



THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY
SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER 2022

MAGAZINE

Sealing a PACT for toxic-exposed veterans

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'Big Sky' servant

Air Force veteran Joe Parsetich
elected national commander

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From the NATIONAL COMMANDER

JOE PARSETICH



It's all about family

Several Christmases ago, my wife and son gave me a couple of those DNA collection kits you see advertised on television. With this gift, I could learn more about my roots. I knew I had been adopted as a baby from a Catholic Charities orphanage in Chicago, but my parents had kept many of the other details from me.

I was shocked when the results came back. First, I learned my birth parents were Puerto Rican, a surprise to someone who was told his whole life he was Italian. It turns out that was a fabrication by my adoptive parents to protect me from racial prejudices present in Chicago during my youth. I also learned I had five brothers, a sister, 250 first and second cousins, and more than a thousand third and fourth cousins. And, although my biological mother passed away years ago, I was able to meet my biological father, who is now 95. I was welcomed into a wonderful culture and family I never knew I had. And it feels great.

That's how I feel about DAV. Until I received help with my VA claim and attended my first chapter meeting in 2009, I didn't know anything about the organization. But I quickly discovered it's a welcoming family of fellow disabled veterans. We're all from different backgrounds, branches and eras, but we're bound together by a common thread.

As we all know, keeping a family together requires everyone's effort. I certainly didn't join DAV to just be a member. I came to help. Because

before I was even a member, DAV was there for me as I began facing the issues haunting me from my time at Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon during the aftermath of the Tet Offensive in 1968. It's an honor to give back to this organization that has done so much for me.

I have a diverse employment background, from being a police officer to training exotic animals to hosting a veterans-focused show on public radio in Great Falls, Montana. These experiences have given me countless stories to share, but more importantly, they've provided me with the ability to relate to lots of different people. It's been a joy to connect with others and point them to DAV, the Auxiliary and the work we do.

Through that work, our organizations have a renewed energy. We're reconnecting with our roots of proactive volunteer service. To me, there's no better feeling than helping fellow veterans and their families.

When we nurture this feeling, more veterans will know how much we care about them.

The work we do in our areas is also attractive to younger veterans and others in the military community, many of whom are looking to join an organization that's focused on service.

We should all be proud of how we provide ill and injured veterans and their families the ability to live life with respect and dignity. It's an incredible honor to take the reins as your national commander, and I look forward to continuing to serve alongside you in this pursuit.

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Cover photo by the Associated Press

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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT J. MARC BURGESS



Strength in diversity

Almost every time I flip through the contents of *DAV Magazine*, I am struck by one thing in particular: the span of generations represented in our pages.

In this issue alone, we feature the story of Paul Kerchum, a survivor of the Bataan Death March, and Rafael Sierra, who earned his citizenship through service in the U.S. Army. We also share groundbreaking Gulf War illness news, which may help to address conditions that have plagued that generation of veterans for decades, as well as a story of Marines reunited years after their service in Cuba.

On top of that, we focus in on the newest generation of volunteers through the story of our latest DAV Scholarship recipient.

To me, this goes to the heart of our mission. We are here to serve veterans of all generations with the skills and talents we have each been given and to

encourage participation of the American people in the promise that was made to those who served.

You will often hear that diversity is strength, particularly when it comes to the military and veteran communities, which are full of individuals from different

You will often hear that diversity is strength, particularly when it comes to the military and veteran communities, which are full of individuals from different backgrounds.

backgrounds. Deeper than that, though, the strength really lies in drawing on our unique individual experiences while uniting under a common cause to create positive change.

That is what I see as our charge and challenge—to find those commonalities that connect us across time and space and use them as fuel to lift each other up. The stories here in this magazine reflect that very theme. That ability, borne by our

members, volunteers and supporters, is what has powered DAV for over a century and is what will continue to do so in the years to come.



Respecting the flag

In your May/June 2022 issue, you wrote “When a flag becomes tattered, damaged or otherwise worn out, it should be retired and properly disposed of.” How do you properly dispose of a nylon flag that is tattered? If it is burned, it off-gasses noxious fumes and leaves a plastic, rock-like mess. What is the preferred protocol? **William Grotts, Wellston, Oklahoma**

Editor’s note: A good alternative to burning a nylon flag would be to donate it to a local post or scout troop to recycle the nylon in a proper and respectful manner.

Homeless veterans housing

In the letters in the May/June 2022 issue, there was a suggestion to use abandoned on-installation military quarters for homeless vets. Usually federal government housing safety codes do not meet civilian public municipal or state housing safety codes. It would take a costly amount to convert these structures to be usable for homeless vets.

Bob Balick, Rome, New York

Grand Ole Opry

This is the best organization I’ve ever been involved with. I am currently a life member and proud to help serve our veterans within our communities. Thank you, (then) National Commander Marshall and DAV for [participating in the Opry]! **Trina Hall, via Facebook**

Legislating on a state level

DAV should be just as active in state issues affecting veterans as they are in federal issues. For instance, two different bills in California about property taxes and exemption by state Sens. Bob Archuleta and Shannon Grove. These are very important also—in all 50 states. **Larry Parscale, Escondido, California**

Editor’s note: DAV Magazine focuses primarily on national issues. DAV departments and chapters advocate on local legislation. The DAV Department of California, like most other states, supports many issues regarding property taxes and exemptions.

New Mexico wildfire relief

As a former resident of the “other Las Vegas” (Las Vegas, New Mexico), it’s great to see these smaller communities of veterans are not lost among the more populated areas. DAV once helped me as I was lost in that shuffle—living in New Mexico and unable to find the help I needed with my VA benefits. I can personally attest to the great work you do for our brothers and sisters throughout the country. Thank you for helping those in need.

Wayne Robinson, Philadelphia

COLA Act of 2022

Although I agree that veterans should receive justly compensation,

how do we fix the larger issue: reasons for inflation? And how do we do so without choosing a left or right side of the political spectrum? Specifically, as a not-for-profit? Or even without giving the impression that a nonprofit is leaning a certain way? **Daniel Avalos, Kennesaw, Georgia**

Military versus private sector

Our military isn’t perfect, but we’ve been on the front lines of human rights initiatives for a long time. Desegregation by race. Desegregation by gender. Guaranteed time off. Guaranteed parental leave for all genders. Increased maternal leave. Pay transparency and equity. Health care. Cost-of-living increases. The list goes on. It’s far from perfect—but it’s light years ahead of the private sector.

Dawn DeRosette, Boston

Disabled American Veteran of the year

It takes a fighting mentality to enter this profession and stick with it. As fighters, we don’t give up, we don’t back down, and we push forward until God calls us home. [Disabled American Veteran of the Year] Adam Alexander exemplifies that push and is an inspiration to keep fighting. Army-Navy rivalry aside for just a moment, glad to have you around still, brother.

Justin Williams, Roscoe, Illinois

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.

America's PACT with veterans

The Honoring our PACT Act is the biggest toxic exposure veterans bill to ever be considered

By Matt Saintsing



PHOTO BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Veterans exposed to harmful substances will find it easier to receive their earned benefits now that the largest and most comprehensive toxic exposure legislation ever is now law.

Signed by President Joe Biden in August, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act (Public Law 117-168) expands health care benefits to millions of veterans of all eras—including future generations—who come into contact with noxious material while serving in uniform.

Among its many impactful provisions, the Honoring Our PACT Act will reduce bureaucratic obstacles for an estimated 3.5 million veterans who seek VA benefits due to burn pit exposures during the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and other hostile locations. The law adds nearly two dozen presumptive conditions related to burn pit exposure, meaning veterans who served in overseas locations with active burn pits no longer have to prove their exposure or establish direct service connection if diagnosed with ailments listed in the law that are known to cause such conditions.

The new law also expands medical coverage by extending, from five to 10 years, the time period that combat veterans who were discharged or released on or after Oct. 1, 2013, have for guaranteed enrollment in the VA health care system. For combat veterans whose service was completed before that date, the law provides a one-year open enrollment period.

The signing of the PACT Act is the culmination of years of work by DAV members and advocates who

lobbied Congress to keep our promise to America's veterans. In 2008, DAV brought the critical issue of burn pits to the American public's attention. DAV initiated the pilot for a Burn Pit Registry, which the Department of Veterans Affairs adopted in 2014.

For Vietnam veterans, this landmark legislation will finally make hypertension a presumptive condition for those exposed to Agent Orange, making it simpler for the VA to award benefits to them or their survivors. The law also expands all Agent Orange presumptions to cover veterans who served in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa and Johnston Atoll.

"The Honoring Our PACT Act represents a major shift in how the VA will care for veterans exposed to toxic chemicals and other hazardous substances," said DAV National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. "This legislation is another step toward ensuring this nation makes good on its promise to care for all the brave men and women who volunteer to serve their country and defend our freedom."

"No longer will our veterans exposed to harmful substances have to fight the VA for the benefits they earned in service to us all," added DAV National Commander Joe Parsetich. "This is a historic victory for veterans, and DAV is proud to have been there every step of the way in advocating for this lifesaving legislation." ■



Learn More Online

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

Helping a ‘BULLDOG’ and ‘BROTHER’

Eighteen years after they met, DAV benefits advocate helps old friend and Marine Corps veteran

By Elizabeth DePompei

It was 1999, and Anthony Pino felt like a superhero. At 28, he had just been honorably discharged from the Marine Corps and was in search of his next mission.

During his four-year enlistment, Pino served on the gun line and as a forward observer; deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; was part of a quick reaction force; and earned a promotion to sergeant aboard USS Wasp.

“Anybody that knows me knows that I wear that eagle, globe and anchor on my sleeve, on my heart, everywhere,” Pino said. “I just think it was the best thing I’ve ever done in my life. It gave me direction, and it made me who I am today.”

