THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY
NOVEMBER DECEMBER 2012

DAV® MAGAZINE

A Combat Veteran's ROAD BACK

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A Part of Our Mission

Mid-Winter Conference

February 24-27, 2013

As National Commander Larry A. Polzin presents our legislative agenda to Congress in February, members will have the opportunity to meet their elected leaders and to advocate our various legislative programs.

DAV members are encouraged to make plans to attend the 2013 DAV Mid-Winter Conference by making their reservations at the Marriott Crystal Gateway in Arlington, Va., (703) 920-3230.

Advocacy in Action.

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER
LARRY A. POLZIN

Memorial Takes Important Step Toward Construction

A great deal of effort has been put forth these last several years by DAV and many others to establish a much-needed national memorial to remember and honor all of America's ill and injured heroes. It has been a long road of fundraising, fighting bureaucracy and slashing through red tape.

Knowing first hand how DAV's determination to see this very ambitious endeavor through to completion makes it so much sweeter to tell you that a federal grant related to the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial in Washington, D.C., removes the last big obstacle on this long road (see page 14).

The Department of Transportation has awarded the District of Columbia $6 million under the Public Lands Highway Discretionary grant program to make changes to streets surrounding the memorial's planned site.

Through your generous support over the years, the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation is prepared to build the actual memorial with the necessary private funding, but the memorial's construction cannot begin until several changes are made to streets surrounding the site Congress approved.

This announcement completes the federal funding required for these changes, clearing the way for the memorial's construction to begin.

For more than 15 years, you have been working to make this memorial a reality.

Finally, we are moving into actual construction. This national memorial will be yours, honoring you, the men and women who have given so much to defend our way of life.

The memorial promises to become a national landmark, meaning a great deal to the more than 3 million living veterans who continue to sacrifice through injuries and illnesses not to mention the millions who have gone before us and those future disabled in their service to our country.

I am grateful for all of the support DAV and Auxiliary members, Chapters, Units and Departments have selflessly given on this journey. You should be very proud that one day soon there will be a memorial recognizing sacrifices.

The memorial has broad bipartisan support in Congress and I want to thank Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Patty Murray (D-WA), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), House Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee Chairman Tom Latham (R-IA) and many others for their support.

With the final financial impediment removed, and a single utility relocation issue remaining to be resolved, we are hopeful that on-site construction of the memorial will begin in 2013, allowing the memorial to be completed in 2014.

For those who don't know, the memorial's site is a 2.4-acre triangle across from the U.S. Botanic Garden and within view of the U.S. Capitol.

Once complete, the memorial will be run by the National Park Service. It will seamlessly fit into the national landmarks with strong meaning and appeal, attracting millions each year. You can learn more and see designs online at www.avdlm.org.

I hope to see you there!

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DAV MAGAZINE • November/December 2012
Contact us: www.dav.org • Toll Free 877.426.2838 • 3725 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, KY 41076 Volume 54, Issue 6, DAV Magazine (ISSN 0885-6400) Editorial Office: DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. Telephone (859) 441-7300 or toll free (877) I AM A VET. Published and circulated bimonthly bulletin by the Disabled American Veterans, a Congressionally-chartered, nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. DAV Home Page is www.dav.org. Available on recording for the blind and those with physical handicaps that preclude reading printed material. The magazine is mailed free to DAV and Auxiliary members who are paid subscribers. Nonmembers may subscribe for $15 per year. Periodical postage paid at office of publication, Newport, KY 41071, and at additional offices. Printed in U.S.A. Change of Address: When notifying a change of address, send former as well as new address, including zip code, to: DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550.

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Cover photo released by the US Marines shows Gunnery Sergeant Ryan Shane pulling a wounded Marine to safety while under fire during battles in the violent city of Fallujah, west of Baghdad. After Shane was discharged due to injuries sustained in combat, DAV is fighting to ensure our nation lives up to its promises to him.

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National Service Officers extend disaster relief to veterans affected by Hurricane Isaac.

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Women veterans relax at the VA On the Move family outing.

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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT
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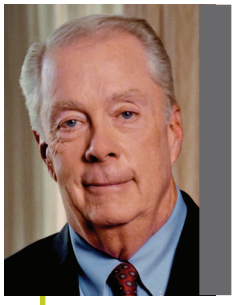


Grassroots Advocacy in Action

As the 2012 national elections draw to a close, I, like many of you, hope for an end to the poisonous partisan atmosphere that divides us. Often seen largely as a contest of words, an election is really a contest of ideas, although it can be hard to see through the fog of political rhetoric. Those ideas, or policies, affect our lives and shape the country we live in.

A long time political observer once quipped that every election is a promising one; candidates will promise anything to get your vote. And the perception that politicians often fail to deliver on their promises once elected is one cause of increasing apathy and dwindling voter turnout.

Studies have shown, however, that politicians who win elections actually do carry out many of their promises. And the promises they don't fulfill often come down to weak support or strong opposition from other elected officials. That's where you and I play a key role in helping fulfill our nation's promises to the men and women who served. It's just good old fashioned, grassroots advocacy in action.

When the 113th Congress convenes in January, many lawmakers, especially those newly elected members, may be unfamiliar with issues vital to veterans and their families. So, it is important to educate them about DAV's legislative priorities (see page 6). Nothing is more effective in terms of getting the attention of your legislators than a personal visit to their local office by a delegation of Chapter officers and members. A one-time official visit isn't enough, however. So set up a series of drop-in visits to your legislator's local office to discuss veterans' issues. If a local office suddenly has several DAV members stopping in every day, this fact will soon be relayed to the legislator in Washington. Besides, all members of Congress want to know what is going on back in their own states and districts.

In addition to local office visits, DAV's Mid-Winter Conference offers members an opportunity to meet with lawmakers and their staffs in Washington. It is also a way to support our National Commander in presenting DAV's legislative agenda to the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees.

Keeping in contact with lawmakers and their staffs is especially important when a bill that would be beneficial to injured and ill veterans and their families is introduced in Congress. Not only should we urge our elected

(Continued on page 36)

LETTERS

Don't Forget Other Vets

As a past commander of the Lt. Robert Grover Chapter 10 in Jersey City, N.J., I find it appalling that all your comments and editorials for years have been about the Iraq and Afghanistan vets who, without question deserve all the support we can give. But I wonder, what about the Korean vets who at an advanced age are now seemingly forgotten? We all didn't die as yet. I'm sure some of us could use some help, support and concern. Maybe because just having a "police action" and not a war that is the cause for forgetting about us. ***Lawrence I. Parish, Deerfield Beach, Fla.***

Senators' Votes Disappoint

I'm very upset, as a member of a family of veterans, at the senators who voted against the Veterans Job Act. All these guys pictures and states should be posted and every veterans organization in those states should hammer these guys and do everything to get them out of office. When you don't represent our vets you don't represent America. Please get all your people out and let's expose these people. ***John Linthicum, Pompano Beach, Fla.***

DAV Magazine welcomes letters. However, due to the volume of mail, we are unable to acknowledge every letter. Letters can be sent to DAV Magazine, 3725 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, KY 41076. Readers can also comment via email through feedback@dav.org. Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving individual claims are referred to the DAV Service Department.

Soaring Spirits

I just want to let you know how Southwest Airlines did some things on a recent trip. I always wear my World War II veteran hat. I was waiting in my wheelchair with my wife near where we were to board when one employee came over to talk to me. Then the captain came over to talk to me and said he would be out to wheel me in. Then an attendant announced that on row three was a handsome World War II veteran and all of the passengers applauded. The airline and their employees made me feel good, and they must always treat veterans well. ***Morton Schwartz, Tamarac, Fla.***

PTSD Is Real

This is in response to Mr. Bouse's letter, "Are PTSD Claims Authentic," in the September/October issue. I have nothing but admiration, respect and pride in veterans from OEF-OIF. You are correct, Mr. Bouse, in noting that these youngest veterans are "all-volunteer." They did not have to serve, they did not have to go to war; but they did. After listening to those young men for seven weeks, I can assure you sir, their traumas are every bit as real as ours, their wounds are as deep as ours, and their PTSD is every bit as genuine as ours. ***Louie McClure, Olean, N.Y.***

Biden on the Cover

I cannot remember being as upset as I was when I received the September October issue of *DAV Magazine* with Joe Biden's picture on the front page. As an ex-master chief in the U.S. Navy and an 80-percent disabled veteran, I am here to tell you that he has never had anything good to say about the military that was not politically motivated. Although I am a life member of DAV, I am considering giving up my membership because of this offensive issue of *DAV Magazine*. ***Robert Martin, Hesperia, Calif.***

DAV's New Look

I am not a fan of the new logo. Although I sort of understand the reason behind this, I do not think changing the logo will be as advantageous as some may think. It's what an organization represents that attracts members. I will proudly wear my "old" logo forever. ***Paul Siverson, Jacksonville, N.C.***

I am a paralyzed veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan. I also own an apparel company and pay close attention to branding. The changes made to the logo and our new slogan are exactly what DAV needs. The look is refreshing. In a clear and positive way, DAV is reaching out to all veterans and finally is starting to stick out. Red, white and blue, sadly, makes people think of the VA or makes DAV look like lesser charity competing for funds. I've seen where organizations like DAV and PVA are really making a difference in the lives of my fellow veterans and their families. Newer organizations have spent more time and money on marketing but aren't doing nearly as much to help. It's about time the look and feel of DAV starts to match the relevance we deserve for the services our organization provides. ***Noah Currier, Rockford, IL***

Praise From a Marine Corps Veteran

Gunnery Sgt. Ryan Shane, left, and Lt. Vince Noble beside an amphibious armored vehicle outside of Fallujah, Iraq, as they prepare for combat.

By Thom Wilborn

Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Ryan Shane lay as still as possible on a street in Fallujah, Iraq, as his insides roared with burning pain from the bullets that struck him in the lower back. A few feet away lay a dying Marine he tried to rescue only moments before.

"I had made my peace that I was done and had done my best," said Shane. "My guts were on fire. I just lay still to prevent being shot again and to keep my buddies from coming out to get me."

