

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

Vol. 26 Issue 03

Veteran's News that needs to be Read FALL 2016



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REDEDICATION & RELIGHTING OF THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL PLAZA

Please join us for the rededication of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Plaza following the successful repairs of damages caused by Hurricane Sandy.

Thursday, October 15, 2016 at 5:30 PM - 55 Water Street, New York, NY

There will be a reception of food, drink & music on the raised area following the ceremony.

Please rsvp to me at this email address: waterproofer1124@aol.com

Joseph G Graham - President - VVA Chapter #126

IN MEMORIAM

May Their Souls Rest in Peace

VVA Chapter #82

Vincent Dueñas

VVA Chapter #20.

Peter Galle

William F. Jarosinski

Richard L. King

Steve Pratt

Brian Wirpsa





VVA-NYSC Meeting Dates 2017

January 21 April 22

June 17 September 16

On-Line INTERCHANGE is the Bi-monthly publication of the VVA-NYSC. Comments and contributions are encouraged and can be sent to:

VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of this organization. Individuals with different viewpoints and opinions are invited to submit them to the Chapter by the **deadline** of the **Third Friday of each month**. Editor reserves the right to edit for length, grammar and reject any libelous or obscene material.

NEWSPAPER STAFF

EDITOR: Francisco Muñiz III

E-MAIL: VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM



VVA-NYSC ON-LINE INTERCHANGE EMAIL ADDRESS: VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM Phone: 516.712.4914

OFFICERS	NAME	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
President	Ned D. Foote	518.338.8147	Nedvva@roadrunner.com
I st Vice President	Grant T. Coates		gcoates@stny.rr.com
Secretary	Francisco Muñiz III	516.712.4914	secretary@nyvietnamvets.org
Treasurer	Nicholas DeLeo		ndeleo52@yahoo.com

DISTRICT DIRECTORS	NAME	EMAIL ADDRESS
CENTRAL DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Nicholas Valenti	npvalent64@yahoo.com
EASTERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Sam Hall	Sammyjh49@yahoo.com
SOUTHERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Joe Ingino	biggie77@verizon.net
WESTERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Mike Walker	mw12345@verizon.net

Liaisons	NAME	E-MAIL
Region II Director	Ted Wilkinson	Yankeeted@aol.com
Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA)	Kathleen Penfield	Kathysitka@yahoo.com
VA Volunteer Services (VAVS)	Cherie Steers	

Legislative Director	Bing Markee	bmarkee@nyvietnamvets.org
Sergeant of Arms	Bob Joyce	JBobF4/44@aol.com

SERVICE OFFICER PROGRAM	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Dolores Garcia—Chief SO		Dolores.GarciaI@va.gov

President's Report

Ned D. Foote

We just had our last meeting for 2016. Although, the Executive Board will be meeting in December to work on next year's goals.

Overall, we had a good year of meetings and financial stability. We had guest speakers at every meeting and at our last meeting we all heard about Hep C that many of you are unaware that you may have. But you would, if you and Chapter delegates attend State Council meetings. Ask the delegates from your Chapter, who do attend, the what, who, how of HEP C are all about. These delegates have the responsibility of informing your Chapter members what transpires at each VVA-New York State Council meeting. They should be informing you of motions that were passed as well what committees have reported on.

Major changes have come about or are in the process in our Service Officer program at the Manhattan VA office. I explained about our Service Officer Ben Weisbroth retiring as our VVA-NYSC Service Officer from the VA Regional Office. We are in process of closing that office down but it is not as simple as shutting the door.

We have over 2,000 files (claims) of our Veterans. They cannot be thrown away. So what we need to do is to scan all them into a computer program. We had to hire someone to do that work but the most difficult part is with removable of staples from the sheets in order to scan. She has done 51,000 pages so far.

We are also very lucky to have Sam Hall, a VVA Service Office, and former County Veterans Director, just retired, to help us with these claims. We needed to notify 2500 Veterans about the change and inform them what to do with any their claim they may have or claims that are still open. We cannot represent them and they need to find a Service Officer from another organization who can follow up on their VA claims. Letters have been sent out to all who had a claim within the system.

For those claims that are in the appeal process we are obligated to continue and this is where Sam comes in. He has already done a couple of hearings and we may have another 45 cases or more that might be have appeals which might take many more years down the road before a hearing.

Now, Sam lives 3 hours from the Manhattan VARO so it is a stretch for him but thankfully he is willing to do this. Also, this is costing a lot of money (transportation, room & board, etc.) and so far the burden has been on VVA-NYSC.

We do hope to have this process (scanning) done by the end of the year. Now, this does not affect our Buffalo Office at this time. Service Officer Dee Garcia has been doing tremendous work up there but she, too, is getting overwhelmed with claims. We have twelve County Service Officers sending claims to her and she is the only person dealing with these claims.

We have been able to provide a part time clerk for her, Jennifer, and she has been a giant help for Dee. We hope she can continue but again all this cost money. What I'm trying to convey is so many of you think the State Council and or National does nothing for you. Think again. All of you who are enjoying your compen-

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Cont. from pg. 3)

sation, who do you, think got it for you? Those who receive comp for diabetes, cancer comp for Agent Orange illnesses or so many other conditions, who do you, think gets legislation passed? Need to get off soap box.

