

66TH ANNUAL  
VA VOLUNTARY SERVICE  
NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING



MARCH 14 - 16, 2012  
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

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**Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) National Advisory Committee (NAC)  
Executive Committee (EC) Meeting**

**Wednesday, March 14, 2012 – 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.**

**Call to Order:** Frances Costa, Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary and National Executive Committee Chairperson, called the meeting to order.

**Invocation:** The invocation was delivered by Charles Gallina, Knights of Columbus.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** The pledge was led by William “Bill” Bryce, Military Order of the Cootie.

**Roll Call:** NEC attendance was duly recorded as follows:

**Present (P)/ Absent (A)**

American Legion (The)	P
American Legion Auxiliary	P
American Red Cross	P
AMVETS	P
AMVETS Auxiliary	P
Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks	P
Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.	P
Disabled American Veterans	P
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary	P
Forty and Eight	P
Help Hospitalized Veterans	P
Knights of Columbus	P
Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars	P
Military Order of the Cootie	P
Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A., Inc.	P
National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution	P
Paralyzed Veterans of America	P
The Salvation Army	P
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.	P
Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.	A

**VA and Other Staff Present:**

Laura B. Balun, Deputy NAC Chairperson and Director, Voluntary Service Office, VA Central Office (VACO)  
Stephen G. Moynihan, Volunteer Meeting Planner, Minneapolis VA Health Care System  
Lorna Hatch, Chief, VA Voluntary Service Office, Togus VA Medical Center (VAMC)  
Fred Lesinski, Chief, VA Voluntary Service Office, Ralph H. Johnson VAMC  
Ronni Miller, Chief, VA Voluntary Service Office, Durham VAMC  
Jerry Butler, Treasurer, VAVS Partners, Inc.  
John P. Brown, III, President, James H. Parke Memorial Fund  
Christopher Slawinski, Treasurer, James H. Parke Memorial Fund Board  
Tyrone Green, Program Analyst, VA Voluntary Service, VACO  
Marty Naugher, Voluntary Service Specialist, VA Voluntary Service, VACO  
Mary Jo Munnely, Lead Staff Assistant, VA Voluntary Service, VACO  
Kregg Parenti, Voluntary Service Specialist, VA Voluntary Service, VACO

**Goals and Objectives:** Ms. Costa presented the goals and objectives of the VAVS NAC meeting as listed in the meeting booklet:

1. Provide the VAVS NAC an opportunity to conduct its business in a manner that assures achievement of all responsibilities mandated by its charter.
2. Provide NAC orientation to new local and national VAVS Representatives and Deputies and new VAVS staff.
3. Present to all member organization representatives an overview of current and pending VAVS policies and procedures.
4. Foster full and open communications among the member organizations, their representatives, and the Voluntary Service Central Office and field staff.
5. Provide the NAC member organizations with the educational and training programs designed to share information geared towards improving volunteer programs with special emphasis on methods to recruit, retain, motivate, and recognize volunteers.
6. Furnish the NAC member organizations the opportunity to hear from VA leadership concerning key issues within the Department of Veterans Affairs.
7. Arrange for the NAC review of, and action on, recommendations.
8. Honor the national recipient of the James H. Parke Memorial Youth Scholarship Award, **Elizabeth “Lizzie” Leneski**, student volunteer at the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
9. Recognize **Tracy Butts**, Chief, Voluntary Service, at the Cincinnati VAMC, Cincinnati, Ohio, as the recipient of the Voluntary Service Award for Excellence.
10. Recognize **Charles Roth**, VAVS Representative, AMVETS, Tomah VAMC, Tomah, Wisconsin, as the VAVS NAC Male Volunteer of the Year and **Joy Neulieb**, VAVS Representative, American Red Cross, Battle Creek VAMC, Battle Creek, Michigan, as the VAVS NAC Female Volunteer of the Year.
11. Recognize the following award recipients for the American Spirit Awards: **Richard Velasquez**, 25<sup>th</sup> Annual National Veterans Golden Age Games Coordinator, VA Pacific Islands Health Care System, Honolulu, Hawaii, for Military Recruitment Category; **Senior Companion Program**, Michael E. DeBlakey VAMC, Houston, Texas, for Senior Recruitment Category; and **Youth Program**, G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC, Jackson, Mississippi, for Student Recruitment.

**Additions/Revisions to Minutes of EC Meeting held October 2011:** Ms. Costa asked if there were any errors or omissions to the minutes. Patricia “Pat” Kranzow, American Legion Auxiliary, stated that the meeting was accurately reflected in the minutes, but pointed out a diversion from parliamentary procedure concerning the tabling of a motion on page 13. She suggested that the proper action should have been to postpone the issue definitely, making it part of the current meeting, or indefinitely to eliminate it altogether.

Patty Piening, AMVETS Auxiliary, moved to accept the minutes and the motion was seconded by Ron Rolfes, Jr., Forty and Eight. **The motion carried.**

**Host's Welcome:** Edmund "Fred" Lesinski, Chief, VA Voluntary Service, Ralph H. Johnson VAMC, welcomed everyone and thanked the Committee for giving the city the opportunity to host the conference.

**66<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Agenda Overview:** Stephen Moynihan, NAC Volunteer and annual meeting planner, greeted the EC members and others in attendance. He stated 330 attendees were registered and highlighted some of the items on the agenda. Members were encouraged to pre-register for meal functions at future meetings due to the small window of time most hotel properties allow for registration.

Mr. Moynihan briefly discussed the pre-con and VAVS staff meetings that were held prior to the annual meeting and urged attendees to visit the Health & Information Fair being presented by the Ralph H. Johnson VAMC. He highlighted the New Representative & Deputy Representative Training session, which is designed to provide orientation for new VAVS NAC Representatives and Deputy Representatives and new VAVS staff. He also encouraged people to take part in the open forum session, which is designed to give local and national Representatives, Deputy Representatives, and volunteers an opportunity to interact with VA staff.

Mr. Lesinski spoke to the transportation options that the DAV volunteers and the Hospital Service Coordinator had arranged for members' meals on their own.

Laura Balun, Director, Voluntary Service Office, announced that the Creative Arts Winners from Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital will be providing the entertainment for Friday evening's Closing Awards Dinner.

