



THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY

JANUARY FEBRUARY 2013

MAGAZINE



Opening the **Outdoors** for **Therapy**

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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 reservations at the Marriott Crystal Gateway in Arlington, Va., (703) 920-3230.

Advocacy in Action.

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER LARRY A. POLZIN



Roll Out the Big Guns

The elections are finally over and a new Congress is about to begin. To get the jump on the start of the new legislative year, our annual Mid-Winter Conference begins Feb. 24. Our members will gather to obtain the latest information concerning veterans legislation, VA programs and the thorny issues that confront us.

Now is the time to educate lawmakers, especially those new to Capitol Hill, about vital veterans issues. The key to that opportunity is having our members advocate on behalf of our fellow veterans. This isn't the year to stay home. It is the year to begin forging alliances with our lawmakers.

National Legislative Director Joseph Violante takes us through the legislative process in his column (see page 14). I want to urge you to attend the Mid-Winter Conference because of the role you can fill in Washington, D.C.

Our members meet and get to know their lawmakers during the conference. They not only need our information on veterans programs, they welcome their constituents and their ideas. Most lawmakers support programs for veterans, but few, especially new ones, know what we need and how we can achieve our goals to improve care and benefits for our fellow veterans.

Meeting with elected officials and their staffs gives our members enormous opportunities to have the full attention of lawmakers directed to such vital programs as adequate compensation, vital health care, improved access to quality mental

health care and the pressing issues of the claims backlog, to name a few.

Our Mid-Winter Conference seminars and workshops arm our members with the information they need to present to lawmakers – to plant the seed of an idea, as Legislative Director Joe Violante says. The legislative process begins at that point, but without strong advocates in Congress, the idea could be lost among the thousands of pieces of proposed legislation that flood Capitol Hill every session.

Making an impression on members of Congress as informed, compassionate veterans advocates enhances our clout. And it all stems from your participation in the Mid-Winter Conference and meeting with your lawmakers.

I sincerely hope you will do your best to attend and thoroughly immerse yourself in the role of veterans helping veterans. Every earned benefit we have is the result of this process, and whatever we can achieve in the future rests with you. Generations of veterans depend on you, and we never want to disappoint them.

Our advocacy in action ensures our cause will truly become a national priority. Our fellow citizens know that taking care of veterans is the right thing to do. We must double our efforts on behalf of injured and ill veterans who have earned their benefits on the fields of honor. Our fellow citizens know that fulfilling our promises to veterans is the right thing to do.

When we show our passionate commitment to those who've served and their families, we ensure our national representatives make the right decisions on our behalf.

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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT ARTHUR H. WILSON



A Shared Responsibility

Day in and day out, thousands of DAV volunteers are doing their part to bring light into the lives of this nation's injured and ill veterans and their families. It's all part of our mission of service and hope that took root in the grim aftermath of World War I and continues to grow and flourish today.

Whether it's providing transportation or visiting patients in a VA hospital, or simply doing whatever they can to improve the quality of life for veterans in their communities, DAV volunteers are special people who have answered a calling to give generously of their time, their energies and their compassion to America's veterans.

And while we're extremely proud of our volunteers, we also commend the dedication and commitment of our partners at the VA for their service to veterans and their families. From the caring staffs at VA medical centers and clinics, to the claims adjudicators working hard to deliver our earned benefits, to those who provide dignified funeral services for us and our families, they all share the mission to fulfill our promises to the men and women who served.

The National Commander's Awards Program honors an outstanding individual within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). This awards program provides DAV an opportunity to nationally and locally recognize individuals within the VHA, VBA and NCA who perform outstanding work on behalf of America's veterans and their families. It is also a way for DAV to thank each of them.

Each year our Departments and National Service Offices nominate deserving candidates from each of these administrations.

Nominees are selected based on several factors, including their exemplary accomplishments and the positive impact of their services. Also considered is their ability to motivate others in the VA to follow their example.

Just imagine if everyone who works for the VA were as praiseworthy, what a difference it would make for all of us and our loved ones. The National Commander's Awards Program not only rewards outstanding achievement, it encourages others in the VA to strive for self-improvement. That, in turn, serves as an incentive for greater accountability throughout the system.

We do not always see eye to eye on every issue, but DAV and the VA must continue working together for the benefit of veterans and their families.

Veterans, especially those with illnesses and injuries linked to their military service, must overcome many obstacles in making the transition to civilian life. DAV and the VA are partners in helping them gain a sense of normalcy so they can live high-quality lives with dignity and respect. Ensuring they can access programs and services that address their overall health and well-being is a responsibility we share.

As a strong and influential advocate for the men and women who made the greatest commitment to our country one can make, rest assured DAV will continue working as partners with the VA—while demanding accuracy and accountability—to ensure our government does what is right by our nation's veterans.

Medical Personnel and PTSD

Nurse Jennifer Grant made an important point about nurses and post-traumatic stress disorder (September/October 2012 issue of *DAV Magazine*). We tend to think of nurses as caregivers and forget that they, too, often need care. She made her points about wounded and burns. During World War II, Army nurses also had to take over the concentration camps we overran as infantry. We stayed only a few hours to see and smell the horrors while the doctors, nurses and staff remained for weeks and months as caregivers on top of caring for our wounded and their horrors. The Army and the VA would not recognize that they needed help after those terrible experiences. I still place a halo over their heads. Thank you, nurses and doctors in all wars; we needed you, and

you were there. Thank you, DAV, too; we needed you, and you are here. **Curt Whiteway, E. Craftsbury, Vt.**

Vivid Memories

The story picturing the B-24 Liberator in the September/October 2012 edition brought back vivid memories from my childhood. Returning from a mission during World War II, the bomber iced up in a thunderstorm, ran short of fuel and crashed less than a half-mile from our home, perhaps five minutes' flying time West of the Orlando, Fla., Army Air Base. Coming across Steer Lake, it raked the belly turret off on an irrigation pipe, bellying into a boggy wetland between tall pines and orange trees in a grove where my dad was foreman. Of 14 aboard, three were killed. Sadly, I well remember those who didn't come home. **Rev. Clifford L. Halford, Plant City, Fla.**

Above and Beyond

I just want to thank the Roubidoux VA Medical Center in Indianapolis for its services and staff. I also would like to thank my Gold Team doctor for saving my life. I have never had a doctor like him who came to my room on his lunch break to see me and give me support. I am moving to Boston and only hope I find another doctor like him. **James Carter, Indianapolis, Ind.**

Magazine Comments

I enjoy your magazine very much, but there are some things in the September/October 2012 issue that I have to disagree with. The first landing in the Philippines was on Leyte, not Luzon. I know, I was there. August 14, I was in an ambulance going to a Naval hospital in Long Island, N.Y. You do a good job on your work. Keep it up. **A disabled Marine veteran.**

Our family has thoroughly enjoyed *DAV Magazine* throughout the years. The articles are always creative and festive. The holiday articles are full of inspiration, yet pure fun. **Kelly Smith**

Editor's Correction:

In reference to the article "Hearing Cites VA's Accomplishments, Shortfalls" in the November/December 2012 issue of DAV Magazine, National Service Officers were, in fact, granted access to the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) in mid-August and the issue of NSO power-of-attorney recognition was also resolved. Portions of the information published in this article were dated to June 2012 when these issues had not yet been resolved. Thanks to these changes, NSOs are now able to better serve veterans, produce better and more efficient claims and help reduce the Veterans Benefits Administration workload.

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.

*Not knowing where to seek help,
he became a prisoner in his own home.*

DAV Service Helps Isolated Veteran



Oliver Pettry Jr., as a young soldier in the early 1960s.

By Thom Wilborn

Oliver Pettry, Jr. knows that veterans depend on other veterans. He learned it during battle in Vietnam, he benefited from it when DAV represented him in obtaining his earned benefits for his combat wounds, and it rescued him when he had no place left to turn.

Pettry was a U.S. Army machine gun squad leader in 1966, carrying out search-and-destroy and ambush missions with the 25th Infantry Division. A rugged, no-nonsense West Virginian, he looked out for his buddies, and they looked out for him. "Veterans helping veterans is the way we survived," he said. "You can't exist without each other."

He had been wounded, returned to battle and after his discharge carried home the Vietnam Gallantry Cross and memories of nearly constant combat. As years passed, his wounds and Agent Orange exposure began to worsen his health. He turned to DAV for help.

"I was wounded when I was struck in the chest with splinters from a tree shattered by an explosion, possibly a mortar round," he said. Pettry was sent to a hospital to heal and then returned to his unit. "I was sent out on ambush the day I got back," he said. "I was still bandaged and oozing blood, but they sent me out."

"In 2007, DAV was there for me, even though the war was long over," said Pettry, a member of Chapter 28 in Charleston, W.Va. "DAV helped me get care and compensation when my health problems worsened."

Pettry would again need DAV's help in 2011, when he was injured in an automobile accident, suffering several broken bones in his leg, hip and chest. "That really hurt



Huntington, W.Va., National Service Office Supervisor Calvin Cabarrus, right, visits Oliver Pettry, Jr., to ensure the veteran's needs are met.

me,” he said. “I couldn’t even walk around the house, and I lived alone.”

Not knowing where to seek help, Pettry became a prisoner in his home. “I had no food in the house because I couldn’t get to the supermarket, and I couldn’t cook because of the pain,” he said. “I was starving. I dropped to 140 pounds.”

Petry’s daughter and son, living in neighboring Virginia, were unable to make the long drive often enough to give the daily care needed. His son, Pete, sent an email message pleading for help to DAV Huntington, W.Va., National Service Office Supervisor Calvin Cabarrus.

“I am worried that my father will fall and further injure himself,” wrote Pete. “Might there be some resources or organizations that can assist my dad with his daily needs such as groceries, cooking and other assistance?”

“Any little chore became a monumental task for [my father],” Pete said.

Cabarrus, learning of the dire conditions that the elder Pettry was experiencing, called Chapter 28 Commander Larry Pennington, who obtained groceries, a wheelchair and a walker with a seat, courtesy of the Chapter. After they visited Pettry, Cabarrus alerted the Huntington VA medical center social worker, who assigned a caregiver to Pettry.

“His life was turned around for the better,” said Cabarrus.

Petry now receives Meals on Wheels deliveries four days a week, and the VA and the state provide a caregiver on a regular basis. “DAV was quick to offer assistance,” he said. “Commander Pennington gave me mobility, and Calvin got me the caregiver from VA. They are good men. They helped me a lot.”

“Many times our veterans need more than claims representation,” said Washington Headquarters Executive Director

Barry Jesinoski. “Pettry’s needs were crucial, and DAV immediately began to offer the assistance he needed.”

“Clearly, our National Service Officers (NSOs) do much more for veterans than is generally recognized,” said Jesinoski. “We assist them in obtaining the services available from the VA and often call on our Chapters to provide assistance. Whether it’s disaster aid, obtaining resources for homebound veterans or supporting homeless veterans, DAV is there.”

