

Veteran

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ater to help produce training materials. McCann went on to work for Nissan and Toyota in their training departments. He currently works as a veterans representative in Inglewood.

McCann said he discovered the veteran talent competition through his work helping veterans.

"In the process of doing my work I went online to the Web site, www.creativeartsfestival.org, and it talked about these different events they have," said McCann. "I knew something about the VA in Long Beach because I had been sending my clients there for services. So I followed the directions, contacted the recreation specialist at Long Beach and the rest is history."

This year at the festival, McCann read the poem "The Sands of Christmas" by Michael Marks.

"The poem is about troops in Iraq at Christmas time," said McCann. "To me there is nothing more disconcerting than our troops having to be at war in the field and away from their families at Christmas, the time of peace for all mankind."

McCann also won gold medals for his solo comedy "K9 Dog Vet" and his short video "Message from the Beach."

"My video is dedicated to the children who are left behind when their parents are called to active duty in the military," said McCann. "It features my own granddaughter, Ciara. She grew up with very little time with her father who was serving at sea in the Coast Guard."

McCann said the creative arts competition and festival are a source of encouragement to veterans.

"It's very therapeutic in the sense that it really gives you a sense of self-worth," said McCann. "A lot of veterans have suffered in the past and suffer today from the trauma of being in the military. Being able to express themselves artistically, and also to network and share with veterans and get together as a group, is invaluable."

McCann is not only an artist but an athlete, too. Through his involvement with the creative arts festival, he was introduced to the National Veterans Golden Age Games. The Games is a national competition open to all U.S. military veterans age 55 or older who are receiving care at any VA medical facility. It features events like swimming, bicycling, discus,

shot put, bowling and golf.

This year the event was held at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla., during the week of May 21. McCann, who had been an athlete during high school and college, won bronze medals in the age 60-to-64 classes of both the quarter- and half-mile sprint bike races.

McCann said he had competed at the senior Olympics in Pasadena and San Diego but this was his first national competition.

"At the national level, I was able to pull off some bronze medals," said McCann, "which I think says a lot about our lifestyle here in Southern California. We can work out around the clock, the bike path is down here and you can stay fit if you really want to. Even if you are a disabled veteran, you can still stay fit if you really work at it. There are plenty of people at the VA to help and encourage you to stay that way."

McCann said participating in the games made a big impression on him.

"It has both given me inspiration and made me humble," said McCann. "It has brought me a great deal of humility when I see the people who go out there and do so well even though they might be in a wheelchair, or blind, and they're going out there and putting in these marks that you would not believe. That is so inspiring to me. It also gives me something to bring back to my workplace. When I deal with my veteran clients, it gives me something to tell them."

McCann said he wants to encourage other veterans to take advantage of the opportunities available through the Golden Age Games and arts festival.

"The important thing," said McCann, "is that the veterans in the community know, chiefly if they're going to the VA and they have artistic talent or they have some sort of performing talent, there is a place for them to take this talent and enjoy themselves. If they are an athlete and they have been going to the VA and they would like to go to the Golden Age Games, they ought to step on up. That is what it is here for. Life is about experiences. Veterans have two things — their experience in the military and they can have this experience. That is something nobody can ever take away."

Considering he plans to participate in future arts festivals and games, McCann is clearly far from finished enjoying new experiences.