

2014 CALIFORNIA WOMAN VETERAN OF THE YEAR AWARDEE- IRENE CRUZ

Irene Cruz works very hard to assist Veterans in getting housing, jobs, VA benefits, assistance with MST claims and actively and continuously helps those struggling with building their self-esteem and restoring their dignity.

While working with AMVETS, Ms. Cruz organized and executed the first ever event, "Honoring Women Veterans Who are Making History". Ms. Cruz said, "I see these ladies working so hard to give back to veterans and no one has acknowledged their efforts. I want to do something that will show how much they are appreciated." She honored nine outstanding Californian women veterans through an Awards Banquet for their service and continued leadership in their communities.

In November 2013, she spearheaded a Minority Women Veterans Conference despite strong opposition and had over 150 women in attendance. The panel was informative and effective, business clothes to support women in their career advancement were made available for free, Barbara Ward was the keynote speaker, Congresswoman Maxine Waters made an appearance.

Ms. Cruz's work with the American Legion, Women Veterans Strategic Alliance and SEIU is her calling. Through these organizations, she consistently helps veterans resolve housing issues, obtain meaningful employment, and connects them to services and people that will obtain their hard earned VA benefits for them.

She chairs Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) Veteran Caucus and challenges politicians to do more for veterans. Recently, they underwent negotiations and Ms. Cruz pointed out to the employer that it was unacceptable for them to not know how many veterans worked for them. As a result, the employer placed a survey on their website for employees to list their military affiliation.

Ms. Cruz hosts a monthly Women Veterans Roundtable in which a collaboration with the California Women's Law Center agreed to conduct pro bono work for veterans with MST claims and VA appeals. Ms. Cruz's active advocacy for veterans created a broad coalition of legal, social and advocacy organizations working to improve services to veterans in Los Angeles.