

# UPDATES

Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. Enewsletter

Volume 5 Issue 6

November/December 2010

## President's Message

**It is here – the new AVVA Website.** If you have not seen it or experienced it please go to [www.AVVA.org](http://www.AVVA.org). This has been our main focus on communication with, not only our members, but others who are curious as who we are. Sharon Hobbs and the Website Committee have done an outstanding job. There are still many items that need to be put onto this site, such as: committee reports, biographies of the Board, who are our new service officers and how to contact them, etc., but what a beginning. The Policies and Procedures Manual is being updated when needed so as to remain current. The current bylaws are available for the membership too.

Carol Engle has done a great job in turning this around, and I am sure that once you see the new layout and options that it has you will be excited too. Making this user friendly and letting the general public know who we are is of the utmost importance.

We also have started a new communication tool to our State Reps/ Presidents in making them aware of every step that we have taken since our election; and, we have trying to do this on a routine basis. The "**News Flash**" is done electronically; we have received great feedback, telling how much everyone appreciates the communication. Sharon Hobbs has

also started a new communication and educational tool in reaching out to the secretaries.....if your secretary is interested in receiving this information please email Sharon at [Shobbs@avva.org](mailto:Shobbs@avva.org).

Legislation has been drafted, the "*Veterans Family Preservation, Treatment, and Research Act of 2010.*" We have been very involved with VVA on this topic.

(continued on page 2)

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### Officers

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## President's message continued...

This legislation acknowledges that the children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren of veterans exposed to toxic substances during their military service are deserving of treatment for birth anomalies and developmental disabilities that may be associated with a veterans' exposure to toxic elements. While at the same time, this legislation provides an opportunity for research into intergenerational effects of toxic exposures. The Health Committee co-chairs have met on this, and there will be more on this discussion later in this year. We are in hopes that all of you will carry this on after the legislation is finalized.

The Health Committee was involved with Agent Orange Awareness month in October. We plan to be more involved in the future. Already some of you have shown solidarity in accomplishing this recognition by making the public be aware of dioxins that cause many illnesses.

The Executive Committee worked in Washington DC during Veterans Day, and we handed out membership information alongside VVA. Bill Williams and I laid the wreath at the *In Memory Plaque*, while Frances Cartier and Sharon Hobbs attended the program at Arlington Cemetery. It was truly an honor for all of us to represent AVVA at these events.

At the Board meeting in October, it was exciting to hear of all of the happenings going on in your regions. What a blessing you all are to our membership. In working together, I know we can accomplish many great things for our veterans and their families.

Happy Holidays to all.

To our Membership:

Thank you again for doing what you do best: endeavoring to assist our veterans and their families to have a better life. Let us in the New Year, strive to end homelessness and bring hope to those who are oppressed.

May we discover enhanced ways in which to communicate with our government; may we become more cognizant of the atrocities of war; and, may we achieve improved benefits for our veterans and their families. Be it PTSD, herbicidal effects, or suicides- Santa's wish list goes on and on and our work is in no way done.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and in this holiday spirit we wish you and your family a blessed Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a very abundant New Year

Nancy Switzer, Nat'l President

## AVVA Website is up and running

Our new and improved AVVA website launched on November 1, 2010. Although, it is still a work in progress, and always will be if we are to stay current, most of the forms and information needed for our members were there for the launch.

Our ultimate goal for our website is for it to be user-friendly to our members, guests, and to possible new members. It is to be a source for up-to-date events, governing documents, national/state leader information, national, state, and chapter news, and last but not least pictures of our members depicting the volunteer hours/work being done for our veterans.

### AVVA is now on **Facebook!**

This new and exciting website has been a long time coming, but now it is a reality. Copious hours have been spent getting the correct forms, documents, and information loaded for the go-live date, but without the expertise and relentless hours of work from Carol Engle, VVA Director of IT, it would not have happened. Thank you, Carol!!

I want to introduce you to the members of the Website Committee: Joanna Henshaw- AVVA Region 9 Director from Nevada, Frances Cartier- AVVA Nat'l Vice President from Maine, and Suzanne Blohm-Weber- AVVA Region 4 Director from Florida.

If you have comments or suggestions for improvement, just send me an e-mail: [webmaster@avva.org](mailto:webmaster@avva.org)

Sharon Hobbs, Webmaster [www.avva.org](http://www.avva.org)

### Secretary's report:

Secretaries Anonymous is officially off-and-running. Secretaries Anonymous is a web-based group of AVVA secretaries who communicate on regular basis concerning secretarial duties and expectations. Probably most of you don't remember that in my candidate's speech I mentioned that a "Secretaries network" was one of my goals if elected, but I remember. To date, we have seven state and chapter secretaries participating. I sent out the welcome on October 26, 2010, and included basic examples of writing professional and appropriate minutes. Each month I will send another example and explanation of correct procedure for writing and recording minutes. Each member of Secretaries Anonymous was encouraged to participate with comments and/or questions. Our ultimate goal as a Secretary is to deliver accurate and concise minutes to the membership we serve. Roberts Rules of Order and Mike Swift, AVVA Parliamentarian, are my sources for facts.

If you have an elected or appointed secretary from your state or chapter who would like to join us, please let me know. [shobbs@avva.org](mailto:shobbs@avva.org) All I need is an email address. By the way, everyone is welcome- not just secretaries. Learning is a part of living. When we stop learning; we cease to contribute.

As for my other secretarial duties, everything is going well. By the time you read this, I will be back from Washington DC. The AVVA Officers worked in the Membership booth alongside of VVA during the Veteran's Day celebration at The Wall. But, I'll have more on that next time.

