DAV returns to its birthplace to mark centennial with veterans tribute | Page 18
One of the most highly visible demonstrations of DAV's dedicated advocacy in action comes in February at the annual mid-winter conference near our nation's capital. Each year, hundreds of DAV members and leaders join together to put a face to the most pressing veterans issues and bring the fight directly to elected leaders and policymakers in Washington, D.C.

We invite you to lend your voice to the cause and join us at DAV's annual mid-winter conference at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Virginia, as we tackle the major issues facing veterans today.

You’ll stand in support of National Commander Andy Marshall as he presents DAV’s legislative agenda to Congress. You will also have the opportunity to meet with your lawmakers to make it clear what DAV is fighting for: ensuring full and timely benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances and burn pits, enhancing survivor benefits, ensuring equitable benefits and services for women and minority veterans, improving veterans mental health services and suicide prevention efforts, and building a veterans health care system for the future.

Come join your fellow DAV leaders as we work to ensure policymakers in Washington hear the voices of America’s ill and injured veterans and their families. Together, we will achieve victory and ensure veterans get the benefits they need and have earned!

Feb. 27–March 2, 2022
For more information, visit dav.org/events/2022-mid-winter-conference
Look out for each other

Those who have served in war know that it never leaves us. As a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran, I know all too well the range of emotions that veterans of Afghanistan have been feeling these past few months and how those emotions can negatively affect their sense of well-being.

The anger, hurt and sadness veterans of that war and other conflicts are experiencing can be overwhelming. Pair these complex and divergent emotions with more than 20 months of personal, social and societal difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and an alarming potential for countless mental health crises exists.

But I want every veteran to know this: You matter. Your service matters. Your sacrifice matters.

Every time I learn of a veteran dying by suicide, it hurts my heart knowing someone’s demons got the better of them. It feels like a 7,000-mile sniper shot from our enemies. We beg anyone who is suffering not to let the enemy take another one of us, especially during the coming holiday season.

If you need help, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with asking for it. While I know it takes tremendous strength to do so, I also know you possess the strength to seek help. If you’re experiencing a mental health issue—including moral injury—and find yourself in need of attention, we urge you to call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255. This free, confidential resource is available 24/7 and can connect at-risk veterans to services they need and have earned. You don’t even need to be a veteran to call. Family and friends of veterans in need are encouraged to call as well, and doing so could very well save a life.

As an organization of veterans serving veterans for more than 100 years, we also know that we are some of the best resources available to our fellow veterans. Our shared connections are invaluable, and it’s up to all of us to reach out to help each other process our emotions. I have no doubt many of you have already done so, but as we approach the holidays, I implore you to make that effort once again. You never know who you may save or what family you may save from unfathomable heartbreak.

Taking care of each other is what we do. It’s in our blood. And it’s why I’m so incredibly honored and proud to lead this organization filled with our nation’s finest servants and advocates.

Thank you all for everything you do for each other and your fellow veterans. I truly hope each and every one of you has a wonderful and blessed holiday season filled with joyous memories alongside your families and friends. But most of all, I truly hope that each of you remembers, again, these unyielding truths: You matter. Your service matters. Your sacrifice matters.
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As many may recognize, we recently passed the 10-year anniversary of the repeal of the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which banned lesbian, gay and bisexual service members from serving openly in the armed forces.

The policy stood for 17 years, and though it was largely viewed as a compromise to allow these individuals the opportunity to continue to serve, it was nonetheless a form of legal discrimination. Those who were outed, whether by choice or not, had careers cut short; were subsequently denied certain benefits; and, in far too many instances, were left feeling isolated, as they had been excised from the larger military and veteran communities.

In recognition of this milestone since the repeal of the policy, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced newly issued guidance that veterans who were separated with other than honorable discharges based on homosexual conduct, gender identity or HIV status are to be considered veterans, eliminating barriers to VA benefits such as health care, home loan guaranty, burial benefits and Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E), provided their record does not implicate other bars to such benefits.

DAV believes a veteran is a veteran, regardless of social identity. We have many LGBT veterans within our own membership, and it is important to hear their voices, understand their experiences and challenges, and ensure they have access to their earned health care and benefits. Period.

We have taken steps over the years to be part of righting the wrongs of this discriminatory policy by helping to fund work done by The Veterans Consortium to upgrade these types of discharges. DAV has also worked with Harvard University’s Veterans Legal Clinic to help further highlight the issue of bad paper discharges and the systematic denial of benefits to veterans without due process.

There is no quick fix to the harm done under these types of policies. It takes time and a collective effort to rebuild trust and establish rectitude. We know that many veterans have faced discrimination, both during and after their military service. This has had far-reaching impacts and, in many cases, has created barriers preventing certain veterans from accessing their earned benefits. DAV believes it is critical to properly acknowledge all veterans who upheld their oath, affording them the dignity befitting their service.

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**Protecting Individual Unemployment benefits**

Please get the word out and fully support getting H.R. 5028 (Protecting Benefits for Disabled Veterans Act of 2019) passed. I haven’t seen anything in DAV Magazine about this. Please help to get this important piece of legislation passed. I’m a life member here in Omaha. **Mike King, Omaha, Nebraska**

**Editor’s note:** This bill was reintroduced in the 117th Congress as H.R. 4732, the Protecting Benefits for Disabled Veterans Act of 2021. DAV supports this legislation, and nearly 7,000 emails have been sent to Congress based on our action alert sent through DAV CAN (Commander’s Action Network). To sign up, go to DAVCAN.org.

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**Demand for women veterans health benefits**

I am a Vietnam-era woman veteran, retired. I am very concerned about how many women veterans such as myself are being denied annual mammograms and women’s exams and treatment within military treatment facilities. For many of us, lifesaving historical data is on file at these facilities. The only way we can be seen is with a VA-approved voucher. I am retired from the military and believe this unprecedented practice of denying retirees at military facilities is cruel, unfair and ridiculous. I demand Congress review this atrocity for women’s health care, regardless if they are an 18- or 90-year-old veteran. **Alfreda Owens, via DAV CAN**

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**Frustration over personal income limits**

I’m not so bad off. I have an honorable discharge, a college degree, and I bought two houses on the G.I. Bill. That being said, the VA hospital in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, said that I wasn’t eligible for no-cost VA health care] because my personal income was more than $32,000 per year. I had to pay them back $400 for services they did that I never asked them to do in the first place. I am still ahead and still glad I served in the Army, but I am done with the VA. **W. Roger Solomon, Tuscaloosa, Alabama**

**Editor’s note:** Of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ eight priority groups, three (5, 7 and 8) have income-related eligibility requirements, whereas the others are based on service-related qualifications.

