

## LOCAL NEWS

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### RB man joining other vets for arts festival

**MILITARY:** His theatrical talents take former soldier to Denver with others for event.

By Kristin S. Agostoni  
DAILY BREEZE

When the U.S. Army came knocking in 1969, Mike McCann temporarily scrapped his plans to find a decent job, settle down and start a family in the South Bay.

And with the war raging in Vietnam, opportunities to put his theatrical talents to work seemed slim, if not nonexistent.

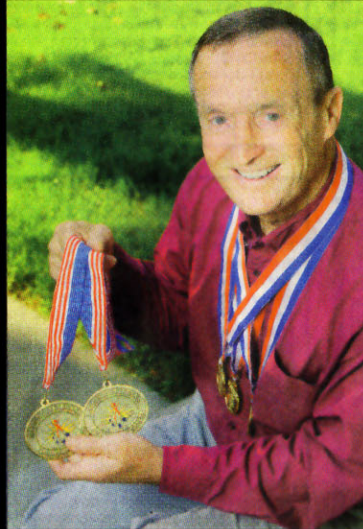
Fresh out of California State University, Long Beach with a bachelor's degree in theater arts, McCann wasn't convinced the military would give him a chance to use it.

"You associate the military with warfare. You follow commands and do orders," said McCann, 60. "When do we have time for the arts? When do we have time for creativity?"

But today he gives the Army more than a little credit for cultivating his interest in the performing arts.

And more than 35 years later, his old military ties have kept him tapped in.

Next week the young recruit who landed in Fort Eustis, Va., as a producer and actor for military recruiting and training videos heads to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Denver, where he was selected to showcase his work with roughly 100 other veterans, including seven from California.



Redondo Beach resident Mike McCann is headed to Denver for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival to showcase his theatrical talents. He recently won medals for three original videos.

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ARTS/A11

### ARTS: RB man to bring varied background to national event

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Open to any servicemen and women receiving treatment at Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities, this year's competition drew roughly 2,700 entries nationwide, said spokeswoman Susan Broschat. Categories include music, drama, dance and art.

"It's very therapeutic for veterans," Broschat said.

McCann will land in Colorado with three gold medals under his belt for a trio of original videos: a patriotic poetry reading, a solo comedy sketch and a film dedicated to children with parents on active duty.

McCann, a San Pedro native who grew up in Redondo Beach, is a tall, slender man who speaks excitedly about his upcoming appearance, but with a clear, strong voice suited for the stage.

He knows he's an amateur with a modest budget and limited options.

He used his own two-story Maria Avenue home in at least one film and relied on friends' editing equipment. He found the poem he'll recite on Oct. 23 — "The Sands of Christmas" — on an Internet site.

And, of course, "talent was cheap," McCann joked.

He wrote himself a part in the comedy sketch and tapped his 9-year-old granddaughter, Ciarra Stebbins, for the film, "Message from the Beach."

It follows the girl as she scrawls a message in the sand for her father and McCann's son-in-law, John Stebbins, who is enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard. That scene unfolded on a Marin County beach.

McCann sees the festival as a chance to pursue an interest he can't enjoy during his day job.

After spending years in the auto industry, he works as a veteran employment representative for the state's Employment Development Department.

He dabbled in community theater over the years, namely the defunct Palos Verdes Players, and he also models on the side.

But the annual arts competition puts him in touch with other veterans and "makes me ageless," he said.

And it helps defy the stereotypes.

"People don't associate veterans with an artistic, sensitive side," McCann said.