Thank you Commander.

It’s been an exciting year at national headquarters as we continue to expand our efforts to serve veterans. As we push to innovate and refine our core functions, we’re inspired by our members and volunteers whose service and commitment are the heart and soul of our mission.

As a charity, our impact is largely dependent on the dedicated service of volunteers, so we think a lot about what inspires our members and how we can honor and recognize their services.

Last year, we caught up with a highly distinguished DAV life member: Medal of Honor Recipient Hershel “Woody” Williams.

In 1942, Woody tried to enlist in the Marine Corps but was told that – at five-foot-five – he was too short. But the next year, as the war raged on, the standards changed and soon he was baptized, almost literally, by fire when he was trained in demolitions and how to operate a flame thrower.

The young man from Quiet Dell, West Virginia was on his way to war.

I’ll let Woody, the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient of the Pacific War, tell us more about his experiences and connection with DAV…

Medal of Honor Recipient Video

Woody’s gallant actions on Feb. 23, 1945 didn’t close out his service. He charted a career in the Marine Corps as a warrant officer in the Reserves, and went on to serve his fellow veterans as a counselor at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Today, at 95 years young, he maintains a full dance card supporting his foundation and other charities like DAV.

Woody’s heroism is extraordinary, as were the circumstances that led to his undaunted display of valor. Few who have served in modern times have been so tested.

Yet, if you were to look at a class going through basic training, attending O-C-S or graduating from an academy, it is likely that, in their ranks… under remarkably uncommon circumstances… there is a hero – perhaps several – among them.

There is at least one individual who would show the tenacity, love and devotion required to face the fire and willingly lay down his or her life so “that others may live.”
And I would be willing to bet that many of us in this room have been inspired to continue our own service in honor of someone like Woody Williams…someone who made that kind of sacrifice for us.

One of the greatest privileges DAV offers is meeting so many who – in spite of their disabilities – step forward and sacrifice their time to be a hero to our brothers and sisters who so desperately need our services.

What motivates their service?

What makes them join us?

And how can we adequately recognize what our fleet of volunteers are accomplishing on behalf of our cause?

The hardest thing about our mission is knowing that no matter how hard we try, tragically, too many of our brothers and sisters are left behind. Their needs are too great… Their challenges seem insurmountable… They’re disconnected and alone.

Recently, we were approached by a group of Israeli combat veterans who were pursuing a career in film in the United States. While living in Los Angeles, they were shocked at how many homeless veterans they saw living on the streets.

To raise awareness of their plight, together we developed this message, which we’ll be sharing more in the months ahead through our social networks. We’ll ask for your help pushing it out.

As a warning: it does contain some graphic scenes and the audio may be startling, so please be prepared or turn away or turn down your hearing devices if you find it troubling…

Lost in the City Video

That was called “Lost in the City.”

So many of us here have, on different levels, fought the battle against veteran homelessness. Nearly every service we provide in one form or another is designed to help veterans find justice.

But of course, we couldn’t do it without the understated heroes in this room who dedicate their most valuable resource to the fight to ensure our brothers and sisters aren’t left behind.

That resource, of course, is our time.

Last year, DAV volunteers – veterans, Auxiliary members and patriotic citizens – provided almost 5 million hours to ensuring the health, wellbeing and dignity of those who served.
Of course, no one can do these things alone. If one person was asked to drive the 17.7 million miles transportation network drivers traveled getting veterans to the care they earned last year alone, they’d be on the road 24-hours-a-day for nearly 160 years.

But we’re not going to discount the impact one person can make any more than we’d short the role men like Woody Williams played in turning the tides of battles and inspiring their brothers and sisters to fight and win.

We’re facing a new century of service and advocacy. And our minds are focused on how we can empower our chapters, departments and individuals with the tools you need to meet problems with solutions.

As many of you know, I’m a big fan of the author Jocko Willink, the Navy SEAL who wrote “Extreme Ownership.” One of the great lessons he promotes is the concept of decentralized command.

With training and resources, the idea is that leaders on the ground should be empowered to make as many decisions as possible in a chaotic and changing environment.

While our advocacy and responsibilities at DAV are not close combat, every day on our behalf DAV leaders are meeting new challenges and confronted with situations that require the ability to adapt and overcome.

The needs of veterans are unique, and the way we carry out our mission requires flexibility.

We can’t afford to be caught flat-footed or have people in the field who aren’t prepared to lead and take action when called upon.

By creating new tools and resources, the goal is to empower you—our DAV leaders—at every level.

