



Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission

2008-2009

Bruno T. Williamson
Chairman

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

Mission Statement: As proud possessors of a priceless heritage our mission to our veterans is clear. The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission (V.A. & R) starts, sponsors and participates in programs and services that enhance the lives of our veterans and their families. Through our efforts we must work to help those who need assistance to restore them to a normal functioning life. Be it physically, mentally, socially, or vocationally.

VA&R Committee

National Chairman

Bruno T. Williamson
405 E. Belle Ave.
Rantoul, Il 61866
Phone: 217-417-6463
Email: nellazecca@mchsi.com

Vice Chairman & East Division

Thomas Kurk
145 Buffalo St.
Apt 32
Canandaigua, NY. 14424-1037
Email: tekngk@aol.com

Central Division Chairman

Mark Tansel
71 Sunset Manor
Mooreville, IN 46158
Email: tansel@sbcglobal.net

Mid West Division

David Mennel
6040 Dryden Rd
Dryden, MI 48428
Email: davidmennel@yahoo.com

Southern Division

Ronnie Grist
2291 Seedling Ln NE
Lawrenceville, GA 30343
Email: Rfgrist@gtga.gov

Western Division

Patrick Gryskiewicz
W5387 Row Rd
Merrill, WI 54452-8763
Email: gryskiewicz@msn.com

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Program Outline

I. Volunteer Services

II. Support Military Troops

- A. USO
- B. Squadron/Individual Support (phone cards, Care Packages)
- C. POW/MIA Issues

III. Collaborative Program Efforts

- A. National Veterans Assistance Day
- B. Fisher House
- C. Veterans Suicide Prevention
- D. Bowling for Veterans League
- E. N.E.A.D.S.

IV. Supporting American Legion and Auxiliary Programs

- A. Heroes to Hometown
- B. Homeless Veterans Initiatives
- C. Creative Arts Festival
- D. Missing in America Project

V. National Awards

- A. VAVS Member of the Year
- B. Best overall participation in the VA&R program based on the annual report form.
 - 1. Detachment
 - 2. District
 - 3. Squadron

VI. VA&R Resources

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

I. Volunteer Services

VA Medical Center (VAMC) & Outpatient Facilities

Volunteer service provided for a veteran within a VAMC or outpatient clinic. The VAVS representative fills a vital role at VA facilities across the country; enabling facility and program administrators to stretch their resources with our guaranteed aid and assistance so they can concentrate on the delivery of core services.

Goal: Have a VAVS representative in each Detachment by promoting aggressive recruitment throughout all Detachments.

Tactics:

1. Encourage Detachment VA&R chairmen and Detachment Commanders to develop strong working relationships with the VAMC Director in each medical center.
2. Promote participation by the assigned VAVS Representative in the VAVS system.
3. Promote special emphasis on methods of recruiting, retaining, motivating and recognizing volunteers.
4. Promote Veteran-related activities that fulfill volunteer service requirements for high school students by offering them volunteer opportunities through the Sons of The American Legion. Assist VAVS Representatives and Deputies to work with VAVS Chief in creating a Youth Service Project for student volunteers.

Best Practices:

- * Set up Volunteer Recruitment tables at all activities and meetings participated in by the Sons of the American Legion.
- * Offer volunteer opportunities on Detachment and Squadron Websites, newsletters and other types of communication.
- * Encourage participation in ward parties and special holiday activities.

II. Support Military Troops

A. USO

Tactics:

1. Encourage promotion and donations to the USO.
2. Create partnerships with USO affiliates and assist with volunteer assistance and program initiatives.

Best Practice: Promote the USO facility in the local area and assist with donations and volunteerism needed at the facility. Involve local businesses and individuals in partnerships that can foster a long relationship of donations and volunteers for the program.

B. Squadron/Individual Support (phone cards, care packages...)

Goal: Provide squadrons and individuals information and activities to support active duty military.

Tactic:

Create partnerships between The American Legion Family to promote special events to support active duty troops.

Best Practice: Providing support to military personnel is a clear part of the mission of The American Legion Family. Sending phone cards to pastoral care at Landstuhl or care packages containing much needed items are always appreciated. Put official send off dates and Welcome Home dates in newsletters, websites and encourage everyone in your Legion Family to attend.

C. POW/MIA Issues

Goal: Support the initiatives of the National League of Families as they continue to speak out and exert maximum pressure on foreign governments to make a full accounting of America's POW/MIA's.

Tactics:

1. Promote observances of POW/MIA Day September 19, 2008 in local communities.
2. Draw attention to the draped chair at every Squadron, county, district and Detachment meeting.