**VAVS Update:** Ms. Balun began by commending Mr. Lesinski and the volunteers for their outstanding work organizing the conference. She then went on to report:

- All VA employees, contractors, volunteers, and residents, who have computer access for their assignment, will have to be trained in the Continuous Readiness in Information Security Program (CRISP) and be registered in the Talent Management System by the end of September 2012. This will require a very large investment of time and resources to accomplish and Ms. Balun stated concern about the possible impact it may have on future volunteer recruitment. She suggested that VAVS Program Managers may reduce the status of Regularly Scheduled (RS) volunteers that only log-in a few hours a month to Occasional (OCC) volunteers. The VA Palo Alto Healthcare System VAVS program will be the pilot site for the new protocol.
- The Valentines for Veterans Concerts were a tremendous success again this year. The concerts provided an opportunity to recognize Veterans in the communities and for volunteers to talk about what the experience means to them with the goal to recruit new potential volunteers by doing so. The concerts are a great means of establishing important community relationships.

### **Subcommittee Reports:**

Recommendations: Mr. Brian Bertges, The American Legion, announced that there are seven recommendations to be proposed for a vote at the business session of the NAC meeting. Six of these are suggested for approval, and one for disapproval.

NAC Volunteer of the Year: Ms. Costa reported that 15 nominations were received this year, 5 male and 10 female. Unfortunately, the submissions of many highly qualified applicants could not be considered due to late submission or paperwork not being properly completed. The forms were sent to the VAVS National Representatives in September with a deadline for nominations to be returned to VACO postmarked no later than December 31.

Ms. Balun commented on the paucity of nominations given the 87,000 volunteers across the country. This recognition and support is the only form of payment the VA offers to volunteers for their service to Veterans and their families, and she would like to see a submission from each organization within VAVS. She also mentioned some nominations arrived in the VACO mail room prior to the December 31 deadline but the delivery to the VAVS office was delayed due to the holiday staffing. Ms. Balun concluded her comments by thanking Tyrone Green for his work coordinating the process for these awards.

Mr. Bill Bryce, Military Order of the Cootie reminded everyone present that volunteers do not have to be from a large facility to have a winning nomination.

Ms. Naomi "Candy" Gray, non-EC member, suggested utilizing an electronic application instead of paper submittals. Ms. Costa pointed out that several nominations were received electronically, but some were still not received before the deadline. Ms. Kranzow, suggested that a deadline be given for when nominations from VAVS program managers should be received by the Representative. Organizations were reminded that this is a NAC Volunteer of the Year Award and that when the NAC members receive the call letter, the National Representatives should establish the date he or she needs to receive the completed nomination package in order to meet the submission deadline. VAVS program managers may make recommendations. Letters of support from local VA facilities are also allowed to accompany each submission. All local nominations must be submitted to the affiliated volunteer's National VAVS Representative who will select the organization's candidate to be forwarded to the VA Voluntary Service Office on the national letterhead of the nominating organization

W.G. "Bill" Kilgore, AMVETS, recommended moving the deadline date for getting nominations to the EC Chair to December 15 in order to avoid issues around holiday mail room congestion. Since that would require a change to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), the recommendation will be passed on to Judith McCombs, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. and Chairman of the NAC SOP Revisions subcommittee.

Recruitment: Mr. Gallina, Knights of Columbus, reported that the downward trend in number of RS and OCC volunteers logging hours has continued through the first and second quarters of FY 2012. As procedural obstacles make getting volunteers started more difficult, retaining existing volunteers will be critical.

Mr. Gallina discussed some recruitment tips, which included: VAMCs should review and update their Representative/Deputy Representative rosters, as well as review Annual Joint Reviews (AJRs) and all quarterly reports for Representative/Deputy Representative attendance. He discussed the Intergenerational Recruiting Strategy that involves targeting specific age groups with an understanding of what tasks appeal to them. Mr. Gallina concluded his report by reviewing some of the key VA programs that offered opportunities for both regularly scheduled and occasionally scheduled volunteers as well as opportunities for cash and noncash donations.

Del "Bulldog" Turner, Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A., Inc., commented on the difficulties in acquiring the necessary identification for volunteers. Ms. Balun said that she would like to set up a meeting with Mr. John Hancock at Central Office to discuss the issue of the PIV badge program. Mr. Bertges is currently working on recommendations to reduce some of the challenges of getting volunteers started and will also be meeting with National Cemetery Administration to find a means of capturing hours logged by Honor Guards and volunteers performing services at the National Cemeteries.

Membership: Mr. Turner reported that the NAC lost two organizations that have dropped below the qualifying level for membership: I.B.P.O. Elks of the World, Inc. and Women Marines Association (WMA). As the WMA works to increase its activity to reach the qualifying level for reinstatement, their application has been accepted to be added as an Honorary Member organization. Two new member organizations have been added

to the NAC: Soldiers' Angels as a Donor Member and Veterans Support Organization as an Associate Donor Member.

Mr. Turner suggested that organizations find partners that can augment their program to avoid slipping into lower categories

(Recess.)

(Whereupon, the meeting was resumed.)

**NAC SOP Revisions:** Ms. McCombs was unable to be present; therefore, Ms. Costa will be sending a recommendation to Ms. McCombs regarding the NAC Volunteer of the Year submission criteria.

**Parke Board Update:** John P. Brown, III, President, James H. Parke Memorial Fund Board, updated the Committee on the distribution of \$30,000 in scholarships and commended Beryl Love for his hard work coordinating the nomination process. A Board election was to be held later in the evening.

Treasurer's Report: Christopher Slawinski, Treasurer, James H. Parke Memorial Fund Board, reported on the findings of a recent audit of the Fund which showed it to be financially sound. The Fund had \$86,220 in its checking account, about \$74,000 in outstanding scholarships, and \$803,595 in conservative growth securities. Last year, donations totaled \$31,531.

**VAVS Partners, Inc. Treasurer's Report:** Jerry Butler, Treasurer, VAVS Partners, Inc., discussed the financial report that had been distributed to the NAC. At the closure of the 65<sup>th</sup> Annual NAC Meeting, after deducting total expenses of \$33,295.85, the total monies of the Committee amounted to \$60,530.78.

**National Salute Report:** Ms. Balun announced that actor, West Point graduate, and Desert Storm Veteran, Mark Valley serves as this year's National Salute Chairperson. She reported on the success of the Valentines for Veterans program: more than 119,000 valentines were received at various medical centers and 4,200 guests visited more than 1,600 Veteran patients. There were 16 concerts held across the country. The total cost of the concerts was \$353,000, but yielded \$551,000 in donations, 146 volunteer recruitments, and 847 inquiries into volunteer opportunities.