I wish each and every one of you a safe and happy Holiday Season.

Sharon Hobbs, AVVA National Secretary  
[shobbs@avva.org](mailto:shobbs@avva.org)

# Veteran's Day in Washington

by Sharon Hobbs, Nat'l Secretary

The AVVA Executive Officers had the distinct privilege of visiting Washington DC on Veteran's Day. Our goals consisted of four objectives: (1) work alongside of VVA in the Membership Tent, (2) lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery, (3) lay a wreath at the Vietnam Memorial Wall, and (4) lay a wreath at the In Memory Plaque. I am please to say that all goals were met.

The weather was brisk in the morning hours, but as the day progressed, it was a beautiful time in DC. The trees above The Wall were changing colors; they provided a stunning backdrop to black granite monument.

We arrived on Wed, November 10<sup>th</sup>, ready to help setup and man the Membership Booth. However, most of the setup had been done. A VVA member from the DC Chapter had everything under control and almost completed. (His first name was Bob; I didn't get his last name). Bill Meeks, VVA Membership Chair, welcomed us with opened arms; we knew that we belonged there. Jack Devine, VVA National Vice President and AVVA Advisor, was there with us also.

Ernestine Horton, Supervisor in VVA Membership Department, worked very hard folding brochures. Nancy Switzer, Frances Cartier, and Charlie Hobbs helped fold brochures also.



AVVA Vice President Frances Cartier and Secretary Sharon Hobbs present wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery on Veteran's Day. Photo by Frances Cartier

Military Vets salute Vice President Biden at Arlington National Cemetery on Veteran's Day 2010. Photo by Frances Cartier



On Veteran's Day, Frances and I parted company with Nancy and Bill and headed for Arlington Cemetery. We had the honor of laying the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier while Nancy and Bill laid wreaths at The Wall and the In Memory Plaque.

Vice President, Joe Biden was at the Arlington Ceremony. He laid the first wreath and was the keynote speaker. VVA Treasurer, Larry Frazee and Tom Burke, National Director-at-Large, represented VVA. It was truly a reverent and overwhelming experience.

The entire trip lasted only two-and-one-half days, but it was a time I will never forget. I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to visit DC on Veteran's Day should that chance ever come your way. You will be delighted you did.



AVVA President Nancy Switzer, Treasurer Bill Williams, Bill Meeks, Vice President Frances Cartier, VVA Vice President Jack Devine, and AVVA Secretary Sharon Hobbs in Washington, D.C. on Veterans Day. Photo by Frances Cartier

## Message from Frances Cartier AVVA National Vice President

The AVVA executive team of which I am a member continues to work with AVVA BOD members, AVVA committee members AVVA membership to further develop positive relationships with each other as well as with VVA that encourages open 2-way communication and collaboration.

November 12, 2010, I worked at the VVA/AVVA Membership Tent, National Mall, Washington DC along with Nancy Switzer, AVVA President, Sharon Hobbs, AVVA National Secretary; Bill Williams, AVVA National Treasurer, Bill Meeks, VVA Membership Chair, Jack Devine, VVA National Vice President, Ernestine Horton, staff from VVA national office and many other volunteers.

Additionally Sharon and I attended that Veteran's Day activities held at Arlington National Cemetery to honor all veterans. We presented a wreath from AVVA along with many other service organizations at the Tomb of the Unknown.

Some of the photos I took are posted on our newly renovated web site, AVVA face book page and my own face book page.

Recently AVVA sent out a second survey that asked members to provide their perspective. As Sharon notes in the flash of 12/10/2010 responses to this questionnaire were low as compared to the one we conducted this past summer. She goes on to note that the responses were excellent. I want to add that they are helpful.

Planning for the upcoming leadership conference will be getting into full swing as soon as we are not distracted by the holidays. This planning can't be done in a vacuum. AVVA leaders at all levels need to know what people attending the conference are interested in.

Some of the topics that people identified through the survey were that they want to discuss at the conference are PTSD, Secondary PTSD, Agent Orange and an AO round table. If there are other topics that you have an interest in please let us know.

Both articles submitted by  
Frances Cartier, AVVA National Vice President

## PTSD and Mental Health Committee

Recently Rep. Michael Michaud [D-ME2], U.S. Representative, Maine's 2nd District sent a letter to Maine residents. He discusses House resolution 1672, a measure to commemorate the Persian Gulf War and reaffirm this nation's commitment to the veterans who served in it and talks about the long term effects of sarin gas, one of the toxic chemicals that veterans of that war were exposed to and the long term effects on the veteran and the family including their children's health.

The letter includes information regarding a newly launched national web site for military and veteran households. "The website, [www.statesidelegal.org](http://www.statesidelegal.org), is dedicated to helping military and veteran families with legal problems that they confront. Created and developed by Pine Tree legal right here in Maine, it is the first of its kind to focus exclusively on the unique legal needs and rights of military and veteran families."

Thank you  
Frances Cartier, Chair  
[frances\\_cartier@yahoo.com](mailto:frances_cartier@yahoo.com)

Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA) assisted the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) with the annual membership drive held on the National Mall about midway between the Washington Monument and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Many veterans stopped by and renewed old friendships, others received membership and health information and some reviewed a map of Vietnam while discussing their experiences when they were stationed in Vietnam all those years ago.

Those of us volunteering soon found out that some stopping were Vietnam Veterans, but had not joined the VVA yet! They soon found an application to join the VVA in their hand and some started completing them as we spoke.