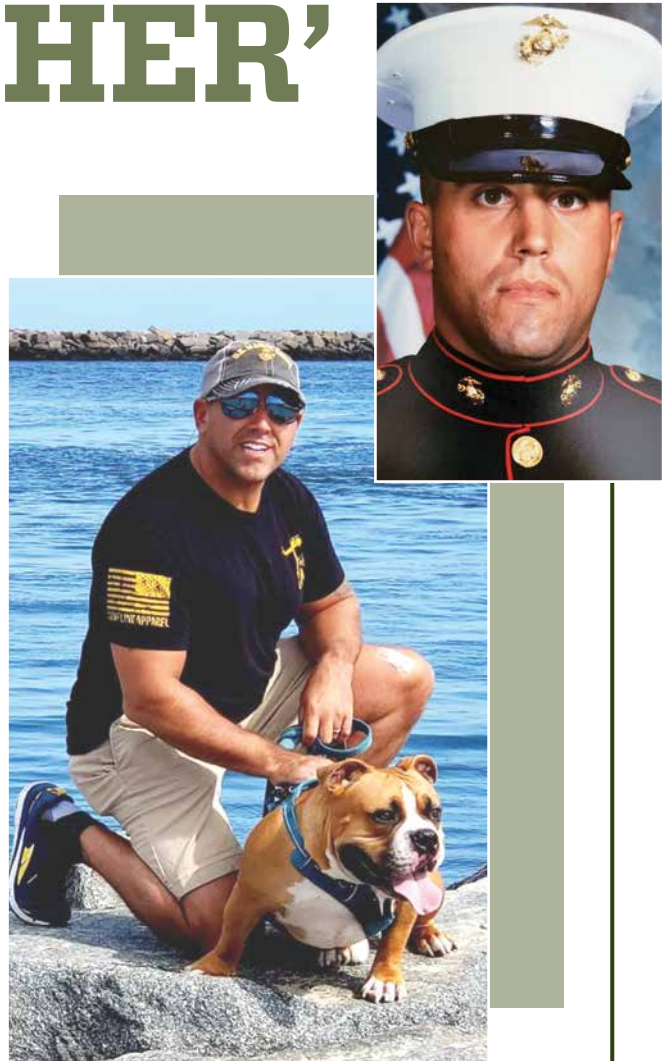
After the Marine Corps, Pino pursued a career in law enforcement, starting with a job at a juvenile boot camp center in Plymouth, Massachusetts. But the further Pino got from his time in uniform, the more he felt the impact of his service.

“The oil started drying out,” as Pino put it.

Pino experienced a number of injuries resulting from his time in the Marine Corps: a broken ankle, bone spurs, a torn bicep and a shoulder injury that would eventually lead to a full shoulder replacement. He also battled anxiety and depression.

By 2017, Pino was a “walking ball of pain,” according to Kenneth Andrade, a DAV benefits advocate based in Providence, Rhode Island.

Andrade first met Pino in 1999 when they worked at the same juvenile boot camp center.



Anthony Pino was a mortarman in the Marine Corps from 1995 to 1999. He is now an enforcement supervisor for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

“We just clicked,” said Andrade, a former Army combat medic who at the time was in the Army Reserve.

After Andrade received orders to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, he and Pino lost touch. During that time and after his own struggles

“I’ve gone through the whole process on my own and failed. **And with DAV, I was very successful.**”

—Anthony Pino

with mental health and service-related injuries, Andrade became a DAV benefits advocate.

Then in 2017, while Andrade was temporarily working at DAV’s Boston office, a familiar face walked through the door.

“I looked at him and I said, ‘Stand up, Marine!’” Andrade recounted.

It took Pino a second to recognize his old friend, but once he did, he gave Andrade a big hug.

Over the next three years, Andrade helped Pino through the benefits claims process. The two swapped countless phone calls and messages and spent hours hunting down military records and filling out paperwork and an appeal.

“He’s done everything,” Pino said. “He’s researched, he’s filled out paperwork, he’s called me day and night ... and he just has such a passion for this.

“I’ve gone through the whole process on my own and failed. And with DAV, I was very successful.”

Andrade said Pino deserves credit, too. Not only did he put in the work, but he also set an example.

“He’s a bulldog,” Andrade said of Pino. “He taught me how to be patient and never give up, because he didn’t give up.”

Andrade said the day he called Pino to tell him his rating had been increased was like “a big, giant Christmas gift” for both of them.

For Andrade, he was able to help a fellow veteran and the friend he calls “brother.” For Pino, he received the benefits he earned and the peace of mind that comes with them.

“I just want to know that when I do start falling apart even more, that the VA is going to take care of me,” Pino said.



Former Army combat medic Kenneth Andrade is a DAV benefits advocate based in Providence, Rhode Island.

Andrade would do what he did for Pino for any veteran. He cautions that every case is different, but at the very least, he and DAV benefits advocates across the country are available to listen and educate.

“DAV is committed to ensuring that all veterans can access the benefits and resources to which they are entitled,” said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “Regardless of a veteran’s needs, our benefits advocates—all of whom served in uniform—are there to lend an ear and help empower that veteran to lead a full and meaningful life after service.” ■



Learn More Online

Veterans seeking claims assistance can find their local DAV contact at benefitsquestions.org.



From the NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

JOY J. ILEM

Maintaining momentum

We're coming off yet another momentous national convention. The robust turnout of our engaged and thoughtful members shows that DAV is stronger than ever as we continue to advocate for the nation's ill and injured veterans. Such strength has provided DAV with an influential voice and earned us an authoritative seat at the table in Washington for more than 100 years.

And we've seen several legislative victories this year because of your grassroots advocacy.

Two imperative DAV-supported bills—signed into law by the president this summer—will expand breast cancer screening to more women veterans. Women who served in known areas harboring materials that cause toxic exposures and those who live in more rural parts of the country will benefit from increased access to mammogram services. We've long known that detecting breast cancer earlier will save lives, which is why DAV was passionate about getting the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans (MAMMO) and Dr. Kate Thomas Supporting Expanded Review for Veterans In Combat Environments (SERVICE) Acts to the president's desk.

Another top legislative priority is improving military sexual trauma (MST) claims. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs' national screening program, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 50 men report having been sexually assaulted during their service. With such stark

numbers, the VA must make the process of filing these claims easier. It is past time to lift the additional burdens for veterans of such trauma.

The Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2021, which is being considered by Congress, would ease the onerous evidentiary requirements to submit MST claims. It would also expand the type of documents accepted to include nonmilitary records, such as civilian medical records and opinions.

We're also laser-focused on advancing other vital bills related to DAV's critical policy goals before the end of the 117th Congress. Improving and expanding mental health services, helping to stem the tragedy of veteran suicide, giving more homeless veterans a much-needed hand up, and strengthening the VA to ensure we provide world-class care to those who served us all are still within the grasp of this Congress.

We know veterans, particularly DAV members, are not content with standing on the sidelines. Your advocacy matters and is embedded in your actions. And acting has never been more effortless with DAV's Commander's Action Network. By going to DAVCAN.org, you can see all of the pivotal pieces of veterans legislation that will substantially affect our brothers- and sisters-in-arms.

The 117th Congress may be in its home stretch, but we must stay focused to ensure we accomplish our legislative goals for our fellow veterans.

The riddle of Gulf War illness

Researchers identify chemical weapon as root cause of once-inexplicable symptoms

By Matt Saintsing

The origins of Gulf War illness have eluded veterans and medical researchers for decades. But now, a new study seems to have cracked the case on how roughly 250,000 veterans were sickened during the 1991 Persian Gulf War: exposure to the chemical weapon sarin.

While combat lasted 43 days, the harmful health effects on some who served in the conflict have stretched for decades. Known as a cluster of once inexplicable symptoms, Gulf War illness — sometimes called Gulf War syndrome— can include muscle aches, joint pain, dizziness, memory lapses, headaches, fatigue and insomnia.

For more than 30 years, federal efforts have come up short in deciphering the root causes of these puzzling symptoms. To help solve the mystery, a team of researchers at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School looked at the genes and surveys of those affected.

“Quite simply, our findings prove that Gulf War illness was caused by sarin, which was released when we bombed Iraqi chemical weapons storage and production facilities,” said Dr. Robert Haley, the study’s lead author and director of epidemiology in the internal medicine department at UT Southwestern.

“There are still more than 100,000 Gulf War veterans who are not getting help for this illness, and our hope is that these findings will accelerate the search for better treatment.”

The researchers included 1,016 veterans of the Persian Gulf War—about half of whom have Gulf War illness. They also tested for a pair of gene variants, one of which efficiently breaks down sarin and one that processes some pesticides but not sarin. Different combinations of these gene types can have varying impacts on developing Gulf War illness.

The study found that those with the least protective genotype, and who heard chemical alarms during the war, were nearly nine times more likely to develop symptoms.

Sarin was not only stored in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq but also used on the country’s citizens. In 1988, as the Iran–Iraq War was drawing to a close, Iraqi Kurds in Halabja, an Iraqi town about 9 miles from Iran, were targeted with a mixture of chemical weapons, one of which was sarin.

Armed with the knowledge of past use, American and coalition forces sought to eliminate the likelihood of sarin being deployed against them. However, little did they know it would result in American troops being unknowingly exposed to toxic substances once again.

“As is common with toxic exposures, we may not have immediate answers as to why groups of veterans develop certain symptoms or illnesses,” said National Commander Joe Parsetich. “But there is still a need to care for those who were made ill in service and to continue pressing for research that will help us better understand those connections.” ■



DAV National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski (fourth from left) joins author Karl Marlantes (center) and Save A Warrior founder Jake Clark (third from right) in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for The National Center of Excellence in June 2022.

SAVING WARRIORS

DAV-backed facility, partner work
to prevent veteran suicides

By Chris Mayhew

In an effort to prevent veteran suicide, DAV has partnered with a veteran-related nonprofit's mission to change the direction of one warrior's life at a time.

Save A Warrior founder Jake Clark's father once told him that if one person's life was saved by his organization, then the effort to do so would be worth it. Fast forward 10 years, and more than 2,000 service members, veterans and first responders have come out on the other end of the life-changing program with renewed purpose.



“It isn’t just about healing a damaged brain; it’s about healing a damaged heart.”

—Barry Jesinoski, National Headquarters
Executive Director

In 2020, the DAV Charitable Service Trust granted \$1 million to Save A Warrior’s National Center of Excellence for Complex Post-Traumatic Stress to address the veteran suicide epidemic. The center, which opened in June 2022, will save thousands more warriors.

“The efforts of those at this organization, unlike prescription drugs, don’t seek to mask the pain,” said DAV National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski at the center’s opening in Hillsboro, Ohio. “They meet the pain head-on and then provide the map for the path away from the trauma that is claiming lives in our community. And it works. That’s why we’re so proud to be here and to support these efforts.”

To date, the Trust has granted an additional \$200,000 for Save A Warrior’s program services.

“While there is no one solution for the many afflictions our veterans face, we believe that Save A Warrior stands out in the fight to end veteran suicide,” Jesinoski said. “Save A Warrior considers the whole of a person to get to the core of what led to suicidal and other terrible thoughts. It isn’t just about healing a damaged brain; it’s about healing a damaged heart.”

Clark said the initial 72-hour small group sessions are a conversation about reality in a culture that sometimes struggles with it. The things service members and veterans are confronting don’t often get talked about in this country, but they are talked about in the program, he said.

“It is sometimes very, very ugly trying to get someone out of a mindset where they’re not looking forward to living out their days,” he said.

The program, created with the help of researchers and clinicians, begins with an initial, intensive three-day session and continues throughout a veteran’s recovery.

Clark said the creation of Save A Warrior drew inspiration and wisdom from Vietnam Marine veteran and author Karl Marlantes’ book “What It Is Like to Go to War.”

“Back when I was really messed up, and I knew I needed help, I thought, ‘Well, I’ll go see the Veterans Administration,’” Marlantes said at the center’s grand opening.

A Rhodes Scholar, Marlantes said he found the VA process at the time “baffling.”

“So I called DAV, you know, and I said I need help with this. And in downtown Seattle, a Marine in a wheelchair comes and meets me, you know, and he worked for DAV, and he got me organized. So thank you, guys.”

