

The Eagle

Voluntary Service
Central Office Newsletter

#VASummerofSERVICE

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* Header photo from the 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games courtesy of the US Department of Veterans Affairs on Flickr

Leaders in Volunteer Management

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Culture of Service

VA's **Summer of Service** has provided an extraordinary opportunity for VAVS. This campaign has brought daily recognition of the role of volunteers, produced stories saluting our vital partnerships and emphasized the importance of the community in caring for America's Veterans.

For decades, VAVS has sought to more effectively gauge the impact of our work. We have always known that the number of volunteers and hours of service were not the only measures of success. And while the stories of volunteer heroics and selfless acts of service were significant and soul-stirring, they did not go far enough in underscoring the true necessity of our programs and in highlighting how VAVS reflects the culture of VA.

Displaying a CULTURE OF SERVICE - it is in this area that I believe has been the most overlooked virtue of mighty VAVS. It is through VAVS that VA can define its capacity for growing a culture of service and building a community of advocates. It is in this area where I have noted subtle, but meaningful progress. Here's how:

- 1) Business/Service line leaders from many parts of VA are requesting VAVS briefings to better understand who we are and how we contribute to the mission of VA.
- 2) VA's leadership development programs are incorporating Veteran service projects

as key components to their curriculum, utilizing VAVS to identify volunteer activities for a deeper connection to VA's first mission of caring for Veterans.

- 3) Proactively, senior officials are making inquiries regarding the strategic utilization of volunteers and community partners in solving important challenges for VA.
- 4) A growing understanding of VAVS' role and impact in outreach efforts.
- 5) The development of offices such as VHA Office of Community Engagement and Secretary's Office of Public-Private Partnership willing to collaborate with VAVS.

The last item on this list may surprise you a bit. *It surprised me* as I considered my thoughts for this month's edition, but I have changed my position on those organizations focused on partnerships since **Summer of Service** kicked off. I was reluctant to embrace their existence early on and I admit to feeling threatened by their development. I mistakenly believed that they sought to undermine the history and tradition of VAVS and marginalize our role in the organization. I further thought that the development of these offices reflected a lack of confidence in our program. I have come to a different way of thinking on this, mainly because of the collaboration that has been in place for **Summer of Service**. I also have a better grasp on the Secretary's vision and a deepening recognition that VAVS *cannot be all things to all people*.

I have been extremely proud of some of the efforts and new national partnerships that have emerged since these offices came about. Many have provided phenomenal services to Veterans and unique opportunities to help these individuals, as well as connect large organizations to VA on a grand scale that VAVS might not have been able to do as swiftly or efficiently. I am in no way diminishing our abilities or capabilities, but I have seen the extraordinary long hours, varied tasks and roles performed by our team at VACO and in the field, and I realized that we simply can't do it all by ourselves.

I cannot begin to talk about the heroic deeds of the VAVS field staff and all that they do for the local facilities. Their impact on their organizations does not go unnoticed and for so many-- they are over-extended. Nationally, VAVS has been "at the table" on these partnership discussions and we continually seek to ensure that any volunteer or donation component of these new relationships is executed according to our policies and ensures the appropriate field involvement to carry out activities at the local level. There are, however, some of these partnerships that do not involve volunteers or donations, so VAVS can breathe a sigh of relief that these new offices can forge ahead and leave us to the business of nurturing our volunteers and those relationships that have been built with community organizations over the years.

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You see, I am no longer threatened. VAVS has already proven itself over the past 70 years. We have 131,000 volunteers to show for our efforts and over 7,400 community groups who were introduced to the noble mission of caring for Veterans long ago through VAVS. We are continually building new partnerships, evolving to the changing demographic of our Veteran population, and possess the agility to shape our programs for the best benefit of the local organizations. I am more convinced than ever that our strategic plan focused on **Leadership, Collaboration, and Impact** is the best way forward and I am more confident than ever that the dynamic corps of VAVS staff, NAC members, and VA volunteers are positioned to model what a true culture of service is all about. We're doing great work... and picking up champions along the way! Thank you for continuing the journey to providing "the best care anywhere" for our Veterans.

