



THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY

NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2022

MAGAZINE

Our unsettled sisters-in-arms

As the nation makes strides in combating veteran homelessness, women veterans often get left behind

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2023 Mid-Winter Conference

Leading advocates to
gather in Washington, D.C.,
Feb. 26–March 1

One of the most highly visible demonstrations of DAV's dedicated advocacy in action comes in February at the annual mid-winter conference in Arlington, Virginia. Each year, hundreds of DAV members and leaders join together to put a face to the most pressing veterans issues and to 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 as we tackle the major issues facing veterans today.

Stand alongside National Commander Joe Parsetich as he presents DAV's legislative agenda to Congress. You will also have the opportunity to meet face to face with your lawmakers to make it clear what DAV is fighting for: a strong VA health care system; benefits for veterans exposed to radiation and other toxic waste; improved mental health care and suicide prevention efforts; equitable services for women and minority veterans; comprehensive care options for aging veterans; and improvements in the claims process for mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder and claims related to military sexual trauma.

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 can achieve victories for veterans and ensure they get the benefits they need and have earned! ■

For more information, visit

dav.org/events/2023-mid-winter-conference



From the NATIONAL COMMANDER

JOE PARSETICH



Growing our community

Our organization's history is rooted in community.

What started in 1919 as a conversation among a group of disabled veterans over a Christmas Day meal in a Cincinnati hotel grew into what we are today: a vibrant organization of more than 1 million members who've bridged generational gaps under the common bond of sacrificial service to our country.

That conversation, DAV's founder Robert S. Marx once said, formed relationships that "ought to continue through an organization of our own—an organization of us, by us and for us."

Not long after, DAV was born, and that spirit of unity has continued for more than a century. I see it at every chapter, department and national event I attend. Lifelong friendships and relationships as strong as those between blood relatives or made in the thick of war have formed because of this organization.

But we shouldn't be selfish about what we have in DAV. There are many who have served and were permanently changed by the experience who haven't joined our ranks. In 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 17.4 million veterans live in the U.S.

Has every one of them learned what DAV may be able to do for them? More importantly, have they experienced what we can do?

Those questions present a great opportunity to grow our membership. Growth won't happen if we hide in our meeting halls. We have to be open to

fresh ideas. We have to be proactive in getting out into our communities. We have to be willing to roll up our sleeves and serve our fellow veterans.

We are at our best when we take action.

This certainly applies to our legislative advocacy through DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network). Our volunteers represent our organization so well when we see them driving DAV Transportation Network vehicles and working in VA medical facilities. Our neighbors associate DAV's name with selfless service when they see us caring for fellow veterans. Each benefits claim we help file reinforces our commitment to justice.

And that's what veterans of more recent conflicts desire and seek when looking to join an organization. They want to serve others. They want to form new bonds built through shared experience—just as they did in the military.

As a national organization that reaches deep into the areas we live, we're in the perfect position to meet those desires.

The more opportunities we offer people to serve others, the more our community will grow. The more our community grows, the more we continue to ensure victories for veterans.

That growth is vital for DAV's continued existence. Though their time in uniform may be over, the newest generation of veterans still has more to give. If we don't provide those veterans the outlet to serve, they'll seek it elsewhere.

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DAV MAGAZINE • November/December 2022

Contact us: dav.org • Toll-Free 877-426-2838 • 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018 • feedback@dav.org. Volume 64, Issue 6, *DAV Magazine* (ISSN 0885-6400). Editorial Office: DAV Magazine, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. Telephone 859-441-7300 or toll-free (877) I AM A VET. Published and circulated bimonthly bulletin by the Disabled American Veterans, a congressionally chartered, nonprofit organization, P.O. Box 14301, Cincinnati, OH 45250-0301. DAV homepage is dav.org. Available on recording for people who are blind or who have physical disabilities that preclude reading printed material. The magazine is mailed free to DAV and Auxiliary members who are paid subscribers. Nonmembers may subscribe for \$15 per year. Periodical postage paid at office of publication, Newport, KY 41071, and at additional offices. Printed in the U.S.A. Change of Address: When notifying of a change of address, send former as well as new address, including ZIP code, to: DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DAV Magazine, DAV National Headquarters, P.O. Box 145550, Cincinnati, OH 45250-5550.



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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT J. MARC BURGESS



Caring for our sisters-in-service

The growing diversity in our military's ranks over the years means the face of the American veteran is changing.

The benefits of diversity in our ranks are obvious. The variety of backgrounds cultivates a broader pool of experiences and knowledge that strengthens the group. The military is more representative of the citizens it serves. The call to serve becomes a compelling option for more people.

Diversity also brings to light the need to address the disparity in veteran care. One population segment we see this in is women veterans.

The number of women who join the military has dramatically grown over the years. They now make up nearly 19% of the total military force. Consequently, women are the fastest growing veteran cohort today and face challenges as they enter a Department of Veterans Affairs health care system that was primarily designed for men.

The VA, recognizing its antiquated care model, has stated that one of its priorities is to ensure it is a welcoming, inclusive environment for every veteran who uses its services.

With regard to care specifically for women, we're starting to see steps in the right direction.

Examples include DAV-backed legislation such as the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans (MAMMO) Act and the Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas Supporting Expanded Review for Veterans in Combat Environments (SERVICE) Act. These acts, which were both signed into law in June,

address access to modern mammography services within the VA while expanding eligibility for those who get screened.

In this issue of the magazine, we take a deep dive into another law that addresses the VA's services for women: the Protecting Moms Who Serve Act. This law codifies the VA's maternity care coordinator program to help pregnant and postpartum veterans navigate their community care. It also calls for a study on maternal mortality and other severe pregnancy complications among veterans. The study will look particularly at service-related causes, including post-traumatic stress and military sexual trauma.

We also take a look at homelessness among women veterans and the challenges they face. Women experiencing homelessness are more likely to hide their situation. They often have children with them, and shelters don't usually accommodate families. Many women veterans don't report their veteran status or realize they're eligible for VA programs. Instead, they seek help from other organizations, missing out on health care and other benefits they've earned from their service.

These challenges and others women veterans face as they navigate their transition from service to their post-military life deserve a spotlight.

What we do in response must not stop at research and studies. We fulfill the promise we make to all veterans with our actions.

DAV must continue to be a voice for women veterans and a fierce advocate for legislation that addresses this growing population, its care and its specific needs.



Honoring our PACT Act

The new PACT Act would be great if it would also include those of us who were exposed to toxic chemicals in our jobs stateside. For example, aircraft and vehicle mechanics who used and were exposed to toxic chemicals daily. Chemicals like JP-4, MEK, trichloroethane, trichloroethylene, diesel fuel, etc.

Linda Marlett, via Facebook

Borinqueneers

I've met a few elders who served with the Borinqueneers. They won't talk about it much. No one in Puerto Rico ever knows their history unless they look it up or learn through relatives. It is sad that school curriculum in Puerto Rico doesn't even mention them when discussing the Korean War. I'm glad to see they're finally being recognized by *DAV Magazine* (July/August issue) while some of them are still alive to see it.

Victor Garcia, Tampa, Florida

Congratulations, Commander

Great news for DAV! Joe Parsetich is dedicated to our nation's veterans. As a fellow Montanan, I have seen firsthand the commitment that Joe has to those who have served.

Matt Quinn, Washington, D.C.

Income limits for veterans

The problem I see with many veterans is the fact that we make too much money to even get registered with the VA. I've tried three times and been denied access to medical benefits promised all three times. I guess if a veteran is a productive part of society after service, then they are on their own. **Kevin D. Riggle, Perrinton, Michigan**

Proposed upgrades to disability rating schedule

From the wording of the article ("VA proposes updates to disability rating schedule," July/August *DAV Magazine*), it sounds like the decision is a roundabout way to keep veterans locked into their previous rating and to not seek an upgrade in rating. Even if the CPAP helps the veteran, their level of sleep is not equal to their natural state of sleep before service. The requirement of CPAP to treat sleep apnea needs to be treated as a chronic condition.

Kenneth Havro, Ogden, Utah

Disabled veterans not guaranteed COLA increase

Everyone needs to internalize this. So many people forget that this is an option for legislation to take away the veterans' cost-of-living increase. Why even have the option to do this? The government has the option to take from those who served, and it is not right. **Steven Lee, Marietta, Ohio**

Sign language

It would be wonderful if the VA could help those of us who've lost our hearing to get a chance to learn sign language. My cochlear implants enable me to hear, but I'm still badly hard of hearing and could definitely benefit from ASL classes. **Steve W. Jackson, Montgomery, Alabama**

National convention

I learned so much during the national convention. My comrades are a force to be reckoned with. We fight and advocate for our comrades who can't. We can and we will be the voice that strengthens our purpose in our veteran communities. Can't wait until Atlantic City next year! Love and prayers to all of DAV. **Willa Smalls, Columbia, South Carolina**

Helping others with PTSD

Not all wounds are visible. Some can be just as painful and devastating to those who came home changed by what they had to endure. Please do not judge them or try to stereotype them, but reach out to them and help them find the help they need. PTSD is real, but there is help out there. We were trained to always have one another's "six" and to never leave anyone behind. That includes our brothers and sisters struggling to find their way after returning.

Don H., Mount Vernon, Illinois

Recruitment issues

We have issues with military recruitment right now. No one wants to serve if they have to fight for their compensation after getting out. Had most of us known how cumbersome and difficult the benefits process is, we might not have enlisted. **Lisa Gudmundson, via Facebook**

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), Twitter (twitter.com/davhq) and LinkedIn (linkedin.com/company/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.