## A Texas Tale of Commitment and Hope

I wanted to forward this to you so you can read what Lynda Greene, Chapter Rep for #734 and also the State Secretary, had written about her. She works so hard for the homeless. Thought maybe you might want to put it into the AVVA updates also.

Marilyn Rose, AVVA Texas State President

Lynda Greene had only 10 tickets to give away to the Houston Astros game and 100 residents to choose from. Greene is community director of a single-room-occupancy residence for male and female homeless veterans: DeGeorge at Union Station, a six-story former hotel one block from Houston's baseball stadium.

Greene picked five names by the luck of the draw. She gave each a pair of tickets, "because it's no fun to go to the game alone."

"One man said, 'I'm going to take my son. It's his 16th birthday.' He couldn't believe his luck," Greene said. "And then he started crying," she said. "He was so frightened. He told me, 'I have never been clean and sober on his birthday, including the day he was born. My son has never seen me clean and sober.'" "Greene said he took his son to the game, "and he stayed clean and sober."

Advent readings tell us to be patient and hopeful because "the Lord God keeps faith forever." In her work, Greene has faced the tragedy of homelessness and the seeming hopelessness of addiction for more than 20 years. How can one keep hold of Advent joy in the midst of that?

"Work with homeless veterans every day and you will see hope where you think there is not hope. Just listen to their stories," she said. "I was moving a veteran in to one of our smaller rooms, and I apologized that it was the only room we had left. I saw the strangest look on his face," Greene said. "He told me, 'When you've been living in the woods for three years in a refrigerator crate, this is heaven.' That put everything in perspective."

Greene sees hope in the Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP), which takes formerly homeless persons recovering from addictions on overnight and daylong retreats. The ISP ([www.ignatianspiritualityproject.org](http://www.ignatianspiritualityproject.org)) offers retreats to those who are homeless and seeking recovery in Akron, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Denver, Houston, Milwaukee, Morristown, N.J.; New Orleans, Omaha, St. Louis, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., with programs to start in 2011 in Minneapolis and Pittsburgh.

Greene recruits retreat participants from Houston area housing programs. Greene said that for many "addiction was probably part of the reason they are homeless."

"Everybody that goes on retreat wants to go again," Greene said. The retreats, she said, "are the piece that was missing. There is an agency for benefits, for mental health, for clothing, but people need more than that. We were missing the spirituality part." Greene expects 50 guests at the first Houston ISP Christmas party she is organizing for all the retreatants of the past year.

On National Homeless Memorial Day, December 21, Houston agencies serving the homeless, including DeGeorge and ISP, hold a candlelight vigil and read the names of all the homeless of the region who have died in the past year. There were 100 names on the memorial list in 2009.

"After the vigil we give out blankets, coats and a hot meal to people living on the streets and in encampments. We made their Christmas last year with a hot meal, a smile and a blanket," she said.

"I think everyone should experience homelessness, not to give up your home, but to work and walk among them," Greene said. "You learn that hope means different things and you learn to appreciate what we have."

Maureen Daly [maureen.daly4@verizon.net](mailto:maureen.daly4@verizon.net)  
(Daly is a freelance writer in Baltimore, Md.)

Just wanted to share the national article on our Houston ISP group; it should have read less on me and more on the program, but, at least we are getting the word out and in the right direction. Peace to all and have a blessed Sunday.

Lynda Greene, AVVA Texas State Secretary



Do you know  
a veteran  
who is  
homeless?

## The VA's National Homeless Veterans Hotline

The Hotline is staffed at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center in conjunction with the National Suicide Prevention services. Studies show a huge correlation with needs required by one or the other services provided at the time of the call.

**1-877-424-3838**  
**24/7 365 days/per year**

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### UPDATES

Sign up to receive this enewsletter by  
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1. [avvaupdates@yahoo.com](mailto:avvaupdates@yahoo.com)
2. Membership at national
3. State Representative/President
4. Regional Director

Join the  
AVVA Talklist!

Send an email to:

[southern@lodelink.com](mailto:southern@lodelink.com)

and request to be put on the talklist

## REGIONAL REPORTS

### Region 3 Report

Hi All! I am slowly getting settled into my new position. Things are starting to come together. Finally! My report is based on what the Region 3 States and Chapters have sent me.

#### KENTUCKY

Chapter 454: The first Wednesday of each month AVVA and VVA Members go to the Louisville VA Medical Center, lock down the ward and show a movie and serve cokes and popcorn. Some of the AVVA members assist with bingo at a nursing home that has 20 Veterans. On the third Friday of each month we have a birthday part at the Louisville Vet Center for all the veterans that have a birthday that month. On August 14th members attended a flag line at a local Post Office that has been dedicated to our fallen heroes, 3 more names were added to the Memorial. Took a group of members for a "Welcome Home" Ceremony and parade at Fort Knox.

On Aug. 26th members went to Elizabeth for another "Welcome Home" Ceremony and parade. On Sept. 15th members worked at Operation Stand-down and handed out clothing to the homeless vets in our area. From Sept. 17-19 had a booth set up at the J-Town Gaslight Festival. Dona Schicker and The President of the Chapter, Robert Keller has been working the the local Vietnamese Community to get an oral history of the Viet Nam War, together for the 35th Anniversary of the Fall of South Vietnam.

Attended the VVA Kentucky State Council Meeting on Sept 12th, we held a POW/MIA Candlelight Service at our Memorial in Mt. Washington. Sept. 30th had our monthly visit to Bashford East Nursing Home. In Oct. attended the "Welcome Home Ceremony and Parade" in London. Oct. 2nd welcomed home an "Honor Flight" of WWII Vets. Chapter 454 had it's annual Dinner and Awards on Oct. 39th.

