



2025 Civic Leadership Honoree - Dan Harden

Dan and family moved to La Verne in 1985.

Formerly working in the Insurance business, he changed careers to become a teacher at San Dimas High School and later transferred to Bonita High School. Accepting a teaching position in Bonita Unified School District was strongly influenced by Dan's wife, Annette, who was a teacher at La Verne Heights Elementary for 35 years. Dan is the father of Shawn Harden and Devon Harden. They attended Allen Ave Elementary School, Ramona Middle School and Bonita High School. Today Shawn is a Commander in the U.S. Navy and Devon is a Sgt in the La Verne Police Department.

Early in his teaching career at San Dimas High School, colleagues recognized his leadership skills immediately and elected him Vice President of the Bonita Unified Teachers Association. A year later he was elected President. Dan remained active in BUTA all his teaching career. His teaching assignments included history, government and economics. After four years he transferred to teach those subjects at Bonita High School. Once there, in addition to teaching, he was also active in extracurricular activities as a football coach and a track coach. June 1993 he was selected as the head football coach and continued working as an assistant coach for Track and Field.

Four years later he was named Co-Athletic Director to work with long-term Athletic Director Kitt Holk. That year Bonita High School's athletic program was honored by the L.A. Times as the High School Athletic Program of the Year for the Pomona Valley.

Have you ever thought about how the Heisman trophy got to Bonita High School? Well, Dan Harden remembers the moment well. During his tenure as Athletic Director at Bonita he received the most amazing phone call from a former Bonita High School Football Star. It wasn't any former football player; it was Glenn Davis. He called and asked if he could leave his Heisman Trophy at the high school. The next day Dan met Davis and his wife, Yvonne, in the high school quad. The elderly couple walked up, and he had the Heisman tucked under his arm like a football. He was very insistent that this not be publicized. He just wanted to give the Heisman to Bonita High School and not make a big deal out of it. But he did want one thing. There was a small trophy in the school's trophy case. No one at Bonita knew anything about the trophy. Davis explained it was given to him in the 1940's by the La Verne Merchants Committee. It had meaning to Davis. So, he left with the smaller trophy under his arm.

Dan's dedication to teaching went far beyond coaching football and track, in fact he is one of the school district's most decorated teachers, receiving awards such as:

- Bonita High School Teacher of the Year
- Bonita Unified School District Teacher of the Year
- California Teachers Association Teacher-in-Politics Award
- La Verne Chamber of Commerce Outstanding Teacher Award
- Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 11128 Claremont, CA Teachers Award
- Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12034, San-Dimas La Verne, Service Rendered to the Community Award
- Veterans of Foreign Wars of The United States, 9th -12th Grade, National Citizenship Education Award for the State of California.

In 2007, after 22 years of teaching, Dan retired, or so he thought. Only a couple of years later Dan was recruited to be the Director of Education at the Fairplex and worked with numerous school districts, universities, colleges, business partners and community leaders to implement the Career and Technical Education Center (CTEC) using Fairplex facilities. CTEC provided hands-on, high-quality career training and technical education that prepared students for long-term real-world success in careers in ceramics, hotel and restaurant management, conservation and wildlife management, construction, fashion design, automotive maintenance, visual art design, and water technology. Dan brought to CTEC his commitment to bettering the lives of youth and his wealth of knowledge, expertise, and innovation acquired in his 22 years of education and civic experience.

It all began as a civics lesson for his son's Shawn and Devon. He took his boys to La Verne City Hall to ask why there was not going to be an election that year. They found out that the election would be canceled if there was no new candidate to file to force an election. No election, that was too much for the government teacher. So, Dan pulled the papers and in the one day left to file, he gathered signatures and became a candidate for city council. As a government teacher he knew how to organize and run a grass roots election campaign. With his family, friends, and teaching colleagues helping, in March of 1992 Dan Harden, a husband, parent, teacher, coach and advocate for youth, was elected to the La Verne City Council. He came to the city council with a wealth of ideas that would benefit the community.

Some of his accomplishments include creating the Red Ribbon Committee in May of 1992, with the goal to encourage, coordinate, and facilitate involvement of citizens and community organizations in combating the problems of alcohol and drug abuse, and gang activity within the community.