Okay, not done bitching. Every year since VVA became an organization we as Chapters have to provide a Financial and Election report. These are mandated by the IRS and our Charter. Our National Constitution and VVA-NYSC By-Laws mandates the times this needs to be done. Read the VVA National Constitution and VVA-NYSC By-Laws at our web site located at WWW.NYVIETNAMVETS.ORG

Over the years we have made these forms as simple as we can. Finance report should take no more than a few hours to do. Election is less time than that. But every year I have to pull teeth to get all of you to do it. February 28th is end of fiscal year. April you are required to hold elections. You have till July 15th to file these reports to National and State Council.

Why would we have eight Chapters suspended because they did not file? If you need help ASK! Five Chapters are now back on board as soon as they received letter of suspension, from National, they immediately sent reports. Two chapters might not ever get them as they might be facing closure and a third Chapter wants to fight me on this even though it is not my rules and if they do not want to comply so be it. Bye. I will no longer hold hands of Chapters. We are heading in direction of VVA not being around forever and I have too much to do keeping and helping other Chapters survive.

Now, I can stop. I get frustrated at times but I move on. Dates for next year will be posted on the VVA-NYSC web site. Hotel rules have changed and will be included in this edition.

Also as you read this On-Line VVA Interchange, please let us know how you like or dislike this publication. Francisco wants another award for the Interchange but we need to know you are reading it and what you think. Keep checking website also as we try to have current info on, www.nyvietnamvets.org.

Enough! Enjoy the Holidays and not being politically correct MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Editor's Note: President is working too hard! He meant to say, HAPPY HALLOWEEN & HAPPY THANKS-GIVING! There is still one more EDITION!

A SHORT HISTORY OF VVA

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families.

By the late 1970's, it was clear the established veterans groups had failed to make a priority of the issues of concern to Vietnam veterans. As a result, a vacuum existed within the nation's legislative and public agenda. In January 1978, a small group of Vietnam veteran activists came to Washington, D.C., searching for allies to support the creation of an advocacy organization devoted exclusively to the needs of Vietnam veterans. VVA, initially known as the Council of Vietnam Veterans, began its work. At the end of its first year of operation in 1979, the total assets were \$46,506.

Council members believed that if the nation's attention was focused on the specific needs of Vietnam veterans, a grateful nation would quickly take remedial steps. However, despite persuasive arguments before Congress, which were amplified by highly supportive editorials printed in many leading American newspapers, they failed to win even a single legislative victory to bring new and needed programs into creation to help Vietnam veterans and their families.

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It soon became apparent that arguments couched simply in terms of morality, equity, and justices were not enough. The U.S. Congress would respond to the legitimate needs of Vietnam veterans only if the organization professing to represent them had political strength. In this case, strength translated into numbers which meant membership. By the summer of 1979, the Council of Vietnam Veterans had transformed into Vietnam Veterans of America, a veterans service organization made up of, and devoted to, Vietnam veterans.

Hindered by the lack of substantial funding for development, the growth of membership was at first slow. The big breakthrough came when the American hostages were returned from Iran in January 1981. It was as if America went through an emotional catharsis that put the issues of the Vietnam era on the table for public discussion. The question was asked why parades for the hostages but not for Vietnam veterans? Many veterans complained about the lack of recognition and appreciation for past national service. Vietnam-era veterans wanted action in the form of programs that would place the latest generation of veterans on the same footing as veterans from previous wars.

Membership grew steadily, and for the first time, VVA secured significant contributions. The combination of the public's willingness to talk about the Vietnam War and the basic issues that it raised, as well as the veterans themselves coming forward, was augmented by the nation's dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in November 1982. The week-long activities rekindled a sense of brotherhood among the veterans and a feeling that they shared an experience that was too significant to ignore.

In 1983, VVA took a significant step by founding Vietnam Veterans of America Legal Services (VVALS) to provide assistance to veterans seeking benefits and services from the government. By working under the theory that a veteran representative should be an advocate for the veteran rather than simply a facilitator, VVALS quickly established itself as the most competent and aggressive legal-assistance program available to veterans. VVALS published the most comprehensive manual ever developed for veteran service representatives, and in 1985, VVALS wrote the widely acclaimed *Viet Vet Survival Guide* – over 150,000 copies of which are now in print.

The next several years saw VVA grow in size, stature, and prestige. VVA's professional membership services, veterans service, and advocacy work gained the respect of Congress and the veterans community. In 1986, VVA's exemplary work was formally acknowledged by the granting of a congressional charter.

Today, Vietnam Veterans of America has a national membership of approximately 50,000, with 525 chapters throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam. VVA state councils coordinate the activities of local chapters. VVA places great emphasis on coordinating its national activities and programs with the work of its local chapters and state councils and is organized to ensure that victories gained at the national level are implemented locally.

VVA strives for individual and group empowerment and locally originated action to assist veterans and other needy members of their communities. These volunteer programs offer unique and innovative services to an ever-widening population. They include: support for homeless shelters; substance-abuse education projects and crime-prevention campaigns; sponsorship of youth sports, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, Big

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Brothers/Big Sisters; and relief to other communities affected by natural disasters and chronic poverty.

