

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

National Commander McIntosh, guests and delegates, it's certainly my privilege to share what's going on at DAV National Headquarters with so many of you who make our cause possible through your tireless efforts.

MR. JESINOSKI:

I want to thank Commander McIntosh and Adjutant Burgess, whose support and forward thinking have again spurred a year of tremendous growth for our organization.

This year, we have focused on a concept that embodies our passion and dedication to creating high quality lives for our nation's injured and ill veterans. The concept of "victories for veterans" shows the results of DAV's efforts to keep our promises to the men and women who've served.

Let's get a quick overview of what these victories can entail...

MR. JESINOSKI:

Those were real voices from real veterans. They illustrate the limitless opportunities we have to empower veterans, their families and survivors to lead high quality lives with respect and dignity.

DAV is as vital and relevant today as we have been at any time in our history. Our most recent efforts in the area of employment show the impact we make when we focus foremost on creating victories for veterans.

If you don't believe me, ask Sam Johnson...

MR. JESINOSKI:

As Marc mentioned previously, in just over two years of existence, DAV's employment department has become an absolute force in terms of connecting veterans with employers. We're extremely proud of the fact that DAV hosted 71 job fairs in 2015.

We're also very excited about the direction we're going. In partnership with Veteran Recruiting, DAV has expanded into virtual fairs that extend our reach and enable veterans who wouldn't be able to attend fairs through our partnership with Recruit Military. We've challenged our nation's employers to hire 10,000 service-connected disabled veterans.

This initiative has become a force in the employment arena, and will continue to grow and evolve.

MR. JESINOSKI:

Last year, DAV conducted the Veterans Pulse Survey – the most comprehensive, nationally representative sample of its kind – and confirmed that fewer than half of all veterans feel they were prepared for a career after leaving the military.

Employment was identified as the most prominent challenges facing transitioning veterans and one of the top challenges for all veterans nationwide.

MR. JESINOSKI:

We will continue in the years ahead to advance this powerful service and address the critical needs veterans face today. When a veteran is changed as a result of military service, he or she faces many challenges. And we're not going to let those setbacks bar the door to the accomplishments and opportunities veterans can still enjoy.

Just ask a familiar voice how important it is to find a sense of community after a tremendous setback.

Jim Sursely knows how important it is for veterans to pursue their goals in terms of employment and reintegration into the community. As a Past National Commander, he also understands the value of DAV membership.

MR. JESINOSKI:

Fortunately, with individuals like Jim in our ranks, DAV has made progress in an area that is one of the biggest challenges for veterans service organizations.

As many of you know, we closed the 2015 membership year over the 1.3 million mark. We've sustained that effort, thanks in large part to the dedication and commitment of the people in this room. But it's important to understand why we need to strengthen our voice.

MR. JESINOSKI:

According to the Veterans Pulse survey, the divide between those who've served and the people we defended is only growing. In spite of how politically divisive the Vietnam War was, the survey showed post 9/11 veterans are more likely to feel that people who never served could not understand what veterans experienced.

Nearly six out of ten post 9/11 veterans feel a disconnect with their civilian counterparts. The all-volunteer force of today represents a fraction of a percent of the total population.

Though we've waged war on two fronts, the general public has not been mobilized or been asked to change their lives whatsoever. A select few are carrying a heavy burden that is taking a toll on their lives and the lives of their families.

MR. JESINOSKI:

We should be proud of the progress we've made achieving 1.3 million members. But we must also see the value in building on that success, engaging our communities and enhancing the relationship between veterans and the American public.

One way that we've been able to build on that relationship has been through the DAV 5K Run, Walk, Roll and Ride events. Let's take a look at the 5K here in Atlanta last November to capture the spirit of community engagement that participants experience...

MR. JESINOSKI:

We're expanding once again this year, with Atlanta, Boston, Cincinnati, Newport News, and Tulsa hosting events. When the public is given an opportunity to participate and begin that relationship, we find hope in a brighter future.