Army veteran Adam Carr, who served as a Green Beret, was part of Cohort 35 to go through Save A Warrior. Today, Carr is the program’s master facilitator, having led or participated in 82 cohorts.

“I saw something when I sat in the seat in my cohort that I could not look away from,” he said. “I had been looking for something like this my entire life, and that says a lot. I served 12 years in the Army.”

There are no words for the experience, said Carr, a member of Chapter 55 in Dublin, Ohio.. The life of each Save A Warrior participant is intertwined with children, spouses, parents, friends and others they know, he added.

“This program changed my life forever,” said Carr. “If you want to know about it, ask my wife—it changed the trajectory of my life, and there’s 2,000 other stories just like that.” ■





National line officers from DAV and the Auxiliary gather on stage during the joint opening session of the national convention in Orlando, Florida. Joe Parsetich (front row, right) was unanimously elected DAV's national commander.

NATIONAL CONVENTION: Leaders elected, PACT Act celebrated

By Brian Buckwalter
Photos by Steve Poisall/The Gallery Studios

More than 2,200 DAV and Auxiliary members and guests gathered at the 2022 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention, held Aug. 6–9 in Orlando, Florida.

The atmosphere was full of positive energy, since the Honoring our PACT Act had cleared its final congressional hurdle earlier in the week leading up to the convention. (The act was signed into law Aug. 10.)

DAV was responsible for bringing the issue of burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan to the public's attention in 2008 and created the forerunner to the Burn Pit Registry. For decades, DAV members have been crucial players in advocating for comprehensive legislation to address the effects of exposures on service members. The legislation was a landmark achievement for the entire veteran community, according to then-National Commander Andy Marshall.

"The focus may have been on Congress the past few weeks, but the work was really done by each of you, so

thank you," said Marshall during his report.

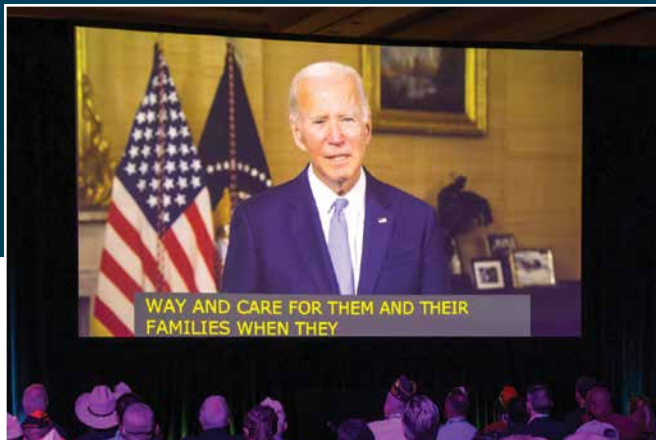
The PACT Act and what it will mean for veterans was a common thread throughout the event.

President Joe Biden addressed the convention crowd via recorded video. He praised DAV and its members for being "tireless champions" for veterans exposed to toxins and for continued involvement in volunteering, claims processing and the legislative process.

"As commander in chief," said Biden, "I know that our one truly sacred obligation as a nation is to properly prepare and equip those we send into harm's way and care for them and their families when they return home. That obligation never ends. I'm grateful to all the work the DAV does to advocate for our veterans with disabilities and provide for their needs."

Comedian and activist Jon Stewart, who has been a prominent advocate for years for burn pit legislation and getting Congress to pass the PACT Act, spoke to attendees live via Zoom and praised the actions of DAV and Auxiliary members.

"DAV's work in getting this legislation passed—and so much legislation before it—has been remarkable,"



Left: President Joe Biden addressed conference attendees via recorded video message, reaffirming the nation's commitment to caring for those sent into harm's way while serving their country. The commitment he spoke about was demonstrated in the bipartisan passing of the Honoring our PACT Act, which he signed into law on Aug. 10. **Right:** Comedian Jon Stewart, who has advocated for burn pit and toxic exposure legislation for years, spoke to attendees live via Zoom and praised DAV and the Auxiliary for their role in getting the act passed in Congress.

Stewart said, highlighting members' use of the DAV Commanders Action Network to contact their representatives. "Unfortunately, sometimes the United States government doesn't hear you until you yell so loudly that you can't be ignored. And you all yelled so loud that they couldn't help but hear you."

Marshall also took the time to recognize DAV members' contributions in all areas of the organization.

"My greatest privilege and honor has been the opportunity to meet so many of you who make our mission happen where you live," said Marshall. "You have inspired me and taught me a great deal about DAV and life in general."

On the convention's final day, delegates unanimously elected Joe Parsetich, a past state commander and member of Chapter 2 in Great Falls, Montana, to succeed Marshall as DAV's national commander. Parsetich, an Air Force veteran of Vietnam, joined DAV in 2009 and immediately began taking on leadership roles in the organization.

"I want to thank all of you for the opportunity to serve alongside you in the important mission that we share," said Parsetich. "But foremost, I want you to understand how humbled I am by this opportunity and how hard I will work to honor your service and contribute to the good fight we wage for justice."

He promised to build off the work done under Marshall's leadership.

"We honor the sacrifices of our bravest when we give of our time and talents to improve the lives of our

brothers and sisters and their survivors," Parsetich said during his acceptance speech. "We must continue to seize the moments where we can make a difference. We must be a source of hope when all else seems lost."

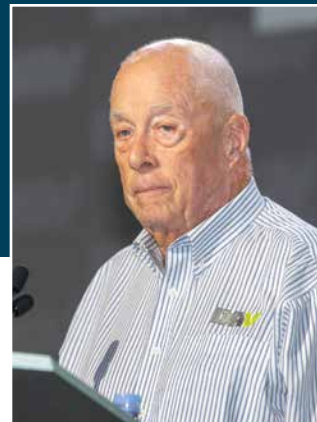
In addition to Parsetich's election, delegates elected other DAV national officers: Senior Vice Commander Nancy Espinosa, 1st Junior Vice Commander Dan Contreras, 2nd Junior Vice Commander Coleman Nee, 3rd Junior Vice Commander John Donovan, 4th Junior Vice Commander Cynthia Madison, Judge Advocate Michael Dobmeier and Chaplain Debra Varner.

The DAV Auxiliary elected Darlene Spence as its new national commander. The theme for her term is "Committed All the Way: Serving Our Veterans and Their Families."

"We owe it to those who gave so much for us," Spence said. "The needs for our service programs and advocacy are urgent."

Other Auxiliary leaders elected are Senior Vice Commander AnnMarie Hurley, 1st Junior Vice Commander Christopher Easley, 2nd Junior Vice Commander Melissa Pierce, 3rd Junior Vice Commander Terry Grabowski, 4th Junior Vice Commander Kathleen Wenthe, Judge Advocate Paula Raymond and Chaplain Aura-Lee Nicodemus.

DAV also awarded several people during the convention for their efforts in serving veterans, including top DAV Scholarship winner Evan Osgood and Disabled American Veteran of the Year Adam Alexander.



Left: Speaking to convention attendees, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough praised the volunteering and advocacy efforts of DAV and the Auxiliary and laid out the VA's priorities as the department moves forward. **Center:** Convention-goers had an opportunity to participate in the My Journey Workshop for Women Veterans, which encouraged growth and learning through conversations. **Right:** Art Wilson announced he was stepping down as president of the DAV National Service Foundation. Wilson had served in DAV's ranks for 56 years, including as its national adjutant from 1994 to 2013.

Alexander suffered extensive damage to his right frontal lobe and lost his right eye from an enemy sniper's bullet in Afghanistan in 2011. Undeterred, he now devotes his time to educating fellow veterans through a local TV program called "The Outpost" that he hosts with his former superior officer and fellow DAV life member Mike Hert.

Alexander, a member of Chapter 17 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, also regularly visits schools to educate students about the sacrifices made by service members.

A new addition to this year's convention schedule was the My Journey Workshop for Women Veterans. Separate from the Women Veterans Seminar, this workshop encouraged conversations so participants could learn from each other.

Associate National Legislative Director Naomi Mathis said the Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Experience Office created the workshop to encourage women veterans to build a network and community in order to work through common issues from their time in service.

On the convention's last day, VA Secretary Denis McDonough spoke to all attendees. He opened his remarks by paying tribute to Garry Augustine, who died in March. Augustine was a 50-year member of DAV and former executive director of DAV's National Service and Legislative Headquarters. McDonough pledged to do what he could to carry on Augustine's work.

He then highlighted DAV's volunteering and advocacy accomplishments over the past year.

"Bottom line: DAV is simply awesome," said McDonough.

McDonough next laid out the VA's priorities of maximizing access to health care for veterans, ending veteran homelessness, ensuring all veterans feel welcome and safe at the VA, and preventing veteran suicide.

He also highlighted how the PACT Act will affect future care and benefits for millions of veterans, and he called on DAV to help spread the word to veterans to apply immediately for benefits related to the new law.

"Because we want every veteran—every single one—to get the care they need and the benefits they deserve," said McDonough. "And we won't rest until they do."

Another noteworthy report came from Art Wilson, president of the DAV National Service Foundation. Wilson announced that he was stepping down from his role after the convention. He had served in DAV's ranks for 56 years, most notably as its national adjutant and CEO from 1994 to 2013. He pledged to continue being an active member and thanked his wife and others for their support.

The event wasn't just about the work, though. Throughout the convention, attendees had many opportunities for breaks. Highlights included Root Beer Floats from sponsor A&W Restaurants on Saturday and rides around the hotel property in one of Ford Motor Co.'s Model Ts.

TriWest Healthcare Alliance treated attendees to Fun Night on Monday. For the first time in several



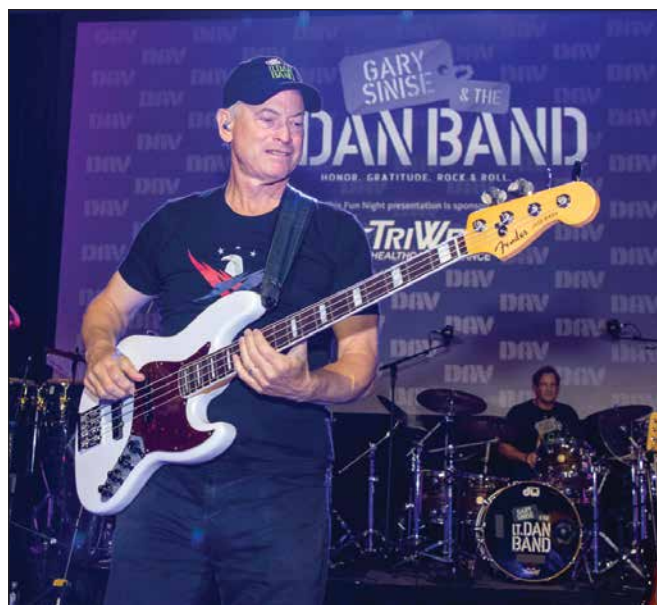
National Service Director Jim Marszalek (left) and National Legislative Director Joy Ilem (right) hosted the convention's Service and Legislative Seminar, which included a discussion with VA leadership about current issues facing the department. Their guests were (from center left) acting Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs, Under Secretary of Memorial Affairs Matthew Quinn and Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal.

years, DAV welcomed back to the stage convention favorite Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band for an evening of music that included covers of popular songs from several decades. Before ending the night with Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A.," Sinise shared his thanks to DAV and its members for being a major catalyst in starting his involvement with veterans and their families.

