

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

Bells in S.E.R.V.I.C.E

The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program promotes our mission to enhance the lives of U.S. Veterans, military and their families.

This year, President Dee Bell has deemed our mission as BELLS in SERVICE, service to our veterans and their families.

In general, we can promote our mission by:

Supporting rehabilitation and healing of veterans through arts, crafts, and hobbies.

Supporting veteran caregivers, family members and survivors.

Enrolling Auxiliary members as VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers at VA health care facilities.

Helping the American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs and Chamber of Commerce promote job fairs for veterans and their families.

Finding opportunities for Auxiliary members to serve veterans in your area such as serving the homeless.

Take advantage of every opportunity to help a veteran find mental health assistance and “**Be the One**” to prevent another suicide.

Each of us should start today who have stood in front of us to protect and defend our great country. It is time for us to stand in front of them! Veterans deserve everything we can do to enhance their lives and that of their families.

Please “**BE THE ONE**” to start a Veterans program or project at your Unit or in your District. The lives of veterans and their families will forever be enhanced!

For God and Country,

Robin Burk

Robin Burk
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Chairperson

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT PLAN

What can we do?

NATIONAL REPORTING OF HOURS BY CERTIFIED VOLUNTEERS

You too can become a VA medical facility volunteer. Please contact the Chairperson to learn the process so you can be approved for service. Facility volunteer, you can:

Serve veterans and their families as volunteers at VA health care facilities through the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS).

Invite others to become VAVS volunteers with you.

Enter all of your VAVS hours into the VAVS tracking system.

Note: VA Healthcare facilities volunteer hour tracking system is different from the tracking utilized for (National) ALA hour bars.

Note: These hours will count toward your (National) Service to Veterans pin and hour bars.

SERVICE TO VETERANS LOCALLY

Service to Veterans recognizes volunteers who provide service to veterans, service members and their families outside a VA Medical Center . Volunteers conduct projects and work for military/veterans and/or families from their homes and in their communities. Service to Veterans volunteers maintains their own recordkeeping and dollars spent. A new pin has been designed to reflect the work of those who volunteer in their communities and at home for veterans. Hour bars, which attach to the pin, are also available to earn.

Visit with veterans and remember them on special occasions.

Offer to drive veterans to doctor appointments.

Offer to stay with a veteran while his/her primary caregiver goes shopping or out for a break.

Take a veteran for a Sunday drive, picnic, or maybe to see one of his/her friends.

Treat veterans to tickets for sporting events or movies.

Arrange an outing to a Legion meeting for special events such as a Veterans Day dinner.

Furnish a room in transitional housing programs as a special project.

Help furnish new living space for a veteran graduating from a transitional housing program. This might include the veteran and his/her family. School supplies for children or meals might be extra touches.

More information regarding service to veterans may be found on the National website under Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation:

Resource: A Guide for Volunteers, www.alaforveterans.org – download or www.emblem.legion.org for the printed version.

ASSIST VETERANS IN ACCESSING VA BENEFITS / HEALTH CARE

This should include coordinating with the local American Legion Post Service Officer.

Invite the Unit, District or Department Service Officer to be the guest speaker at a unit/department event.

Find your local Service Officer: Download the list at www.legion.org/serviceofficers

Help eligible veterans attain benefits through referrals.

Encourage eligible veterans to use the VA health care system and its services, including hospitals, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Vet Centers, etc.

Participate in and encourage veterans and their family members to participate in town-hall meetings organized by The American Legion.

Resource: VA Health Care Hotline for women veterans 1-855-VA-Women (1-855-829-6636)

explore.va.gov/health-care

ASSIST IN ACTIVITIES THAT HELP HOMELESS VETERANS

Give a helping hand to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your department and offer to assist that coordinator in responding to requests for assistance with homeless veterans or homeless veteran service providers.

Crochet hats, scarves or mittens to be distributed to homeless veterans.

Make payments of overdue rent, utility payments or deposits and security deposits.

Host or volunteer at homeless veterans' stand down events where homeless veterans receive free goods and services such as haircuts and medical exams.

Contact homeless veteran emergency shelters, transitional housing projects and permanent housing projects in your community and identify the organization's volunteer and in-kind contribution needs, including:

Meal preparation and serving

Clothes collection and distribution

Assembly and delivery of hygiene kits, buddy baskets

Purchasing or securing household items or furniture

Create a "Tree of Warmth" by collecting scarves, mittens, hats and attaching them to a tree in a location the homeless frequent. Include a sign that says "Please Take if Needed", "Free if Needed," or something similar.