Chapter 868: Set up a Membership booth at the Welcome Home Ceremonies at Fort Knox, Elizabeth and London.

Chapter 851 Hazard: Does volunteer work at the new Veterans's Nursing Home. They sponsor a Bingo once

or twice a month for the vets and they ice cream socials and chili suppers. Takes the vets shopping for their needs.

#### NORTH CAROLINA

CHAPTER 272: Does Wednesday lunches, Gunshows, Thanksgiving meal for shelter, collecting presents for Christmas for the shelter, Bass Master Fishing tournament fundraiser Nov. 4th and cooking for Chapter meetings.

Chapter 654: Visiting the Veterans in Nursing Homes. Helping the Veterans and Handicap. Attended the Beirut and Montford Point Ceremonies. Had a Poppy Drive at the Mall. Gave donations to those in need. Attended the OCCVO and State Council Meetings. Saving soda tabs to give for cancer treatments. Painting our float (trailer) for the Veterans Day Parade for the Veterans to ride in the parade. Getting ready to do the Belks Charity Day.

Chapter 909: Helping with fund raisers with VVA, Fair fund raiser and membership drive, Blankets, candy, underwear and other items for homeless taken to VA Medical Center in Salisbury and Salvation Army. Help get wheelchair for VSO office in Cabarrus County. Paid bills for veterans in need. Taking donations for our AVVA and VVA cookbooks to be able to help veterans with whatever their particular problems might be.

Chapter 962: With the DAV doing a raffle to raffle off Boston Butts. Doing the Belks Charity Day Nov. 6th

#### SOUTH CAROLINA

Chapter 523: Will be involved with the Belks Charity Day on Nov. 6th

Chapter: 1017: They are adopting a family for Christmas and had a Vet Day Breakfast at a local Church where everyone was invited.

Chapter: Is participating in "Lift A Soldier's Spirit" by writing letters to soldiers overseas that would not receive any while they are over there.

Chapter 303: Held a Gold Star Family-POW/MIA ceremony where they presented wreaths and had refreshments for all who attended.

As always, I am very proud of all what the AVVA Members are doing in their State and Chapter. Keep up the good work!

Donna-Marie Crowell  
Region 3 Director

## Region 2 Report

Cathy Keister: Director

Nancy Rekowski: Deputy Director

I thank the membership of Region II for putting their trust in me to represent their Region of AVVA. I take my new position on the National Board of Directors very seriously. I will keep in constant contact with my States and their membership.

I see exciting things in the future of AVVA. I hope the enthusiasm we saw from the members present in Orlando continues through out our term.

Love, laugh and get the mission accomplished..

Sincerely,

Cathy Keister, Region II Director

## Region 1 Report

Welcome Chapter 1044, Sanford, ME

On December 5, 2010 VVA members from all around Region 1 came together to support VVA Chapter 1044, Sanford, ME by celebrating the presentation of the chapter's charter. Many veterans and their families from the area gathered in a show of support for the new chapter.

Joe Armstrong, President VVA Chapter 1044 reminded attendees of the importance of organizing important documents that veterans and their families will need when they apply for the benefits to which they are entitled by utilizing the "Paper Safe," a personal and family self-help guide, published by Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA), 2002. Copies of the "Paper Safe" were available with other VVA and AVVA handouts.

Peter Ogden, Director, Maine Division of Veterans Services spoke to the attendees regarding the progress that Vietnam Veterans have made toward fulfilling their motto, "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another." He pointed out that the returning veterans of today are coming home to an entirely different world and this is mostly due to the individual as well as collective efforts of Vietnam Veterans as well as members of VVA and AVVA.

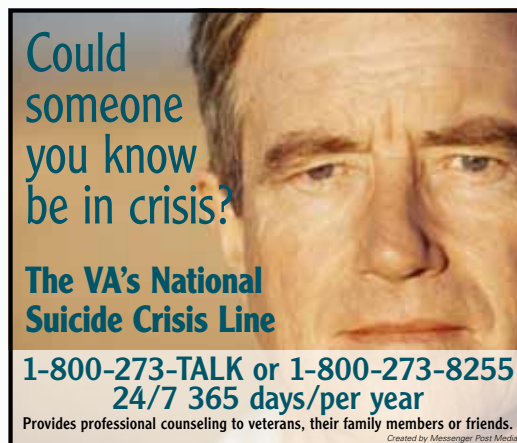
Peter told the group that there are about 16 families of fallen soldiers in the Sanford area. He asked for assistance of the chapter members and the community to assure that these families receive all the support and information they need to ease this difficult time in their lives and assure that they receive all the benefits that they are entitled to.

Russ Warriner, author "Empty Tubes and Back Seat Memories" talked about the book he wrote chronicling experiences as a Huey Crew Chief. He donated the proceeds from book sales during this meeting to Chapter 1044 as well as autographed the books.

John Wallace, President of VVA Maine State Council, presented Joe Armstrong and Chapter 1044 members with their Chapters Charter. Wayne Cartier, VVA Region 1 Director administered the oath of office to the new Board of Directors of VVA Chapter 1044.

Melvin Murrell, President VVA Chapter 992 Hillsborough, NH supports Chapter 1044 by starting fundraising at the meeting. Thank-you Melvin and the many other members of chapter 992 who attended this event and contributed your time as well as funds in support of your brothers.