"I couldn't be more pleased with our 100th convention," said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "It represented perfectly DAV's commitment to more victories for veterans and the vibrancy of our organization. Our members came out in force to receive information and training on how they can best support our nation's veterans and their families. Additionally, their national leadership votes and the resolutions they brought to the floor put DAV and the Auxiliary in a position to continue to be the most effective organization serving veterans in the country."

As soon as the gavel fell to end the convention, DAV demonstrated its effectiveness and commitment. Newly elected National Commander Parsetich left Orlando with a small delegation of DAV members to go to the White House to witness President Biden signing the Honoring our PACT Act into law on Aug. 10.

The 101st national convention is scheduled for Aug. 5–8, 2023, at Harrah's Atlantic City in Atlantic City, New Jersey. ■



Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band returned for Fun Night, sponsored by TriWest Healthcare Alliance. The band entertained the crowd with covers of popular songs from several decades.



Learn More Online

For speeches, reports and other information from the 2022 DAV National Convention, visit dav.org/events/2022-national-convention. View all of DAV's convention videos on the DAV YouTube Channel at youtube.com/disabledamericanveterans.



Yisel Cabrera (center), senior manager of Economic Mobility and Hispanic initiatives at the **Ford Motor Company Fund**, presents a check to the DAV Transportation Network for \$200,000, representing the value of the eight donated vehicles announced at the convention, as well as a \$100,000 check to the DAV Scholarship Program.



From center left: Robert Chisholm, Zachary Stolz and Scott Kilpatrick from the law firm **Chisholm Chisholm & Kilpatrick** present DAV with a check for \$200,000. In addition to the firm's financial generosity, it has collaborated with DAV since 2008, representing more than 14,700 veterans with their appeals in court.



Stephanie Muckey (center), a population health strategy lead for **Humana's Veteran Bold Goal** program, presents a \$25,000 check to DAV's National Service Program to help support DAV's continued work in empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.



Camp Corral's CEO Phil Kowalczyk (center) and Travis Caison, Golden Corral's associate director of marketing, join then-Auxiliary National Commander Lynn Helms Prosser, Adjutant Marc Burgess and then-National Commander Andy Marshall for a check presentation to **Camp Corral**—a camp for military and veteran children. The \$600,000 donation made through DAV's Just B Kids program will provide scholarships for hundreds of kids to attend camp free of charge.



Retired Army Lt. Col. Rafael Montagno, the affinity account manager for **USAA** and a retired medevac pilot, speaks to convention attendees about the partnership between DAV and USAA. He expressed his thanks for the work DAV benefits advocates do for veterans and encouraged attendees to continue to serve within their communities.



Retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague, director of the **Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency**, updates convention attendees on the recovery efforts of his organization. He said there are currently teams deployed to 10 countries in the Pacific and Europe. The agency estimates that 38,000 service members missing in action are recoverable.

Rallying for a cause

Top 2022 DAV Scholarship winner Evan Osgood has a track record of volunteerism and leadership

By Elizabeth DePompei

Bernard “Papa B” Brockmeyer was a bit prophetic when it came to his grandson, 17-year-old Evan Osgood.

“He would always say, ‘You really have a way of bringing people together and rallying them behind a cause,’” said Osgood, a soon-to-be high school graduate from Loveland, Ohio, and member of high IQ society Mensa.

Papa B, who died when Osgood was a child, was right, and this year, DAV is recognizing Osgood with its top annual scholarship prize of \$30,000. The DAV Scholarship Program awards \$110,000 in scholarships each year to volunteers 21 and younger who give back to veterans in their communities.

The scholarships are a recognition of the service and leadership at the heart of DAV’s mission. Osgood exemplifies both.

At just 7 years old, he co-founded a nonprofit that brings science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education to the community—a passion project he maintains today.

And in 2020, when COVID-19 pillaged the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to fend off the virus, Osgood founded a nationwide network of volunteers making masks for health care workers, vulnerable populations and military veterans. Since then, over 10,000 volunteers have made and donated over 800,000 pieces of PPE. Many of those volunteers were veterans, and nearly 40% of PPE went to veteran communities.

Osgood has also organized community events, built furniture for people moving from homelessness to homeownership, helped neighbors with house repairs, led numerous school initiatives and much more.

“Evan has much in common with the veterans he serves,” said DAV National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst. “His dedication to helping others, his leadership among peers and his problem-solving mindset are invaluable assets to his community.”

Evan Osgood, of Loveland, Ohio, was named the top 2022 DAV Scholarship winner, receiving a \$30,000 prize to go toward college expenses. Osgood began volunteering at a young age and has provided volunteer opportunities to thousands of people.



For his high school capstone project, inspired in part by veterans he had met, Osgood set out to address chronic infections caused by biofilm-forming bacteria.

“Biofilm is the equivalent of every enemy Superman has ever battled fighting together,” Osgood explained. “Antibiotics, our modern-day medical Superman, can’t break through.”

Osgood and a research partner created an apparatus that successfully broke through biofilms using electric currents. His hope is to one day build a device that can be used to treat patients, particularly those who were injured in military service.

“I want service to continue to be a part of my life beyond college,” he said. “How can I use those skills that I’ve been able to develop, as well as all the skills and network that a college education will give me, to really bring my service to the next level?”

It’s not hard to imagine what Papa B would think.

“He would be so very proud of Evan and how he has stepped up to make a difference for our veterans and the country as a whole,” said Evan’s mom, Lisa Osgood. “It’s nice to see that he’s getting some recognition for all the work that he’s done in the past 10 years.” ■

ADDITIONAL 2022 DAV SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

\$20,000: Emma Gardner, Arkansas; **\$15,000:** Leanne Maharaj, Virginia; **\$10,000:** Arjun Verma, Florida; **\$7,500:** Ayva Kacir, Arizona, and Madyson Weidner, Arkansas; **\$5,000:** Jean You, Pennsylvania; Destiny Klinkhammer, Wisconsin; Adithi Tirumalai, California; and Rosadry Rios, Illinois

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

DISABLED AMERICAN VETERAN OF THE YEAR



Adam Alexander, in addition to testifying before his state's legislature on bills to improve the lives of other disabled veterans, he co-hosts an award-winning public access television show that gives local Oshkosh, Wisconsin, veterans a platform for sharing their stories. The award recognizes Alexander for overcoming tremendous challenges and going on to serve and inspire others.

OUTSTANDING AUXILIARY MEMBER OF THE YEAR



Patricia "Patti" Whitlow has been a life member for seven years and commander of DAV Auxiliary Unit 50 in Prince George, Virginia, since June 2020 and has served on numerous state committees. She regularly volunteers at the Hunter Holmes McGuire Hospital in Richmond, Virginia, and voices support for important legislation affecting veterans and their families.

OUTSTANDING DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR



Outstanding Veterans Benefits Administration Employee of the Year
Rebecca A. Brenen: The Veteran Service Center manager in Los Angeles goes above and beyond to work with service officers to enhance DAV's capabilities. Her open-door policy with DAV ensures there is accurate awareness of delays of VA disability claim decisions.



Outstanding National Cemetery Administration Employee of the Year
James LaPaglia: The digital services chief and retired Air Force lieutenant colonel led the initiative to make the Veterans Legacy Memorial interactive for people to remember lost loved ones publicly. National Cemetery Executive Director Danny Devine accepted the award.



Outstanding Veterans Health Administration Employee of the Year
Ashley Lowry: The Iraq War Army veteran is a dedicated intensive care unit nurse in St. Louis. She spent countless hours at the sides of veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteered for extra shifts, and didn't let the virus come between her and patients.

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT AWARDS



Judge Robert S. Marx Award

Department of South Dakota Department Commander Dan Francis accepts the award, which recognizes the department with the highest percentage increase in fully paid life members over goal.



Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright Award

Department of Wyoming Department Adjutant Floyd Watson accepts the award, which recognizes the department that closes the year with the largest percentage increase in total new members.



Top NSO Recruiter of the Year Carlo Melone

of the Chicago office recruited 258 new members.



Top Member Recruiter of the Year Michael Crowe

of Chapter 8 in Mesa, Arizona, recruited 80 new members.



Membership Recruiters Hall of Fame

Carlo Melone (right) recruited 258 new members.

Hank Myers (left) recruited 231 new members.

John Rodriguez (not pictured) recruited 202 new members.



Division I: Department of Massachusetts

Award accepted by Past Department Commander William Egan.



Division II: Department of Missouri

Award accepted by Past Department Commander David Gerke.



Division III: Department of Puerto Rico

Award accepted by Department Commander Ruben Arce.



Division IV: Department of Connecticut

Award accepted by Department Commander Juliet Taylor.



Division V: Department of Wyoming

Award accepted by Department Adjutant Floyd Watson.

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR



DAV Volunteer of the Year

Robert Hilliard (center left) is a member of Chapter 27 in Tomah, Wisconsin, and commander of the DAV Department of Wisconsin. He has volunteered for eight years and given more than 11,000 hours in service to his fellow veterans through DAV's Local Veterans Assistance Program and the Tomah VA Medical Center.



DAV Auxiliary Volunteer of the Year

Michele Goings (center) is a member of DAV Auxiliary Unit 47 in Petersburg, Virginia. Goings began her volunteer work through the DAV Local Veterans Assistance Program seven years ago. She has volunteered more than 12,000 hours through the DAV Auxiliary Department of Virginia and her unit to assist veterans and families in her community.

LOCAL VETERANS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AWARDS



Division I:
Department of Virginia (236,408 hours) award accepted by Assistant Department Adjutant Lisa Gregory.



Division II:
Department of South Carolina (190,607 hours) award accepted by Department Adjutant Andy Miller.



Division III:
Department of Wisconsin (77,859 hours) award accepted by Department Adjutant Matthew Kempainen.



Division IV:
Department of Nebraska (40,119 hours) award accepted by Department Adjutant Jamie Jakub.



Division V:
Department of South Dakota (30,394 hours) award accepted by Department Commander Dan Francis.

DAV & Auxiliary National Convention Award Highlights

ENTREPRENEUR AND EMPLOYMENT AWARDS



Arthur H. and Mary E. Wilson Award for Top Venture Impacting Veterans

Ericka McKim is a Navy veteran and the founder of And I Like It bakery. The bakery focuses on keto-friendly treats made with all-natural sweeteners. The bakery sells cheesecakes in 11 stores across the Dallas-Fort Worth area, along with three different all-natural sweeteners for people battling health issues and dietary restrictions.