Bill would require VA to look into cancer rates of military aircrews

American military aircrews dominate the skies wherever they operate. With medical evacuation, intelligence gathering, troop and cargo transportation, and beyond, it's hard to overstate their impact on defending the nation. Now there's an effort to provide them with the support they need and have earned.

The VA would also be required to work with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to determine links between illnesses and specific exposures. Establishing a cause-and-effect relationship could unlock VA care and other benefits quicker.

A 2021 study conducted by the Air Force compared cancer rates among fighter pilots and weapons systems officers with those who operate other airframes. Fighter pilots were nearly 30% more likely to be diagnosed

“After being on the front lines, too many service members come home to fight lifelong battles with service-related illness,” he said in a statement in April. “I am proud to co-sponsor the Aviator Cancer Examination Study Act and stand up for those who have risked their lives for our country.”



Find updates to other major veteran legislation by joining DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) at DAVCAN.org.

Fortunate find at national convention

Marine and his wife happen upon a DAV benefits advocate at just the right time

By Camille Cates

A chance encounter with a fellow Marine changed John Hinners' life forever.

A Marine veteran of Vietnam, Hinners was at the 2021 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention in Tampa, Florida, when he and his wife, Barbara, came across benefits advocate Don Inns.

"Barbara saw my DAV shirt and stopped to ask me a few questions about John's appeal at the Board of Veterans' Appeals [BVA]," said Inns.

Running into Inns not only proved to be timely for the couple but also involved some uncanny coincidences.

"The funny part was, this guy was originally from Cincinnati, just like me. He was also a Marine, and [Barbara] picked him out of nobody, I mean, walking down the hallway," said Hinners. "She stopped him and asked him some questions. It was just all meant to be."

Inns informed the couple that as a DAV benefits advocate, he could represent Hinners once DAV assumed his power of attorney and could handle his claim right away.

"He was just right on the ball with everything. I don't know what we would have done without him," said Barbara.

Though Inns is in DAV's national service office in Indianapolis and Hinners lives in Florida, they were able to work together virtually. In reviewing Hinners' case, Inns discovered that he had experienced significant service-connected health issues related to his service in Vietnam.



Top: (From left) Barbara Hinners, John Hinners and DAV benefits advocate Don Inns, who met the previous year, greet each other at the 2022 DAV National Convention in Orlando, Florida. **Bottom:** Hinners, a Marine veteran, served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967.

When Hinnners arrived in Vietnam in 1966, he was originally sent to a tank battalion in Da Nang but soon found himself assigned to postal duty. That new job didn't keep him out of harm's way, though. He sustained a substantial knee injury during a mortar attack.

As time went on, his knee was not his only health concern.

"I've had three heart attacks. I had three stents [put in]," Hinnners noted. "They said that it was Agent Orange that caused it."

As is prevalent among many veterans from the same era, exposure to Agent Orange led to Hinnners' ischemic heart disease.

He was also fighting post-traumatic stress disorder, the invisible wound caused in large part by a friendly fire incident.

"You don't really think of it at the time, but somebody's trying to kill you," said Hinnners. "That doesn't go through your head until you're there."

A BVA decision dated Oct. 15, 2021, resulted in a rating increase and connected additional health issues to his rating. "Because of DAV's proactive nature and benefits advocacy training, the claim was completed in 44 days," said Inns.

Inns' steadfast efforts also afforded resources to Barbara.

"In diligently seeking an increase in benefits for John, we weren't going to leave Barbara behind. As a caregiver, I knew she needed to be taken care of, too," said Inns. "Ancillary benefits such as the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs also became available for her."

The Hinnnerses may have had a bit of luck on their side when they met Inns at the 2021 national convention, which was originally scheduled to be held in Reno, Nevada.

"Reno is known for its luck," Inns said. "But not going to Reno can be lucky as well, apparently." ■

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DAV



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* DAV receives a royalty payment from northAmerican of 1% of the after-discount line-haul transportation for a DAV member's household goods move. The agreement between northAmerican and DAV runs through Dec. 31, 2022.

To learn more about special offers, visit dav.org/membership/member-advantages and check your email for more info.



Back on course

Veterans return to the links for the National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic in Iowa

By Rob Lewis

While much has changed in the world since September 2019, a group of more than 120 disabled veteran golfers returning to the links in Riverside, Iowa, after a two-year hiatus proved to be both a step back toward normalcy and a step forward into the future of a beloved and impactful event—the National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic.

The golf clinic is an adaptive sports program presented by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs and supported by 240 volunteers.

The clinic was put on hold as the U.S. grappled with the fallout from the pandemic that started in early 2020. This year, however, the presenters determined the event could return with certain safety and mitigation measures in place.

“The veterans and the families are so excited to be back here. They love the challenges the game of golf presents and the camaraderie they build amongst their fellow veterans,” said DAV National Commander Joe Parsetich, who attended the clinic. “When people are challenged with different disabilities, whether physical or psychological, it’s their attitude toward life that keeps them going.”



“You see that here. Whether it be on a golf course or into a swimming pool or up a rock-climbing wall, the life that is just in their eyes and on their face is priceless.”

True to its mission, the clinic provided golf pro instruction; state-of-the-art prostheses; specialized golf equipment; and, perhaps most importantly, the opportunity for veterans to cross-pollinate ideas and share inspiration with one another.

But the clinic more than inspired and energized participants. It was also an exhilarating experience for those in and around Riverside in supporting roles, including VA Secretary Denis McDonough.

2022 DAV FREEDOM
AWARD RECIPIENT:
Michaun Harrison



“Adaptive sports bring out the best in you even on your worst day. And that’s what I think I like about golf: You can’t master it.”

—Michaun Harrison

Left: Michaun Harrison, an Army veteran, takes a swing on her approach shot over water on the fifth hole at the National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic. Harrison, who is blind, was one of more than 120 veterans who participated in the event from Sept. 11–16.

Above: Harrison stands with the plaque she received for being named the clinic’s DAV Freedom Award recipient. This award is presented to participant who best demonstrates the spirit of the week as veterans from across the country gather to experience the therapeutic and physical benefits of adaptive sports.

“The fact that our vets can play golf out here is a reminder that we’re all free because of what they’ve done for us,” McDonough said. “The fact that they can have a taste of that freedom here on the course ... is a very inspiring feeling.”

The ‘taste of freedom’ was made possible by the Iowa City VA Health Care System and 17 different corporate, individual and nonprofit donors. Many of the representatives of those organizations and individual donors were among the volunteers, who provided water and refreshments out on the course, served as adaptive guides, dog-sat companion canines while their owners were taking part in the clinic, and more.

Immediate Past National Commander Andy Marshall attended the clinic as the representative of DAV Chapter 4 in Palm Harbor, Florida, which helped sponsor the event. He was thrilled to have the opportunity to attend, especially since the cancellation of the previous clinic because of the pandemic prevented him from attending as national commander.

“I wasn’t going to miss this event for anything,” Marshall said. “And I’m honored that my chapter raised the money to support the golf clinic. What I’ve seen this week—from the rehabilitative experience for these veterans to the way DAV, the VA, sponsors and



volunteers put in the work to make this such a special experience—exceeded my highest expectations.”

Going above and beyond was par for the course for the recipient of the DAV Freedom Award at this year’s clinic.

Disabled Army veteran Michaun Harrison of Fredericksburg, Virginia, was honored with the award, which is presented each year to the participant who proves to the world that an injury or disability does not bar the doors to freedom.

Attending her third golf clinic, Harrison used her infectious and joyful disposition to rally and inspire those around her throughout the week. Having fun while rehabilitating her mind and body was a natural byproduct of the sport.

“Adaptive sports bring out the best in you even on your worst day. And that’s what I think I like about golf: You can’t master it,” said Harrison, who is a member of Chapter 7 in Fredericksburg. “It’s a challenge. And it’s just fun to be out there.”

Harrison, who was medically discharged in 2001 as her vision began to fade, also drew energy and inspiration from her fellow golfers and the volunteers who she felt made the event so special.

“Even if I hit the ball 2 feet or 2,000 feet, [my fellow veterans] were out there clapping for me. And that’s what matters: Even at your worst, your buddies think you’re the best,” she said. “I tip my hat to [the volunteers] because I know they have their challenges. They have their families back at home. They’re sacrificing a lot to be out here for us.”

Such selflessness and a sense of purpose in the face of adversity is what defines the clinic.

“Michaun Harrison is not only exemplary for her spirit and desire to continue to grow, but she is also typical of the sort of men and women you meet out on the course here at Riverside,” said DAV National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst. “Those of us who know and love the event have missed it for the fact that it brings so much into the lives of the participants and all of us who support and cheer them on.” ■



Top: More than 120 veterans spent the week together experiencing the physical and psychological benefits of adaptive sports. Besides golf, clinic participants had the opportunity to do kayaking, rock climbing and cycling. **Bottom:** Participants Tonora Shannon (left) and Terri Clark stand with volunteer Daniel Helle after finishing a hole at Pleasant Valley Golf Course near Riverside, Iowa. Both veterans have vision loss but participated in adaptive sports thanks to volunteers like Helle and event sponsors.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF START SKYDIVING



Warrior weekend to remember ...

In August 2022, Blue Skies for the Good Guys and Gals held its 10th annual Warrior Weekend to Remember. The event provides enriching and healing experiences for disabled veterans and Gold Star Families and is supported by a grant from the DAV Charitable Service Trust. This year's event marked the first time Army veteran and DAV Ambassador Ce-Ce Mazyck (above) jumped from a plane since a 2003 training accident left her paralyzed from the waist down. She also made a second jump at the event. DAV Past National Commander and Trust President Dick Marbes (right) lent Mazyck moral support from the co-pilot seat, but the combat-wounded Air Force veteran later returned to make his own jump.