VVA is governed by a national board of directors and by national officers – 24 women and men democratically elected by VVA delegates, are sent by their respective chapters to biennial conventions. VVA's essential purpose is to promote the educational, economic, health, cultural, and emotional readjustment of the Vietnam-era veteran to civilian life. This is done by promoting legislation and public-awareness programs to eliminate discrimination suffered by Vietnam veterans.

VVA's government-relations efforts combine the three ingredients essential to success in the legislative arena -- lobbying, mobilizing constituents, and working with the media -- to achieve its ambitious agenda. Legislative victories have included the establishment and extension of the Vet Center system, passage of laws providing for increased job-training and job-placement assistance for unemployed and underemployed Vietnam-era veterans, the first laws assisting veterans suffering from Agent Orange exposure, and landmark legislation (i.e., Judicial Review of veterans claims) permitting veterans to challenge adverse VA decisions in court. All were enacted largely as a result of VVA's legislative efforts. The Vietnam-era Veterans in Congress (VVIC), formed in 1978, in part through the efforts of VVA, now boasts a membership of nearly 100 members of Congress.

VVA helps to provide greater public awareness of the outstanding issues surrounding Vietnam-era veterans by disseminating written information on a continual basis. [The VVA Veteran](#)®, VVA's award-winning newspaper, is mailed to all VVA members and friends of the organization. In addition, self-help guides on issues such as [Agent Orange](#), to [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder](#), to discharge upgrading are published and made available to anyone interested.

WHO ARE THE VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA?

Founded in 1978, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA is organized as a not-for-profit corporation and is tax-exempt under Section 501(c) (19) of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

VVA'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLE

"Never again shall one generation of veterans abandon another."

GOALS

VVA's goals are to promote and support the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans, to create a new identity for this generation of veterans, and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans.

OUR FIRST PRINCIPLE

VVA holds as its first principle that the organization is measured by deeds and openness as evidence of the core values of **justice, integrity, and meaningful achievement.**

At the First National Convention, VVA started to record its history for prosperity. We are the only veteran's organization that uses the court system to achieve our goals. We want to train a new group of leaders that will follow our tradition in obtaining the benefits that our veterans earned during time of service.

Take a look at the final recorded history:

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New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation

We provide grants to Vietnam Veterans of America-New York State Council, (VVA-NYSC) a veteran's service organization that advocates for legislation at the State and Federal level of government to provide housing, education, health and mental care services to veterans and their families. We provide funding for VVA-NYSC Veteran's Service Officer program that assist veterans with their military disability compensation and pension claims from the Veterans Administration.

We advocate for better Federal and State veteran's benefits and veteran preferences in government employment. VVA Chapters within New York State, assist widows, widowers, and orphans of our veterans. The organization organizes programs that enrich the lives of Vietnam veterans, as well as veterans from past, current wars, and their families.

We have an active Agent Orange committee that helps Vietnam veterans receive up to date information on prostate cancer, diabetes, and other chemically-related diseases.

We have an updated database of agencies that provide:

- **Listings of Veteran Job Fairs offered by county or veteran service organizations;**
- **Counseling for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);**
- **Outreach programs that support returning veterans' reentry into civilian life;**

For disabled veterans, this can be even more difficult than a tour of duty.

We do this all year long, but without your gift and the gifts of other supporters, nothing can be done to help those that are so deserving of it. However, we have much more to accomplish.

We, the New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, have a mission to keep advocating for and helping these veterans. We ask you to join us in our mission to provide assistance, guidance, training, and education to all veterans of past, present, and future military conflicts.

So let us continue to work together to ensure our national heroes receive everything that they are entitled to receive for their sacrifice and service to our nation.

President	Vice President	Treasurer	Secretary
Francisco Muñiz III	Ned D. Foote	Grant T. Coates	Nick Valenti
Directors	Sam Hall	Stan May	

Note: If you receive a phone solicitation for donation to the New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, please make a donation and information will be sent to you. If you do not want to donate, please just tell them , 'No, Thanks" and hang up the phone. Do not call the NYS Attorney Office and complain about the Foundation. You can send your tax deductible donation, to the extent allowed by law, directly to the Foundation at NY Vietnam Veterans Foundation, 48 March Lane, Westbury, NY 11590-6302.

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Finally a Voice – The birth of Vietnam Veterans of America! This film documents the founding of the Vietnam Veterans of America and examines whether the organization has stayed true to its founding principle that:

“Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another.

[https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/finally-a-voice-the-birth-of-the-vva#/#/](https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/finally-a-voice-the-birth-of-the-vva#/)

The Future: VVA National has begun a Strategic Plan for the future of VVA: Preserving Our Legacy.

There are three plans:

Go out of business;

Lead in the formation of a new veteran organization to perpetuate our legacy and assure the tomorrow of all veterans’

Why Not both Plans?

The National Leadership will lead the way by establishing two Working Groups, composed of nine (9) members each, plus two (2) alternates. The Board of Directors and State Council Presidents will recruit Working group members for each track of the Strategic Plan.