Outstanding Local Veterans Employment Representative

Serena Bermudez has been with the Virginia Employment Commission Jobs for Veterans State Grant since 2015 and has helped more than 200 veterans find successful employment.



Outstanding Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist

Nancy Brown has been with Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development since 2013. Just in the past year, she has helped 31 veterans find meaningful employment in North Central Wisconsin.

DAV PATRIOT EMPLOYERS OF THE YEAR



Large Employer: WPS Health Solutions' Military and Veteran Inclusion lead Timothy La Sage (second from left) accepts the award. WPS Health Solutions, a Wisconsin-based nonprofit, is a health insurer serving millions of service members, veterans and their families through TRICARE.

Small Employer: Aristech Surfaces LLC (not pictured) actively recruits veterans, who comprise 10% of employees at its Florence, Kentucky, branch. Now part of Trinseo, the company manufactures and distributes surface and design materials around the world.



Midsize Employer: Sierra7 CEO Rafael Fagundo, a Navy veteran, founded the company with the simple but noble mission: Serve those who served. Since 2022, Sierra7 has hired 166 veterans, over half of whom are disabled. Approximately 25% of Sierra7's total workforce is made up of veterans.



To view or download photos from the 2022 national convention, visit [flickr.com/theDAV](https://www.flickr.com/photos/theDAV/).

‘For this beautiful country’

Veterans Rafael Sierra and Angel Gomez are among thousands of immigrants who became U.S. citizens through military service

By Elizabeth DePompei

Growing up in Panama City, DAV benefits advocate Rafael Sierra dreamed of being a bus driver. He never envisioned serving as a combat medic in the U.S. Army.

DAV member Angel Gomez wanted to explore the world beyond the small town in Mexico where he was born. But he never could have imagined enlisting in the Marine Corps and driving Humvees across foreign landscapes or the explosion that would forever change his life.

Both were brought to the United States by mothers in search of more opportunities for their children. And both are among the many immigrants who have come to this country and volunteered to defend it. Since 2002, nearly 150,000 immigrants have become citizens through their military service.

As a 12-year-old, Sierra was devastated to leave his close-knit neighborhood on Calle Quinta for a new life in Miami. In his first few days in America, he realized he was missing something else: the simplicity of his birthplace.

“I would get home, hang up my [school] uniform, ... and then all I had to do was put on some shorts and run out the door—no shoes, no shirt, nothing else—and no one would even bat an eye,” Sierra said.

“It was just a way of life.”

Gomez also remembers the culture shock of moving from Mexico to Farmersville, California, when he was 8. Like Sierra, Gomez didn’t speak the language of his new home, so he took English-speaking classes between regular third grade instruction.

Fourth grade brought a milestone when he was asked to read aloud from a book in English. Gomez did so well he was able to proceed without additional language lessons that year.

“But I still had an accent,” he said. “Like, really harsh. Some of the words would come out wrong, so it just took a little bit more time.”

By the time Sierra and Gomez reached the end of high school, another life-changing transition was on the horizon.

Dedication and sacrifice

For 19-year-old Sierra, the Army was an opportunity to learn a skill he could use to continue to provide for his family, as he had always done.

What began as a four-year enlistment in 1993 turned into a 24-year career, in large part because of the camaraderie Sierra found among soldiers. During that time, he served as a combat medic in Iraq and Afghanistan, led hundreds of other medics through training, met and married an Army nurse, had two children and traveled the world.

Born in a small town in Mexico, Angel Gomez immigrated to California when he was 8 years old. At 18, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and deployed to Iraq. On his second deployment, an improvised explosive device sent shrapnel into Gomez’s head, severely injuring him. While recovering in the hospital, Gomez took the oath of allegiance to the United States. Gomez lives in California with his 7-year-old son.



DAV benefits advocate Rafael Sierra retired from the Army in 2018. During his career, he deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan (pictured). In 1999, six years after enlisting, the Panama native became eligible for U.S. citizenship and took the oath of allegiance to the United States. Sierra and wife Danielle, a former Army nurse, have two children, Josselyn and Elijah.



“I’m very grateful to be where I’m at and be able to do what I’ve done for this beautiful country,” Sierra said.

Soon after enlisting in the Marine Corps, Gomez knew he wanted to be a “lifer,” too. By 18, he was in Iraq. On his second deployment in March 2005, the war zone already felt “like normal,” but that deployment would be anything but.

One pitch-black night, Gomez and his unit headed out beyond the wire on a mission. Gomez was driving, as he had many times before.

A few minutes in, a nearby improvised explosive device went off, hurtling a piece of shrapnel into Gomez’s head.

“I was dazed,” Gomez said, “covered in blood.”

He remembers being bandaged and put in a Humvee. Two weeks later, he woke up in a hospital in Germany.

Gomez couldn’t feel the right side of his body, and a portion of his skull had been removed due to brain swelling.

“I was there, in my mind, but I just couldn’t talk, I couldn’t do anything,” he said. “I felt trapped.”

A path to citizenship

After stabilizing at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Gomez was transferred to the VA Palo Alto Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center in his adopted home state of California. Staff there learned he wasn’t a U.S. citizen and set out to change that.

In July 2005, Gomez sat in a wheelchair, wearing a helmet and dress blues, and raised his left hand to take the oath of allegiance to the United States.

“I didn’t feel excited,” Gomez admitted. “My life had just changed drastically a couple of months ago, and so I was still trying to process that.”

It took years for Gomez to recover. He still can’t use his right arm and wears a brace on his leg, but he lives a fully independent life. In 2007, he participated in his first National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, an annual adaptive sporting event co-presented by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

While U.S. citizenship was never top of mind, Gomez now has an appreciation for the hallmarks of being an American, such as registering to vote and being called for jury duty.

“It’s pretty awesome,” he said.

Six years into Sierra’s enlistment, a letter notified him that he was eligible for citizenship. Soon after, he took the oath.

“I was truly honored to be able to do that,” Sierra said.

He immediately sent the certificate of citizenship to his mom, realizing the dream she had when her family left Panama all those years ago.

“She was super excited and happy and proud of me,” he recalled.

In 2018, Sierra retired from the Army. He’s now dedicated to helping fellow veterans through his work at DAV.

“In very many ways, I felt like the U.S. had provided for me, and I still feel the same way,” he said. “I do what I do now, as a DAV national service officer, because I feel like I want to continue to give back.”

“So many of our members and service officers have realized the dream of citizenship through their service,” said National Commander Joe Parsetich. “The fact that people are willing to come here and put their lives on the line just for the opportunity to have a better life—that’s something we should not just be grateful for but enormously proud of as well.” ■



Left: Paul Kerchum poses for an official Army photo in 1946. He had endured life as a Japanese POW during nearly all of World War II. **Right:** Kerchum is pictured wearing his service dress uniform at a POW/MIA event. Following the war, he retired from the Air Force after 21 additional years of service.

SURVIVING BATAAN

DAV member, former Japanese POW confronts his past

By Matt Saintsing

Paul Kerchum has dodged death at every turn. He came of age during the Great Depression, survived the nightmarish Bataan Death March and endured three and a half years as a prisoner of war in Japan during World War II.

Now, at 102, Kerchum is one of the last remaining survivors of the bloodcurdling march up the Bataan Peninsula on Luzon, the Philippines' largest island. Japan stormed the archipelago's beaches at the end of December 1941, hoping to oust Allied forces. As Japanese troops advanced through the rainforest, Kerchum's unit, the 31st Infantry Regiment, was ordered to cover friendly units making their way to the peninsula.

However, by April, after months of fierce fighting, malnourishment, disease, and dwindling ammo and other crucial supplies, the regiment had no choice but to surrender to their soon-to-be captors. That's when an estimated 10,000 Americans and 66,000 Filipinos were forcibly marched to an enemy-held POW camp—Camp O'Donnell.

Seventy years after slogging through the thick jungle, Kerchum vividly remembers what he and the others suffered.

"During the march, we were formed in three lines, and I was always in the middle line because the

“We were complete basket cases. We probably had PTSD, but it was unheard of at the time.”

—Paul Kerchum

Japanese trucks were coming up, and they would whack people in the far line with their rifles or whatever they had in their hand,” recalled Kerchum, a DAV life member of Chapter 26 in Benson, Arizona. “So I found out, stay in the middle line, and I just watched the shoes in front of me.”

Official estimates of the horrendous trek range from 60 to 70 miles. Up to 10,000 prisoners were beaten; shot; bayoneted; and, in many cases, beheaded by the Japanese along the way. “I could hear the shots, I could hear the screams,” added Kerchum.

Today, he remains one of only a handful, at most, of Bataan Death March survivors. Rather than shying away from his brutal past, he often shares the remarkable yet horrific account of what he witnessed, though his candidness about those experiences is a relatively new development.

“He never talked about it—never,” said his daughter, Paula Desmarais. “He’s very open about it now, and he goes to schools to give talks.”

“Paul is living history, and his strength and resolve as a survivor of some of the most ghastly events from World War II is constantly on display,” said DAV National Commander Joe Parsetich. “By teaching the younger generations about what he and others suffered, he is ensuring that other survivors, and those who perished, will never be forgotten.”

Kerschum’s talks also include stories about his time aboard a Japanese “hell ship.”

Japan used these merchant vessels to relocate American POWs from the Philippines to other regions of Japanese-occupied territory. However, as the war raged at sea, American warplanes and submarines had no way of knowing their fellow countrymen laid tightly packed below the ships’ lower decks. In “Death on the Hellships: Prisoners at Sea in the Pacific War,” author Gregory Michno assessed that more than 21,000 Americans were unknowingly injured or killed by friendly fire.

After a year of captivity, which included building an airfield for Japan in the Philippines, Kerchum boarded

the hell ship Haru Maru with 1,100 other captive Americans.

“The holes were covered. We remained in complete darkness,” said Kerchum. “All I kept hearing was the explosions from depth charges from the Japanese destroyer escort, and there was constant zigzagging of our ship.”

By November 1944, Kerchum was in a prison camp in northern Japan, working at Mitsubishi mine No. 11. To supplement the wartime labor shortage, Japan forced more than 1,000 Americans to exert themselves by extracting critical resources.

The POWs lived in a state of constant hunger, squalor and fear. On one occasion, they were forced to eat dog, after their Japanese guards provided the Americans with a single puppy. Each man received just a morsel to satiate his empty stomach.

The American POWs were elated when they got word of Japan’s unconditional surrender on Sept. 2, 1945. The next day, American B-29 bombers flew over the camp, dropping food, clothing and medicine. “They kept dropping us stuff, and we ate pretty good,” said Kerchum. “And after 30 days, I was no longer a lightweight.”

Despite the astonishing hardships during World War II, Kerchum decided to stay in uniform. He served for another 21 years with the Army Air Forces, later the U.S. Air Force. While he finished his career with high marks, the years immediately following his liberation were marred by insubordination—a relic, Kerchum suspects, of lingering mental health issues.