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**“Thank you for your service”**

When you see a vet, let them know how much you respect them, both men and women. Sometimes just a smile and a “thank you for your service” can lift up a veteran who may need the encouragement. Thanks to all my brothers and sisters. Vets salute! You deserve it. **Ron Anderson, via Facebook**

As a veteran, I don’t feel I need to be thanked for serving my country. I consider it to be my obligation and duty to repay for all the freedoms that I enjoy! How many other veterans share this mindset? I personally know others that feel the same way. **Gary Luken, via Facebook**

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**Hearing our heroes**

The “Hearing our heroes” article in the September/October issue was wonderful! As a fellow vet struggling with tinnitus, the wait of getting in to see an audiologist seems forever! I’m hoping when my appointment finally arrives, this will be available to me. **Brittney Jacobson, Indianapolis**

I was in a gun turret on a destroyer for a couple years. Even with the head gear, I suffered tinnitus until about two years ago. I have been receiving acupuncture for several years for various medical issues. One day I mentioned the tinnitus to an intern, and he said they had needles for that too. Having had much success with needling on other issues, I was glad to try anything. It isn’t going to be an overnight cure, but after several treatments the tinnitus lessened, and now is very infrequent. It is no longer part of my regular treatment plan. Acupuncture definitely worked for me, and I hope many other people will try it. Please encourage veterans to try acupuncture. Thank you for helping veterans get some “quiet time.” **Larry Hebert, Villa Park, Illinois**

**Congrats on 100 years!**

Happy centennial for DAV! Thank you, Commander Andy Marshall! Salute to you, your heroic service, DAV and a lifetime of service to veterans! **Susan Nochta, Richmond, Virginia**

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WRITE TO US  Please send feedback to DAV Magazine, 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018, or via email to feedback@dav.org. We also welcome feedback on our Facebook (facebook.com/DAV) and Twitter (twitter.com/davhq) pages. We regret we are unable to acknowledge every letter due to the volume received. Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving claims are referred to DAV’s Service Department.
The number of veterans experiencing homelessness saw an uptick last year, according to an annual report released by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in March. Now, DAV has thrown strong support behind several pieces of draft legislation aimed squarely at reducing the number of unhoused veterans.

The report’s data was collected in January 2020, mere months before businesses nationwide were shuttered to slow the spread of COVID-19. On a single night that month, about 40,000 veterans were found to be homeless. Since then, many Americans have been experiencing financial burdens, reduced resources and housing instability due to the pandemic, and veterans are not immune.

“With the recent end of the federal eviction moratorium and the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to cause significant financial strain on families throughout the country, it is critical that we work together to help veterans who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness,” said Rep. Mike Levin of California, chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.

DAV testified before that panel during a hearing in September to consider a number of draft bills to strengthen resources for homeless veterans.

Associate National Legislative Director Anthony Lewis told the subcommittee that several factors could compound to cause problems with veteran employment.

“Post-deployment readjustment, substance use disorders or traumatic brain injuries make their participation in the workforce difficult, or even impossible, making [veterans] more likely to be homeless,” said Lewis.

Lewis said DAV vigorously supports legislation that would extend the Department of Labor’s Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program, the only federal grant to focus exclusively on competitive employment for homeless veterans. The draft bill would extend the program past its 2022 expiration date through 2025.

However, DAV is looking to increase funding for this program “above what is recommended in this draft legislation,” added Lewis.

Lewis also praised community- and faith-based nonprofit organizations for their contributions to reducing veteran homelessness and offered support for legislation that would provide a weekly stipend for child care for veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

“Child care assistance would remove a major obstacle for veterans, especially women veterans, as they attempt to regain their personal empowerment and economic independence,” said Lewis.

The reported increase in 2020 comes after a decade of slashing the homeless rates of veterans. From 2010 to 2019, the number of veterans reporting unstable housing decreased by more than 50%. Despite drastic reductions over the past 10 years, veteran homelessness remains overrepresented at about 8% of all homeless adults, despite just 6% of the U.S. population having served.

Learn More Online
Find updates on this and other veterans legislation by joining DAV CAN (Commander’s Action Network) at DAVCAN.org.
New York native Frank Frost was just a teenager when terrorists attacked the United States on Sept. 11, 2001. Like many other Americans, he was inspired to join the military by the tragic events of that day. Coming from a military family, Frost joined the Army in March 2007. He served two tours in Iraq as a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 10th Mountain Division before his honorable discharge in 2012.

Though he survived war, Frost was just 32 when his life came to a sudden end in 2019 as a result of an accident stemming from service-connected post-traumatic stress disorder.

“There are moments that become time-stamped, and they haunt you—receiving the military flag, the first time you mark ‘widow,’ the first time his favorite movie comes on and your first anniversary without him,” said his wife, Monica. “No one prepares you for your husband’s funeral, but they really do not prepare you for what comes next.”

Faced with a funeral bill, Monica went to the Department of Veterans Affairs benefits office where she was told that her husband had been helped by DAV. The benefits secured through DAV extended to her as well.

Monica was introduced to DAV National Service Officer Don Inns, who immediately began helping her. Inns advised her to first focus on the funeral and then to obtain the relevant records and return when she was ready.

“My late mother became a young widow when I was only 10,” said Inns. “I acutely remember the sense of helplessness on her part. Helping surviving spouses obtain VA benefits is personal and brings peace of mind.”

“Don sat me down and was patient with me. I cried a lot,” Monica recalled. “He spoke to me in truth. He was very honest of what needed to happen, the time frame we were looking at, and gave me several ways to reach out to him. He even stayed late on several occasions to call and check on me. Don is, and was, my hero.”

DAV’s representation didn’t end with the claim for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). Inns helped Monica obtain ancillary benefits through the Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA).
“No one prepares you for your husband’s funeral, but they really do not prepare you for what comes next.”

—Monica Frost, wife of Army veteran Frank Frost

and Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA, or Chapter 35).

“DAV provides a circle of representation,” said Inns. “To care for the caregivers of our veterans completes the circle. The fast grant of DIC made a big difference in Mrs. Frost’s future and quality of life.

“The service DAV provided to Mrs. Frost is a fitting tribute in memory of her late husband and recognition of her critical role as a caregiver,” he added.

According to the VA, in fiscal year 2019 alone there were nearly 32,000 new recipients of DIC, and of that total, more than 30,000 were surviving spouses like Monica. She said the support she received from Inns and DAV allowed her to simply keep going.

“DAV gave me stability for the first time,” she said. “They helped me maneuver through a system that is not always meant to be maneuvered through quickly. Don was professional, detail-oriented and made sure he took care of me in whatever way he could. For that, I know my husband is thanking him for taking care of his wife during the worst time of my life.”

Monica is emphatic about encouraging others to seek out DAV’s assistance.

“Do not go through it alone,” she said. “Allow DAV and their vast experience to navigate the system while you focus on becoming healthy. Asking for help is the strongest thing you could ever do.”

Change, Monica knows, happens in the most uncomfortable of circumstances, and DAV is there for veterans and their families so that no one has to go through loss, change and navigation of the system for earned benefits by themselves.

“DAV gave me a place that understood where I was, worked with me, provided me resources and a shoulder to cry on,” she said. “I tell everyone to go to DAV. You are not a number—you are family.”
Joe Montgomery launched his nonprofit, Operation Honor, out of his home, focusing on woodworking projects for veterans. He began building cornhole boards in his garage, raising funds for troops through tournaments called “Tailgating for Troops,” and sending boards to military members overseas.

“Our mission is to enhance the lives of the veterans and their family,” said Montgomery. “When these men and women started coming into our shop, we found they would simply turn things off. The drama, the stress, the anxiety, the noise, the depression would all just shut off. They were making things with their hands. They were making what we call ‘products with a purpose.’”

In 2015, while Montgomery was visiting Kentucky Veterans Cemetery North, he noticed that many of the flag burial cases that the cemetery used were made outside the United States. Montgomery and the veterans of Operation Honor began building flag burial boxes and other pieces of remembrance for veterans and their loved ones.

As the organization has grown—and more veterans have gotten involved—so has the need for a larger workshop. In May, the DAV Charitable Service Trust awarded $148,000 to Operation Honor to help fund the building of the organization’s new home, Patriots Landing.

