Chapter Reaches New Heights with Outreach

DAV Chapter 10 in Billings, Mont., had a very common problem: how to keep in contact with three generations of veterans across a vast frontier state.

“We face a challenge of how to keep in contact with three generations of American veterans, covering a 75-year age span from World War II all the way to Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Chapter Adjutant Ed Saunders.

The Chapter’s solution was to reach each generation of veterans in a manner they’re comfortable with, including an active Facebook page, an email newsletter and some printed newsletters mailed mostly to veterans who prefer getting their news that way.

After the Chapter found effective ways to communicate with its members, the next obvious step was to take its message to the rest of the community. The vehicle of choice was the local media.

“We began by approaching print media and asking if they’d be interested in how veterans can work with schools on American history through Chapter 10’s Flags Over America program,” Saunders said. “We’ve since been very successful in getting our message out through print, radio and local TV.”

One specific issue the Billings veterans community needed was additional public transportation to the local VA hospital. Could the media actually help deliver this message to community leaders and stakeholders? Saunders thinks so.

Craig Vance, Sr. Vice Commander of the Department of Oklahoma, has been successful taking advantage of the most mobile of all communication media: radio. “We’ve found that our local radio
stations are always looking for someone to talk for a few minutes during morning drive time about upcoming local civic events," he said. “I’ll call the radio station several days before our event to schedule a specific day, and then on that day I’ll arrive at the station about 15 minutes before airtime to familiarize the announcer with the event.”

Vance said the outreach power of radio is a golden opportunity for him to let his community know about DAV’s message and free services his Chapter and Department provide. “We’ll be interviewed for several minutes about the specific event details, but we also get the opportunity to mention other things, like our location, the Chapter’s day-to-day services for veterans and their families and where they can get more information,” said Vance. “The radio station has also done an on-site remote broadcast as well as interviews in the hours leading up to our local Golden Corral Military Appreciation Monday.”

Saunders’ advice to anyone starting an outreach effort is to do their research first, as it pays off in the end. “Before talking to the press, we do our research and find the facts,” Saunders said. “What surprised me was how our local media now approaches us to find out DAV’s position on a subject. We’ve become a credible source for the media. Our material is well-prepared and reliably presented.”

“I applaud the local outreach efforts by these Chapters,” said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “This is a great demonstration of what innovation and creative thinking can accomplish. I encourage everyone to explore their own avenues of getting DAV’s message of service to veterans in front of their local communities. Our communications team at National Headquarters is only an email or phone call away for help and advice.”

For media relations and outreach guidance, contact Associate
National Director of Communications Steve Wilson. Call 859-442-2046 or email swilson@dav.org.