-- SABRINA C. CLARK

35TH NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES - BIG CITY, BIG WHEELS, BIG HEARTS



Bobbie Scoggins, Chief, Voluntary Service, North Texas Healthcare System; Tina McDaniel, Voluntary Service Specialist, Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center; Daniel Thouvenot, Voluntary Service Specialist, Dallas VAMC

The 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWCG) took place in Dallas, Texas June 21-26. More than 600 Veterans from every state and even the United Kingdom took place in the events this year. In Voluntary Service we know large scale events like the Wheelchair Games don't happen without the support of dedicated volunteers and sponsors and the event in



Dallas was no exception. Led by the North Texas Healthcare System Voluntary Service team of Bobbie Scoggins, Tina McDaniel, and Daniel Thouvenot, more than 2,550 volunteers clad in bright orange served an estimated 17,708 hours during the games.



From bowling and boccia to quad rugby and archery, every venue and every event was staffed by friendly faced volunteers eager to give back and serve those who served our country.



The 36th National Veterans Wheelchair Games kick-off June 27, 2016 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Check out <http://wheelchairgames.org/> to find out how you can get involved in this exciting event!

★ National Veterans Wheelchair Games Volunteer Experience Spotlight

Submitted by: Will Clark, Youth Volunteer

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is an event I will remember forever. The things I saw at the event inspired me to see the alternative options in life instead of dwell on the situations I get into. Whether it was an athlete falling out of their chair and getting themselves back up, or the child of an athlete who came and gave them a hug after their game, I see everything in my life differently and I owe it all to the Veteran athletes that participated in the games. I would most definitely recommend volunteering at these wheelchair games to anybody because of the effect it had on me and the great things I saw and learned while I was at this event.



Will Clark with Secretary McDonald and another NVWCG Youth Volunteer

The thing I liked the most about the games was the will from the athletes to not give up at any time. It is so easy for people to give up when things get difficult but those who don't let failure become an option are the strongest. The mental and physical strength shown by these athletes is incredible. Most people don't get the opportunity to volunteer or even see and watch an event like this, and I'm more than glad I'm one of the few people to say I was a part of this inspiring event. I look forward to volunteering at another wheelchair games event in the future.





HUMAN HUG PROJECT

Submitted by Candace Bradley, Voluntary Service Specialist, Lexington VAMC, Lexington, KY and Nikki Baker, Associate Chief, Public & Community Relations, VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, Los Angeles, CA

Recently the Lexington VA Medical Center and the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System received visits from some very special volunteers - Ian Michael and Gino and Erin Greganti from Human Hug Project. Ian and Gino are both combat Veterans that served in the United States Marine Corps. In 2003, Ian was ordered to Kuwait and shortly after was involved with the invasion of Iraq. Gino served in Afghanistan in 2001, in immediate response to 9/11.



Human Hug Project in Lexington

It is their mission at Human Hug Project to go out and give hugs (give love and hopefully get love in return) to our Veterans and their loved ones versus sitting at home suffocating under the pressure of their PTSD symptoms. They understand they are not alone in that fight. Many Veterans are diagnosed with PTSD every year.

Gino's path to healing began when a VA social worker gave him a hug. "The power of love rests in an embrace. We need to love our Veterans back to health and happiness. It's a small action with a powerful *reaction*," Ian explained.



After hearing Gino's story, Ian decided to team up with Gino and his wife, Erin, and they would hug at VA Hospitals across the country.



Human Hug Project in Los Angeles

"So far the reception has been amazing. They have shared laughter, love, and stories with so many Veterans. It is nice to see the hallways filled with joy and laughter", says Michael.

Of their visit to the Greater Los Angeles, Ian said, "We left your facility feeling inspired more than ever to continue doing what we do. The health of our Veterans is very important to you and equally important to us. Gino and I both suffer from PTSD and would never of thought that "hugging" would be our calling. Hugs have brought so much laughter and love into our lives. Each hug allows us to become open and vulnerable and the connection made with other people is healing. It is very important to our project to share love and gratitude to all of our Vets!"