### **Old Business:**

Future 2013 Annual NAC Meeting Plans: Ronni Miller, VAVS Program Manager, Durham VAMC, invited everyone to attend the 67<sup>th</sup> Annual VAVS NAC Meeting to be held in Cary, North Carolina, March 4 through March 6, 2013. The meeting will take place at the Embassy Suites Raleigh-Durham where the room rate is \$119 for a full suite, complimentary breakfast, parking, in-room internet, and a 24-hour shuttle to and from the airport and adjacent local restaurants.

### **New Business:**

Fall 2012 EC Meeting: Ms. Balun was still awaiting information from the hotel for the date of the upcoming meeting. She will relate the details to the EC members as soon as they are available.

Ms. Balun presented the group with options for the FY 2014 NAC meeting, seeking advice on which cities should be considered to host. The Committee voted for three cities to be researched by VA staff and they are: 1) Fayetteville, Arkansas; 2) Biloxi, Mississippi; 3) and Detroit, Michigan. The information will be presented in October.



**Appointments:** Ms. Costa recommended appointing Brian Bertges as Chairman of the Recommendations Subcommittee. The motion was made by Mr. Turner and seconded by Mr. Kilgore. **The motion carried** and the subcommittee members will be announced at a later session.

**Good of the Order:** Ms. Costa thanked VAVS Partners, Inc. for sponsoring the break, and urged everyone to complete the meeting surveys especially since there will not be a critique session at the end of the week.

Mr. Bryce announced that this is his last year on the NAC. He has served for 8 years and wished to thank everyone for all of their cooperation over the years.

Ms. McCarthy notified the Committee that she is now the Blue Star Mothers of America Representative and will be submitting a membership change to the VA.

The meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

**VAVS REP/DEP TRAINING**  
**Wednesday March 14, 2012, 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.**

Faculty: Joe Dooley, Chief, Voluntary Service, Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans' Hospital, Bedford, Massachusetts; Nathan Witt, Chief, Voluntary Service, Harry S. Truman Veterans' Hospital, Columbia, Missouri; Dax Allcorn, Voluntary Service Technical Career Field Intern.

Mr. Dooley opened the meeting and introduced Mr. Witt, who began by asking the audience to keep their own facility procedures in mind as they listen to the presentation. He listed several helpful resources, such as handbooks and online tools and reviewed many of the definitions used in the VA. What sets VA apart from other health care volunteer programs is the population that is served. All of us in VAVS need to "sell our message" of providing additional human and financial resources.

Mr. Dooley discussed the history of VAVS and its mission as well as the military background of VA Secretary, Eric K. Shinseki. He gave an overview of the VA organizational structure and the responsibilities of each department. Mr. Dooley explained the NAC's membership categories and charter, which is to make recommendations to the Secretary through the Under Secretary for Health on all matters regarding volunteers in VA facilities and volunteerism. The Committee's role is particularly important at the present time as the VA transitions into patient-centered care in the Medical Centers.

Mr. Witt reviewed the responsibilities and appointments of national VAVS Representatives, local VAVS Program Managers, and local VAVS Representatives and Deputy Representatives. He spoke about the purpose and structure of local VAVS committees and emphasized that the most important thing to consider before certifying Representatives is to ensure that they have a real passion for serving Veterans.

A brief discussion with the audience occurred concerning the requirements for the fingerprinting process and the ability to serve by those lacking technical skills. Mr. Witt gave some examples of the activities happening at local VAMCs. The audience participated in a discussion of the criteria for being considered an adequate Representative or Deputy Representative.

Mr. Witt presented volunteering statistics, recruitment strategies, and the 2012 priorities for the VAVS program and they are: (1) Support the Secretary's initiative to end Veteran homelessness; (2) Improve access to care through the Volunteer Transportation Network; (3) Standardize and promote VISN volunteer statistics; (4) Assist with voter registration for Veteran patients; and (5) Focus on VSS training for VAVS staff.



Before concluding the session, Mr. Dooley briefly discussed the new Veterans Transportation System, as well as volunteer recruitment trends and opportunities.

**OPEN FORUM**  
**Wednesday, March 14, 2012, 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

Ms. Balun commenced the Open Forum by asking the VAVS Program Managers to introduce themselves and encouraged the audience members to seek them out with follow-up questions or comments. The floor was then opened to participants' concerns.

Mr. John Markiewicz, VAVS Representative, Lake City VAMC, Lake City, Florida, shared his concern that commuting time is not able to be claimed as volunteer hours, even for the more remote hospitals. Ms. Balun stated that the volunteer coverage begins at the time the volunteer begins his or her assignment, but that certain organizations do offer some form of credit for travel time, as field service hours.

Mr. Robert Keller, Vietnam Veterans of America, suggested changing the definition of Veteran service hours to allow volunteers to claim the time and resources used supporting the Moving Wall exhibit. Ms. Balun replied that the hours would qualify if it is a VA activity.

Ms. Geraldean Hunter-Vautherot, Military Order of the Cootie Auxiliary, commented that too much money was being spent on mail, especially when large envelopes are used to send out a few sheets of paper. Ms. Balun encouraged everyone with internet access to get on the email list as a cheaper and more expedient alternative, and also stated that we can certainly ensure using the smaller envelopes for future mailings.

Ms. Charlotte Clinger, United Daughters of the Confederacy, inquired about the costliness of the biannual I.D. badge process. Ms. Balun responded that the term has recently been extended to 12 months, but that some VISNs do not yet have the new guidance of 12 months for a flash badge.

Ms. Mary O'Neal, AMVETS, asked about capturing volunteer hours at nursing homes with beds designated for Veterans. Ms. Balun replied that volunteers must be directed by the VA for the hours to be certified. Ms. Lynn Prosser, Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary, shared with the group how her organization categorizes volunteer services in order to receive credit. Mr. Jimmy McCown, AMVETS, suggested contacting local VAVS Program Managers and social work offices to coordinate those activities.

Mr. Andrew Nagy, Forty and Eight, requested that staff find a way to get inactive members off of the roles. Ms. Balun said that new protocols are in place that should remove inactive members on September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year. Any organization with inactive members on its reports should contact the Voluntary Service office and they can contact the help desk to ensure their coding is correct. Mr. Bertges commented that one of the recommendations to be presented to the NAC is to provide representatives access to reports and data allowing them to make necessary adjustments. A discussion took place surrounding some of the issues that have been encountered sending out reports in various formats.

