



## At the reins with Serra High School graduate, American Legion mover and shaker Romie Bassetto

Written by Jean Bartlett, January 13, 2022

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**American Legion Officer Romie Bassetto.** (Photo courtesy of American Legion Post 105, Redwood City, CA.)

Redwood City resident Romie Bassetto is known for his "Get It Done" attitude which he notes has been known to ruffle feathers over the years. He's had that attitude for as long as he can remember.

"When I was a kid, if I was told I couldn't do something, I worked harder to do it," Romie said. "As an adult, if I am at a meeting trying to get something accomplished that is my goal. A lot of projects have stumbling blocks and you'll hear 10 things that are wrong with the project. I say, 'Tell me two things that are right with the project and we'll go from there.' Keep moving forward."

A Vietnam veteran who joined the American Legion in 1981, Romie eventually served three years each as Redwood City Post 105's 1st Vice Commander, 2nd Vice Commander and 3rd Vice Commander, along with two terms as Post 105's Commander, 2007-2012, and 2019-2021. (George Smith currently serves as Post 105's Commander.) Also in there and before 1981, Romie ran Show Ring Productions, which included competing as a driver in draft horse competitions. Currently, and 100% passionately, the longtime Redwood City resident is involved with a Redwood City Veterans Housing project.

Among many veteran benefits, the project provides: "68 veteran preference below market rate units offered at the low income designation. In addition, "the current outdated building Post 105 has been occupying for over 70 years, will be removed and replaced with a new/turnkey structure and interior that includes a large main hall, a new kitchen, restrooms, bar, offices, and 94 parking spots for exclusive Post use." Veterans do not need to be members of the American Legion to live in this eight-story, veteran and multi-family development.

"I don't want to lose readers here with too much information," Romie laughed. "But I want the public to know about this. In short, this is all about providing a decent, affordable place to live, and meet, for individuals who gave everything to support their country. I've been working on this for 7 years now." Details on this Redwood City Gateway project can be found on Post 105's [website](#).

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Romie was born on July 8, 1947, the second of Lawrence and Yolanda (Signorini) Bassetto's four sons. Like his brothers, older brother Larry and younger brothers Jimmy and John, Romie is first generation American. His mother, the daughter of Eugenio and Rosina Signorini, was born in Florence, Italy, in October of 1920, and moved to the United States, and subsequently San Francisco, with her family when she was 4 years old. Lawrence Louis Bassetto, who went by Louis, was born in Horn, Switzerland, January of 1912. Louis moved to the United States in 1930, when he was 18.

←Romie and his dad, San Francisco, circa 1952.

"My dad spoke eight languages when he got to this country and he learned English. His father was an importer/exporter all over Europe and during the summer months, my dad would travel with him to places which included, Spain, France and Belgium, and my dad was good at picking up languages, although he said that English was the hardest language he ever learned. His father came over to

the United States first, like so many fathers would do to get settled and have a place ready for their family. His dad also became a U.S. citizen. When my dad came through Ellis Island, in 1930, he said he was shaking like a leaf. While he was from Switzerland, he was then living in Italy, and he thought he'd be tossed because of his papers.

"Using gold pieces that were smuggled to him, my dad had gotten phony Italian papers before he left. Mussolini was in charge and it wasn't so easy to get out of Italy. But since my dad's dad was by then a U.S. citizen, my dad was able to also get legitimate papers from the American Embassy in Italy. When he came through Ellis Island, he figured the people in Customs would throw him overboard as soon as they saw his phony papers. When he got to the front of the line they told him to toss everything except the papers from the American Embassy.

"My father moved to this country not only because his dad was here, but because Italy was not a good place to live at that time. He used to say, 'When I was in Italy, there was a guy named Mussolini running the show and if you wanted to eat you had to be a Fascist. And if you weren't a Fascist, you didn't get a job, and if you didn't get a job, you didn't eat. Nobody can tell me who I have to vote for or support to stay alive.'

"Funny, my dad spoke with an accent but my mother did not, probably because she was so young when she learned English. She also spoke Italian and French. My folks would often speak to each other in

French. I used to say, 'Are you trying to hide stuff from us?' And my dad would say, 'You don't know? Because French is the language of love!' My parents enjoyed talking to each other in French at night."

"My father became a U.S. citizen immediately. Because his dad was a citizen, and my father was under 19, he just had to fill out papers to establish citizenship. My mother on the other hand—because she came with her family through Ellis Island and no one was yet a citizen—had a Green Card until she was able to apply for citizenship. It was a long process. But nobody could believe that my mother, who graduated from Mission High School in San Francisco, wasn't born here. Did we ever learn any languages? No, because my father was given a hard time about his accent and he didn't want any of that for his children. Plus he was a very proud American."