Human Hug Project has hugged over 2,500 people since the journey began earlier this year, and they plan to visit all 155 VA hospitals.



To learn more about Human Hug Project follow the hashtag **#freehugproject** on social media.

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/humanhugproject>

Instagram & Twitter: @humanhugproject

VA BOSTON HCS VOLUNTEER NAMED 2015 OUTSTANDING FEDERAL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Submitted by Richard Leeman, Assistant Chief, Voluntary Service, VA Boston HS, Boston, MA

Ms. Sheila Ciulla, longtime volunteer with the VA Boston Healthcare System, has been selected as the 2015 Outstanding Federal Volunteer of the year by the Greater Boston Federal Executive Board. Sheila is a sales Vice President for Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare and when she is not spending long days and nights on the road, she can be found volunteering on the Hospice Unit, helping to make dying Veterans last wishes come true, or fund raising for VA Boston Adaptive Sports.

Sheila has also assisted in providing adaptive ski lessons for Disabled Veterans and has held the role of team leader during past VA New England Summer/Winter Sports Clinics. As she has stated many times in the past "I just love working with Veterans." We are all truly honored to work with her and to witness first hand her willingness to help Veterans.



NEWLY APPOINTED UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH GREETS VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS



L to R: Dr. David J. Shulkin, Under Secretary for Health; Robert Wallace, Assistant Adjutant General and Executive Director, Washington Office -VFW; Louis Celli, Director, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation - The American Legion; Sherman Gillums, Deputy Executive Director, PVA (seated); Stewart Hickey, National Executive Director for AMVETS; Garry Augustine, Executive Director, Washington Headquarters - DAV; Rick Weidman, Director for Policy and Gov't Affairs - VVA



RICHMOND VA HOSTS VETERAN RESOURCE FAIR

Submitted by Jason Gray, Chief, Voluntary Service, Hunter Holmes McGuire VAMC, Richmond, VA

The Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia kicked off the *Summer of Service* in a big way by hosting a Veteran Resource Fair in their multipurpose room. In cooperation with community partners, Altria and the law firm of Hunton and Williams, the Voluntary Service team in Richmond provided an event that provided legal, therapeutic, medical, housing, and educational resources from over 40 organizations to Veterans and their families.



Over 120 Volunteers staffed the Resource Fair and helped provide lunch to the more than 350 Veterans in attendance.

Attendees were treated to a full lunch served by McGuire volunteers and a presentation by the Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon. The 24-man drill team based out of Washington, D.C. showed compassion for the Veterans, as well as superior precision with their rifles, and spent time talking with attendees after their performance.



CINCINNATI VAMC FORGES CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP FOR VETERAN IMPACT DAY

Submitted by Tracy Butts, Chief, Voluntary Service, Cincinnati VAMC, Cincinnati, OH



Volunteers from Deloitte & Touche

The Cincinnati VAMC Volunteer Service recently partnered with Deloitte & Touche to host a successful *Summer of Service*, Veteran Impact Day. Thirteen enthusiastic Deloitte & Touche employees armed with shovels, mulch, and food entered the grounds anxious to start into their volunteer assignments. Those assignments ranged from beautifying the Fisher House grounds, socializing with inpatient Veterans, sharing healthy refreshments with outpatient Veterans, and providing a cookout with a corn hole activity. During the two-hour cookout several members sat with Veterans and shared military experiences.

At the conclusion of their day, they were given a tour of several locations - Women's Clinic, Fisher House, and Spinal Cord Injury Clinic at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. In talking with Jessica Mays, Audit Manager for Deloitte & Touche, she shared that the members were extremely grateful to have the opportunity to support Veterans and would be interested in developing another impactful day for next June.

One nice surprise was the visit by Congressmen Brad Wenstrump who graciously thanked Deloitte & Touche employee volunteers for offering their time, talent and resources in support of Veterans at the VA Medical Center.