Learn more about Blue Skies at warriorwtr.com/blue-skies. Visit dav.la/37y to watch Mazyck's emotional jump and dav.la/385 to watch Marbes' jump.



Skin in the game

New research finds veterans more likely to receive advanced skin cancer diagnosis

By Matt Saintsing

Veterans are already at higher risk for melanoma, the deadliest and most aggressive form of skin cancer, but new research finds that they're more likely to be initially diagnosed with advanced stages of the disease compared with civilians.

"I know from my clinical experience that we see a lot of advanced skin cancer cases in our patients," said Dr. Rebecca Hartman, associate chief of dermatology with the VA Boston Healthcare System, one of the study's authors. "We were really interested in looking at the burden of melanoma specifically within the VA to see what's unique about melanoma and veterans compared to the general population."

The study found veterans were 18% more likely to present with stage 3 melanoma and 13% more likely to receive an initial diagnosis of stage 4, when the cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

According to the American Cancer Society, melanoma is less common than other types of skin cancer but is more likely to grow and spread.

The study did not look at incident rates among veterans compared with civilians, but Hartman said various reasons might lead to higher skin cancer rates.

"Some of the exposure veterans endure increase their risk," she said. "Many of our conflicts take place in sunny places, and many veterans may also have a career that involves sun exposure outside of the military."

Demographics may lead to an increased risk of melanoma. Hartman said that fair skin and advanced

age are factors when diagnosing the disease. She also said it's more commonly found in men than women.

A 2021 Air Force study found that pilots and weapons systems officers working in and around fighter jets were 24% more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma than Air Force officers who did not fly fighter aircraft.

In many cases, melanoma is treatable when detected early. The five-year survival rate, according to the American Cancer Society, is 99% when the cancer has not spread. Those numbers drop when it extends nearby or to the lymph nodes (65%) or has reached other body parts (25%).

But it's never too late to protect your skin from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays, said Hartman. Medical providers, including VA physicians, can prescribe sunscreen as part of a veteran's care. Avoiding direct sunlight in the middle of the day is another good practice.

And keeping an eye on your skin could be lifesaving. Hartman said that veterans, their family members and health care providers should look for the "ugly duckling" in their skin.

"It's something that stands out that doesn't look like the rest of your spots," she said. "If you have a lot of spots that look similar, that's usually a reassuring sign. But look for anything changing size, shape or color." ■

PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

From the NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR

JAMES T. MARSZALEK



Getting out front

Looking back on 2022, I couldn't be more proud of how our benefits advocates have continued serving veterans. Despite the challenges brought by COVID-19 these past few years, DAV adapted and never stopped offering VA claims assistance for the brave men and women who defended our nation.

I'm particularly pleased with how we came back swinging by restarting our information seminars nationwide to educate veterans and their families about the benefits they've already earned.

Hundreds of information seminars have taken place this year, with our highly trained national service officers traveling into communities across the country to offer veterans and their families keen insight, completely free of charge, on how best to navigate the sometimes daunting VA claims process.

There's a reason more than 1 million veterans trust DAV with their powers of attorney: Our national service officers are the best in the business. They stand ready to hold in-person information seminars, which typically last about 45 minutes, anywhere, including educational campuses; unique event spaces; and, of course, DAV chapter locations.

We've also conducted information seminars virtually, enabling easy access to veterans—no matter where they are—to learn more about DAV's mission and how we can help. And remember, while veterans are always welcome to join our ranks, there's no membership

requirement to receive an information seminar or claims assistance.

To request an information seminar, departments and chapters can always reach out to their local national service office to get one on the books.

But our expert national service officers aren't the only benefits advocates usually attending these seminars.

DAV departments and chapters have volunteer service officers ready to offer additional assistance. Our department and chapter service officers are some of the most critical links in DAV's chain. They can provide vital veterans benefits information that will better assist veterans and their families, prepare claims for benefits to which veterans may be entitled and gather crucial information needed to support claims.

Veterans can rest assured that when a department or chapter service officer takes an inquiry, such information is immediately handed off to a national service officer.

For more than a century now, DAV has been there for our nation's injured heroes, their families and their survivors. And our service officers at every level can advocate for veterans wherever they are.



For more information

You'll be able to find the 2023 information seminar schedule at dav.org/veterans/outreach-programs/information-seminars/, and you can learn more from your local national service office at benefitsquestions.org.

From **military** to *motherhood*



Beswick



Richards

New law spotlights maternity care for women veterans and service members

By Elizabeth DePompei

Former Iowa Army National Guard medic Jess Beswick remembers the first time she felt like she let her child down. It's a feeling any parent will inevitably know, but Beswick experienced it before she even gave birth.

At 30 weeks pregnant, and despite her best efforts to be the picture of health, she was diagnosed with gestational diabetes.

"That felt to me like I was failing," Beswick said. "It was probably my lowest point in the pregnancy."

It wasn't the only low point. Beswick's journey to motherhood began with unexplained infertility that persisted for years. When she finally became pregnant at 37, she experienced a slew of complications,

including high blood pressure that turned into preeclampsia and placenta accreta, a condition that can cause severe blood loss.

"That was scary for us because, at one point, they were talking about potentially having to give me a hysterectomy as part of my C-section," Beswick said. "And we want more kids."

On top of everything, she had to manage post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms related to two deployments.

Beswick's story is all too common among service members and veterans who become pregnant. Research shows they are more likely to experience certain complications. There's some insight into why, but there is still much we don't know.

A new law championed by DAV and spearheaded by Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois aims to change that. The Protecting Moms Who Served Act, signed into law on Nov. 30, 2021, dedicates \$15 million toward the Department of Veterans Affairs' maternity care coordination program.

Preliminary data from an ongoing study conducted by the VA Health Services Research & Development Service suggests that the rate of **pregnancy-related deaths among veterans using VA benefits is nearly double the national rate.**

Perhaps more significantly, the law also calls for a comprehensive study on maternal mortality and severe complications among veterans. The Government Accountability Office is to complete the study by Nov. 30, 2023.

“This is going to be the first comprehensive look so that we know exactly the extent of the challenges that we’re dealing with,” said Duckworth, a mother, DAV member and combat-wounded double amputee veteran of the Illinois Army National Guard.

“Nothing like that has ever been done before.”

The stakes couldn’t be higher. Preliminary data from an ongoing study conducted by the VA Health Services Research & Development Service suggests that the rate of pregnancy-related deaths among veterans using VA benefits is nearly double the national rate.

‘As seamless as possible’

Due to concerns over the complications Beswick was experiencing, her cesarean section was scheduled five weeks ahead of her due date.

“They were worried that if I went into labor that I could bleed out,” she said.

On Dec. 22, 2021, despite all the obstacles, Beswick and her husband welcomed a healthy baby boy into their lives. They named him Griffin.

“He came out and he was fine,” Beswick said. “And I got to keep my uterus.”

Beswick credits the successful delivery to what she calls “overwhelmingly the best care” she’s ever received. It was covered through the VA and provided by the University of Iowa.

Across the VA health care system, maternity care is outsourced to community providers in non-VA facilities. To help expecting veterans navigate and access community care, every VA facility has a maternity care coordinator.

“We have a really, really good, dedicated maternal care coordinator at the VA in Iowa City,” Beswick said. “And she would check up on me every few weeks.”

During one call with her coordinator, Beswick mentioned that she was having difficulty sleeping. The VA sent her a pregnancy pillow. When Beswick was diagnosed with gestational diabetes, the VA offered a blood sugar tester.

“I cannot think of a single thing that was missing,” Beswick said of her care.

That experience is what Duckworth wants for every expectant mother getting care through the VA.

“I just want it to be as seamless as possible,” Duckworth said, adding that she still hears veterans complain of a lack of coordination between the VA and outside maternity care providers.

The senator has firsthand experience, too. When Duckworth had her second child and experienced problems with lactation support, she used her outside health insurance for care.

“It was just so much easier than trying to go through the whole system of the VA getting approval and a referral and all that,” she said. “That shouldn’t be the case. You shouldn’t have to have outside health insurance in order to access lactation support.”

According to Duckworth’s office, the culture of maternity care within the VA has undoubtedly changed since 1996, the year the department established coverage for such services, but some of those changes are relatively new for a health care system that dates



Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois spearheaded the Protecting Moms Who Served Act. Duckworth is a mother, DAV member and combat-wounded double amputee veteran of the Illinois Army National Guard.

back more than a century and still serves significantly more men than women.

In 2009, the VA hired its first director of reproductive health. In 2012, the maternity care coordination program was introduced. Meanwhile, more women are entering service. As of 2020, women made up 18.7% of the military force, according to the Department of Defense.

“The rise in the number of female veterans who are using [the] VA for care has been significant [and] it’s been fast,” said Dr. Amanda Johnson, director of reproductive health for the VA Office of Women’s Health.

“And these are people who are entering a health care system that really wasn’t initially built for them.”

Johnson notes that because the VA outsources much of its maternity care, veterans are using the same health care system as civilians. And the state of maternal health across the U.S. is alarming.

‘What we do know’

At roughly 26 for every 100,000 live births, the United States has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed nations, according to a USA Today investigation published earlier this year. Another approximately 50,000 women suffer severe complications or life-threatening injuries during childbirth every year.