Best Practices: Support programs designed to bring the POW/MIA issue to the attention of all citizens as to not let anyone forget the sacrifice they made for our country. Engage the local community to fully recognize POW/MIA Day with media coverage. Involve the entire American Legion Family to host an event on POW/MIA Day such as a breakfast with guest speakers and show the POW/MIA table ceremony.

III. Collaborative Program Efforts

A. National Veterans Assistance Day

Goal: Show respect for this grateful Nation's veterans and the role they have had in securing the freedoms we enjoy.

Tactics:

1. Promote May 16, 2009 (the third Saturday in May) as National Veterans Assistance Day in local communities at city hall, county court houses, State Capitols, schools and veterans facilities.
2. Encourage participation within your Post, Unit and Squadron with special events designed to honor these brave men and women.
3. Obtain the National Veterans Assistance Day poster from National and hang in Post home, nursing homes, other veterans halls. Publicize your events in the media, websites and newsletters.

Best Practices:

Seek out individuals needing help getting to appointments, getting groceries, yard work, simple home or car repairs, take them prepared meals, honor them on this special day in some small way. Involve the squadron in repairs or clean up around the Post or hold a special dinner or breakfast for these veterans. Visit VA nursing homes and local nursing homes and sit and talk with them. Publish thank you letters for service in the newspapers, websites and newsletters.

B. Fisher House

Goal: Provide volunteer resources and increase annual monetary donation, as reported by Fisher House by 20%.

Tactics:

1. Continue to financially support the Fisher House program through Detachment and Squadron donations.
2. Encourage Squadron members to volunteer at facilities in their areas.
3. Set up information display at Detachment, District and Squadron meetings to increase awareness of the mission and needs of Fisher House.

Best Practices:

Utilize the CD and Poster from National to set up informational displays to increase awareness of the mission and needs of the Fisher House. In addition to money, squadrons can provide support to the families by furnishing gas cards, or gift cards to enable them to have some sense of individuality while living at the facility. Volunteer to baby sit, run errands, or work around the grounds putting up and taking down seasonal displays.

C. Veteran's Suicide Prevention

Goal: Spread information about veterans at risk for suicide and what action squadron members can take to help stop this tragedy.

Tactics:

1. Inform and promote awareness of the signs of veterans at high risk for suicide.
2. Every VA Medical center has a suicide prevention phone line and squadron members should be encouraged to help answer phones and refer to the correct Counselor.

Best Practice:

Inform the local American Legion Family about the warning signs of a veteran at high risk for suicide and share the information with the community, friends and families of veterans. VA medical centers are required to have suicide hotlines and they need volunteers to help answer the phones, not as counselors but to help direct calls where they need to go.

D. Bowling Veterans League

Goal: Spread awareness of this Bowling League and increase participation in their mission.

Tactics:

1. Squadrons hold tournaments to raise funds and awareness of the VA programs.
2. Encourage local American Legion Families to participate.

Best Practices:

Hold a bowling tournament for the veterans or to raise money for the veterans. Send o a portable carpet lane to the troops overseas to help combat the boredom.

D. National Education for Assistance Dog Service (NEADS)

Goal: Each Detachment sponsor a Canines for Combat Veterans dog and increase awareness of the need for these dogs and how members can help.

Tactics:

1. Provide comprehensive resources to each Detachment for the program.
2. Promote the NEADS program and specifically the Canines for Combat Veterans part, aggressively at the Sons of The American Legion meetings on Websites, media, and newsletters.

Best Practices:

Initiate an information site on the National Sons of The American Legion website. Hand our comprehensive resource material to the NEC's to take back to each Detachment. Encourage Squadron members to become out of state representatives.

IV. Support American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary Programs

A. Heroes to Hometown

Goal: Help disabled veterans coming home from VA medical centers integrate back into their communities and still receive the care they need to recover.

Tactics:

1. Increase awareness of this program and mission.
2. Encourage members of the American Legion Family to become “Buddies”

Best Practices

Hand out brochures to American Legion Family members and study the program And ways that you can help. Develop a plan so that when called upon you can smoothly swing into action on behalf of the veteran.

B. Homeless Veteran Initiatives

Goal: Work collaboratively with the VA Homeless Veterans Program, The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans to encourage active participation in homeless veterans initiatives.

Tactics:

1. Work with the VA Homeless Veterans Program (HVP) Office to disseminate information related to Project CHALENG (Homeless Veterans Outreach).
2. Seek out and support Homeless Veterans Shelters.

Best Practices:

Adopt a Homeless Veteran’s Shelter in your community or send support to one in your Detachment. Support them with toiletry items, clothing, books and cleaning supplies.

C. Creative Arts Festival

Goal: Promotes the annual competition that recognizes the progress and recovery made through recreation therapy, and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation’s veterans after disability or life crisis.