All enjoyed the potluck buffet. Efforts to organize the buffet were spearheaded by AVVA members Jim and Linda Davis. Jim and Linda are 2 of the newest AVVA members in Maine and are conducting a membership drive in southern Maine. Currently they have 12 new AVVA members who are recruiting more AVVA members so they can form an AVVA chapter.



Could someone you know be in crisis?

**The VA's National Suicide Crisis Line**

**1-800-273-TALK or 1-800-273-8255**  
**24/7 365 days/per year**

Provides professional counseling to veterans, their family members or friends.  
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# TEXAS AVVA

## CHAPTER REPORTS

**Chapter 343, Houston, TX** Our Chapter has been busy getting ready for our Veteran's Day Benefit BBQ to be held at Bear Creek Park. Due to scheduling problems this year our BBQ will be held on October 31st. Even though the date is different we will still be serving our great BBQ and have terrific door prizes. The recipients this year are Houston VA's Ronald McDonald House and our Chapter's Robert Connally Scholarship fund.

**CHAPTER 404, Borger, TX** is making windmills, boots and covered wagons for center pieces every Tuesday night getting ready for Texas State Council meeting in June, 2011. Enjoying the company and one of us cooks the meal. It is like a night out once a week and again enjoying each other's company. We have some very talented members in our chapter. We have had three major fund raisers for us since August. Again our games for children have attributed to our success. Our games are ring the bottle, darts and balloons and spin on a color to match.

**CHAPTER 685, Galveston County,** Hurricane Ike destroyed the Texas City Dike and the Chapter 685 Watch fire Memorial Park. We are happy to announce that the Texas City Dike has been repaired and is better than ever. The City of Texas City honored Veterans by giving us our Park back and we will rededicate it on November 12th. We will have a Priest and other ministers there to bless the grounds, Veterans services, a mini watch fire, and a free concert performed by Michael J. Martin. Michael is one of the original members of the Last Patrol who marched all over our country fighting for Veterans rights and the Vietnam Wall. To read about Michael go to his website at, <http://www.mjmmusic.com>. Everyone is welcome to come out and join us.

We continue to ship our Prints out to fallen veteran's families, "Job Well Done, Brother" for Vietnam Veterans, and "On Behalf of a Grateful Nation" for the War on Terror. We continue to help Veterans...All wars.

**Chapter 991, Palestine, TX.** We have been very busy as usual! We have been sending pancake mix and syrup by request from a Chaplain serving in Afghanistan. Lt. Chaplain David Mowbray started making "Mancakes" for our warriors serving in Afghanistan and it went over bigger than he expected! So, we helped him out and sent many

boxes of mix and syrup. Now, we are working on "Operation Christmas Stocking". This same chaplain makes sure all the men and women get a stocking on Christmas morning. We have been sending stockings, candy, and small toys. We are getting ready for our annual Indian Taco dinner/ can food drive in November for a local food bank. Then our annual toy drive in December. Also, we plan on placing wreaths in area Veteran Parks in December to honor and remember our Vietnam Veterans. Next we have our "Valentines for Veterans" coming up where we collect candy to deliver to the VA hospital in Temple. We are a proud busy chapter who never want to forget those who have served or are serving this great nation of ours.

### CHAPTER 1000 – Killeen, TX

1. September 9-11 National Gathering of the Guard in Killeen. The Patriot Guard roared into town lead by Chapter 1000's own Kevin Young on his Harley proudly carrying the VVA flag. The Guard escorted the American Veterans Traveling Wall Memorial and the Texas Fallen Heroes Memorial to the Killeen Events Center. Chapter 1000 members Cliff Baldwin, President Bill Whittaker, Mike Dawson, and Don Kennedy set up a booth with membership applications, exhibits of chapter activities and Vietnam memorabilia for sale. Other member attending were AVVA member Linda Dawson, Lynn Kennedy, and Bonnie Tingle as well as chapter members Mike Giaccati, Ken Czarnecki, Bill Waltz and Lupe Lopez.

### 2. PROJECT SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE

The 651st Regional Support Group Army Reserves from San Diego, CA came through deploying to Kuwait. They will spend a year there mopping up. Bill Whittaker and Lynn Kennedy spent time talking to MSGT Otis Tidwell, a Security Specialist with the Reserves. We were please to discover he was also a Vietnam Vet serving at the end of the war. The Reserves Colonel Oliver Johnson surprised Bill and Lynn with coins in recognition of excellence. He expressed his appreciation for what we were doing for his troops. We were honored to receive them.

In Iraq the mission has changed as proven by a conversation with Sgt Jay Jacobs who came to the SRP center with a young soldier in his unit to help him process for deployment. Sgt Jacobs is with the 1st Cav, Fox 212 and deployed in October going to northern Iraq to support the Iraqi soldiers there.

### 3. FORT HOOD RETIREMENT DAY

Chapter 1000 will be at Fort Hood Saturday, Oct. 30 with a booth set up with VVA information, membership applications, and other items. The goal is to enroll more members to put us over 100 members strong.

**Chapter #734, Conroe, TX.**, although low in numbers, continues to remain active and involved with community events and projects.

Some of the projects members have been involved with include the following:

Members recently participated in the annual *Conroe Catfish Festival*. This is one of the largest community sponsored events held in the Conroe area and it is an excellent venue for membership. 734 has been a participant in this event for many years.

Chapter #734 assisted several area schools in the Willis area with much needed school supplies. Members have always been supportive of the needs of educational materials within the community and have assisted when possible.

Several members recently participated in area veteran health fairs; members donated and distributed health related information, as well as information related directly to the health care of veterans.

