

Fired Up: **VETERAN FERNIE VELEZ FINDS THAT MOVE![®] IS A PERFECT FIT FOR BETTER HEALTH**

When Fernie Velez served in Vietnam as a U.S. Marine Corps infantryman, he was fit. But things changed when he left the service. “I started gaining weight right after I left,” he explains. “Then I got busy with college and work, and I just didn’t have time to exercise anymore.” His efforts to lose weight on his own were unsuccessful. Fernie says that he tried to take “shortcuts” and couldn’t keep it up.

Re-Connected

In 1985, Fernie re-connected with his best friend from college, Steve. Over the years—and unlike Fernie—Steve had stayed physically active. On a hike with his old friend, Fernie realized just how out of shape he’d gotten. “We hiked together up the Half Dome at Yosemite,” Fernie recounts. “I made it to the top, but just barely. Steve said to me, ‘man, you’re going to be 70 years old and weigh 300 pounds!’” It was hard to hear those words, but Fernie realized that Steve was right.

Good Fit

In the fall of 2012, Fernie made a commitment to Steve: he was going to lose weight and improve his fitness. He accepted his doctor’s offer to join the MOVE![®] Program at the VA Central California HCS in Fresno. “When I entered MOVE![®], I weighed 245 pounds,” Fernie says. “I’m 5’9”, so that was a BMI of 36—which is ‘Class 2 Obesity’ and put me at risk for diabetes and many other weight-related health problems.”

Fernie participated in an eight-session MOVE![®] group, and soon realized how good a fit the program was for him. “They never pushed me to do anything,” he recalls. “They would suggest things, and I would try them. They didn’t tell me what I *couldn’t* do!” And when it came to diet, MOVE![®] staff helped Fernie understand portion control. “They



said, ‘you can have some ice cream, but just not four scoops’,” he explains. “So now, I have just one scoop.”

No Pressure

Being in control of his program—and having no “pressure”—was the thing about MOVE!® that worked best for Fernie. “When I started, I would walk a block and back. Then I walked two, and later three,” he says. “As I lost weight and became more physically active, I found ways to push myself further.” Fernie joined the Senior Games, which helped him to keep up his physical fitness. “I swim and bike, and have also run my first 5- and 10-K races,” he reports. “I ride with a guy who’s 75 years old. He’s a little slow, but he keeps up. He’s in great health, and he inspires me!”

Excited

On the 1-year anniversary of his program, the Fresno MOVE!® Team checked on Fernie’s progress, and it was impressive. “Presently, I weigh just 197 pounds—that’s a 48-pound weight loss—and I’m no longer obese,” he says proudly. “But I’m not stopping there, I’m looking to get down to 180!”

Fernie’s success in managing his weight has positively affected his outlook on life, too. Since Vietnam, he’s suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and secondary depression. “Over the years, gaining weight made me feel increasingly blue,” he says. “Before, I kind of stuck to myself. But now, I’m excited and feeling great....and I’m talking to people again.”

Fernie says that he hopes sharing his story of success and better health will inspire other Veterans to try MOVE!®. “If just one or two other Veterans try the program because of my story,” he explains, “that will be good!”