“When I heard the news, I was in Lowe’s. I think my knees were shaking,” said Montgomery. “It’s just an incredible blessing from DAV. Thanks to DAV, we are now able to move forward with our plans of finishing Patriots Landing.”

Construction on Patriots Landing is slated to begin in spring 2022 in Grant County directly behind Kentucky Veterans Cemetery North. The facility will be open for all to come and see the veteran-crafted product showroom, tour the facility and view military displays throughout. It will be a home for veterans and their families to participate in multiple programs designed to heal.

One of those veterans is Jennifer Wells, who enlisted in the Army and served until she was medically retired in 2014. While deployed to Iraq, Wells served as perimeter security for her base. She would spend hours at night in the watchtower looking over her
fellow service members. About 10 months into her deployment, Wells was standing guard with another soldier, who left the floor hatch of their watchtower open. Unaware, Wells stepped through and fell more than 40 feet to the ground below.

“It wasn’t really his fault or my fault. It was just an accident,” said Wells.

Upon impact, Wells broke two vertebrae and her arm and sustained severe head injuries. She was medevaced out of Iraq and returned home, where her surgeon told her she was lucky to have survived.

Years later, she came to Operation Honor.

“Woodworking was something I’d always been interested in but never had the time to do,” said Wells. “I finally decided this year to go down and try it. It was great. It was a way for me to relax and fully let go of everything in my head. I was able to focus just on one thing and let the worry and anxiety of life melt away.”

By the end of Wells’ first day with Operation Honor, she had created a wooden American flag with 9 mm bullet casings that represented the 50 stars.

“It was the perfect place for me,” said Wells. “I was able to zone out and focus on what I was creating. Building something like that with your hands gives you a sense of pride. You don’t realize that, though, until you’re done and you see the finished product. By the end of it, I felt like this weight had been lifted, like all of the stress and anxiety had poured out onto my work.”

Changed through her experience with Operation Honor, Wells wrote a letter to the family that would receive the flag she made that day.

“I wanted them to know this flag wasn’t just manufactured or quickly thrown together,” said Wells, “that there was a lot of meaning and love that went into this piece. I wanted them to know it also helped me and my journey and that their support means a lot to this organization. This organization is really helping veterans.”

Supporting veterans like Wells through her work with Operation Honor, the DAV Charitable Service Trust is helping to address the most pressing issues and concerns of disabled veterans and their families.

“Organizations like Operation Honor allow veterans to deal with the struggles of transition by focusing their energies on new skills and creating these products with a purpose,” said Richard E. Marbes, president of the Charitable Service Trust. “The Charitable Service Trust is proud to help make a difference where it matters most.”

Learn More Online

To learn more about Operation Honor and Patriots Landing, visit patriotslanding.org. To learn more about the DAV Charitable Service Trust, visit cst.dav.org.

Above: Each Patriot Cross is handcrafted with honor and respect by veteran craftsmen. Left: DAV Executive Director Barry Jesinoski takes a pass with a sander during a recent visit to Operation Honor.

“Thanks to DAV, we are now able to move forward with our plans of finishing Patriots Landing.”

—Joe Montgomery, Founder of Operation Honor
In July, Larry Pascoe; his wife, Jackie; and their son, Jason, had mere minutes to get to their basement before a tornado hit their property outside Armada, Michigan.

“We’ve got 10 acres, and it had to pick the one acre that the house sits on to come down on,” said Pascoe, an Air Force veteran.

The Pascoes and all of their animals—dogs, chickens, rabbits and turkeys—survived unhurt. But the twister, one of four to hit the region that night, caused significant damage to their home, pole barn and vehicles.

Pascoe, who retired from the Air Force in 1993, said two of their four dogs refused to go to the basement with them. They found their dachshund hiding underneath their bed, the roof overhead having been ripped off.

“The puggle was in the kitchen guarding the refrigerator,” said Pascoe.

The house was uninhabitable, so the Pascoes lived out of a trailer with no running water and used generators for electricity for two weeks as they made other arrangements.
“That’s not my idea of ‘glamping,’ as they call it,” he said.

Pascoe said that after the storm, the community, which boasts a large number of veterans because of nearby Selfridge Air National Guard Base, started showing up with food, gas cans and offers to help clean up his property.

Among those offering help was Jason Zielke, a DAV benefits advocate working out of Detroit.

Zielke, an Army veteran, was on his way home the night the tornadoes hit. As he was driving, he looked out of his passenger window and saw what looked like a funnel cloud. He was just exiting the freeway when his wife called confirming a tornado was in the area.

He made it home safely, but while he and his family were not affected, he knew others may not have been as fortunate. Immediately after the storms passed, his thoughts shifted to veterans in the area who may have been affected by the tornadoes.

“If that was me, I’d want someone to help,” said Zielke.

He reached out to the county clerks in the two counties the tornadoes struck to let them know veterans in need could get help with financial assistance through DAV’s Disaster Relief Fund.

Pascoe learned about this offer and reached out to Zielke, who was able to get him a draft check in just a few days.

Throughout the country, veterans like Pascoe must deal with the aftermath of widespread disasters such as hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes and floods. Others may have to recover after an isolated incident such as a home fire. DAV’s disaster relief drafts and its comfort and hygiene kits are meant to provide rapid-response aid before other relief programs take effect.

“The days immediately after a disaster are full of uncertainty and can be incredibly stressful for our nation’s veterans and their families,” said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “Our disaster relief grants and kits won’t solve every problem, but our hope is that they can help ease the burden of recovery and serve as a reminder that no veteran is forgotten, especially in their time of need.”

The one-time grants DAV offers can be up to $1,000, depending on the situation. Veterans can use the money to secure temporary shelter, replace lost food and home items, make repairs to their home or in any other way they see fit. This year, DAV has issued more than 1,300 disaster relief drafts, totaling more than $865,500, to recipients in at least 13 states and territories. DAV volunteers and employees also have distributed more than 3,000 comfort and hygiene kits to people affected by disaster.

DAV’s benefits advocates, who are members of the communities they serve, administer the program. Hoy Evans, who works for DAV in Oakland, California, said the majority of assistance in their area is because of wildfires.
“We get a front-row seat to the fires every year,” said Evans. “The stories that come from them can be pretty hair-raising.”

Evans’ supervisor, Bob Cole, recalled how one veteran they assisted had just enough time to grab her phone and get out of her mobile home before it burst into flames. Her entire neighborhood was engulfed by the McCash Fire that started in late July.

“It just completely cremated all those mobile homes,” said Cole.

Other fires they’ve provided drafts for this year include the Caldor Fire and the Dixie Fire, which is now the second largest in California’s history.

In Puerto Rico, DAV benefits advocate Alex Martinez recently assisted veteran Elba De Marchena and her family after an electrical fire destroyed everything inside their home. Like many homes in Puerto Rico, it was constructed from weather-resistant concrete and is safe for them to continue living in.

De Marchena’s husband, Pedro, is her full-time caregiver and said the funds helped replace a refrigerator and provide food for the family.

“It’s been a blessing, and he’s a thousand times grateful,” he said through his son, also named Pedro, translating. “Nobody is going to understand how grateful he is for Disabled American Veterans and what they’ve done.”

Martinez said providing disaster relief drafts is more than just an extension of what DAV does; it’s an ingrained moral obligation stemming from military service.

“We take care of our own,” said Martinez. “If you see them suffering, you suffer to a certain extent.”

Martinez said most people he’s helped rarely look at the amount they receive but notice that someone is trying to help and make them feel better in a bad situation.

Karen Martin, a DAV benefits advocate in St. Petersburg, Florida, agrees. She recalled the responses she got helping veterans affected by Hurricane Michael in 2018.