Dr. Amanda Johnson (left) is the director of reproductive health for the VA Office of Women’s Health. Jodie Katon (right) is a core investigator at Health Services Research & Development in the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. Katon research areas include reproductive health and maternal outcomes.

No such comprehensive data exists specifically for military veterans, in part because not all veterans use the VA for maternity care, making it a difficult population to track.

“There is a lot we don’t know, and there’s a lot of reasons for that. Some of it is [because military service] really isn’t a monolithic experience, and we don’t have touch points with every person of childbearing potential who has served in the military,” Johnson said.

“What we do know about our population is that when we think about ... the things that put people at risk for poor outcomes or morbidity or mortality, we know that our population has some risk factors that may make them more vulnerable.”

A recent survey of veterans who used VA maternity care showed that 37% were 35 or older. Being older puts people at higher risk for early pregnancy loss, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and diabetes, Johnson said.

Veterans using VA maternity care are also more likely than the general population to have one or more mental health diagnoses. Out of nearly 16,000 births within the VA health care system between 2000 and 2012, 19% of mothers had a current or past PTSD diagnosis, according to a 2017 study published by the journal Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology. The same study shows that for those with PTSD, the risk of gestational diabetes and preeclampsia increased 30% to 40%.

VA patients are also more likely to be nonwhite when compared with the general population. Nationally, the maternal mortality rate among non-Hispanic Black women is nearly three times higher than for non-Hispanic white women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“The poor outcomes [among nonwhite women] are reflective of systemic issues that go far and deep in the U.S.,” said Jodie Katon, a core investigator at Health Services Research & Development in the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. “And we are sending our veterans into the same systems of care.”

Johnson believes the VA is uniquely positioned to provide the best maternity care in the country and be a model for the private sector, noting that those who use maternity benefits often use the VA for their primary care. That allows the same team of doctors to offer health care support tailored to that veteran.

“So I think we have an opportunity to recognize the risks in our population and then to intervene before

pregnancy, during pregnancy and then [after pregnancy],” Johnson said.

But the need for maternity care and support starts well before the service member becomes a veteran and enters the VA health care system.

‘An important contribution’

Vivian Richards still wonders what her house would sound like if she had more children, more voices to fill its rooms.

When she enlisted in the intelligence branch of the Army in August 2000, her plan was to serve five years, become pregnant and transition back to civilian life. Her dream was to have as many as five kids.

Then 9/11 happened. That day changed the country and the course of Richards’ life. She’d go on to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of special operations.

“The responsibilities that come along with executing combat operations really just put any kind of personal goals to the back end,” Richards said. “And everything just became really mission focused.”

As she approached 10 years of service, Richards, then 32, felt the pull to have a child. She wasn’t ready to leave the Army, so she decided to try to juggle both. Days after enrolling in an infertility program, she learned she was pregnant.

“And then it kind of got real in the sense of, how am I going to do this and still meet what had become the most prevalent sense of obligation to me, which was my obligation to my team, obligation to my soldiers, my obligation to the Army,” she said.

Later that year while she was still on active duty, Richards gave birth to her daughter, Axelle, at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. She described that experience as terrifying. Richards said she had a birth plan that included natural delivery, but those plans were ignored once she got to the hospital. She didn’t even know who her care team would be until she showed up.

After she gave birth, the clock started ticking. In two months, Richards would be back at work. By the six-month mark, she’d be considered deployable.

Meanwhile, she was navigating conflicting identities of soldier and mother, along with PTSD from previous deployments and postpartum depression that made bonding with her child difficult.



Through it all, Richards didn’t feel like she had the support of the systems around her.

“It’s like you’re rejecting the tribe,” she said of attitudes toward women getting pregnant in the military.

Richards retired as a sergeant major in September 2020. She never had more children.

Beswick, the former Army National Guard medic, said stories like Richards’ are why she didn’t want to start a family while in service. She saw other mothers do it and how difficult it was for them. In July 2012, she separated from the Army National Guard.

“I didn’t want to have to put that part of myself on hold for the military,” Beswick said of motherhood. “I felt, at 10 years, that I had given enough.”

Proponents hope the Protecting Moms Who Served Act is a step toward creating a more supportive environment for veterans and service members who become mothers. The study commissioned by the law will include active-duty service members who use TRICARE for maternity care.

“Women can really provide an important contribution to the effort, and so, if you want to retain good women, smart women, hardworking women, you have to provide for all of their needs comprehensively,” said Beswick.

DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem said exceptional maternity care for those female service members once they become veterans is part of our nation’s sacred promise.

“Through community care, the VA is poised to provide a quality of coordinated health care for women veterans that far exceeds what is available exclusively in the private sector,” Ilem said. “Considering the sacrifices women make in service to our country, this is the least we can do.” ■

FINDING HOME

The difficult journey for women veterans experiencing homelessness

By Chris Mayhew, Kevin C. Miller and Brian Buckwalter



Jennifer Badger had been out of the Navy for more than a decade when the circumstances in her life led her into homelessness.

When she enlisted in May 2001, she was looking for a change and a way out of her hometown of Fulton, Missouri. She became an intelligence specialist and deployed to the Persian Gulf in 2002 on the aircraft carrier USS George Washington.

In 2005, she decided to transition back to civilian life. She had become a single mother and wanted to raise her son without worrying about deploying again.

In the years that followed her separation from the military, circumstances and choices led Badger down a troubled path of drug addiction, abusive relationships and depression. She went to prison in 2019 and got high the day she was released.

At that point, she said her family had given up on her. “I lost everything,” Badger said. “I lost all three of my children. I lost everything but my life.”

With nowhere to go, she became homeless. She slept on friends’ couches. She continued to use drugs. She eventually nearly died from an overdose.

Badger’s story is one in a concerning trend among women veterans.

A growing problem

VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

more than
50%
decline over the past decade

MALE VETERANS

FEMALE VETERANS

between 2016 and 2019



A woman with military service is **2X** more likely to experience homelessness than someone who hasn't served

According to the most recent data from the Department of Veterans Affairs

With women now comprising 15% of active-duty forces and 19% of reserve units—a number that continues to rise—they have become the fastest-growing segment of the veteran population.

Yet, the availability of services offered to women veterans at risk for homelessness has not kept pace with their increasing numbers.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, women transitioning from the military can face many challenges when returning to civilian life that put them at risk for homelessness: single parenting, domestic abuse, psychological aftereffects related to military sexual trauma (MST) or combat, substance abuse, employment and affordable housing.

Searching for help

Despite experts knowing the needs, many women may find it challenging to know where to go to find help.

This was the case for Army veteran Penni Lo’Vette Brown.

She said the post-traumatic stress and MST she suffered was initially untreated after she left the military.

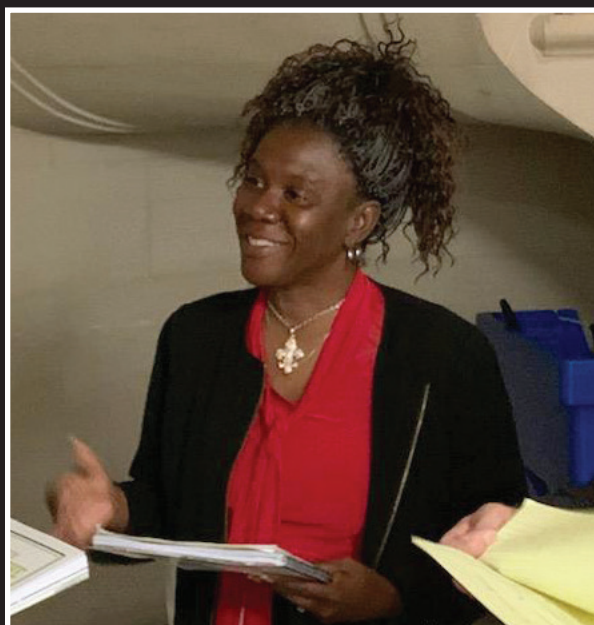
“My marriage is something I was not prepared for,” Brown said.

There was domestic violence, and she needed to find protection for herself and her three young children. But she felt she had nowhere to turn.

“In 1999, I became homeless with three babies on my hip,” Brown said.

She made more than two dozen calls looking for a shelter that would allow her to bring her children. Brown said her children’s safety was paramount, and she’s not sure she would or could have left her husband without that assurance.

She finally found an emergency shelter in Santa Barbara, California, where she took her children. A month later, she moved to a different shelter in nearby Lompoc that offered access to permanent and affordable housing options. She entered the VA’s Veterans Readiness and Employment (formerly known as Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment) program, where she trained and became a barber. And after two months, she was able to move into an apartment near her children’s school using the Housing Choice Voucher Program through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. She later received treatment for PTSD from the VA.



Above: Penni Lo’Vette Brown advocates for veterans rights on Capitol Hill. **Right:** Brown, pictured in 1985, worked in air defense artillery in Germany. She served in the Army for eight years.



For Badger, not long after her near-fatal overdose, she decided she was done and looked for any place that would help her.

“I woke up one day and just knew this was not me,” she said.

Badger had realized she was the same age her father had been when he died from a drug overdose and didn’t want her children to experience what she had gone through.

“I needed my kids to have a success story because my dad did not have a comeback story,” she said.

When she finally decided to seek help, she called any number she could find. In her search, Badger was eventually pointed to Welcome Home Inc., a homeless veterans program in central Missouri that receives financial support from the DAV Charitable Service Trust.

“I feel like if there was no Welcome Home,” Badger said, “I would probably still be homeless and using or back in prison or dead.”

Tammy Scott, a caseworker and the organization's permanent housing program coordinator, was the one who answered the phone, picked Badger up and brought her in.

