

Department of Veterans Affairs  
**Voluntary Service**  
2007 Annual Report





# Letter from the Director

Here at the Department of Veteran Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS), we are grateful for the volunteers who make a difference in the lives of America's veterans everyday. Across the country I continue to see and hear about the impressive contributions of partner organizations, VAVS volunteers, and those that run these programs. The best testimonies come from the veterans themselves who express their joy to have these individuals in their lives.

FY 2007 gave VAVS the opportunity to come together as a community and prove our devotion and dedication to the memory and care of America's heroes. In response to VA's changing dynamics, VAVS incorporated this unity with events such as Echo Taps Worldwide and Welcome Home Celebrations. The appreciation received from the community, veterans, and their families illustrates the active fulfillment of the mission and vision of the Department of Veteran Affairs.

There are many successes in VAVS that we are fortunate to celebrate. However, there are still many challenges that give us the opportunity to uphold our commitment to the care of those who serve in the Armed Forces. The future of VAVS depends on the continuation of the strong responsiveness of our caring and compassionate communities. I am confident that VAVS will utilize these resources and continue to play a vital role in the care of veterans and their families.

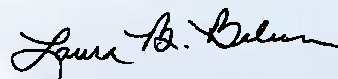
## Front Cover

Dylan Rutherford of New Jersey plays Taps at the Annapolis National Cemetery in Maryland. Fourteen year old Dylan not only participated in the Echo Taps event, he coordinated the event for the Annapolis location. The event took place on May 19, 2007, Armed Forces Day.

Thank you, Dylan!

## VAVS Mission

To provide a structured volunteer program under the management of VA compensated employees, in cooperation with community resources, to serve America's veterans and their families with dignity and compassion.



Director, Voluntary Service Office



## What is VAVS?

The Department of Veteran Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program, the largest volunteer program in the Federal government, has provided 60 years of service to America's veterans seeking care in VA health care facilities. With more than 350 national and community organizations supporting the program, VAVS is advised by a National Advisory Committee (NAC), composed of 63 major veteran, civic, and service organizations.

VAVS volunteers and their organizations contribute gifts and donations, which supplement VA appropriations to medical centers, clinics, and nursing homes. These significant contributions allow the Department of Veteran Affairs to assist direct patient care programs, as well as support services and activities that may not be fiscal priorities from year to year.

As VA has expanded its care of veteran patients into the community, volunteers have become involved. They assist veteran patients by placing staff in such settings as hospital wards, nursing homes, community-based volunteer programs, end-of-life programs, respite care, national cemeteries, and veteran outreach centers.

## National Advisory Committee (NAC)

The National Advisory Committee (NAC) of the Department of Veteran Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) was established by VA Circular No. 117, May 17, 1947, and became a Federally chartered advisory committee on February 5, 1975.

The Committee provides advice to the Secretary of Veteran Affairs, through the Under Secretary of Health, on the coordination and promotion of volunteer activities within VA health care facilities, along with other matters relating to volunteerism. It also keeps the officers and members of participating organizations informed of volunteer needs and accomplishments.

The NAC Executive Committee is made up of 19 member organizations that monitor and perform oversight of the NAC membership policies and procedures. Members of the Executive Committee are appointed by the Chairman of the NAC.



# FY 2007 Priorities and Accomplishments

## *VA Voluntary Service National Staff Training Conference*

In August 2007, a National Staff Training Conference for VAVS Program Managers was held in Orlando, Florida. More than 140 participants attended the three day conference, which featured many outstanding speakers and educational sessions relevant to the issues and challenges we face in VAVS management. Participants benefited by enhancing their skills, and by developing and sharing new ideas, resources, and best practices in VAVS.

**2007 Priority Accomplished: Coordinate and Implement a Chief's Training**

## *EchoTaps Worldwide*

On May 19, 2007, Armed Forces Day, more than 3,000 volunteers worldwide participated in the Echo Taps Worldwide event, which is a cascading musical performance of Taps to honor and remember our American veterans. Individuals, schools, and organizations participated in this unique tribute as performers or support volunteers. In all National VA Cemeteries, State Veterans Cemeteries, and American Battle Monuments overseas. Echo Taps volunteers have vowed to continue this event annually to ensure a lasting tribute to veterans in their final resting place that commemorates their service to our nation.

**2007 Priority Accomplished: Support Echo Taps Worldwide**



## *Caregivers Volunteer Program*

VAVS developed recruitment and training materials for Caregiver Support Network to prepare volunteers and more effectively assist primary caregivers of veterans. The Caregiver Support Network exists to meet a growing need to support those outside the medical environment, who have the daily responsibility of caring for ill and injured veterans in their homes. This goal was established out of the growing need for well-trained volunteers to provide compassionate support to those caregivers who give care to America's veterans in their homes.