Ms. Renee Ball, Disabled American Veterans, shared with the group the value of virtual volunteering and asked that more information on the program be provided to the VAVS Representatives and Deputy Representatives. Ms. Balun said that she would share Ms. Ball's suggestion, however local hospitals would need to provide the information on the specific virtual assignments are offered at a particular site.

Mr. Keller suggested that VAVS issue a report each year detailing what member organizations have been working on. Ms. Balun responded that organizations had previously been asked to deliver summaries of

their activities, but that requirement was discontinued because submission rates were too low. Mr. Turner recommended visiting the organizations' and VAMCs' websites to get more information on their programs. Creating a repository of annual reports with links to from local websites may be a helpful resource that will be considered for future development.

**BUSINESS SESSION**  
**Thursday, March 15, 2012, 8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Call to Order:** Ms. Costa called the session to order.

**Presentation of Colors:** Presented by the American Legion, Post 147Color Guard.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Led by George Palmer, VAVS Representative, Marine Corps League, Ralph H. Johnson VAMC, Charleston, South Carolina.

**Invocation:** Given by Chaplain Lorenzo Moses, Chief, Chaplain Service, Ralph H. Johnson VAMC.

**Welcome:** Ms. Costa welcomed everyone and thanked AMVETS National Service Foundation, for sponsoring the morning continental breakfast. She introduced Mr. Scott Isaacks, Acting Director, Ralph H. Johnson VAMC, Charleston, South Carolina. Mr. Isaacks described some of his facility's volunteer activities and expressed the VA's appreciation for the service and sacrifices of its volunteers.

Ms. Costa next introduced the Mayor of the City of Charleston, The Honorable Joseph P. Riley. Mayor Riley thanked the Committee for selecting the city of Charleston for its meeting and invited the group to enjoy the city's numerous cultural and historical offerings. He emphasized the importance of the volunteer's role in shaping a democratic society and that serving at a Veterans Hospital is the most American form of volunteering.

**Roll Call:** The VAVS NAC was established in 1946 and became a federally chartered advisory committee in 1973. A copy of the Committee's charter had been provided to the members. The purpose of the NAC is to advise the Secretary, through the Under Secretary of Health, and other members of the VHA Central Office staff, on how to coordinate and promote volunteer activities within the VA healthcare facilities and on matters pertaining to volunteerism.

The roll call of the NAC members was duly recorded as follows:

<u>Organization Name</u>	<u>Present (P)/ Absent (A)</u>
<u>Service Member Organizations</u>	
American Ex-Prisoners of War	A
American Gold Star Mothers	P
American Legion (The)	P
American Legion Auxiliary	P
American Red Cross	P
AMVETS	P
AMVETS Auxiliary	P
Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks	P
Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.	P
Disabled American Veterans	P
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary	P
Forty and Eight	P
Help Hospitalized Veterans	P

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.	P	
Knights of Columbus	P	
Korean War Veteran Association	P	
Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., Inc.	P	
Ladies Auxiliary, Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A., Inc.	P	
Marine Corps League	P	
Marine Corps League Auxiliary	P	
Masonic Service Association of North America	P	
Military Order of the Cootie	P	
Military Order of the Cootie Auxiliary	P	
Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A., Inc.	P	
National Ladies Auxiliary, Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A., Inc.		A
National Society Daughters of the American Revolution	P	
Paralyzed Veterans of America	P	
Polish Legion of American Veterans, U.S.A.	P	
Sons of the American Legion	P	
The Salvation Army	P	
United Voluntary Services	P	
Veteran of Foreign Wars of the U.S.	P	
Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.		A
WAVES National	P	
<b><u>Associate Service Member Organizations</u></b>		
Blinded Veterans Association	P	
Catholic War Veterans		A
Catholic War Veterans Ladies' Auxiliary	P	
Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War		A
Fleet Reserve Association	P	
Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.	P	
Italian War Veterans of the U.S.		A
Ladies Auxiliary of the Fleet Reserve Association	P	
Ladies Auxiliary, Polish Legion of American Veterans, U.S.A.	P	
National Society Colonial Dames XVII Century		A
National Society Sons of the American Revolution	P	
Sons of AMVETS	P	
United Auto Workers		A
United Daughter of the Confederacy	P	
Women's Army Corps Veterans Association		A
<b><u>Donor Member Organizations</u></b>		
Air Compassion for Veterans		A
The Bowlers to Veterans Link (BVL), Inc.	P	
Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project	P	
Soldier's Angels	P	
Silver Star Families of America		A
<b><u>Associate Donor Member Organizations</u></b>		
Veterans Support Organization	P	
<b><u>Honorary Member</u></b>		
Women Marines Association	P	

**Opening Remarks and Meeting Objectives:** Ms. Costa asked the speakers to be aware of the time so that each presenter will have the full time allotted to them. She also asked that the voting members read and be prepared to vote on the 2012 VAVS NAC Recommendations that were handed out to the Member Organizations.

Ms. Costa introduced John. S. Hale, NAC Chairperson and Veterans Health Administration Chief Communications Officer.

**VHA Health Communications:** Mr. Hale began his presentation on using communications to solve health care challenges by giving the group an overview of the Office of Communication's objectives and research methodologies. His office has been probing top-performing health organizations' best practices in utilizing communications to support their health enterprise. A key finding was that some of the most valuable resources in community outreach are employees and patients. An effort is currently underway to improve internal communications to assist those engaged with the VA system to carry the central messages out into the community.

A major recent focus for the Office of Communications has been the idea of developing a brand strategy for the VA. This consists of three elements: 1) Brand Promise – Health care built around Veterans; 2) Brand Attributes – Friendly, caring, innovative; 3) Brand Identity – aesthetic elements designed to reinforce a close personal relationship with Veterans, emphasizing that the VA health care system is built around their highly specialized needs. The work of VAVS is one of the best expressions of the VA brand that could be conceived.

The upcoming work of the VHA Office of Communications will focus on engaging Veterans in four major areas: 1) Promoting good health among Veterans at all stages of life; 2) Making the medical facility experience more welcoming; 3) Communicating the effectiveness of research in promoting innovation within the VA; 4) Informing Veterans of the full range of their VA benefits. The VHA Office of Communications has made major progress in understanding its audience and effective means of strategic outreach.

Mr. Nagy asked whether the billions of dollars owed from third party collections would ever be recovered. Mr. Hale responded that the new Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health is aware of the problem and that there are efforts underway to recover as much as possible.