Romie's father's first job in the United States was holding up a sign explaining the languages he spoke so that people could walk up to him and ask him for directions. He eventually moved to Chicago where he went to work for Republic Steel Corporation as a straw boss (an assistant to a foreman in charge of supervising and expediting the work of a small group of workers). Chicago was where Louis met Yolanda. Yolanda had headed out to Chicago to visit with her aunts and uncles.

"My dad was footloose and fancy free and he ended up dating her."

Romie's mom returned to San Francisco, not long before Memorial Day of 1937. On Memorial Day, 1937, in Chicago, about 200 men, women and some children, all carrying American flags, formed a line as they crossed a grassy field to the main gate at Republic Steel's South Chicago plant. This particular plant had stayed open during a nationwide strike in the steel industry which pitted workers in dire working conditions against employers. The goal of the workers, through the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, was to unionize the plants. On this day in Chicago, marchers and strikers, armed only with rocks and bricks, were met by 150 Chicago police officers carrying riot clubs, tear gas and guns. Within moments, before everything went eerily quiet several minutes later, 10 marchers were killed by gunfire, 60 were wounded, some shot from behind, and 40 police officers were injured.

That was it for Romie's dad. He was done with Chicago and there was a really good reason for him to move to the West Coast.

"My dad had met the 'one' and he moved to San Francisco to chase after my mom. How did he eventually propose to her? He took his savings book to her and said, 'That's all I have but if you say it's okay, that's ours.' And she said, 'Yes. That's okay.'"

They married in San Francisco in 1941 at Saints Peter & Paul Church in North Beach.

"When Pearl Harbor happened (December 7, 1941), my father was called back to Chicago, where he was registered with the Selective Service (Draft).

"Now, before my parents married, my mom worked for Canco in San Francisco (an American tin company). She operated a comptometer (key-driven calculator) in the company's finance office. And she said to my dad, 'They've got jobs here but you have got to really learn English so you can go back to school to learn about micrometers (component precision measuring tool) and other things a machinist needs to know. And that's what my dad did. By the time the War broke out, he was working as a machinist making machine gun grips and handles and telescope parts – all this stuff for submarines. So when he heads back to Chicago to answer his Draft summons, they take one look at what he is making in San Francisco and said, 'There is no way in hell we are going to send you to war. We are going to have you keep doing what you are doing.' And that's what he did during the War. He built submarine parts



though he never knew what these parts were specifically. One group would build one part of what was needed and another group would build another part. This was done for security, for espionage reasons."

SERIAL NUMBER <b>648</b>	1. NAME (Print) <b>Lawrence Louis Bassetto</b> (First) (Middle) (Last)		ORDER NUMBER <b>2655</b>
2. ADDRESS (Print) <b>1001 Le Conte Ave San Francisco</b> <b>9319 Brandon Ave Chicago Cook Ill. Calif.</b> (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
3. TELEPHONE <b>Regent 9145</b> (Exchange) (Number)	4. AGE IN YEARS <b>28</b> DATE OF BIRTH <b>Jan. 1 1912</b> (Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)	5. PLACE OF BIRTH <b>Switzerland</b> (Town or county) <b>Horn</b> (State or country)	6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP <b>U.S.A.</b>
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS <b>Mr. Louis A Bassetto</b> (Mr., Mrs., Miss) (First) (Middle) (Last)			8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON <b>9319 Brandon Chicago Cook Ill.</b> (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME <b>Republic Steel Corporation</b>			
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS <b>118 Burley Ave Chicago Cook Ill.</b> (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
REGISTRATION CARD D. S. Form 1 (over)		<b>Lawrence Louis Bassetto</b> (Registrant's signature)	

Louis Bassetto's Draft Registration Card.

Born at St. Mary's Hospital on Stanyan Street in San Francisco, now St. Mary's Medical Center, Romie began his education at E.R. Taylor Elementary School in San Francisco and then moved right across the street to St. Elizabeth's for first grade. In 1957, the Bassetto family moved from San Francisco to Farm Hill Road in Redwood City. 10-year-old Romie attended Roosevelt Elementary School followed by Roy Cloud Elementary School, which was then a K-6 school. He was in the first sixth grade graduating class of Roy Cloud. His last two years of middle school were spent at Goodwin Middle School, now John F. Kennedy Middle School in Redwood City. In fifth grade, he decided he wanted to learn an instrument.

