

Texas veteran, advocate named Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year

RENO, Nev. – Texas native Callie Rios was named the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year today at the DAV and DAV Auxiliary 97th National Convention.

In 2002, Rios enlisted in the U.S. Army at age 18. The single mother was seeking a better future for her child. When she joined the military, Rios took an oath to defend her country and was prepared to face any enemy on behalf of the nation. But she never expected to be attacked by a fellow soldier.

“There was a turning point in my military career at Fort Knox when I was the victim of a sexual assault,” recalled Rios. “I did not really find much support in my unit; I didn’t really find much support anywhere. It was a very lonely time for me. I came back out of it, and now I’m ready to help other women who were in the same situation as I was.”

Rios understands firsthand how difficult it can be to overcome injuries that are invisible to everyone else. She channels the trauma she suffered in the Army into supporting fellow veterans. This personal experience is what drives her commitment to ensuring others don’t hesitate to seek out mental health assistance.

Rios is active in DAV Chapter 58 in Midland, Texas, serving as the junior vice commander. In 2017, she spearheaded a women veterans conference, Heroes in Heels, sponsored by the chapter. Linking mental health practitioners and former

servicewomen with invisible wounds was an event priority.

In addition to supporting women veterans, Rios provides outreach to former service members at an area college. As a former student veteran who now holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, she recognizes the unique challenges facing veterans on campus.

For nearly a decade she has served her home state as a volunteer member of the Texas State Guard, supporting humanitarian missions, including Hurricane Harvey.

"I am proud to honor Callie for her commitment to veterans, her family, local community, Texas and the nation," said DAV National Commander Delphine Metcalf-Foster. "Her resilience as a survivor of military sexual trauma and commitment to supporting men and women battling invisible injuries undoubtedly provides inspiration to our fellow injured veterans and their families. Her humble spirit and positive attitude are living testaments to DAV's mission of empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity."

"I volunteer and I give back so much because I love people," Rios stated. "If they can find a piece of my story that connects with them, and helps them in any kind of way, it's worth it for me."

Photos and media may be made available upon request.

About DAV: *DAV empowers veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It is dedicated to a single purpose: fulfilling the nation's promises to the men and women who served. DAV does this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them; fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill; linking veterans and their families to employment resources; and educating the public about the great*

sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. DAV, a non-profit organization with more than 1 million members, was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U. S. Congress in 1932.