Tactics:

1. Encourage VAVS Representatives to publicize and promote getting volunteers for local events in their respective centers.
2. Publicize the time and place on the National Webpage with a link to the Creative Arts Festival.
3. Increase Detachment contributions.

Best Practices:

Encourage Detachments to provide information to Squadrons requesting them to seek out information about local events and encourage them to sponsor participants on the local level.

Encourage Detachments to offer award incentives to Squadrons who contribute to The Creative Arts Festival.

D. Missing in America Project

Goal: to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremains of American veterans.

Tactics:

1. Have squadron Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Chairmen visit their local funeral homes for any unidentified cremains.
2. Have local Squadrons help with the inter costs.
3. Provide links to Missing in America Project on Detachment Webpages.

Best Practices: Encourage Detachments to provide information in newsletters, websites, or in committee meetings on Missing in America Project. Encourage members to visit their local funeral homes for cremains and help to inter them with full military honors.

V. VA&R Awards and Scholarships**A. Charles B Rigsby Volunteer of the Year Award**

A plaque and SAL cap will be presented to the Volunteer of the Year at the National Convention, this award, will be based on the Rehabilitation Commission judging reports submitted to the National Rehabilitation Commission prior to the National Convention. The report is on the National Webpage in a downloadable form and should be reproduced by Detachment for their squadrons. Rehabilitation and assistance to veterans should be reported on an outstanding individual, if applicable, from any Squadron. Squadrons should submit their nominees to be judged at Detachment Conventions. Detachments will select one application from their respective State during their Detachment Convention and send it to the National Adjutant, Sons of The American Legion, P.O.Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206. The National Winner will be chosen at the National Convention.

B. Kirby Kepler Memorial Award

Presented for the best Squadron Rehabilitation report. A laminated plaque of the award is presented to the winning Squadron, and may be retained permanently by the Squadron.

C. Allen I. O'Brian Memorial Award

Presented for the best District Rehabilitation report. A laminated plaque of the award is presented to the winning District and may be retained by the District.

D. Earl Webster Memorial Award

Presented for the best Detachment Rehabilitation report. A laminated plaque of the award is presented to the winning Detachment and may be retained permanently by the Detachment.

E. James H. Parke Memorial Fund Scholarship

The Sons will contribute \$1,000 annually to the James H Parke Memorial Fund Scholarship from the National SAL VA&R Commission. For more information on this scholarship and eligibility criteria contact the VA Medical Center in your region.

VI. Resources

These resources direct you to programs and services related to the objectives of National VA&R Committee.

Resources Provided through The American Legion:

A System Worth Saving

Initiated by TAL through resolution 206, the SWS Task Force visits VA Medical Center facilities; Vet Centers and other VA managed facilities recording first-hand observations and responses to pre-determined evaluation criteria. This information is compiled into an annual report for congress and the administration and supports TAL position for a number of related topics including mandatory funding for the System.

Brochures Available from TAL

- Gulf War Benefits and Programs
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Vietnam Veterans - Guide to Agent Orange Benefits
- What to do Before a Veteran Die
- Women Veterans - Identifying Risk, Services and Prevention

Heroes to Hometowns

TAL is an active participant in this program that matches severely injured members of the military with individuals in their community that can provide the injured soldier and his/her family with a support network to assist with their everyday needs. For more information go to <http://www.legion.org/veterans> or call (703) 908-6250.

Family Support Network

Connects the families of deployed service members with The American Legion. Legionnaires provide a broad range of services to help families cope with unique challenges of deployment. For more information call (800) 504-4098 or go to familysupport@legion.org.

Resources Provided through the Auxiliary:

VA&R Guide (Formally Guide for Volunteers)

Explains the importance of volunteers to the VA Medical Center Program And summarizes additional volunteer opportunities. Available for free download at www.legion-aux/var/gfv.

Resources Presented by Topic (in alphabetical order):

23rd Annual Golden Age Games

The premier senior adaptive rehabilitation program in the United States, and the only national multi-event sports and recreation seniors' competition program designed to improve the quality of life for all older veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. 2009 in Birmingham, AL, June 1-5, 2009. www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov for coverage on the 2008 games.

23rd Annual Wheelchair Games

This is a multi-event sports and rehabilitation program for military service veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, amputations, or certain neurological problems. Attracting more than 500 athletes each year, this is the largest annual wheelchair sports event. 2009 Richmond VA, July 7-11. www.wheelchairgames.va.gov for coverage on the 2008 clinic.

23rd Annual Winter Sports Clinic

Each year, the clinic brings together veterans with a wide range of disabilities, to challenge themselves both physically and mentally. During the course of the six day event, participants are introduced to a number of activities such as adaptive skiing, rock climbing, scuba diving, sled hockey and snowmobiling. 2009 games in Snowmass, CO, March 29-April 3, 2009 www.wintersportsclinic.va.gov for coverage on the 2008 clinic.

