

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**Garry J. Augustine**  
**NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR**  
**to the**  
**DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS**  
**90<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION**  
**August 6 – August 9, 2011**

## **Revolutionizing Service with Advancements in Technology**

It is my sincere pleasure as National Service Director to present to the delegates at the 90th National Convention my report of the continued success of the National Service Department. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) continues to understand the vital importance of a strong voice to advocate for the rights and interests of disabled veterans and their families.

We continue to make positive strides toward fulfilling our promise to take care of those who have served in the United States Armed Forces. These brave men and women are committed to the country, and we must ensure that we do not falter in our responsibility to take care of those who return with injuries. Their injuries serve as daily reminders of the sacrifices that they made.

When Judge Robert S. Marx and 100 disabled veterans of World War I gathered in Cincinnati, Ohio, on December 25, 1919, it was the start of what would be the finest veterans service organization in the world. I can only imagine that Judge Marx would certainly be proud of the service we provide to America's disabled veterans, service that has evolved into today's finest, best trained, best equipped, and most dedicated veterans' advocates in the world. The DAV was founded because the government was not fulfilling its obligations to the Nation's wartime disabled veterans. Obviously, there was a need for representation and a strong voice within Congress. This still rings true today, and has been since the beginning of the veterans benefits process.

If history teaches us anything, it is that protecting our benefits will only become more difficult in the future. Needless to say, we must continue to develop initiatives to revolutionize the services we provide to our Nation's disabled veterans and their families.

Over the years, the DAV has made tremendous strides in acquiring and utilizing state-of-the-art computer technology to assist veterans and their families in filing claims for benefits. DAV National Service Officers (NSOs) have access to an impressive array of resources, including access to the extensive databases of the VA.

As American writer Stewart Brand observed, "Once a new technology rolls over you, if you're not part of the steamroller, you're part of the road." The world is rapidly changing with today's new technology and the DAV has responded to these never-ending changes and became part of the steamroller in order to continue to provide the best representation available to disabled veterans, their dependents, and survivors. The VA continues to develop a paperless claims processing system, and DAV is prepared to continue to provide consistent quality service and advocacy to disabled veterans and their families within this new system as we have always done. In keeping with today's technology, DAV has also embraced new technology and electronic networks and NSOs now have dual computer monitors and their computers have the most [up to date] programs and software available to remain compatible with the VA claims processing initiatives. NSOs are able to track cases right from their desks through a direct link with VA databases.

Throughout DAV's history we have continually adapted to the ever-changing needs of disabled veterans, their dependents, and survivors. As our business practices continue to evolve based upon the rapidly changing advancements in technology, we will continue to do everything possible to ensure all of our country's disabled veterans and their families receive the rights and benefits they have earned.

### NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM

Building better lives for our nation's disabled veterans and their families. This is accomplished through service. Service has always been the mainstay of the Disabled American Veterans. Our largest endeavor in fulfilling the DAV's mission is our National Service Program. In 100 offices throughout the United States and in Puerto Rico, we employ a corps of approximately 240 National Service Officers (NSOs) and 30 Transition Service Officers (TSOs) who counsel and represent veterans and their families with claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense and other government agencies.

Veterans need not be members to take advantage of our assistance, which is provided free of charge. With outlays of \$38,768,385 in 2010, these direct services make up the largest item in our budget for program activities. Our NSOs and TSOs, all wartime service-connected disabled veterans, represented nearly a quarter of a million veterans and their families in their claims for VA benefits, obtaining for them more than \$4.5 billion in new and retroactive benefits.

NSOs function as attorneys-in-fact, assisting veterans and their families in filing claims for VA disability compensation, rehabilitation and education programs, pensions, death benefits, employment and training programs. They provide free services, such as information seminars, and counseling and community outreach activities such as the Mobile Service Office (MSO). NSOs also represent veterans and active duty military personnel before Discharge Review Boards, Boards for Correction of Military Records, Physical Evaluation Boards, the Disability Transition Assistance Program, the Transition Assistance Program and other official panels.

## DAV NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICER TRAINING PROGRAMS

DAV National Service Officers continually train throughout their careers so that they are cognizant of the changes in all laws and regulations affecting veterans benefits. This constant training assures that all DAV NSOs are at the forefront of veterans advocacy. Our NSOs are highly trained professionals and skilled experts in developing and prosecuting veterans' claims through in-depth reviews of medical histories, in conjunction with application of current law and regulations. They also review rating board decisions, informing veterans and their families of the appeals process and of their appellate rights.

The extensive preparation required for these essential services provided by NSOs begins with a 16-month on-the-job training program, which provides the foundation for new trainees. Trainees are instructed by tenured supervisory NSOs. The National Service staff at National Service and Legislative Headquarters administers and monitors the program and the instructors.