“I didn’t know if we could find help for my father,” said Pete Pettry. “DAV stepped up, and it was reassuring. I felt the thanks of a grateful nation had been realized by DAV, and it gave me a sense of pride to see my dad being cared for.”

Pete, a U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard veteran, described DAV as a noble organization dedicated to serving veterans. “We’re very grateful for DAV’s help,” he said. “Calvin is one of the unsung heroes, as are all DAV service officers. No one comes close with their expertise.”

“Each time I help a veteran, it feels like I’m making a difference in their quality of life,” Cabarrus said. “I’m an injured veteran myself, and I know what it’s like having someone there to help carry the burden for you.

“After we got total benefits for Oliver, DAV didn’t forget him,” Cabarrus said. “We are lifetime partners. We are always going to be there for veterans. We are more than advocates; we become a friend for life.”

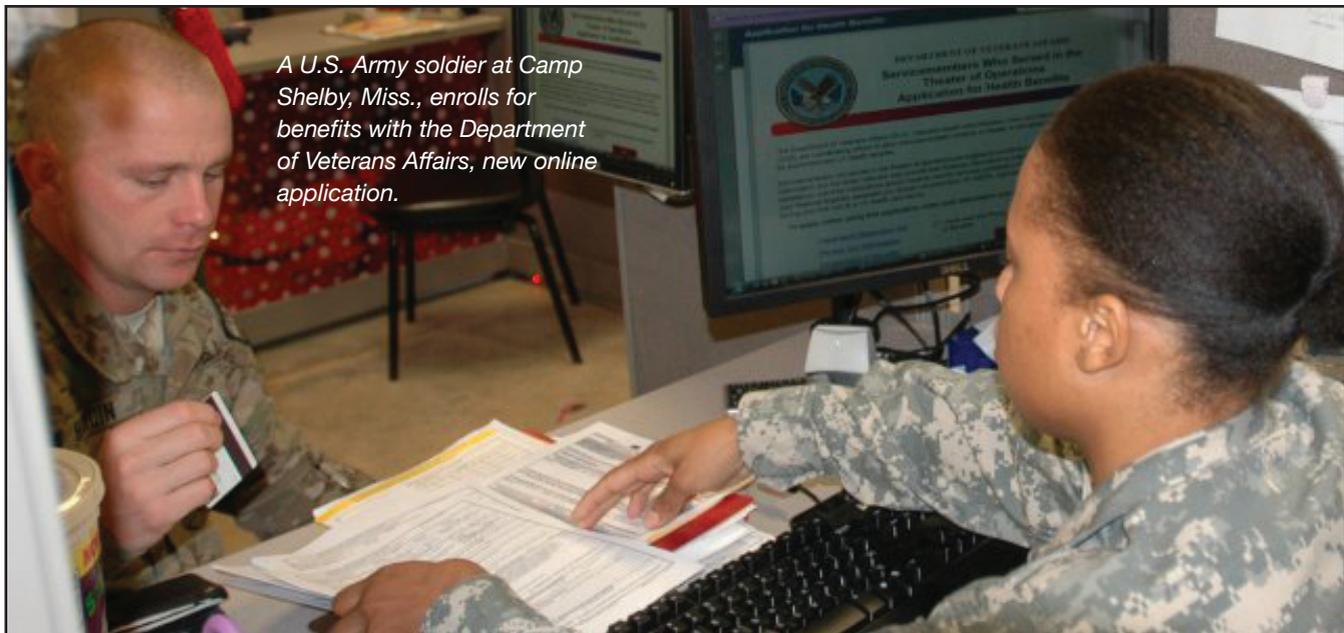
“It was shameful that a Vietnam veteran should waste away in his own home, without food or mobility. And it is heartwarming that DAV was the organization the family turned to for help,” Jesinoski said.

“Our NSOs are dedicated to giving our veterans and their families access to the full range of benefits that are available to them,” said Jesinoski. “Our veterans need to know that they are not alone, and in the case of Oliver Pettry, he found that we are here to help them all.”

Nontraditional voluntary efforts that provide direct assistance to veterans and the DAV, like those undertaken by Chapter 28, are eligible to be credited through DAV’s Local Veterans Assistance Program. Credited hours make volunteers eligible for national recognition and, for those eligible, can be applied toward the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship. For more information on how you can help veterans in your community or be recognized through LVAP, contact your local Chapter or the DAV Department in your state. ■



Oliver Pettry Jr., right, and his son, Pete, visit the New River Gorge Bridge near Fayetteville, W.Va., which the elder Pettry helped build in the mid-1970s.



A U.S. Army soldier at Camp Shelby, Miss., enrolls for benefits with the Department of Veterans Affairs, new online application.



Critical Issues Must be Addressed

By Dave Autry

In anticipation of the White House budget request, DAV and our allies in the veterans community continue our proactive efforts to inform and educate not only the Department of Veterans Affairs and its stakeholders, but also the general public, the administration and Congress, about the most pressing issues affecting the men and women who served and their families.

In that regard, DAV, AMVETS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the Paralyzed Veterans of America have issued a review of the critical issues that must be addressed in the administration's budget for fiscal year 2014. These organizations have remained steadfast over the years to ensure that our government provides:

- Competent, compassionate and consistently high-quality health care to all eligible veterans, and to their eligible family members and survivors;
- Timely and accurate delivery of all earned benefits to

veterans, dependents and survivors, including disability compensation, pensions, education, housing assistance and other necessary support; and

- Dignified memorial services to all eligible veterans and preserving our national cemeteries as shrines to those lost in or following service to the nation.

“After more than a decade of continuous war, VA will be stressed to continue to meet the growing health care needs of the nation’s veterans long after our uniformed personnel repatriate from their deployments. Their long-term wounds, whether physical or psychological, will need to be attended to by VA. This is a responsibility that cannot and should not be minimized,” said National Legislative Director Joseph Violante.

“As with previous generations, veterans’ injuries will require highly specialized, lifelong care, sophisticated prosthetics and other vital equipment and services,” said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. “Providing for all veterans is a firm and lasting commitment,

not only by VA but by all Americans, to restore their lives and return them to a state of optimal health.”

Despite growing pressure on the administration and Congress to rein in federal spending, they must ensure that VA health care and benefits programs receive adequate funding to meet the demands of veterans. “In these uncertain economic times, coupled with a growing federal deficit, we have serious concerns about potential reductions in VA operations. Any cuts to VA programs, particularly in light of continuing anxiety about sufficient funding, could have devastating consequences for the delivery of health care and benefits to veterans,” said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson.

DAV calls on the administration and Congress to ensure that the health care and benefits programs administered by VA are protected from any efforts to reduce spending as a result of deficit and debt reduction steps. The administration and Congress also must work together to ensure that the advance appropriations already provided for fiscal year 2013 will be sufficient to meet the projected demand for veterans health care in that year, and they must ensure that sufficient resources will be provided in the advance appropriation for fiscal year 2014 as well.

It is also vital that VA continue to improve and modernize the benefits delivery system. After three years of study and testing, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is finally deploying a new claims-processing system with a new information technology framework, and Congress must ensure that this transformation process is successfully completed so that veterans’ claims for benefits can be decided right the first time.

“Particularly crucial to VA’s efforts has been the VBA’s decision to reach out to DAV and other veterans service organizations (VSOs) accredited by VA to help veterans file claims. The VBA recognized that this collaboration could reduce its workload and increase the quality of its work,” said National Service Director Garry Augustine. “To be successful, however, the VBA must continue to work in an open and transparent manner to strengthen its partnership with VSOs.”

That collaboration has been particularly valuable in developing and deploying the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). This paperless, rules-based claims-processing work tool will rely upon electronic claims files, managed workflow, increased production and improved quality. Whether or not the VBMS will “revolutionize” claims pro-

cessing may not be known for years to come; however, DAV believes the transition from paper-based processing to an intelligent, digital processing system is inevitable and must be completed. “DAV will continue to work with the VBA to help ensure that the VBMS gains all the capabilities needed to do the job ahead,” Augustine said.

Another challenge facing veterans is a successful transition from military service to civilian status, which hinges upon a veteran’s ability to be competitive in the workforce. “To help ensure a successful transition, Congress mandated a more comprehensive approach to preparing service members for entering civilian life. Now it must properly fund employment, training and education programs to meet the increasing needs of the men and women transitioning from active military service into an intensely competitive civilian job market,” Jesinoski said.

“The veterans community has played a role in evaluating the new curriculum as it has evolved, and DAV will continue monitoring the program’s implementation across each of the uniformed services,” Augustine said. “The new curriculum must be relevant to today’s transitioning service members by allowing it to be tailored to the unique circumstances each new veteran may face, such as pursuing an education, searching for a career or starting a business.”

In addition to meeting veterans’ health care needs, the VA must have adequate funding to maintain its critical infrastructure. “As VA strives to improve the quality and delivery of care for our wounded, ill and injured veterans, the facilities that provide that care continue to erode,” said Jesinoski.

With buildings that have an average age of 60 years, VA has a monumental task of improving and maintaining these facilities. DAV urges the Administration and Congress to provide the necessary resources to maintain and improve the VA’s critical infrastructure as outlined in the department’s Strategic Capital Investment Plan.

“As the 113th Congress and the Administration begin crafting a budget, DAV will continue educating them about these critical needs and carry forward recommendations for funding levels and policy initiatives that will deliver on America’s promises to our nation’s veterans, their families and survivors,” said Violante. “It will be absolutely essential that our grassroots advocacy network stay informed, stay ready and take decisive action to do what’s right by veterans.” ■

VA Extends Health Care, Compensation for Gulf War Illnesses

The VA has extended presumptive service-connection for Gulf War veterans suffering from undiagnosed and medically unexplained chronic multi-system illnesses to Dec. 31, 2016. The claims filing period had been set to expire at the end of 2012.

"This is a sound decision by the VA because researchers are still baffled by the extensive illnesses suffered by veterans of the 1990-91 Gulf War,"

said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski.

"It's crucial that the VA continues to provide service-connected health care and compensation to the men and women who served in that war."

"Gulf War veterans are suffering from multiple symptoms that include persistent

memory and concentration problems, chronic headaches, widespread pain, gastrointestinal problems and other chronic abnormalities," said National Service Director Garry Augustine. "At present, no effective treatments have been identified for Gulf War illness, and studies indicate that few veterans have recovered from their symptoms."

Congress initially approved a 1994

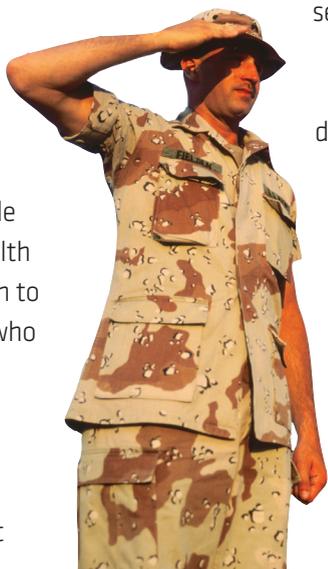
law granting presumptive service connection for two years to the veterans experiencing chronic, undiagnosed illnesses that include fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory disorders and memory problems. Due to a lack of scientific understanding about the nature and cause of Gulf War illnesses, which affect more than

175,000 veterans, VA has extended service connection several times.