Scott said up to eight women can stay at the 80-bed facility. It has four permanent rooms designated for women in a locked hallway segregated from the men. Two additional flex rooms can accommodate families or women, depending on current demand. There's 24/7 camera monitoring, too.

Scott said providing an environment where women feel safe is crucial to getting them help. Women who come to her program, more so than men, come from abusive relationships. They are more likely to have MST in their background or unmet mental health issues.

To escape homelessness, Brown said, women veterans with children do need the VA health care and benefits for themselves and state medical benefits for their children.

Limited options

Both Brown and Badger were fortunate to find homelessness services available to them. They were connected to programs or shelters in their area, but that's not always an option. Homelessness among women veterans is on the rise, but help can be limited, hard to find or nonexistent.

While Badger had used the VA for some medical care in the past, she didn't know about its breadth of resources for homeless and at-risk veterans and that she qualified for them. But because Welcome Home partners with the VA, each of its residents gets a representative from the VA's Health Care for Homeless Veterans program. This means residents have an entry point to veterans benefits such as medical care, mental health care and even substance abuse counseling.

Badger took advantage of these VA programs and services to get sober and start rebuilding her life.

Decades after her own struggles, Brown now counsels at-risk women veterans as the DAV Department of California women veterans adviser.

When she experienced homelessness, Brown didn't reach out to the VA for assistance. Her focus was on her children, not her military background. She said this is a common mindset among the women she talks to, with many staying in abusive relationships rather than risking becoming homeless. They don't tend to seek out VA benefits when they find themselves in a housing

crisis. They look in their community for anything that may help.

Brown points women veterans to federal, state Homeless Veteran Stand Downs California, including homeless veteran stand downs and a regular bus shuttle program. Buses take homeless veterans to women's clinics and other VA medical care. The bus program is especially targeted at those living in rural areas miles away from specialty care in bigger cities. She also designed MST training for chapters in California that focuses on how the issue is not gender-specific.

What the VA does

Homelessness and housing insecurity is an issue facing communities across the country. While the VA has made significant strides in addressing this issue, more needs to be done for women veterans.

"With greater numbers of women serving in the military and the greater likelihood of women veterans being single parents, new and more comprehensive housing and child care services are needed," said Joy Ilem, DAV's national legislative director. "DAV will continue to advocate for VA to improve outreach to women veterans and ensure VA provides equitable access to programs, facilities and services that meet their distinct needs and ensure that they feel safe and welcomed."

What the VA is doing includes its Supportive Services for Veteran Families program, which connects low-income veterans to nonprofits to get them into housing. The program typically provides eviction prevention or rapid rehousing, including the first month's rent and utility and security deposits. The VA credits the program with keeping 19,200 children and 10,500 households together in fiscal year 2021.

The VA also offers a spate of other programs, including the Housing Choice Vouchers Brown used to pull herself out of homelessness. The vouchers pay a subsidy to landlords on behalf of veterans. Veterans typically pay up to 30% of their income for rent. VA statistics show that nearly 11,000 women veterans were helped last year through the Housing Choice Voucher Program. The VA's grant program to community-based agencies serving homeless veterans served more than 1,300 women veterans in 2021.

VA programs specific to women veterans include the Center for Women Veterans. The center coordinates the VA's administration of health care, benefits, services

and programs for women veterans. The center has a hotline for women at 855-829-6636. The VA also offers the Women Veterans Health Care program and mental health programs for women.

“The downside to all of the VA’s homeless veteran programs is that they don’t cover communities across the United States equitably,” Illem said. “They tend to cover areas with higher veteran populations.”

Advocacy in action

Homelessness is a major concern for DAV at all levels.

Both the Charitable Service Trust and Columbia Trust provide funding to the DAV Homeless Veteran Initiative, which promotes partnerships and collaboration at all levels of government to develop assistance programs.

The Charitable Service Trust also financially supports many organizations that help veterans experiencing homelessness, distributing more than 100 grants totaling nearly \$3.8 million over the past five years.

DAV departments and chapters coordinate and participate in Homeless Veteran Stand Downs at various locations throughout the country. These outreach events, said Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst, are meant to connect homeless and at-risk veterans with community resources and assistance, including employment, legal, housing, medical and veterans benefits.

These stand downs also provide veterans with assistance to address some potential underlying causes of homelessness. Benefits advocates are on hand to provide VA disability claims processing support and to educate attendees on employment opportunities such as DAV’s job fairs.

Kleindienst said there are always women-specific VA medical services, clothing and hygiene items available to event attendees.

“It’s heartbreaking to think of even one veteran being on the street, and an increase in homelessness for women veterans sets off a lot of alarm bells,” he said. “We see them at the events we’ve hosted at headquarters and try to make an extra effort to ensure their unique needs are met. Women have historically been underserved, and their vulnerability often extends to the children they support.”

Moving forward

Today, Brown is commander of DAV Chapter 91 in Lompoc. She also owns a barbershop that doubles as her office where she counsels women veterans daily on homelessness and MST claims. She’s enrolled in law school. Her children are now grown and enjoying successful careers.

She works to get women veterans into emergency shelters in communities where there can be long waitlists for beds. There are still only a few emergency shelter options for women with children.

She said she was blessed, but she also put in the hard work to ensure her experience was temporary.

“It was a tenacity,” Brown said. “I had babies that I had to make sure were OK.”

In Missouri, Badger is still early in her recovery journey but said she’s doing well because of the care she received and the effort she put in to get sober. She has her own apartment and works at the

Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans’ Hospital in Columbia as a travel clerk.

She has aspirations to put her bachelor’s degree in human services to work, too, by becoming a peer support specialist at the VA. She said she noticed there aren’t many women filling this role—none where she’s located—and wants to be an example for other women veterans to follow.

“If I can do this in six months, what can I do in a year?” she said. ■



A DAV Homeless Veteran Stand Down attendee receives supplies and access to community resources.



From the **AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER** DARLENE SPENCE

Recommit to our cause

I want to wish everyone a warm holiday season full of friends, family and hope. My prayer is for every DAV and Auxiliary member to find joy this season.

When you elected me to serve as your national commander, I made it my mission to commit all the way to serving veterans and their families. I ask that you think about the commitments you make and what you can give during this season and year-round. Our work with DAV to serve wounded, ill and injured veterans and their families requires that strong commitment and a willingness to go the extra mile.

Our organization's members have already given so much. I have seen you volunteering at VA hospitals; assisting at bedsides; and serving in the sometimes overlooked areas, including the chapel and information desks. You have crisscrossed this great country of ours as volunteer drivers for the Transportation Network, taking our heroes to their medical appointments.

We excel at giving, but we need more people to make their own commitments to serve our nation's veterans and their families. We must endeavor to involve our own families and friends to join this just cause.

Growing our services starts with increasing our ranks. Some units across the country have found success increasing membership by setting up

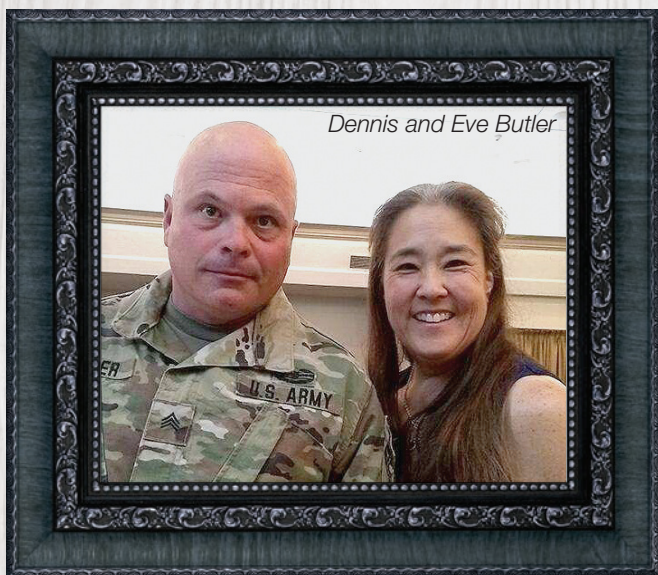
tables outside grocery stores. Other units have found new members by hosting cookouts and picnics. Making extra efforts to recruit family members has also worked for some units.

If you are a Transportation Network driver, make sure you introduce yourself to a veteran's family members and show them what the Auxiliary is all about. Don't forget to sign up junior members from families you know so they can take our message of assisting veterans into their schools.

Tell them about the opportunities for children of wounded, ill and fallen military families to attend Camp Corral, a free weeklong camp offered at 17 different locations this year in partnership with DAV.

The needs of today's veterans and their families are indeed urgent. These brave men and women bear a heavy burden. And we are here to help them and their families.

We must also improve and be willing to change to reach as many veterans and their families as possible. I ask you to continue serving in the ways that you are and re-up your commitment. Take a moment to reflect upon whether you can find it in your heart to give in new ways, because it is that sort of commitment that allows DAV and the Auxiliary to truly make a difference in the lives of our nation's veterans and their families.



A FAMILY AFFAIR

The military transition affects more than just veterans—spouses are looking for support, guidance and a community

By Chris Mayhew

When Geri Lynn Maples' husband was severely injured in Iraq in 2004, she felt alone, unfamiliar with the Department of Veterans Affairs and under financial pressure to find a new career.

People need to remember that supporting veterans includes the entire family, said the Middletown, Ohio, resident.

"A lot of times, and just from my personal experience, I think we get forgotten. And I think our kids get forgotten," Maples said.

The DAV Auxiliary is effectively a support system for the families of veterans changed in service. Auxiliary units meet regularly around the country.