What input do you have to this plan? E-mail your suggestions to President Ned D. Foote at NEDVVA@ROADRUNNER.COM

Central District Report

Nick Valenti

VVA Chapters #85, #103, #205, #296, #377, #480, #704, #708, #803, #827, #896, #944

New York State Council Meeting held on June 18th had an extensive agenda. The new, New York State Western District Director was introduced by outgoing Director Ted Wilkinson. Ted was elected to the office of Region 2 Director and Mike Walker has eagerly stepped up to the plate to represent Western New York.

Also at the meeting a great presentation was given by Lisa Gualtieri, Home Respite Coordinator at the Syracuse VA Medical Center, Voluntary Service. She explained how the In-Home Respite Caregiver Support Program works and who to contact if you wish to be a volunteer or just learn more about the program. In attendance there were twenty four of the thirty five chapters present. The presentation generated a great deal of interest and a very constructive question and answer segment followed. For moiré information call Lisa at 315-425-4315.

The bulk of the meeting was taken up with a presentation and follow up discussion on the future of Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. The session was entitled “LIGHTS OUT? - Preserving Our Legacy – A Strategic Plan.”

The plan that will be developed will address: “VVA remaining the same, chartered organization it

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has been and will formulate a strategic plan to ‘go out of business’ at a time certain in the future, that time to be determined by a working group and communicated to the general membership.” The plan will also address “the need to form, charter, fund and empower a new veteran’s organization to perpetuate our legacy and assure the tomorrow of all veterans.” The VVA will LEAD this effort. The task itself will be accomplished by a working group and communicated to the general membership.

The plan uses the Process/Content Model. The Process will deal with such questions as “How will we do it?” and “Who will guide the plan?” The Content will deal with such questions as “What will be done?”; “Who will do it?”; “When will it be done?” and “How & When will we stop?”

The Process - National VVA will lead the way. The plan itself is the Process.

How will an implementation system work? Working groups (2), composed of 9 members each, plus 2 alternates will identify and own the content.

The Board of Directors and State Council Presidents will recruit working group members for each track of the Strategic plan. Working groups will receive training on “How to be successful.”

The task is quite daunting. The stakes are quite high. Our legacy hangs in the balance. Assuring tomorrow for all veterans will carry on our own mantra “**Never Again Will One Generation Of Veterans Abandon Another.**”

Some Chapters have chosen to share their community activities with us. To that end I try to convey the hard work they do to the whole Central District. I don’t always get it right but I try.

This is what I came up with: **Chapter #480** Owego has sponsored a Catfish Derby for many years. This year is no exception. This event funds many of the Community activities they participate in on an annual basis; **Chapter #377** Finger Lakes (Dryden) has made inroads with the Cortland WalMart store and has used that working relationship to engage in successful fundraising. Also **Chapter #377** along with **Chapter #480** are in their eighth year participating and organizing the annual “Tribute Ride” recognizing New York State Route #38 as the “Vietnam Veterans of America Memorial Highway of Valor;” **Chapter #704** Cayuga County (Auburn) is a proud participant in the Tribute Ride helping to ensure riders gain safe passage through the City of Auburn. Navigating all the intersections safely is a major concern. These three Chapters have a working history of cooperation and comradeship. **Chapter #704** continues to support a scholarship program that has found its way into eight high schools in Cayuga County. One final note on **Chapter #704**, their eighth annual Stand Down event is scheduled for August 20th at Case Mansion, 108 South Street, Auburn, New York 13021. For further information contact Lou Patti (VVA #704 president) at 315-567-5395 or Regina Bullock (Cayuga County Point Man Ministries Home Front Leader) at 315-252-5852. Another Chapter that I remain in very close contact with is **Chapter #904** Utica. Their meetings involve a cross section of veteran organizations. Masonic War Veterans, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Gold Star Mothers, and Order of the Purple Heart. These are just a few of the working of the Chapter. Whether it’s the Proctor ROTC Cadets, MOPH Chapter #490 Color Guard, the VAMC in Syracuse, the Patriot Run, Gold Star Mothers, the Oxford Veterans Home, or Honor Flights the Chapter is there for the veteran and his or her family. Let none of us forget what **Chapter #803** Elmira has accomplished and continues to maintain - The VVA War Museum located at 1200 Davis Street, Elmira, New York 14901. If you want to contact them by email go to vvawarmuseum803@gmail.com.

We hope to have Website and Interchange updates after the Leadership Conference.

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On a final note there is a Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin that commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War. The service dates for eligibility for this lapel pin are November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975 regardless of location. Want to learn more, visit www.vietnamwar50th.com

PS: If I am incorrect on anything feel free to contact me. Even at my age I can learn from my mistakes. If you want me to include anything the next time just send to my email: npvalent64@yahoo.com.

Western District Report

Mike Walker

VVA Chapters #20, #77, #193, #268, #459, #603, #681, #865, #978

All is quite on the Western front. All chapters are coming off a busy summer. Chapter 20 celebrated the 20 year anniversary of their memorial. Chapter 77 have broken ground for their new memorial that's being built in the City of Tonawanda. Chapter 268 is working to raise money to refurbish a Civil War memorial in the City of Lockport. Chapter 865 summer was full of fund raisers not only for the chapter but for different charities around town.

I have gotten out to Chapters 20 (Rochester), Chapter 268 (Lockport) and Chapter 77 (Tonawanda). It was great going there and meeting some of the members. All the chapters are doing good work with things that are important to all Veterans. Hope to get to the other Chapters before the snow starts flying.

