotional account of how she was affected by her three trips to visit troops in Korea as a 17-year-old, which she called "the most amazing experience of my life." The actress-singer called the garden "beautiful" and offered her support for the veterans.

In addition, two veterans took the stage to acknowledge how the VA's new alternative therapies have positively changed their lives.