"I went to the instructor and said, 'I want to play the trumpet.' And he said, 'All the trumpets are gone.' 'What about the trombone?' 'There are no trombones.' Finally the music teacher looked at this big case in the corner. 'You can try that if you want.' 'What is that?' 'It's a tuba.'

"So I opened it up and here is this big ugly, silver thing. I thought, 'I can't get that thing home.' So I went home, got my red, Radio Flyer wagon, hauled it to Roy Cloud, put in the tuba and towed it to my house. My mother said, 'You'll never stay with that. Your brother didn't stay with the accordion. You won't stay with that.'

"When you tell me I can't do something, I'm going to work harder to do it. My mother said, 'Your brother had private lessons and he did this and he did that.' And I said, 'I don't care. I want to play this thing.' I drove my family nuts. I was playing 'Oom-pah-pah' pretty much nonstop until I could move from there to some more notes. I liked the tuba immediately.



The other thing Romie liked from a very young age, though his family did not question that, was animals.

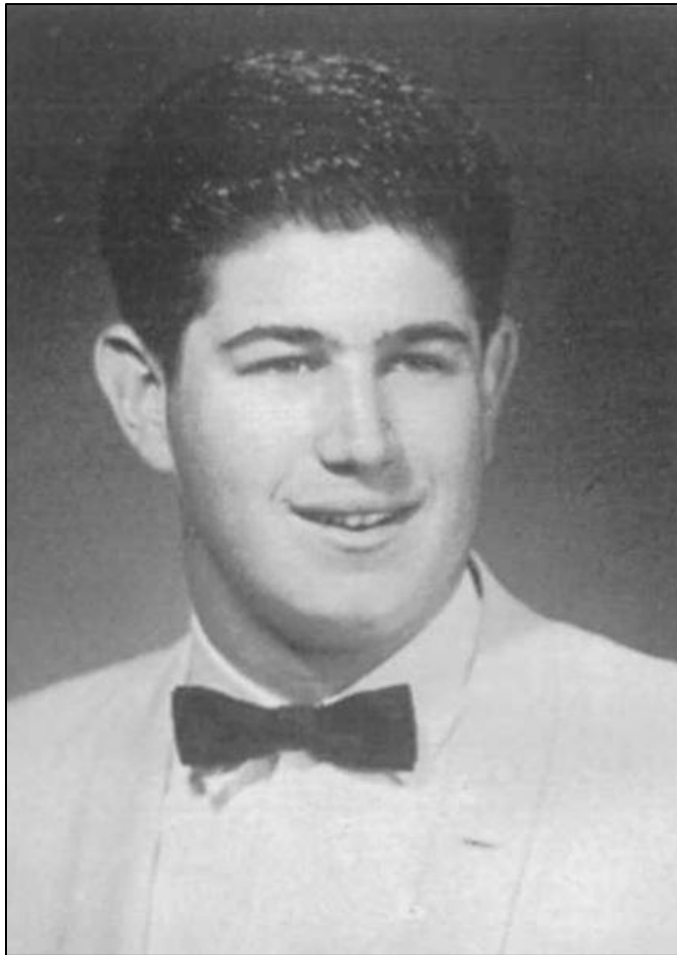
←Romie, 6, rides a pony in San Francisco.

"In San Francisco, on Third Street, there used to be a company called Olsen Nolte Saddle Shop (now in San Carlos). I knew the owner. As a kid I wanted to work in the saddle shop because I wanted to be around anything that was horses. One day the owner said to me, 'You don't want to do this, work in the shop. You want to be out where the animals are.' Eventually he introduced me to a guy named Joe Greer. Joe became like my second dad and through Joe, I learned how to work with all kinds of animals, including horses and mules. I also learned farm equipment and how to work on a farm. This led to my driving horses and competing. That was my passion. But I am getting ahead of myself!

"My first official job, before high school, was working at my dad's store, Solari's Market, at Third Street and Kirkwood Avenue in the Bayview District. (The store imported international food along with local selections.) My dad stopped being a machinist not long after the War ended. He had that store for 30 years. That neighborhood then was very Italian. Eventually the neighborhood changed and there was a lot of crime there. Finally things got so bad, my mom told him, 'Time to get out of here.' My mom started a catering business, while my dad had the store, and she kept the catering business going after my dad died, just shy of his 67th birthday in December of 1978."

Romie said it was at some point in the mid-1960s that his mom got her catering business going.

"I remember one time—we were in our new home on Farm Hill—my brother Larry and I are in another room, just listening, and my mother approaches my father and says, 'I want to get a part-time job working in the catering business, not a full-time job, but a part-time job.' And we can hear the rustling of my dad's newspaper and he says to her, 'Are you telling me, I can't take care of my family?' Who can even imagine that kind of answer now? But this is the 1950s and the time of June Cleaver. (A television sitcom character, June Cleaver represented the quintessential 'supposed ideal' suburban housewife of the late 1950s and early 1960s.) My father was also very typical of the European male in those days. Later, as I mentioned, she did go into catering. She was a fantastic cook."