“It was as if you gave them a million dollars,” she said. “The sheer joy and the gratitude were just overwhelming.”

Back in Michigan, the Pascoe family has started the process of rebuilding. Pascoe said his insurance will cover most of the damage, but the money DAV gave him helped in the immediate aftermath of the tornado.

“It couldn’t have come at a better time,” said Pascoe.

He used some of the money to pay for the $30–$40 a day he was spending on generator fuel while his family was living in the trailer. The rest of the money went toward a deposit on a temporary home. They still drive the 28 miles back to their property each day to care for their animals.

“That place was supposed to be my forever home post-retirement,” said Pascoe. “And it’ll be my forever home again. It’s just going to take a little while.”

Hurricane Ida made landfall as a Category 4 storm in Louisiana on Aug. 29 and made its way up through the northeastern United States, causing flash floods in many areas, including New York City and New Jersey, as of Sept. 14, DAV has disbursed 151 disaster relief drafts, totaling $113,500, in response to Hurricane Ida.

(U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, photo by Brigida Sanchez)
VA to cover three new toxic exposure-related presumptive diseases

DAV has been instrumental in bringing awareness before Congress and the American public to the crucial issue of burn pits and other toxic exposures. In fact, we were also the first major veterans organization to raise concerns about such exposure in the media and initiated the pilot for the Burn Pit Registry, which the Department of Veterans Affairs adopted in 2014.

It’s taken time—far too much time, in many cases—but the issue continues to gain momentum. We’re seeing it gain traction both through legislation and in the expansion of benefits.

In a first for the VA, veterans living with the harmful health consequences of burn pit exposure will receive presumptive disability status for three respiratory illnesses. Rhinitis and sinusitis—inflammation of the nose and nasal sinuses, respectively—along with asthma will now be covered under a new VA policy, provided those symptoms developed within 10 years of a veteran’s service in a qualifying country where burn pits were in use.

The rule covers veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Syria and Djibouti following Sept. 19, 2001. But it also includes veterans who served in several countries in Southwest Asia, stretching back from August 1990 to present day.

This policy change, which helps create a fast track to health care and disability compensation for veterans suffering these chronic conditions, reflects two things: A growing body of scientific evidence links the toxic fumes to the development of these diseases, and these veterans have endured years of denials as their illnesses worsened.

While we’re glad to see this policy change, it’s important to note that these three ailments are an initial list of qualifying illnesses. Other diseases—including cancers—can develop years after being exposed as well.

The VA announced it will be reaching out to those veterans and survivors who are affected by this policy change to inform them about their eligibility and provide information on how to apply. DAV benefits experts are able to assist those whose claims have previously been denied, and we encourage those who believe they may be eligible for these newly established presumptive conditions to contact our representatives for help.

Learn More Online

To find a DAV benefits expert near you, visit benefitsquestions.org.
When officials from the Little Rock VA Medical Center contacted DAV Chapter 30 in Mountain Home, Arkansas, they made a simple yet important request: Can you help set up a community meeting so we can discuss veteran suicide? Understanding the severity of the epidemic in their local area at the time, chapter leaders were happy to oblige.

“We were expecting them to give a presentation and share some statistics,” Dan Hall, a Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam and commander of Chapter 30, said of the 2015 meeting. “But most importantly, we were hoping they had some sort of prevention plan to share with us that we could implement.”

Instead, according to Hall, the officials told the estimated 75 people who gathered for the meeting that Baxter County, with its population of roughly 42,000, had the highest suicide rate in the state—2.2 per month—and that the problem needed to be addressed.

“They basically came in, told us we had a suicide problem and left,” said Dr. George Wolford, an Army veteran of the Vietnam era and chaplain of Chapter 30. He also said chapter members felt the solutions for the crisis needed to be proactive and vigorous.

“Our [solution] was going out and finding people at risk for suicide,” said Wolford.

“We took [the VA’s visit] personally and decided that, to be successful, we had to make it a community effort,” added Hall.

But Hall and Wolford immediately knew they were faced with a number of problems, specifically access, education and finances.

“The VA and DAV chapters and [other veterans groups]—that’s not where you go to find the veterans who need help,” said Hall, who noted that 76% of the veterans who die by suicide are not in the VA system and generally not involved in the veteran community at all.

To gain access to these veterans, they knew the community needed to be educated on warning signs of suicide so residents could alert the chapter of an at-risk veteran. These signs include, but are not limited to, marital and other relationship problems, financial hardships, professional issues, housing and mental health issues.
Educating the community meant Hall and Wolford required funding beyond the chapter’s means, so the duo began submitting funding requests to DAV and other similar organizations, as well as the VA, and in 2018, Chapter 30 received a grant from DAV’s Columbia Trust.

“One of the most successful functions of the Trust is bridging resources from well-populated departments and chapters to those in need,” said National Service Foundation President Arthur H. Wilson. “The funding is used for service initiatives like Chapter 30’s suicide prevention program, which they otherwise couldn’t afford to offer veterans in their communities.”

With funding in hand, as well as other grants from the VA and state of Arkansas, Chapter 30 was able to create a website, public service announcements and billboards and to establish a training program to help residents identify at-risk veterans.

“They helped us put this program together, and it became a whole lot bigger than just a DAV chapter; it became a community effort,” said Hall.

Hall added that besides himself and Wolford, who holds doctorates in both clinical and community psychology, the chapter has been able to train two members of the local sheriff’s department; two local school resource officers; regional medical center personnel; local clergy; and members of the Good Samaritan Society, in which a third of local members are veterans.

“One of the first things people ask when they encounter me is, ‘Are you the guy from the VA?’ I tell them, ‘No, I’m not from the VA,’” said Wolford. “I’m from Disabled American Veterans, and I’m not paid by anybody. I’m here because I want to be.’ And when I say that, you can just see the tension melt.”

Wolford now has a list of about 30 veterans he calls at least once a week to check on. He sometimes meets them for a meal. Other times he gives them rides to support meetings. But he is always there to listen and help.

“Don’t be afraid to ask the question: ‘Are you considering suicide?’” said Hall. “And if they indicate they are, then the job is to persuade them that that’s kind of a permanent solution to a temporary problem—there are resources, and you’re not alone.”

And their efforts have paid off. When the program began in 2015, Baxter County experienced 26 suicides per year. That number fell to 16 suicides per year in 2018. In 2021, there have been three suicides for the entire year.

“It’s not our credentials that get this job done,” Wolford said. “It’s just that we got off our butts and did something. Anybody can do it.”
From the NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR

DOUGLAS K. WELLS JR.

Thousands of new deals mean big savings for DAV members

W
e are excited to introduce a new benefit to you as a DAV member. I love it, and I know you will too!

In August, we launched a private discount network for DAV members that includes more than 850,000 deals worldwide for virtually every interest and walk of life. Savings include offers on travel (hotels, resorts, airfare, car rentals, cruises), major theme park tickets, online shopping, local restaurants and retail, classes, movie tickets and more.

In the short time the program has been available for our members, we have seen thousands of registrations and incredible savings for users. Why pay more when you don’t have to?

To get access to all these exclusive offers, be sure to register by visiting the program website dav.enjoymydeals.com. It’s free for you as a member. Simply use your DAV membership number and create your own password to start saving. You can also access the discounts while you’re on the go by downloading the MyDeals mobile app. You may periodically receive emails with reminders on how to sign up and news about savings. More information is available at dav.org/member-advantages.