Shane's unit, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, was one of those ordered in to suppress the insurgent uprising Nov. 9, 2004 in Fallujah. As the Marines moved into the heavily defended city, insurgents fired at them from every hiding place they could find. Earlier that day, Shane had rescued another wounded Marine when his unit was caught in an open area of a street. "One of our snipers was hit," said Shane. "I picked him up and carried him to the safest place I could find. As I was running with him on my shoulder, the insurgents were shooting at me, with their bullets kicking up pieces of pavement from the road and concrete from the wall to my left.

"Later, as my platoon provided supporting fire, our guys were crossing another road," he said. "I could see one of our guys was down, but I didn't know it was Sgt. Lonny Wells. I said to myself, Come on boys, let's get him out of there.

"I went to him, trying to drag him to safety, and Navy Corpsman Joel Lambott joined me," Shane said. "I felt bullets hitting my back, bouncing off my vest. The next burst hit me in the lower back. I was airborne and I think I blacked out.

(Continued on page 32)

Funding for polytrauma units at VA medical centers help veterans regain independence and quality of life to better integrate into family and community life.

DAV Legislative Goals:

Greeting the New Congress

By Thom Wilborn

When the 113th Congress convenes in January, DAV will be prepared to advocate for our legislative priorities. They include providing comprehensive support services for caregivers of severely wounded, injured and ill veterans from all eras. The current law covers only comprehensive support for caregivers of veterans who served after Sept. 11, 2001.

The legislative priorities are based on resolutions approved at our 91st National Convention in August and will be presented to lawmakers to initiate legislation intended to fulfill our nation's promises to the men and women who served.

In addition to the caregivers initiative are resolutions to support sufficient funding for VA health care and equal medical services and benefits for women veterans. DAV also calls for a comprehensive program for traumatic brain injury rehabilitation and stiff opposition to any effort to privatize VA health care services and programs.

"Our members and their grassroots support for our legislative initiatives are a powerful force urging members of Congress to do the right thing," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "DAV's Commander's Action Network (DAV CAN) is a crucial tool for our members to tell lawmakers of our positions on veterans' legislation, and we urge all of our members to sign up at http://capwiz.com/dav/mlm/signup."

"The legislative resolutions are conceived, developed and voted on by our membership," said National Legislative Director Joseph Violante. "With the strength of 1.2 million members behind us, we represent the voices of ill and injured veterans before Congress in advocating for much-needed services."

"Everyone has a role to play in the fight for the interests

of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill. We encourage veterans and concerned citizens to visit our site to learn more about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans," he said.

Among the priority health care legislative goals are:

- Full funding and resources for polytrauma units at VA medical centers;
- Sufficient resources for VA health care for veterans living in rural and remote areas;
- Sufficient funding to improve services for homeless veterans;
- Improved programs to prevent and treat substance abuse disorders in veterans; and
- Programs to provide psychological support and mental health counseling services for family members of veterans suffering from post-deployment mental health challenges or other service-connected conditions.

Resolutions covering benefits include legislation to remove the prohibition against concurrent receipt of the survivor benefit plan and dependency and indemnity compensation. A similar resolution seeks removal of the prohibition against concurrent receipt of military longevity retirement pay and service-connected disability compensation.

DAV will ask Congress to support legislation to provide realistic cost-of-living allowances for veterans and survivors' benefits. Another priority is to change the federal requirement that veterans must have received compensation for 10 years at the time of death before survivors would be eligible to receive dependency and indemnity compensation.

Among the other legislative priorities affecting benefits are:

- Increasing VA compensation to address the loss of quality of life;
- Full funding for all VA programs;
- Opposing any attempts to change the basis of the VA rating schedule from the "average impairment of earnings capacity" standard; and
- Establishing service connection for the residual effects of military sexual trauma.

Veterans' employment and business ownership also are priority issues for DAV, calling for legislation to provide a reasonable transition period for all service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses after the veteran's death.

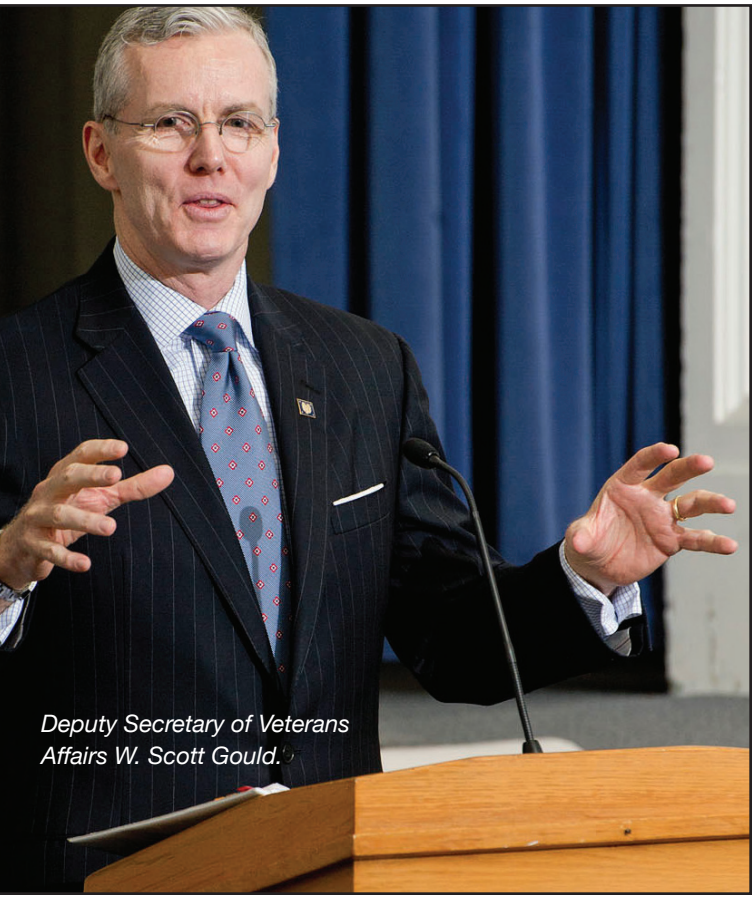
DAV is also supporting the transfer of the Veterans Employment and Training Service from the Department of Labor to the VA.

"We want our injured and ill veterans to know that they are not alone in the legislative arena," Jesinoski said. "DAV is dedicated to the service of our nation's men and women who live with illnesses and injuries related to their military service. They are acutely aware of their needs and the gaps in existing services, and they can best tell their elected representatives what veterans need."

"DAV has earned the reputation in Congress as a strong and influential advocate for veterans' rights," said Violante. "We understand the needs of today's veterans, because we are an organization of veterans helping veterans." ■

Among our legislative goals is establishing service connection for the residual effects of military sexual trauma, as discussed in a recent seminar in San Francisco.

Hearing Cites VA's Accomplishments, Shortfalls



Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs W. Scott Gould.

Figures make it look like the VA is 'slipping' on the path to meet its goals

By Ashleigh Bryant

Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs W. Scott Gould testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Sept. 20, bringing to light many of the department's major accomplishments, while Committee members brought focus to areas where the department appears to still be falling short. At the accountability hearing, the Committee addressed concerns about the state of VA mental health care, the suicide crisis plaguing the veteran and military communities and the process of hiring more mental health professionals to treat patients.

"Data continues to show that 18 veterans per day commit suicide, and five of those were receiving VA care at the time of death," said Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.). "As of mid-July, VA had hired less than 900 employees as part of this effort, and there seems to be confusion among officials as to what the goal is and when it will be reached. I have grave concerns about access to VA mental health care, which is clearly in crisis."

Gould testified that the department is working diligently to hire 1,600 additional mental health care professionals by the end of the year, a goal set by VA Secretary Eric Shinseki.

"We are today hiring 75 individuals per week, and we are on track to meet our goal for hiring these individuals by the end of the year," said Gould. He went on to hail the success of the Veterans Crisis Line suicide prevention efforts, which has processed more than 650,000 calls and rescued 23,000 from potential suicide.

Miller, who participated in a DAV virtual town hall meeting (see page 20) with veterans the day prior to the hearing, also cited concerns expressed to him by veterans about the claims backlog. He questioned the attainability of the VA's goal of having no claims pending more than 125 days and a two percent error rate by 2015. Miller said today's current backlog snapshot, with 67 percent of claims waiting longer than 125 days and an error rate of 30 percent, makes it look like the VA is "slipping" on the path to meet its goals.

Though the VA is expecting to process 1.2 million claims this year, new claims continue to outpace those completed. More than 900,000 claims are still pending with nearly 600,000 on hold for more than 125 days. Gould told

Committee members the 50-percent growth in claims since 2008 as well as the 330-percent growth in complexity and components of those claims are a consequence of expanding benefits access to veterans with claims for Agent Orange, post-traumatic stress disorder and Gulf War illnesses. This was, he explained, the right decision by the VA which subsequently increased the backlog.

"In 2009 we processed 997,000 claims, we got a million. In 2010 we processed a million claims for the first time in the department's history, we got 1.2 million. And in 2011, we processed a million again, and we got 1.3 million," said Gould. "I am pleased to announce this year we will also hit a million claims. This places us at the beginning of a three-year run to end the backlog."

Gould thanked Congress for support of the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) technology currently in pilot stage at four Veterans Benefits Administration offices, aimed at bringing these numbers down.

"Our technology initiatives aim to improve access and increase efficiency, with goals to contribute to an additional 15 to 20 percent increase in productivity and a 4 to 6 percent improvement in claims quality," said Gould.

DAV has championed claims reform to a modern, paperless system designed to get claims right the first time, but has testified that the VBMS needs improvements to move a greater impact on the backlog.

"Our NSOs are still not able to access the VBMS system at any of those pilot sites on behalf of the veterans we represent because VBA fails to recognize the power of attorney our NSOs hold," said National Service Director Garry Augustine. "This hurts the veterans and our ability to produce better claims, which would ultimately reduce VBA's workload and enhance efficiency."

The VA estimates that with the current number of claims pending, workload capability and the projected increase in claims in the next three years, the department will need to process 4.7 million claims to reach its 2015 goal. ■

LEGISLATIVE Update

Stopgap Funding Bill Averts Shutdown

■ A short-term measure funding most of the federal government at current levels through March includes extra money for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to meet an increase in the disability claims workload. The $1.047-trillion stopgap funding bill, known as a continuing resolution, is an increase of about $8 billion over fiscal 2012 spending.