"The prevalence of these illnesses has continued nearly unabated since the war," Jesinoski said. "Extension of the presumption of service connection is warranted, and will now cover a period of 25 years after the war ended."

"Gulf War illness is an example of the continuing cost of war paid for by the suffering of our veterans long after the battles have been fought," he said. "While the war lasted less than 100 hours, the price of our victory will extend far into the future. Most of the criticism of the VA's most recent extension is that 2016 is not long enough."

"DAV has urged the VA to continue medical and scientific studies to determine the cause and nature of the multi-symptom illnesses affecting our veterans," said Augustine. "The VA-supported studies by the National Academy of Sciences continue."



Report Says Claims Backlog Hurting Veterans and VA's Image

■ A new report by the Center for a New American Security says that the enormous backlog of 900,000 pending claims for veterans benefits is "...tarnishing the VA's brand in the eyes of veterans, who see this backlog as a tangible expression of the government's disdain for them," *The Washington Post* reported. To address this crisis, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has been engaged in a comprehensive transformation of its claims processing system for the past three years. "In pilot program testing, the new paperless Veterans Benefits Management System has cut the average time to process a case from 240 to 119 days. The system is on track to be used nationwide by the end of 2013," according to VBA Under Secretary Alison Hickey.

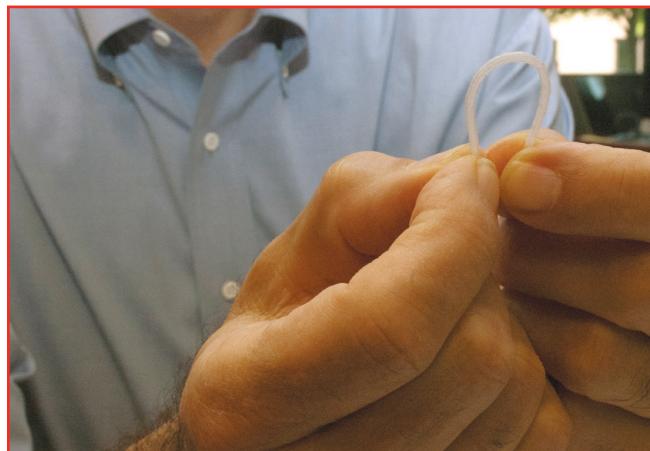


Breakthroughs in Restoration

Todd Nelson, left, a retired Army master sergeant, now works for USAA helping wounded veterans like himself find employment. He also spends his free time sharing his personal story as a motivational speaker and as a member of a regenerative medicine advisory panel for the AFIRM.



These researchers are developing some unbelievable treatments that will no doubt change the way our wounded service members and veterans receive care.



By: Ashleigh Bryant

In 2009, retired Army Master Sgt. Todd Nelson underwent the last of some 47 surgeries to repair the damage inflicted on his body by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan. He had finally grown accustomed to and accepted his new, post-recovery appearance, but he also realized there was little else that could be done.

“The fact is they can’t really do anything for me except replace a scar with a scar,” said Nelson. “So I’m cool with it. I’m used to it by now.”

Nelson, who helps ill and injured veterans find employment, also serves on a regenerative medical advisory committee in San Antonio, Texas, which helps to guide research through the Armed Forces Institute of Regenerative Medicine (AFIRM). The Defense Department launched the AFIRM in 2008, bringing together experts and researchers in the field of regenerative medicine to help accelerate the development of treatments and therapies for service members. In particular, the AFIRM’s research zeroes in on the types of wounds most common to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“In modern warfare, some of the most feared wounds are those caused by burns,” said John Bushby, a Navy pilot who flew 67 combat missions over North Vietnam. He now works as part of the AFIRM team as the chief operating officer for the New Jersey Center for Biomaterials at Rutgers University. “There’s this very distorted view of possible injury. That Hollywood depiction of the clean bullet wound, a neat drilling of the body with no concurrent loss of bone and tissue, is what the combatant expects.”

We know, of course, this is far from the truth and so does Nelson. For him, the reality was a car packed with explosives. A suicide driver detonating the bomb along a roadside. Smashed cheekbones, a shattered forehead and

chin. Shrapnel tearing away skin, muscle and bone. Fire searing the flesh of Nelson’s nose, ears and eyelids. The reality of impending death, with only the slimmest chance of survival. Excruciating recovery, countless surgeries, futures changed and lives irreversibly altered. That was his new reality.

The procedures Nelson has undergone to repair the damage were based mainly on older Vietnam-era technologies: flesh taken from one body part to salvage another. The breakthroughs the AFIRM has made in limb salvage, burns, facial reconstruction and scarless healing may never serve Nelson directly, but he considers it his mission to share his story and make sure research continues for these procedures to advance.

“I basically represent our country’s battle for freedom and democracy. People look at me, or people like me, and what do they see? They see we’re not winning this fight,” said Nelson. “As long as our enemies are able to do this to us and we’re not able to recover, basically we’re putting people on the street who are walking billboards saying they’re kicking our tail. That’s the reason we need to continue this. Until we’re able to restore people back to their original conditions, the enemy is winning.”

Collaborating to Meet Challenges

The AFIRM is the joining of many minds and a shrug to the traditionally competitive nature of biomaterials research. Researchers at Rutgers and the Cleveland Clinic lead a network of 15 institutions, and teams at Wake Forest and the University of Pittsburgh head a second network of 16 institutions. Synergy has become status quo, and it’s yielding tremendous breakthroughs as the AFIRM researchers are no longer competing for the same grant funding. Rather, they are a team working toward a shared goal.



Retired Army Master Sergeant Todd Nelson and wife, Sarah, several years and dozens of surgeries after he suffered devastating injuries from an IED explosion in Afghanistan.

Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski was invited to visit the Rutgers laboratories to see first hand the types of treatments now in development.

“It was extraordinary to see and hear about some of the advances they are making within the AFIRM,” said Jesinoski. “The researchers are developing some unbelievable treatments that will no doubt change the way our wounded service members and veterans receive care. They are on a course to helping restore quality of life for a lot of men and women who have been injured in service.”

Lauren Macri, the acting chief operating officer for the Rutgers-Cleveland group, explained they currently have the ability to take a small skin sample and manufacture entire sheets of a patient’s own skin. “The second-generation product also includes pigmented cells, so if you’re a person of color, you can have skin that actually matches your natural tone, and beyond that adding all the essential components to skin like hair follicles and sweat glands. All that is coming.”

Also coming is a sprayable cell treatment, wherein a small amount of donor skin will be able to more efficiently cover large surface burn areas. This treatment, similar to a breath spray, is now in clinical trials and is likely to become

the first product to reach the market thanks to the work of the AFIRM.

The research efforts have also yielded a scar remediation therapy in which fat generated from liposuction procedures is purified and specific cells are injected under scar tissue. In many cases, the scar remodels, becomes pliable and results in a more cosmetically appealing surface. Researchers are currently looking at how old scar tissue responds to the treatment, which could aid patients whose scar tissue formed long ago.

In the area of bone regeneration, materials previously used were not only dangerous, but the protein needed to promote growth was also incredibly expensive. If the protein leached during treatment it could lead to bone growth within the muscle tissue and possibly sterility. But the AFIRM has developed bone regeneration scaffolds that use significantly less protein. “You get about 30 to 40 percent more bone formation at a quarter of the price and with a quarter of the risk,” said Dr. Joachim Kohn, director of the Rutgers-Cleveland group.

The AFIRM has also been working on a flexible material that can help reconstruct nerves that have been damaged or severed. The braided material prevents any kinking that



A researcher at Rutgers University’s Center for Biomaterials conducts tests on bone scaffolding materials as part of the AFIRM’s work to reduce the cost and increase the safety of rebuilding damaged sections of bone.



Dr. Joachim Kohn, Director of the AFIRM's Rutgers-Cleveland cohort, demonstrates the flexibility of one AFIRM development, a material designed to withstand bending while protecting connected nerve sections as they regrow.

skeptic's glasses. After all, many of the treatments the AFIRM is working on are still in clinical trials, and they have yet to put a product on the market.

"The skeptic would say nothing has changed, and that's a valid point," said Dr. Kohn. "The reason for this is medical-device development's extraordinarily long cycle. The first artificial skin was invented at MIT in 1976, and it was first approved as a product by the FDA in 1996. That's a 20-year cycle."

By these standards, the breakthroughs of the AFIRM won't be in practice until 2028. However, a greater utility of the technology paired with

could kill the nerve while it heals and reabsorbs into the body once the work is complete. They are also developing ways to regrow nerves faster and protect existing nerve endings to help prevent muscle atrophy in patients waiting for that replacement.

This is just a brief accounting of the many advances this team has developed in its short existence.

"The AFIRM is in its fifth year, but remember it takes one year to start something up," explained Kohn. "So for just four years of work from the AFIRM, this is unprecedented progress. If you expect magic, it won't work. But the progress has been fantastic. You have to give medical device development seven-to ten-year, but even then we're faster than any time in the past."

The Future of the AFIRM

When the AFIRM was first launched, it was tasked with finding treatments for serious burn trauma caused by explosive devices in Iraq and Afghanistan. While that is not the primary concern today, the AFIRM continues this work for the next cycle.

"If or when the insurgents change their strategy, we will see burns again, and we will be ready," said Kohn. In the meantime, now in transition between the first and second five-year cycles, the AFIRM is in a crucial position.

One could look at this story and view it through a

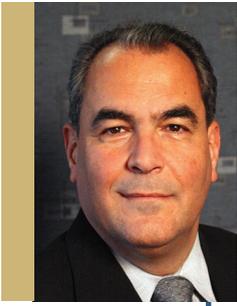
an understanding of how to navigate regulatory pathways and finance such innovation is significantly shortening that timeline.

"We are seeing medical-device development cycles as short as five to eight years now," said Kohn. "And I am privileged to see what is in the pipeline for five years from now. That's the part that the skeptic doesn't see, and there will be massive changes."

One person who is not skeptical is Todd Nelson. For someone who will likely not benefit personally from the advances, he has high praise for the work of the AFIRM. He also encourages other veterans, especially those who have suffered traumatic injuries and long recoveries, to get involved in the discussion about the AFIRM through social media.

"I'm really excited about the potential the AFIRM has because it's really earth-shattering stuff," said Nelson. "If there are any other disabled veterans out there that want to be part of it, here's a chance to be part of something significant. If you've ever wondered why did this happen to me, it might be because you're the building block to helping someone else. This will go down in the history books; it's a chance to be part of something great."

