



National Convention Remarks

Barry Jesinoski

National Headquarters Executive Director

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Thank you Commander. And thanks Marc.

Over the last several years, under the direction of our national adjutant, we have been on a quest to modernize, improve and invigorate our great institution.

There is much going on, as you are all aware. And before I touch on some of the highlights from last year, it's important to me that I thank the many leaders here and in their communities nationwide who've inspired our transformation.

Our DAV is not an individual. It's not one person. It's a special community within the veterans community.

As such, though an individual can accomplish great things through DAV; the success of the whole is dependent on our abilities to work together and leverage our resources toward a common goal.

Of course, we who have been a part of a unique team by serving in the military know this very well.

As we talk about a gradual evolution DAV is making, it's important for all to understand that any changes we are making are ultimately designed to support the whole of our mission. And that extends to you, our members on the front lines, who **are** DAV where you live.

In two years, our organization will turn 100 years old. Over the course of the last century, we have made changes, great and small, to welcome home new generations from wartime service.

The DAV that we know today would be nearly unrecognizable to the charter members of the Disabled American Veterans of the World War. And as we look to the next century, we do so knowing that we need to continually evolve if we are to extend our mission to future generations.

One of my favorite books is titled, Extreme Ownership, and it's written by two former Navy SEALs and combat veterans.

It's a fantastic read that focuses on how leaders can apply lessons learned from hard-fought battles into everyday situations.

When you hear stories of extreme courage and the approach our most elite warriors apply to their lives, it provides a very unique and inspiring perspective we can bring to our work with DAV.

The best leaders, according to the book, do not just take responsibility for their job. They take extreme ownership of everything that impacts their mission.

The book challenges us, as leaders, to take nothing for granted when it comes to our success. If our team is to succeed, it is incumbent on us to provide each member with the resources and guidance they need to fight and win.

And leadership, according to these SEALs, is the single greatest factor in any team's performance. The leader's attitude, service to the team and outlook set the tone.

It is the leader's ultimate responsibility to understand the mission and – *for me this has always been key* – to effectively pass that information along to the rest of the team; **up and down** the chain.

DAV does not work when we are not all working together.

The goal of DAV at the national level is ultimately to empower our advocates and service providers at every level to accomplish our mission.

We are, I assure you, aware that nothing is as impactful to veterans, survivors or spouses as the one-on-one work you do as a service officer, transportation network driver or hospital volunteer.

We know that what often fuels your participation in our mission is the reward that comes from a well-earned comment of thanks. Or, when you see a reluctant frown turn into a smile.

And you never know, when you meet a veteran in need of help, where his or her boots may have been.

DAV continues to be the nationwide leader in providing volunteer assistance to support veterans. Last year, DAV drivers spent 1.5 million hours logging 18.5 million miles in Ford vehicles.

And that's just a part of it. In hospitals, our volunteers donated 1.4 million hours. And in the last decade, through the Local Veterans Assistance Program, volunteers accounted for more than 6 million hours of service.

While these numbers are unbelievable, we know from you that we're just scratching the surface in terms of the unmet needs of our aging, disabled veterans.

To that end, we have launched and are continually working to develop and improve a new tool called Volunteerforveterans.org.

We've heard from you who serve on the frontlines in our fight to keep our country's promise to veterans that there are certain needs you encounter that aren't served through our traditional volunteer programs.

And these needs – that can be as simple as a little help around the house or a night of respite for a caregiver who is otherwise working 24/7 – can make a world of difference in the lives of struggling veterans and their families.

Some of the jobs we might address may be one-time projects that require several hands, but make a huge impact. Like this initiative that an Auxiliary unit spearheaded for the Forward March Campaign.

Volunteer for Veterans dot org could be a game-changing resource that leverages technology to help as many or more veterans than we've ever reached before.

But for it to succeed, we need you – the folks at the tip of the spear – to take Extreme Ownership of the tool and source it with opportunities and volunteers.

And we need your feedback and experience with the site to get it where it needs to be to reach its full potential.

We're also taking a closer look at how we establish recruiting goals. We're looking at ways we can more effectively and efficiently recruit members. We're augmenting your work in the field with digital outreach.