This expanded perk can be used as another tool in your arsenal when discussing the many benefits of DAV membership. I don’t personally know anyone who likes to pay full price when they could be saving, and this platform has such an incredibly broad range of deals that it will appeal to veterans at every stage of their lives.

Consider using your social media reach, community engagement opportunities, newsletters, chapter meetings and other creative means to share this with current and prospective new members so they can begin to reap the rewards of DAV membership.

We are with DAV because we believe in the mission of supporting our fellow veterans, and most of us don’t need much in the way of gratitude. But we are personally excited that the new platform and app are now offering our members such amazing deals. It’s a very fitting thank-you to those who continue to live a life of service through their work and membership with DAV.
After a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic is scheduled to return to the mountains of Colorado in 2022, and interested veterans can now submit an application to participate.

The annual event, co-presented by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs, will take place March 26 through April 1. The clinic serves as a leader in adaptive winter sports instruction for disabled veterans, promoting world-class health care and rehabilitation. Known as “Miracles on a Mountainside,” the clinic offers veterans opportunities for self-development and challenge through sports therapy and rehabilitative activities such as adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing, rock climbing, sled hockey, scuba diving and other adaptive activities.

Participation is open to U.S. military veterans with qualifying disabilities such as spinal cord injuries, orthopedic amputation, visual impairments and certain neurological problems. Veterans who currently have inpatient or outpatient status at VA medical facilities will have first priority. Due to the challenges presented by the ongoing pandemic, all participants will be required to provide COVID-19 vaccination status in order to attend.

Download the application at wintersportsclinic.org. It must be completely filled out and properly signed. To submit the completed application, please do one of the following:

1. Mail to VA Western Colorado HCS, Teresa Parks/WSC, 2121 North Ave., Grand Junction, CO 81501.
2. Scan and email to Teresa.Parks@va.gov.

Application deadline is Nov. 30.
“We had a common experience which bound us together. And we ought to continue through an organization of our own—an organization of us, by us and for us.”

These words spoken by DAV founder Judge Robert S. Marx after World War I are now inscribed on the wall outside the entrance of the organization’s national headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky. They serve as a reminder of DAV’s establishment in 1920 as well as the unbroken and everlasting bond between its more than 1 million members.

In late September, DAV celebrated its century of service to America’s disabled veterans and their families while officially dedicating its new headquarters. The celebration included an event at Cincinnati Music Hall, which sits next door to the site of the organization’s founding, the city’s Memorial Hall.

Featuring donated performances from the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra and United States Military Academy Cadet Glee Club, the event included songs that represented America’s armed conflicts in the more than 100 years since DAV’s founding.

The celebration was hosted by Craig McKee, an Air Force veteran and renowned Cincinnati news anchor, and “American Idol” alum Melinda Doolittle. It opened with “Cincinnatus Fanfare,” which John Morris Russell, conductor of the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, noted was in homage to Rome’s citizen soldiers, for whom Cincinnati is named. A rendition of “Over There” represented World War I; “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” connected with World War II; the theme from “M*A*S*H” represented Korea; and “Bridge Over Troubled Waters” represented Vietnam. “Beautiful City” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic” rounded out the Gulf War and post-9/11 wars.

“When we perform something like the ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic,’ it really tells the story of America,” said Russell. “It tells the story of what democracy and what this nation is really about.”

Other patriotic songs, including “God Bless America,” “My Country, ’Tis of Thee,” “America the Beautiful,”
Top: Conductor John Morris Russell and the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra lead DAV's centennial celebration in a musical salute to America's veterans.

Bottom: Air Force veteran and news anchor Craig McKee (center left) emceed the night at Cincinnati's Music Hall with spectacular vocals by “American Idol” alum Melinda Doolittle (center right), along with the United States Military Academy Cadet Glee Club. (Photos by Glenn Hartong)

“Taps” and a medley of each military branch’s official songs, were also sprinkled throughout the evening. “Music is so important. It energizes. It motivates. It is a morale booster as well,” said Russell. “And when we hear this music, we don’t only just hear the tune and the harmonies behind it, but we also hear the meaning that was put into that music when it was written.”

Some of the most powerful moments of the night, however, came during interludes between performances, when disabled veterans shared their
individual experiences in the military and how DAV has helped them and their brothers- and sisters-in-arms during their life after service.

The group included National Commander Andy Marshall, an Army veteran of Vietnam and two-time Purple Heart recipient; Past National Commander Dennis Joyner, an Army veteran of Vietnam and combat-wounded triple amputee; Greg Gadson, an Army veteran who lost both of his legs in Iraq; and Centra “Ce-Ce” Mazyck, an Army veteran who was paralyzed during a training jump with the 82nd Airborne Division.

During her monologue, Mazyck spoke about the contributions of underrepresented groups and women in the military. She also shared how doctors told her she would never walk again after her accident. At the conclusion, Mazyck stood up and exclaimed, “There is nothing we cannot do.”

“There was probably one of the most powerful moments during such a solemn night full of reflection and celebration,” said Marshall. “It gave me goosebumps to not only see her determination and power but the resolve of so many others who make DAV what it is—the greatest veterans organization in the country.”

Mazyck’s remarks earned rousing applause, leading into Doolittle’s performance of Aretha Franklin’s “Respect.”

“I could not be more impressed by and appreciative of the Cincinnati Pops, West Point Glee Club and Melinda for their amazing contributions to the evening,” added Marshall.

“What our organization has done for so many for so long is the most impressive thing. It’s seldom we see that kind of longevity anymore, but it exists at DAV because of the many selfless souls inside and outside our ranks. And with God’s grace, our organization will continue helping countless more veterans achieve their personal victories in our next 100 years.”
Since its founding, DAV has relied on the support of patriotic individuals and companies. In conjunction with the charity’s centennial celebration, top supporters were recognized for their contributions.

The award for Partner of the Year went to EG America, a retail leader with over 1,700 convenience store locations nationwide, including Cumberland Farms, Certified Oil, Fastrac, Kwik Shop, Loaf ’N Jug, Minit Mart, Quik Stop, Tom Thumb and Turkey Hill. EG America has partnered with DAV since 2019, raising over $1.6 million. In addition, the DAV corporate partner was also presented with the National Adjutant’s Circle and Champions for Heroes award.

“Our partnership with DAV has always been a very important initiative to our company and is fully supported by our guests,” said George Fournier, president of EG America. “We are honored to be recognized and extremely grateful for these prestigious awards from DAV, and our team would like to dedicate these to the hundreds of veteran team members and guests in our more than 1,700 stores across America.”

Al and Terri Nardslico were recognized as Philanthropists of the Year for their generosity in supporting DAV’s mission and the veterans it serves.
The Philanthropic Ambassador award was presented to the Diane J. and Robert A. McDonald Family Foundation. Robert—Bob as he is known—who served with the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division and as secretary of Veterans Affairs from 2014 to 2017, was in attendance with his wife, Diane, and other family members, including their son, Rob, and daughter-in-law, Alexa.

“They are dear friends to DAV because of the constant support they have lent this organization—not just with financial contributions but by lending their time and expertise to help DAV fulfill our mission,” said Chris O’Brien, who co-emceed the event with his spouse, Janeen Coyle.

He added that the McDonalds’ selfless contributions also played an integral role in DAV planning its centennial celebration.

The Honor Guard Member of the Year was awarded to Herbert Chappory for his unwavering commitment as a monthly DAV supporter.