SUPPORT REHABILITATION AND HEALING OF VETERANS THROUGH ARTS, CRAFTS AND HOBBIES

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) is the national, annual competition and festival that recognizes the progress and recovery made through recreation therapy and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation's veterans after disease, disability, or life crisis. As the national presenting sponsor, the American Legion Auxiliary should strive to increase monetary support by encouraging departments to sponsor fundraisers that will contribute to the increased awareness and support of this program.

Help your unit and department earn recognition at National Convention through donations to support VA Creative Arts Festivals. Volunteer individually, with a fellow member, or as a unit at a local Creative Arts Festival.

Identify arts, crafts and hobby projects targeted to veterans (such as writing, oral history recording, visual and performing arts, quilting, and gardening). A unit may organize a project of its own or introduce a unit to veteran arts, crafts, and hobby projects already operational in the community.

Contribute donated supplies to help supplement visual veteran artists' needs for their projects.

Donate, through departments, funds that help local veterans attend state and national Wheel Chair Games, Veterans Creative Arts Festivals, Paralympics, etc.

HELP THE AMERICAN LEGION, STATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PROMOTE JOB FAIRS FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Host an informational table at a local job fair.

Support the Legion by helping host a local job fair at your post home.

Serve as a career e-mentor for women veterans.

Volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, specifically if a house build is supported by The American Legion.

Resources: www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes

www.ementorprogram.org/p/milspouse

Serve as a career e-Mentor for women – Encourage Auxiliary members to serve as career mentors for female veterans via electronic communications. The e-mentoring network, operated by the Business and Professional Women’s Foundation, Joining Forces and Mentoring Plus, virtually pairs female veterans with career mentors and subject matter experts for guidance and support.

Resource: www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/habitat.pdf

Home Building – Support home building and renovation projects for veterans and their families by volunteering for Habitat for Humanity. Locate veteran-specific projects through The American Legion.

ASSIST AND SUPPORT CAREGIVERS OF VETERANS

Invite the VA caregiver support coordinator in the VA healthcare system closest to you to make a presentation to your unit, district, .or community-wide meeting.

Familiarize yourself with the Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network.

Become a veteran caregiver peer support trainer or volunteer

Become a Legacy Corps AmeriCorps member if the Legacy Corps project is offered in a state or locality near you.

Volunteer as a VA Voluntary Service volunteer support caregiver if the VA health care system closest to you offers such volunteer opportunity.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

VA Caregiver Support – www.caregiver.va.gov

Elizabeth Dole Foundation- <http://www.elizabethdolefoundation.org>

Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network-
<http://www.taps.org/MVCN>

SOMETHING NEW THIS YEAR!

Do you know that there are veterans in your area that are recipients of the **Medal of Honor**? This is the highest honor that our government bestows on a serviceperson for their valor. In your Unit, consider creating a history of a recipient in your area. You may be able to meet with them, interview them and prepare a narrative or story board to honor their extraordinary service to our country. If the Veteran has passed on, find a family member and have them retell their relative’s story. You may want to consider inviting a Post member to assist with this program. Invite them and their family to the Post. It’s a great place to have your interview and their family may provide more than the veteran may remember or is willing to tell.

DEPARTMENT AWARDS

CHAIRMAN’S AWARD:

This award is for one Unit in each membership grouping for “Best All Around Program Supporting Veterans”. Donations must be made to the following:

- State Veterans Nursing Homes Events / Needs
- State Hospitals
- VAMC Facilities Events / Needs
- Veterans Outpatient Events/ Needs
- Fisher Houses

Your donation remittance form must be received by Department no later than **March 31st, 2024**. Donations may be made to any or all of the five (5) above-listed facilities.

DEPARTMENT AWARD:

Dorothy Smith Award: Revolving Trophy

To be awarded annually to the Unit that reports the “Best All Around VAR Program or Project” that includes the following:

Cover page with Name of award, Unit name and number Unit location, name of the Unit President and name of Unit VAR Chairperson.

Cash contributions must be made through Department to at least one VA hospital and at least one Fisher House and to The National Creative Arts Festival.

Unit must participate in and/or donate to a homeless Veterans Program or project.

Entry must be in narrative form, double spaced, 8 1/2" x 11" paper, not to exceed 1,000 words and include a cover page.

Each entry must be received by the Department Chairperson no later than thirty (30) days prior to Department Convention.

NATIONAL AWARDS

NATIONAL AWARD: Service to Veterans

Member Award: Hour Bar Recognition for Service to Veterans Volunteers

Type of Award: Hour Bar

Presented to: Member by her department via the ALA National Headquarters

Materials and Guidelines:

Volunteers are recognized when specific hour milestones are reached: 50, 100, 300, 500 and 1,000.

After the first 1,000-hour bar is awarded, the next bar earned will be in 1,000 hour increments up to 20,000 hours. Hour bars are also offered in increments of 25,000 and 30,000 hours.