Rogers (R-Ky.)

The measure provides $2.16 billion for the VBA to hire and train additional claims workers. That is the amount requested in the president's budget proposal and is $146 million more than provided in 2012.

"The problems plaguing the VBA claims system are well known: the number of claims filed each year is growing; the complexity of claims filed is increasing; the backlog of pending claims is staggering; and the quality of the claims decisions remains far too low," said National Service Director Garry J. Augustine.

"While the additional resources in the [continuing resolution] are sorely needed, the VBA must increase the quality and hours devoted to training and should regularly test the job skills and knowledge of its claims personnel," said National Legislative Director Joseph A. Violante. "The VBA also must change how it measures, reports and rewards progress so that the quality and accuracy of claims work are at least as important as production and timeliness."

Although the House has passed seven of the 12 annual appropriations bills, the Senate has failed to approve a single one.

House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) called the measure "a good-faith effort to provide limited, yet fair and adequate funding for government programs and services."

The measure funds government operations through March 27, or until final appropriations legislation can be approved.

"This bill is very restricted in its scope, does not contain extensive or controversial policy riders or funding levels that dramatically differ from current levels, and protects critical funding for our national defense," Rogers said. "The legislation reflects the bipartisan agreement made by the House and Senate leadership and the White House to prevent a government shutdown, maintain the programs and services critical to the American people, and provide certainty and stability to ensure our continued economic recovery."

Survey Finds **Barriers** to **Hiring Veterans**

By Thom Wilborn

The Society for Human Resource Management reports that more companies have been hiring veterans during the past year and a half, but many companies said they had made no specific effort to recruit veterans, even with federal tax credits for hiring them.

The poll was conducted in January 2012 among 359 human resource professionals and reflected employment practices for the previous 36 months. The poll found that two-thirds of those responding had hired veterans in 2011, an 11-percent increase from 2010, but organizations with fewer than 100 employees were less likely to hire veterans in the previous 36 months than those with more workers.

The survey found that 82 percent of publicly owned for-profit companies and 91 percent of government agencies had hired veterans, but only 55 percent of privately owned for-profit companies had given jobs to veterans during the 36-month period. In addition, 71 percent of those who had not hired a veteran made no specific effort to recruit and hire veterans and had no plans to do so.

The poll found that employers who hired veterans cited their outstanding skills and responsibility—97 percent said veterans had a strong sense of responsibility, and 96 percent reported they have the ability to complete the jobs assigned to them. Nearly all the companies that hired veterans said they had a strong obligation to hire veterans to show gratitude for their service.

"We have witnessed higher unemployment rates among veterans than non-veterans for several years," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "Based on the poll, it appears there is a lack of knowledge of where to find qualified veterans and concerns about post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD) and mental illness and injury."

The survey reported that 13 percent of human resource professionals were very familiar with effective resources for finding veterans to work—such as the Labor Department's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program and Local Veterans' Employment Representative Program. About one-third of government agencies knew of the programs.

Jesinoski

Employers were using websites such as Career Builder, Monster and Indeed, which they considered the most effective tools to recruit veteran employees.

The poll said that 52 percent of those responding cited difficulty transitioning to the civilian workplace and half believed translating military skills to civilian jobs as the leading impediments to hiring veterans. A lesser barrier was employers' perception of readjustment issues and PTSD, with 42 percent of those responding citing them as a challenge. Experts estimate the PTSD rates among combat veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ranges from 11 to 20 percent.

To offset these impediments, Congress recently approved the Veterans Opportunity to Work and Hire Heroes Act, which provides tax incentives for employers hiring unemployed veterans and creates a program to help unemployed veterans upgrade their skills for jobs in demand. But the survey found that even with the tax benefits available, 31 percent of companies were very unlikely or unlikely to actively recruit and hire unemployed veterans and almost 40 percent were very unlikely or unlikely to recruit veterans with service-related illness or injury.

Employers who hired veterans cited their outstanding skills and responsibility

Under the new law's Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, the VA reported it had approved 45,000 slots for new training and education programs offered by a community college or technical school. The VA aims to accept 54,000 applications in 2013.

The retraining program provides eligible veterans $1,473 per month for a year to obtain an associate's degree, non-college degree or certificate for any of the 200 high-demand occupations as defined by the Labor Department.

Veterans must be 35 to 60 years old, unemployed on the date of application and not dishonorably discharged. They cannot be eligible for any other VA education benefit program, must not have been enrolled in a federal or state job-training program within the previous 180 days and not be receiving VA compensation due to individual unemployability.

"The law is providing needed tax incentives for businesses to hire unemployed veterans," said Jesinoski. "But it is clear that the VA and other federal agencies need to reach out to potential employers to inform them of the resources to find veteran candidates and to overcome the reluctance to hire injured and ill veterans."

In fiscal year 2011, 28.5 percent of the total hires by the federal government were veterans—the most in more than 20 years, according to the Veterans Employment Council.

"It's clear that the employment outlook for veterans needs to improve as we move into 2013," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "It would be of great benefit to veterans if the actions of corporations who are hiring veterans would be duplicated by those employers who don't seek and don't plan to hire veterans."

DAV's legislative goals call for Congress to provide adequate funding for veterans' employment and training programs. Congress is also being asked to support licensing and certification of active duty service members and outreach and employment for women veterans.

Programs to help veterans translate their military skills to civilian jobs were supported by 78 percent of those responding to the human resources poll. Meanwhile, programs to help veterans transition from the military culture to the civilian workplace were supported by 73 percent of the companies.

"Unemployment is a serious problem for our returning veterans," said Jesinoski. "Ever so slowly though, our nation's businesses are recognizing that veterans make excellent employees if given the chance. It is in our nation's best interests to ensure that veterans get the jobs they are qualified for and eliminate the impediments that currently exist." ■

From the NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR
GARRY J. AUGUSTINE

Transition Service Program Assists Newest Veterans

DAV's Transition Service Program has an important role in fulfilling the promises to the men and women who served. For the past 11 years, our Transition Service Officers (TSOs) have been playing a large role in meeting the growing needs of service members separating from the military. Our program currently has 31 TSOs, supplemented by National and Department Service Officers, providing VA benefits briefings, medical record reviews, claims assistance and other free services at military separation centers across our nation covering every branch of the armed services.

Our Transition Service Program is the largest and only one of its kind offered by a veterans service organization. The TSOs work closely with the Departments of Labor, Defense and Veterans Affairs, and various family services offices to assist transitioning military members.

Our TSOs, who themselves have served, are full-time professional DAV employees of the National Organization. We recently added TSOs at U.S. Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Va., and at Wright Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. Meanwhile, another TSO was recently assigned full-time to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

Veterans making the transition to civilian life must overcome many obstacles, and we are providing the programs that address their overall health and well-being. Beyond helping hundreds of thousands of veterans each

U.S. Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Va.

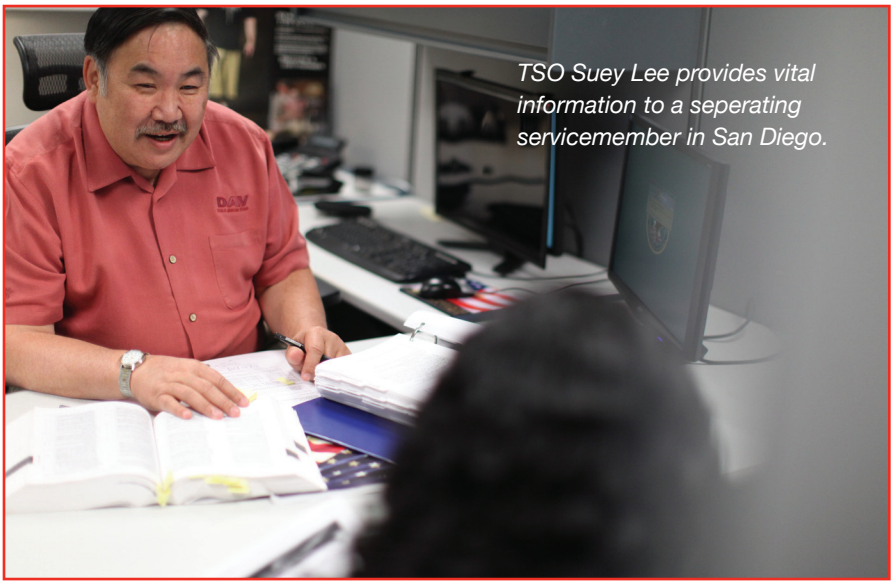
year access available government benefits, we link veterans to job training programs and provide opportunities for veterans to connect with services they need.

Recent War veterans now have ample opportunities to obtain education benefits, employment skills, needed licenses and certification and training assistance necessary to smooth the transition. Our TSOs are providing transitioning service members vital information about their VA benefits, as well as our professional claims services.

One of the most popular and important aspects of this program is a complete review of a service member's medical records to help determine what injuries and illnesses may qualify for service connection and resulting benefits.

The value of the Transition Service Program is incalculable. Disability claims may be prepared and processed even before discharge and decisions can be made when supporting evidence is fresh. These veterans will be able to get their earned benefits early in life, not decades later when their injuries and illnesses worsen.