“We were complete basket cases,” he added, speaking of the 29 other former POWs assigned to the same unit. “We probably had PTSD, but it was unheard of at the time.”

But now, enough years have passed that Kerchum has made peace with his experiences.

“I asked him about God in the prison camp, and he said to me, ‘There was no God,’” said Paula. “But now, I think that’s what brought him to the point of forgiving and then letting go. It’s his faith.” ■

VA suspends annual caregiver program reassessments

■ The Department of Veterans Affairs announced the suspension of annual reassessments for its Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC), pending a review of the program's restructured eligibility criteria.

According to the agency's press release, during the ongoing review, the VA will not discharge or reduce stipends for any veterans or family caregivers participating in the program. The official announcement follows the VA's halt on expulsions from the program in March.

"In our effort to uphold our sacred obligation to families of veterans, the VA continues its review of PCAFC to ensure department requirements and procedures meet the needs of caregivers and veterans participating in the program," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough.

In 2020, with the expansion of the program to severely disabled Vietnam-era veterans, the VA



announced new eligibility criteria that led to more veterans being dropped from the program than had previously been anticipated.

"VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers has been a lifeline for tens of thousands, but the unacceptably high rate of denials into and discharges from the program based on new eligibility criteria have been deeply troubling," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Randy Reese.

"The VA must develop and implement new PCAFC eligibility criteria and reevaluation requirements that focus on getting veterans and caregivers into the program, not out of it," said Reese.

New 3-digit suicide crisis line goes live

■ The Veterans Crisis Line has a new toll-free, three-digit dialing code to make it easier for individuals to access confidential help in a mental health emergency.

Veterans, their families and friends can dial 988 and press 1 to be

Veterans Crisis Line



**DIAL 988 then
PRESS 1**

connected with trained counselors. The new three-digit code went live nationwide in July, helping make it easier to remember and share in times of need.

The current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number, 1-800-273-8255, remains available to people in emotional distress or suicidal crisis.

Veterans can also reach the Veterans Crisis Line through chat at veteranscrisisline.net/get-help-now/chat and via text at 838255.

From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

DARLENE SPENCE



Continuing a legacy of serving others

I remember going to my first DAV Auxiliary unit meeting back in 2004 after my husband, a retired Air Force veteran and DAV member, encouraged me to check it out. Honestly, I went not expecting to get involved. But it just so happened that it was election night, and Unit 17 in Universal City, Texas, needed a leader.

I left that meeting as the unit's commander, a position I still hold today. I was so immediately hooked on what our Auxiliary stands for that I couldn't pass on the opportunity to be a part of it. As I've added additional state-level duties over the years, each role has allowed me to witness and participate in the important, life-changing work we do for ill and injured veterans and their families.

Often, we do this work on a very personal, individual level.

Like this past Christmas, when my unit sponsored an active-duty military mom raising five kids on her own. The kids' wish lists were simple: shoes, clothes and a few toys each. We were able to purchase and deliver everything they asked for. The children were overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support, which is something they'll likely always remember. I'll certainly never forget how their reactions touched my heart.

Our unit also frequently purchases toiletries, socks and underwear to deliver to patients going through the substance abuse program at the South Texas Veterans Health Care System – Villa Serena in San Antonio. Some people in the program are experiencing homelessness or otherwise don't have access to basics.

The first time we showed up, we learned that no one else had ever really done anything for this particular VA community.

I've been involved with the Auxiliary for 18 years now, and it's stories like these that reinforce my commitment to our mission and to our members. We are able to find and meet the needs of the military and veteran communities in places others may overlook.

That is an awesome and powerful calling. We are able to tangibly show our veterans and their families they are not forgotten or left behind. And I am excited to see what we all do this coming year.

This calling is present on a broader scale, too, including our work pushing Congress to hold the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable in implementing its Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. This program is critical to so many of our Auxiliary members who, like me, are full-time caregivers to their spouses.

We're effective in this advocacy work only if our membership continues to grow. Numbers speak in the halls of Congress. And I'm eager to work toward boosting our organization's membership rolls.

Over the past year, the Auxiliary has done incredible work under Past National Commander Lynn Helms Prosser. I am honored for the opportunity to take the torch from her and lead this organization as we continue to provide support and care to our injured and ill veterans and their families. Thank you for entrusting me with this responsibility.

Reborn, reunited and refueled

First DAV Patriot Boot Camp event welcomes back alumni bonded by business and service

By Elizabeth DePompei

As the co-founder and CEO of a tech startup, Air Force veteran Robert Thelen knows what it means to work long, hard days.

He's heard no more often than yes, and while he's had plenty of successes, he's familiar with failure, too.

"It's easy to get really, really low on fumes," said Thelen, whose company, Rownd, helps businesses register and retain more users through frictionless sign-in across their websites and apps.

But for Thelen and hundreds of entrepreneurs in the military and veteran community, there's one place they know they can always go to refuel: DAV Patriot Boot Camp.

"This is our recharge. It's our topping off of the tank," Thelen said during the first boot camp of its kind at DAV National Headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky.

"You top the tank off with the fellowship, with the mentorship, with this ability to be around other entrepreneurs, to be around amazing speakers that just inspire you to get back out there and do it again."

Founded in 2012, Patriot Boot Camp provides training, networking and mentorship for current and future business owners in the military and veteran community. More than 1,000 alumni have raised

over \$150 million in venture capital and employ over 1,900 people. DAV acquired the charity in January, significantly expanding the organization's mission to help veterans build meaningful, fulfilling lives after service.

In July, 13 alumni reunited for the first-ever DAV Patriot Boot Camp event. Over the course of two days, participants were connected with investors, subject matter experts and mentors. The boot camp ended with a pitch contest.

Some alumni, including Thelen, returned in different capacities, serving as speakers, panelists and mentors. That spirit of coming back to give back is ingrained in the program's culture and part of its mantra: "Pitch, ask, give." Participants are bonded by sharing their ventures, telling others in their cohort where they need help and sharing what they may be able to do to assist one another.

"What that means is that everyone embraces sharing of their network and their resources when someone else asks for help—without an expectation of something in return," said Taylor McLemore, one of the original founders of Patriot Boot Camp and co-chair of DAV's National Veterans Entrepreneurship Council. "And the beautiful thing that happens is that when everyone does this, what you feel that you've



Top left: Air Force veteran Emille Bryant participated in the very first Patriot Boot Camp in 2012 and again in 2021. Bryant is the founder of go:IKIGAI, a consulting firm that helps small businesses with strategy, vision and leadership.

Top right: Army veteran and alumni Shawn Shivers II brought a new business idea to DAV's premiere event: a crowdsourcing app that will allow truck drivers to communicate with one another ahead of picking up and dropping off deliveries.

Bottom: Air Force veteran and Patriot Boot Camp alumni Robert Thelen is the CEO and co-founder of Rownd, a company that helps businesses register and retain more users through frictionless sign-in across their websites and apps.

given actually doesn't feel that big, but what you receive feels massive.

"And so the sum of the parts is significantly larger than what each individual contributed, and the community as a collective rises."

Army veteran and alumni Shawn Shivers II brought a new business idea to the event: a crowdsourcing app that will allow truck drivers to communicate with one another ahead of picking up and dropping off deliveries. The goal is to create a safer, more efficient experience for drivers.

"I've met people that can help me in legal, I've met people who can help me in funding, and I've met other founders who have been in my shoes," Shivers said. "And they've been able to coach me and mentor me and give me the guidance that I need to be successful."

In the world of DAV Patriot Boot Camp, anyone can ask and anyone can give, whether it's a participant or mentor. Entrepreneurs swap business war stories, share contacts, spread resources and figure out how they can help one another.

"Being an entrepreneur is never a straight line," said Marilyn Jackson, a program alumni, serial entrepreneur, Air Force veteran and CEO of UnderGrid Networks. She also serves on the Entrepreneurship Council. "Reengaging on a return basis is very

important, because you're never going to be where you were before.

"I'm still mentored today, because I think in every phase, there are certain things that you discover that you don't know."

Air Force veteran Emille Bryant participated in the very first Patriot Boot Camp in 2012 and again in 2021. Bryant, the founder of go:IKIGAI—a consulting firm that helps small businesses with strategy, vision and leadership—returned to improve his skills but also to help his fellow alumni.

"I'll do this again. I'd do it again next year," Bryant said. And he may not be alone. The event exceeded a 90% satisfaction score from participants.

Alumni say the keys to creating such a strong fellowship are trust and vulnerability. DAV Patriot Boot Camp is unique in that it is for and by people in the military and veteran community. Participants start with a base understanding of their peers' experiences and values.

"You're in a place where you're both a founder and a veteran, and you can just let all those barriers down," Thelen said. "It's so critical."

The next DAV Patriot Boot Camp will take place Oct. 20–22 at DAV National Headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky. Learn more at patriotbootcamp.org. ■

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Front row, from left: Debra Varner, Daniel Contreras, Joe Parsetich, Nancy Espinosa
Back row, from left: Coleman Nee, John Donovan, Marc Burgess, Andy Marshall, Michael Dobmeier, Cynthia Madison

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Front row, from left: Kathleen Wenthe, Melissa Pierce, Darlene Spence, Paula Raymond; **back row, from left:** Aura-Lee Nicodemus, AnnMarie Hurley, Bunny Clos, Lynn Helms Prosser, Christopher J. Easley, Terry Grabowski

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DAV GOES COUNTRY

Grand Ole Opry's 'Salute the Troops' concert celebrates service members and veterans ahead of Memorial Day

By Elizabeth DePompei

Inside the legendary Opry House in Nashville, Tennessee, DAV joined hundreds of country music fans to honor military service members, veterans and their families with a concert from powerhouse performers like Craig Morgan, Cam, and The War and Treaty.

Leading up to Memorial Day, the Grand Ole Opry's "Salute the Troops" concert was presented by Humana, in partnership with DAV, at country music's most iconic venue.

DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess stood feet away from the famed wooden circle—a piece of history from the original Opry House stage—and accepted a \$20,000 donation to DAV from Humana and USAA.

"It was an honor to accept such a generous gift on behalf of DAV—and at such a storied place in country music history," said Burgess. "We at DAV are endlessly grateful for our partnerships with Humana and USAA and for their unwavering support of DAV's mission. Together, we can better serve disabled veterans and their families, now and for generations to come."

"Humana values the work that DAV does every day to support veterans and their families," said Ed Sandrick, director of Humana's Veterans Channel. "It is rewarding to bring our partners together to help the communities we serve."

Then-DAV National Commander Andy Marshall, also took the stage to introduce the packed Opry House

to the more than century-old organization.

"We hope that those in the audience left the Opry House with a strengthened sense of patriotism and gratitude for what veterans have done and continue to do for this country," Marshall said. "For the veterans who were in the audience that night, we hope it was a reminder that you are not forgotten and you are not alone."