NEW YORK STUDENTS GIVE BACK TO VETERANS

Submitted by Robin Johnson, Chief, Voluntary Service, Canandaigua VAMC, Canandaigua, NY

South Seneca is a small rural School District on the East side of Seneca Lake in the Finger Lakes area of Central New York. The middle school children there have quite often sent hand-made greeting cards to the Veterans at the Canandaigua VAMC, whether it was at Christmas, Veterans Day, or other Holidays of recognition.

This summer a contingent of 68 students from the school District came to visit the Canandaigua VA; as much as an appreciation of our Veterans as it was an educational experience for them. They were accompanied by school staff headed by their English Language Arts Teacher and Veteran supporter, Gertrude Shaffer.



The Student's visit began at 9:45 am when they were greeted in the Auditorium by Robin Johnson, Chief of Canandaigua Voluntary Services. After a welcome and introductions, the children were treated to a presentation by VA Homeless Program Staffer Dawn Hessenthaler, about the growing plight of Homeless Veterans and what the VA is trying to do to help these individuals. Tammy Franklin, Womens Veteran Program Manager at the VA, then talked to the students about the needs of Women Veterans, and the growing services for Women Veterans that the VA has taken on in recent years.

Shortly after the presentations, a group of Veterans were brought to the Auditorium for a meet and Greet with the students, and refreshments were served while the students and the Veterans got to know each other.

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It was then time for the students to shine, as the young group made a formal presentation to the Homeless program of over 300 pounds of household-type items that they had collected over the last several months in a "Support our Veterans" campaign they had conducted. It was an awe-inspiring moment that will no doubt last forever for these students, and will remain in the hearts of our Veterans and staff in attendance for a long time to come.



The group was then led on a short tour of the facility before their departure. It may seem at times that children are wrapped up in their own world and respect for others is a thing of the past, but for this group of 68 students and their supporters back home, nothing could be further from the truth. They have shown that they are an example for all to follow, and their allegiance to Veterans will be long remembered at this VA facility.

UAW-GM/CHEVROLET DONATION GRANTS WISHES FOR VETERANS

Submitted by Ronni Miller, Chief, Voluntary Service, Durham VAMC, Durham, NC

The Durham VA Medical Center has been looking for a solution to a transportation problem for over 5 years and their prayers were finally answered by the United Auto Workers, General Motors, and Chevrolet in

the form of a wheelchair accessible van for their Recreation Therapy Department. Due to limited resources, the department has struggled to provide recreational and social activities to inpatient Veterans, especially residents of the Community Living Center. Simple trips that could brighten the day of a Veteran, like a trip to a ball game, movie, or restaurant, were difficult to manage and the staff often had to resort to renting a van for these excursions.



In response to this need, UAW-GM and Chevrolet presented the Durham VAMC with a specially modified, 15 passenger van with a high-top roof and wheelchair lift to be used by Recreation Therapy as well as Veterans in other special programs such as Mental Health Intensive Care Management, Medical Foster Care, Blinded Veterans Rehabilitation, and Women Veterans Leisure Group. Donations like this one from UAW-GM and Chevrolet have been helping Veterans across the country stay engaged in their communities since 2012.

This donation will also greatly impact the Hospice program at the Durham VAMC, allowing staff to grant special wishes for Veterans who may not have another day to wait for available transportation. That gift means more to the staff and Veterans than they can possibly express.



Durham CLC resident, Karl Ahrens, cuts the ribbon on the newly donated van.

AMERICAN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION HONORS DETROIT PROGRAM

Submitted by Bill Browning, Chief, Volunteer and Community Relations, Detroit VAMC, Detroit, MI



Steve Munafo (center) receives the AHA HAVE Award for the Detroit VA Jams-For-Vets Program.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) recently presented one of its four Hospital Awards for Volunteer Excellence (HAVE) to the Jams-For-Vets program at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit, Michigan. Receiving recognition in the **In-Service Hospital Volunteer Programs** category, this collaborative endeavor between Voluntary Service in Detroit has been helping Veterans in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) since 2012.