DAV is dedicated to advocating on behalf of the men and women who live with illnesses and injuries related to their military service. Some injuries are visible, and some, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and many residuals of traumatic brain injuries, are not. We are here to help them all, regardless of the severity or degree of their injuries. Our Transition Service Program means these veterans leaving active duty are not alone in their transition. ■

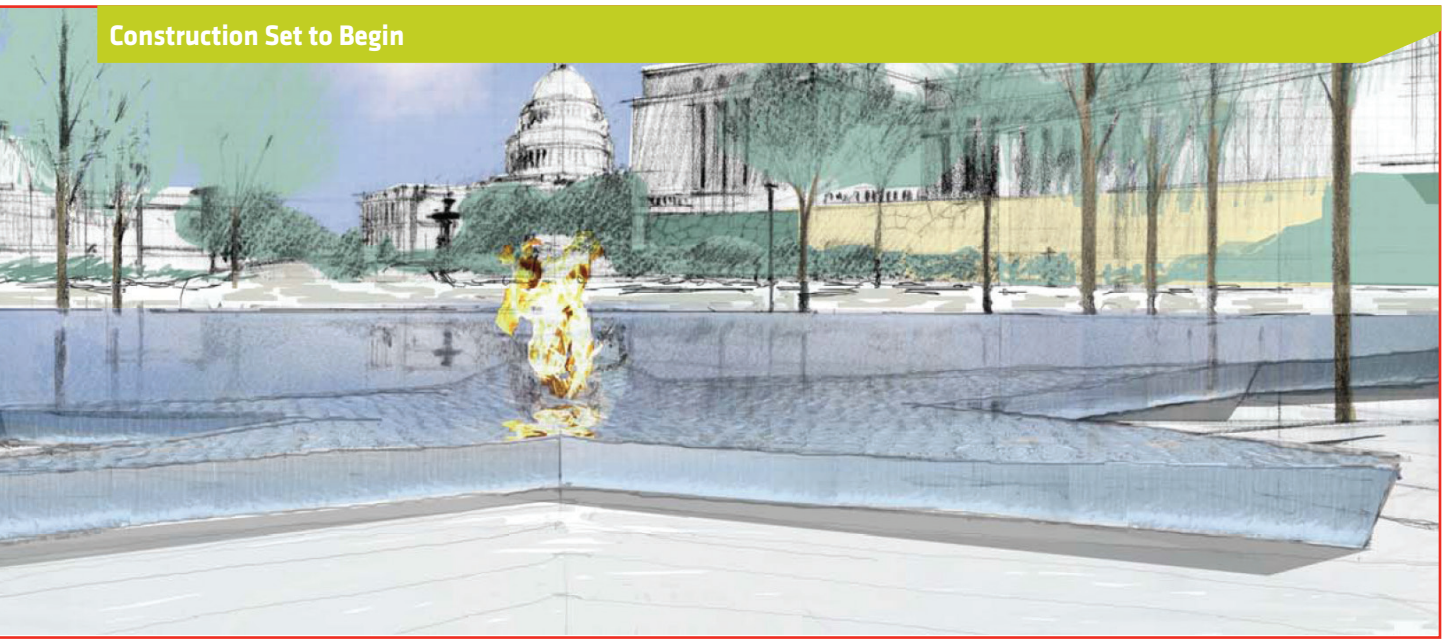


TSO Suey Lee provides vital information to a seperating servicemember in San Diego.

Illinois DAV Collects Veterans' Stories

■ The DAV Department of Illinois and the Illinois Court Reporters Association teamed up in September to collect the oral histories of veterans. Their stories—about a dozen in all—will become part of the Library of Congress Veterans History Project's permanent collection.

The DAV Charitable Service Trust awarded a grant to the National Court Reporters Association to collect the oral histories of DAV members across the country. The goal of this partnership is to assist the Veterans History Project in its mission to collect and preserve the oral histories of American wartime veterans and the civilians who served in their support.



DoT Gives Grant for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial

The District of Columbia has recently been awarded $6 million under the Public Lands Highway Discretionary grant program to make changes to city streets surrounding the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial site. The grant completes the federal funding required for the second phase and clears the way for the Memorial's construction to begin.

Arthur H. Wilson, president of the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation, hailed the announcement as "removing the last hurdle we needed to clear on this long road to establishing a national memorial to remember and honor all of America's disabled veterans. We are grateful for all of the support we have received on this journey and proud that one day soon there will be a memorial recognizing the sacrifices made to protect the many in our great nation and throughout the world.

"The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial has enjoyed broad bipartisan support in Congress over the years, and we particularly want to acknowledge the tremendous efforts put forth by Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Patty Murray (D-WA), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), House Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee Chairman Tom Latham (R-IA) and many others from both sides of the aisle in both chambers," Wilson said.

"We are also extremely grateful to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, his senior leadership team and Federal Highway Administrator Victor Mendez for their personal dedication and commitment to the memorial that resulted in this grant award," he said. "In addition, Mayor Vincent Gray and his team in the District of Columbia have committed to expediting this street work in order to prevent unnecessary delays for the memorial's construction." With just a single utility relocation issue remaining to be resolved, we anticipate that on-site construction of the memorial will begin next year and be completed and dedicated in early 2014. Many of the components of the memorial, however, are already under construction.

The Memorial Takes Shape

Cloud Gehshan Associates joined the project to "determine how best to tell the veterans' stories in a meaningful way," said Jerome Cloud, principal in charge of design for the company in Philadelphia.

After much research on disabled veterans' stories, the design team

created a quotation matrix of 700 stories to ensure a wide diversity of voices. The chosen 18 quotations were selected for universal resonance and timelessness.

These quotations will be etched onto 48 glass panels alongside historic photographic images and four bronze sculptured silhouettes. The images and quotations embedded in the glass will be illuminated by the light passing through the bronze cutouts during the day and lit up at night, said Cloud.

Drawing on more than 40 years of experience, Savoy Studios began work on the glass panels this summer. Each panel has five layers of glass, is four inches thick and weighs approximately 1,700 pounds.

The quotations and photographs are being etched into oversize 48-by-103-inch panels, which will form three walls at the site. Pittsburgh-based PPG Industries provided the sheets of three-quarter inch Starphire® glass, which is also used in the Apache helicopter, B-2 bomber and a new mine-resistant personnel vehicle.

At the heart of the memorial will be a ceremonial flame to honor the sacrifices of the nation's brave soldiers. While the flame itself is a simple concept, the technology behind it incorporates highly sophisticated control features, according to Monty Lunde, president and CEO of Technifex, the Valencia, Calif., company that is designing, engineering and fabricating the stainless steel framework and electronically controlled flame system. Technifex successfully couples imagination with complex engineering for this timeless piece.

As the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial prepares for on-site construction, on the other side of the country in the Walla Walla Foundry in southeastern Washington state, sculptor Larry Kirkland is working with his team of artisans to give shape to four large bronze silhouette sculptures.

Kirkland is meticulously crafting these icons through lost-wax casting, a practice that has been used by artists for thousands of years. The process involves a number of steps, from model- and mold-making, to a variety of techniques for applying the bronze, before the bronze is poured into the wax mold. Once all the wax molds have been completed, he will cast them in bronze, apply the patina coat and seal them for posterity.

All combined, these design elements compare and contrast the ideals — and realities — of the journey taken by all disabled veterans. ■

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Disaster Relief Aids Veteran

By Thom Wilborn

As Hurricane Isaac slowly crept toward New Orleans, memories of Katrina filled the minds of southern Louisiana residents. Isaac, struck the state's coast as a Category one storm on the same date as Katrina in 2005. Residents feared a repeat of destruction and loss.

DAV, using the experience of Katrina, was ready before Isaac came ashore. "Two Mobile Service Offices (MSOs) were dispatched to the area from Florida and Arkansas," said National Service Director Garry Augustine. "Each was supplied with disaster relief vouchers to provide immediate financial assistance to injured and ill veterans stricken by the storm."

"Each hurricane has characteristics of its own," said Department of Louisiana Adjutant Charles Holdeman. "Each one does something different."

Instead of flooding New Orleans, the late August storm hit the parishes south and east of the city hardest. "Water to the south came up six feet and flooded many homes there," said Holdeman. "Areas north of Lake Pontchartrain were flooded and leveled. The wind blew water over the lake's 15-foot causeway."

More than 13,000 homes were damaged by the storm, and nearly 95,000 people requested federal aid to repair homes and replace lost belongings. Flooding caused most of the damage. Nine lives were lost, five in Louisiana.

"When disasters strike, DAV is there to help veterans recover," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "Disaster relief vouchers make it possible for recipients to have the basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing right away when their needs are so crucial."

"Knowing the storm was coming and would strike a very vulnerable area with thousands of veterans, DAV was able to pre-position resources to provide disaster aid," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "As soon as the storm dissipated, we moved quickly into the areas of greatest destruction to render much-needed aid."

"We learned that the area south of Baton Rouge was one of the hardest," said Augustine. "We directed our resources there and were fully prepared for the veterans coming to us for assistance."

Holdeman joined the DAV MSOs at Denham Springs, La., near Baton Rouge where hundreds of veterans gathered for help. "The first day we had

Victims of Hurricane

Our disaster aid support is simply one of the services we provide to the men and women who served

97 veterans come to us," he said. "The next day, probably 150 people came."

Besides providing emergency funds, Holdeman said drinking water was brought in for the veterans, and arrangements were made so they could wait in air-conditioned buildings to be interviewed by DAV National Service Officers.

"These veterans were very happy to get DAV's help," Holdeman said. "They all thanked us, and we even added five new members. They really wanted to join DAV when they saw what we were doing."

The distribution of vouchers later moved to DAV's New Orleans National Service Office. "In all, we distributed vouchers to about 500 veterans, which exhausted our supply and ability to help," said Augustine. "We help as many veterans as we can, but our funding, although substantial, was completely distributed."

"When a storm strikes one veteran, it strikes us all. We are an organization of veterans helping veterans," said Wilson. "Those who suffered total loss of home and property had a friend in DAV."

"Our national service staff got a first hand look of the gratitude and appreciation for DAV from the relieved victims of Hurricane Isaac," said Jesinoski. "They were eager for the opportunity to help these injured and ill veterans at a time of great need. They displayed the heart and core of our organization to those in need."

"Our disaster aid support is simply one of the services we provide to help the men and women who served," said Augustine. "We could not do this on behalf of our veterans without the support of a generous public."

"This was an inspiring effort," said Holdeman. "Some people came to DAV from great distances because they had lost everything. They really had no one to turn to but DAV. The whole effort made me feel good." ■

National Service Officer Chris Diederich with Bernie Ball from Baton Rouge, LA.

Matching Goals: The Puck Stops Here

WARRIORS AND LAWMAKERS FACE OFF

The USA Warriors ice hockey team, a partner of DAV, took on the Lawmakers, a congressional team, in the pair's second on-ice matchup in Arlington, Va., on Sept. 12. The Warriors, all service-connected injured or ill service members or veterans, fell 7-3 to the Lawmakers, but there was nothing defeating about the evening for the team.

Army veteran Mark Little, pictured above, is the Warriors' newly pinned team captain. He lost both legs to an improvised explosive device in Iraq in 2007, which could have put an end to his hockey days. The high school and college player said, win or lose, he knows the team's mission makes an impact.