To learn more about the AFIRM or to become part of the conversation on Facebook, visit www.facebook.com/AFIRM.MRMC. ■



From the NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR JOSEPH A. VIOLANTE

Make Your Voice Heard, and Make the Law

As the 113th Congress begins its work, our members should redouble their efforts to support DAV's legislative priorities with their elected representatives in Washington. More is required than a single letter, telegram, email or phone call. It is regular, recurring contact with both your Representatives' local and Washington offices. And there are crucial times when personal contact means the most.

One of the keys to becoming an effective advocate is timing your contact with lawmakers with the progress of the legislation; but anytime is a good time to start talking with them. Even before a bill is introduced you can plant the seed of our legislative initiatives in the minds of those who pass our laws. Your contact with the local and Washington offices of your Representative or Senator should discuss the idea for legislation and, if they agree, give them ideas on how it should be done and can be written.

If a bill on one of our legislative issues has been proposed, even if it was not proposed by your representative, call to get your Representative or Senator to co-sponsor it. Once a bill has a sponsor it is ready to be introduced, but additional co-sponsors are always welcome. Your advocacy or opposition to the proposal can greatly affect how or whether it proceeds.

All new bills go into a hopper, where

they are given consecutive numbers and then read into the *Congressional Record*. At that point, the Parliamentarian sends the bill to the appropriate committee—usually in our case it's Veterans' Affairs or Appropriations. At this point, there is again an opportunity to contact your legislators and the committee urging their support for our legislative initiative.

When the bill reaches a committee, it is reviewed, researched and revised. The committee closely examines it and calls in expert opinions, including DAV's, before it is ready for committee action. Depending on the changes made, our members—through contact with their lawmakers—have another opportunity to advocate for the bill if it remains to their satisfaction, or to oppose it if the bill has been altered to adversely affect veterans.

Next, the committee members formally vote on the bill, and if approved, it goes to the full House of Representatives or Senate, where it can be offered for debate. Once again, our members have the opportunity to influence the outcome through contacts with their elected representatives.

Often when a bill is debated, it can again undergo changes that could help or harm veterans, so being watchful of the legislation is crucial. That's where our Commander's Action Network (DAV CAN) proves to be a superb advocating tool. Our DAV CAN members receive e-mails from DAV explaining the status of the bill and what needs to be done to advance the interests of veterans. DAV CAN emails usually include suggested

pre-written letters that can be sent directly to the elected representatives. It is important for you to join DAV CAN, and to use it.

Once a bill is placed on the House or Senate calendar, it then can be voted on. In the days prior to a vote, our members have another opportunity to contact their elected representatives. Giving your lawmakers the word on how to vote can have a tremendous effect on legislation affecting veterans.

If approved by one chamber of Congress, the bill is forwarded to the other to begin the process anew. When a bill has been approved by both the House and Senate, it sometimes undergoes a conference process by a panel of Representatives and Senators to reconcile differences between the two versions. While the reconciliation debate is handled primarily by the conference appointees, your elected representatives, who may not be part of this process, can still influence panel members and their staffs.

Once through the conference committee, the compromise bill is again voted on by the House and Senate, and the time to advocate for the bill presents itself again. If approved by both sides, it goes to the President, and then the time comes to advocate for the bill with the White House. If the President approves the bill, it finally becomes law.

It is a long process, but it's called representative government. You have a stake in decisions at each point, and you have many opportunities to influence how our laws are made. Each step of the process gives us the chance to see meaningful veterans legislation passed and signed into law.

Our Washington Headquarters Legislative staff tracks hundreds of bills and proposals through this process each Congress. Some bills become law, but many more die due to lack of support, or because they are bad ideas. Dozens of bills that would have greatly benefited the lives of our veterans languished when Congress adjourned late last year.

Justice delayed is justice denied. There's no way to tell if more contacts by our members with Congress would have made a difference, but some of these bills that could have

become law affected concurrent receipt, mental health, expanded VA health care and increased compensation.

Clearly the effort is worth it. If you have a computer and are not in DAV CAN, you should sign up by going to the DAV website (www.dav.org) or by contacting my office. That's the first step in becoming a veterans advocate. Our organization is a powerful group of veterans helping veterans, and members of Congress are aware of that fact. They pay attention to what DAV and our members say.

It's what you say to your elected representatives that means our success. Our small staff does a magnificent job in representing DAV in Washington, but we can't do it alone. With 1.2 million empowered advocates behind us, we can create an even more imposing force to do what is right for injured and ill veterans. ■



Community Service Award...

Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-Oh.) recognizes Pam Harris, a member of DAV Chapter 115, Northern Hills, Oh., with the Community Service award from the Cincinnati VA Women Veterans Program. One of the first Navy Waves placed on ship outside Da Nang, Vietnam as a corpsman, she was recognized for ongoing support of her fellow veterans and for volunteering to help relocate veterans after Hurricane Katrina and work repairing the homes of those displaced.



Honoring Women

In October, women veterans of every branch of the armed forces and every era of service had tremendous reason to celebrate their legacy. The Women in Military Service for America Memorial marked its 15th anniversary of honoring women veterans, and hundreds poured in from around the country to help celebrate the dedication of this beautiful memorial to our servicewomen.

From the earliest days of women's service in the military, their contributions have been invaluable. The same is true within our own organization, and as I watch our membership grow, I hope to see continued increases in the number of women veterans who choose to make DAV a part of their post-military lives.

Increasingly, DAV has moved in a direction that includes our women veterans and that can only bring great things to our community. We need to be ever expanding our focus to include

the service and sacrifices of the women who have stood alongside our men-in-arms throughout the years.

So many women, especially those who served during World War II and the wars in Korea and Vietnam, have had their service go unrecognized for many years. Oftentimes they are not asked about their military service, but they are nonetheless a vital part of our nation's history and a key part of the DAV mission for the future.

One of the biggest challenges we face in this arena is identifying women who may be eligible for membership. Too often, we look past them in the crowd and forget to ask women if they may be veterans of our armed forces. We should no longer be surprised to hear that a young mother of two is a Marine war veteran, that our neighbor served as an Army nurse in Vietnam or that the woman who sits next to us at worship services is a fighter pilot in the Air Force.

Today, the roles women fill have expanded to every corner of the military. This year has brought tremendous changes to the types of career fields and training programs that are open to our servicewomen. It is an exciting time for women, and it is an especially important time for DAV to welcome the brave women who have sacrificed so much for this nation.

Building a strong presence of our sisters-in-arms is one of the most important facets of our membership mission. DAV has always been out front on women veterans' issues, and the huge influx of women currently filtering into the veterans' community presents us the chance to bring untold experience, expertise and enthusiasm into our fold. If we show women veterans we are here for them, that they don't have to go it alone, and that they have a home and a family with DAV, our mission to fulfill promises to veterans will only grow stronger. ■

From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

DONNA M. ADAMS



Take Action

On Nov. 6, Americans had the opportunity to take part in the democratic process of electing a President who will lead this country for the next four years, as well as new members of the Senate and House of Representatives. I'm sure very few members of our Auxiliary even considered not taking part in this process. The new Congress will begin Jan. 3, and we need to gear up to let our Senators and Representatives know about the issues that concern our veterans, whose sacrifices have allowed us to sustain the privilege of voting.

DAV keeps us informed of legislative efforts that directly affect veterans, and the organization is diligent in recognizing the Auxiliary for our support in their efforts. While we must continue our legislative action on behalf of our veterans, it's also time for our Auxiliary members to become more proactive in our efforts to secure and maintain benefits for the families and survivors of those who gave so much for this country. Several issues come to mind when thinking about inequities in current laws that give our members unique opportunities to make a difference.

First is the ongoing issue of the DIC-SBP offset. The VA has provided for an eligible surviving spouse of a service member who dies from a service-connected injury or illness to receive dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC). If the veteran was retired from the military, he or she had the option of enrolling in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and paid a monthly premium to ensure that their surviving spouse would receive the retirement if the veteran should pass away. Under current law, the amount of retirement is reduced by the DIC the surviving spouse receives. So while the retired veteran chose to pay the extra premium to provide for his or her family, the spouse is required to forfeit the benefit they otherwise are entitled to receive as a direct result of a service-connected death.

A second concern is the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act that was

signed into law in 2010. The law includes provisions for support to the caregivers of seriously injured Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. While we applaud the efforts to provide this benefit, it's difficult to understand why counseling, respite care and training are not also available to caregivers of seriously disabled veterans who served prior to Sept. 11, 2001. The DAV and Auxiliary have been diligent in our efforts to fight for all veterans regardless of era, branch or rank, and as Auxiliary members we have a duty to ensure that laws enacted to benefit the families of veterans are treated in the same manner. Our Senators and Representatives need your help to understand that the Caregivers Act should be amended to include all caregivers of our American heroes.

While there are other legislative areas that we need to be concerned about, these two issues have been of ongoing concern, and bills have been introduced in the past to correct these inequities. I urge you to contact the offices of Senators and Representatives in your district and form a relationship with their veterans liaison. Regardless of party affiliation, the members of Congress were elected to serve us, and we need to let them know that we are concerned, we are steadfast, and we will continue to pursue a positive change in laws that are clearly deficient.

As members of DAVA, we have shown that we care about our veterans, and we must also demonstrate that we are concerned about the families of veterans as well. Our national programs are all geared toward making a positive impact in our communities, and our legislative program creates a base that can change the way our government recognizes the lasting impact our veterans and their families make in our country.

To each of our veterans, thank you for your service to our country. And to each of our Auxiliary members, thank you for your service to our veterans. You continue to perform an invaluable service.

Celebrating Her Story, One



Visitors, both veterans and veteran supporters, gather at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial to celebrate 15 years its doors have been open.

Retired U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught, President of the Women's Memorial Foundation, gives her introduction speech to the attendees. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Andrew Lee)



By Ashleigh Bryant

Walking into the Women in Military Service for America (WIMSA) memorial, one of the first things to catch the eye is an 8-by-20 foot wall covered in colorful scraps of paper. Taped to the wall with blue painter's tape, these hundreds of overlapping sheets contain messages, drawings, doodles and prayers for the women who have served this nation. The artists are men, women and children of all ages, passersby to the memorial who took the time to thank women they have never met for the freedoms they helped secure.

The memorial's artist-in-residence, Chris Demarest, explained that the wall began with a single drawing from a 6-year-old visitor. He taped her sketch to the wall alongside a note asking others to add their own contributions. One week later, the entire length of the wall had been covered, and now hundreds of notes have been left honoring mothers, aunts, wives, daughters, sisters and strangers.

Visitor at a Time

It remains the only major national memorial dedicated solely and uniquely to honoring the service of women veterans.



“What I expected would just be a vehicle for little kids to entertain themselves has become all sorts of people coming in and leaving notes,” said Demarest. “There was one note taped right next to my easel that just said, ‘You have made me rethink how I am raising my daughter.’ It had nothing to do with my art, but everything to do with the Women’s Memorial.”

The memorial opened in 1997, and some 200,000 people visit annually. Quite often it’s droves of school children or tour groups paying their respects to those buried at Arlington, but this stunning memorial has also served as the backdrop many women have chosen for landmark moments in their military careers. Since its dedication, it remains the only major national memorial dedicated solely and uniquely to honoring the service of women veterans.