During his 20-year history the group eventually became the Youth and Family Action Committee. Dan cultivated many successful programs, and many continue today, including graffiti abatement, anti-smoking and drug use programs, Educational Mailers, a parent resource guide, generation to generation counseling, additional school counseling services provided by Tri City Mental Health, peer coaching, mentoring, the Every 15 Minutes program, School Resource Officer, Friday Night Live, Summer Lunch program, support for the Garden of Angels, and numerous other programs provided over the years. The work Dan has done made a long-lasting impact on the La Verne community.

Oh, have you ever wondered where the idea for the La Verne Sports Park came from? No surprise, that was Dan Harden. Dan organized the Athletic Department at Bonita High School, The La Verne Youth Sports Committee, the University of La Verne, the La Verne City Council and the Bonita Unified School District office to plan and fund the Sports Park. With the Council's Financial expert, Tom Harvey, a plan was set down to build the sports park. No funds from the city's general fund were used. Utilizing Bonita High School fields and city parks the dream became a reality. A six-million-dollar venture to create a state-of-the-art sports park facilities which could be utilized by the high school during school hours and youth sports programs and community members after school hours. It included lighted multi-use fields at the high school, lighted baseball fields, all-weather track, synthetic turf football field, lighted tennis courts, two lighted soccer fields at Oak Mesa, a refurbished city pool, a new softball diamond for Bonita Bearcat Softball, and a skate park for La Verne's skateboarders. Thousands of kids have benefited from this project. According to Dan, the secret to success is partnerships.

The busy man had a few more ideas for La Verne. They came about during the Iraq war. Dan is an Air Force veteran, and he believed that it was time to show our appreciation to those serving in Iraq and all veterans for boldly serving to defend our freedom, our democracy, and our American way of life. Dan wanted it to be a place to welcome all veterans and honor their service. In discussion with the City Council, the idea was conceived to create a venue of respect, honor, and esteem for those that had served and will serve in our nation's military. Thus, the City Council created a La Verne Veterans Memorial Committee.

The committee began meeting in 2011 with the purpose for the construction of the La Verne Veterans Memorial. The committee worked tirelessly organizing numerous fund raisers and special events to raise awareness about efforts to build the Memorial. The Memorial was dedicated on Memorial Day 2013. The donations exceeded \$230,000 and the debt for the memorial was completely retired.

Oh, but one more thing was needed. A Battlefield Cross, alternatively referred to as a Battle Cross. A symbolic replacement of a cross, or memorial marker appropriate to an individual service-member's religion, placed on the battlefield or at the base camp, for a soldier who has been killed. It is made up of the soldier's rifle stuck into the ground next to the soldier's boots, with a helmet on top. Dog tags are sometimes placed on the rifle. The purpose is to show honor and respect for the dead at the battle site. The practice started during World War I, as a sign of respect for those that gave their lives in combat during wartime. Today, it is a means of showing respect for the dead amongst the still-living troop members and veterans. It is commonly seen in the field or base camp or Memorials after a battle, especially among American troops in Afghanistan or Iraq. While it is used less today as a means of identification, it still serves as a method of mourning among the living, as attending the funeral is not always possible for soldiers still in combat. Today, thanks to Dan Harden's effort, a bronze Battle Cross is placed at the La Verne Veterans Memorial to remember the fallen.

Still more was needed to complete the Memorial, one should believe that the Memorial will never be complete. So, with the blessing of the La Verne City Council, four additional statues have been added to the La Verne Veterans Memorial. You may have seen the male and female military members, a triple amputee soldier in a wheelchair and a military working dog. All represent the many men, women and service animals that serve and have served in the United States military.

Working with former mayor Don Kendrick and former city council member Robin Carter, they raised the funds necessary to complete this project.

What's next? You can be sure that Dan Harden has no shortage of ideas for projects that will help make the City of La Verne a great place to live and raise a family.

To conclude, if you have received one of Dan's business cards you will read at the bottom of the card his motto for life "Live with integrity and make a difference in the lives of others."