"Playing hockey lets these guys see that although they have a disability, life hasn't ended," said Little. "I'm proud of the program's ability to take a tragic injury and provide a safe place to experience camaraderie, freedom and a competitive drive alongside my brothers and sisters in arms."

The Lawmakers roster, all members of Congress or their staffs, included such notable names as Representatives Pat Meehan (R-Pa.) and Mike Quigley (R-Ill.).

Post-game, Quigley said despite the challenges the Warriors face, they have an undeterred spirit and competitive drive. "The same qualities that made them successful in the military, their teamwork, perseverance and determination, make them inspiring competitors on the ice, and I'm honored to be a part of this event."

Far Left, Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno kicks off the game with a ceremonial puck drop between USA Warriors captain Mark Little and Lawmakers captain Representative Mike Quigley (D-Il.). Left, The USA Warriors team sported the new DAV logo on a special patch for their jerseys, a nod to the partnership formed earlier this year between the two organizations.

The matchup even received attention on the House floor prior to the puck drop. Just hours before lacing up his skates, Rep. Brian Higgins (D-N.Y.) delivered a speech calling on Congress to live up to its responsibility to care for those men and women returning from duty. Higgins commended the USA Warriors for their devotion to injured service members and veterans, also noting the unacceptably high unemployment rate for returning veterans under the age of 24.

"If you really want to say thank you to the veterans on behalf of a grateful nation, let's nation-build at home and put our veterans to work rebuilding the America they so honorably defended," said Higgins.

Among the evening's special guests were Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno and Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Joseph Dunford, as well as DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski.

"This was my first opportunity to come out and see the team in action, and it really speaks volumes to what the program provides these veterans," said Jesinoski. "They are an incredibly talented group, and DAV is so proud to be partnered with an organization that helps veterans heal."

The Lawmakers game is the Warriors' largest single fundraising event for the year, and between ticket sales, donations, a raffle and the silent auction, the team raised more than $11,000 for the program.

The Warriors and DAV entered into a partnership this year and the DAV Charitable Service Trust awarded a grant to the USA Warriors Ice Hockey Program to help fund the team's continued work with injured veterans. As a show of mutual support for the collective mission of serving veterans, the Warriors debuted a patch of the new DAV logo on their jerseys at the Lawmakers game. ■

DAV Virtual Town Hall

VA Committee Chair Answers Questions

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) joined DAV online for about an hour Sept. 19 to take questions and comments from DAV's Facebook fans, Twitter followers and website visitors. Some 29,000 people from around the country logged on, sending the chairman hundreds of questions.

Here is an excerpt of the virtual town hall meeting. The full archived chat log is available at www.DAV.org/TownHall.

This meeting was just one in a series of opportunities DAV provides its online community. "Like" DAV's official page at www.facebook.com/the.DAV to ensure you know when future virtual town hall meetings are scheduled.

Jim P: I am a veteran and I use VA. I have a service dog, but my VA hospital won't let me bring my dog to my mental health clinic appointment. Do you believe that all disabled veterans with service dogs ought to be able to bring those dogs with them?

Chairman Miller: There is no reason that I am aware of that your local VA should not allow you to be accompanied by your service dog. There is a VHA directive that we pushed VA to issue that allows veterans to be accompanied by their service dogs in addition to guide dogs.

Jim S: Do we have any definitive legislation that has been enacted relative to the sequestration? We keep hearing that benefits won't be affected, but what about other parts of the VA budget?

Chairman Miller: For the past year, I have worked to ensure that funding for VA is not cut under possible sequestration and introduced a bill to make it clear VA was exempt. I have asked numerous officials for straight answers. After nearly a year of conflicting responses and non-responses, the Administration finally took VA off the table completely in a report released last week on how the Administration would implement a sequester if required.

Ginger: We would love to see more funding in the area of outreach for women veterans.

Chairman Miller: We are proud of the service [of] our women warriors. We are working right now to ensure our female veterans get the care they need. I agree, VA needs to do more outreach to the women who have served our nation.

Donald: The Board of Veterans Appeals has remanded many cases back to the Regional Office / Appeals Management Center (AMC). When the AMC completes a rating decision, it can take up to six months to actually process and pay the veteran a benefit. These types of cases could go back many years. The AMC should be instructed to rate the case and instructed to promulgate the case within five days or send it back to the regional office jurisdiction to promulgate.

The way that it is now is creating financial hardships and sometimes can place our veterans in harm's way due to their mental health. What can we do to get the job done?

Chairman Miller: I am continuing to oversee the efficiency of the appeals management process, and some changes are taking effect as we start receiving results from an appeals pilot program that is currently taking place at the Houston RO.

Sheryl: I find it frustrating that existing claims do not have access to the automated system, only new claims, as I understand it. This would add greater accountability for those claims that have been put on the back burner, so to speak. Any plans to remedy this by requiring all claims to be accessible through the online system?

Chairman Miller: VA is developing a new computer claims processing system called the Veterans Benefits Management System or VBMS. According to VA, the system will provide significant improvement and automation of claims processing. In the end though, VA is still receiving well over a million claims each year and this year, they will process about a million. So they are still behind the input rate. Also, claims are now averaging many more issues per claim which take more time to process. We are keeping a close eye on the progress of VBMS and hopefully, it will meet VA's claimed advances.

Gary: What are you doing for bases other than Camp Lejeune for trichloroethylene contamination? Tyndall AFB, Panama City, Fla., is contaminated. They are not sharing this info with the public.

Chairman Miller: All decisions for benefits based on environmental toxins must be based on scientific evidence. The Committee will continue to ensure that scientific studies are conducted and respond to the results accordingly. Please send any information you have on this issue to the Oversight & Investigations Subcommittee at http://veterans.house.gov/subcommittees/report-waste-fraud-and-abuse.

Brian: I'd like to know what your committee is doing to equalize the gap in treatment between male and female survivors of military sexual trauma (MST). Currently the VA has four separate centers for residential treatment of women survivors. None currently exists for male survivors. That is just the most glaring example. Will your committee engage the VA on providing equal care for male survivors of MST?

Chairman Miller: The Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs had a hearing on MST on July 18, and the Committee is aware that this is a problem for all service members, regardless of gender. We are working with VA to amend their regulations governing MST.

Billy: Basic costs, including food, gas, heating oil and other things have gone up so high, and the COLA doesn't go that far. Can we get an automatic COLA of 3 percent or more a year?

Chairman Miller: The COLA amount is determined by the consumer price index, which directly relates to the increase received by Social Security benefits recipients.

Lewis: What action is the VA going to take for those that were stationed at Camp Lejeune? I was stationed there four times between 1968 and 1976.

Chairman Miller: Congress recently passed and the President signed a law providing VA health care for veterans and family members who were on board Camp Lejeune between 1958 and 1988 (for a minimum of 30 days) and who have a disease linked to the water contamination. The list of diseases tracks those studied by the National Research Council as having limited/suggestive evidence of an association with exposure to the chemicals that were in the water supply during that time.

Melissa: I am a woman veteran and user of the VA health care system. Do you plan to hold any hearings about women veterans? There are a number of problems with getting care in VA facilities, and I think there are a number of issues that need to be addressed.

Chairman Miller: Women are the fastest growing segment of the veteran population, and I am very concerned with ensuring they are provided appropriate and specialized care and services through VA. Many hearings and forums specific to female veterans have been held in the past and will certainly be held in the future.

Joe: Is your Committee pushing for more and better training for VA rating [specialists]?

Chairman Miller: H.R. 1627, which was recently signed into law, contains several provisions providing for better training for VA adjudicators. In addition, VA has recently redeveloped its internal "Challenge" training for employees. ■

Left, Army veteran Rosa Garcia and daughter Alma Garcia, both of Riverside, Calif., enjoy a relaxing afternoon at the "VA On the Move" picnic in honor of the military service of women.

DAV, VA Focus on Women Veterans

By Ashleigh Bryant

You can often tell the men in a crowd who have served in the military. Whether it's a fresh haircut and clean shave or a certain posture or poise, male veterans are generally easy to spot. Women veterans, however, are much more difficult to identify, and it's still somewhat rare that they are asked about their service.

It's an unfair, though evolving, reality. One problem that keeps coming up for women who have served in the military is that many just do not realize they qualify as veterans. To help overcome that hurdle, the Loma Linda VA Healthcare System in California partnered with San Bernardino DAV Chapter 12 to host their seventh annual event to honor the women who have served our nation. This year's VA On the Move picnic event focused on one of the most important things for women veterans—their families.

"Our women veterans are so proud to have served, and we just wanted to make sure their families could see how proudly they served," said Lisa Roybal, the women veterans program manager for the Loma Linda VA Healthcare System and a 20-year Navy Nurse Corps veteran. "We also know the younger population of women veterans have families, and they want to include them, so we wanted to invite them all out to spend the day together."

VA On the Move is an initiative to reach out to veterans in the community to inform them about benefits and programs, rather than waiting for the veterans to approach the VA.

"As a veteran, this event speaks to me," said Army veteran Rosa Garcia, who attended the event with her daughter. "Especially now, as women are getting more involved in combat roles, we have to support each other

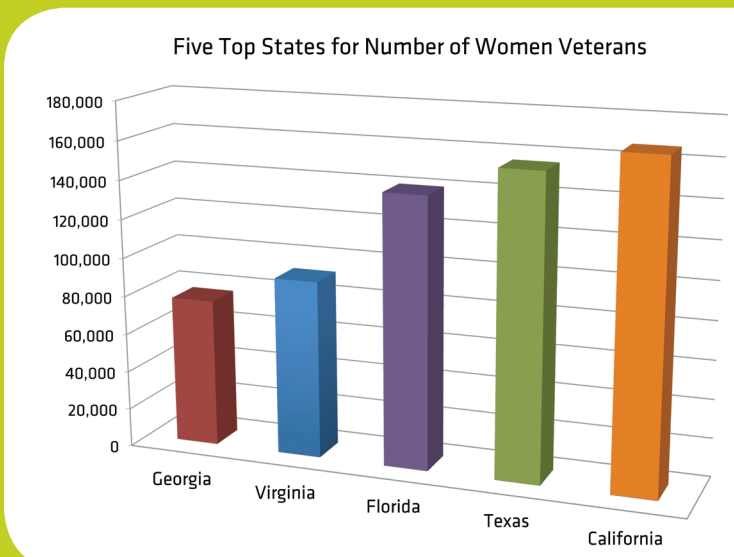
San Bernardino DAV Chapter 12 members helped host the women veterans event, bringing in more than a dozen local and national agencies to provide information on benefits and services.

