

**ANNUAL REPORT OF JIM MARSZALEK  
NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR  
TO THE DAV 93RD NATIONAL CONVENTION  
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA  
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NATIONAL COMMANDER JOSEPH W. JOHNSTON, NATIONAL OFFICERS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, AND DELEGATES TO THE 93RD NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS:

***“Accountability”***

***“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”***

***~ Abraham Lincoln***

As National Service Director, it is my sincere pleasure to present to the delegates my report on the endeavors and achievements of the National Service Department. This annual report provides details concerning the DAV National Service Programs during 2013 and our impact in bringing the promise of hope and success into the lives of countless veterans, service members and their families.

Since that fateful Christmas night in 1919 when Judge Marx held a party, which later resulted in the birth of DAV, we have stood united in our mission of fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served. Through experience, DAV has long understood the vital importance of establishing a strong voice to advocate for the rights and interest of injured and ill veterans and their beneficiaries. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines accountability as *“An obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one’s actions.”* With this being said, DAV has instilled both change and action throughout 2013, and has willingly maintained the responsibility in ensuring our government is held accountable in providing sound health care and wide-ranging benefits for our nation’s heroes.

*“Fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served”* is not just a catchphrase - it is the fundamental responsibility of our organization. Our effective communication and influence are required to instill our strategic plan with innovative solutions in today’s technological society. Throughout 2013, the National Service Department maintained accountability by taking necessary approaches in ensuring injured and ill veterans are provided a service built on quality with the amenity of timeliness.

On February 17, 2013, during an Information Seminar conducted by National Service Officers (NSOs) in Fairfax, Virginia, DAV filed the very first electronic claim on behalf of a veteran. The VA believes this represents the future of disability claims processing, one that will replace an antiquated system that has buried VA regional offices under piles of paper. The consequence of having paper files instead of electronic is delayed decisions, which are keeping veterans from receiving earned benefits within a timely manner. By the end of December, DAV was on the forefront of paving the foundation into the future by submitting approximately 4,700 electronic claims on behalf of clients; more than any other Veterans Service Organization in existence.

In March of 2013, DAV provided a greater emphasis on submitting Fully Developed Claims (FDCs). At that time, roughly 3.4 percent of all claims being submitted by DAV were fully developed. With initiative and dedication from our NSOs, more than 27 percent of all claims being received were fully developed by the end of December of 2013. This emphasis, based on our knowledge and determination, resulted in roughly 41,068 veterans receiving benefits within months instead of a year or longer.

In October of 2013, our government shut down as the result of the new budget not being passed by Congress. In less than 36 hours from that shut down, our NSOs, along with Department and Chapter members, set up site locations in every state throughout the nation to continue serving veterans, service members and their families. In a time of great need when the government was not open for business, DAV was there.

Throughout 2013, our NSOs, Departments and local Chapters, provided disaster relief during damaging natural disasters in New York, Illinois, Colorado, Hawaii, Indiana, Oklahoma and Missouri. As a result, more than \$241,000 in direct relief assistance was provided to veterans, service members and their families to aid them in times of great need.

During the course of DAV's history, we have continually adapted to the ever-changing needs of our nation's veterans, their families and survivors. As our business practices continue to evolve based upon the rapidly changing advancements in technology, we will do everything possible to ensure all of our country's injured and ill veterans, as well as their families, receive the rights and benefits they have earned.

As we advance forward into the future, DAV continues to understand the vital importance of being a strong and influential advocate for the rights of injured and ill veterans, DAV members and their families. Throughout the past year, we have fought for the rights of our nation's heroes and their families, and this report will provide specific examples of DAV's committed efforts in ensuring their voices did not go unheard.

### **NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM**

Fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served is accomplished through service. Service has always been the mainstay of DAV. Our largest endeavor in fulfilling DAV's mission is our National Service Program. In 100 offices throughout the United States and in Puerto Rico, we employ a corps of approximately 277 NSOs and 34 Transition Service Officers (TSOs) who counsel and represent veterans and their families with claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense and other government agencies.