Ms. Dassa Carvey, WAVES National, expressed the need to communicate the Aid and Assistance benefit to Veterans and their spouses far more than the VA currently does. Mr. Hale agreed with her suggestion and hopes the VAVS will take advantage of their direct access to patients to inform them of the program.

Mr. Carroll Prosser, Disabled American Veterans, commented on the injustice of VAMCs purported practice of giving preference to Veterans of the Iraqi and Afghan wars. Mr. Hale lightheartedly asked that participants save any difficult questions for Under Secretary Petzel. He went on to acknowledge that Mr. Prosser had raised a very serious point, but that he was unaware of any VA policy to favor one group of Veterans over another. Veterans returning from recent conflicts may receive more attention at local facilities, but the VA believes every Veteran ought to be treated with equal courtesy and care.

**VAVS Report:** presented by Ms. Balun included the following highlights:

- More than \$354 million in voluntary contributions donated last year;
- Priorities for FY 2012: support the Secretary's initiative to eliminate Veteran homelessness; improve access to care through Volunteer Transportation Network; standardize and promote VISN volunteer statistics; assist with voter registration for Veteran patients; focus on VSS training for VAVS staff;

- Major issues for VAVS currently are volunteer recruitment, and training volunteers in the Continuous Readiness in Information Security Program (CRISP).
- VAVS 2012 accomplishments: VA Central Office Veterans Day concert; collection of clothing for DC Winterhaven homeless event; National Salute to Veteran Patients, whose 2012 National Salute Chairperson is Mark Valley, West Point graduate, Desert Storm Veteran, and actor, currently starring on “Harry’s Law;” Valentines for Veterans concerts in 16 cities which brought in over \$551,000 in donations and 847 inquiries for volunteering; assistance to the American Legion Auxiliary with donating Tempur-Pedic mattresses.

Ms. Balun showed a Public Service Announcement about the Caregiver Support Program.

(Recess.)

(Whereupon, the meeting was resumed.)

Ms. Costa thanked the American Red Cross for sponsoring the food and beverages for the break and introduced Mr. Glenn R. Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs, National Cemetery Administration.

**National Cemetery Administration:** Mr. Powers began his presentation by thanking all of the VA volunteers that donated over 322,000 hours of service to national cemeteries in FY 2011. National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is committed to maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines and 98% of their customers agree or strongly agree that the appearance of national cemeteries is excellent. He shared with the group a few examples of volunteering efforts at various cemeteries around the country and expressed Under Secretary for VA Memorial Affairs Steve L. Muro’s belief that volunteers are vital to NCA’s ability to serve Veterans and their families.

Sadly, every year many Veterans die homeless or without family or friends to claim their remains or make burial arrangements. The NCA has partnered with several organizations to ensure these Veterans receive the burial benefits that they have earned. NCA is working to reduce Veteran joblessness by offering a year-long paid apprenticeship program that leads to full-time permanent employment opportunities at national cemeteries or with other employers.

Mr. Powers updated the group on NCA’s efforts concerning one of the Secretary’s major priorities of expanding Veteran access. They are currently leading the largest expansion of the National Cemetery System since its inception during the Civil War. NCA is also carrying out initiatives designed to meet the needs of Veterans in highly rural and urban areas, as well as continuing to fund the construction of state and tribal cemeteries.

Ms. Costa thanked Mr. Powers and introduced Mr. Chris Nowak, Director, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events.

**Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events:** Mr. Nowak updated the NAC on the initiative to increase utilization of volunteers in the adaptive sports programs. He discussed some of the events his office puts on each year, particularly the Creative Arts Festival which is now the model for all of the other programs.

Mr. Nowak emphasized the importance of achieving adaptive sports goals as part of their recovery program and community reintegration. The VA has entered into a partnership with the U.S. Olympic Committee for Paralympic athletes to provide Veterans with an opportunity to participate in adaptive sports at a higher level. The 2012 U.S. Paralympic Team consists of over 25% Veterans and 87 Veterans are currently receiving an allowance to train as part of their benefits.

Comment from audience: Mr. Henrico “H. O.” Brown, VAMC, Hampton, Virginia commented on The First Swing program his facility is using to teach Veterans to play golf. Mr. Nowak noted that The First Swing was the model his office used in designing the Tee Tournament.

Ms. Costa thanked Mr. Nowak and introduced Mr. John Patrick, Director, VAMC, Portland, Oregon.

**Impact of Volunteers in Community Service:** Mr. Patrick shared some of his experiences of almost 30 years with the VA, including his work with Steve Moynihan creating the current VAVS handbook. The VA mission has expanded so much over the years that there are always gaps and skilled volunteers are critical in assisting the Administration to achieve its goals. Mr. Patrick discussed some of the work being done at his facility on current initiatives, such as ending Veteran homelessness and expanding transportation benefits.

Mr. Patrick encouraged everyone to attend not only VAVS meetings but also other local VA meetings. It is important that everyone be engaged with the VA system and to tell its story. He recommended reading Phillip Longman’s book on the quality of VA’s health care, entitled “Best Care Anywhere.”

Comment from Audience: Ms. O’Neal commented on her experience with the VA refusing to use a donated handicapped van that had been refurbished. Mr. Patrick acknowledged her concerns, and stated at his facility, they are working to get certification programs in place for volunteers.

Ms. Costa thanked Mr. Patrick for his remarks and thanked the Veterans Support Organization for sponsoring the afternoon break that will be held between the educational workshop sessions and adjourned the business session at 11:30 a.m.

**BUSINESS SESSION**  
**Friday, March 16, 2012**  
**8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

**Call to Order:** Ms. Costa called the session to order.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** The pledge was led by George Palmer, VAVS Representative, Marine Corps League.

Ms. Costa thanked the Knights of Columbus for sponsoring the morning’s continental breakfast. She apologized for not including the Corporation for National and Community Service in Thursday’s roll call and reported that the organization had applied and qualified as an Associate Member of the NAC. Theresa Long and Cathy Sharp were recognized as representing the organization at the NAC meeting.

**Subcommittee Reports:**

Recommendations: Report given by Mr. Bertges, member of the Recommendations subcommittee.

