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Veteran shows off his creative side

by Drew Holland

After singing "Mack the Knife" from a wheelchair, one man stood up and waved his dismantled prosthetic leg in front of a roaring crowd. Another man who had lost nearly half his fingers captivated the audience with his beautiful piano playing. Unlikely performers? According to Army veteran and longtime Redondo Beach resident Mike McCann, these are the kinds of things that can happen at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. McCann was invited to the festival this year after winning three gold medals in the solo comedy, solo patriotic poetry and multimedia video categories.

"Being a winner and selected to perform in Denver at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is one of the biggest honors of my life," said McCann. "I think of the veterans no longer with us who gave so much, and it keeps me humble."

The Creative Arts Festival, presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the American Legion Auxiliary and Help Hos-

pitalized Veterans, is the culmination of a yearlong fine arts talent competition covering a variety of categories and involving 3,000 participants nationwide. The festival is open to all veterans receiving care at VA medical facilities. This year it was hosted in Denver during the week of Oct. 17.

McCann is an outpatient from the VA in Long Beach for a respiratory condition he has as a result of his military service.

"I have a respiratory disability and it takes discipline to control this condition," said McCann. "VA has helped me control this condition so that I can maintain my ability to perform. I am thankful I have the VA. Where would I be without it?"

McCann, now 60, grew up in Redondo Beach and graduated from Cal State Long Beach with a bachelor's degree in theater arts in 1968. In January of 1969, he was drafted into the Army where he worked in the command information office at the Army transportation center at Fort Eustis, Va. There he used his experience in the the-

(Please turn to Page 39)



Mike McCann