In October, nearly 500 people filed into Arlington National Cemetery to celebrate the memorial’s 15th anniversary. Women from every military branch and era gathered and paid tribute to each other,

and to the history of women in the armed forces.

“This anniversary means a tremendous amount because the purpose of the memorial is to be a place where we could tell her story,” said WIMSA Foundation president, retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Wilma Vaught.

This year and for several years prior, DAV has sponsored efforts and events for the memorial foundation, including the distribution of Women’s History Month kits for schools, libraries and veterans organizations across the country.

“DAV is proud to support this memorial and what it represents to women veterans and to the entire country,” said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. “We’re honored to help educate the public about both the history and future of women veterans.”

Veteran Linda Gunder, who attended the Army’s last

all-female basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., first visited the memorial in 2000. “I brought my son out here so he could see it when I came out and registered,” she said. “I’m glad that it’s grown, because more women veterans need to enter their service record with this place. It wasn’t all guys, the girls were there, too. I’m very pleased to see it. This is a very worthy monument to women.”

Demarest, who speaks with women veterans touring the memorial, explained the site helps provide a tangible link between women who served in different eras.

“Talking to a lot of the World War II, Korean, and even Vietnam War women veterans about their experiences, it was extremely limited. The change they see oftentimes through their own daughters and granddaughters is amazing,” said Demarest. “They are proud to be part of that heritage. I think that the Women’s Memorial is a great launching point to remember their history and to bring in the younger servicewomen so they feel like they’re included.”

“So many of the women serving today, when they come through and walk through for the first time, they suddenly realize there is a legacy. They may not call it a legacy, but they understand that they stand on the shoulders of all those who preceded them, and that’s important,” Vaught echoed. “They’re learning where they’ve been, and this will help them get where they’re going.”

And it helps to shape the way future generations, including many of the young girls who pass through the memorial’s halls, recognize that they also have the opportunity to add to the legacy.

“A 10-year-old girl is going to come through here and say, ‘Wow—Tanks, planes, helicopters,’” said Demarest. “She might say, ‘I want to do that,’ but she’ll also know that she can.”

Today, the registry reflects the individual histories of some 250,000 women veterans. Countless memories and service stories bring the memorial to life for visitors who can read about each woman veteran registered. And Vaught, ever advocating for more names in the register, particularly encourages more women within DAV to make their information a lasting part of the memorial. ■



Opening the Outdoors for Therapy

Camp Hope in Missouri was started with the life insurance money of a fallen Marine and provides injured and ill veterans a unique setting to recover.

By Joseph R. Chenelly

Joe Fowler loves the distinct tug on a fishing rod as a bass takes the bait or the moment of exhilaration when a buck wanders below the tree he's perched in with bow in hand.

"But tagging a deer would just be a bonus. This is all about building camaraderie, meeting new people, making new friends—the important stuff I miss no longer being in the military," Army veteran Fowler said of his recent stay at a recreational therapy program at Camp Hope in Farmington, Mo. "We help

each other just by hanging out, whether in a tree stand or around the campfire."

Camp Hope, which recently received a grant from the DAV Charitable Service Trust, is one of several organizations reintroducing the outdoors to disabled veterans, enabling them to continue their rehabilitation doing things they loved before their injuries or illnesses. There is no charge for veterans.

Fowler, who was badly wounded in Iraq in 2005, spent eight days in November with several other veterans who learned from each other, learned about themselves and enjoying activi-

ties some thought they'd never be able to do again.

"Don't tell me you cannot climb a tree anymore," said William White, founder of Camp Hope. "We want them to see that they are capable of living full lives, much better than they thought. They inspire each other. We just let them become comfortable with each other."

White and his wife, Galia, started Camp Hope with the life insurance money they received from the military when their son, Christopher Neal White, a 23-year-old Marine, was killed in Iraq in 2006.



Top left, Joseph Fowler (left), Jeremy Henderson (center) and Bobby Lee Lisek spend time at Camp Hope, building confidence, realizing they can still do the things they love despite their combat injuries. Bottom left, Henderson aims for a high score on the popular pinball machine. Another important aspect of their recoveries is connecting in a comfortable setting with other veterans going through similar challenges.



Above, Camp Hope has several lodges in which veterans can come together between hunts and other excursions. Each lodge is named for a fallen hero.

“His mother and I were not going to profit from our son’s sacrifice,” White said. “We decided we needed to make a positive out of this negative. Chris and I used to hunt and fish together when he was growing up. After his death, I couldn’t do it without him. We decided to help those who were able to make it back. We know it has saved some people’s lives. It really has exceeded our expectations.”

Camp Hope is located on a 170-acre farm now dubbed Chris Neal Farm.

“Camp Hope has been a real blessing,” said Army veteran Bobby Lisek, who lost a leg and suffered a

brain injury in Iraq.

After his first visit five years ago, Lisek said, “Thank you so much for this great opportunity. I have finally met someone who has been through the same stuff as me.” He was one of the first veterans to attend an event at Camp Hope. He now returns regularly to serve as a hunting guide.

“There are no professional counselors here. Everyone is a volunteer,” White said. “We all have a passion for this. Once the war is over and the money is all gone, we will still be here, doing whatever we can to help.”

“Every day, we’re inspired as veterans with service-connected disabilities to overcome physical obstacles,” said DAV Charitable Service Trust Chairman Richard Marbes. “Doctors can repair bones and muscles, prosthetics can enable an amputee to walk again, but the road to a full and rewarding life can be much more difficult, which is why we support programs that support veterans’ physical, emotional and mental recovery.”

Information on how to apply for a free stay at Camp Hope can be found at www.chrisnealfarm.com. ■



New Orlando a Must for DAV Conventioners

The 92nd DAV and DAV Auxiliary National Convention promises to be another premier event for all of us advocating for veterans and their families. The annual meeting of DAV's national body is set for Aug. 10-13 at the world-class Hilton Orlando.

This is your opportunity to address the needs of injured and ill veterans of all generations. Be among the throngs of delegates who will draw up legislative initiatives aimed at fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served.

Major issues to be addressed include lengthy delays veterans experience waiting for decisions from the VA on claims for benefits; improving mental health care for the psychologically injured; and funding for construction projects to maintain the VA's infrastructure.

"Attendees will hear from subject-matter experts, policy makers and administrators," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "More importantly, they will hear directly from those who attend the convention."

Election of national officers will be held, and national leadership will provide in-depth updates on the organization's progress over the year.

"Standing together to create DAV's legislative goals is one of the most important things any member can do," Adjutant Wilson said. "It is important that lawmakers and the White House understand that we are an organization of veterans fighting for veterans."

This is our benefits and health care systems, and Washington is struggling to meet the needs of our nation's veterans."

Hilton Orlando is an upscale, resort-style hotel. It is one of the newest Orlando full-service hotels. While it is not a Disney property, it has tremendous proximity to all that "new Orlando" has to offer including art, theatre, museums, shopping and dining. The hotel is near all of the major Orlando attractions, including SeaWorld Orlando, Universal Studios Orlando, and Walt Disney World Resort theme parks. The Orlando International Airport is a mere 15 minutes away.

"This is our chance to take care of important DAV business, and can also serve as an opportunity to spend time with family members at the nearby attractions," Adjutant Wilson said. "Of course, our primary mission is to tend to critical business and shape our organization's agenda for the year to come."

"Our days will be full, however, convention delegates are encouraged to take advantage of DAV negotiated room rates at the Orlando Hilton before or after the convention for family vacation and recreational opportunities."

There are a limited number of reduced rate rooms available before and after convention, so please make vacation plans now.

Hotel reservations can be made by calling (407) 313-4300. Be sure to mention that you are attending the DAV National Convention in order to receive the special rate of \$124 single/double per night. More information is available online at www.dav.org/events. ■



PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

1.7 Percent COLA Enacted

President Obama has signed legislation providing a 1.7 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for 3.9 million recipients of VA disability benefits, dependency and indemnity compensation and pensions.

The COLA bill, which had been stalled in the Senate since late September, was freed up on Nov. 13 and unanimously approved in time for the increase to be included in the checks received in January. Additional delay could have stalled payments until February or later.

“VA compensation is a major source of income for many veterans and their families, so adjusting those payments for inflation is absolutely necessary,” said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. “We’re pleased the Senate was able to pass the bill so quickly after the legislative election recess.”

“Veterans deserve a boost in their benefits to help make ends meet,” said Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Patty Murray (D-Wash.). “We were finally able to move forward with passage of this bill. Caring for our nation’s veterans should never be a partisan issue.”

Murray said the noncontroversial bill had been blocked by an unnamed Senate Republican. Under Senate rules, a single senator can block legislation by privately placing a hold on the bill. Senate Republicans reported on Sept. 27 the bill had been cleared, but by then, the legislative body had gone into recess.

The VA warned that if Congress didn’t pass the bill by Nov. 13, it would be unable to pay the December cost-of-living adjustment as scheduled on Jan. 1. The VA reported after the Senate passage of the bill that payments would be on schedule.

“This is a much-needed relief from the higher costs veterans must pay for a number of basic items, such as food and fuel,” said Jesinoski. The COLA is the same as the mandatory increase for Social Security recipients based on the federal cost of living index.

“We are grateful that the Senate worked with the utmost speed to approve the COLA once it returned to work,” he said. “It was the first item on the agenda and was approved without dissent—a strong sign of our nation’s commitment to honoring injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors.”

Patty Murray, (D-WA), with veterans.



California Salts...

Crew members from the “John A. B. Dillard, Jr.” vessel take a group photo with members of the Oakland-based Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 7, and the VA Martinez Community Living Center before embarking on a tour of the San Francisco Bay Sept. 20. Photo Credit: Mr. Brandon A Beach.

A Bluegrass Touch: Auxiliary Fall Conference

This year's Auxiliary Fall Conference drew an enthusiastic group of participants eager to learn and get in on the action.



Each and everyone of our attendees made the conference memorable and took advantage of the learning opportunities presented.

Donna Adams, Auxiliary National Commander

Below, Auxiliary National Commander Donna Adams, center, meets with California DAVA State Commander Julie Wiessman-Steinbaugh, front, National Commander Larry A. Polzin, left, and National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess at the Auxiliary Fall Conference.



■ At a highly informative, fun-filled 2012 Auxiliary Fall Conference at the Lexington Downtown Hilton in Lexington, Ky., Sept. 27-29, Auxiliary National Commander Donna M. Adams covered many topics of importance on the local and state level. Members participated in discussions, break-out sessions and took advantage of the learning opportunities presented to make this conference memorable.