If any of the Western Chapters have questions please give me a call. If I don't know the answer I'll find it for you.

Southern District Report

Joe Ingino

VVA Chapters #11, #32, #72, #82, #118, #126, #421, #807

The following guidelines are parts of the contract between the Owego Treadway Banquet & Conference Center and New York State Council, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.. A property sale of the Treadway motel has changed the name to Red Roof Inn.

- Credit card reservations only. E-mail will be sent containing confirmation number in addition to call.
- **Tax exempt form is needed at each arrival.** if no form, regardless of previous stays, tax will be 12%.
- **Cancel** room if not coming and reservation exists. No shows will be charged one night rate of \$92.00 & tax (Red Roof) or \$99.00 & tax (Holiday Inn Express).
- Rooms may be cancelled 24-48 hours prior to reservation date.
- Cutoff date for reservations is **ONE month** prior to meeting weekend.
- All 2017 date may be reserved now.
- Cots are available (\$15.00) and additional person (3 in room) (\$10.00)

If Red Roof Inn is full, Holiday Inn Express will accommodate overflow at Red Roof rate.

2017 Meeting dates (Saturday)

January 21 April 22 June 17 September 16

Make your reservation early. If obligations change during the year, give your confirmation number to another delegate. When they check in and pay with their credit card, you have no charge.

Incarcerated Veteran Committee Report

Nick Valenti

Since the March 30, 2016 **Incarcerated Veterans Committee Report** I found myself witnessing a transformation in the inner workings of inmate organizations. Up until then I was mostly working with **Chapter #205** Auburn Correctional Facility. The transformation I speak of is the development of a **future veteran group** that would insure a lasting presence of Veteran activity within the Department of Corrections in New York State. More specifically, Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter #205 and their three decades of hard work - giving back to the Community they are estranged from while helping those veterans and their family members in as many meaningful ways as possible. Incarcerated Vietnam Veterans have come to a crossroads in their struggle to live by the mantra **“Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another.”**

When it comes to the viability of a veteran organization in the Corrections System the impediments are almost insurmountable. Not only do they face fees above the membership dues required by National Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) these veterans have to deal with a transfer policy within the Correctional Network in New York State that precludes members of an inmate organization from remaining a member if that person (member) is transferred to another facility. These two limitations pose a burden when it comes to membership stability and planning. As if that isn't enough we all are facing our biggest challenging reality check - **our own mortality.**

This takes on a life of its own when we attempt to leave a lasting legacy for all those veterans and their families who have, are and will continue to follow when we no longer exist as a viable advocate. We must meet this challenge and not make the mistake of leaving our future servicemen and women to fend for themselves. The aging process is ongoing and our ranks are shrinking. **VVA Chapter #205** saw this coming long ago. Their solution, although untraditional is proving effective in guaranteeing many more years of continued Veterans advocacy, Community involvement helping the homeless, working with food pantries and making monetary donations to local organizations who outreach to the needy.

Here is what they did when faced with shrinking membership and the presence of veterans other than Vietnam Veterans who wanted to participate in a meaningful manner and take up the work that **Chapter #205** was struggling to continue.

A second Veteran organization was formed at Auburn Correctional Facility. The group is made up of what we refer to as **Veterans of Modern Warfare (VMW)**. Members were enrolled, a Chapter application was submitted and a fully fledged Chapter was recognized by their National organization. They were issued a **Chapter** number, number **24** and membership cards issued. **VVA Chapter #205 lent its support, guidance and organizational skills to the establishment of VMW Chapter #24.** That created two veteran organizations in the same facility, **each with their own officers, memberships and goals.** Having two groups of veterans required a mechanism to insure cooperation in all activities. In order to diminish the possibility an adversarial atmosphere an umbrella organization called the **Veterans Group of Auburn (VGoA)** was formed. This group retains its own separate set of officers. The **pillars** that support this umbrella organization are **VVA Chapter #205 and VMW Chapter #24.** All members are veterans working together to continue to serve not only the veterans in the facility but also the outside Community.

This continued collaborative effort of **VVA Chapter #205 and VMW Chapter #24** has helped ensure a steady stream of volunteers for the **crochet squad** and pursuing internal **facility events.** As time passes it is hoped the **Veterans Group of Auburn (VGoA)** will continue their community service outreach beyond the prison walls.

Membership Affairs Committee

Ted Wilkinson—Chair

Questions on membership email: twilkinson@vva.org or call me at 585-322-6722.

Please do not call membership with a question or concern. Use the email membership@vva.org. By using email the concern will have not interrupt the staff and they will have your exact concern in writing.

VVA-New York State Council Chapters were shut out this year for the national growth awards.

VVA continues to grow in membership at a rate of 5% a year while New York is just a mere .01% a year. There is just a handful of Chapters that are even showing an increase.

Policy: For Upgrading Active Membership to Life Membership.

Membership to Vietnam Veterans of America is currently \$20 for one-year, \$50 for three years, and \$100 for a life membership.

A. Should the member wish to upgrade their active membership to life-member status the following guidelines must be followed:

1. The remaining \$80 of a one-year active membership must be paid within sixty (60) Days of the initial payment.
2. The remaining \$50 of a three-year active membership must be paid within sixty (60) Days of the initial payment.

