



Barry Jesinoski
National Convention Remarks
July 30, 2017
New Orleans, Louisiana

It's great to be here today and report on the progress we've enjoyed over the last year.

So much of what we do every day is intended to support and empower DAV departments and chapters in our shared mission. The work that you do daily is our greatest source of inspiration. We're humbled to share this sacred cause and, by what you are able to accomplish, to fulfill our mission.

As many of you have seen on television, radio, billboards and in magazines through our public service campaign, empowering Victories for Veterans is the driving force behind everything we do. We want your feedback. We want to understand the challenges you face and to provide solutions to help you with your goals.

We also know what you mean to the veterans in your communities. That's never lost on us. We understand the power of hope and how it can inspire and improve people's lives. We think of veterans like Adam Greathouse, this year's DAV Freedom Award recipient from the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic...

We're inspired by that also. It's worth noting that more than two dozen DAV chapters and departments sponsored the Winter Sports Clinic – including a host level sponsor in the Department of Missouri that kicked in \$40,000 dollars. Auxiliary juniors from the Department of Oklahoma came in as bronze level sponsors and we already have a commitment from juniors with the Department of Texas to join them next year.

What that video can't capture is the impact DAV and the clinic has had on the lives of others through Adam's transformation. Adam left his first clinic experience to return to West Virginia and become a DAV volunteer.

He's dedicated more than 2,100 hours in a variety of capacities at the Huntington VAMC. A DAV Life Member, part of his volunteer time is dedicated to mentorship.

He will drive hours to VA facilities to meet veterans suffering from PTSD. He'll meet with them and walk them to their appointments to make sure they stay and get the help they need. He's determined to make sure his fellow veterans don't become a statistic like he nearly did.

But the statistics associated with suicide among our brothers and sisters and the knowledge that we can always improve drives us to do more. And while in many ways we have enjoyed a banner year, we have many challenges we must face together.

We hear you... We **understand**...

Recruiting can be difficult. And even then, getting active members who are willing to facilitate our mission on the local level can be hard.

Volunteerism is trending downward – not just for DAV, but as part of a nationwide trend. Baby Boomers are working longer into their retirement years and our Greatest Generation has largely faded from the volunteer ranks. And that's without even taking into consideration the difficulties we face onboarding volunteers.

The way people support charities is changing as well. And we must continually evolve to provide prospective donors and companies with a diverse range of opportunities and experiences to give back.

Also, while our public outreach has never been so prolific, there is more clutter than ever as we dive headlong into the Information Age.

The way people look at charities and how they interact is increasingly digital. We all understand that if we're not vying for our due share of the public's mind and heart, we risk the legacy of our organization.

For us to ensure the DAV we've inherited will be up to the challenge of serving future generations of veterans, we need to focus on opportunities that expand and enhance our relevance.

Steve Jobs once said: *"When you first start off trying to solve a problem, the first solutions you come up with are very complex, and most people stop there. But if you keep going, and live with the problem and peel more layers of the onion off, you can often times arrive at some very elegant and simple **solutions**."*

We work very hard and push ourselves daily to honor your work by providing solutions to the challenges you face. We look to innovate and advance our cause. We are willing to push through the complexities and find those elegant solutions.

With every challenge we face, we see tremendous opportunities. And we're looking to you, our members, to tell us what you need to get the job done.

From recruit training on, I was always in awe of Marine sergeants. They seemed to have every answer and know exactly how everything should be done.

I was fortunate that, though my enlistment was cut short, I had good NCOs who mentored me and looked after me. One of them once told me that "sergeant" was a French word. Translated, it roughly means "to serve."

And though it felt like I was doing a lot of the *servicing* in the field and on working parties, all these years later I can appreciate the many valuable lessons he taught me about leadership.

You who lead have a greater commitment to service than the rank and file members we represent. It is our job to empower them with the resources they need to make a difference for the better.

We are tasked to live with the problems people face in the field, and we try to peel the layers back and make it as easy as possible to make that difference.

We look for low-hanging fruit.

You tell us that digital newsletters are changing the way you do business... You say you want to leverage that technology... It's working in Virginia. It's working in Oklahoma. It's working in Minnesota.

In return, we get together with member leaders, learn their best practices and push guidance to help other chapters and departments.

You say that public service announcements are getting noticed in your community. You want to leverage placements with local media to increase local awareness and membership. So we provide you with the tools to pitch PSAs on your own.

We see you reaching out to the media successfully to promote volunteerism. You need drivers, you tell your local television, radio and newspapers. And when we see the value of the work you're doing, we provide every chapter with template releases you can use to promote your program and announce when new vehicles enter the network in your community.

Sometimes the solutions are simple.