But it's much more challenging for the national organization to recruit members than it is for department and chapter service officers and volunteers who are providing direct assistance. We want to help you make that happen.

But what we know, from talking to you, is that DAV means something a little different for nearly every member.

Last year at convention, we asked many of you a simple question.

Recruiting isn't easy, but it's easier when you reflect on the reasons why you joined and take the time to simply ask a prospective member if they would be willing to join.

In addition to sharing your personal DAV story; your knowledge of member advantages and our work to protect our benefits is crucial.

To maintain our ranks at more than one million members, we're going to need to make this a priority. And we need your commitment.

The more you know about DAV's services and initiatives, the easier it is to recruit.

But more importantly, your awareness of DAV programs makes you a better advocate for those we serve.

One of the important areas where DAV has grown is our employment department. By simply sending veterans you know who are looking for work – or who are under-employed – to jobs dot DAV dot org, you can connect them with resources and events that can significantly change their lives and the lives of their families.

We are a national leader in this area. Last year, with our partners at RecruitMilitary, we hosted more than 140 career fairs and we're sustaining that pace for 2018.

Not only are we connecting veterans with employers, we're doing more to prepare them to succeed.

It's difficult to imagine DAV's progress in this area when you consider our employment program is barely four years old. As our expertise has grown, we've learned that it isn't just veterans who need help connecting with jobs.

The greatest hurdle a veteran may face in his or her job search may be misconceptions employers have about hiring veterans – particularly those who were changed in military service.

For that reason, we've developed the Veteran Advantage: DAV Guide to Hiring and Retaining Veterans with Disabilities.

The guide showcases the benefits, real and intangible, of adding veterans to a company's workforce. It catalogues success stories from leaders like Roush Enterprises, First Data and Comcast/NBC/Universal.

We've shared this already with you on our web site and via social media. And we encourage you to pass it along to prospective employers where you live.

You will likely be hearing about it more in October when we, along with some of our featured partners, officially launch the guide in conjunction with National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

The guide is just one way your DAV is working to enhance the services we provide veterans in need. Across the board we're thinking out of the box.

Our Victories for Veterans public service announcement campaign reached new highs last year. We updated the messages to include some "new" faces that probably aren't new to many of you here today.

Past national commander Armando Albarron headlines another message and shares his victory, which was receiving his benefits and education.

Our messages were featured prominently on Times Square in New York on Veterans Day. We were thrilled to give the public there the opportunity to learn about DAV and create thank you cards, which were distributed to hospitalized veterans.

We hope these PSAs, which have been viewed more than any DAV message in the history of our organization, inspire you. More importantly, we hope they help you reach your goals to serve more veterans in your communities.

We're excited about DAV 5K events scheduled in November for Atlanta, Boston, Cincinnati, Tulsa, Newport News, Virginia and Kemah, Texas near Houston.

These events remain a special and unique way we can connect with the public and generate support for the mission.

Last year, we asked some of the runners who they honored through their participation.

One of the things DAV 5Ks remind us about is the sincere desire our fellow Americans have to honor the service and sacrifices of disabled veterans. Without their good will and trust in our integrity, we would not be able to accomplish our mission.

Volunteer for Veterans dot org is just one way we're using technology to empower the public to give back. In the lead up to Memorial Day, we launched the Victories for Veterans dot org fitness challenge. This allows people to customize and create their own fundraisers to support our mission.

Users can determine how many miles they want to go to help veterans achieve victories through DAV.

We also launched the I Help Veterans dot org site to challenge the public to make a promise to support veterans and educate them on the many ways they can give back.

But like Volunteer for Veterans dot org, without our members taking ownership of these initiatives they cannot succeed. Our success is absolutely dependent on you. We need you to take ownership of these initiatives. We need you to take ownership of these opportunities and promote and support them where you live.

I want to thank you for all you do. And I want to thank my directors and staff at DAV headquarters for the work they perform to honor your service by serving you. It is a great privilege to work alongside so many talented and passionate people.

And, most importantly, I want to thank you – our member-leaders – who carry our banner and make DAV a vital part of your communities. Your power over adversity and commitment to our cause inspire us to push constantly for victories.

May God bless you and your diligent contributions on behalf of our brothers and sisters who served.

Commander, this concludes my presentation.