The dozens of toolkits available on the members section of the website were developed with your success in mind. Many were direct requests from the field.

Whenever possible, instead of taking a top-down approach, we’re focused on an outside-in approach.

We’re thinking of the needs of veterans, chapter leaders, prospective members and volunteers. And we’re developing customizable resources to help you achieve results.

Woody Williams’ assault on those bunkers inspires us as much for his bold heroism as it does for the innovative thinking behind it. He and his fellow Marines used the tools they had to defeat the enemy.

As leaders, your knowledge of our mission and ability to leverage DAV programs and services can make you a hero among us.
You can forever change lives.

Conversely, if you who are called to lead falter...veterans fall through the cracks.

Remember the axiom that knowledge is power. This is true only when knowledge is shared. Be a conduit of information and a mentor to those who will follow in your footsteps.

While we are leaders in volunteerism and employment on a national level – and though our public service announcements made 7.5 billion impressions on television, radio and other media last year alone – we know there is a larger audience of veterans we need to reach.

While we are one million members strong, we know there are 4.8 million service-connected disabled veterans in our nation and probably many more who aren’t getting the compensation they earned.

There is room for us to grow our ranks and extend the reach of our services.

But to do so, we need our leaders at every level to fully understand our organization and be willing at any time to ask a fellow veteran if he or she is eligible and open to joining DAV.

There again, we are providing resources to empower member leaders to bring people on board. Veterans want and deserve to know about what their DAV does; that 85 cents of every dollar we spend goes to program services; and how their dues are used…

**How are DAV membership dues used?**

Our services continue to grow and evolve.

Volunteer-for-Veterans-dot-org remains an ambitious online application with unlimited potential for DAV chapters and individuals who want to donate their time to projects big and small.

We're working with partners like NFL-Hall-of-Famer LaDanian Tomlinson’s *Team America* to connect young people and athletes with volunteer programs.

This is all in addition to our other services that make us the most prolific volunteer organization serving veterans.

We're thinking about our key messages…

What motivates someone to become a DAV Transportation Network driver?

We think, as much as anything, it's the veterans our drivers serve and the special thanks they get when they do. So, why not let a veteran do the asking?

**Transportation network video**

This and all the videos we produce are tools for you to help extend the reach of our message. And that extends the reach of our services. So please share them.
Passing along information about our employment program and resources is another way you can serve your fellow veterans.

Again this year, we'll hold 145 traditional and virtual career fairs and we’re working directly with employers to encourage and support their employment efforts. The disabled veterans hiring guide is evolving as we get feedback and support from corporate America and we’ll relaunch the resource this Fall.

In the short time since we've launched our employment department, our growing thought-leadership is being recognized on a national level. DAV was recently placed on the Department of Labor’s Advisory Committee for Veteran Employment, Training and Employer Outreach where we have a well-earned seat at the table.

Internally, we’re improving our systems and making critical decisions to ensure we get off on the right foot for the next century of service.

By the way, you can look for more resources and toolkits to prepare for the centennial before the close of the year at D-A-V-dot-org.

There is more to come, but our future success depends on leaders like you in this very room.

The most important tool in your arsenal is your knowledge of our mission and ability to convey and inspire action among your fellow veterans.

Your most important quality is your integrity.

By remaining true to our mission and behaving in a way that is beyond reproach, you inspire others through your example.

You are the “Woody Williamses” of our community. And the way you lead from the front and recognize and inspire your members will build a legacy that will carry us well into the future.

And when it comes to the future, we’re looking ahead… We’re evaluating changing trends in charitable giving. We’re recruiting corporations to become a part of our mission and helping them reach out to their customers to support our cause.

We’re developing new tools to allow individuals and small groups to raise funds on our behalf. If someone wants to donate their birthday to supporting disabled veterans, we want to help them do so. If they want to run a marathon or ride a unicycle across a continent to honor DAV, we are more than willing to help them in their quest.

We’re accepting vehicle donations and incentivizing our state and local leaders to promote that program by sharing revenue that you can put to work through local service initiatives.
But as we develop new streams of support, we have to be extremely vigilant in how we manage the existing ones.

Guardian Society members support DAV through legacy gifts like annuities and bequests. That is an extremely special and meaningful way to remember our fellow veterans and we thank and honor those individuals for making our mission the cause for which they will be eternally remembered.

Please give them a round of applause.

Thank you. And thanks to everyone here and at home who contribute to DAV in so many ways.

May God bless each and every one of you.

And may he help us in our pursuit of justice for brave men and women who’ve sacrificed for our nation.

Commander, this concludes my report.