B. After the sixty-day grace period, members wishing to upgrade an active membership must pay the full payment of \$100.

VVA National Membership Growth Award

Procedure:

A. The National Membership Growth Award is designed to recognize membership growth at the VVA chapter- level.

B. Winners will be based on the percentage of growth during the VVA fiscal year which is March 1st - February 28th.

C. Each year in March, the Membership Affairs Committee Chair will request the membership totals of each Chapter within VVA from the National Membership Department. The report will consist of three columns:

- (1) Membership totals on March 1st of the previous year,
- (2) Membership totals on February 28th of the current year, and
- (3) Percentage of change.

D. Winners will be decided from the following numerical categories:

1. 25 - 50 members
2. 51 - 100 members
3. 101 - 200 members
4. 201 - 300 members

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DEDICATION OF BENCH AT SAMPSON VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter #704 and the Carnicelli-Indelicato American Legion Post #1776 in a joint project dedicated a bench at Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Romulus, New York in Seneca County on **August 8, 2016.**

Members of the two veteran organizations represent **Global War on Terror; Persian Gulf; Lebanon; Korea; and Vietnam.**

The inspiration for the bench came from the Vietnam Veterans motto **“Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another.”** The two white roses are symbolic of the **loss of innocent lives in war.**

Burial in Sampson Cemetery is an honor reserved for Armed Forces Veterans discharged from active duty under other than dishonorable conditions. A veteran’s legal **spouse** is also entitled to burial in the cemetery. The cemetery operates under **VA National Cemetery guidelines.** Want to learn more? Visit www.sampsonveteranscemetery.com, or go to Facebook @Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery.



From left to right front row: Vance Phillips, Lou Patti, Fred Norton, Jim Bryant

Second row: Nick Valenti, Jerry Fulmer, Bonnie Phillips, Fred Pfeifer

Third row: Tom DeFurio, Bob Smith, Leon Gaklik, Tom Bryant



From Left to right: Fred Pfeifer, Lou Patti, Tom Bryant, Jim Bryant, Tom DeFurio, Nick Valenti, Vance Phillips, Jerry Fulmer, Bonnie Phillips, Bob Smith, Fred Norton, Leon Gaklik.

POW-MIA REPORT-Veteran Initiative

Grant T. Coats—Chair

September 22, 2016

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR: The number of US personnel missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War is still 1,618, unchanged since June 9th. The total accounted since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is 965. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and identified before the end of the war, bring the total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to 1,028. Of the 1,618 still missing (POW/MIA) and unaccounted-for (KIA/BNR), 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,261 (VN-463, VS-798); Laos-301; Cambodia-49; PRC territorial waters-7. These country-specific numbers can and do fluctuate when investigations result in changes to loss locations. Since formation in 1970, the League has sought the return of all POWs, the fullest possible accounting for those still missing, and repatriation of all recoverable remains.

NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY - 2016: Countless ceremonies were held across the United States and around the world, including US Embassies in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Many of the international commemorations were held under the auspices of the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA) at military installations. The national ceremony was again held at the Pentagon, as has been the case since 1984 at the White House and 1988 at the US Capitol. The speakers this year were Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva, USAF, and Captain Gerald Coffee, USN, held as a POW in Vietnam for over seven years, until his release in February, 1973.

Government Affairs

Joe Ingino

Sen. Johnny Isakson to VVA: "Keep the Pressure On for Passage of S.2921"

On September 13, John Rowan, VVA national president, met with Sen. Johnny Isakson, chair, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. Isakson urged VVA to keep those calls coming, and he thanked Rowan for VVA's strong grassroots advocacy and social media campaigns in support of the Veterans First Act, S.2921.

Proposed Lejeune Contaminated Water Ruling

According to a September 12 *Stars and Stripes* article by Nikki Wentling, the VA has proposed to establish presumption of service connection for eight diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune, NC. Based on evidence from several internationally recognized scientific authorities, including the National Academies of Sciences, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Bob McDonald has determined there is sufficient scientific and medical evidence available to establish a presumption of connection between exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune and the following eight diseases: adult leukemia, aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and Parkinson's disease. The proposed regulation can be viewed at this link: www.regulations.gov. The 30 day public comment period will be open until Oct. 10, 2016.

VETERAN'S NEWS UPDATES

An Important Message from VVA National President John Rowan

Vietnam Veterans of America and Campaign Endorsements

Vietnam Veterans of America National President John Rowan noted today that VVA cannot make any endorsements of political candidates for any elected office. "VVA's Constitution and our not-for-profit tax status strictly prohibit the national organization, as well as local VVA chapters and state councils, from making any such endorsements. Occasionally, confusion arises when individual VVA members -- who are often very politically active -- are identified as representatives of our organization. To preclude any misunderstandings, as required by our membership, we must get the word out to clarify the record," Rowan said.

"The federal tax code is very clear in this regard and any implication of improper activities could cause us to lose our tax exemption and not-for-profit status. As long as no VVA endorsement of a political candidate is given or implied, individual VVA members are encouraged to participate in the political process. As private citizens, we have every right to do so," said Rowan.