"We are a community of spouses, siblings and family members who are there to lend an ear or a helping hand," said DAV Auxiliary National Commander Darlene Spence. "Many of us have shared similar experiences.

We are a resource for spouses to help their families find success after active-duty service ends."

Maples said she was dealing with figuring out the VA system and how to provide for her family for four years.

A decision to go back to college for social work, with the idea to work for the VA, led her to discover DAV and other organizations working to help veterans.

DAV provides employment support for spouses both through virtual and in-person job fairs and by providing resources to help them become successful entrepreneurs, said National Employment Director Rob Lougee.

"One way that soon-to-be transitioning spouses can prepare for the job market is to take advantage of the military and DAV's focused resources on training for in-demand jobs across the country," Lougee said. "That can help prepare you for job placement wherever you decide to move after transitioning out of service."

Additionally, DAV employs transition service officers at military bases who help service members prepare for the civilian world. Transitioning military members have a chance to file initial claims for VA benefits, but they also find out about support services available for the entire family.

"It's important to talk with your spouse and service officer about programs that can help make the transition easier for the entire family," said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. "DAV is here to help guide you to a host of resources, from assisting caregivers to helping find treatment and therapy options for post-traumatic stress, which can affect the entire family."

Eve Butler, of Killeen, Texas, said she still looks for spouses to connect with a little more than two years since her husband, Dennis, medically retired from the Army.

She was active in Fort Hood's family team-building program and still keeps up with people she knew on base. But many of them have moved elsewhere across the country.

She said she found a veteran spouse support group in 2020 and participated in a 12-week peer program. It helped, but she's still looking for a core group to talk with regularly. More needs to be done by the military to help spouses who now are in a position of helping their partner deal with a harsh new reality, she said.

"Everything was focused on him for probably about a year to find him a purpose, because he's 100% [disabled]," she said. "It was, what hobbies or activities can I get him to do? I didn't focus on myself because I was focused on him." ■



Auxiliary

Making a Difference



Moving forward together

Auxiliary holds annual fall conference

By Chris Mayhew

More than 400 DAV Auxiliary members from across the nation converged in Lexington, Kentucky, Sept. 29 through Oct. 1 for the 2022 DAV Auxiliary National Fall Conference.

At the annual event, members were educated on activities planned for the coming year, veteran advocacy alongside DAV, and programs such as Auxiliary Juniors and scholarships.

DAV National Commander Joe Parsetich said that witnessing his wife, Meg, be a leader in the Auxiliary at the unit and state levels has shown him the importance of the Auxiliary and its mission.

"Just as Meg and I have found a common goal in serving veterans, DAV and the Auxiliary have been united in a common cause and shared purpose since the Auxiliary was founded after 1922," he said. "While veterans' needs have changed over the last 100 years,

our duty to attend to those needs and the scars of war, physical or not, has endured."

The commander continued by praising Auxiliary members for volunteering in hospitals and as DAV Transportation Network drivers to ensure veterans get the care they earned.

"The Auxiliary shines as a community in support of DAV's mission, supporting the unique needs of families and caregivers of veterans," Parsetich said.

The conference was a good chance to hear directly from other Auxiliary members and connect, said Peggy Roberts of Unit 62 in Buffalo, Missouri.

Roberts spends at least three days a week as a volunteer driver.

"It's my mission from God as far as I am concerned," Roberts said. "I like to help others. Veterans are my passion."

Auxiliary leaders shared details about happenings and needs in national campaigns on Americanism, community service, Auxiliary Junior activities and Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service.

"Only through the togetherness of DAV and the Auxiliary can we meet the seen and often unseen needs



From left: Darlene Spence, Auxiliary national commander; Randy Reese, executive director of DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C.; Bunny Clos, Auxiliary national adjutant; and Joe Parsech, DAV national commander, address Auxiliary members from across the country at the Auxiliary National Fall Conference in Lexington, Kentucky.

of veterans and their families,” said Auxiliary National Commander Darlene Spence. “We must expand our membership ranks to meet the changing needs of veterans. Our unified work is to fulfill the needs and ensure veterans and families, including full-time caregivers like myself, are not left behind.”

Randy Reese, executive director of DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C., also spoke at the Auxiliary conference. He noted that, through the Commander’s Action Network, members of DAV and the Auxiliary sent 45,000 emails to members of Congress and made 1,300 phone calls in the weeks before the passage of the Honoring our PACT Act.

“When DAV and the Auxiliary members email, call and write their elected representatives on behalf of veterans, they speak with one voice,” Reese said. “When there are enough emails and calls, then the lawmakers want to see who is speaking.

“You’re representing DAV and the Auxiliary,” he continued. “We’re taking care of those who served this nation—and their families. You can never forget their families.”

Auxiliary National Adjutant Bunny Clos said the event was extremely successful, thanks to the large attendance of enthusiastic members from across the nation and the

entertaining and informational program presentations.

“Members left energized and ready to enhance our organization throughout the veteran communities we serve,” Clos said.

During the conference, national program chairs presented information to inform members on how to execute and expand each program within the community to further the shared mission of assisting veterans and their families.

“Being here is where you learn about how you can expand the inspiring work DAV and the Auxiliary do for veterans every day,” Clos said. “If you missed this year, you need to be here next year.”

Roberts said she encourages her fellow Auxiliary members to attend the fall conference to meet people and get to know the larger mission of DAV and the Auxiliary.

“It’s informational,” Roberts said. “I learn something new every year I come. You can take it back to your state and implement what you hear here.” ■

Doing right by veterans

DAV works to enhance media coverage of veterans

By Chris Mayhew

In an effort to combat misperceptions about veterans in the media and provide employment opportunities for those who have served, DAV recently partnered with an organization that supports veterans seeking careers in the media.

Military Veterans in Journalism (MVJ) has worked with DAV to create a training series for newsrooms about people with disabilities. Through the program, veterans will act as ambassadors to newsrooms and encourage responsible coverage of those who've served.

"Coverage of disabled veterans must be improved, and our Speakers Bureau provides the means to do just that. It brings veterans in the media landscape—several of whom are disabled—into newsrooms," said MVJ Executive Director Zack Baddorf, a disabled Navy veteran. "By partnering with DAV, the Speakers Bureau provides a solution to a concerning problem."

Work to inform newsrooms will start with a speakers series including veterans, some with disabilities, already working in media across the U.S., Baddorf said.

"MVJ's training series for newsrooms encourages positive, responsible and accurate portrayals of disabled veterans," said DAV Chief Communications and Outreach Officer Dan Clare.

Clare, a former military journalist, talked with MVJ trainers about the importance of conveying America's unwritten social contract with veterans, including benefits and care they earned through service.

Stars and Stripes reporter J.P. Lawrence participated in the training with Clare. Lawrence worked in Afghanistan and served with the Army National Guard in Iraq.

A reporter needs to be skeptical and wary, while also speaking with people who are in pain, Lawrence said.



PHOTO BY LANCE ORL, ROBIN LEWIS U.S. MARINE CORPS

Military Veterans in Journalism Speakers Bureau member Raychel K. Young-Porter is a photojournalist who served in the Marine Corps. She graduated from the Department of Defense's Combat Camera Leadership Course.

"Sometimes that pain mixed also with mental health, with a lot of personal grievances that are hard to separate sometimes from what they are talking to you about," he said.

"You can listen to someone and be moved emotionally by what they are saying, but you have to verify their truth," Clare echoed. "You have to tell their truth. You have to do that for your own integrity, and you can't let that slip."

The Department of Veterans Affairs deserves scrutiny as the second-largest government agency, Clare said. However, stories that are inaccurate, politically partisan or distorted can do a disservice to the community.

Journalists provide a great service when they dig into issues confronting veterans, Clare added. That becomes more critical as veterans represent a smaller percentage of the population and the wars they served in have ended. But coverage can have consequences that hurt public perception of veterans and can cause serious harm. Depending on context, coverage of issues related to suicide can increase the risk of imitation.

DAV is one of many resources that journalists can turn to for information about government benefits, legislation, policy and veteran experience, Clare told the training group.

"There are lots of people out there who are willing to help journalists," he said, referring to the need many journalists have to localize national stories. "At DAV alone, we have more than 1,200 chapters, and we have representatives there who are going to help you help those reporters find the right people." ■



Elnahal

New Jersey physician, hospital CEO takes reins at VA health

■ For the first time in more than five years, the Department of Veterans Affairs has a Senate-confirmed under secretary for health.

A vote of 66–23 confirmed Dr. Shereef Elnahal in July. In his

new position, Under Secretary Elnahal will lead the health care arm of the VA.

“Dr. Shereef Elnahal’s confirmation as VA’s under secretary for health is great news for veterans, their

families, caregivers, survivors and our workforce,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Dr. Elnahal is an exceptional leader and clinician, and he will play a critical role in VA’s mission to provide timely access to world-class health care to the more than 9 million veterans we serve and the millions more we will serve in the future.”

Before his appointment, Elnahal served as president and CEO of University Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, from 2019 to 2022, leading the hospital through the COVID-19 pandemic. He also served in New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy’s cabinet as the state’s 21st health commissioner.

VA infrastructure review halted

■ Over the summer, Congress scrapped a plan to identify Department of Veterans Affairs health care facilities to close or expand.

The 2018 VA MISSION Act created the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission to determine which underutilized VA buildings should close. It also would have determined areas where the department should grow its presence.

The House attached a bipartisan amendment to a VA funding bill to defund the AIR Commission. The \$5 million for the review will now expand and fund veteran homelessness initiatives.