The proposed recommendations were summarized as follows:

1) that VA invests in replacing the existing VSS system. With the changes proposed to the areas listed herein, cascading effects through the database would be needed, which calls for the replacement of the program. Be it that the VAVS program has the ability to produce earnings beyond the cost of the program, an investment in tracking could enhance the capabilities of the VAVS program. Let it further be recommended that VAVS field and VACO staff, National Reps, and others who can offer the skill set necessary to assist in the development be included in the design of the new VAVS tracking system.



The Executive Committee suggested approval. Military Order of the Cootie moved to accept this action, with a second from the Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A. **The motion carried.**

2) that VA invest in replacing the existing VSS system by using the 8180G fund. By making a \$500,000 contribution each year for a period of two years, it would replace the current issues with the VSS program, and increase overall effectiveness and contributions that volunteers can make to the VAVS program.

The Executive Committee suggested approval. Knights of Columbus moved to accept this action, with a second from Sons of the American Legion. **The motion carried.**

3) that VA provide all National Reps/Depts access to read-only reports and quarterly meeting minutes and attendance from the volunteer.va.gov website. This access would increase their ability to communicate more effectively with VACO and field staff. Items that should be accessed should include all information reported on the AJR, quarterly reports, lists of facility VAVS Reps/Depts and their contact information.

The Executive Committee suggested approval. Polish Legion of American Veterans moved to accept this action, with a second from Forty and Eight. **The motion carried.**

4) Members of the NAC recommend that Department of Veterans Affairs make it a criterion that all National Representatives and Deputy Representatives have an email address, however printed copies can still be produced upon representatives' request.

The Executive Committee suggested approval. AMVETS moved to accept this action, with a second from Disabled American Veterans. **The motion carried.**

5) With Veteran-centered care in mind, members of the NAC recommend that the Department of Veterans Affairs establish a requirement to have Veteran representation on committees at the VAMCs in order to increase communications, transparency, and perception of VA in its efforts to provide the highest quality of care to our nation's Veterans.

The Executive Committee suggested approval. United Voluntary Services moved to accept this action, with a second from Marine Corps League. Mr. Bertges briefly explained the intent for implementation of the recommendation and noted that VACO will have the opportunity to develop their own plan. **The motion carried.**

6) (A) that VA-paid employees be allowed to serve as Reps/Depts for government employee groups; and (B) that VA-paid employees be allowed to serve as Reps/Depts for any of the organizations that are currently members of the NAC.

The Executive Committee suggested disapproval. United Voluntary Services moved to accept this action, with a second from Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A. Mr. Bryce explained that he suggested the recommendation be disapproved because of the number of ramifications involved in it. **The motion carried.**

7) that the VA, while undergoing a revamp of the VSS system, develop an online registration that will allow volunteers to register as a VAVS volunteer through an online system.

The Executive Committee suggested approval. Polish Legion of American Veterans moved to accept this action, with a second from American Red Cross. Mr. Beadle made the comment that fingerprinting applicants prior to the registration process would be more expedient. Mr. Bertges responded that the recommendation would remove the burden from VAVS staff and therefore allow them to focus on other responsibilities. **The motion carried.**



NAC Volunteer of the Year: reported by Ms. Costa, Chair. The winners were Charles Roth, VAVS Representative, AMVETS, Tomah VAMC, Tomah, Wisconsin, and Joy Neulib, VAVS Representative, American Red Cross, Battle Creek VAMC, Battle Creek, Michigan.

Ms. Costa thanked the organizations for submitting 15 nominations for consideration, but asked that they take the initiative in trying to increase the number of submissions for next year. She also asked that the service organizations be mindful that the forms are filled out correctly and are submitted before the December 31<sup>st</sup> deadline.

Recruitment: reported by Mr. Gallina, Chair. Volunteer hours have continued on a steep downward trend due to several factors. The emphasis for this year will be an intergenerational recruiting strategy with a keen awareness of the necessity of retaining these volunteers. He mentioned some of the key VA programs that offered opportunities for both regularly scheduled and occasionally scheduled volunteers as well as opportunities for cash and noncash donations. Secretary Shinseki's initiative to end Veteran homelessness has provided new opportunities for volunteering. Make the Call is the most recent campaign in this area and more information will be made available through the website.

Budget cuts are going to continue over the next years and volunteering is going to become increasingly important to the VA's operations. It is the NAC's responsibility to assist the VA in ensuring that new administrative procedures are implemented efficiently and effectively so as not to disrupt the recruitment, retention, or recognition of volunteers. Mr. Gallina commended the 2010 VAVS Technical Career Field Intern Class for developing the Quick Series® Publishing Guide, "VAVS Serving Those Who Served," that was handed out to all NAC attendees. The pocket guide is to be used for recruitment and to educate potential volunteers on the VAVS program.

Membership: reported by Mr. Turner, Chair. Mr. Turner acknowledged the three new member organizations of the NAC, Soldiers' Angels, Veterans Support Organization, and the Corporation for National and Community Services. The Women's Marine Association is now an Honorary Member organization.

Ms. Costa thanked the Subcommittee Chairs for reporting on their subcommittees and thanked the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. for sponsoring the morning's break.

(Recess.)

(Whereupon, the meeting was resumed.)

Ms. Costa introduced Patricia M. Hayes, Ph.D., Chief Consultant, Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group, Office of Patient Services, VHA.

**Serving Women Veterans:** Dr. Hayes presented on the "Rethink Veterans" campaign that is designed to bring awareness to the services VA provides to the rapidly growing women Veteran population. The largest subpopulation of woman currently taking advantage of their VA medical care benefits are between the ages of 40 and 65. The Women Veterans Health Care mission is to ensure all women Veterans receive equitable, high-quality, and comprehensive health care in a safe environment at all VA facilities.

Dr. Hayes reviewed some of the many ways the VA has worked to improve the experience for women, including implementing comprehensive primary care for women Veterans at all care sites and conducting national studies to assist in understanding what women Veterans want from VHA. Dr. Hayes commended the volunteers that

have donated their time to VA's maternity support programs and would like to see them act as a means of outreach to women Veterans to encourage them to use the benefits they have earned.

Comments from the audience:

- Ms. Prosser commented on the need for doctors to convince more women Veterans to apply for benefits to cover service-connected disabilities. Dr. Hayes agreed that it is the VA provider's obligation to assist Veterans in filing their claims and encouraged volunteers to work with the Women Veteran Program Manager at local VA facilities to ensure brochures on the subject are available.
- Mr. Bertges asked how the service organizations present could assist in reducing the alarming rate of suicides amongst women Veterans. Dr. Hayes suggested outreach for the crisis help line and speaking up about women's health needs at local facilities as two ways of addressing the problem.
- A recurring issue raised during the comment session was that women who served in the Armed Forces tend not to think of themselves as Veterans if they did not engage in combat. Some facilities have beds reserved for women that regularly go unfilled.