Veterans need not be members to take advantage of our assistance, which is provided free of charge. With outlays of \$47,060,644 in 2013, these direct services make up the largest item in our budget for program activities. Between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2013, our NSOs and TSOs, who themselves defended the American way of life by way of military service, represented veterans and their families with more than 330,000 claims for VA benefits, obtaining nearly \$3.3 billion in new and retroactive benefits.

NSOs function as attorneys in fact, assisting injured heroes and their families in filing claims for VA compensation, rehabilitation and education programs, pensions, death benefits, employment and training programs. They provide free services such as information seminars and counseling, and community outreach activities such as the Mobile Service Office (MSO) program. NSOs also represent veterans and

active duty service men and women before Discharge Review Boards, Boards for Correction of Military Records, Physical Evaluation Boards, the Transition Goals Planning Service (GPS) and other official panels.

### **NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICER TRAINING PROGRAMS**

DAV National Service Officers continually train throughout their careers so that they are cognizant of the changes in all laws and regulations affecting veterans' benefits. This constant training assures that all DAV NSOs are at the forefront of veterans' advocacy. Our NSOs are highly trained professionals and skilled experts in developing and prosecuting veterans' claims through in-depth reviews of medical histories, in conjunction with application of current law and regulations. They also review rating board decisions, informing veterans and their families of the appeals process and of their appellate rights.

The extensive preparation required for these essential services provided by NSOs begins with a 16-month On-the-Job Training Program, which provides the foundation for new trainees. Trainees are instructed by tenured supervisory NSOs. The National Service staff at National Service and Legislative Headquarters administers and monitors the program and the instructors.

An NSO's training does not stop after completing 16 months of initial training. In fact training never stops because the laws, regulations and policies, which govern veterans' benefits, continue to change and grow in complexity. That's why equipping our NSOs with state-of-the-art computers and keeping their cutting-edge advocacy skills up to date is of paramount importance. DAV is the only veterans' service organization to have a training program certified for college credit by the American Council on Education.

In addition to these training programs, supervisory staff and selected NSOs from field offices across the country receive specialized instruction in management and leadership development. The goal is to produce the most highly trained representatives possible to serve veterans and their families.

### **NATIONAL APPEALS OFFICE**

The Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA/Board) is the highest appellate level within the VA responsible for the final decision concerning entitlement to veterans' benefits. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, the BVA decided 41,910 cases in which more than 96 percent of the claims before the board involved VA compensation benefits issues. Our highly skilled National Appeals Officers serve appellants in the preparation of written briefs for BVA review and conduct formal hearings before Veterans' Law Judges. We maintain the largest staff of any advocacy group, representing almost 29 percent of all cases decided by the BVA in FY 13. Approximately 74% of the appeals represented by DAV at the BVA resulted in original decisions being overturned or remanded to the regional office for additional development and re-adjudication.

### **JUDICIAL APPEALS**

DAV continues its *pro bono* representation program for clients seeking review in the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (Court). Through the DAV National Appeals Office, in 2013, these *pro bono* attorneys extended an offer of free representation before the veteran's court in 1,468 appeals which had been denied by the BVA, and provided personal representation at the Court in over 1,160 of those cases. Since the inception of DAV's *pro bono* program before the federal courts, *pro bono* attorneys have made offers of free representation in more than 5,218 cases and provided free representation before the court in approximately 3,420 cases.

The substantial growth of this program would not have been possible without the coordinated efforts of DAV and two top-notch law firms – Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner, LLP of

Washington, D.C., and Chisholm, Chisholm & Kilpatrick of Providence, Rhode Island. Robert Chisholm (of the Chisholm firm) and Ron Smith (of Finnegan) are two of the nation's most accomplished members of the veterans bar, and DAV is pleased to have them in prominent roles in our enlarged program at the Court. By this time next year, we hope to be able to report still another substantial increase in the number of veterans, dependents and survivors served by DAV through this venue.

### **TRANSITION SERVICE PROGRAM**

For the defenders of freedom making the all-important transition back into civilian life, DAV participates in Transition Assistance and GPS programs.