From 1961 through graduation in June of 1965, Romie attended the all boys, Catholic high school, Junipero Serra (Serra) in San Mateo. "The best school in San Mateo County, then and now," he noted with enthusiasm. "I donate as much of my time as I can there. Hey, if you know something will really improve a kid's life, give them a good start in the world—and I'm telling you, that's what Serra is all about—if you can be involved, be involved!"

←Romie, senior photo, Serra High School, 1965.

"Now you know how my mom told me I would never stay with the tuba? I was still playing it after four years. Then I started my freshman year at Serra. I wanted to be in orchestra and band but the school wouldn't let me do it because I didn't have a clear open slot in my studies. But I was determined. I found an old E Flat tuba in the corner of the music room. I also found a mouthpiece that stunk to high heaven. Then I sat in front of the music teacher and I played. When I was finished, I put it down and walked out.

"The music teacher comes running up behind me, 'Hey, you! Yeah, you! I want to talk to you. How did you learn how to play that?' I told him I had four years of playing and had been in honor bands. 'What class do you have now?' he asked me. 'I have to do typing.' He told me if I could get out of typing, he'd let me into music class."

Who knew that when Romie's mom sat him down in seventh grade and taught him how to type on a Smith Corona, that it would result in additional music on the tuba? The Serra freshman headed upstairs to the typing teacher.

"I asked him, 'What's it take to get out of here?' And he said, '60 words a minute, corrected, will get you an A and get you out of here.'"

The tuba player typed 65 words a minute at exactly 60 words corrected. He passed the class with an A and his high school music career began.

"There are not a lot of tuba players, so I played in band every year at Serra. If they had a Dixieland band, I was in it, a field band, I was in it. If they had an orchestra, I was in it. Essentially I was the bass!"

In addition to music and his regular classes, Romie played football his first two years. He would have continued but a game injury to his leg sidelined him and his days in football came to an end.

When he was 17, he bought himself a 1946 Plymouth Woody Station Wagon.



"It was my first car and I paid \$100 bucks for it. When I brought it home my father said, 'That's fine, what about insurance?' 'What?' So it sat on blocks for three months until I could get the \$300 to pay for the insurance. That was a lot of money back then. My car made the yearbook, inside cover. My dad and I painted it and bleached the wood. We put a lot of work into it. I sold it long ago. For the first six years, I would see it around Redwood City but it's been decades since I last saw it. If that car was in tip-top restoration shape now, I'm sure it would be worth over \$100,000."



**Romie's 1946 classic in the family driveway, circa 1964.**

Right out of high school, Romie went to work for an executive chef. He also worked at his mom's successful catering business, and like all U.S. male citizens, Romie registered with the Selective Service within 30 days of turning 18.

"And then one day I got a letter from the President of the United States," Romie shook his head and smiled. "How could I turn him down?"

The result?

"They threw me in the U.S. Army!"

The inductee did his basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, which was then the infantry training center for Vietnam. Eight weeks later, the private was fully trained in first aid, firearms, treatment of wounds, grooming standards, marching, repelling, the Uniform Code of Military Justice and all the specific tactics needed to prepare for the stress of the battlefield.

Because he stayed in the top 10 percent of his class, he was then shipped to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for Advanced Individual Training.

"I went to armor school, training on tanks. I was trained on an M60 tank, but I was claustrophobic. I hated getting into those covers."



**Fort Sill, Oklahoma, 1967.**

Romie served with the 9th Infantry Division, the "Old Reliables." The Division was created during World War I, though it was not then deployed overseas. During WWII and the Vietnam War, the 9th Infantry Division deployed constantly in overseas battle theaters and was time and time again honored for its steadfast resourcefulness and service in battle.

When the soldier arrived in Vietnam, the airfield was being bombed.

"I got in front of the Sergeant and said, 'Armor.' And he said, 'Armor, shit. Where you are going boy they ain't got no armor.' I was going to the Mekong Delta.

"Here the U.S. Army had spent all this money training me and I never spent one day inside the hatch of an M60 tank. I didn't mind at all."

The terrain and the heat were treacherous in the Mekong Delta. Red ants and mosquitos arrived in swarms. The U.S. Army Specialist 4 served a year there as Convoy Escort and Battalion Commander's Aide and Gun Jeep Driver. He operated out of firebases and Division Headquarters. He was on call 24/7.