Before the concert kicked off, active-duty service members and veterans, including DAV members, were invited to walk a red carpet led by a drumline and ending with a meet-and-greet with the night's performers. Other artists included Western music and comedy group Riders in the Sky, "The Voice" winner Jake Hoot, Bluegrass group Dailey & Vincent and "I Wish Grandpas Never Died" singer Riley Green. DAV member Stephen Cochran, a combat-disabled Marine and country singer-songwriter, attended the event as a special guest.

The night featured an emotional and soulful rendition of "God Bless America" by The War and Treaty, a husband and wife duo of Army veteran Michael Trotter Jr. and Tanya Trotter. The audience rose to their feet, with some waving small American flags and others proudly placing their right hand over their heart.

"I want to just say to every soldier, every veteran, every family member, thank you," Michael told the audience. "I don't know if anybody ever told you this, but we make the country go 'round and 'round, baby." ■

From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBRA VARNER



Our faith in challenging times

When we look around the world that we live in today, it can seem, at times, as if everything is falling apart.

For some, it raises the age-old question about why bad things happen to good people. For those of us who have seen how fate or chance affect those on the battlefield, it's a viscerally complex conundrum.

Although we ask the question, the answers we get don't always satisfy the reasoning in our minds.

The reality is that, even if you've chosen to do good, evil is present in our broken world, and we must confront what faces us.

Like a retirement account that dried up unexpectedly. Or an unforeseen medical diagnosis. Or a life-altering call in the middle of the night.

These moments and others can leave us feeling hopeless and alone. When life is hard and there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel, the question becomes: Where do I turn? How can I be thankful during tough times?

Lean on your faith. Whatever it is, trust in it and depend on it to carry you through. If you do not believe in a higher power, draw from wherever you have placed your confidence and the strength that lies within you.

We must recognize that we all have a purpose in this world. Your dreams, desires and hopes are obtainable.

You have the emotional and intellectual fortitude to weather the storm. People may fail you, but don't place all your confidence in others. Look up. Then buckle up for the ride, because nothing that comes into your life will last forever.

Remember, "this too shall pass."

These words can encourage us. They can remind us of faith as we lean on them for refuge and use them to bolster our inner strength. Everything in our lives will, at some point, fall or fade away: health, wealth, job security, family and friends. But faith tends to only get stronger.

That's how we can face challenges with confidence and courage to move forward. You did it before when you wore the uniform. Now you can do it again. You've won in the battle. Now win at life.

How can we be thankful during challenging times? Only when we recognize that there is a source of strength and refuge—our only security in this life and the one to come.

For confidential crisis support for veterans and their loved ones, contact the Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988 then press 1, chat online, or text 838255.



**Veterans
Crisis Line**
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37TH ANNUAL



NATIONAL DISABLED
VETERANS
WINTER SPORTS CLINIC



Miracles on a Mountainside

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:

VA Western Colorado HCS
Teresa Parks/WSC
2121 North Ave.
Grand Junction, CO 81501

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

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS NOV. 30

Tax-wise ways to support veterans now without writing a check!

Make a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA at age 70 1/2 or older; reduce your taxable income. Make your gift online by visiting freewill.com/qcd/dav, or contact us for transfer instructions.

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Transfer shares of appreciated stock; eliminate capital gain tax, plus claim a deduction if you itemize. DAV pays no taxes when selling the stock, so its full value helps veterans. Please contact us for transfer instructions; do not sell the stock first.

Leave part of your retirement assets to DAV instead of the IRS! Retirement assets left to nonspouse heirs are heavily taxed, so consider leaving other assets to children or loved ones instead.

For more information about giving to DAV

- Call 800-216-9802, press 1
- Email giftplanning@dav.org
- Return the attached postcard
- Visit davplanmygift.org

GIFTS from the garden

If DAV member Vicente Agor or his wife, Jeanne, gives someone a bag of lemons or a carton of tomatoes, it's one of their signs of trust and connection with that person.

"They're giving you something they've worked for in the garden, and they want to share it with you," said their son, Vicente Jr. "So if they're sharing it with you, you're in. You're a friend. You're part of the 'family.'"

The Agors spend a lot of time in the backyard garden of their Southern California home. For the couple, married for 63 years, it's a place of rest after a lifetime of travel and experiences.

Agor was born in Sarrat, Philippines, in 1930. In the early 1940s, when the Japanese occupied his country, he fled and hid in the rice fields in the mountains for five years. After his return home, he was recruited into the U.S. Coast Guard in 1955 as a steward trainee.

He became a U.S. citizen in 1968 before becoming one of the branch's first Filipino American chief warrant officers in 1969. After 30 years of service, Agor retired from the Coast Guard; had a second career as a surveyor in Orange County, California; and was later elected as a member of the California State Assembly.

Agor said he and his wife made a decision to give a portion of their appreciated assets to DAV because they believe disabled veterans deserve respect and dignity. The mutual fund shares they worked hard to grow over the years will be used to support the DAV programs and advocacy work that they value.

"It makes a difference for veterans in need," said Agor. "It's helping others create a good community and good society."

Not unlike the harvest from their garden given to others, their choice to gift DAV with a portion of their hard-earned assets is a sign of trust and connection.

"DAV gives disabled veterans a voice," Agor said. "They are a champion. They allow us to be included, not excluded." ■

Vicente and Jeanne Agor stand outside their home in the early 1960s. Vicente, who was born in the Philippines, spent 30 years in the Coast Guard before retiring as a chief warrant officer. The Agors have been married for 63 years and currently reside in Southern California.



SHARED FOCUS



Annual orientation draws more than 100 state leaders

By Chris Mayhew

The duty to pick up the mantle of leadership and do everything necessary to achieve mission success is a solemn privilege few are called to each year.

The annual DAV Commanders and Adjutants Association orientation is where the tools, education and field-tested wisdom are shared among state-level adjutants and commanders.

This year's gathering took place in July at DAV National Headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky. Dozens of state-level leaders from across the nation were there to soak up need-to-know tips, procedures and details to empower them to be more effective leaders.

The two days of enrichment were packed with the latest on DAV's numerous, always-evolving services. DAV national staff led the sessions, providing multiple opportunities for attendees to ask questions.

"I thought it was a phenomenal turnout. Everyone enjoyed the new headquarters," said then-Commanders and Adjutants Association President Brian Wilner. "We preached everybody networking, and just watching

everyone networking during the day and night was amazing."

The midsummer event is timed to receive newly elected commanders and newly appointed leaders in other positions when they are still new to the job.

The orientation consistently touched on the pillars of the organization and its history, integrity and professionalism and on DAV's commitment to veterans and their families, Wilner said. In addition to discussing the organization's overarching mission, participants were able to exchange information on best practices and get answers to questions about the responsibilities of state leaders.

"DAV staff was really listening to department representatives, too, making sure they got what they needed to succeed," Wilner said.

"I appreciated the opportunity to have so many of us together, to have that ability to network and to have availability to that information," said Stephen Santos, commander of the Department of Maine.

The best part was having access to staff and other elected leaders, he said.

"Seeing everyone in cubicles and putting names to faces was huge," Santos said. "Seeing so many show up, that was such a win." ■

This summer, National Adjutant Marc Burgess, with the concurrence of then-National Commander Andy Marshall, announced new appointments to his staff.

"I could not be prouder of the caliber of talent we have in DAV's ranks. Not only do these appointments and promotions speak to the initiative, experience and capability each person brings with them, but they also show their commitment to serving our nation's veterans. I'm excited to see them all grow and flourish in their new roles."

—Marc Burgess

Assistant National Employment Director



Yost

Jeremy Yost was appointed assistant national employment director at DAV National Headquarters in Erlanger, Kentucky, effective Sept. 5.

In his new role, Yost will support DAV's efforts to connect veterans with meaningful careers by assisting with job fairs and supporting other efforts that

promote hiring and connect veterans with employers, resources and benefits. He was previously the national service office supervisor of the Washington, D.C., National Service Office.

Yost, an Ohio native, is a combat-disabled Marine Corps veteran who served from 2006 to 2011, attaining the rank of corporal. He served with the Marine Corps Security Force Guard Regiment from 2007 to 2009. He was with 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, from 2009 to 2011, deploying to Marjah, Afghanistan, from 2009 to 2010.

Yost began his DAV career as a national service officer in Cleveland in 2013. He was promoted to assistant supervisor at the DAV national service office in Denver in 2014 and became the assistant supervisor of the DAV national service office in Pittsburgh in 2016. In his previous position in Washington, he led a team of national service officers handling claims and appeals for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits on behalf of veterans and their families.

He is a life member of DAV Chapter 10 in Dumfries, Virginia, and earned an associate degree from Ohio Technical College. Yost and his wife, Tiffany, live in Kentucky with their daughter.

Assistant National Legislative Director



Lewis

Anthony Lewis was promoted to assistant national legislative director effective Aug. 9.

Lewis, an Iowa native, is a service-disabled Navy veteran who served from 1999 to 2003. His service includes a deployment to Afghanistan.

From Washington Headquarters, Lewis provides expertise on issues regarding veterans health care, research, prostheses and homelessness. He advocates to advance legislation and policies critical to disabled veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors, and he works to safeguard current benefits and services from erosion.

Lewis joined DAV's professional staff as a national service officer in the Detroit National Service Office in 2019. He was appointed associate national legislative director in July 2021.

Before joining DAV professionally, Lewis served as a legislative correspondent in the U.S. Senate and as a congressional intern with the U.S. House of Representatives. He has also served as a senior adviser to a state gubernatorial campaign, a veterans outreach coordinator for a presidential campaign and a speechwriter for the National Guard Bureau.

Lewis is a life member of DAV Chapter 10 in Dumfries, Virginia. He holds a bachelor's degree in liberal studies from Iowa State University.

He resides in Virginia with his spouse, Erin, and their three children.

Associate National Legislative Director



Mathis

Naomi Mathis was appointed associate national legislative director effective July 18. She previously served as a national service officer in Bay Pines, Florida.

In her new role at Washington Headquarters, Mathis will support DAV's efforts to advance a broad range of federal

legislative goals and policies to assist injured and ill veterans and their families.

Mathis is a native of Queens, New York, and a combat-disabled Air Force veteran who served from 2000 to 2007. Her service as a command battle management operations specialist included a deployment to Iraq. She attained the rank of staff sergeant before being medically retired.

Mathis began her DAV career as a transition service officer at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi, in 2007. She stayed in that role until joining the national service office in Bay Pines, Florida, as a national service officer apprentice in 2018. She was promoted to her previous role as a national service officer in 2020.

Mathis is a life member of DAV Chapter 13 in St. Petersburg, Florida. She resides with her three children in Virginia.

Associate National Communications Director



Miller

Kevin C. Miller was appointed associate national communications director effective Aug. 1.

In this capacity at Washington Headquarters, he will support a variety of DAV's public relations and internal communications programs, including strategic planning; media relations;

speechwriting; social media; and content creation including press releases, op-eds, magazine articles, e-newsletters and podcasts.