Our TSOs provide benefits counseling and assistance to service members filing initial claims for VA benefits at more than 100 military installations throughout the country. By filing compensation claims at separation centers where service medical records and examination facilities are readily available, we are able to provide prompt service to these future veterans. Over the last year, our TSOs conducted 1,390 formal presentations to 54,220 transitioning service members. During that same time they filed 19,898 claims for VA benefits. Counsel and representation for active duty service men and women during their transition was provided through the military's disability evaluation system. We devoted in excess of \$2.1 million to this program in 2013.

### **MOBILE SERVICE OFFICE PROGRAM**

The Mobile Service Office Program continues to reach out to veterans in their own communities. Not all veterans are able to visit a DAV office due to distance, transportation, health or other reasons. By literally putting our service offices on the road, assisting veterans where they live, DAV is increasing their access to benefits. With 10 specially equipped MSOs visiting communities across the country, this outreach effort generates a considerable amount of claims work from those veterans who may not otherwise have the opportunity to seek assistance at our National Service Offices. During 2013, our MSOs traveled more than 89,708 miles, visiting 832 cities and towns. Our NSOs interviewed 20,075 veterans and other potential claimants. The Harley-Davidson Foundation in August 2010 pledged a second \$1 million over four years to partner with DAV to maintain the Harley's Heroes® program. During 2013, the MSOs participated in 127 days of activities for 112 individual dealerships. Nearly \$1.1 million was expended for the Mobile Service Office program in 2013.

### **OUTREACH PROGRAMS**

The National Service Department has the cooperation, support and assistance of Department and Chapter Service Officers across the country. Each receives the training and information necessary to assist those we serve. Our Department and Chapter Service Officer Certification Training Program guarantee the vitality and growth of our local service programs. This provides an environment where our Hospital Service Coordinators, Department and Chapter Service Officers and volunteers work together for the common goal of service to our defenders of freedom. In 2013, DAV trained and certified 1,638 Department and Chapter Service Officers in 31 states.

During 2013, we conducted 37 Information Seminars at various Chapters across the country, with 4,044 individuals in attendance. These Information Seminars provide the opportunity for veterans to discuss VA benefits with our NSOs in their own community, giving Chapters an opportunity to recruit new members and encourage their involvement.

Since 2006, DAV NSOs have offered services at other community-based events, including participation with state and county fairs, air shows, Major League Baseball, the National Football League and NASCAR.

## **WOMEN VETERANS**

Serving in record numbers, women make up nearly one-fifth of today's active duty, Guard and Reserve military forces. Over 150 service women have made the ultimate sacrifice in combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thousands more were critically wounded by visible and invisible injuries. Once they have served, women veterans are enrolling in VA health care in unprecedented numbers, and they are seeking a wide array of VA benefits and services they have fully earned. As a consequence VA at all levels is experiencing a large influx of new women veterans, who are in need of gender-specific services that VA traditionally did not provide.

VA acknowledges the need to make an internal cultural change to improve and expand services for women veterans and to tailor VA programs to meet their needs. DAV is helping to make that change in fostering greater awareness of women veterans and working cooperatively with VA officials through our legislative, communications and foundation resources, providing testimony before Congress, and by conducting a variety of forums and discussion groups in Washington, D.C., and throughout the nation. DAV has recently commissioned a special report focused on the challenges and barriers women veterans face as they transition from active military service to civilian life. The report will also examine existing government programs designed to help them return to duty, post deployment or to civilian life. Based on the findings of the Women Veterans in Transition Report, DAV will address defined gaps in services by making recommendations for improvements in federal laws, regulations and policies.

DAV continues our determined advocacy for women and is the leading veteran's service organization in promoting the needs of women veterans at the National, Department and Chapter levels. In addition, DAV's own Women's Advisory Committee, made up of women veterans from across the country, meets annually at our National Convention and Mid-Winter Conference to help set our agenda on women and their needs. To ensure women's unique experiences and sacrifices in serving our nation in uniform are properly recognized, DAV actively seeks out and recruits women veterans to add to the 63 women now serving in our NSO and TSO corps.

## **EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM**

Our National Service Program, in conjunction with our National Legislative Program and newly established Employment Department, is responsible for the organization's employment-related programs and works alongside the Department of Labor, the VA, the Office of Personnel Management, Congress and other government agencies to ensure our injured and ill veterans are treated fairly and equitably in the work force. Our Employment Department empowers veterans by overseeing special employment initiatives and working with private and public sector entities to develop and build partnerships to address joblessness and underemployment.