"The guy that was my boss was in charge of the Battalion. We had 760 guys in the Battalion. If the Commander wanted me, I was at his tent. If we were out in the field, I was there until the mission was accomplished."

Included among the Spec 4's duties was the typing of the Commander's situation report for their unit, due in every 24 hours. It was also Romie's job to gather biographical information on someone in the unit who lost their life during deployment.



"This allowed the Commander to write a very personal letter to the soldier's family. They were hard letters for him to write and after he wrote them, he needed time alone. I would stand at his tent and tell people, including officers, it just wasn't a good time to talk to him.

"One time he said to me, 'The Army says it's the 'mission and the men.' I say it's the 'men and the mission' because I am writing the letters. They are not.' I never forgot that. He was human first. He was also a bit of a health nut. I was not.

"After I went through all the training and weighed 183 pounds, I could have cared less about doing push-ups and all that." (Romie is also 6 feet 3 inches tall.) "The Commander did push-ups. If we were on an airbase, he would run the runways to stay in shape. I'd be right behind him in the jeep and he'd say, 'You know, it wouldn't hurt you to run.' And I'd say, 'What happens if you have a heart attack or something? I'd have to get you to medical aid fast!'

"I remember one day we went on an operation and that operation was really something. I look over and the Commander was reading the Bible. I said, 'What the hell?' He looked at me and said, 'The Army is my job, it is not my life.' He definitely got a point across.

"I wrote a diary the whole year I was there. But that was in violation of the Military Code of Conduct. You could be court-martialed for this."

The concern is should a diary fall into enemy hands, the military does not want recorded details of movements and operations.

"I kept the diary in a plastic bag around my neck. The Commander would say, 'You know, you are not supposed to write that,' and I'd say, 'Okay.' Then we'd be in the middle of something and he'd say, 'Are you going to put that in your book?' And I'd say, 'You're damn right.' I still have it. It's in purple ink, pencil, blue ink, anything I had to write with. It kept me sane. I didn't realize that journaling like that was as important to me as it was. I lost friends there. All these years later, I still can't read it."



Romie's Old Reliable's jeep, Vietnam, 1969.

Author: Jean Bartlett ([www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com))

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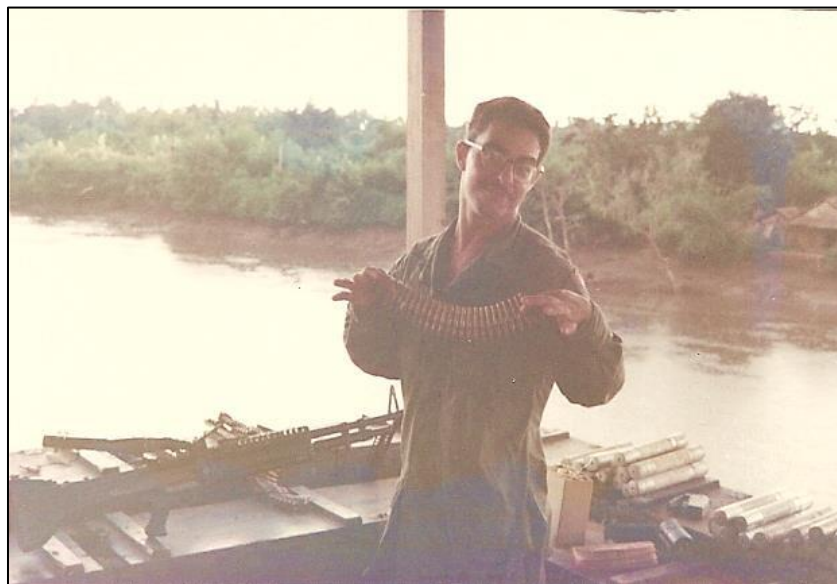
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When it was time for Romie to rotate out of Vietnam, a Major sat him down. He offered to up Romie's stripes, then after Romie took a 30-day leave home, give him the rank of Staff Sergeant and \$10,000, tax-free, if Romie would return to Vietnam.

"Uh-uh," Romie told him. "You can't offer me enough money."



**Romie with his buddy George, Vietnam, 1968. The monkey, who was the Battalion's mascot, eventually went home to the United States with a member of the unit.**



**Romie's friend, and jeep gunner, Roy Veal on guard duty, Mekong Delta, 1968. That seemingly odd accordion is actually rounds for the gun jeep's M2 .50 Caliber Machine Gun.**



**Romie, driving, and his friend Tim Pope, Vietnam, 1968.**

Romie served in the U.S. Army from 1967 through 1969. He turned 21 in Vietnam. When Romie was drafted you could serve at 18 but not vote. (The voting age changed to 18 in 1971.) You can still serve at 18, under 18 with parental consent, but as was true then, you must be 21 to have a drink. This still irritates Romie.