DAV, along with its Independent Budget partners, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars,

said in a joint statement that the AIR Commission’s cancellation is “disheartening but not unexpected.”

“The process was flawed from the beginning, in part due to a global pandemic, and did not have the necessary support from Congress or the administration,” the organizations said. “For these reasons, and others, the [Independent Budget veterans organizations] believe the best course of action is to stand down the process rather than proceed with a half-measured attempt at a major overhaul of VA’s infrastructure.”



PHOTO BY SGT. RENEE SERUNTINE/LOUISIANA NATIONAL GUARD

Chapters give back for holidays

DAV has spirit of the season

By Chris Mayhew

The holidays can be a difficult time for some veterans, especially for those struggling to make ends meet or battling mental health issues. Fortunately, DAV members across many chapters and departments spread hope and cheer with their acts of kindness, large and small.

One example comes from Chapter 51 in Lebanon, Missouri, where members visit residents of six local veterans homes as well as low-income veterans living on their own.

"I make homemade Christmas cards for everybody, and two of us deliver the gift cards and visit with the veterans," said Kimberly Tatham, a chapter service officer.

Veterans who are hospitalized or institutionalized often have few visitors, so chapter members take the time to sit down and talk with each of them individually, Tatham explained. Monthly visits give veterans the opportunity to talk about service-related issues or just chat, she said.

Chapter members bring about \$150 in gift cards for each low-income veteran in the community so they can purchase additional groceries and meet other needs, she said.

An Auxiliary Unit 51 member also makes homemade quilts for veterans, and DAV blankets have also been delivered during visits.

In southeast Wisconsin, DAV Transportation Network drivers know which veterans don't have much, said Patty Davis, a hospital service coordinator who oversees volunteer drivers transporting more than 700 veterans a month in the region. Chapter 19 and Auxiliary Unit 19



Members of DAV Chapter 51 and Auxiliary Unit 51 in Lebanon, Missouri, gather in 2021 to purchase holiday gifts for residents of local homes for veterans. From left are DAV member Howard Reagan, Auxiliary member Margaret Viles, DAV member Kimberly Tatham, and Auxiliary members Michelle Newell and Robin Ballhagen.



Members of Chapter 51 in Lebanon, Missouri, gather for a holiday meal in 2021.

in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, pitch in with DAV Department of Wisconsin to fund gifts for veterans on multiple holidays.

“We make up food baskets for them and get them a gift card,” Davis said.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, outreach from the chapter during the holidays included visits to patients at the VA hospital in Milwaukee.

Chapter members stuff about 120 bags with goodies, including a blanket, puzzles and personal hygiene items, according to Davis. The gift bags go to veterans who have to travel to the VA hospital to be treated for cancer or other diseases.

At Chapter 102 in Valparaiso, Indiana, the annual holiday party recognizes volunteers, feeds veterans and their families, and brings Santa with a sack full of toys for children.

“Our Christmas party is our one time where we honor our volunteers from throughout the year,” said Chapter Commander John Earl Papka.

Multiple service officers attend the party to privately help veterans with claims on the spot. Having service officers available at all chapter meetings has become an important tradition, Papka said.

“It’s about the fellowship and checking in on how they are doing,” he added.

Groceries are taken to veterans in need who can’t attend the holiday party.

“We’ll find needy families who are veterans and provide them with a turkey and green beans so they can have a respectable dinner,” Papka said.

“We’ll find needy families who are veterans and provide them with a turkey and green beans so they can have a respectable dinner. ... **It’s about the fellowship and checking in on how they are doing.**”

—Commander John Earl Papka,
Chapter 102, Valparaiso, Indiana

In Southern California, the holidays are a time for one chapter to continue its homeless outreach and celebrate with veteran families and their children in the community.

Chapter 28 in Riverside has a Homeless Veteran Stand Down pantry and meal on the third Saturday of each month, said Clyde Maddox, a past chapter and state commander who currently serves on DAV’s National Executive Committee.

“During the holidays, we do go out of our way to get additional food and turkeys,” Maddox said.

Before Christmas, the chapter invites all to come in with their families for a celebration. Gift cards are given out so veterans can buy what they like to prepare a holiday meal at home.

“For those who have a place to cook, we want to make sure they have what a family would traditionally have for a holiday dinner,” Maddox said. “We go out and buy a bunch of things for the kids.

“We really go all out during the holidays to help the homeless and our members,” he said. ■

Honoring those who sacrificed

College football player who caught famed coach's spirit of patriotism gives legacy gift to disabled veterans



Timothy Williams knew the value of being on a team. He also recognized the sacrifices America's veterans have made that allow our country and its citizens to enjoy untold freedoms.

Both of these realizations developed more fully during Williams' time playing football in the late 1970s on a full-ride scholarship to Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. However, it wasn't the sport itself that shaped these virtues in him, but rather coach Bob Waters, a famed former quarterback for the NFL's San Francisco 49ers.

"Coach Waters was very patriotic, and he made sure his players respected others, the flag and this country," said Mike McDaniel, a former teammate, close friend and co-executor of Williams' estate.

Waters' own love for our nation profoundly influenced Williams' affinity, especially his desire to honor veterans when he encountered them.

"Tim would see a veteran in the airport, stop, thank them for their service and talk with them. His heart went out to those who used crutches or wheelchairs, and he wanted to do something more for them," said McDaniel.

Williams' far-reaching appreciation of our nation's heroes was evident in his selection of DAV as the beneficiary in his will when he died.

"Tim had a lengthy battle with myocardial infarction, so he had some time to research different organizations to leave a gift to. And he found out that DAV has a long history of helping disabled veterans who need adaptive equipment and accessibility aids," said McDaniel. "He wanted to give to those most deserving of help, and that's why he chose DAV."

Playing football under a dynamic coach with loyal friends was crucial for Williams in his formative years as a young college student. As his last days drew near, his final wishes included honoring the coach who'd instilled those bedrock values—patriotism, respect and team spirit—by helping disabled veterans through the DAV community of care. ■



Top: Timothy Williams starts the high step agility trainer during defensive practice for WCU. **Bottom:** (From left) WCU teammates Timothy Williams, Mike McDaniel and Grady Corbin.

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Spiritual support

While many are planning to celebrate a busy holiday season, we will approach these sacred days with care and support for one another's beliefs.

As a chaplain, I'm part of a tradition that provides caring ministry and counseling to all, no matter their faith. A diverse chaplain is crucial to support the needs of the many, because we are responsible for all observances in a culturally, racially and religiously diverse environment.

Nothing tests our personal convictions and beliefs more than the situations our veterans face throughout their service and transition back to civilian life. Many of them have come to rely on chaplains as spiritual leaders when they seek guidance on faith, spiritual resiliency and personal matters. We are their advocates when consulting with leadership on moral, ethical and quality-of-life issues.

Being a chaplain is a gift, a privilege and an honor. We support the free exercise of faith for all DAV members and their families. We pledge a personal commitment to the Constitution's protection of the right to religious freedom and its prohibition of government interference.

While we are duly filling our role, we must be sympathetic to all beliefs

and faiths, even if they don't align with our own. Faith and worship for our comrades and their family members are voluntary, and veterans of all faiths must cooperate with each other.

In the holiday season ahead of us, remember to give support to all faiths and beliefs without being judgmental. The chaplain should have a heart for all people. There is a threefold ministry that will keep us as chaplains in a nonsectarian place: a ministry of presence, a ministry of compassion and a ministry of silence.

- **Presence:** We should desire to help comfort those who need comfort.
- **Compassion:** We should sincerely desire to help heal broken and wounded hearts by meeting peoples' spiritual and emotional needs.
- **Silence:** We must understand that we gain the ears of our listeners not by telling them we care but by showing them. As the adage goes, people do not care about how much we know until they know how much we care.

When the bottom falls out in someone's life, they don't want to hear a sermon or to read a tract. What they need is someone to help bind up their emotional, physical and spiritual wounds.

Look after one another during a potentially difficult emotional season, and give your spiritual support.

In Memoriam: Richard E. Patterson

■ Richard E. “Rick” Patterson, past DAV National Headquarters executive director, died Sept. 19. He was 74.

The combat-disabled Vietnam veteran and DAV life member was a proud native of Boston. He enlisted in the Army in 1965 and was sent to Vietnam in 1967 as a medic with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Later that year, he suffered severe gunshot and shrapnel wounds in a battle against North Vietnamese Army forces near Dak To. He was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with the “V” device.

Patterson joined DAV as a member immediately after he was medically retired in 1968. He joined DAV’s professional staff as a national service officer in Boston in 1972 and was promoted to supervisor of the DAV office in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1975. In 1978, he was transferred to DAV’s national appeals staff in Washington, D.C., where he represented veterans and their families at the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. He supervised the appeals staff from 1981 to 1988, when he was promoted to associate national service director at DAV Washington Headquarters.

In 1994, Patterson was named executive director at DAV National Headquarters, then located in Cold Spring, Kentucky. He was a steady and dedicated leader who helped guide the organization through a period of transition and unprecedented membership and financial growth. With oversight of DAV’s fundraising, membership, voluntary services, communications, human relations and administrative assets, he was a disciplined and diligent proponent of smart growth balanced with financial stability.

Patterson’s leadership was critical to the post-9/11 transformation of DAV as the organization worked to welcome home a new generation of disabled veterans while continuing to meet the needs of veterans of previous generations.

Art Wilson, who hired Patterson in Boston and remained close to his fellow Vietnam veteran throughout their careers with DAV, knew he was special from the moment he stepped into the national service office.