“These honorees have created a lasting legacy of support for veterans by contributing to our cause,” said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “Their continued commitment to DAV and our veterans has remained resolute, allowing us to expand our lineup of free programs and services for those who have given so much to this country.”

“Previous page (left): Chris O’Brien and Janeen Coyle, hosts of “Married With Microphones” on WGRR FM 103.5, in Cincinnati, emceed the event. Previous page (right): National Adjutant Marc Burgess presents representatives from EG America with the Partner of the Year Award.

Left: National Adjutant Marc Burgess with Diane and Robert McDonald. Their foundation was recognized for its generous charity and support. Above: National Adjutant Burgess (center) with Bernard and Lisa Selz, recipients of the Gift of a Lifetime award for their donations assisting disabled veterans.

“These honorees have created a lasting legacy of support for veterans by contributing to our cause.”

—Marc Burgess, National Adjutant
A season of gratitude

Every year, we look forward to the peaceful stretch that starts with the solemn observation of Veterans Day and continues with the heartwarming embrace of the holidays. By the time these special weeks conclude with our entry into a new year, we’ve hopefully found the time and mental space to prepare for what 2022 will bring.

That’s the theory anyway. How many of us actually have the time to find that peace and warmth amid the obligations and demands of the holidays? While it may be difficult, I challenge you to invest the time and energy in truly reflecting on our many blessings. By recognizing the gifts we’ve received, we can use them to make 2022 a banner year for the men, women and families we serve.

By recognizing the gifts we’ve received, we can use them to make 2022 a banner year for the men, women and families we serve. As men and women bound together to support DAV and its ongoing work on behalf of those who have served, we must have gratitude for one another. It’s the glue that holds our team together through these trying times. Just a year ago, we all shared a sense of relief as 2020 receded into the rearview, but 2021 turned out to be no docile lamb. We thrived and survived by leaning on each other.

We must also cultivate and grow our gratitude for the veterans whose sacrifices have provided us with a purpose as members of the DAV Auxiliary. Without their selfless courage and dedication to protecting our nation, we wouldn’t be blessed with this common mission.

And, of course, we must never forget to hold deep gratitude for the thousands of men, women and companies who give freely of their time and resources so that our mission can continue. Volunteers and donors are special and should be cherished.

There are as many reasons to be grateful as there are challenges we will face. I hope each of you finds a reason for gratitude during these special weeks and enters the new year renewed with hope and purpose.
In the Cincinnati neighborhood known as Over-the-Rhine, where DAV was founded over 100 years ago, is Joseph House, a nonprofit that, for nearly 30 years, has been helping veterans who suffer from addiction make positive changes in their lives.

In the last year, Joseph House has begun implementing a new program that focuses on education and support through the Family and Friends Support Program. The program focuses on a collaborative six-week course in which Joseph House equips families and addicts with the tools they need to support healthy and sober lives.

Joseph House recently received a $75,000 grant from the DAV Charitable Service Trust to implement this program.

“We really appreciate the Trust’s support,” said Brian Owens, outreach and outpatient coordinator and licensed professional clinical counselor at Joseph House. “This has been something Joseph House has wanted to do for a long time. Getting family, friends and loved ones involved is really the start of healing for these veterans and their families. Through the addiction process, it gives families a better understanding of what this is all about. This program is meant to promote healing. It’s really all about a fresh start.”

Joseph House leadership believes this family support is so important in the recovery process because it offers a support system that addicts often lose or lack altogether.

“One of the main issues is these veterans do not have any family support,” said Alicia Patterson, Marine Corps veteran and Joseph House executive director.
“One of the main issues is these veterans do not have any family support.”

—Alicia Patterson, Marine Corps veteran and Joseph House executive director

“Often, by the time they’re homeless, they’ve burned too many of those bridges with family and friends.”

The grant will help fund motivational interview training for the Joseph House team—a counseling method designed to strengthen motivation and commitment to a particular goal and inhibit occurrences where family members negatively affect the veterans’ recovery.

“Organizations like Joseph House are crucial for many veterans transitioning home,” said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “The transition from service to civilian life for these warriors can be difficult and detrimental. Addiction is a reality many veterans face, and Joseph House has a proven method that helps veterans and their families recover and pursue their American dream.”

If you or a loved one is suffering from addiction, visit Joseph House’s “Get Help” page at josephhouse.com/get-help. To learn more about the DAV Charitable Service Trust, visit cst.dav.org.

DAV members have access to even more discounts to eat, play, shop and travel.

We’ve recently expanded our Member Advantages program to give you more access to special discounts and savings on national and regional brands! These are some of our valued partners.

Send holiday wishes from the heart. 1800Flowers.com’s holiday flowers and gifts are guaranteed to make it a celebration they’ll never forget. Use Promo Code DAV to save 25%.

No one enjoys the experience of “sticker shock,” especially at the pharmacy. Save this prescription discount card and keep it with you to access discounts on brand and generic medications at over 68,000 pharmacies nationwide.

With Rocket Mortgage, you’ll receive up to $2,000 off closing costs! Our Home Loan Experts will walk you through every step of our simplified VA mortgage experience.

1800Flowers.com
DAV.org/membership/member-advantages
ROCKET Mortgage

*DAV receives 3% of total Product Value of member purchases from 1-800-FLOWERS and their Family of Brands when using the promotional code provided. This offer between DAV and 1-800-FLOWERS renews on a month-to-month basis starting Feb. 22, 2019. **$1.50 is donated to DAV for every qualifying prescription filled. The prescription program is managed by United Networks of America, and DAV is not responsible for negotiating prescription rates. The agreement between DAV and UNA Rx Card runs through June 4, 2022. +DAV receives an annual fee from Rocket Mortgage in the amount of $5,000. This offer between DAV and Rocket Mortgage runs through Jan. 18, 2022.
When Daniel Finney was old enough, his mother, Tammy, told him he would be coming with her to work. As the chief of community relations and engagement at the Columbia VA Healthcare System in South Carolina, she wanted her son to learn from veterans and see the amazing care they receive every day.

“He was extremely reluctant,” said Tammy. “He gave me a list of other activities that would take the place of volunteering. No. 1: sleeping.”

Parents often have the last say. Finney did join his mother that day, and in just his first day of volunteering, his life took a whole new trajectory.

“At first, it was kind of do what I was told,” said Finney. “She knew the importance of volunteering. At the time when I was 13 years old, I really didn’t see the importance of volunteering. I knew it would help with colleges, but I really began to appreciate it when I made a connection with the veterans.”

As the top recipient of DAV’s scholarship program, Finney will receive $20,000 toward his education for his efforts to give back. DAV Youth Scholarship—previously known as the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship—has changed the lives of many students looking to offset higher education costs, give back to those who served and begin looking toward their future careers. It awards more than $75,000 annually to young people who volunteer to support veterans through the charity.

Finney is currently a junior at Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina, where he is studying exercise science intending to become a physician assistant. For seven years now, he has dedicated his life to helping veterans and encouraging those his age to follow in his steps and become volunteers.

“I started having friends come in and showed them my experiences volunteering, helping veterans on a day-to-day basis,” said Finney. “I enjoyed listening to the veterans’ stories, hearing the life lessons that they had learned and given to me. I would’ve never gotten that experience without volunteering. It inspired me to come back each day.”

“To understand what patriotism means on a whole other level, beyond learning it in school—those are the opportunities I wanted him to experience,” his mother said. “There was never a question after that of whether he wanted to continue.”

Finney found his passion while volunteering with veterans. He realized that the medical field would be his life and attributes that to his experiences made while volunteering. But that wasn’t his only takeaway from his experiences.