**2007 Priority Accomplished: Develop Materials for Caregivers Volunteer Program**

## *Support OIF and OEF Veterans Through VAVS*

VAVS is actively involved in promoting and supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans and their families. VAVS coordinates and supports "Welcome Home Celebration" events for OIF/OEF service members, veterans, and their families. Families of OIF/OEF veterans who are receiving care in VA Polytrauma Centers receive lodging and other support services, through gifts and donations from individuals and organizations coordinated by VAVS. Plans are underway to expand respite and caregiver support service options for OIF/OEF veterans and their families.

**2007 Priority Accomplished: Provide Support to OIF and OEF Patients Through VAVS**

## *Advanced Clinic Access*

VAVS educated and informed staff and volunteers about new initiatives for Advanced Clinic Access (ACA) in 2007. The goal of ACA is to improve quality and service by eliminating unnecessary waste and delays through continuous improvements in VHA processes. ACA Systems Redesign offers new volunteer opportunities, which include: making reminder telephone calls to veterans; serving in the Ambassador Program; mailing appointment reminder letters to patients; driving vans transporting patients; assisting with data collection; and participating in telemedicine. Workshops on Advanced Clinic Access were conducted at the 2007 VAVS NAC Meeting and at the National VAVS Training Conference.

**2007 Priority Accomplished: Promote Volunteer Support for Advanced Clinic Access**



## *Recruitment & Retention*

This priority was accomplished by decreasing the volunteer turnover rate to 25% or less. Improving volunteer recruitment and retention is an ongoing priority and will be carried over as part of the FY-2008 VAVS priorities.

**2007 Priority Accomplished: Decrease Volunteer Turnover Rate to 25% or Less**

## *VSS Tracking Volunteer Requirements*

Budget funds were not available to accomplish the goal of developing a tracking mechanism for volunteer training and security requirements in the Volunteer Timekeeping System (VSS), and is being carried over as part of the FY-2008 VAVS priorities.

**2007 Priority Deferred: Develop VSS Tracking Mechanism for Volunteer Training Requirements**



# National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans

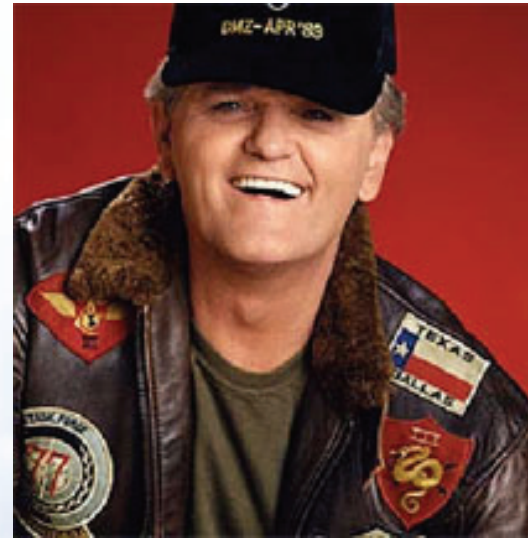
National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Program is an annual event coordinated by Voluntary Service on the 14th of February. It is an opportunity for Americans to say thank you to the more than 98,000 veterans of the U.S. armed services who are cared for every day in VA medical centers, outpatient centers, outpatient clinics, domiciliary, and nursing homes.

The purpose of the program is to:

- Pay tribute and express appreciation to hospitalized veterans
- Increase community awareness of the role of VA medical center
- Encourage citizens to visit hospitalized veterans and to become involved as volunteers
- Provide an opportunity for the community to become acquainted with the volunteer opportunities within the medical center

For the last 18 years, Ann Landers has devoted a column in January to VA's National Salute asking readers to send Valentine cards and letters to hospitalized veterans at their nearest VA facilities. We are grateful for the outstanding response from the community during this celebration. Last year, approximately 1.3 million valentines were received as a result of the column.

Over 43,000 visitors visited over 68,000 veterans during the Salute week, generating over 770 media events. During this one week over 900 new volunteers were recruited to serve veterans. This observance continues to be a great opportunity for VHA to present a positive image to the public and to promote volunteerism in support of hospitalized veterans.



## Those who participated in a variety of activities at VA medical centers included:

- individuals
- veterans groups
- military personnel
- civic organizations
- businesses
- schools
- local media
- celebrities
- sports stars

## The activities and events included:

- special ward visits
- valentine distributions
- photo opportunities
- school essay contests
- special recognition activities
- veteran recognition programs



## VA VOLUNTARY SERVICE FY 2008 PRIORITIES

### ■ Enhance Voluntary Service Timekeeping System (VSS)

- Develop tracking module in VSS for volunteer training and security requirements
- Automate Healthcare Integrity and protection Data bank (HIPDB comparison with Health and Human Services (HHS)

### ■ Support Welcome Home Celebrations

### ■ Develop Materials for Patient Feeding Volunteer Program

### ■ Improve Volunteer Recruitment and Retention