Many of us know veterans who have to pack hiking shoes to get from a VA parking lot to their medical appointments. So we've tested DAV golf carts at the VA medical center in Cincinnati. So far, the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive...

Based on need and availability, we may expand this program further to other places where it would be equally beneficial.

Finding elegant solutions requires creativity and understanding. It requires a commitment not to accept the status quo. I am blessed to have a team who looks at the issues we face; the tools that are changing the world; and the resources we can employ or create.

Our most precious resource, and yours, is **time**. As DAV looks to mark a century of service, we're already looking further out and trying to forecast our needs as an organization for our *second* century of service.

In addition to our traditional volunteer opportunities in VA hospitals and through the transportation network, we've seen incredible progress with Local Veterans Assistance Program hours.

Last year, DAV surpassed 1.2 million hours through LVAP. However, a lot of that – we believe – doesn't reflect an increase in volunteer effort.

Much of it reflects an overall increase in reporting that effort, with departments recognizing members and crediting them for the amazing work they are doing through DAV.

Meanwhile, beyond the reach of our traditional volunteer opportunities and among citizens, community groups and companies, we are frequently approached to identify volunteer opportunities.

We have more than a million veterans nationwide whose lives we change every year through our core services. We have 20 million veterans who are certainly predisposed to honor their brothers and sisters. And, all together, we have some **320 million Americans** who directly benefit because of the security and prosperity that veterans' sacrifices have made possible.

This winter we launched the Forward March campaign as a pilot program. As Marc mentioned, the effort netted more than 100 brand new volunteers who were able to provide a special thanks and "pay it forward" for veterans. Here's one veteran who benefited from that initiative...

While we're grateful for the seeds we planted through this unique campaign, it made us look closer at how many opportunities we've had to turn away on other occasions. We found we had tremendous limitations in terms of our potential reach.

While we're far and away the most prolific volunteer entity for veterans in the country, we don't have a centralized database that identifies the individual needs of veterans, their survivors or even our own chapters and departments.

We run important programs that rely on a core of especially dedicated volunteers. We recognize that our traditional volunteer programs require a special commitment that is out of reach to many prospective volunteers who are juggling families and careers.

Beyond those formal – *albeit critically important* – programs, to date, we have no process for connecting volunteers with veterans.

That needs to change.

By year's end, DAV will launch a new and exciting project we've named simply "volunteerforveterans.org."

It is a digital platform that will allow veterans, their caregivers and even DAV chapters to identify volunteer opportunities.

So, when a veteran needs help cleaning some gutters, he or she can go to www.VolunteerForVeterans.org, log in and find other veterans or community members who can help.

Likewise, a DAV chapter who identifies a large-scale volunteer need can create an opportunity on the platform, then share that opportunity through their social networks and email newsletters.

*This could completely **revolutionize** volunteer engagement.*

It can be a game-changer for DAV. But for it to live up to its potential, we're going to need you, our DAV leaders, on board.

We're going to need you to spread the news in your community. For us to crowd-source problems that will impact the lives of veterans – we're going to need your help populating the platform with veterans in need and encouraging participation from community members and volunteers alike.

This effort shouldn't be looked upon as competition to our traditional volunteer programs, but as a creative introduction to volunteer service that benefits veterans and DAV.

It does not compete – it contributes. Not only can chapters and units use it to recruit and engage new volunteers, it may be able to help organize volunteer staffing.

With volunteers identifying themselves and their locations, DAV will be crediting DAV Departments with Local Veterans Assistance Program hours and recognizing the contributing participants. It can be a big win on multiple levels.

But like I said, we are an organization of members.

And for any of these initiatives to reach their potential, we need more than your buy in. We need you to make it happen.

This is just one of the initiatives that we're working on to apply technology in ways that serve the best interests of veterans, their families and survivors.

More is on the horizon.

VolunteerForVeterans.org is potentially going to help us in another area as well. Corporations frequently come to DAV and want to support our cause.

In many instances, they want a hands-on experience as much or more than they want to write a check. By creating opportunities for them to volunteer, we have the chance to enjoy the full potential of their generosity, and most importantly, help more veterans in need.

Just before Memorial Day weekend, the New York Stock Exchange invited DAV and our national commander to ring the opening bell. It was truly an honor to take part in such an historic tradition in a way that also brought the spotlight on our organization and what we do.

As anyone in this room who likes a good root beer float can attest, DAV is seeing more and more benefit from corporate relationships.

Not only do corporations have funds to support charities, they have:
employees to volunteer, as I mentioned;
services and products to donate;
consumers to inform;
and large internal audiences who **embrace special causes**.