Finney has become a leader among his peers. His accolades include being named secretary of the.
National Society of Leadership and Success; serving as one of three mentors for the Department of Veterans Affairs’ national Student Leadership Council; and volunteering with the VA “Geek Squad,” a telehealth group that focuses on virtually assisting veterans.

His passion was infectious. Finney introduced more than 15 new volunteers to the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center’s summer student volunteer program while in high school.

Finney said its important for veterans to know their sacrifices haven’t been forgotten, which youth volunteers can do by showing them that the next generation is here to help them and make a difference in their lives.

He plans to continue his studies and help his community and America’s veterans. With the scholarship, those dreams are now becoming a reality.

“I look at this scholarship as another door opening up,” said Finney. “This has allowed me to do so many things. One of them is to pay for college. I want to continue to be a civil servant wherever I go. I want to continue to help veterans, whether that’s a part of my job or whether I’m still volunteering. It can be working at a hospital or helping with a food drive for the homeless veteran community. It can be anything. I now have that desire ingrained in me to continue to serve our veterans.”

“Daniel is the exemplary candidate of what we look for in a youth volunteer,” said National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst. “At age 20, he has already given so much back to veterans in his community. We at DAV know that contributing to the education and growth of volunteers like Daniel will benefit them and their communities. Congratulations to Daniel and his family on the well-earned scholarship.”

To apply for the DAV Youth Scholarship, visit davscholarships.org. Applicants must be 21 or younger and have a minimum of 100 lifetime hours in service to veterans through DAV.
Army veteran becomes first woman to reach three decades as a DAV national service officer

The demographics of the military have been changing for decades—slowly at first and then at an increasingly rapid pace. Women now make up 14% of the military and roughly 10% of the veteran population.

At DAV, too, the landscape has seen a dramatic increase in women, both among members and the corps of national and transition service officers. And in July, Senior National Appeals Officer Tori Joyner marked a major longevity milestone, becoming the first woman veteran to reach 30 years of service as a DAV national service officer.

“We’re really proud to see Tori hit the 30-year mark, but more importantly, we’re just proud of the incredible work she’s done for veterans over the full span of her career thus far with DAV,” said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “With more than three decades with the organization under her belt, she is truly an expert in the process and has demonstrated that time and time again for the veterans she serves.”

Joyner, an Army veteran, has spent 37 years in total with DAV, starting out as a receptionist at the national service office in Washington, D.C., in 1984. Seven years later, her supervisor offered her an opportunity to tackle the 16-month on-the-job training and begin helping veterans in a new role: national service officer.

“DAV has been a part of my life pretty much all of my adult life, since I left the military,” said Joyner, who was awarded the traditional milestone national service officer’s ring—her 30-year “bling”—at this year’s national convention in Tampa, Florida.

“This means a lot to me,” said Joyner. “I’ve worked very hard to achieve this level of recognition. All the conventions I’ve gone to, all the men get emotional when they accept this ring. And I always wondered what that would feel like, and it’s overwhelming right now.”

Joyner is part of an important evolution. She has watched DAV change over time, with more and more women taking on leadership roles, carving out important milestones and often becoming the face of the organization.

“To be the first woman to be in this situation is like a whirlwind,” said Joyner. “It’s a feeling of accomplishment beyond what I would have thought when I first became a national service officer.”

Logging nearly 40 years with DAV, Joyner said it feels like “just yesterday” that she started the career that helped her give as much to others as she got in return.

“One thing that DAV has taught me is to fight, and I will continue to fight for our veterans,” Joyner said. “That never leaves you; it’s part of you.”
VA still faces challenges with MST claims, coordination of care for survivors

An estimated 57% of denied claims for military sexual trauma (MST) between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, 2019, were not processed correctly, according to a Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (OIG) report released in August. The OIG cites noncompliance with six recommendations made during a similar review in 2018 to improve the MST claims process and ensure accuracy, resulting in an 8% increase in processing errors between the two sampled reporting time frames.

The report notes many of the errors found in the 2018 OIG review stemmed from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) claims processors missing MST markers, failing to obtain required records before completing claims, and not requesting exams when appropriate.

“From initial claim to final adjudication by the VA, MST cases are complex and unique,” said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “It is imperative that the VA unify its policies and procedures and put the best interest of veterans at the heart of its approach to improving this process.”

As of May, and recommended by the 2018 report, all MST claims will be handled by specially trained VBA processors at five offices across the U.S. A VA spokesperson also stated that following the report, the VA began to take necessary actions to meet its responsibility to care for those veterans who have been affected by MST.

New VA emergency care program to aid older veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs has set in motion a collaboration between the agency and three private organizations to improve emergency care for older veterans.

The American College of Emergency Physicians, The John A. Hartford Foundation and the West Health Institute will accredit 70 VA emergency departments in senior care. Sixteen departments have already received accreditation, with four others currently pending.

“Nearly half of the nation’s 19.5 million veterans are over 65 years old and account for more than 45% of [emergency department] visits at VA hospitals, more than double the [emergency department] visit rate for seniors nationwide,” said Dr. Steven L. Lieberman, VA acting under secretary for health, in a statement announcing the partnership.

“With COVID-19 highlighting the importance of geriatric emergency care around the world, through this initiative, the VA continues to rise to the occasion by infusing age-friendly emergency care practices and improving care coordination in communities across the nation.”

VA emergency rooms will be better equipped and staffed to screen patients for ailments associated with aging, including cognitive impairment, delirium, fall risks and others.

The department expects full accreditation of all 70 VA geriatric emergency departments by December 2022.
Born in Brooklyn, New York, MaryAnn Hannon was raised on Long Island by parents who exemplified serving others. Her father, Robert, was in the Air Force during the Korean War. When his enlistment was complete, he joined the Coast Guard Reserve and retired after 20 years. He also served as a New York City police officer. Her mother, Jane, was a dietary aid, nurse and private caregiver.

Hannon has fond memories of joining her parents to volunteer at a variety of events that served veterans or others in need in their community, and she recalls her mom taking time out of family holidays in order to deliver meals to her homebound patients. Hannon does not recall how or when her parents began supporting DAV, but she does remember her mom hanging up the DAV calendar each year and telling her young daughter how much we owe our veterans.

Fast forward to today. After educational degrees and a couple of career changes, Hannon is semiretired. Fortunate to have traveled extensively, both in the United States and overseas, she appreciates even more her country and the veterans who served it.

“I believe that our veterans served this country and risked their lives so that we can be free,” she said. “I want to say thank you and give back to them to show my utmost appreciation.”

Although both her parents have died, Hannon has continued her family tradition of supporting DAV and America’s heroes. She has included DAV in her will, and the gift serves as her legacy as well as that of her parents.

“I am so fortunate to be in the place that I am now,” she said. “I owe so much to my parents, and I know that it would make them so happy to know that I am continuing to support our country’s veterans. It makes me happy as well—it truly is an honor.”
Vaccination clinic...

DAV Chapter 114, in Helotes, Texas, hosted a pop-up COVID-19 vaccination clinic just outside San Antonio on Aug. 14. The city’s public health district, Metro Health, coordinated the effort to ensure everyone who wanted to receive a COVID-19 vaccine had access to do so. The clinic administered the Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

Caring for the community...

Patty Davis (left), adjutant and treasurer of DAV Auxiliary Unit 19 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, serves as the Auxiliary representative at Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center. Last November, Unit 19 joined with the Marine Corps League’s North Shore Marine Detachment 1289 of Cedarburg, Wisconsin, to collect and pass out 120 care packages to residents of the medical center’s community living center. The packages contained toiletries, art supplies, blankets, sweatshirts and sweatpants donated by local company Master Printwear.

