

Time to rally

As we begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must remember that we cannot let up in our mission to honor those who have sacrificed for our nation. The pandemic in parts of the country has inhibited our amazing volunteers from doing their job, however, there are several Voluntary Service programs throughout the country that are finding ways to fulfill their duties.

In Wisconsin, Patty Davis, DAV Auxiliary State Adjutant and Transportation Manager at the Milwaukee VA, has been leading the charge with her team on developing ways to volunteer safely during this pandemic. Making sure every DAV Transportation Network vehicle has been disinfected and cleaned after each ride, ensuring that every veteran and volunteer driver has an efficient amount of PPE, and limiting the amount of passengers in each vehicle.

In Minnesota, Transportation Manager Stephanie Zeimetz has been focusing on the importance of personal and human connections made by their volunteer drivers. Zeimetz and the entire Department of Minnesota say that many of the veterans in her community, especially throughout the winter, are isolated. So, the time these veterans get with their Transportation Network volunteer drivers is often the most in-person conversation they've had during this isolating time.

Our incredible volunteer drivers would not be able to provide rides to their local VA hospitals without the vehicles provided by DAV. In 2020 alone, DAV donated 119 total vehicles, eight of which were provided from our partners at Ford Motor Company. However, these vehicles have to be transported throughout the country and the risk of travel for many of our volunteers is high.

Nevertheless, we've had volunteers fly and drive across the

country to make sure their community and VA receive new Transportation Network vehicles.

We all should be proud of these amazing volunteers, and all those who give their time and energy to DAV. Today and going forward, our fellow veterans may face many of the same issues we have since our founding in 1920—veteran homelessness, the struggle to find meaningful employment, and unique physical and mental health challenges.

Coming out of a daunting pandemic, as our forbearers were at this time a century ago, we need to be prepared to safely and effectively reengage our volunteers and members. Undoubtedly, in spite of great efforts through telehealth, there are going to be many appointments veterans will have missed that they need to catch up on.

For those of us who are capable of doing so, please consider donating some of your time as a driver. And for all of us who understand the value and importance of our DAV Transportation Network and hospital volunteerism, please encourage others in your community who have time to give and generous spirits to become involved. The rewards are priceless and the impact the program has on our heroes is enduring.