VA Leads Nation in Breast Cancer Screenings

■ Of note following October's National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the VA is ranked number one in the country at performing mammograms for women within the nation's entire health care system. In 2010, the VA screened 87 percent of eligible women, compared to 71 percent within the private sector, 69 percent within Medicare and 51 percent within Medicaid. Since the number of women veterans is on the rise (up to 337,000 in 2011), the VA has focused on improving access to breast cancer screenings and training medical care providers in the latest exam techniques. Currently, 45 VA facilities provide on-site service, and thanks to the implementation of mobile mammography, rural veterans can now be screened without traveling far from home. The VA also plans to have in place in 2013 a breast cancer clinical case registry to improve patient care coordination. To learn more about these and other services for women veterans, visit www.va.gov/womenvet or www.womenshealth.va.gov.

New Work Skills Program Announced for Veterans

■ According to officials at General Electric, Alcoa, Boeing Co. and Lockheed Martin, they will launch a new initiative to train 100,000 veterans in advanced manufacturing

jobs to meet the growing need in the field. The "Get Skills to Work" program will immediately put 15,000 veterans to work and train an additional 85,000 during the next three years. The program will be managed by the Manufacturing Institute and will work with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University to develop tool kits for both veterans and employers to help translate military skills in the needs of the civilian manufacturing sector. "Get Skills to Work" will begin offering veterans accelerated skills training through regional community colleges. More information can be found at www.GetSkillstoWork.org.

Veterans With PTSD May Benefit from Trained Canine Companion

■ For hundreds of thousands of returning veterans suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues, trained service dogs may relieve some of their major symptoms, according to a story in the *Courier-Post*. The paper reported that one in five veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan will experience PTSD or major depression, and there is now some evidence that trained service dogs can help them with sleep, panic attacks and social isolation. The VA is currently studying the costs and benefits of training and placing service dogs as part of the mental health care services it offers.

Disabled American Veterans National Headquarters Unaudited Statement of Financial Position • September 30, 2012			
Unrestricted Assets		Unrestricted Liabilities	
Current Assets	\$ 28,712,490	Current Liabilities	\$ 113,203,874
Investments, at Market	324,648,212	Total Liabilities	113,203,874
Land, Buildings and Equipment,		Unrestricted Net Assets	
Net of Depreciation	5,936,228	General and Net Assets Designated by the	246,212,956
Other Assets	119,900	Board of Directors	
		Total Unrestricted Net Assets	246,212,956
Total Unrestricted Assets	\$ 359,416,830	Total Liabilities and Unrestricted	\$ 359,416,830
		Net Assets	
Life Membership Assets		Life Membership Liabilities	
Current Assets	\$ 1,453,997	Current Liabilities	\$ 230,261
Investments, at Market	53,777,266	Reserve for Future Distribution of	55,001,002
		Life Membership Dues	
Total Life Membership Assets	\$ 55,231,263	Total Life Membership Liabilities and	\$ 55,231,263
		Reserve for Future Distribution of	
		Life Membership Dues	



From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN REV. DR. RONALD R. RINGO, Jr.



On Eagle's Wings: A Hope In Change

Abraham Lincoln once said, "The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time."

With the start of another new year, what will we remember and what are we looking forward to?

Will we remember that we were good neighbors during the year? In today's fast-paced, hectic world many don't even know who their neighbors are. How can we know their needs or extend our friendship if we haven't met?

Will we remember that we spoke kind words to those we came in contact with during the year? Again, in today's world it is easy to be short or critical with others, which degrades and demeans. However, kind and loving words are sweet tones of the heart and are the things remembered often for a lifetime.

This new year ahead of us will bring some sorrows and disappointments, frustrations and other possible hurts. However, if we can begin to create as many positive and uplifting memories as we can, we will have some great joys to look back on next year.

It has been said, "One's purpose in life has an overriding influence on what you do with your time, energy and resources. It can also have a profound effect on how you relate to other people. Without this sense of purpose, life has no compass."

It is my prayer at the beginning of this new year that we all understand how we are all very interdependent. How when we seek to live by the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," we can make a special difference in the lives of those whose paths we cross. May we seek to look for these opportunities this year and beyond.

As always, it is my hope that this message will help you to "mount up as on eagle's wings" and renew a little of your strength to keep moving forward and find joy. (Isaiah 40:31)

Until next time, may God bless you, and may God continue to bless our great nation ... SEMPER FI.

A Simple Change of Beneficiary Form, An Easy Way to Remember DAV Without a Will

“I feel that disabled vets are the most under appreciated and therefore most deserving group in our society,” said Scott Argus when asked why he decided to name DAV as a partial beneficiary of his retirement account.



Scott Argus, Guardian Society member

Scott’s plan—via a simple change of beneficiary designation—assures that his retirement assets will not be depleted by taxes, as often happens when left to heirs. “Knowing there is no tax burden is a big plus,” Scott said, “and therefore the gift to DAV will go much further someday.”

His compassion for disabled veterans goes back to 1969 when Scott enlisted in the Air Force at age 19. He remembers the heartache of waiting for crewmembers who were never to return, and the worry for others who survived enemy fire but

with severe injuries. He observed first hand the inadequacies in their medical care and felt that “soldiers defending our country deserved better than that.”

Scott left the Air Force after eight years, but his passion for veterans grew. “Getting aid to wounded veterans became my interest, so I began researching veterans’ organizations and what they were doing. DAV kept popping up as the most efficient at delivering services to disabled veterans. Ever since, I have been eager to contribute what I can.”

In reaching out to veterans in such a tangible way through his future gift, Scott is also paying tribute to his military friends who made immeasurable sacrifices decades ago. We salute Scott for recognizing DAV’s steadfast mission of service to injured veterans and for planning this easy estate gift, using a beneficiary form provided by his company.

Legal address for beneficiary designations and other estate gifts: **Disabled American Veterans, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, Ohio 45250, tax ID: 31-0263158.**

For more information, or to request our folder with other estate gift ideas, please call us at **1-800-216-9802, press 1** or email **giftplanning@dav.org.**

Please let us know if DAV (National Headquarters, Cincinnati, Ohio) is in your estate plans. We’d like to thank you quietly and honor you through the Guardian Society.



PROTECTING THOSE WHO SERVED

It Takes a Community

DAV announced at these events that it is launching an exciting digital initiative to collect stories of veterans transitioning back to civilian life.

By Joseph R. Chenelly

Expressing appreciation for community leaders who show support for veterans, DAV in the fall began a series of events around the country called “A Community of Heroes.”

These events brought together community leaders, celebrities and organizations supporting veterans, to thank them for their work and discuss how we may work more closely to best serve veterans.

DAV leaders spoke about the various services the organization offers at the community level, including free assistance with claims for VA benefits and our Transportation Network.

Department-level programs were also highlighted, such as

the event in Minneapolis where the Minnesota Donor Connection Program was detailed. That program connects the public with veterans in need of durable medical equipment.

In Nashville, DAV’s Mobile Service Office program was explained, describing how it allows the organization to serve veterans in rural areas of the country, providing services they have earned but may not have been able to otherwise access due to living far from VA facilities.

DAV’s Transportation Network was among the services highlighted at the event in San Diego as well. Some 9,400 veterans were transported free of charge by DAV volunteers to and from VA medical appointments in San Diego, an area known for its vast, spread-out landscape.



Left, Dean Ascheman, former DAV Department Commander, Erik Stolhanske, actor and veterans’ advocate, Reg Chapman, event emcee and CBS reporter, Chuck Foreman, former Minnesota Vikings player, Barry Jesinoski, DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director, and Stu Voigt, former Minnesota Vikings player.



Left photo, Christine Haas, an anchor with NBC San Diego, served as MC. Center photo, San Diego speaker, Colin Archipley, veteran and creator of Archie's Acres. Right photo, Stephen Cochran, injured veteran, country music musician and event speaker, mingles with active duty Fort Campbell representative.

“The pieces to empower injured and ill veterans that often go unnoticed are the many people and organizations who play important roles in helping them readjust to their new lives,” National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson said. “This is an opportunity for DAV to ensure they know we appreciate them and want to work even more closely with them.”

DAV announced at these events that it is launching an exciting digital initiative to collect stories of veterans transitioning back to civilian life.

“Collecting stories is a way to honor our nation’s veterans,” Adjutant Wilson said. “The road back to civilian life is often challenging, with many obstacles. By preserving these stories, we pay tribute to their perseverance and strength of spirit. I encourage veterans to submit their stories at MyStoryDAV.org.”

DAV plans to share the stories to “inspire and empower other veterans to overcome their challenges as they transi-

tion to civilian life,” said National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess. “We will also share the stories with the public to raise awareness about the challenges veterans face.”

“These special events are part of DAV’s larger awareness campaign,” said Burgess. “We need to do this now because our work is becoming more challenging. There has been a 31-percent increase in the number of service-disabled veterans since 2000 - that’s 3.3 million from all generations who are receiving VA compensation. It is expected that more than half of the 2.4 million veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will need assistance to reach their full potential after sacrificing to defend our way of life.”

“DAV is here for all veterans, ensuring that their rightful benefits are preserved,” said actor Erik Stolhanske. “As a community working together, we will never let veterans down.” ■



Our Own Aqua Man...

National 4th Jr. Vice Commander David W. Riley, third from right, takes a dip at the Coast Guard’s new \$27 million aviation survival technician (rescue swimmer) school. Riley, who lost all four extremities while serving as a Coast Guard rescue swimmer, was an honored guest at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new facility.



Members of Indiana Chapter 72 pitch in to build a deck on the new home for Clifford Woods family.

Volunteers Rescue Veteran's Family

By Thom Wilborn

Clifford Woods, a Vietnam veteran totally disabled by Agent Orange illnesses, could do nothing more than comfort his family as they watched their home burn on a clear June day. The fire spread so quickly there was only time for his wife, three children and grandson to escape their Georgetown, Ind., home. Everything else was lost, including the family pets.

"We were left with only what we were wearing," Woods said. "We were homeless."

In addition, the 65-year-old Woods and his family, including two children who are disabled, were destitute.

"My insurance covered what I owed on the house," he said. "We did manage to purchase two campers to live in and have some money for living

DAV has given **our lives back.** We now have some kind of normalcy.

expenses. The bathroom was a porta-potty."

Woods explained it was difficult living in campers without any comforts. Needed medical care became more complex, space was at a premium, and

the needs of the family were largely unmet.

In March 2012, Woods learned about DAV's role in disaster relief assistance when his home was damaged by a tornado. When he lost his home in the fire, he turned to DAV Chapter 72 Adjutant Kevin Coley in Salem, Ind. Woods had served in the U.S. Army's 9th Infantry Division in Vietnam during 1967-68 where he was exposed to the toxins in Agent Orange, which caused illnesses that totally disabled him.

Coley saw the family's needs and contacted Chapter Commander Jerry Thompson and Department of Indiana Commander Ken Ward to organize DAV's help. "We just jumped in and did it," Thompson said.

In total, four DAV Chapters pooled contributions, which provided enough

to help meet the down payment on the Woods' new home. They also partnered with others to help with the family's needs for food, furniture and clothing. "They were living in campers without plumbing and didn't have money for a new home," said Thompson. "The family was broke and unsure of what to do."