The chapter also donated the U.S. and the TX. flags to area senior citizen community facilities; they also donated the stands and toppers along with the flags. Flags were also donated to the Montgomery County Community Court House.

Several members participated in the VFW annual *POW/MIA Remembrance Ceremony* held the end of September. Members read the names of those killed or missing from Montgomery County during Vietnam and a wreath was placed at the base of the stationary helicopter at the post. Fallen members from Chapter #734 were remembered and a plaque was laid commemorating the memory of one of the founding members of 734.

Many members were “several hats” and participate in area VFW and American Legion events; whatever the name of the sponsoring group - it is all done for our veterans and for those in need.

## Strategic Planning Committee

During the 2010 AVVA National Convention, our voting representative's [unanimously] appealed to the Board to reinstate the Strategic Planning Committee. With VVA being a 'last man standing' organization, National AVVA, State Councils and Chapter's must be prepared to fulfill our promise of "Together Always". Strategic planning will focus on the future and the commitment that it will take to fulfill that promise. Nearly all of us have experienced a changing environment in our Chapters due to age, illness and even the passing of our VVA members. Most recognize that the Chapter environment is indeed changing, often in unpredictable ways. Strategic planning stresses the importance of making decisions, pre planning and education for its leadership and members to ensure the success of our members in response to those changes. .

Proceeding the October National AVVA Board of Directors meeting in Silver Spring, MD, the Board participated in a Strategic Planning exercise using the SWOT model. During the exercise, many of AVVA's strengths, weakness's, opportunity's and threats (SWOT) were identified by the Board.

While many issue's (both positive and negative) were brought to the forefront, the dominate theme was Communication. How do we send AVVA's message to our current and future members, better communication within the board and to our members and their communities? How do we better receive information from our members and include their voice in the direction and goals of the organization? Are we using all available technology to inform our members and the public of AVVA's mission and the great work of our members ?

With the Boards recognition of what now needs to be done to further it's mission, there is still much work to be done to resolve issue's and prepare for the future of AVVA. The Board has recognized that it cannot secure it's future without the membership so the members will also be invited to participate in a strategic planning session during the 2011 Leadership Conference in Reno, Nevada. Your voice will be heard!

Nancy Rekowski, Committee Chair  
Region II Deputy Director

# SNOWBALL EXPRESS

## Texas Style

This past Saturday was a bittersweet day for me. I attended the Snowflake Express event put on by the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America at the Palestine Railroad Park. There was so much laughter and so many tears. So many veterans and others would have to suddenly turn their back and walk away so that they could regain control of their emotions. The sweetness was watching these children laughing and playing with each other and seeing the delight on their small faces. The bitterness was knowing that their father or mother had to die for them to have this memorable day.

The Snowflake Express is a smaller version of the Snowball Express which is a National organization dedicated to bringing some comfort, laughter and memories to the children of our KIA since 9-11. So many of the memorials for our fallen heroes are long drawn out and somber occasions that are not pleasant experiences for the children. Not the way that children want to remember their parent, or the way that believe their parents would want to be remembered. I believe their parents would want to be remembered with love and laughter. The Snowflake Express gives them this opportunity. It also gives them the opportunity to interact with other children that have lost a parent and to know that they are not alone.

Veterans groups from all over participated in this event. Along with the AVVA, there were the VVA#991, the DAV#63, VFW, American Legion#335 and the Patriot Guard Riders all came together from all over East Texas to make this a day to remember for these children.

And the children came.... from Carthage, Waco, Austin, Wills Point, Buda, Killen and other places. All had lost a parent to the War on Terror.

There were Teddy Bears, dressed in red, white

and blue, decorated by Dana Waldon, Daynette Light, and Wanda Killerbrew for each child. One precious, little boy was wearing a pin with a picture of his daddy on it and he took it off and pinned it on his teddy bear. A beautiful little girl asked, "Is this for my daddy?" and big, strong veterans had to turn away as the tears fell.

They traveled to Rusk with a Patriot Guard escort of at least 25 motorcycles, flags flying proudly, where they boarded the train to the Palestine RR Park where they were treated with a hot dog and watermelon lunch, a bounce house, magician, games and even horses for them to ride. Then on to the YMCA for swimming and rock climbing, finishing up with a pizza party.

I am so proud to have been given the opportunity to be a part of this event and hope that it will turn out to be an annual event.

By Joyce Stark (copied from the Leon County newsletter, Texas)

Debbie Wesson  
Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter  
991 Rep

Recipient of letter of recognition from Snowball Express Organization



Chuck Shannon, member of the Vietnam Veterans of America.  
Contributed photo



Caroleena Shannon and Joyce Stark. Caroleena is the Activity Director at Copper Creek Nursing Home in Buffalo and also a Certified Clown.  
Contributed photo



The train pulling into the Palestine RR Park station with it's load of happy children, most had never been on a train

## Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 991

This year's parade was another good one. We started off the week on Friday Eve. Nov 5th, 6:30 PM, at the Healing Fields where a special speaker from the VFW Post 5901 spoke about veterans. There was a patriotic music and solo's by Shelly Todd's 5th grade class. The unfurling of the 700 Flags, opening up the week of Events honoring all Veterans.