Jams-For-Vets, headed by musician and volunteer Steve Munafo, uses a music therapy approach to help Veterans overcome severe mental health issues and learn coping skills to manage their emotions. Steve has worked with the staff psychologist to teach music skills to Veterans and formed them into a group known as *Victory Band* that performs on the first Monday of the month in the medical center atrium. Veterans in the program have seen improvement in their ability to work in a team, integrate into the community with confidence, and even help break the stigma of mental illness and no longer allow it to define them.





CALIFORNIA QUILTER HONORS IRAQ WAR VETERANS WHO GAVE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

Submitted by Maria Almes, Chief, Voluntary Service, VA Northern California HCS, Mather, CA



Ron and Jennifer Ralphs

Jennifer Ralphs spent over five years making five service quilts reflecting the names of 4,486 fallen soldiers in the Iraq War. Ms. Ralphs wanted to donate these quilts to VA Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS), but wasn't sure what could be done with them. The Chief of Voluntary Services, Ms. Maria Almes, contacted BPOE Lodge 2484's Exalted Ruler, Rick Swinford who jumped to action. John Garrett, Elks member, responded to Rick's request for help and donated his time and skill framing these beautiful quilts with the help of his wife Susie. Ms. Ralphs' dream of sharing this honor for Veterans has come true. These Service Quilts will be now mounted on walls of the Sacramento VA Medical Center.



"With the utmost respect, I have quilted the names of the brave men and women who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country" Jennifer shared with members of Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, (BPOE) Lodge 2484 who were in attendance when these quilts were officially passed back to VANCHCS.

VA2K CELEBRATES 5TH YEAR OF WALKING AND ROLLING

Increased participation at more VA locations resulted in more than \$324,000 in donations being made of needed items such as clothing, toiletry items, food and water for homeless Veterans, during the fifth annual VA2K Walk & Roll held on May 20, 2015.

More than 23,500 VA employees and community members participated in the event which was held at 209 VA locations nationwide, up from more than 170 last year.



VA Hudson Valley's VA2K Event

All VA administrations including VA Central Office, Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration, and National Cemetery Administration participated in the event which is designed to promote healthy physical activity for VA employees.

The event included a 2 kilometer (1.24 mile) walk/roll and other health-related events. This year's theme was "We must take care of ourselves so that we can take better care of our Veterans."



More photographs from this year's event can be found on the VA2K 2015 Flickr page at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/veteranshealth/sets/72157653545193006>

BATH VAVS PAYS FINAL RESPECTS

Submitted by Lynn Dinehart, Chief, Voluntary Service, Bath VAMC, Bath, NY



Lynn Dinehart with Bath volunteers, Kathie Kent and Richard Walters

As the Chief of Voluntary Service in Bath, New York, Lynn Dinehart is often called on to assist Veterans in numerous ways and, as everyone in Voluntary Service knows, no request is too obscure or too difficult when it comes to serving Veterans. One particular call that comes all too often from the Bath National Cemetery has been embraced by Lynn, her staff, and volunteers as just another opportunity to serve. When Lynn learns that a burial is scheduled for a Veteran without family she will round up volunteers and staff to stand in for these Veteran funerals at a moments notice - taking the charge that "No Veteran Dies Alone" one step further, Lynn makes sure that no Veteran is laid to rest alone either.

69TH NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING INFORMATION AVAILABLE

Didn't make it to the NAC this year? Not able to take all the notes you wanted on the presentations? No worries - everything is available on our VAVS website. From presentations to the conference booklet, check the NAC page here: <http://www.volunteer.va.gov/NAC.asp> for anything you might have missed.

★ CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF ★

- Sabrina C. Clark, Director
- Mary Jo Munnally, Lead Staff Assistant
- Tony Burtley, Voluntary Service Specialist
- Christine Feeser, Program Specialist
- Tyrone Green, Program Analyst
- Ginny Hoover, Voluntary Service Specialist
- Kevin Stanford, Acting VSO Liaison/VHA