

Vernon of Manzanita Apartments: Living a Life of Service, Love, and Community

For Vernon, life has always been about service — to his family, his community, and those who need a hand along the way. A proud United States Marine Corps veteran, he comes from a long line of service: uncles, cousins, and his father, an Air Force Master Sergeant who became Florida’s first Black fire chief. “Everything I’ve been taught along the way, from my parents and the Marines, I represent it all today,” Vernon said.



Yet even a life defined by discipline and leadership did not shield him from hardship. After facing family struggles and losing his housing, Vernon spent 11 months living in his van. But even amid uncertainty, he never lost his generosity. Just days after moving into his new home at Community HousingWorks’ Manzanita Apartments, he gave his van to a young mother and her daughter who needed it more. “It was more than just a mode of transportation. It was truly a blessing,” he shared. “I was moved by love, and I pass it along.” He even laughed about switching to a bike afterward: “I need exercise anyway. I’m happier on my bike.”

Vernon’s path to stability began through Community Housing Works’ permanent supportive housing program at Manzanita Apartments. Once he moved in, he finally had a safe, permanent home, and the freedom to focus on what matters most: family, community, and purpose. “When I first walked into my apartment, I felt like a prayer had been heard and answered.”

Vernon’s life has always been about uplifting others. Known to everyone as “Coach,” he has spent more than 33 years mentoring youth in San Diego, teaching conflict resolution and life skills long before formal programs existed. “I was a mentor before the term mentoring was even coined,” he explained. “What I thought was a sacrifice was actually an investment.”



Today, he continues to support interfaith programs and community initiatives, offering guidance to younger generations and sharing his experience with neighbors and staff alike.


Looking ahead, Vernon sees Manzanita as a stepping stone, not the finish line. “At the rate I’m going right now, in five years I should be able to make a choice whether I want to buy [a home]... I’m able to save a few pennies, help support my grandbabies back to school.”

“Supportive housing is often just a stepping stone. People are looking for stability so they can move forward with their lives. When we’re able to get them housed, you see how true it is—they can and do succeed beyond it.”

Allyson Manquen, Case Manager for Permanent Supportive Housing at CHW partner Interfaith Community Services

Vernon’s story demonstrates the true impact of permanent supportive housing beyond a place to live: the stability to heal, thrive, and invest in the lives of others. Through Community HousingWorks, he continues to inspire his community, embodying resilience, generosity, and an unwavering zest for life.

Wrap Around Support for Veterans in Permanent Supportive Housing

 **Housing Retention:** 94.1% of veteran households in CHW communities remained stably housed in 2025.

Permanent supportive housing provides formerly unhoused individuals, residents with a destabilizing disability, and formerly unhoused veterans with a safe, stable home, along with social and supportive services, access to community resources, and skill-building programs.