In 2017, it's my pleasure to announce that DAV will add San Antonio and Raleigh, North Carolina to the slate. We're thrilled with our progress in this area and the energy it brings our organization.

Of course, 5Ks are not the only activities that give us reason for optimism.

MR. JESINOSKI:

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic celebrated its 30th year of creating Miracles on a Mountainside. This event has never been as vibrant or important to the veterans community as it is today.

We are reminded through this event of the spirit of our community. The veteran participants have overcome some of the most profound disabilities one can imagine. We're inspired by their courage and positive outlook on life. Their stories are reminders that we are not defined by our disabilities, but by our will to overcome them.

MR. JESINOSKI:

That's certainly true for DAV Freedom Award recipient Mariela Meylan, who, as Marc mentioned, was struck by a civilian vehicle while on patrol in the Kuwaiti desert in 2004.

At one time, doctors wanted to take her off life support, but years of determination and effort eventually enabled her to walk, drive, to ski and participate in the clinic.

Like Mariela, 2008 DAV Freedom Award recipient Centra "CeCe" Mazyck used the event to challenge her perceived limitations and reach new heights in life. She was so grateful to DAV and so compelled to support her fellow DAV members that she earned a place among those profiled in our public service announcements...

MR. JESINOSKI:

Perennially, the Winter Sports Clinic shows the life-changing impact that DAV and our partners at VA can have in the lives of our nation's heroes. But every day, meaningful "thank yous" are made possible through the selfless work of our volunteers.

DAV remains the most prolific veterans service organization in terms of volunteerism. It's important that each of you understand that we at national headquarters are in awe of your efforts. Since 1987, DAV volunteers have driven more than 642 million miles. Last year alone, volunteers donated 1.6 million hours of their time to honor the service and sacrifices of our heroes and their families.

MR. JESINOSKI:

We never forget that, at the end of the day, the driving force behind every aspect of our mission is enabling *victories* for the veterans we serve.

I want everyone here to know that we are doing our utmost at your national headquarters to honor your service to this organization. We're working to establish tools and resources that empower your efforts in your communities.

We believe, based on all you do and all you've sacrificed, that DAV should be a household name.

MR. JESINOSKI:

This year again, we're going to be pushing the DAV Thank a Vet initiative. Last year, with support from megastar Reba McIntire, we saw incredible reach from this special program. We want more of our members to get involved. It's easy enough to do it online at DAV-Thank-A-Vet.org...

We are working to honor your contributions at every level. We're working with companies to build financial support and enhance our outreach. We're hoping to build upon and maintain our outstanding relationships with Ford, USAA, and Golden Corral, while continuing to develop new partnerships with companies like Hankook Tires, BlueLine Rental, Quick Lane, Price Choppers, B&B Theaters and others who see the value in brand affiliation with the best veterans service organization in the world.

MR. JESINOSKI:

We're building relationships with celebrities like Reba. And some new relationships with celebrities like Jordan Sparks, Justin Moore and LaDainian Tomlinson.

This fall, we'll be working with ABC to share our message through their programming. We'll be on the big stage with Good Morning America and have a full week on "Who Wants to Be A Millionaire."

On Wednesday evening, we'll have a special guest here whose voice is going to help our outreach considerably.

MR. JESINOSKI:

We're starting to get the notice we deserve for the hard work you do every day. We're in the news and on the radio. We're seeing DAV billboards in our communities and can feel the momentum building behind our cause.

And it can't happen soon enough, knowing that our nation's heroes are going to need a strong DAV for generations to come.

But most importantly, we're focusing on victories for veterans and doing it right. Integrity remains the hallmark of DAV's brand. We're proud of what we've accomplished and hopeful for the future.

MR. JESINOSKI:

I'd like to thank DAV's members and leaders throughout the country for serving as a beacon of hope to our fellow veterans. May God bless each and every one of you for all you've done to make these victories possible for DAV and the heroes we serve.

Thank you Commander. This concludes my report.