Dr. Hayes shared a Public Service Announcement, "She Wore These," that VHA produced as part of its outreach efforts to inform women Veterans of their benefits.

Ms. Costa thanked Dr Hayes and introduced the Transportation Panel.

**Transportation Panel Discussion:** Mr. Ron Minter, Disabled American Veterans Representative, commented on how Veterans Transportation Service (VTS), Veteran Transportation Network (VTN), and the Office of Rural Health can work together to ensure Veterans' needs are being met. He shared some statistics on the VTN since it teamed up with the VA in 1987.

Mr. David M. Riley, Director, VTS, discussed the Veterans Transportation Program and its mission to improve the quality of life for Veterans by increasing access to health care through integrated and cost effective transportation solutions. VTS hopes to compliment the existing Veteran transportation resources, particularly by servicing those who live in rural areas or that require American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) compliant vehicles. Developing transportation committees within each hospital is one way VA hopes to address transportation issues and improve coordination. VTS is currently running a pilot route scheduling program that is designed to maximize efficiency and better serve Veterans' transportation needs.

Mary Beth Skupien, Ph.D., MS, Director, Office of Rural Health (ORH), VHA, shared with the group the ORH mission and strategic focus areas. She reviewed some ORH resources, such as Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers, VISN Rural Consultants, and Veterans' Rural Health Advisory Committee and presented a chart displaying how their FY 2011 budget was spent. Telehealth and Project ARCH (Access Received Closer to Home) have been the two major programs that VA has been employing recently to reach the rural and highly rural veterans which make up 43% of the total Veteran population.

After a video was shown, the panel answered questions from the audience.

- Mr. Bertges inquired if anything was being done to develop Health Buddies that do not require a land line to operate. Dr. Skupien acknowledged that land lines have been a problem and that she is working with the Office of Information Technology and the Office of Telehealth Services to resolve the issue.
- Mr. Beadle asked when the new route scheduling system would be available to all VAMCs. Mr. Riley replied that it is currently at 46 sites and hopes it will be implemented by every care center by 2014.

Ms. Costa thanked the transportation panel and introduced Stacy Papachrisanthou, Acting Director, Marketing and Communications, Veterans Canteen Service (VCS).

**Veterans Canteen Service:** Ms. Papachrisanthou presented the group with an overview of what merchandise and services VCS offers to Veterans and their families. VCS has established the Voluntary Service Promotional Account (VSPA) which gives back a percentage of bulk sales to Voluntary Service Organizations. The proceeds from the Annual Sales Event support the Fisher House Foundation and VCS provides each new family staying at a Fisher House with a \$20 coupon book to buy necessities at a VCS store. Donations of household items or cash are always welcomed.

VCS is dedicated to partnering with the VA to end Veteran homelessness. They have committed \$500,000 for 2012 in addition to offering numerous employment opportunities. VSO were asked to support VCS by buying from them and encouraging others to do the same.

Ms. Costa thanked Ms. Papachrisanthou and introduced Ms. Miller.

**2013 NAC Meeting:** Ms. Miller invited everyone to attend next year's 67<sup>th</sup> Annual VAVS NAC Meeting, March 4 through March 6, being held at the Embassy Suites Raleigh-Durham Research Triangle Park, Cary, North Carolina.

**Closing Remarks:** Ms. Costa thanked Ms. Miller and thanked Disabled American Veterans, Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary, The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Veterans Support Organization, and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. for sponsoring the day's boxed lunch that is available outside the meeting room. She also thanked the Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A., Inc. for sponsoring the afternoon break that will be held between the educational workshop sessions.

Thaddies Holloway and Michael Slatton, Creative Arts Winners, Chicago, Illinois, performed for the group and American Legion Post 147 Color Guard Retired the Colors with members of Forty and Eight Voiture 974.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

### **CLOSING AWARDS DINNER Friday, March 16, 2012 – 6:00 p.m.**

**Call to Order:** Ms. Costa welcomed everyone to the awards dinner.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** The pledge was led by George Palmer, VAVS Representative, Marine Corps League.

**Invocation:** The invocation was delivered by Chaplain Lorenzo Moses, Chief, Chaplain Services, Ralph H. Johnson VAMC.

**Keynote Address:** Ms. Costa introduced the Honorable Robert A. Petzel, Under Secretary for Health, VHA.

Dr. Petzel acknowledged Scott Isaacks and Himanshu Singh, Laura Balun, Fred Lesinski, and Steve Moynihan for all of their hard work in organizing the event.

Dr. Petzel's speech:

It's great to join you here in Charleston, South Carolina, for the 66th Annual VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee Meeting.

American writer and poet Helen Steiner Rice once said:

"In this troubled world, it's refreshing to find someone who still has the time to be kind. Someone who still has the faith to believe that the more you give, the more you receive. Someone who's ready by thought, word, or deed to reach out a hand, in the hour of need."

Every day, VA's volunteers across America reach out their hands to lift up Veterans and make their day a little bit better.

America's **Veterans** fought in World War II, battled in the mountains of Korea, fought in the jungles and highlands of Vietnam, and survived firefights on roadsides in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Based on a determination to make a commitment in the name of the greater good, they left their homes and families, endured hardships, and made countless sacrifices.

They served our country in its times of need.

In return, when Veterans find themselves in their times of need, VA's volunteers are there with a helping hand, a kind word, and a good deed.

VA volunteers are there for Veterans when rural Veterans need rides to the medical center or clinic, when newly paralyzed Veterans need help learning to ski again at our winter sports clinics, and when Veteran caregivers need a few hours of much-needed respite.

In one act of kindness after another, our volunteers echo the selfless spirit of our Veterans offering gifts of time, energy and cheer all in the name of the greater good.

VA Secretary Eric Shinseki told this group once that the world needs "people who are regularly, habitually, and deliberately kind and giving—people who make caring for others a personal devotion, a part of their everyday life."

That aptly describes the people in this room and VA volunteers across the country. That's the type of kindness and commitment the world needs if it is to thrive.

And that's what VA volunteers offer to our Veterans.

Last year, close to 87,000 VA volunteers gave more than 12 million hours of service. Their donated time and effort, their skills were worth \$264 million if you added it up. And that's in addition to \$90 million in monetary donations that came from the organizations that the volunteers represent.