"I tell everybody, the first mission we went out on was the most fear I have ever felt in my life. We were packing real weapons, real ammunition and real hand grenades. This wasn't storytelling. Someone could die. It has real emotional impact.

"So, we were old enough to go to war, but we couldn't have a drink and we couldn't vote for the SOBs that sent us there. Don't give someone a rifle and then tell them they are not man-enough, or woman-enough, to have a drink until they turn 21. That's BS!"

During the Vietnam War, the Oakland Army Base served as a major transit station for U.S. soldiers both en route to, and returning from, deployment. Discharged honorably, Spec 4 Bassetto was "dismissed, unceremoniously, at 3:30 in the morning" out of Oakland.

"I stepped out of the Center and figured I would find a way home. What do I know? Then immediately, these guys in a Volkswagen, step out of their car, and call me a baby killer and all kinds of other crap. Here I am in my dress uniform, a lean, mean, 183-pound, 6-foot-3 returning veteran who just wants to go home. I said to them, 'I guarantee, one or all of you, that if I go to the hospital, one or all of you is going



there too. So let's keep it moving.' They got back in their car and I went back into the Center. 'Is there anybody in here going across the Bay?'

"Two hours after I returned, I was in civilian clothes. My dad picked me up in San Mateo. 'Son,' he said, 'Where's your uniform?' My dad was as American as you can get. He was all about the flag and the whole bit. 'Pop,' I said, 'I was away for a few years on vacation. Don't you dare tell anyone where I've been.' And that was my welcome home.

"I've lived long enough that now when I wear my 9th Infantry service cap, people will come up to me and say, 'Thank you for your service.' With the reception I got, I made a promise, when it is within my power, I will never ever let that happen to another veteran."

Romie has kept that promise. Seeing to it, many times over the years, that returning local veterans in need of a reception and/or a ride had one.

Romie said that emotionally, his return to civilian life was tough but he got right into work and eventually started his own company, an event services company, Show Ring Productions.

"Let's say there was an upcoming event that needed bleachers, a tent, staging, lights and sound. That's what I provided. In the 1970s, I built the first discotheque on the Peninsula at the Holiday Inn in Belmont. Had to get a lot of the equipment out of Meteor Productions in New York. They developed and produced the Meteor ClubMan DJ Mixer range which was huge."

Romie also had semi-trucks to move horses. Those horses were his horses.

"My passion was to drive horses and I competed. These were draft horses, like the Anheuser-Busch draft horses, the Clydesdales."

Romie owned all kinds of draft horses including: Percherons, Belgians, Suffolks and Shires. But what exactly is draft horse driving?

First off, you need a good amount of horse knowledge. You've got to know how to harness and hitch-up your draft horses. (Draft horses are large "work" horses bred to do plowing and other hard farm labor.) You have to be exceptionally skilled with voice control and the right way to put your hands on the line, or accurate driving is not going to happen. Competitions include: one-horse driven carts, two horses hitched side by side on a show wagon, four horses hitched as two teams and six horses hitched as three teams. Romie worked, primarily, with the four-horse and six-horse teams. In draft horse driving, the horses, as directed by their driver, are judged on their ability to not only move forward – walking or trotting in a unison stride along the ring – but on their ability to stop at specified points, as well as to back up on command. Along with other competition requirements, the drivers are additionally judged on the beautiful condition of their horses, an excellent looking hitch wagon, exactness of their tandem lines and their *driver* formal attire. Horse pulling in a draft horse competition is a different thing altogether. Here one or two draft horses are required to show their strength by pulling a weighted sled a short distance, with the winners pulling the most weight.

"There is a big draft horse show in Grass Valley every year, the Draft Horse Classic at the Nevada County Fairgrounds. (Coming up this year September 15-18.) I was in their second show, in 1988, and then many shows thereafter. The horses are judged on gait and how pretty they are. Then they have driving competitions. That was what I was involved in and that's what I am the most proud of. It's also where I won the most awards driving multiple horses."

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**Romie and Dale Yearian work with their six-horse team at Dale's ranch in Oakdale, CA.**

Romie kept horses over the years in Oakdale, Corning and Hillsborough. He and a San Mateo County general contractor, who owned horses, toured the United States for three years with the contractor's horses.

"On the road we traveled with 10 horses. If something happened to a team, you had to be able to switch them over. But the bottom line is – how lucky I was to do something I loved so much for a living."