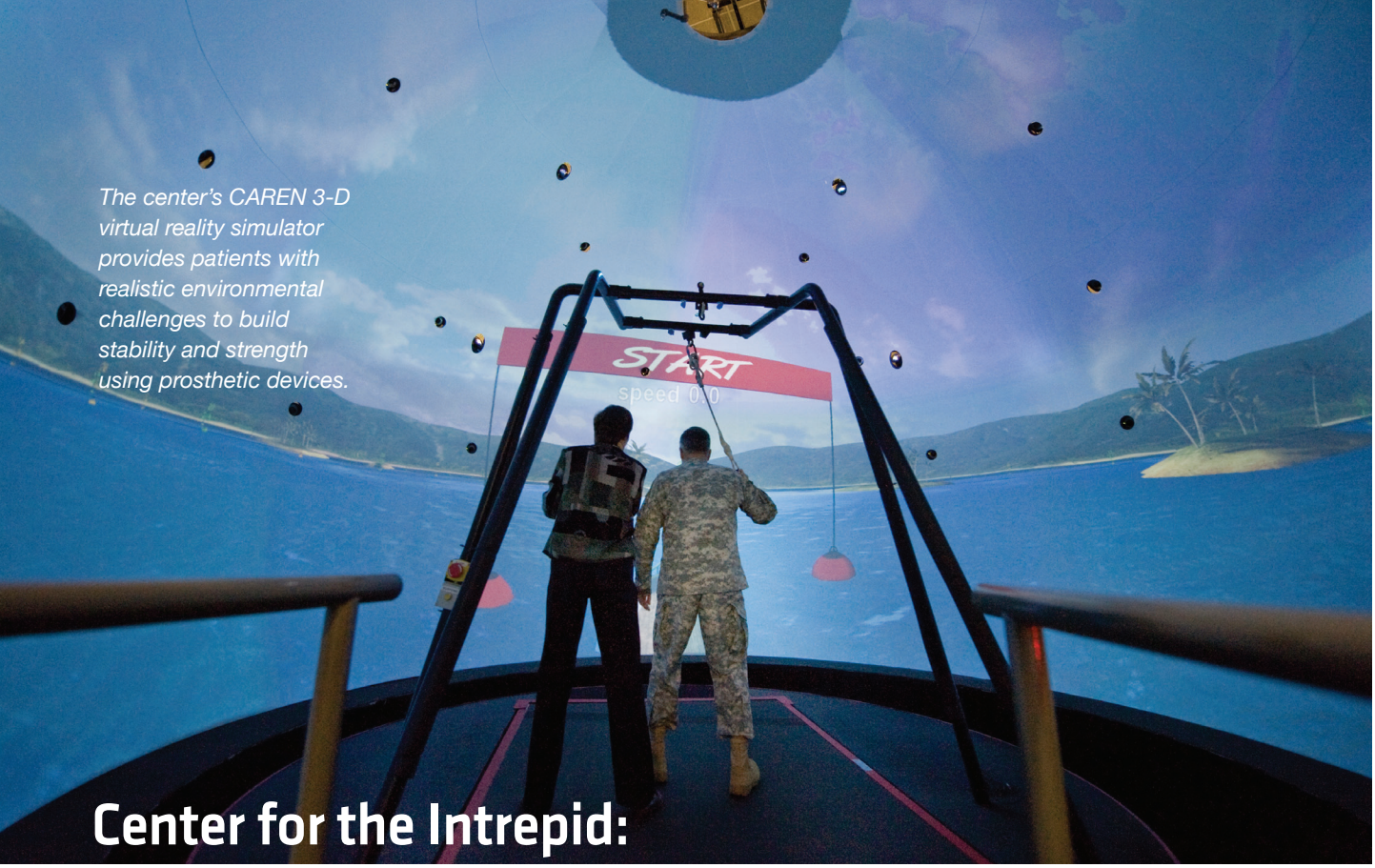
and each other's families."

For Chapter 12 Commander Richard Valdez, the event was a definite success. "A lot of the women I've talked to today have said they have been finding out information they just did not know was available," he said. "Our whole goal here was not only to show women veterans that we are standing up for them, but also that there are federal and local agencies that are out there to help them."

Hailing from the state with the country's largest women veteran population, Chapter 12 has zeroed in on the increasing need for women's programs. They are helping to purchase equipment for women veterans at the Loma Linda VA who have completed the biofeedback training course. Biofeedback is a process that teaches patients to harness their own mind to control thoughts, emotions and behavior. With the Chapter's assistance, women veterans will be able to continue the process at home.

As part of the VA On the Move event, Chapter 12 also opened up its Veterans Exploration Garden on site for veterans to experience. The Chapter also invited an equine-assisted therapy group from Redlands, Calif., to give a public demonstration of how horses can aid those struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder. These efforts are all in line with Chapter 12's mission to produce tangible results for the veterans of the community, and the overall DAV mission to fulfill our promises to veterans and their families. ■





The center's CAREN 3-D virtual reality simulator provides patients with realistic environmental challenges to build stability and strength using prosthetic devices.

Center for the Intrepid:

Five Years of Changing Lives

By Ashleigh Bryant

This year, the Army's Center for the Intrepid at Brooke Army Medical Center, San Antonio, celebrated its fifth year serving casualties of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the first year alone, the center accommodated more than 28,000 patient visits. Nowadays, the staff routinely manages upward of 650 patient visits per week.

The center's primary focus has been on providing rehabilitation for casualties who have sustained amputation, burns or loss of limb function. The staff has also made remarkable strides in educating the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs on the newest treatments and promoting research that will ultimately change life for generations of injured service members.

For example, many of the injured want nothing more than to return to their units on the front lines of the fight. While some injuries require more intensive treatment and rehabilitation, the center's staff has managed to help accommodate that wish for a number of patients.

"The Center for the Intrepid shares a common goal with DAV," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "We want our injured service members and veterans to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives. The center has helped put these men and women on the path to maximize their potential for emotional, mental and physical recovery. DAV applauds the fine work of the center's staff, but moreover the determination of the patients who dedicate themselves to healing."

Returning the Injured to Duty

Injuries which years ago might have sidelined, if not outright ended, a military career are diminishing with technology fielded at the center. There are roughly 5,300 limb-salvage patients from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, exceeding the number of lower-extremity amputations by about five times.

But orthotic devices like the Intrepid Dynamic Exoskeletal Orthosis (IDEO) make pain-free walking, running, parachuting and even returning to combat entirely feasible for some patients. The custom-fit device is made of carbon and fiberglass and mimics an

amputee's running prosthetic, enabling the foot and ankle to perform despite compromised bone structure or muscle loss. Not only does it help save some from limb amputation, it also keeps many valuable and experienced service members on active duty.

"Without the drive and efforts of so many wounded warriors who utilize the IDEO and overcome limitations of their injuries, there would be no reason for any acknowledgement of this program and the IDEO," said center prosthetist Ryan Blanck, the device's inventor. "They are the real heroes in all of this."

Of the more than 240 service members who have been outfitted with the IDEO since its 2009 introduction, more than 30 have returned to duty, and 11 have combat deployed. Currently, high demand for limited resources means those patients medically retired from their injuries may not be able to receive them. The IDEO is now under a provisional patent phase, which could give the device more widespread potential.

Patients remain at the center for several months, or until they reach their maximum potential and are outfitted with their final prosthesis.

Total Rehabilitation

The center is absolutely dedicated to healing injured service members, with a staff and facilities that reflect the intention to help them return to normalcy in life and work. It is equipped with an indoor running track, a prosthetic fabrication lab and a natatorium as well as a firing range and military performance lab.

Here, patients learn how to adapt to everyday functions like walking and driving, but also how to adjust a prosthetic device to perform more complex tasks like firing a rifle, climbing a rock wall and navigating unstable terrain.

The center is also home to the CAREN 3-D virtual reality simulator, the first of its kind in the world. Patients stand on a treadmill beneath CAREN's 21-foot dome, surrounded by a 300-degree screen. The simulator immerses patients in various virtual and physical worlds, adjusting the platform and treadmill to the computer-driven scenario changes. Patients may be taken on a hike over hilly trails, down a busy city street or on a boat in choppy waters.

Through several months of physical and occupational therapy, patients reach their maximum potential. According to center staff, this lasts several months or until they get their final prosthesis. As with IDEO patients, the overall number of amputees able to return to service is low, fewer than 50. But armed with unparalleled equipment and technology, the center makes every effort.

"Our feeling is that we've invested so much time in their training, if a soldier wants to stay on active duty, we should do what we can to give them that ability," said the center's first director, Col. Mark Bagg (Ret.).

Looking to the Future

Currently, the center serves amputees and burn patients injured in Iraq or Afghanistan, with ultimate plans to expand operations to encompass veterans, retirees and family members.

"The Center for the Intrepid is a representation of the kind of advanced, quality facility that our military members and veteran patients deserve," said Wilson. "Investment in this facility has yielded tremendous things for our injured service men and women, and we look forward to the center's long-term vision of bringing more injured veterans into the fold."

More than 600,000 American individuals and organizations contributed to construction of the center. During fundraising efforts, the DAV Charitable Service Trust awarded a $750,000 grant in 2006 toward the $50 million cost of the 65,000-square foot, state-of-the-art facility.

As the country moves closer to an end to the war in Afghanistan, rehabilitation for the wounded will last for years to come, making the center a vital facet in the recovery process for generations of American veterans. ■

VICTORY GARDEN

By Ashleigh Bryant

A harvest of fresh vegetables and the VA hospital's most popular recreational outing

The city of San Bernardino, Calif., isn't catching many breaks these days. City officials filed for bankruptcy protection in August. The police and fire departments are facing deep budget cuts, and crime continues to rise as employment stagnates. Factors like these spell anything but prosperity for a city's residents who were already devastated by the housing crash.