An NSO's training does not stop after completing 16 months of initial training. In fact training never stops because the laws, regulations, and policies, which govern veterans' benefits, continue to change and grow in complexity. That's why equipping our NSOs with state-of-the-art computers and keeping their cutting-edge advocacy skills up to date is of paramount importance. The DAV is the only veterans service organization to have a training program certified for college credit by the American Council on Education.

In addition to these training programs, supervisory staff and selected NSOs from field offices across the country receive specialized instruction in management and leadership development. The goal is to produce the most highly trained representatives possible to serve veterans and their families.

## NATIONAL APPEALS OFFICE

The Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) is the highest appellate level within the VA responsible for the final decision concerning entitlement to veterans benefits. About 96 percent of the claims before the board involve disability compensation issues. Our highly skilled National Appeals Officers serve appellants in the preparation of written briefs for BVA review and conduct formal hearings before Veterans Law Judges. We maintain the largest staff of any advocacy group, representing 29 percent of all cases decided by the BVA in 2010.

## JUDICIAL APPEALS

DAV continues its pro bono representation program for veterans seeking review in the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. In fiscal 2009-10, the BVA took action on more than 14,000 cases involving DAV clients. Each and every one of those cases was reviewed to identify those in which a veteran's claim was improperly denied. Thanks to DAV, more than five hundred of these cases were appealed to the court. While we are still working toward our

goal of appealing each and every significant case, it is hard to believe that just a few years ago, we had yet to crack the two hundred case per year mark.

The substantial growth of this program would not have been possible without the coordinated efforts of two top-notch law firms – Finnegan Henderson of Washington, D.C., and Chisholm Chisholm & Kilpatrick of Providence, Rhode Island and Washington, D.C. Robert Chisholm (of the Chisholm firm) and Ron Smith (of Finnegan) are two of the nation’s most accomplished members of the veterans bar, and DAV is proud and pleased to have them in prominent roles in our enlarged program at the court. By this time next year, we hope to be able to report still another substantial jump in the number of appealed cases.

### TRANSITION SERVICE PROGRAM

For those servicemembers making the all-important transition back into civilian life, DAV participates in Transition Assistance and Disabled Transition Assistance programs. Due to a generous grant provided by the GE Foundation, we have been able to increase our staff of Transition Service Officers.

Our TSOs provide benefits counseling and assistance to servicemembers filing initial claims for VA benefits at military installations throughout the country. By filing compensation claims at separation centers where service medical records and examination facilities are readily available, we are able to provide prompt service to these future veterans. Over the last year, our TSOs conducted nearly 3,000 formal presentations to 82,155 transitioning servicemembers. During that same time they filed 26,598 claims for VA benefits. Counsel and representation for active duty servicemembers during their transition was provided through the military’s Disability Evaluation System. We devoted approximately \$1.8 million to this program in 2010.

### MOBILE SERVICE OFFICE PROGRAM

The Mobile Service Office (MSO) Program continues to reach out to veterans in their own communities. Not all veterans are willing or able to visit a DAV office due to distance, transportation, health or other reasons. By literally putting our service offices on the road, assisting veterans where they live, DAV is increasing their accessibility to benefits. With 10 specially equipped Mobile Service Offices visiting communities across the country, this outreach effort generates a considerable amount of claims work from those veterans who may not otherwise have the opportunity to seek assistance at our National Service Offices. During 2010, our MSOs traveled more than 114,248 miles, visiting 815 cities and towns. Our NSOs interviewed 20,190 veterans and other potential claimants. The Harley-Davidson Foundation in August 2010 pledged a second \$1 million over four years to partner with the DAV to maintain the Harley’s Heroes® program. During 2010, the MSOs visited 183 Harley-Davidson dealerships as part of this program. Nearly \$870,000 was expended for the Mobile Service Office program in 2010, which included 10 new MSOs replacing the aged fleet.

## OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The National Service Department has the cooperation, support, and assistance of Department and Chapter Service Officers across the country. Each receives the training and information necessary to assist those we serve. Our Department and Chapter Service Officer Certification Training Program guarantee's the vitality and growth of our local service programs. This provides an environment where our Hospital Service Coordinators, Department and Chapter Service Officers, and volunteers work together for the common goal of service to disabled veterans. In 2010, DAV trained and certified 1,409 Department and Chapter Service Officers in 33 states.

During 2010, we conducted 42 Information Seminars at various Chapters across the country, with 6,603 individuals in attendance. These Information Seminars provide the opportunity for veterans to discuss VA benefits with our NSOs in their own community, giving Chapters an opportunity to recruit new members and encourage their involvement.

Since 2006, DAV NSOs have offered services at other community-based events, including participation with state and county fairs, air shows, Major League Baseball, the National Football League, and NASCAR.

## WOMEN VETERANS

In historic numbers, women are serving our country with pride, patriotism and honor equal to their male counterparts. But women veterans use VA health care facilities and other earned benefits in lower numbers than their male counterparts. As a result, we advocate for women veterans on a variety of fronts. We have organized top-level forums designed to bring women veterans and government policymakers together to openly address topics of concern.