America Supports You

Connects home front groups and troops overseas. Comprehensive list of groups and offers a variety of ways to help deployed troops, injured troops and their families. Check www.americasupportsyou.mil

Bowling for Veterans League

Holds bowling tournaments as fund raisers for veterans programs. Sends carpeted lanes to troops overseas for recreation. www.bowlforveterans.org

Comfort Quilts

To contribute quilt squares, assemble a quilt kit or make a monetary donation go to, www.marinecomfortquilts.us

Creative Arts Festival

This program is a celebration and grand finale stage and art show that is the culmination of talent competitions in music, drama, dance, creative writing, and art for veterans treated in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national health care system. Approximately 130 veterans will exhibit their artwork or perform musical, dance, dramatic or original writing selections in a gala variety show. 2008 in Loma Linda CA, Oct 20-27; 2009 2009 in San Antonio TX, Oct 4-11. Go to www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov for coverage on the 2007 program.

Fisher House

The Fisher House™ program is a unique private-public partnership that supports America's military in their time of need. Fisher House™ Foundation donates "comfort homes," built on grounds of major military and VA medical centers. These homes enable family members to be close to a loved one at the most stressful times - during the hospitalization for an unexpected illness, disease, or injury. Go to www.fisherhouse.org or call (888) 294-8560.

Homeless Initiatives

1. **VA Homeless Veterans Program Office.** Peter Dougherty Director.
<http://www.1.va.gov.homeless/>. (202) 273-5774.
2. **National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.** A non-profit Organization dedicate to helping homeless veterans gain control of their lives and return to society as productive citizens.
www.nchv.org (800) VET-HELP
3. **Project CHALENG** was first initiated in 1994 when the VA launched Project CHALENG for Veterans, an innovative program designed to enhance the continuum of care for homeless veterans provided by the local VA and its surrounding community service agencies.
www.va.gov/homeless. Click on CHALENG

Landstuhl Hospital Care Project

The Landstuhl Hospital Care Project is a non-profit organization that provides comfort and relief items for military members who become sick, injured, or wounded from service in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. Donated items are distributed to military patients at Lanstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, the largest American military hospital outside the U.S. and to field hospitals in Afghanistan and Iraq.
www.landstuhlhospitalcareproject.org

Military.com

This site is full of information pertinent to military families. A variety of free online newsletters are offered. www.military.com

Military One Source

Funded by the Department of Defense, Military One Source is the online resource for active and recently retired members of the military. This site also provides wonderful resources for those serving these families.
www.militaryonesource.com

Missing in America Project

This is a non-profit organization dedicated to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed Cremains of American veterans. www.miap.us

National Military Appreciation Month

For the most comprehensive list of what's planned for activities during the month of May to celebrate this month go to www.nmam.org

National Education for Assistance Dog Service (NEADS)

Canines for Combat Veterans. Trains service dogs to help veterans with hearing loss or amputees. www.neads.org

National Veterans Assistance Day

Connects the Squadron member with a veteran in the community that may need help with chores around the house. National Veterans Assistance Day is May 16, 2009.

POW/MIA Resources

The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia was incorporated in the District of Columbia on May 28, 1970. Voting membership is comprised solely of wives, children, parents and other close relatives of Americans who were or are listed as prisoners of war, missing in action, killed in action/body not recovered and returned Vietnam War U.S. POWs. www.pow-miafamilies.org (703) 465-7432.

The Defense Prisoner or War/Missing Personnel Office mission is to lead the national effort to account for personnel missing as the result of hostile action and establish the most favorable conditions to recover those who become isolated in harm's way. <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo//index/htm>

Suicide Prevention

Identifies veterans at high risk for suicide and informs citizens of the warning signs. (800) 273-8255.

USO

The USO is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide morale, welfare and recreation-type services to our men and women in uniform. The original intent of Congress - and enduring style of USO delivery - is to represent the American people by extending a touch of home to the military. The USO currently operates more than 120 centers worldwide including seven mobile canteens located in the continental United States and overseas. www.uso.org

Related Web Sites:

1. Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents:
www.va.gov/opa/vadocs/fedben/pdf
2. National Center for PTSD: <http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/index.jsp>
3. History of Veterans Day: www.va.gov/vetsday
4. Enrollment in VA's Health Care System: www.va.gov/elig
5. VBA Regional Offices: <http://www.1.va.gov/directory>
6. Survivor Benefits: www.vba.va.gov/survivors
7. Tricare Fact Information: www.tricare.osd.mil
8. VA Center Facilities: <http://www.1.va.gov/directory>