Home Depot provided building materials to add a deck with a ramp to allow Woods' disabled son easy access to the home.

"Our Chapters answered the needs of this veteran and his family," said National Director of Voluntary Services Ron Minter. "The unity provided by the Department of Indiana and the coordination and leadership by the Chapters resulted in a quick response to some very desperate needs."

"Our Chapters and Departments are the life's blood of our organization," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "Our members are dedicated to our mission, and being local, they are in a position to respond first, answering the most urgent needs."

"DAV has given so much help," said Woods. "Kevin Coley, Jerry Thompson and others have been working here with their own hands to build the deck and ramp. You couldn't ask for a more wonderful group of men. They just get up and go."

"I am touched to have DAV's help," he said. "DAV really cares about veterans."

"DAV is a blessing to me, and that's putting it mildly," said Woods. "I'm eternally indebted to DAV. It has given us our lives back. We now have some kind of normalcy in our lives. Before, we were living day-to-day and unknowing what the next day would bring."

In late October, the Woods family moved into their new home. It wasn't quite finished, and they didn't have electricity, however, it was home. "It was so

rewarding to see these children playing in the house," said Thompson. "Before they had to play outside. Now they're in a warm home playing on a carpeted floor. The 5-year-old grandson is thrilled with his very own closet."

"Veterans know that DAV helps veterans," he said. "This is visual proof that what we receive in donations goes to veterans to help them in the best way possible. It makes me feel proud to be a member of DAV."

"This home means everything to my family," said Woods. "We're really happy to have a roof over our heads."

"The Chapters have set up additional donations on our behalf, and DAV is obtaining clothing for us," he said. "I can't express my feelings to all the wonderful DAV members who have helped us. I told them that anytime they needed me, I'd be there. I can't do a whole lot, but I can drive a truck."

"We would never have made it without DAV's help," said Woods' wife, Jerri. "We were down and stressed."

house for our dedication, including a red ribbon on the door," said Woods' wife Jerri. "I thank them so much and so does our whole family."

"The final analysis of this support is that DAV can be of service to veterans wherever they may be," said Minter. "Our volunteers and members exemplify veterans helping veterans in the finest sense."

"There are many veterans and families in our nation today who have benefited from the charity and generosity of our Chapters," said Adjutant Wilson. "DAV is always there for them, offering a helping hand."

Tragedies such as this give veterans the opportunity to show their support for one another, according to Minter. DAV's Local Veterans Assistance Program, which was created to recognize non-traditional volunteer efforts on behalf of veterans and DAV, can ensure efforts like those made on behalf of the Woods family receive due credit by the organization.

"Our volunteers and members exemplify veterans helping veterans in the finest sense."

Ron Minter, Director of Voluntary Services



Today we have a better outlook. We have our family under one roof now, together. And that's the way it should be. DAV has restored and resurrected us as a family."

"Helping veterans when they need it makes you feel good," said Thompson. "You're able to help veterans who can't help themselves."

The home was dedicated Oct. 15 in ceremonies attended by representatives from DAV, Sen. Dan Coats' (R-Ind.) office, Baird Distinct Mobile Homes and local media. "DAV decorated the

"DAV wants to recognize the dedication of our members and the public whenever we reach out to provide hope to those in need," Minter said. "Virtually any effort that advances our cause or assists veterans is eligible for recognition. I encourage all our members and volunteers to contact their local DAV Chapter or the DAV Department in their state to learn more about our Local Veterans Assistance Program and how they can give back to our heroes in their community." ■



Homedale Middle School sixth grade class held their 1st annual Americanism program with an essay contest on “Why I should know the Constitution”. Mike Smith, right, Past Department Commander presented them with a trophy provided by the auxiliary and a cash prize provided by the DAV Chapter 1.

PASSAGES

Retired NSO John F. Regan, Sr., Dies

■ John F. Regan, Sr., 82, a National Service Officer for nearly a quarter of a century, died in Quincy, Mass., Nov. 9, 2012. He was interred at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, Mass.

“John was a true friend of all veterans,” said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. “His record of service to those we serve is exemplary. His lifetime of service is a testament of his character and his dedication to veterans.”

“John’s passing is sad for those of us at DAV, but we can take comfort in knowing that he gave his full measure of strength and energy to the injured and ill veterans he advocated for,” Adjutant Wilson said. “He was especially close to all his fellow National Service Officers and to the men and women who came to him seeking the fulfillment of the promises made to those who served.”

Regan joined DAV in June 1973 as National Service Officer in the Washington, D.C., National Service Office. He was appointed Supervisor of the Boston National Service Office in September 1974, and retired from that position in October 1997.

A Vietnam combat veteran, Regan joined the U.S. Army in October 1966 and served two tours in Vietnam, first as a

member of the 4th Infantry Division in the Central Highlands, and later with the Riverine Patrol and the 9th Infantry Division in the Mekong Delta. He was honorably discharged as a captain in February 1971. For his military service Regan received the Bronze Star with two Oak Leaf clusters, the Air Medal and the Meritorious Service Medal. He also received the Congressional Medal of Honor Society Man of the Year award for his work as a National Service Officer.



Regan

Regan also served as the Department of Massachusetts Commander from 1997-98. Prior to his military service, he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from St. Bonaventure University in St. Bonaventure, N.Y., and also attended Holy Name College to study theology.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Pat; two daughters, Tricia Regan Rullo and Kathleen Regan; a son, John F. Regan, Jr.; a brother, James P. Regan; a sister, Mary Regan; and three grandchildren.

“John’s life was dedicated to the service of our nation’s men and women who live with illnesses and injuries related to their military service,” Adjutant Wilson said. “Like all of our National Service Officers, he was there to help them all, empowering them to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.”

Testimonial Dinner for National Commander Polzin



National Commander Larry A. Polzin will be the guest of honor at a gala testimonial dinner Saturday, April 13, aboard the Queen Mary in Long Beach, Calif., celebrating his role of leadership in DAV.

The testimonial begins with a reception at 6 p.m. followed by a testimonial program and dinner at 7 p.m. The cost of dinner is \$50 per person, and checks, payable to the DAV Department of California, must be mailed to the Department at 13733 East Rosecrans Ave., Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670, no later than March 13. Please indicate your dinner choice of grilled beef tenderloin or grilled salmon with your check. To make a

reservation or for additional information, please call the Department of California's Charlotte Robertson at 562-404-1266.

Room reservations aboard the Queen Mary may be made by calling the ship's Reservation Department at 877-342-0742. Please mention you are making reservations for the Disabled American Veterans Testimonial Dinner in order to receive the special group rate of \$125 to \$159 per night, plus tax.

In addition to the testimonial for Commander Polzin, arrangements are being made for tours of local places of interest.

Testimonial Dinner for Auxiliary Commander Adams



A testimonial dinner to honor Auxiliary National Commander Donna Adams will be conducted Saturday, April 6, at DAV Chapter 20, 8447 N. 61st Ave. in Glendale, Ariz.

The event begins with a cocktail hour at 6 p.m. followed by dinner at 7 p.m. Dinner tickets are \$50 per person. Reservations are required, and tickets should be purchased no later than March 23.

Checks should be made payable to DAVA Commander's Testimonial and sent to Diane Stone, DAVA Commander's Testimonial, 6852 W. Cheryl Drive, Peoria, AZ 85345. For additional information, please contact Diane Stone at 623-979-2200.

Room reservations should be made directly with the InnPlace Hotel Phoenix North, 10220 N. Metro Parkway E., Phoenix, AZ 85051, at 866-257-5990 and refer to the DAVA room block at code DAD05A. The room rate is \$69 plus tax, per night. Transportation to and from the airport is available at www.Supershuttle.com. The charge is approximately \$36 for a round trip. Cab fare is approximately \$60 per round trip.



Ms. Veteran America – The Woman Beyond the Uniform

By Ashleigh Bryant

America has never been given a truly accurate representation of what a woman veteran is. Somewhere in between G.I. Jane and Private Benjamin is the balance of a strong, capable and feminine sailor, soldier, airman or Marine. Women who served in our armed forces rarely fit the Hollywood stereotypes, and more often than not you wouldn't even be able to guess that a woman had served.

Take Denyse Gordon. She's an Air Force master sergeant, a combat veteran of the Iraq War with nearly 20 years of service to her country, and since 2006 she has worked to help military members transition to successful civilian lives. The Brooklyn, N.Y., native has truly lived a life of service. And in October, ditching her combat boots for an elegantly draped black evening gown, she stood out among 36 other women to be chosen the very first Ms. Veteran America.

"This competition resonates because it sheds light on the fact that women serve, too. You step outside your comfort zone, and you're up on stage in front of everyone to show the country it's about the woman beyond the uniform. When we put that uniform on, you better believe we're there to do our job and serve our country with pride. But this competition shows that when we take those uniforms off, we have a personality outside the military."

A competition crowd favorite and second runner-up was 89-year-old Gladys Hughes. The World War II-era Coast Guard veteran (who, by the way, became Ms. Mississippi Senior in 2003) said she was proud to see her competitors' personalities shine through.

The inaugural event was hosted at the Pentagon Ritz Carlton in Arlington, Va., and helped raise \$30,892 to help



Denyse Gordon, an Air Force master sergeant, won top honors in the Ms. Veteran America 2012 competition.

fight homelessness among women veterans.

"The Ms. Veteran America competition is quite an innovative way to address a number of very important issues," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "It's bringing much-needed attention to the growing population of women veterans, highlighting their contributions to our military and providing funding to reach out in the community and help veterans carve a path to the kind of quality

future they deserve."

"It's more than the crown; it's more than the sash," said Gordon. "It's a new way of showcasing female veterans. We're mothers, daughters, sisters and aunts. I think as we see this paradigm shift within the military culture it will become more normal for the public to see that both in and out of uniform, we are still women."

A "pageant" for women veterans may still be a bit of a head-scratcher for some. At a time when women are increasingly gaining equal footing and recognition for their military service, couldn't this be perceived as taking a step backward? But at the heart of this competition is a woman with a deep desire to change public perceptions about who women veterans are, how we recognize them and what they are truly capable of doing within our communities.

Humble Beginnings for a Noble Cause

"As a female veteran, some of our femininity becomes lost when we wear the uniform because we have to blend in with the boys," said the pageant's creator and veteran Jaspn Boothe. That mentality went out the window for this competition. The contestants represented all the service branches, ages, races and personalities, and were judged on the grace,

poise, beauty and talent that Boothe says tend to be “camouflaged during military service.”

A look into her past tells you Boothe knows a thing or two about the strength and grace needed to be a woman in the military. As a captain in the Army Reserve and a single mother, Boothe lost everything she owned to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and, two months later, was diagnosed with head, neck and throat cancer. She needed a full-time job, a place to live and lengthy medical treatment, but she was met only with dead ends as she tried to find programs that aid female veterans with children. After a six-month stay at Brooke Army Medical Center, Boothe had a clean bill of health and began searching for a new job, a new home and a way to help her fellow veterans overcome similar hardships.