We are involved in the congressionally chartered VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. In addition, our own Women's Advisory Committee, primarily made up of women veterans from across the country, meets annually at our National Convention. We actively seek out and recruit women veterans for our National Service Officer corps.

## EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Our National Service Program is responsible for the organization's employment-related program and works alongside the Department of Labor, the VA, the Office of Personnel Management, Congress and other government agencies to ensure that disabled veterans are treated fairly and equitably in the work force.

Historically, disabled veterans have not fared as well as non-disabled veterans and other workers in the job market. Our primary goal is to seek legislation and policies to enhance programs and services provided by the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, the Office of Personnel Management, and other government agencies.

Our active involvement and oversight ensure disabled veterans get fair consideration in the job market.

### HOMELESS VETERANS

Homelessness has been a constant presence in America's cities, towns, and rural areas for many years. Since the early 1980s, homelessness has been a regular focus of media interest and a topic of policy debate and remains one of America's most complicated and important social issues.

The DAV's Homeless Veterans Initiative is to seek legislation and policies to enhance programs and services to help homeless veterans break the cycle of poverty and isolation and move from the streets to self-sufficiency. Your National Service Officers and Department and Chapter members have participated in Stand Downs for homeless veterans nationwide, and on behalf of the National Service Staff, I extend thanks for all that each of you do to make a significant difference in the lives of homeless veterans and their families across the Nation.

### RETIREMENTS

DAV NSOs are service-connected disabled veterans from all walks of life. They uphold the great principles of this organization and work to ensure that veterans and their families have legal representation and a voice when filing claims to the VA for benefits. NSOs understand their role as veteran advocates and are dedicated to the DAV's mission of service and improving the livelihood of veterans disabled during military service.

Our experienced professional NSOs who have retired this past year leave a legacy of commitment and dedication of serving their comrades as advocates for fair and equitable benefits. These individuals served their country in her hour of need and returned home, many with deep scars of war, to work on behalf of others disabled due to their military service. From the National Service Staff, we wish each of these NSOs a long and healthy retirement. We appreciate their efforts in support of our cause. For the record, those who retired this past year are: John Kessinger, Paul Sydorko, Gregory Jones, Ronald Hope, Gregory Seurer, Gary Weaver, and David Gorman.

### DEATHS

We call to remembrance our National Service Officers whose demise occurred this year. As the Nation's veteran population rapidly declines -- the attrition takes its toll on our NSO ranks. These NSOs have provided services and helped improve the quality of life for scores of disabled veterans, their dependents, and survivors. We shall recall and preserve the legacy of the following departed NSOs: Denvel Adams, Bruno Hassen, Robert Jordan, John Keller, Verne Nygaard, Guillermo Pajo, and Karl Brown.

## CONCLUSION

At this time, I wish to recognize the leadership, professionalism, and personal sacrifices made by our National Commander Wallace Tyson, and all of the National Line Officers; members of the National Executive Committee; the National Finance Committee; and the Officers and Board of Directors for both the National Service Foundation and Charitable Service Trust. I extend my thanks and salute you for a job well done.

I thank National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson for his continued leadership, vision, and direction. Our success is a reflection of his tireless efforts to inspire and ensure quality and professionalism in all that we do. He has kept us focused on what it takes to bring to fruition our mission of service to disabled veterans and their families. In addition, I express my gratitude to National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess and his team for their support of our goals and programs during the past year. I also want to welcome recently appointed Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. The Service Department looks forward to his leadership, his approach and participation in veteran affairs, and his direct involvement in management of the National Service Department.

I would like to extend a special note of thanks to recently retired Washington Headquarters Executive Director David W. Gorman. Dave joined the DAV's professional staff as a National Service Officer some 40 years ago. He kept us focused on what it takes to bring to fruition our mission of service to disabled veterans and their families. The Service Department will certainly miss his steadfast guidance, direction, and active involvement in managing the National Service Department; we are not only enriched but also more sound as an organization due to his involvement.

Appreciation is extended to the National Service Department staff members with whom I have the pleasure of working: Deputy National Service Director Brenda Kecskes and Assistant National Service Directors, Scott Trimarchi, Chad Moos, John Maki, and Jim Marszalek; and our staff of devoted Service Support Specialists, Emily Hall, Amanda Evans, and Theodora Taylor.

Our successes are not single-handed. We receive the dedicated and capable assistance and cooperation of the DAV Auxiliary, Department and Chapter Service Officers, and Hospital Service Coordinators. Thank you all for your support.

Last and most important of all, I wish to thank our loyal and dedicated corps of National Service Officers, Transition Service Officers, and support staff members who advocate on behalf of America's disabled veterans and their families. The National Service Department will continue to do everything possible to ensure all of our country's disabled veterans and their families receive the rights and benefits they have earned.