As you know, I previously served as a Network Director and a VA Chief of Staff, so I understand and I have seen, first-hand, the contributions you and the volunteers across this Nation make to our Nation's Veterans. Their work is critical to our success. In fact, I would say that volunteers are a key part of every one of our VAMC treatment teams. Because, while VA provides the highest quality health care possible, VA volunteers provide a special human connection that elevates our services and programs to a higher level.

I want to talk about a couple of examples.

VA volunteer Wilma Guerin from Lake Havasu City, Arizona. She is 85 years old and regularly drives Veterans to the VA hospitals in Phoenix and Prescott in the local Veterans of Foreign War Disabled American Veterans van. That sounds impressive, but it gets even better. The trip to Prescott is 203 miles each way. That's a four-hour drive. So if a Veteran has a medical appointment at 8 a.m., she gets up early and must depart at four in the morning – sometimes even earlier.

“If I leave at 4 a.m.,” she said, “I get up at quarter to three. But you get used to it. I'm normally an early riser anyway.” I consider myself to be an early riser and I don't roll over until five in the morning.

She says she drives because she wants to do something for our Veterans.

Last spring, I also was honored to meet another volunteer, Mark Booth. He is a volunteer with the VAMC in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. I was down there after the tornado to see the wonderful things the people of Tuscaloosa had done for their patients, for themselves, employees, and the community. As you know, it was heavily damaged by a tornado.

Mr. Booth is in charge of the Medical Center's Volunteer Lounge. He keeps coffee and refreshments flowing all day, keeps supplies and equipment full and in good working order, distributes donations, keeps the volunteer sign-in system functioning and the meal ticket printer supplied with paper, and much, much more.

When the tornado struck Tuscaloosa last year, it demolished The Salvation Army building, which was Mr. Booth's home. That was a Wednesday night. By Friday morning, Mr. Booth was back in the volunteer lounge, making coffee in his shorts and sandals. He apologized for not meeting dress code that day – and then acknowledged that everything he owned had been destroyed except for a few items in his backpack.

As these stories show, VA's volunteers are a remarkable collection of people. They are an inspiration to all of us. They show the way, give hope, and gladly reach out their hands to Veterans.

Together, VA volunteers are engaged in a quest to make the world a better place, one encounter, one Veteran at a time.

We salute their generous spirit and selfless commitment.

May God bless all of you and may God continue to bless our Veterans, our troops, and this wonderful, wonderful country.

Thank you.

Dr. Petzel helped present the awards.

**American Spirit Awards:** Youth Program, accepted by Deborah Thomas, VAVS Program Manager, G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC, Jackson, Mississippi, for Student Recruitment Category. Senior Companions Program, accepted by Marilyn Vargiu, volunteer, Michael E. DeBakey VAMC, Houston, Texas, for the Senior Recruitment Category. Richard Velasquez, VA Pacific Islands Health Care System for the Military Recruitment Category.

**VA Voluntary Service Award for Excellence:** Tracy Butts, VAVS Program Manager, VAMC, Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Special Presentation of Awards:** Ms. Balun presented Mr. Moynihan an award in recognition of his

exceptional contribution serving as a Volunteer Meeting Planner for VAVS National Advisory Committee (NAC) and his dedication and devotion to the VAVS program. She also presented Mr. Rick Gillette, who is retiring from VA on

May 3, 2012, with an award recognizing his dedication and devotion to VAVS, his contributions serving on the NAC planning committee, and handling NAC registration for many years. He has committed to continuing to support VAVS as a volunteer to assist with NAC registration.

**Male Volunteer of the Year:** Charles Roth, VAVS Representative, AMVETS, Tomah VAMC, Tomah, Wisconsin.

**Female Volunteer of the Year:** Joy A. Neulib, VAVS Representative, American Red Cross, Battle Creek VAMC, Battle Creek, Michigan.

## **Educational Workshops**

### **ICARE/Customer Service**

*Faculty: James "Rocky" Buchanan, Voluntary Service Specialist, VAMC, St. Louis, Missouri; and Sylvia Jackson, Chief, Voluntary Service, VAMC, Marion, Illinois*

VA has adopted five Core Values and Characteristics that apply universally across the agency. The Values are: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. The workshop stressed that values define who we are, our culture, and how we care for Veterans and their families. Participants also learned that the Core Values and Characteristics are more than just words. They represent an individual and an organizational commitment to do the best we can every day to perform our crucial mission of taking care of Veterans, family members, and other beneficiaries.

### **Skill-based Volunteer Managed Therapeutic Activities**

*Faculty: Julie Baker, Chief, Voluntary Service, North Florida, South Georgia Veterans Health System, Gainesville, Florida; and Alee Karpf, Recreation Therapist, The VA Honor Center, Gainesville, Florida*

The workshop provided a model for using skilled volunteers to extend the therapeutic reach of the recreation therapist. The faculty provided a description of a variety of volunteer-led therapeutic activities; discussed the volunteer recruitment process, volunteer retention, and provided an opportunity for participants to hear directly from the volunteers.

### **VA Volunteer Concierge Program**

*Faculty: Deborah Brookshire, Chief, Voluntary Service, Southern Arizona VA Health Care System, Tucson, Arizona; and Gayle Donkin, Voluntary Service Specialist, Southern Arizona VA Health Care System, Tucson, Arizona*

The Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) was the first VA hospital to implement a Concierge Program for patients. This workshop discussed how SAVAHCS is offering Concierge Services for hospitalized patients, as well as Veterans and their families waiting in the Emergency Department, and attending clinic appointments. The presentation outlined how guests are receiving a warm reception, pleasant escort, and personal services to make their experience in our hospital comforting and memorable. The workshop stressed that impeccable customer service is the trademark of having a successful VA Volunteer Concierge Program. The workshop provided the necessary tools to implement a successful Concierge Program.



## **Make Your Voice Heard**

*Faculty: Sharon Croteau, Chief, Voluntary Service, VA Connecticut Healthcare System, West Haven, CT*

VA facilities across the country are adopting a Veteran-centered care program called “Veteran Family Advisor.” The Veteran Family Advisor program enhances communication and increases transparency between the healthcare facilities and the Veterans they serve. The workshop explored the type of workshops and committees that may benefit from having a Veteran advisor and Ms. Croteau discussed how to match the Veteran’s interest and talents so that they can affect change and ‘make their voices heard.







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