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Truong Diep holds one of the signs that his office created advertising the Republican presidential ticket of John McCain and Sarah Palin.

MICHAEL GOULDING, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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## Little Saigon dedicates campaign office to McCain

War veterans and local officials say they believe the Vietnamese American community will remain grateful to the Senator for his service in Vietnam

By **DEEPA BHARATH**

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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**WESTMINSTER** For the first time in the history of Little Saigon, a U.S. presidential candidate has a dedicated campaign office in the heart of this Vietnamese American enclave.

Nestled in the Asian Village strip mall on Bolsa Avenue, John McCain's Little Saigon campaign office occupies the same floor as a taekwondo studio, a store that sells wedding dresses and tuxedos, a travel agency and a stock broker.

Truong Diep, a candidate for Westminster City Council and a member of Assemblyman Van Tran's staff, is running the campaign office with the help of young volunteers and older members of the Little Saigon community, many of whom are former South Vietnamese war veterans.

Tran is the co-chair for McCain's campaign in California. He says that the Vietnamese American community owes a debt of gratitude not only to McCain, but his father for their service in Vietnam.

"Senator McCain's family has a 70-year connection with Asia and an even more special connection with Vietnam," Tran said. "Senator McCain has supported and authored a number of legislations that helped Vietnamese veterans unite with their families. There's no question that we owe a debt to the senator, who was a true war hero."

McCain, who was an aviator for the U.S. Navy, almost lost his life when his plane was shot down in October 1967 during a bombing mission over Hanoi. He was badly injured, captured by the North Vietnamese and tortured as a prisoner of war for six years.

According to results of the recent 2008 National Asian American Survey, 53 percent of Vietnamese Americans said they would vote for McCain and 21 percent said they would vote for Barack Obama. The report states that 24 percent of Vietnamese Americans were undecided.

Cuong Cao, president of the California Republican Assembly and a

captain in the former South Vietnamese army during the war, said he and many other veterans feel McCain is their representative.

"What he has done for amnesty of Vietnamese families is great," he said. "He is honest and he supports our cause. He is not with the communists. He's a conservative just like we are."

But Phu Nguyen, a member of the local Vietnamese American Democratic Club, says the younger members of the community think differently. Nguyen was one of about 100 who participated in a rally supporting Barack Obama on Bolsa Avenue last week.

"I certainly believe Senator McCain's service in Vietnam is admirable," the 31-year-old said. "But the McCain of today is a completely different person from the McCain of the Vietnam War era."

Nguyen said McCain's current voting record shows that he is "very friendly to the Vietnamese communist government."

"He was for taking Vietnam off the list of countries of concern and voted in favor of trade agreements with Vietnam without any human rights stipulations whatsoever," he said.

Nguyen said he and other young Democrats in Little Saigon are often judged and criticized and somehow made to feel like they are lacking in loyalty and morality.

But inside McCain's Little Saigon office, the local population's allegiance to the senator shines through. The office distributes McCain-Palin stickers as well as banners and yard signs.

There is also a strong presence of Van Tran and other local officials who support the Assemblyman.

On the wall are photos and news clippings of Tran and his supporters. There is a photo of Garden Grove Unified Trustee Lan Nguyen and his wife running a charity race for tsunami victims. There also are captioned pictures of Westminster Councilman Tri Ta feeding the homeless; Garden Grove Councilwoman Dina Nguyen pinning the red-and-yellow Heritage Flag pin on Arnold Schwarzenegger; Westminster Councilman Andy Quach standing in front of the Vietnam War Memorial; and Garden Grove school trustee Trung Nguyen checking results on an election night.

Diep, who runs McCain's campaign office, says the senator still cares deeply about Little Saigon and Vietnamese Americans all over the country.

"He was the only presidential candidate in this election who came down here even before the primaries," he said. "He paid respects to the War Memorial in Westminster. No other candidate has reached out to the community like he has."

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