Volunteers Give Lifetime of Service

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Salvator Uccello, left, assists a passenger boarding a Transportation Network van in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Salvator Uccello has spent his life in service to others. Uccello spent 10 years of his youth in the U.S. Navy, followed by a career in the Postal Service, and for the last 22 years he has been an active participant in the corps of DAV volunteers. Katie Critz spent most of her life as a professional nurse caring for thousands of patients, and for the last 30 years has been giving her time and loving care to veterans.

In recognition of their dedicated service, Uccello, 81, and Critz, 84, received the 2009 George H. Seal Memorial Trophy from National Commander Raymond E. Dempsey before thousands of DAV members during the National Convention in Denver, Colo.

Uccello was recognized for volunteering more than 19,529 hours at the West Palm Beach, Fla., VA medical center (VAMC), and Critz has volunteered for more than 13,235 hours at the
Dallas, Texas, VAMC. “They provide outstanding leadership to our wonderful volunteers by devoting their lives to serve the men and women who have sacrificed for our nation,” said Commander Dempsey. “Both Salvator and Katie are very deserving recipients of the 2009 George H. Seal Memorial Trophy for their years of excellence in volunteering.”

The Seal award annually honors the remarkable DAV and Auxiliary volunteers who serve veterans and their families through the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) program. The awards are conferred in memory of George H. Seal, who was Director of Membership and Voluntary Services and a leading organizer and administrator of the DAV VAVS program from 1952 until his death in 1977.

“These are two dedicated and caring people who are the best examples among our thousands of volunteers,” said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. “Their contributions to building better lives for our sick and disabled veterans are exemplary and display the compassion of the DAV and the Auxiliary.”

“When I retired from the post office in 1987, and I became Department Commander in Connecticut, I didn’t think I would be volunteering,” Uccello said. “Now I don’t know how you cannot do it. Once I got involved, I had to stay.”

A member of Chapter 42 in West Palm Beach, Uccello serves as the DAV Transportation Network Coordinator helping thousands of veterans arrange trips to and from the VAMC each year. He also volunteers in physical medicine, rehabilitation services and recreation therapy.

“He is focused on taking care of patients’ needs,” said Voluntary Services Program Manager Mary Phillips. “We are most fortunate to have Mr. Uccello volunteering here.”

“I’m just happy knowing that I’m doing a decent job,” said Uccello. “I have a good group of people—something like 83 volunteers, plus the drivers, so I think I’m privileged to be
“If I can make one person happy, I’ve had a good day,” he said. “If someone walks out of my office happy, I don’t care what it is, I’m psyched.”

“Not every day is perfect,” he said. “But I think overall there are better days and best days. They are all good days.”

Critz, a member of Auxiliary Unit 175 in Mesquite, Texas, volunteers as an escort and patient advocate, works on the coffee cart, the Aegis, Silver Spoon and recreation therapy programs.

“She is always willing to assist the veteran patients,” said Voluntary Services Program Manager Bobbie K. Scoggins. “She is a leader in recruiting additional volunteers and friendly and compassionate about the care and well-being of our veterans.”

“I began volunteering at the VA hospital about 30 years ago,” said Critz who was married to two now deceased veterans. “I enjoy working with the hospice patients. Many don’t have any family at all, and you are with them in their last hour. Most of our volunteers can’t do that, but being a nurse by trade I can do that.”

“I enjoy calling on the patients that get few or no visitors,” she said. “They tell us they’d be alone without our visits. I get the greatest joy of doing that.”

“What I do is for the patients,” she said. “The Aegis program I assist gives psychological support to patients with little or no family. The Silver Spoon involves feeding patients that cannot feed themselves. I do those things to help our veterans.”

“She is a very dedicated and committed volunteer,” said Commander Dempsey. “She is a mentor to a younger generation of volunteers and brightens the spirits of veterans in any way
she can.”