

Military and vets make art from plant to paper

By Daniel Strasberger

The Desert Trail

JOSHUA TREE — Joining Forces: Plant to Paper is a new art and writing project catering to veterans and people on active military duty.

Mil-Tree joined forces with Arts Connection from San Bernardino to create the project.

This multifaceted art project, spanning from February through May, is paid for by a Veterans in the Arts Initiative grant from the California Arts Council.

The goal is to clear invasive plants from the desert, make them into paper and pulp and create works of art and writing that will be displayed in a show in May.

Cheryl Montelle, Mil-Tree founder, is excited about bringing the project to the Morongo Basin.

"Mil-Tree's mission is to bring veterans into the community through arts and dialogue," Montelle said. "Communication and arts is



COURTESY PHOTO

Lt. Col. Frank Marilao and Donald Burton, from Marine Corps Community Services, join Mil-Tree founder Cheryl Montelle at an informational meeting for the "Plant to Paper Project" Thursday at Copper Mountain College.

what we are about, to create bonds and connections where there haven't been."

Much of Montelle's work in the community is inspired by counselor Ed Tick's book on treating veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I read a book by Ed Tick, 'War in the Soul,' that

said PTSD is more of a soul wound than anything else," she said. "When you are in a situation that is beyond your wildest, sometimes your soul cannot take it all in, it's too much and creates anxiety and all the symptoms that PTSD creates."

The goal of Mil-Tree is to create bonds of friend-

ship between veterans and the community. The Plant to Paper Project is a means to use art and events to help strengthen the bond.

The Mojave Desert Land Trust will lead hikes into the desert, providing water and tools to volunteers to pull up invasive plants.

The land trust will hold two hands-on paper-making workshops, led by Denise Kraemer, processing the collected plants into paper.

Workshops on writing, plaster casting and silk-screening will follow. The project ends with a group show and presentation.

"This is a really great opportunity, and I'm really hoping people take advantage of it," Montelle said.

Art and writing workshops

Upcoming events in "Joining Forces: Plant to Paper" will include the following. All events are free. Veterans, active-duty military members, families and the community are welcome to join. For information or to sign up, email Cheryl Montelle at miltreecommunity@gmail.com or log on to mil-tree.org.

- Invasive plant removal: Feb. 20 and March 5.
- Paper-making workshop: Feb. 20 and Feb. 27.
- Writing workshops: Feb. 27, March 12, March 26, April 9, April 23 and May 7.
- Casting workshops: March 5 and April 2.
- Silk-screening workshops: April 30 and May 14.

The art workshops will take place at Copper Mountain College and the writing workshops will be hosted by Paula's Dome.

The project will culminate with an exhibition May 27 at the 29 Palms Art Gallery, 74055 Cottonwood Drive. The event will include an art show and a spoken-word presentation.