“I could tell right away that he was a gifted and steady professional and the kind of veterans



Above: Rick Patterson displayed a movie poster from the Vietnam War film “We Were Soldiers” in his office at DAV National Headquarters.

Right: Patterson as a “Sky Soldier” and medic with the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

advocate who would make a significant difference throughout his career,” said Wilson, whose own career culminated in his appointment as DAV national adjutant. “When I was appointed to the post, I knew right away who my choice for national headquarters executive director and chief financial officer would be.

“Rick’s vision and commitment help put DAV in position to meet the challenges to come.”

Like Patterson, Dave Gorman is another Boston native, 173rd Airborne Brigade soldier, disabled Vietnam veteran, national service officer and DAV leader who ended his career as a DAV executive director. He said Patterson was not only a trusted friend and confidant but also a courageous leader.

“I could tell right away that he was a gifted and steady professional and the kind of veterans advocate who would make a significant difference throughout his career.”

—Art Wilson, Past DAV National Adjutant

“Rick could be counted on to stand in the pocket and deliver for those who needed him most—whether that was his fellow soldiers, the DAV team or the countless veterans whose lives he helped make better,” said Gorman, who retired in 2011 as Washington headquarters executive director. “DAV says it is dedicated to keeping our promise to America’s veterans, and Rick was a living embodiment of that promise.”

Although he retired from DAV in 2010 after 38 years of service to America’s ill and injured veterans and their families, Patterson remained a trusted

adviser and served as the Audit Committee chair for the DAV National Service Foundation and the DAV Charitable Service Trust.

Patterson was a life member of DAV Chapter 45 in Silverhill, Alabama, as well as a number of other chapters around the country. He attended Rhode Island Junior College and Northeastern University. He was the father of four children and grandfather of five. Patterson and his wife, Linda, resided in Fairhope, Alabama.

May he rest in peace.



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Giving goes both ways ...

Left: DAV lifetime member Al Rainer (left) presents Ken Hoffman, commander of DAV Chapter 73 in Tamarac, Florida, with a \$500 donation from the Kings Point Veterans Club. The club raises funds during the holiday season to donate to charities. This is the second year in a row the chapter has received a donation.

Right: Hoffman stands with Leona McAndrews of Crafts for Vets. McAndrews' handmade items were delivered to a veteran's hospital in Miami.



Chapter members on city hall's footsteps ...

Members of DAV Chapter 15 in Stockton, California, stand with a plaque held by Chapter Commander Michael Emerson on the steps of city hall on June 13, 2022. The event was a dedication celebrating the chapter's 100 years of service to veterans.

REUNIONS

NAVY

USS OGDEN (LPD-5) Nov. 10–13, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Mark Stephens, Email: ussogdenpd5@gmail.com, Web: ussogdenreunion.com

USS PATRICK HENRY (SSBN-599) Nov. 3–6, Kings Bay, GA, Contact: R. Pelletier, Ph: 508-769-2360, Email: rpelle9011@aol.com

USS THREADFIN (SS-410) Nov. 3–6, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: Stephen Kolb, Ph: 904-646-3814, Email: snrkolb@comcast.net, Web: usstthreadfin.com

USS VOGELGESANG (DD-862) March 12–14, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: Ron Savino, Ph: 703-474-3185, Email: Ldobb@aol.com

INQUIRIES

- Searching for anyone who went through basic training at Amarillo AFB, TX, from Nov. 24, 1967, to January 1968 and was assigned to 3332nd BMTS, Flight 433. Contact: Dennis Peterson, Email: sqtpete@centurylink.net
- Searching for Louise Coleman, an Army nurse stationed at Fort Sam Houston, TX, summer 1967. Contact: Wekewa, Ph: 317-414-3499, Email: genwek@gmail.com
- Searching for Lt. Cmdr. Harry Hansen, executive officer of USS Henry B. Wilson (DDG-7), 1970–1971, and MSC James Banzali, who served in the EDF on USS Barbey (FF-1088). Contact: MSC D. Jaminial (retired), Email: jaminiald@yahoo.com
- Searching for Donald Nelson, boatswain's mate of the LCA-X2, Assault Craft Unit 1, San Diego, 1968. Contact: Chief Petty Officer Steve Kirkpatrick, Ph: 909-844-1072
- Searching for Sgt. Ronald Southall, Sgt. Ed Paceley, Chief Master Sgt. Ray Boulanger, Sgt. Rieker or anyone who worked at the small arms marksmanship unit, Nellis AFB, NV, 1973–74; Sgt. Stoutley, Disaster Preparedness Unit, Nellis AFB, NV, 1973–74; or anyone who worked with Project CHECO Udorn RTAFB, Thailand, 1974–75. Contact: Henry Hawkins, Email: hawksbirdman@aol.com

- Searching for anyone who saw a UH-1B do an aerial extraction on a stretcher of an Army E-6 whose left arm was severed while clearing an unfinished landing zone. Our Huey used both rotors to cut foliage to get into the LZ, and the door gunner hung upside down on the skid to reach the litter handles, lifting up to the crew chief. Likely occurred late morning sometime between September and November 1965 in II Corps or I Corps. Contact: William Beebe, Email: rvm6566@copper.net
- Searching for Gibbs, Amigo, and corpsmen Newton and Lancaster, 1st Recon Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Vietnam, 1968–1969. Contact: Duane "Bridgette" Bourdo, Ph: 401-255-4052, Email: duanego@verizon.net
- Searching for members of the 867th Field Artillery Battalion (280 mm atomic cannon), Neckarsulm, Germany, 1953–56. Contact: James Degnan, Ph: 661-294-0256, Email: my4cam@aol.com
- Searching for anyone who was on temporary duty assignment from Langley AFB in February 1968 to Tachikawa Airfield, Japan, and Vietnam. Contact: Vito, Email: vitof@bellsouth.net
- Searching for Spc. 4 Steve Christenson, who served in Vietnam with the 442nd Transportation Company and was injured in a jeep accident in late October 1970, treated at Cam Ranh Bay hospital. Contact: Robert Quattlebaum, Ph: 334-596-6299
- Searching for anyone who slept in barracks T648 or neighbor barracks along the perimeter fence line at Ubon Royal Thai AFB in 1968. Contact: Jerome Siebenrock, Email: honohonoking@icloud.com
- Searching for information on deceased members of the Tennessee State Militia or U.S. infantry regiments who were buried at Fort/Camp Montgomery, Alabama Territory, between 1814 and 1818. Contact: John Shipnough, Email: usasprinter2@aol.com
- Searching for anyone who may have contacted Lt. Wendy Johnson, MD, from Corpus Christi, TX, back in 1999. Contact: BM1 John Guillory (retired), Email: mattney@msn.com
- Searching for anyone (Marine or Navy) who was stationed at Iwakuni air station in 1957. Contact: Jan (Jake) Mentzer, Email: patmentzer@sbcglobal.net
- Searching for Will and Geraldine Williams, stationed at Lackland AFB, TX, during the 1980s; last known base, George AFB, CA. Contact: Verna Zellars (Williams), Email: ezell4108@gmail.com
- Searching for Peggy Redus McDonald, stationed at Maxwell AFB, AL, in 1970s and Sheppard AFB, TX, in the 1980s. Contact: Verna Williams Zellars, Email: ezell4108@gmail.com
- Searching for Thomas E. Michael, USS Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mediterranean tour, 1973–74. Contact: Danny Conrad, Ph: 757-389-1413
- Searching for military sexual trauma survivors for support, healing and assistance with VA claims and benefits. Contact: Robert Brennan, Email: robzsdemail@gmail.com
- Searching for U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Sam Neuman (retired), 93rd Evacuation Hospital, Fort Leonard Wood, MO. Contact: Jim Smith, Email: ndkids@yahoo.com
- Searching for Everett Pruitt, cable dog, Company C, 25th Signal Battalion, Fort Bragg, NC, 1987–88. Contact: Kenneth Johnson, Ph: 805-734-8301, Email: oilytrombone@gmail.com
- Searching for Jacqueline Johnson, military police reservist, Fort McClellan, AL, Company A, 12th Military Police Battalion, 1985, basic and advanced individual training. Contact: Kenneth Johnson, Ph: 805-734-8301, Email: oilytrombone@gmail.com
- Searching for all veterans that were stationed at Gibbs Kaserne: 32nd Signal Battalion, LRRP, 317th Engineer Battalion, 97th MRP Company and 97th General Hospital in Frankfurt, Germany, and 32nd Signal Battalion in Höchst, Darmstadt, Germany. Contact: Jamaal Abdul-Saleem Muhammad, Email: Jusbttru@aol.com
- Searching for anyone on USS Hale, Newport, RI, during summer 1958 to substantiate my claim for the heat stroke that happened to me during our summer shakedown cruise in the forward fire room. Contact: Robert Brown, Ph: 508-591-7247
- Searching for any shipmates that served on the USS Constellation (CVA-64), 1966–68, in the Gulf of Tonkin, especially if you are trying to get service-connected disability through the VA. Contact: Robert Marble, Email: bobmarble318@gmail.com



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2023 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic

MARCH 25–31 | SNOWMASS VILLAGE, CO

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic is scheduled to return to the mountains of Colorado in 2023, 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 25–31. The clinic serves as a leader in adaptive winter sports instruction for disabled veterans, promoting world-class health care at a one-of-a-kind rehabilitative event. 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 and scuba diving.

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. ■

APPLY NOW

The application can be downloaded at wintersportsclinic.org and must be completely filled out and properly signed.

Applications should be mailed to:

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Teresa Parks/WSC
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Grand Junction, CO 81501

They can also be scanned and submitted to teresa.parks@va.gov.

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