We've seen tremendous growth in these areas. In large part, we see this because we have a large internal audience and an emotionally compelling mission the public understands.

As you learned yesterday, this year we entered into a new partnership with A&W, which includes that exciting activation next Sunday, August 6 that will increase awareness of our free services while generating funds to support our mission.

We continue to be blessed by our partnership with Ford, who is by far our longest lasting and most prolific partner. That's a relationship that began with the generosity of Henry Ford and has resulted in hundreds of vehicles donated to support the transportation network.

Golden Corral has a unique and special commitment to our organization that adds extensive value to our grassroots efforts with every contributed penny going to departments and chapters.

It's grown with our partnership to support Camp Corral through Just B Kids. It's also grown in that you'll see DAV more prominently displayed at Golden Corral restaurants year round.

That's an extra value that they bring to promote our cause among their many patriotic customers.

USAA, in a short period of time, has donated nearly \$2 million dollars to DAV in different ways and have been a strong proponent of our free service programs. They are far and away the most recognizable brand in financial services for the military and veterans community and we're looking at more ways we can engage with them through new and exciting opportunities.

Hankook donated funds to support the mobile service office program and sponsored DAV's involvement in military appreciation days with the Cincinnati Reds.

That event resulted in Commander Riley throwing out the first pitch.

We also added Price Chopper/Market 32, Tervis, and A&W Restaurants, who added in-store consumer activation fundraising campaigns.

BlueLine Rental and QuickLane are also supporting DAV. We've activated with Polaris and country music star Brantley Gilbert to provide funds to support DAV's mission and Razr all-terrain vehicles to deserving veterans.

It's worth noting that any cause-marketing related corporate partnership supports local service initiatives as well as our national programs – with 25 percent allocated to departments and chapters.

Currently, DAV 5K events are a way we can provide businesses and the public a unique way to experience our charity and become ambassadors supporting our cause. We're up to six 5Ks this year and will continue to look for communities where we can sustainably expand that program.

The companies who are supporting us through that initiative become even more supportive of what we do because they see the energy and impact of our brand in action.

Not only can for-profits contribute through their philanthropy, we're connecting with them increasingly to hire disabled veterans and their families. In three short years, DAV has become a leading voice in the field of veteran employment.

We are the most productive charity in the country when it comes to connecting veterans with employers.

This effort will be augmented in the near future with an employment resource for human resources professionals and continued growth in career fairs with our partners at RecruitMilitary and VeteranRecruiting.

In partnership with VisitMyrtleBeach, DAV was able to recognize a handful of veterans at the Carolina Country Music Festival. Along with headliners such as Darius Rucker, Montgomery Gentry, Kenny Chesney and Jason Aldean, DAV veterans were welcomed to the stage and honored.

In partnership with the Gary Sinise Foundation, we're formally executing something that happens daily between DAV members. At Boulder Crest Retreat in rural Virginia, which receives significant support from the DAV Charitable Service Trust, some of our most experienced members are part of a program that now pairs new home recipients and others with DAV mentors.

When people like Commander and Yvonne Riley; Dennis and Donna Joyner and Jim Sursely meet with these veterans, they are able to quickly impart lessons and knowledge that took decades to acquire.

We have a couple events scheduled there in the coming months including the first all-woman veteran retreat. This engagement reminds us of the mentorship, formal and informal, that needs to take place in our departments, chapters and employee ranks.

That same sergeant who said the definition of his job meant “to serve,” once told me that he wouldn’t be doing his job if he wasn’t preparing me to take over for him.

Everyone here who wore the uniform knows that lesson. None of us will be around forever. And while we may be doing a great job and keeping a tight ship, what will become of the legacy we inherited and hope to pass on if we’ve not prepared our corporals to become sergeants and our lieutenants to be captains?

We’ve not solved all the challenges we face. But we’re making great strides.

Every day in every aspect of our responsibilities, we’re challenging ourselves to find the ideas that promote the outcomes we want for our organization and the veterans we serve.

I thank you for your patience as we bring VolunteerforVeterans.org online this winter and promote many other initiatives. I thank you for your open minds and willingness to embrace innovation.

In closing, I must also talk about the bedrock value that will determine the outcome of any path we choose for DAV.

Our **integrity** is the reason we enjoy wide public support. And though we are transparent about how we operate our charity, no balance sheet can adequately reflect our most important asset – our reputation.

Integrity is everything.

My sergeant would tell me it means to do the right thing even when no one is looking. Today, it means doing the very best we can for DAV, and those we serve, in every action we take and choice we make. If we continue to let this value be the driving force behind what we do, the future of our organization is assured.

Thank you all for your integrity and service.

Commander Riley, fellow members, this concludes my report.