But as you travel the streets lined with vacant lots, fast-food chains and boarded-up businesses, one very bright and vibrant parcel of land stands apart. An oasis in the arid landscape, the sprawling plot of earth is dotted with young avocado and citrus trees, grape vines, tomato and pepper plants. Everything here is carefully tended by the hands of volunteers with DAV Chapter 12, patients from the nearby Loma Linda VA Healthcare System and other members of the community.

The land was entrusted to Chapter 12 in late January through a memorandum of understanding with the city. DAV members were to use the plot to create the Veterans' Exploration Garden, a sort of communal space where veterans could use gardening as a form of therapy. Clearly, it's grown into something far greater.

"When I became Commander I said, 'Get ready, we're about to change speeds,' said Chapter 12 Commander Richard Valdez. "I wanted to produce something tangible. Now DAV has a presence in the community."

The result has been a harvest of fresh vegetables and the VA hospital's most popular recreational outing. They descend upon the space weekly, many struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and a tendency to shut out the outside world.

"This gives me something to look forward to every week," said Army veteran Mack Reilford, who has been coming to the garden since it opened. "It takes me out of my normal routine, which is mostly a lot of thinking about the past."

"This is more than just a single project or program for veterans, it's a terrific model for other communities to implement" said National Headquarters Executive Director

Marc Burgess. "It's bringing veterans in from the hospital, kids in off the street and local residents out into the city. Everyone benefits from this garden."

"It's all about partnership," said San Bernardino Mayor Patrick Morris, who oversaw the site's adoption by Chapter 12. "That is the driving force behind this project, from grants and supplies from Home Depot to the manpower volunteers have provided. Without partnerships, the garden simply could not exist."

Angelo Martinez, the site's full-time, on-site caretaker, is probably one of the garden's most inspiring features. He received an 'other than honorable discharge' from the Army, but found a warm welcome among these veterans.

"I was having problems at home and started coming to the park every day, and I saw this group. One day I asked one of the guys what I could do to help out," said Martinez. "I came in the next morning and have been here ever since."

A man in his early twenties, Martinez was going nowhere fast in a high-crime community. "Coming here has completely changed me, from going downhill to going uphill. If it wasn't for the garden, I'd probably be in a lot more trouble right now," he said.

The garden serves as a veritable watering pool on the savannah, drawing in people from all walks of life. In addition to the local residents and active DAV members, the garden is breathing life back into veterans who had lost touch with the organization itself.

One local Vietnam veteran explained he had long since abandoned his memberships with veterans service organizations, DAV included, until this gardening project popped up on the scene. "DAV is the only one out here really doing something. It's what brought me back."

Though the garden has already yielded a solid bounty of peppers, zucchini and cucumbers, it's still very much in its infancy. In the months to come, the Chapter will add a greenhouse and a worm farm, and will expand the already robust collection of trees and shrubs. All of the work, of course, is done by the veterans and other community volunteers. For a financially strapped city, one that desperately needs more citizen-driven endeavors, these kinds of partnerships and programs are a bright spot on an otherwise bleak horizon. ■

Veterans tend to plants in the Veterans Exploration Garden, harvesting fresh herbs and vegetables they planted earlier in the season, as part of the recreational therapy program through the nearby Loma Linda VA Hospital.

From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

REV. DR. RONALD R. RINGO, Jr.

"Greater Love Hath No Man Than This"

In November we take a moment and remember those who serve or have served our country in our military services. We hopefully remember the great dedication, time and sacrifice they freely have given their fellow man so we can enjoy the freedoms and liberties we do today.

It is taught in the scriptures that: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." Does that sound familiar? Well, I know that I was taught this belief throughout the time I was a young enlisted infantry Marine. One of my sons also has actually lived it serving two combat tours in Iraq as a Marine and seeing several of his friends pay that ultimate sacrifice.

History suggests that actually few people ever are called to give this ultimate love and sacrifice. We have seen the courageous in the military give their all on the battlefield because of this love of country, devotion to duty and commitment to their fellow service man.

But, we also see devoted mothers sacrificing their lives to protect a child. As well as, political, organizational and religious leaders who have been martyred for their cause or beliefs. Yet, what about you and me in our daily walk and routines? Let me share a poem with you that may help you ponder this question. It is "My Today," written by Mabel F. Ricard:

I have no other day than this;
Oh, Father, grant I shall not miss
The service sweet of doing good,
And living truly as I should.

Oh, Father, in this day that's mine,
Let all thy sweetness through me shine;
Let all my ways acknowledge thee,
May my Lord be manifest in me.

Oh! Let me by thy voice to speak
The truth to those who vainly seek;
And through me let thy love o'erflow
To all the world that needs it so.

Oh! Let today be this for me,
A day of glorifying thee.
'Tis all the day that my soul knows;
'Tis from today tomorrow grows.

So, for today, this is my prayer—
Tomorrow, Lord, is in my care.

Most likely, our sacrifices are many smaller ones that will become expressions of that greater love. Most of us lay our lives down every time we think of another and put their interests and needs ahead of ours.

Even though we may not be killed as a martyr, or in combat, or give our life for a loved one's safety, we are given many opportunities each day to lay down our lives for another. Not in death, but in service and sacrifice, be it one day, one hour or one moment at a time, you are giving the mark of a true friend. No greater love can be given than to lose ourselves in service to others. It has been said that; "When we are in the service of our fellow beings, we are only in the service of our God."

Until next time, may God bless you, and may God continue to bless our great nation…

Semper Fi

Caregiver Support Safe From Possible Spending Cuts

■ The VA says it has contacted caregivers of wounded and injured veterans who received notifications mistakenly sent warning that automatic spending cuts set for January could stop their monthly stipends.

As reported in *Stars and Stripes*, VA spokesmen Josh Taylor said, "The letter has no bearing on the VA Caregiver Support Program or the stipend benefit."

About 6,000 spouses and parents of seriously injured veterans currently receive the monthly caregiver stipend, which can total more than $30,000 a year. Congress put the program in place to make sure that families of veterans who need constant care aren't left destitute.

VA Opens Second Phase of Job Training Program

■ The Department of Veterans Affairs has filled all 45,000 openings for the first year of a new skills training program for unemployed veterans and has turned to filling the 54,000 slots for the second phase.

The Veterans Retaining Assistance Program provides up to one year of Montgomery GI Bill benefits to unemployed veterans ages 35 to 60 who sign up for vocational training classes aimed at helping them find jobs in high-demand fields.

Effective Oct. 1, the Montgomery GI Bill pays $1,564 a month to full-time students. The training program requires enrollment in an approved school to learn a skill for one of more than 200 high-demand occupations that the Labor Department estimates will have a minimum of 10,000 job openings in the next decade.

Potential applicants can learn more about the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program and apply online at www.benefits.va.gov/VOW, or toll-free at 800-827-1000.

VA Gulf War Task Force Report Released

■ The VA has released the second in a series of annual reports from its Gulf War Veterans Illnesses Task Force, outlining how the department will address the concerns of veterans deployed during the 1990-1991 war. The report focuses on efforts to improve the delivery of health care for Gulf War veterans, including the launch of a prototype clinical care model specifically for Gulf War veterans. The report can be found online at http://1.usa.gov/UR1Kco.

VA Says No Service Dogs Benefits Warranted for PTSD Sufferers

■ The Department of Veterans Affairs will pay service-dog benefits to veterans with vision, hearing or mobility-related injuries but not to veterans suffering only with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health disabilities.

A 67-page final draft of rules concerning veterans in need of service dogs was published in the *Federal Register* Sept. 5. In justifying its decision, the VA cited "nationally established" and "widely accepted" training protocols for sight, hearing and mobility-assistance dogs and the lack of similar training protocols for mental health service dogs.

From left, National Judge Advocate Michael E. Dobmeier, National Chaplain Ronald R. Ringo, Jr., 4th Jr. Vice Commander David W. Riley, National Commander Larry A. Polzin, Senior Vice Commander Joseph W. Johnston, 2nd Jr. Vice Commander Ron F. Hope and 3rd Jr. Vice Commander Moses A. McIntosh, Jr.

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Service

(Continued from page 5)

Lambott was hit in the heel and got back to safety." Shane was later told that his Marines counted six rounds that had struck his back body armor, and one bullet had embedded in his ceramic protective chest plate.

"I wiggled my toes to see if I had movement, and I felt my hands, arms, legs and face to see if I had feeling," he said. "The Marine I went after was badly bleeding and needed immediate care. It was a pretty helpless feeling."

Once an insurgent machine gunner was driven off, Shane's men rescued him and Wells, carrying them under heavy fire to a medical amphibious vehicle. Wells was taken aboard, but the Marines couldn't lift the 250-pound Shane up the ramp to waiting medical care.

"Insurgents were shooting guns and RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) at the track," said Shane. "I was conscious and I remember it all. I was worried about the Marines risking their lives attempting to rescue me on a stretcher. I wanted them to take cover, but I'm thankful for their heroism.

"I was in a lot of pain, but when they got me to the track, I had to crawl up from the street. That's when it hit me that I may actually get out of this," he said. "I told them I could crawl up. My legs didn't work, so I pulled with my hands, and I pulled my guts out to get up there.

"I remember lying there with the smell of blood and diesel fuel, looking across at Sgt. Wells, but I didn't recognize him," said Shane. "He was still blinking every once in a while, but he looked lifeless. I knew it was the Marine I had gone after, but I couldn't make out his face. I just remember us staring at each other. After a while, he stopped blinking and I just closed my eyes."

At the field hospital, Shane lost consciousness from the pain and woke up two days later when he was in the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. The bullets that struck him had shattered on impact and sliced through his abdomen causing severe injuries to internal organs. Doctors performed 10 surgeries there and at the Naval hospital in Maryland to extract bullet shards and repair his organs as best as they could.

While at Landstuhl, Corpsman Lambott and two others from Shane's company who were wounded in Fallujah came to visit. "They told me Wells was the Marine I had tried to rescue and that he didn't make it," said Shane. "I remember starting to cry and how bad it hurt my insides. All three of those Marines held my hand."

As he recovered, the 15-year Marine infantry veteran received a Bronze Star for valor and a medical discharge with 20-percent disability, which did not qualify him for the military benefits of a medical retirement. He also struggled with depression and disabilities that were never discussed at his military physical and medical review boards. His service-connected VA disability rating granted in 2006 also failed to fully include the extent of his injuries and other errors.