The result was Final Salute, Inc., which Boothe founded to be for women veterans by women veterans, to help provide transitional housing, housing subsidies, interest-free loans and grants to homeless female veterans and their children.

Boothe created the Ms. Veteran America competition in honor of the 200,000 women currently serving in the military and the 1.8 million female veterans across the country. Proceeds from the event and the donations raised by each contestant went back to Final Salute, Inc. to address veteran homelessness. Thanks in part to that funding, the non-profit will open a newly constructed transitional home for women veterans in Alexandria, Va.

“Too many women veterans and their families are forced into unfavorable living situations because there aren’t programs available to address their unique needs,” said Deputy National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “The VA can’t address this problem alone; it will take efforts like these to put an end to homelessness.”

As the new face of the competition, Gordon’s next year will be spent helping to champion these very issues.

“This competition is not a beauty pageant. I think people are viewing the cause more than the glitz and glamor of the competition,” Gordon explained. “We’re all coming together to raise more awareness about our 13,000 homeless women

veterans. That’s 13,000 too many. And we need to have some courageous conversations about this.”

Revealing Our Legacy of Service

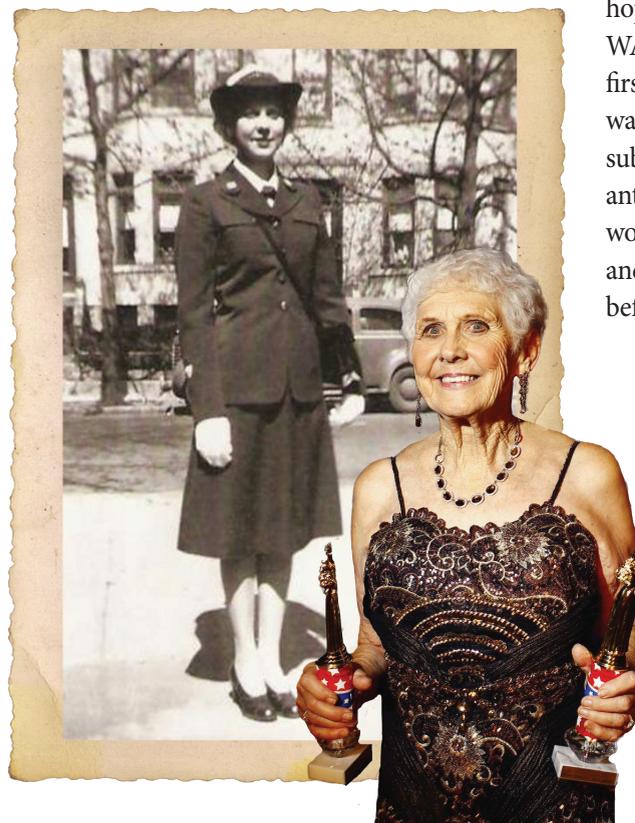
For those who may still thumb their nose at the competition for being somewhat passé, the evening’s VIP lineup packed a pretty credible punch. The 16th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Carlton Kent, was one of the event’s special guests; VA Under Secretary of Benefits Allison Hickey served as a judge; and the first female double amputee from Afghanistan, Sue Downes, was a co-host.

For the past year, hundreds of potential contestants were auditioned before the list was pared down to the final 37 women veterans who would compete. Following the first round evening gown competition, judges selected the top 10 to compete for the crown in a demonstration of the women’s military knowledge, stage presence and talent selections.

Both Gordon and Hughes agreed that, on top of everything else the competition meant to them, it was a clear reminder of how far women have come in the military.

“I think back to the WASPs and the WAVs and the SPARs, those women from yesteryear, there will never be another group like those women,” said Gordon. “We made history here, and we will forever be connected, different service branches and different eras, but we all went through this together, and we’re the first group. So we have to set the bar high.”

A challenge, perhaps, to next year’s Ms. Veteran America hopefuls. But from the WAVs and WASPs to our first women fighter pilots, wartime nurses and doctors, submariners and combatants, history shows us that women will continue to meet and exceed those limits set before them. ■



Gladys Hughes is the second runner-up in the Ms. Veteran America 2012 competition and a veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Marszalek Appointed Deputy National Service Director

Managing a nationwide network of National Service Officers and support staff who represent hundreds of thousands of veterans in their disability claims is a huge job, and the National Service Department has received valuable assistance with the recent appointment of James Marszalek to Deputy National Service Director.

National Commander Larry Pozin recently approved National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson's appointment of James Marszalek to the number two position in DAV's largest department. "In his new assignment, he assists in supervising the National Service Program, which comprises 100 offices in the U.S. and Puerto Rico in every phase of the program," Adjutant Wilson said. "He provides knowledge, skill and expertise in his daily duties in support of our nation's injured and ill veterans seeking their earned benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs."



Marszalek

Marszalek joined the DAV professional staff in 2001

as a member of the National Service Officer Training Academy in Denver, Colo. After graduation, he was assigned to the Cleveland, Ohio, National Service Office. He was later assigned to the Seattle, Wash., National Service Office as Assistant Supervisor. In 2004, he was appointed supervisor of the San Diego, Calif., National Service Office and in 2006 joined the Pittsburgh, Pa., National Service Office as the National Area Supervisor.

In July 2011, Marszalek was appointed Assistant National Service Director at National Service and Legislative Headquarters and in 2012 was selected for his current position.

A member of Chapter 76 in Pittsburgh, Pa., and a Gulf War era veteran, he enlisted in the U.S Marine Corps in 1996 and was separated in April 2000 before joining DAV.

"Jim provides leadership in support of the work by our Washington staff in nearly every veterans issue, including serving as DAV's point man in the vital development of VA's electronic data program to accelerate claims decision using the Veterans Benefit Management System," said Adjutant Wilson. "His leadership extends beyond the VA to other government agencies that deal directly with veterans programs to ensure veterans receive all that is due them."

Justin Hart Appointed Associate National Service Director

National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson, with the approval of National Commander Larry Polzin, has appointed Justin Hart as Associate National Service Director at National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C., effective Oct. 13.

"In his new position, Hart will play a crucial role in the daily operation and oversight of DAV's National Service Program which fulfills our promises to the men and women who served our nation," Adjutant Wilson said.

DAV's National Service Program employs nearly 260 National Service Officers and more than 30 Transition Service Officers in 100 offices across the nation.

Hart joined DAV in June 2007 and, after completing on-the-job training, was appointed an Associate National Service

Officer (NSO) in Providence, R.I., in November 2008. He was appointed supervisor in DAV's National Service Office in Newington, Conn., in August 2010, before joining the National Service staff in Washington.

Hart served in the U.S. Army from August 2000 until his discharge in December 2006. He is a combat veteran of the 502nd Infantry Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division who served in Kosovo and two tours in Iraq. The Purple Heart is among his many distinguished awards and commendations. He is also a member of Chapter 47 in Windsor Locks, Conn.



Hart

"Hart is joining our staff in Washington to serve on the front lines of veterans' issues," said Adjutant Wilson. "He will help provide DAV's leadership at the VA and other government agencies that deal directly with federal veterans programs, ensuring that our nation's leadership does the right thing for our veterans."



Right, Dorothy Pollock, a World War II era Marine Corps veteran, thanks an Army officer for his service at Golden Corral in Winder, Ga. From left, DAV Department of Georgia Commander Glenn Martin; Michael Bouchard, a Marine who lost both legs in Iraq and Associate Manager Wayne Moore prepare for an exciting night.



Military Appreciation Monday Tops All-Time Totals

At the Winder, Ga., Golden Corral restaurant, Military Appreciation Monday is more than a meal—it's a full-fledged community event. And for one night, veterans become the town's focus.

Although rain interfered with many planned activities this year—a live band, professional wrestling, trick horses and more—it didn't dampen spirits.

"This is the time of year the Winder community comes together to show our appreciation to what the veterans have done for us," said Wayne Moore, associate manager at Golden Corral. "We want to do the best we can to show our vets that at Golden Corral we appreciate them—we want to serve them as they have served us."

Next year, Moore and his management team hope to bring a circus to the event. Seriously. Though the restaurant's list of activities may make it a "Big Top," Golden Corral franchises, in partnership with DAV Departments and Chapters, have once again managed to exceed their own lofty expectations.

In 2012, 423,615 veterans received a free meal through the program, and

patrons donated \$1,260,454 to support grassroots service and advocacy initiatives for veterans and their families.

Those totals exceeded previous year records for meals by nearly 50,000, with contributions rising by nearly \$225,000.

"The money we raise here is so important to our mission," said Willie Lester, a Service Officer for Chapter 2 in nearby Athens. "All our events from the Thanksgiving drive to our Memorial Day service and after-school programs are helped from this event."

"It also helps us with our service program, so we can make sure our fellow veterans get their benefits," said Lester.

Golden Corral has served more than 3.6 million free thank-you meals and helped raise more than \$7.3 million for DAV through the program, which began in 2001 when Golden Corral owner Hu Odom collaborated with the DAV to thank those who served and are serving at his Virginia Beach, Va., restaurant.

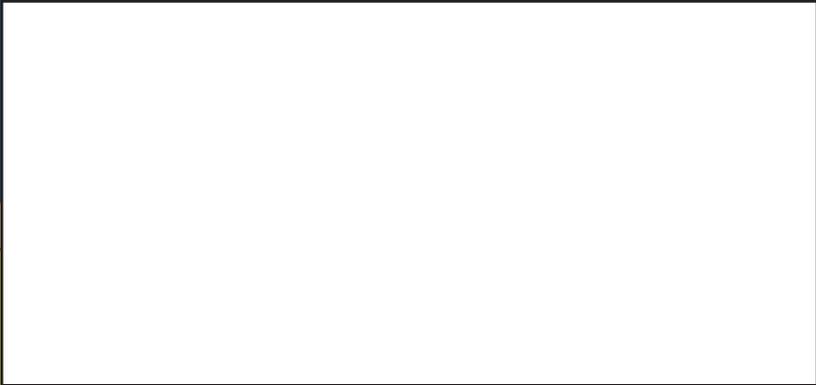
In addition to fundraising, the event offers Chapters and Departments an

invaluable opportunity for outreach, with Chapter Service Officers like Lester getting the opportunity to make veterans, their families and survivors aware of the services and benefits available to them.

"We started this because we wanted to do something for our community, and the community wanted to do something for the vets," said Moore. "We don't do enough to thank vets for what they've done for us."

"Even though I'm not a veteran, I'm proud of DAV," Moore said. "Everyone who is involved in this event is a supporter. I wish we could do more."

"In every way, Golden Corral somehow continues to outdo themselves in their support of veterans and their families," said National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess. "Military Appreciation Monday is a unique program that unites veterans as a community and ensures DAV is able to fulfill our promises to those who've served. We're grateful for their support and look forward to another exciting year." ■



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- Structured
- Nylon/Cotton Twill
- Mid-Profile
- Moisture Wicking
- Hook and Loop Closure

\$15