UNIT AWARD: Outstanding Unit VAR Program Award

Type of award: Citation

Presented to: One Unit Chairperson per division (5 awards)

Materials and Guidelines:

Entries must include the award cover sheet located in this Program Action Plan.

Awarded to the unit chairperson in each division who conducted the best overall promotion of the VAR program.

The entry must be typewritten in narrative format, not to exceed 1,000 words.

Include pictures, clippings, scrapbooks, folders, etc.

Units will submit entries to the Department Chairperson by the required date.

Attach an award cover sheet, including the name of the award, as well as the name and contact information for the Department and Unit VAR Chairperson.

NAFA AWARD:

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NAFA) support recognition

Type of Award: Verbal announcement during VAR chairman's remarks at the 2024 ALA National Convention.

Presented to: Departments, Units and/or Members who qualify for stated contribution level to NAFA. Donations are made through the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.

Materials and Guidelines:

NAFA will recognize Departments/Units/Members that contribute in this way.

Bronze: \$1,000-\$2,400 to the NAFA from Aug. 1, 2023-July 31, 2024

Silver: \$2,500-\$4,999 to the NAFA from Aug. 1, 2023-July 31, 2024

Gold: \$5,000-\$14,999 to the NAFA from Aug. 1, 2023-July 31, 2024

To be considered, donations to the NAFA must be received in the national office from August 1, 2023 through July 31, 2024.

ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in July.

VETERAN AFFAIRS VOLUNTARY SERVICE (VAVS) AWARDS

National Award: VAVS Volunteer of the Year Award/ALA NAC Nominee

Type of Award: Citation + \$500 donation to VAVS facility or VCAF of her choice presented by the American Legion Auxiliary.

Presented to: Member

Materials and Guidelines:

Candidates for VAVS National Advisory Committee (NAC) Volunteer of the Year will be submitted by the chiefs of voluntary service and department chairperson by November 1, 2023, and to the National VAVS deputy.

The American Legion Auxiliary selects the ALA Volunteer of the Year. The name of the ALA Volunteer of the Year is forwarded for consideration as the NAC Volunteer of the Year.

MEMBER AWARD: 10,000 Hour Volunteer Service Award

Type of Award: Citation + \$100 donation to VAVS facility or VCAF of her choice presented by The American Legion Auxiliary.

Presented to: Member

Materials and Guidelines:

Given to volunteers who have reached 10,000 hours of service in a VA facility during this year (April 1, 2023-March 31, 2024).

Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by the first Friday in June.

MEMBER AWARD: 20,000 Hour Volunteer Service Award

Type of Award: Citation + \$200 donation to VAVS facility or VCAF of her choice presented by the American Legion Auxiliary

Presented to: Member

Materials and Guidelines:

Given to volunteers who have reached more than 20,000 hours of service in a VA facility during this year (April 1, 2023-March 31, 2024).

Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by the first Friday in June.

INDIVIDUAL RECOGNITION AWARD: Volunteer Recruitment & Service Department Award

Type of Award: Citation presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs

Presented to: Hospital Representative

Materials and Guidelines:

No entry form required

Awarded to the hospital rep at every facility that shows an increase in both volunteers and volunteer hours at a VA Medical Center from April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024.

The award winner will be determined by the national VAVS representative through verification of hours and number of volunteers as recorded by VAVS.

INDIVIDUAL RECOGNITION AWARD: 100 Percent VAVS Meeting Attendance Award

Type of Award: Attendance Card presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs

Presented to: Hospital Representative and Deputy

Materials and Guidelines:

No entry form required

An “Attendance Card” will be awarded to each representative and deputy who has 100 percent attendance to VAVS committee meetings at her assigned facility.

The national VAVS representative will verify the winners from VA records.

JAMES H. PARKE SCHOLARSHIP

This substantial scholarship is awarded annually by Veterans Affairs to a student volunteer.

The American Legion Auxiliary contributes \$2,000 annually to this scholarship fund. To be eligible, candidates must have completed 100 hours of regularly scheduled VAVS volunteer service during the calendar year prior to September 1; be a student in the 10th grade or above; and have not reached their 19th birthday. The Medical Center director nominates a candidate for the award by submission of the nomination form to the president of the fund by November 1 of each calendar year. Nominations received after that date will not be considered. The nomination form should be completed to reflect the volunteer service and background of the candidate and include: age, years of volunteering, number of volunteer hours, areas of service and affiliated/supporting organizations, if any.

See www.va.gov for information on VAVS, James H. Parke Scholarship. The national winner receives a plaque and a letter of commitment. This presentation is usually made at the Annual Meeting of the VAVS National Advisory Committee.

ALWAYS: Check the Unit Guide, website and National website for specific requirements for all awards.