Vietnam Veterans of America, founded in 1978, was formed in large part to fight for and affect laws and policies to ensure that Vietnam veterans receive the help they have earned and need. With chapters and state councils nationwide, VVA is the only Congressionally chartered national Vietnam veterans organization exclusively comprised of Vietnam-era veterans. VVA's commitment to all veterans is exemplified in its founding principle, "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another," and continues to maintain advocacy in the veterans affairs arena as its top priority.

Your Senators and Members of Congress have but a few more days before they recess until after November 8th, Election Day. Yet it is critical that your Senators are given the opportunity by leadership for an up-or-down vote on S. 2921, the Veterans First Act.

This bill, fathered by Senator Johnny Isakson (R-Georgia), passed unanimously in the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, which he chairs. It embraces several provisions -- several very important provisions -- for veterans and our families, including the expansion of the caregiver program in the VA, funding to enable the VA to move forward expeditiously on fulfilling its obligations to assist homeless veterans at the West Los Angeles VAMC campus, and funding to enable the VA to enter into leasing agreements for several much needed community-based outpatient clinics, or CBOCs. Most important, however, is that S. 2921 contains the Toxic Exposure Research Act (S. 901). Passage of this bill is VVA's highest legislative priority, not for us but for our children and their children. We need research to connect, to indicate a positive association, between a father or mother's exposure to toxic substances while in uniform and health conditions -- birth defects, cancers, learning disabilities -- in our offspring.

It's critically important we get this bill enacted NOW.

44 Senators have cosponsored the bill.

VVA urges you to Take Action NOW at <http://capwiz.com/vva/home/> click on the alert, enter your zip code and send the prepared letter requesting your U.S. Senators contact Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Democratic Minority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada asking that S.2921, the Veterans First Act, be moved to the floor of the Senate for vote and passage before they recess for September.

Follow-up your email and call (202) 224-3121 and be connected to your Senators office or tweet your Senators office for a reply.

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VVA Applauds Navy Sec. Mabus for Implementing Protections for Sailors and Marines with Invisible Wound of War

(Washington, D.C.) – “We are encouraged by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus’s recent policy directive aimed at increasing protections for Sailors and Marines suffering as a result of their service—from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, or any other diagnosed mental health condition. This new Navy policy requires that these invisible wounds of war be considered before the veteran is separated from service,” said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America.

Effective immediately, Sailors and Marines being processed for any type of involuntary administrative separation who have a diagnosed mental health condition may be referred into the Disability Evaluation System. Additionally, if the Sailor or Marine is being administratively processed under provisions that authorize a characterization of service of other than honorable, the case must be referred to the first general officer/flag officer in the chain of command for a final determination. Sailors and Marines with mental health diagnoses who have already been inappropriately discharged can appeal to the Boards for Corrections of Naval Records under the new directive.

Two Fort Campbell Soldiers Receive Distinguished Flying Cross

Two Fort Campbell soldiers have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, given for heroism or extraordinary achievement in an aerial flight.

The Leaf-Chronicle reports Chief Warrant Officer 2 David Woodward and Capt. Lindsay Gordon were awarded the cross on Wednesday for their actions while flying an AH-64 Apache helicopter during a mission in Afghanistan last December.

Woodward and Gordon are with the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade. They were flying along with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and guided their aircraft between U.S. troops and enemy forces as an extraction began.

Part of the ground commander's report was read during the Fort Campbell ceremony, saying he had "never been pulled from a more dire situation."

Gordon and Woodward said they were "humbled" by the recognition.

Fired Phoenix VA Director Scores Legal Win, Sparks Outrage

Stars and Stripes | Jun 03, 2016 | by Travis J. Tritten

WASHINGTON – The former director of Phoenix veterans hospitals who was at the center of a 2014 wait-time scandal scored a major legal win this week, shooting down sections of a law allowing the Department of Veterans Affairs to quickly fire misbehaving employees.

U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said Tuesday that the law fast-tracking firings is unconstitutional because VA employees cannot appeal a final decision by an administrative judge.

Lynch and President Barack Obama's administration have sided with Sharon Helman, who is suing in federal court over her 2014 termination from the VA for accepting a trip to Disneyland and other gifts.

The decision by Lynch is new evidence of the VA's faltering efforts to fire executives and employees when it deems them guilty of misconduct. It also undercuts a key reform passed by Congress in the months following the nationwide VA scandal, which erupted after a doctor in

(Cont. on pg. 18)

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Phoenix said veterans were dying while waiting for care at the facilities overseen by Helman.

The Obama administration is sending the message that "the sanctity of a federal bureaucrat's job is far more important than the health and well-being of our veterans," said Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, an architect of the law.

McCain blasted the president for originally touting and signing the law. Other Republicans also voiced outrage over the decision.

"The effect of this reckless action is clear. It undermines very modest reforms to our broken civil service system supported in 2014 by the president and an overwhelming majority of Congress," said Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Florida, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

In the past, employees had the option of appealing their termination to the Merit Systems Protection Board -- a panel appointed by the president -- in a process that could typically take months. But a joint VA-White House investigation during the wait-time scandal found a "corrosive culture" and widespread poor management at veterans hospitals and clinics across the country.

The findings added urgency to VA efforts to quickly root out bad employees. A \$16 billion reform law passed by Congress in 2014 dramatically scaled back the appeals process, ordering an administrative judge to make a final decision within 21 days -- with no appeal options -- on whether to uphold the firing.