A Marine since he was 18, Shane desperately wanted to remain in the Corps, but his injuries prevented him from meeting the tough physical standards of an infantryman. He realized he needed time to heal. He tried to stay in the best shape he could without doing the hard, physical exercise that only brought searing pain and sought to begin his life as an injured veteran.

Nearly six years passed before Shane, who had joined DAV, talked to Newark, N.J., National Service Office Supervisor Nicholas Bernardi. In reviewing Shane's VA claim file, Bernardi found the veteran had been improperly rated for his injuries.

"As Shane explained his injuries several red flags popped up," Bernardi said. "I couldn't understand why he was separated from the military and not retired."

Bernardi met with Shane and discovered a close personal association —they had served on the same battlefield during the invasion of Iraq, but never met. "During his first deployment, Shane's unit went into Mosul to get a foothold, and my unit, the 101st Airborne, came in to secure the area," he said. "He felt greatly at ease with DAV because he was dealing with someone who served with him and had the same experiences. He trusted what I was doing."

"My health hasn't gotten any better, but it is what it is," said Shane. "I have been told it may get worse as I get older. I still have bullet fragments inside me, and there are some days that I hurt more than others. The best thing for me was finally coming to grips that I had to slow down and to make changes because of my injuries. I am thankful for every bit of life I have."

Bernardi closely followed Shane's

case through the VA process to ensure errors were not repeated. "Within six months the VA disability was increased several times to a final rating of total disability with special monthly compensation for his wounds and associated conditions," Bernardi said.

Meanwhile, DAV's Washington, D.C., National Service Office Assistant Supervisor Stephanie Cooper began to work with the Department of Defense to upgrade Shane's medical discharge to the 30-percent disability level that meets medical retirement standards.

Bernardi said it was his top priority to ensure Shane received the benefits he earned. "It's our duty to uphold DAV's mission to keep the promise to the men and women who served," he said.

"My injuries are a part of my life now," said Shane. "DAV and the VA have helped me accept them. I miss the Marines, and I miss the action. It is a hard thing to deal with when you have your career pulled from beneath you."

He praises DAV's work for making the difference in his case. "The depth and breadth of DAV and the networking and influence it has make it unparalleled," he said. "No one does things like DAV.

"I have worked with great professionals, but for a non-profit organization, this level of service and professionalism is unsurpassed. At times, I felt like I was Nick Bernardi's only client.

"I am thankful for what Nick and DAV have done for my family and me," he said. "DAV has righted the wrong. I never would have challenged the rating if not for DAV. Now DAV is helping me obtain disability retirement from the Marine Corps. I have wanted my Marine Corps retirement since the day I left. I think I earned it."

"This is an outstanding example of how DAV service helps restore the lives of injured and ill veterans," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "NSO Bernardi quickly recognized that Shane's initial rating failed to account for the full extent of his injuries. We are veterans helping veterans because no one should go it alone."

"DAV National Service Officers are working hard every day to ensure veterans are honored with correct disability ratings," said National Service Director Garry Augustine. "It is a special privilege to serve our veterans in such a significant way."

"I found DAV phenomenal," said Shane. "It is filled with dedicated professionals and provides first-class service. You know that DAV really cares about you."

"Caring about veterans is DAV's sense of pride," said Bernardi. "It's the least we can do to help veterans. We do this work because we want to help veterans and their families." ■

Veteran Ryan Shane, right, meets with Newark, N.J., National Service Office Supervisor Nicholas Bernardi who helped him obtain his earned benefits after 15 years of service in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Member Funds Mutually Beneficial Gift Annuity

Peter Kamysz, a World War II veteran, went 58 years without a VA disability rating he should have had all along. Since 1946, he has suffered from a constant ringing in his ears so severe he took up bowling four days a week to drown out the noise. Meanwhile, his service-related hearing loss worsened, forcing him to step down from a 20-year career in accounting.

It was not until 2004, when he met a DAV National Service Officer, that Kamysz was encouraged to apply for VA benefits. Soon after, he was granted a disability rating and became a DAV member. "You've done so much for me," he said, looking back.

When he read about charitable gift annuities in *DAV Magazine*, he called to inquire and liked what he learned. With a gift to DAV of $10,000 or more, he would receive a generous fixed income for life and enjoy significant tax benefits. "It's mutually beneficial," Kamysz said of his recent gift annuity. "It adds strength to DAV's excellent history of advocacy for all vets, while providing me a good rate of return and some tax relief." His subsequent letter told more:

"I shall be forever grateful for DAV's efforts. Getting those good hearing aids from the VA was a blessing, albeit late in life, along with the benefits of my disability rating. Fortunately, my circumstances have allowed me to add strength to your wonderful mission. I know that Vilma, my recently departed wife, would have strongly supported my action. After all, she's the one who had to endure all those years of my saying, 'Huh? What's that?' May God bless you in helping our beautiful heroes."

Peter Kamysz, DAV member and Gift Annuity donor

Charitable Gift Annuity Benefits:

- ★ Fixed income for life, largely tax-free
- ★ Rates range from 4.4% (age 60) to 9.0% (age 90)
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- ★ Guardian Society recognition for your generosity

To learn more, and to receive a personalized illustration of the income and tax benefits for your age(s), call the DAV's gift planning staff at **1-800-216-9802**, e-mail **giftplanning@dav.org** or return the attached postcard.
We hope to hear from you soon!

Minimum gift is $10,000.
Minimum age is 60.

DAV GUARDIAN SOCIETY
PROTECTING THOSE WHO SERVED

From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER
DONNA M. ADAMS

The Key Is Understanding

Over the years, DAV Auxiliary has seen changes in our program goals and how we conduct business, but our determination to make a difference in the lives of our veterans and their families remains unchanged. We offer diverse eligibility requirements and it is up to us to seek out those who support our veterans and invite them to join us.

The families of veterans who rely on the VA for their monthly income or use the VA medical centers for health care should already know the benefits of joining the Auxiliary. They should also understand that it is because of the number of people we represent that our federal legislators listen. In my mind, these families would want to support the organization that has fought for so many years to ensure that the benefits extended to them are maintained and enhanced. It is up to us to educate them and ask them to join.

DAV is the premier organization in advocating for legislative reform and maintenance of federal benefits, and our Auxiliary has walked right beside them in these efforts. Our veterans have earned these benefits and we have been diligent in our efforts to ensure that the families of those with severe injuries or illness as a result of military service are able to maintain a lifestyle comparable to those still able to compete in the private sector. But what about those who aren't dependent on the VA for their income or health care?

Many of our veterans receive a small amount of compensation from the VA connected with their illness or injuries but continue to work to support their families and don't use the VA hospital. Those families still share a common bond of service to our country and can take advantage of the services offered through VA programs of home loans, death benefits and wartime pensions. Auxiliary members are offered the same discounts on goods and services available to members of the parent organization. DAV National Service Officers are available to family members to help with claims for death benefits, widow's/widower's pensions, and survivors benefits. We keep our members up to date on federal programs that affect them, and we offer educational scholarships and resources to help with financial crises.

We have all heard the term "paying it forward" as a way to support our community programs. We can each pay it forward by giving a gift of DAVA membership to family or friends, and the upcoming holidays allow us the perfect time for giving. Have you thought of a gift of the initial down payment of a life membership or even sharing the cost with a potential member with $10 each? These new members can then use that savings to extend the same gift to their friends and families. Eligible members can be found in our churches, grocery stores and bowling alleys. We can visit the veteran centers at our community colleges and universities, and our community leaders are often looking for opportunities to connect with the organizations in their areas.

A large number of veterans and families haven't joined simply because they don't know the effort that has gone into ensuring that programs are there for them should they be needed. We meet people every day who support our veterans but don't know how they can show that support, and many veterans without a service-connected disability want to let those they served with know that they still think of them often. DAV Auxiliary gives all these people that chance to say "thank you," and each one of our current members can offer that opportunity.

With your help, we can make this an outstanding membership year. The key is understanding.

Adjutant's Column
(Continued from page 3)

representatives to support the measure, getting our fellow veterans, friends, neighbors and relatives to do likewise makes an even bigger impact.

Of course, members of the House and Senate receive hundreds of letters and e-mails from large corporations and well-funded special interest groups about a whole host of legislative issues. So it takes a concerted effort to show that there is a groundswell of concern about veterans legislation.

That's what the DAV Commander's Action Network is all about. DAV CAN is a coordinated, dedicated, vigorous grassroots campaign to urge lawmakers to act in the best interests of veterans. This very effective program helps DAV activists keep their elected representatives on notice that veterans' issues are important to their constituents. I encourage you to become an active member of DAV CAN, by visiting http://capwiz.com/dav/mlm/signup/or contacting National Legislative Director Joseph A. Violante, DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters, 807 Maine Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20024, or calling (202) 554-3501.

REMEMBRANCE

Retired NAO Paul Majo Passes

■ Retired National Appeals Officer Paul Majo died Sept. 1 at the Samaritan Keep Nursing Home in Watertown, N.Y., where he had been a resident. Majo was 77.

He joined DAV in September 1976 as a National Service Officer trainee in the Syracuse, N.Y., National Service Office. Majo was later transferred to Washington, D.C., where he became a National Appeals Officer at the VA's Board of Veterans Appeals. He served there until his retirement in May 1997.

"Paul was an exemplary member of our service staff and provided compassionate, professional service to veterans," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "He was a trusted and dedicated national service officer helping to fulfill our promises to the men and women who served."

A native of Watertown, N.Y., Majo enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps soon after graduating from high school in 1953 and served in Korea. While in the service he graduated magna cum laude from Louisiana Technical College in Reston, La., with a Bachelor of Arts degree in social studies and science.

He continued serving in the armed services until his retirement from the U.S. Air Force in 1974. Majo worked for the U.S. Postal Service for a short time before joining DAV.

NAO Majo

Majo is survived by his wife, Lucy, two sons, a sister, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He was buried at Glenwood cemetery with military honors.

MARCH 30 –
APRIL 6, 2013

Snowmass Village, CO

27th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic

DAV FULFILLING OUR PROMISES TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Department of Veterans Affairs

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TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

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