Saturday morning November 6th at 10:45 AM the Veterans parade started. There were 223 entries, with over 400 units attending. Ft Leavenworth sent fifty Officers down to march in the parade. We had Sgt Jake Butler's parents, Pvt Jeremy Drexler, and LCpl Christopher Wasser's parents in the parade again this year. Both Wassers and Butlers spoke at the Support Our Troops Rally in 2003-2004. They are staunch supporters of Veterans Events throughout KS. There were about 20 new entries this year in the parade

The Vietnam Veterans and Associates Chapter 912 are instrumental with helping with the Veterans Week of Events. Our chapter has a float and motorcycles that are in the parade. At 11:00 the Parade stops in front of the Fr. Co. Veterans Memorial there is a small program then our Chapter does the Rifle Salute and TAPS, then proceeds on to Forest Park, where there are re-enactments. Reenactments of WWII, Civil War, Wild West Women of the Frontier (honoring veterans) and Chicks in Chaps that do a veterans program to patriotic music. There are also several food, craft booths and entertainment. The Field of Flags is open 24 hrs a day and anyone is welcome to walk thru anytime.

The parade is the largest Veterans Parade in Ks. It has grown from 10 entries to over 200 since 1994. I am thankful that the VVA Chapter

started participating in the parade and being asked to come to a meeting to meet them that I became involved with them and the AVVA. Attached is the Field of Flags and most pix are on face book

Live honestly, Love generously, Care deeply, Speak kindly & Leave the rest to God.  
Sherry Lynn



Photo by Sherry Lynn



Photo by Sherry Lynn

# NOW IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO BECOME TEACHERS

by Edie Rose

It is that time of year. We have all been to the voting polls and to do our patriotic duty and have our say as to who we want in office - who we think would do the best job. Yet our mission is not over - it is just starting. As a matter of fact, I am here to explain to you what I mean when I say, "You are going to have to be a teacher."

I hope that this information will give you some encouragement to go out and meet your local elected officials. Let them know that your wants and wishes are for our Veterans and let them know you have numbers behind you, because numbers are what make these people tick. You see, to them numbers mean VOTES and votes mean job security. We must play the game their way, but we must never forget that they work for us. We are the numbers that gave them their job, however, we should always play nice. God willing, I am here to help you do just that.

The information I am about to give you comes from research gathered from training through the VVA and from the 111th Congress Directory Handbook, dated 2009.

Grass Roots efforts start at home, so you may want to meet your legislator and introduce yourself. That is OK and the best way to start, in my opinion, so that they get to know you and know what your interests are.

Before you go, you must first call and set up an appointment with the office. Now make sure that you mark the date on your calendar. Gather a few of the people from AVVA. Make sure that all of you are wearing your AVVA pins so that every can see them. Be proud of the group that you are there to represent. Also, do not put on your favorite perfume that day. Let us face it - three or four women, all with a different perfume on, in a small office can smell overwhelming and no one will want to talk to you. They may want to get you the hell out of that office fast.

Now it is time to discuss what to take with you. First and foremost, your most pleasant smile. Also, your knowledge of Veterans needs and do not forget to

have business cards with you at all times. This is most important and I cannot impress this on you enough. Either fire up your computer or go to the cheap printer and get some made for your chapter. Have a line left blank so that each member may put his or her name and phone number on them. You will not be sorry if you do this. You will feel like a fool when you enter the office of that Legislator, and they ask for your card (here comes the red face) as they hand you their business card. I know - I have been there, done that and turned red in the face. We do learn by our mistakes, or better yet - someone else's. Remember the cards - please.

You are all together, wearing your AVVA pins, carrying business cards, and do not look like some Joe Blow that just walked in from God knows where. Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early. Being early shows that you do not want to miss the appointment. Begin by letting them know that you are there just to introduce yourselves - not for any particular issue, but to let them know that you have a special interest. Tell them of your special interest, remember that there are a great number of people in the district that back you on the same issues. Remind them that Veterans groups join together when it comes to Veterans issues and that it does not take much to get them to unite. You know the numbers. Remember that I stated the number game. Remember it here. It will help you and they will remember you because you are talking about what they need to hear.

At this time you have done what you came to do. You have let them know that you have a special interest in all Veterans Matters. They now know that the community is watching them; that you will be back when there is a special interest matter that you may need to talk to them about; and that you will be checking in with them from time to time. Remind them that you have given them your card and you have the card they gave you. Let them know that it will be by your phone just in case something comes up and when you need to call them, you will be doing so. Say your good-byes, thank you, and leave.

Phase 1 is now over. Go to lunch have a good afternoon. Now go home and put that card by your phone. You are going to need it sooner than you think. By the way, you did a good job. We are all proud of you. It was not that bad, was it?

## IT IS TIME TO EMPOWER YOUR SELF BE AN ADVOCATE

To do this we must have Strategies for Influencing Legislators. This means that you have some homework to do. (Yes, I know - back to school you go)

Let us start this way to make it easier on all of us. At this time we have new people in office. Therefore, this is a good time to go up to their office and see them face to face. We have introduced ourselves and talked about our interest in Veterans issues, but what do we know about them?

Did we look around the office and see what was in there? Are there pictures of his/her children? What about their college? Where did they go to school? Do they have a favorite sports team or other special interests? The little things about our Legislators are as important as how they vote. And you are going to see why you need all this information.

You will need to read the paper, watch the news, and pay attention when ever this person name comes up on the news. Be knowledgeable on what he or she is doing. Keep your ear to the ground, because you do not know when you will need to go and talk to them. Remember the more that you know about them, the better off you are and the better informed you are, the easier it is to talk to someone. I will remind you again that they are working for you.