Miller, a California native, is a service-connected disabled veteran who served as an infantryman in the Marine Corps from 2002 to 2006. He served with Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team 1, deploying to Iraq,

Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Djibouti from 2003 to 2005. From 2005 to 2006, he deployed once more to Iraq with 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment.

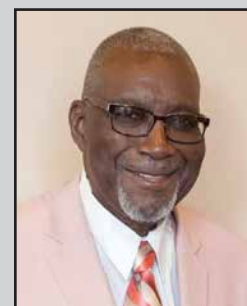
Miller has been active in veterans advocacy for the past decade and primarily focused on education, employment, housing, health care and veterans benefits through his work with Swords to Plowshares and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. He has worked extensively with diverse subpopulations of veterans, including students, seniors, LGBTQ, women and homeless veterans, and has been a Truman National Security Project Defense Council member since 2021.

Miller is a life member of DAV Chapter 16 in American Canyon, California, and has earned a Master of Public Administration degree from San Francisco State University and a bachelor's degree from Cal Poly Humboldt. Miller and his wife, Libby, reside in Silver Spring, Maryland. ■

REMEMBRANCE

Death of retired national service officer

■ Retired DAV National Service Officer Raymond Callaway, a combat-disabled veteran of Vietnam, died on May 18, 2022. He was 76.



Callaway

A Detroit native, Callaway served in the Marine Corps from 1965 to 1967. After being wounded in Vietnam, he returned to Detroit, where he attended Shaw College and Wayne County Community College before joining DAV as a national service officer in April 1973.

Callaway spent the entirety of his 25-year career in Detroit, retiring in February 1999.

He is survived by his wife, Delores Callaway.

"Raymond dedicated his life to a higher purpose in serving others, both as a Marine and a devoted DAV veterans advocate," said DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess. "While we grieve his loss, his legacy endures in the lives of the countless veterans he assisted. Our thoughts and prayers are with Delores, his family and friends. May he rest in peace."

Last World War II Medal of Honor recipient dies

■ Hershel “Woody” Williams, the last surviving World War II Medal of Honor recipient, died June 29. He was 98.

Williams earned the medal on Feb. 23, 1945, for singlehandedly taking out seven enemy bunkers on Iwo Jima with a flamethrower. His actions that day opened a path for his fellow Marines to break through the enemy’s position and seize an advantage.

While fighting on the island, Williams also sustained a shrapnel injury to his left leg and earned the Purple Heart. He refused to be evacuated, though, staying through until U.S. victory on Iwo Jima was declared on March 26, 1945.

Following his service, Williams became a DAV life member and spent 33 years as a veterans counselor for the Department of Veterans Affairs. He was a vocal



Williams

PHOTO BY CPL. BRENDAN CLUSTER, MARINE CORPS

advocate for the importance of veterans organizations until the day he died.

“Without veterans organizations existing in this country, we wouldn’t have near the benefits that we have now,” he told *DAV Magazine* in 2019. “Congress just won’t do it unless we have organizations like DAV pushing for them to do these things.”

In 2010, Williams started the Woody Williams Foundation to honor fallen service

members’ families, known as Gold Star families. The foundation works to place Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments in communities around the country, conducts Gold Star family outreach and awards scholarships to Gold Star children.

“Woody had an unmatched love for the veteran community,” said National Adjutant Marc Burgess. “His genuine desire to help people has touched and inspired me and countless others. He will be missed, but his legacy of service to country and his fellow citizens will carry on for generations to come.”

REUNIONS

ARMY

4TH BATTALION, 39TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION Sept. 22–24, Springfield, MO, Contact: Rich Siedsma, Ph: 417-932-5479, Email: rcsiedsma2@gmail.com

7TH SQUADRON, 17TH AIR CAVALRY “RUTHLESS RIDERS-PALEHORSE” Sept. 21–25, Gatlinburg, TN, Contact: Joe Wirth, Ph: 201-390-5350, Email: joseph.wirth@yahoo.com, Web: ruthlesriders.co

25TH INFANTRY DIVISION ASSOCIATION Sept. 25–Oct. 2, Honolulu, HI, Contact: Sarah Krause, Ph: 215-880-0181, Email: tropicln@aol.com, Web: 25thida.org

249TH ENGINEER BATTALION “BLACK LIONS” Sept. 22–25, Springfield, VA, Contact: Robin Wandell, Ph: 1-660-815-1166, Email: firewoodfriends@hotmail.com

577TH ENGINEER BATTALION Sept. 29–Oct. 3, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Tammy Beene, Ph: 615-293-5422, Email: tammy@knowbettertravel.com

864TH ENGINEER BATTALION (PACEMAKERS) Oct. 19–23, Albuquerque, NM, Contact: Maxine Scripter, Ph: 505-249-8238, Email: mrsanagramssister@hotmail.com

COMPANY D, 2ND BATTALION, 14TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION (1968–1970) Oct. 3–6, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Tom Monahan, Ph: 609-923-6131, Email: tcm327b@comcast.net

TROOP C, 2ND SQUADRON, 17TH AIR CAVALRY REGIMENT, VIETNAM Oct. 19–22, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Emil Hirsch, Email: hirsch.emil@yahoo.com

MARINES

ALL BATTALIONS, FORCE LOGISTICS COMMAND, VIETNAM Sept. 19–23, Niagara Falls, NY, Contact: John O’Conner, Ph: 585-367-2405

BULK FUEL ASSOCIATION Sept. 24–27, Quantico, VA, Contact: Jim Good, Ph: 517-414-1806, Email: jlgood50@hotmail.com

COMPANY K, 3RD BATTALION, 7TH MARINE REGIMENT, VIETNAM Sept. 29–Oct. 3, Myrtle Beach, SC, Contact: Bill Gerke, Ph: 631-433-8575, Email: msggerke@aol.com

MARINE AIR GROUPS, WORLD WAR II-PRESENT

Oct. 11–14, Branson, MO, Contact: Ken Davidson, Email: grasusan9583@sbcglobal.net; or Joseph Mowry, Email: josephmowry@att.net

NAVY

NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION 1-9-10

Oct. 23–27, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Peter Dowd, Ph: 617-688-2512, Email: seabemcb1@yahoo.com, Web: nmcbtn.org

UNITED STATES LST ASSOCIATION Oct. 17–20, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: Angela D’Aloisio (USS Saginaw, LST-1188), Ph: 803-865-5665, Email: support@nehemiahcommunications.com; Don Lerche (USS Litchfield County, LST-901), Ph: 309-530-8710, Email: donlerche@yahoo.com; Mike Kempf (USS Park County, LST-1077), Ph: 317-490-4229, Email: m.w.kempf@sbcglobal.net; Guy Simmons (USS Sutter County, LST-1150), Ph: 978-476-3895, Email: guysimmons@aol.com; Larry Condra (USS Wexford County, LST-1168), Ph: 314-604-5221, Email: Larrygeec@netscape.net; Web: uslst.org

USS ABNAKI (ATF-96) Sept. 19–22, Urbandale, IA, Contact: Nancy Ferber, Ph: 641-745-7077, Email: masonsawyergrma@yahoo.com

USS ALFRED A. CUNNINGHAM (DD-752) Sept. 26–30, San Antonio, TX, Contact: John Keith Johnstone, Ph: 414-762-7587, Email: johnstone752@att.net

USS ANTIETAM (CV/CVA/CVS-36) Sept. 19–23, Mobile, AL, Contact: Sandy Haskin, Ph: 716-326-2510, Email: dchaskin@cecomet.net, Web: ussantietam.com

USS ARNOLD J. ISBELL (DD-859) Sept. 23–26, Albuquerque, NM, Contact: Mickey Lawrence, Ph: 704-985-8724, Email: mickeylawrence869@gmail.com

USS CONCORD (AFS-5) Oct. 25–30, Mobile, AL, Contact: Sherry or Carly, Ph: 719-380-1412, Email: sherry.a.completetereunion@gmail.com, carly.a.completetereunion@gmail.com, Web: a.completetereunion.com/uss-concord

USS LLOYD THOMAS (DD/DDE-764) Sept. 20–24, Dayton, OH, Contact: Scott Sheffer, Ph: 412-951-0588, Email: lloydthomas@atlanticbb.net, Web: dd764.org

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

Web: ussogdenreunion.com

USS SARATOGA ASSOCIATION Oct. 12–16, Washington, DC, Contact: Mark Beecher, Ph: 304-917-1206, Email: bizmark@mercurycat.com, Web: uss-saratoga.com

USS STICKELL (DD-888) Oct. 10–13, Newport, RI, Contact: John F. Welch, Ph: 301-980-0561, Email: johnfwelch44@gmail.com

USS TAYLOR (DD/DDE-468) Oct. 2–6, Norfolk, VA, Contact: James G. O’Neill, Ph: 804 212-8911, Email: oneillfalm@aol.com, Web: sailors.usstaylor468.org

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

USS TOLOVANA (AO-64) Sept. 20–22, Albuquerque, NM, Contact: Okie Baughman, Ph: 321-795-3940, Email: okie_baughman@yahoo.com, Web: usstolovana.org

USS VANCE (DE/DER-387)/USCGC VANCE (W-487) Sept. 18–23, Kissimmee, FL, Contact: Jim Ensey, Ph: 410-442-9839, Web: ussvance.com

USS WALLER (DD/DDE-466) Oct. 9–13, Nashville, TN, Contact: Keith Lemons, Ph: 606-365-2902, Email: schulerlemons98@gmail.com, Web: usswaller.com

USS WILHOITE (DE/DER-397) Sept. 21–24, Branson, MO, Contact: Elisabeth Rider, Ph: 479 280-2776, Email: sailingaway1987@gmail.com, Web: usswilhoite.org

AIR FORCE

612TH, 613TH AND 614TH TACTICAL FIGHTER SQUADRONS, 401ST TACTICAL FIGHTER WING, TORREJÓN AIR BASE, SPAIN Oct. 27–30, Orlando, FL, Web: 613tfs.com

CAM RANH BAY AIR BASE, VIETNAM, 1962–1975 Sept. 29–Oct. 2, Kansas City, MO, Contact: Jimmy White, Ph: 920-609-5672, Email: dicancooka@gmail.com

NUCLEAR WEAPONS TECHNICIANS ASSOCIATION Sept. 25–27, Las Vegas, NV, Contact: Janice Miller, Ph: 325-650-1854, Email: garjans@suddenlink.net

ALL SERVICES

KHE SANH ASSOCIATION Oct. 23–30, Sparks, NV, Contact: Russell Turner, Ph: 636-282-2263, Email: rkt88@prodigy.net



Thank you for your service

Golden Corral and DAV are proud to relaunch the annual Military Appreciation Night on **Monday, Nov. 14, 2022**, between 5 and 9 p.m. Participating Golden Corral restaurants nationwide will welcome our nation's veterans and active-duty military men and women to a free buffet dinner and drink and tons of camaraderie.

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Share your evening! Send photos of your chapter or department at a Military Appreciation Night event to production@dav.org by Nov. 25, and your photo could be selected for the January/February edition of *DAV Magazine*.



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