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Coto's Super Bowl bash for military is biggest yet

By [LANDON HALL](#) | Orange County Register

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COTO DE CAZA – Gary Davis stopped in the middle of the kitchen and raised his cellphone to take a picture. His inspiration? The stainless steel six-burner stovetop sitting in the middle of Gary and Julie Crisp's 5,600-square-foot house.

"I never saw a stove that nice," said Davis, 22, a Camp Pendleton-based Marine Corps corporal who hails from Pevely, Mo., population 5,883. "First time in a house this big too."

For the fifth consecutive year Sunday, Gary Crisp, CEO of [C2 Reprographics](#) in Costa Mesa, and his wife, Julie, opened their hillside home to members of the military to watch the [Super Bowl](#) – and to eat and drink for hours beforehand. About 100 Marines from Pendleton and their wives or girlfriends arrived by bus in addition to 50 active-duty soldiers from Fort Irwin in San Bernardino and 25 sailors from San Diego. An additional 150 veterans from all service branches attended. Last year was the [first year retired vets came](#).

The Crisp home was probably the most secure installation in all of south Orange County on Sunday. It also might have had the most appreciative, wide-eyed guests.

“This is the best Super Bowl party I’ve ever been to,” said Cpl. Nick Rodriguez, another Camp Pendleton Marine. He was dripping wet, wearing a towel after coming out of the hot tub. After a trip to the bathroom, he plunged back in.

The estate hummed with activity as service members played games, tried to stay aboard a mechanical bull, posed for photos with some of the San Diego Chargers’ cheerleaders and listened to an uncanny Doors cover band. Rod Carew signed autographs for guys who weren’t even born when he retired from the Angels in 1985.

“Being a Marine, I came here to be a part of this,” said Carew, who spent seven years as a combat engineer in the Marine Corps Reserves.

Guests watched the game on eight big-screen TVs stationed inside and outside the house. Loads of pizza, burgers, chili dogs and pies were inhaled. And how was the chow?

“The food here is great,” said Rodriguez, the hot tub soaker, who happens to be a cook in the Marines. “But I spent the last 13 months in the desert in Afghanistan. So anything is better than that.”

The manicure table at the back of the Crisp house was meant for wives and girlfriends, a respite from all the testosterone. So what were two tough Marines doing there?

“He talked me into it,” said Lance Cpl. Caleb Childress of Elizabeth, W.Va., referring to his buddy sitting next to him, Lance Cpl. Juan Rico of Victorville. Two women were going to work on their nails. Another buddy teased Childress that his had dirt under them.

Then Childress, 20, stood up, and one realized that the party wasn’t just about fun and games. He’s missing his left leg, which was taken by an IED in Afghanistan last June. He’s awaiting a medical discharge, after which he’ll head back home. Asked what he’ll do then, he replied, “I don’t know.”

Money raised at the event will benefit the Purple Heart Foundation, a San Clemente-based nonprofit that helps injured Marines and their families. For more information, go to www.purpleheartfund.com.

Joe Preis, a San Clemente business lawyer, fought in the Marines in Desert Storm and Somalia during his service from 1990 to 1994. He says Marines these days face many more hardships with more frequent combat deployments, and that it was up to retired Marines to help them make the transition to the “brotherhood of community” here at home.

Manny Montanez, who helped organize Crisp's first Super Bowl party in 2008, knows what it's like to live with war wounds. He was inside a tank in Vietnam on Jan. 8, 1969, when a rocket-propelled grenade tore through the steel and exploded. "It was like someone took a hot butcher knife and severed me from the waist down," said Montanez, 63. He couldn't walk for a year but recovered, and he received the Bronze Star. On Sunday he lifted up the cuffs of his jeans to reveal his gouged legs.

Since he was taken away from the wrecked tank by medevac helicopter, that was the last some of his buddies in the 25th Infantry Division ever saw of him. He and his platoon leader, Warren Yeagley, found each other online last year but met in person for the first time in 43 years Sunday.

Yeagley, 64, said the most important thing for today's vets to know is that there are people to help them.

"When we came home we were just crazy; now they have a name for it — post-traumatic stress disorder," said Yeagley, who drove from Phoenix for Sunday's party. "The first thing's finding out there's help available. We didn't know that for a long time."

Montanez remembers being laid up in an Okinawa hospital in May 1969 when some USO entertainers came into his room. It was Johnny Cash and his wife June, and a stylish football player: Joe Namath, quarterback of the New York Jets, who was named MVP of Super Bowl III a few months earlier for engineering a 16-7 upset win over the Baltimore Colts.

"It's funny the things you remember," Montanez says. "He had on a pair of paisley pants and a blue shirt. I thanked him, and he said, 'No, thank you.'"

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