Historically, our injured and ill heroes have not fared as well as non-injured or ill veterans and other workers in the job market. Our primary goal is to seek legislation and policies to enhance programs and services provided by the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, private and public sector entities, the Office of Personnel Management and other government agencies. Through active involvement and oversight, we are empowering our veterans to live high-quality and fulfilled lives in the job market.

## **HOMELESS VETERANS**

Homelessness has been a constant presence in America for many years. Since the early 1980s, homelessness has been a regular focus of media interest and a topic of policy debate and remains one of America's most complicated and important social issues.

DAV's Homeless Veterans Initiative seeks legislation and policies to enhance programs and services to help homeless veterans break the cycle of poverty and isolation and move from the streets to self-sufficiency. Your National Service Officers and Department and Chapter members have participated in Stand Downs for homeless veterans nationwide, and on behalf of the National Service Staff, I extend thanks for all that each of you do to make a significant difference in the lives of homeless veterans and their families across the nation.

## **RETIREMENTS**

DAV NSOs uphold the great principles of this organization by ensuring our defenders of freedom and their families have legal representation and a voice when filing claims with the VA for benefits. NSOs understand their role as veterans' advocates and are committed to DAV's mission of service for those who sacrificed in our defense.

DAV NSOs are service-connected disabled veterans from all walks of life. They uphold the great principles of this organization and work to ensure that veterans and their families have legal representation and a voice when filing claims to the VA for benefits. NSOs understand their role as veterans' advocates and are dedicated to DAV's mission of service and improving the livelihood of veterans disabled during military service.

The experienced professional NSOs who have retired have left a legacy of commitment and dedication of serving their comrades as advocates for fair and equitable benefits. These individuals served their country in her hour of need and returned home, many with deep scars of war, to work on behalf of others disabled due to their military service. From the National Service Staff, we wish each of these NSOs a long and healthy retirement. We appreciate their efforts in support of our cause. For the record, one NSO retired this past year, Kent Hoffman.

## **REMEMBERING OUR FALLEN**

We call to remembrance our National Service Officers who passed on this year. As the nation's veteran population rapidly declines -- the attrition takes its toll on our NSO ranks. These NSOs have provided services and aided in fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served for scores of injured and ill veterans, their dependents and survivors. We shall recall and preserve the legacy of the following departed NSOs: William Gearhart, Kenneth Grunewald and Jerry Steelman.

## **CONCLUSION**

At this time, I wish to recognize the leadership, professionalism and personal sacrifices made by our National Commander Joseph Johnston and all of the National Line Officers; members of the National Executive Committee; the National Finance Committee; and the Officers and Board of Directors for both the National Service Foundation and Charitable Service Trust. I thank National Adjutant Marc Burgess for his continued leadership, vision and direction.

Our success is a reflection of their tireless efforts to inspire and ensure quality and professionalism in all we do. They have kept us focused on what it takes to bring to fruition our mission of service to injured and ill veterans and their families. In addition, I express my gratitude to National Headquarters for their support

of our goals and programs during the past year. I also want to thank Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine and National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. As a result of their continued support and contribution, their knowledge and passion for the National Service Program time after time has strengthened everything we have done this past year.

Appreciation is extended to the National Service Department staff members with whom I have the pleasure of working: Assistant National Service Directors, Scott Trimarchi, Chad Moos, John Maki, Justin Hart and Steven Wolf; and our staff of devoted Service Support Specialists, Emily Hall, Amanda Evans, Angela D’Aguilar-Kauffin, Queen Blanks, and Tyese McCall.

Our successes are not single-handed. We receive the dedicated and capable assistance and cooperation of the DAV Auxiliary, Department and Chapter Service Officers, and Hospital Service Coordinators. Thank you all for your support.

Last and most important of all, I wish to thank our loyal and dedicated corps of National Service Officers, Transition Service Officers and support staff members who advocate on behalf of America’s injured and ill veterans, and their families. The National Service Department will continue to ensure all of our country’s defenders of the American way of life and their families receive free, professional assistance in obtaining VA and other government benefits earned through their service.