But Lynch now contends the law violates the Constitution because it allows nobody to review the judge's decision, including VA Secretary Bob McDonald.

The law "vests a federal employee with the final authority -- unreviewable by any politically accountable officer of the executive branch -- to determine whether to uphold the removal of a [VA] senior executive, which includes the power to overrule the decision of a cabinet-level officer," Lynch wrote in a letter to Republican leadership in the House.

Lynch said the Justice Department will no longer defend the law in court against Helman and other challengers. But the Justice Department will continue to defend against the other constitutional violations charged in Helman's federal lawsuit.

Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Georgia, chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said the loss of the reform law will allow "the Merit Systems Protection Board to continue second-guessing VA's efforts to discipline senior executives."

Lawmakers have become increasingly frustrated with what they see as the VA's inability to fire poor managers. New legislation has been working through the House and Senate, though there is no agreement yet between the two chambers on how much power to give the department in dealing with such cases.

The VA has suffered a string of embarrassing reversals after punishing employees, including a recent decision by a review board to [reinstate VA executives Diana Rubens and Kimberly Graves](#). Both were implicated in a scheme to move themselves into higher pay jobs with less responsibility and collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in relocation bonuses.

This is the second legal victory for Helman. Last year, an administrative law judge ordered the VA to repay her \$5,624 in wages that were garnished while she was on administrative leave and faced termination.

The department decided to fire Helman early in the 2014 scandal when federal audits found secret wait lists were kept in Phoenix and VA facilities across the country to hide long delays in veterans health care. But in December 2014, an appeals judge found it did not have grounds to fire Helman for the wait-time issues. Instead, she was fired for accepting thousands of dollars in gifts that included the Disney theme park trip and Beyonce concert tickets.

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President Obama Opposes Privatization of VA Health Care

Jun. 5, 2016 9:26 PM EDT

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — President Barack Obama is opposing suggestions the government privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve health care veterans receive.

In an interview with the Colorado Springs Gazette the president said his administration has made progress modernizing the VA and providing veterans with more timely health care following criticism over wait times. Privatizing the agency would delay that progress, he said.

"The notion of dismantling the VA system would be a mistake," Obama told The Gazette during an interview on Thursday that was published Sunday. "If you look at, for example, VA health care, there have been challenges getting people into the system. Once they are in, they are extremely satisfied and the quality of care is very high."

"It's a big ocean liner, and on any given day, given how far-flung the agency is, we're still seeing problems crop up that we have to correct. I think the main message is that we've still got a lot of work to do. It's an all-hands-on-deck process."

"I think Secretary McDonald has done a terrific job," the president said. "Since there's only eight months left in my administration, he's got all the way until then to run through the tape."

U.S. Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colorado Springs, a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, agreed with Obama that total privatization would be a mistake, but he said veterans need more options, including private care.

To cope with the problems, Obama signed the Veterans Access to Care Act that requires the VA to contract with private providers when a clinic isn't within 40 miles of the veteran seeking care or the wait time for care is more than 30 days.

VA Admits to Improper TBI Screening

According to a June 9 *ABC News* article by Sarah Kolinovsky, almost 25,000 veterans were examined for traumatic brain injuries by Veterans Affairs medical providers who were not qualified to diagnose them, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has admitted.

Commission on Care released final report on transforming VA Health Care

In accordance with In Section 202 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, Public Law 113-146 as amended by the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2014 Public Law 113-175. Congress established the Presidential Commission on Care, an independent commission charging it to examine veterans' access to Department of Veterans Affairs health care and to examine strategically how best to organize the Veterans Health Administration, locate health resources, and deliver health care to veterans during the next 20 years.

On June 30, the Commission on Care released the final report on recommendations transforming veterans' health care in accordance with the law, President Obama, Secretary of Veterans of Affairs and Congress received copies of the final report.

Chairperson Nancy Schlichting, CEO of the Henry Ford Health System, states in the Commission press release on July 5. The Commission recognized that the reforms we're proposing cannot be sustained without fundamentally bolstering governance and strengthening leadership," Schlichting emphasized. "With able leadership and congressional support for these recommendations, VA will be positioned to provide veterans with the quality health care they have earned." <https://commissiononcare.sites.usa.gov/files/2016/07/2016.7.5-Press-Release.pdf>

COMMITTEES	CHAIRPERSON	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Agent Orange/Dioxin & Other Toxic Exposure	Walter Schmidt, VSO	wschmidt@oysterbay-ny.gov
Constitution	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
Finance	Charles Tipton	ctipton237@yahoo.com
Homeless Veterans	Tom Kelly	dsdba53@yahoo.com
Membership	Ted Wilkinson	yankeeted@aol.com
POW/MIA & Veterans Initiative (VI)	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
PTSD & Substance Abuse	Tom Harris	bkrdad@aol.com
Veterans Affairs	Sam Hall	Sammyjh49@yahoo.com
Veterans Health Care & Aging Veterans	Tom Harris Jerry McDermott	bkrdad@aol.com jmcdermott@murphynolan.com,
Veterans Incarcerated Committee	Nick Valenti	npvalen64@yahoo.com