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LOCAL

Medal of Honor exhibit salutes heroes

'Visions of Valor' opens Phoenix stand

By **MIKE BRANOM**
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With America engaged in violent struggles overseas, two aging warriors want to remind their countrymen why heroes are needed.

Fred Ferguson of Chandler and Leo Thorsness of Tucson wear Medals of Honor, signifying their willingness to risk their lives above and beyond the call of duty. Now, they and other men who received the military's highest citation are being honored by portraits hanging in Phoenix's Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center.

The exhibit, "Visions of Valor," opened Wednesday on the 64th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

"While we're at war, it's necessary for people to have physical reminders of the sacrifices that people of every generation have paid so we can walk around and make choices to do what we do,"



JULIO JIMENEZ, TRIBUNE

VIETNAM HERO: Chandler resident and Medal of Honor recipient Frederick E. Ferguson, a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, attends the opening of the "Visions of Valor" exhibit at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center in Phoenix. The exhibit consists of photographs of Medal of Honor recipients by photographer Nick Del Calzo.

said Thorsness, 73.

Added the 66-year-old Ferguson: "We need to honor them (servicemen and women), we need to respect and, every chance we get, we need to thank them."

The exhibit is presented by Phoenix-based TriWest Healthcare Alliance, health

care provider for retired military personnel and their families throughout the West.

"As we learned more about these individuals and their backgrounds, the more we wanted to share that knowledge with the public," TriWest CEO Dave McIntyre said.

Ferguson and Thorsness

received their medals in America's last long-term military endeavor: Vietnam.

Ferguson rescued five comrades by flying his helicopter on a rescue mission into Hue during the 1968 Tet Offensive. All the while, he dodged enemy fire streaming from streets, buildings and riverboats.

Thorsness, piloting a jet fighter in 1965, helped his downed wingmen by staying with them long enough to relay their position to rescuers. While patrolling above he shot down two enemy fighters despite a near-empty fuel tank and, at one point, a numerical disadvantage of 4-1.

The photographs were taken by Nick del Calzo and were featured in his book, "Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty." There is no charge to view the exhibit, open to the public through Jan. 7. The exhibit will then tour other veterans' facilities and military installations in the West.

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