Award of excellence...

National Service Officer Don Inns (right) presents the 2021 DAV Department of Indiana’s Award of Excellence to Lois J. Wagoner at the Department of Indiana convention. Wagoner’s career in federal government service spans more than 60 years.
From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN
DEBRA VARNER

Serving in unity

There is hardly a concept more central to any of our faiths or nonfaith than this: We are called upon to be people who care. Caring draws us to a special place and is what keeps us going when all else seems to be failing around us. The knowledge that we can be the one who cares for our neighbor or for being our brother’s keeper unites us.

How are we to care for one another? We are people that need people. This challenges us to strive to express our concerns, to have a willingness to give and a love that goes beyond self.

There is value in an organization such as DAV. We are sensitive to the needs of others around us because there is value in all of us. Wherever you are, if you would look around at others and give them a little bit of care and attention to the degree that you are able, it will prove to be beneficial.

During this season, we will be given many opportunities to serve others and share within our communities the gifts of giving.

Comrades, not only do we provide for our own, but we also care for others. Caring allows us to focus on major issues that confront us as representatives of our organization, especially during this time of transition in our nation’s military posture and this time of great need among those who have served and supported our country so faithfully.

We must remember the families and loved ones of those left behind. Become a beacon of light to show that our fallen comrades have not been forgotten. Share a meal or adopt a family during the holiday season.

In our nation’s capital, a tree is lit every year. This year, I challenge you to light the tree of your heart. Many of our service members are returning home, some not knowing what to expect or if anyone has missed their presence. It may be someone in your neighborhood, someone in your local chapter or someone you once worked with who is returning home. DAV has always been a help to those coming home.

We cannot, and we will not, disappoint those returning home or those veterans who are already living among us.

It is the people we encounter whom we serve, especially fellow comrades. They are the real reason we care and support. It is our calling to be there for them as an encouraging presence and a comforting voice in their time of crisis.

Let us faithfully serve in harmony and love. We are DAV; we are veterans proudly serving veterans, their families and our country.

In His Service to You.
Supporting victories for veterans...
National 1st Junior Vice Commander Nancy Espinosa (center right) accepts a donation check of $100,000 from the Department of Connecticut to the National Service Foundation at the department’s convention banquet. From left: Ronnie Maebry, immediate past department commander; Elizabeth Walsh, chairperson of the Connecticut Disabled American Veterans Foundation; Espinosa; and Donald Butler, department commander.
Providing loads of support for Minnesota veterans...

Members of the 148th Fighter Wing volunteered to assist DAV Department of Minnesota Chapters 3 and 23 of Virginia and Chapter 6 of Duluth by unloading the chapters’ trailers full of donated clothing into a single 53-foot trailer for transport and distribution to disabled veterans. Air Force Master Sgt. Michael Panula (center) is the son of Butch Panula, the chaplain of Chapter 23 and coordinator of the chapter’s clothing program.

Chapter 27 receives Diamond Award for serving veterans...

Arkansas Secretary of State John Thurston (front row left) presenting DAV Chapter 27 Commander Rex Surette (right) with the Diamond Award for the chapter’s commitment to serving local veterans. Back row from left to right: Department of Arkansas Commander Harry Komprood, chapter member Stanley Lynch, chapter Chaplain Sam Niemann, and chapter member Joy Leapheart.
Jack Otis Hicks, who served as DAV’s national commander from 1972 to 1973, died Sept. 17 in Apollo Beach, Florida. He was 83.

A Kentucky native, Hicks joined the Air Force in 1954 and served four years before an injury ended his military career. After being honorably discharged, he moved to La Rue, Ohio, where he became part-owner of the restaurant Coonies Place, operated La Rue Lumber Co. and served as the town’s mayor for a decade.

Hicks was elected national commander at the 51st DAV National Convention in St. Louis. At just 34 years old, he is one of the youngest people ever to hold that honor. All told, he served DAV at the local, state and national level, including as commander of the Department of Ohio.

President Jimmy Carter appointed Hicks in 1980 to a three-year term on the National Highway Safety Advisory Council. He was inducted into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame in 1996.

Hicks moved to Florida in 1986, where he remained after retiring from Cox Lumber.

He is survived by his wife of 32 years, Sue; daughter Jackie; son Jeff; stepdaughter Robin; four grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

His final resting place will be at the Sarasota National Cemetery, where he will be buried with full military honors.

“DAV will never forget Jack’s lifetime of service to his community and his fellow veterans,” said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “We will forever hold his memory dear and try to live up to his example as an exemplary advocate and leader.”
REMEMBRANCE

DAV Auxiliary Past National Commander Barbara Maldet

DAV Auxiliary Past National Commander Barbara Maldet of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, died Sept. 3 at the age of 77.

Having held numerous unit, state and national roles, she was ultimately elected to the Auxiliary’s highest office in 1992 at the 70th DAV National Convention in Reno, Nevada.

Maldet was a registered nurse, caring for geriatric and terminally ill patients, before her involvement with DAV and its Auxiliary. She joined the Auxiliary in 1980 and, along with her husband, U.S. Navy veteran Joseph Maldet, she worked tirelessly to carry out the organization’s mission.

“Barbara’s life was rooted in compassion and care, both in her professional and advocacy achievements,” said Auxiliary National Adjutant Pat Kemper. “She was a true friend to this organization, and she had an unrelenting dedication to disabled veterans and their loved ones.”

Maldet is survived by her husband; two sons, Matthew and Mark Maldet; brother, William Obert; and grandsons, Dylan and Evan.

PLANNING A REUNION?
Send the details to feedback@dav.org.
Women veterans committee hosts seminar...
Department of Maryland Women Veterans Committee at DAV’s 2021 National Convention at the J.W. Marriott in Tampa, Fla. From left: Chapter 13 Commander Nicole Dunn, Women’s Veteran Committee Chair Katina Barnes, Nurse Alma Holley manager of Women Health Clinic Washington DC VA Medical, Homeless Committee Georgia Eaves and chapter member Michelle Lee.

Auto dealer donates $10,000 to Pennsylvania chapter...
Tim McGee (left), commander of DAV Chapter 55, accepts a $10,000 donation from Bill Napierkoski (center) and Alan Snyder (right) of Taylor Chevrolet and Toyota in Hermitage, Pennsylvania, made in memory of Snyder’s son, Army Specialist Justin M. Snyder, who served multiple combat tours in Afghanistan. Justin “served his country in a dedicated, unselfish and noble manner. However, he eventually succumbed to his injuries and departed this life in 2016. May he rest in peace as a true American war hero,” said Commander McGee.

Centennial event in Florida...
Officials from DAV Chapter 49 in Sebring, Florida hold up proclamations from local cities and the Highlands County Veterans Council the DAV Centennial Event in downtown Sebring in 2020. From left: Judge Advocate John Vincent, Chaplain Paul Hinman, Sr. Vice Commander David Fearnley, Adjutant Kathryn Evans, Commander Marco Espinosa, Jr. Vice Commander Bradley Bouters, National Commander Andy Marshall, Treasurer David Haehle and Sergeant at Arms Dennis Tully.

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Proud Veteran Lapel Pin | $4
*Not actual size.

Ladies’ Open Neckline Top
S–XL $35
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Stealth Cap | $20

Cigar Humidor | $65

2021–2022 Daily Planner | $8

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