Romie's got stories and after considering the matter, he decided the following are two particular favorites.

"We are in Grass Valley and the guy running the show comes over to us. We were running Shires that year in the competition. He said, 'We don't have enough pulling teams this year. Is there a chance in the heavyweight competition that you guys can come down with your team of horses and make a pull? Just so the people can see another pulling team.' So I said, 'Sure.' Now the guys in the pulling competitions, the pullers, are in bib overalls, they've got Western boots on and they look like good ole boys. And here we come out with our show harness and our show horses, and we're in our show uniforms to compete an hour later. We get into the arena and we won the competition that year!"



His other immediately favorite story took place in the Almaden Plaza Shopping Mall in San Jose.

"I had 40-something people working for me that day and we were doing a big Santa's arrival. We had so much stuff there, including a team of horses and all kinds of carriages and sleighs.

"In the corner, there was an old lady sitting with another old lady. I tell this guy working for me, 'Take this carriage and go over to those two old ladies and give them a ride.' So he goes over and picks them up and then I see him come back to where he originally picked them up, and then I see this old lady pointing. The next thing you know, the carriage takes off to the back of the Shopping Center. When he comes back, I say, 'What the hell were you doing?' And he says, 'Well, I went to pick them up and that one old lady said, 'No! We want to go to the other end of the shopping center.' So I took them. That one old lady sure was rude.' And I said to him, 'That old lady is my mother!' He was mortified. 'I didn't mean anything,' he told me. I said, 'Don't worry about it. She is rude!'

Romie laughed heartily. 'This carriage driver told me that he overheard my mother say to her friend, 'I don't know how my son makes money doing all of this!'

"I was in the business for more than 25 years and my mom never once asked me a question about what I did. But I was successful and I had a business that was fun. Of course every Monday morning it was reality again and we started all over for the next weekend. I did pretty well. At one point I had 14 trucks and trailers. I had a show wagon that I sold for \$43,000 when I decided to get rid of it. My last horse was Bob and he was at Oakdale. I said, 'Nobody gets Bob. When he goes down, no more horses, I'm retiring.'"

Romie did retire when Bob died, but his job experiences come with a résumé of stories that few can say they have shared – which include, at one point, owning 460 pigs on the coast. He always worked on farms and always owned farm animals. His résumé includes a five-year contract with Ardenwood Historic Park in Fremont. He and his horses hauled 100,000 kids a year, much to everyone's delight. He was also the train conductor with his in-demand Show Ring train ride.

"I loved it all. I remember kids would come over and want to volunteer and I would bring out a shovel and rake. 'That's how everyone starts,' I told them, 'even me.'"





In 1981, Romie joined Redwood City American Legion Post 105. He'd heard about the benefits of being a part of an American Legion from a couple of guys he knew. But he was reluctant to join. Society had not recognized Vietnam veterans, and veterans of the Second World War and Korea were not always welcoming either. But he did his research on the American Legion and decided to go through their doors.

Founded by weary veterans of the First World War and chartered by Congress in 1919, the purpose of the American Legion as a patriotic veterans organization, was and is to focus on service to veterans, servicemembers and communities, constantly guided by the four main pillars defined by those founding "doughboys:" Americanism, Children and Youth, National Security, and Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation.

There are nearly 2 million members of the American Legion, with more than 12,000 posts in communities throughout the United States. Some of the resources and programs which can be found through American Legions include: mentoring and job training for veterans, veteran advocacy, family support, youth baseball, oratorical contests and scholarships, sponsorships of Boy's State and Girl's State programs, support of local scout troops, and support of community fundraisers.

"You don't do anything alone in the American Legion," Romie noted. "You've got to work with others to figure out how to get whatever it is done."

Included among Post 105's supported local programs are: the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Band of the West (a unit of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps that is the only sea cadet band in the nation), Blue Star Moms, The San Mateo County Veterans Alliance, Graveside Memorial Services, Student Veterans of America, and the VROC (Veterans Resource and Occupation Centers) at Cañada College, College of San Mateo and Skyline College.

"Of course, I've got a story!" Romie smiled.

"When I was a Commander in 2009, Boy Scout Troop 27 came to one of our Executive Board meeting. They were looking for \$700 for a canoe. They were in full uniform with their Scout Master. I said to the Scout Master, 'That was great, nice presentation about your canoe, but we've got no money. We can't afford to give you 700 bucks.'" They kind of looked at me strangely and started heading out the door. So I said to them, 'What's that, Mr. Leader? You are quitting, just because I said, no?' So, he turns around and I said, 'I got an idea how to get your \$700.' He looks at me. 'But I want your Boy Scouts involved. Here's what I propose. We are going to give you the Hall, rent free. We are going to help you prepare a spaghetti and meatball dinner, and salad and garlic bread and all the rest, and all we want from you is the cost of the ingredients. Now here's your job. In your uniforms, you have to get out there, with your parents, and sell tickets. Then when we have the dinner, you have to be there, in uniform, to help serve the tables.'