As an advocate, you will gain more ear attention, and brain space, from your lawmakers if you start talking about the things they are interested in first. Such as, "Oh I read in the paper you son was on first string in the game this week." Or "I saw you last week in the news at that convention. By the way how was it.?" Do not let the chit-chat go on for more than 5 minutes. Do not forget what you are there for and that your time (and theirs) is limited. Remember your reason for being there now that you have broken the ice and you have his ear, take advantage of it.

Establish yourself as a helpful expert on Veteran issues or at least the one that you are there for. Know all about the bill you want to discuss. Know who will benefit from it. Know what they will gain and why they need this to pass? Convey how important it is to the Veteran population at this time.

Now is the time to tell your story. This is the time to let them know, that you are one of the Veterans or the families that are in need of this bill to pass.

Remember you cannot ever overstate the personal importance of your stories and the influence that they have in the policy process. When no one has come to talk to them, face-to-face, these lawmakers only have data to look at. Now you have come to that office to meet with him/her and you have made a point. You have looked them in the eyes and you have stated your personal story. When you stated that story, you also reminded them that behind the numbers and the facts that he has been looking are faces, human beings, and voters.

Faces are a must and as Advocates, you may think that you are wasting your time or their time. Not so! Remember that you may be the first person that has ever come to his/her office and spoken to them about this issue - something that they may not have know anything about before you walked in. You could be the person that has made the difference of whether that bill is passed or not. Do not ever underestimate yourself. One person can make things change. Let that person be you.

Communicate frequently with your legislator and his/staff. Advocates stay on top of things and every congressional office knows this to be true. Do not be afraid to offer your help and advice on Veterans issues, as you are the experts, aren't you? Keep them accountable for all of the votes on Veterans issues and then, question them if you do not like the way that they voted. Again, remember that they work for you. It is your job to check up on your employees.

## HOW TO MAP YOUR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FOOTPRINTS

**I do not want to do this! No way! This sounds hard!** It is not hard or I would not do it myself.

Every one of us has economic footprints that we have not ever thought about. What we do that has to with the government is a footprint. From paying taxes to being an employee, from club memberships to items you purchase - everything you do demonstrates your weight and power as a citizen and this goes into the equation. CEOs and union leader or as-

sociation presidents may have greater economic footprints than the normal Joe Blow does, but this may not be true in all cases.

Now is the time that you need to look at your own world and see what your strengths are. What you, yourself, carry to this office and how many numbers you are bringing with you. He already knows that you are a taxpayer and a voter - that is a given. You must let him know that, for example, you bring with you the AVVA, one of over 7,000 strong, as well as associated with the VVA with its number in the tens of thousands. If you belong to the VFW, America Legion, or any other of the Veteran organizations, you now have all of those numbers that will back this bill. Do not be afraid to express the organizations that you represent because as you do, he is seeing numbers. These numbers will be associated with your face and now you have become someone important to him. Someone so important that he cannot turn a deaf ear to you and your request.

You have now completed Phase 2. To check on your lawmaker and to see how they are voting, you may go to always go to the Thomas (Library of Congress) at <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and look around.

### **Edie's comments'**

First off, thank you, Suzanne, for the opportunity and honor to write in our publication each and every time it comes out. I promise to the membership that I will do my best to bring you information that we are able to learn from and grow. It also gives me the opportunity to do the same, as I have to research the information before I can put it in our press. Thank you all.

If you have something that is of interest to you that feel the membership need more in-depth learning on please contact me at [edierose.avvag-mail.com](mailto:edierose.avvag-mail.com) please put in the subject AVVA press or it may be over looked.

I will see you next time with more information on how to address letters and tips for going to town hall meeting with you legislators.

See you then, Edie

## Legislative Checklist

(Quick guidelines to ensure a successful encounter with your political representatives.)

### Phase One

1. Choose legislator and call for an appointment.
2. Dress for success and arrive early.
3. First visit is for introduction of yourself.
4. Let them know the numbers of your organization.
5. Exchange business cards and end the visit.

### Phase Two

1. Develop influential strategies.
  - a. Research their lives and voting record.
  - b. Follow news clips about them.
2. Meet again and establish relationship with them.
3. Present yourself as an helpful expert.
4. Discuss the bill you are supporting.
  - a. Whom it will benefit.
  - b. How it will benefit them.
5. Explain your personal views on the importance.
6. After visit stay in touch with them through staff.
7. Remind them of the numbers you represent.
8. Follow up by checking on them through the Library of Congress at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

Feel free to contact any one of the AVVA Officers, Board of Directors, State Representatives or contact Edie. She has been very successful in her efforts to make a difference.

## LOOK WHAT'S NEW



AVVA Business card holder \$18.00

AVVA Portfolio \$20.00

For these and other AVVA merchandise please contact:

Penny Meinhardt

[pmeinhardt@avva.org](mailto:pmeinhardt@avva.org)

# HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Are you a widow, taking care of your ill veteran or know someone that is. I am offering my support, experience and assistance to anyone in need. Please feel free to contact me . . .  
Suzanne Blohm-Weber (386) 986-9153

## UPDATES DEADLINES

**Next deadline:**

January 1, 2011

Feel free to submit at any time, it will be published in the next issue.

Don't forget to send photos with chapter reports, we want to see what you are doing.

Please send submissions and e-mail changes or requests to:

**[avvaupdates@yahoo.com](mailto:avvaupdates@yahoo.com)**

All submissions will be considered, screened for content and edited if necessary. "Letters to the Editor" are strictly the opinions of the author and not that of Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America. All chapter, state and regional reports are the responsibility of the writer and must contain name and contact information in order to be published. Content must be verifiable, accurate and appropriate for this newsletter. Thanks for your support.

*Together  
Always*