"Now I might have been talking here alone but I didn't do this alone because everyone in our Legion wants to support our local scouts as much as possible. That includes, as far as I am concerned, getting these kids to believe in themselves. If they work for it, they appreciate it. And they did work for it. For my part, I know how to make my mother's spaghetti sauce. Hey, I learned from the best. I make that sauce a lot, anywhere from 5 to 10 gallons at a time."

The bottom line, once the tickets were sold and Post 105 was reimbursed for the event's ingredients, Boy Scout Troop 27 earned much more than that original request for \$700.



**On March 27, 2009, American Legion Post 105 Commander Romie Bassetto and Executive Board Member and current 3rd Vice Commander William Jackson Jr., presented Boy Scout Troop 27 with a check for \$5,282.65.**

Along with his volunteer work serving as a member of American Legion Post 105, Romie is also a member of Vietnam Veterans of American Chapter 464, AMVETS Post 53, Redwood City VFW Post 69 and the Avenue of Flags Committee at the Golden Gate National Cemetery. He has additionally served as American Legion District 26, Area 2 Membership Chairman and District 26 1st Vice Commander.

When Romie was acknowledged by California State Senator Jerry Hill on October 27, 2016, as Veteran of the Year for California's 13th Senate District, it was easy to understand why. In 2015, Romie and Post 105 Officer and fellow Vietnam veteran (Col.) Leo McArdle, co-chaired the Avenue of Flags subcommittee, which hosted the traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington—The Wall That Heals—at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno. In 2016, Romie organized Redwood City's Veterans Day Parade and festivities, as well as a ceremony in December to observe the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day. He was acknowledged by Senator Hill for his grillmaster skills at veteran events and fundraisers, as well as being the continuous volunteer who rises before dawn to get donuts for the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts who place flags at gravesites in the National Cemetery before Memorial Day. That would be 3,000 donuts bought by Post 105. He also wakes up at 3 a.m. on Memorial Day to "brew the many gallons of coffee provided to visitors attending the annual ceremony at the cemetery." He's long been involved with the "full-blown Veterans Day ceremony at Redwood City's Courthouse Square and the Redwood City Independence Day Parade."

"I believe, 100 percent, that things can get done if you put your focus on what you can do. Let's just not get stuck on all the bullshit in between."

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**At the reins with Serra High School graduate, American Legion mover and shaker Romie Bassetto**  
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**In 2015, American Legion Post 105 1st Commander Romie Bassetto and Chaplain (Col.) Leo McArdle (now Post 105's 2nd Vice Commander), donated hours of their time to help present The Wall That Heals at the Golden Gate National Cemetery.**



**California Senator Jerry Hill presents Romie Bassetto with a plaque for Veteran of the Year, October 27, 2016. (Photo courtesy of the Office of California State Senator Josh Becker.)**

Married and divorced, the father of one daughter and three grandchildren—two granddaughters and a grandson—Romie doesn't say much about the 56 certificates and plaques he has received over the years for his work with veterans, and, of course, his days as a draft horse driver. But there is one note that he cherishes. He received it after historian and author Mitch Postel, President of the San Mateo County Historical Association since April of 1984, curated the exhibition, "Peninsula at War! San Mateo County's World War II Legacy" at the San Mateo County History Museum. The Exhibition ran from December 7, 2016 and continued through January of 2019. Romie's job was to bring WWII veterans to



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the event's opening. He brought 60, and 83 volunteers to see that whatever these veterans needed was done. (The opening event was at a near capacity with 500 in attendance.)

"For each one of these guys, we had a certificate and plaque made. On one of those, I got the WWII Navy veteran's rate wrong. Now these guys are all in their late 80s and 90s and he was upset. Well that was my priority to fix that and he got a new certificate and plaque within one day.

"His daughter wrote me a note, essentially saying that whole event and the care that was put into her father receiving the corrected plaque and certificate, opened doors to her dad finally talking to her about his experiences in the Second World War – which meant the world to them both. They also both thanked me for my service. The entire note is a treasure to me. We've got to share our war experiences, or as that famous saying goes, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' I would add, 'Always keep your glass half full.'



**Romie and Dale Yearian at the reins of their six-horse team, Oakdale, CA.**



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is also a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and a published author.

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