

The Eagle

Voluntary Service
Central Office Newsletter

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* Header photo from the Wreaths Across America event courtesy of the US Department of Veterans Affairs on Flickr

Leaders in Volunteer Management

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to 2015!

It happens every year. The New Year comes in and about this time, we wonder how it could be flying by so quickly. Why is that?

In an e-mail with my dear friend and mentor, Sarah Naylor, she mentioned to me an article she is writing for an international publication on the topic of "Conscious Commitment to Humanity". I don't know why these words resonated so deeply with me and perhaps it's a bit "heady" for my *Eagle* article this month, but I'm hoping you'll go with me on this cerebral journey for a moment. I honestly believe somewhere in that message is the answer to why time flies by without us even realizing that it's passing.

Think about how many things we do subconsciously. Have you ever gotten in your car with the intention of going someplace and find yourself driving a route that you've taken a million times instead of the location you set out to go? When we finally catch ourselves (and have to turn around)—we realize what creatures of habit we are and just how ingrained those habits are in our lives. What would happen if we were just a bit more mindful and intentional with our actions and our words? It is my belief that true service comes from that intention and that there is extraordinary power in operating from that focused place of our being. It is impossible to serve by accident. You can find yourself involved in some unplanned encounter or activity that turns out wonderfully and

yields remarkable results, but **you can only truly be of service when you make a conscious decision to do so.** It is the very nature of service - giving of yourself, your talent and your resources intentionally!

We've heard the saying that "The road to ___ is paved with good intentions." This is only true where there is no commitment to outcomes, goals or the desire to make a difference. That's the importance of commitment. Commitment also requires a greater level of understanding; an awareness that what you say and do has power. Even if the impact is not immediately revealed, every action creates a reaction somewhere. It matters!

That comes as no surprise to VAVS. We know that what we do matters to Veterans. Read carefully the wonderful stories in this month's issue about the holiday activities that took place in several of our facilities. Daniel Pink in his book, [Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us](#), says that every one of us is motivated by a need for "Purpose: The feeling and intention that we can make a difference in the world." Think about that. Purpose is a basic human need—like food, clothing or shelter. VAVS has a wonderful opportunity to give caring people that sense of purpose, the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of Veterans.

2015 is here! "We need not mourn the passage of time, but celebrate the survival of hope." My hope is that each of us set out to find our purpose, commit to it with intention, and finally discover the good we all have to offer humanity. Looking forward

to serving with you throughout, what is sure to be, an exciting year.

-- SABRINA C. CLARK

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

Robert Turtill, Public Affairs Specialist,
OPIA, VA Central Office

Thousands of volunteers placed remembrance wreaths on Veterans' graves at VA national cemeteries as part of Wreaths Across America on Saturday, December 13, 2014. This is the ninth year of Wreaths Across America, a nationwide program which distributes holiday wreaths as a tribute to Veterans laid to rest at VA national cemeteries and state Veterans cemeteries. An estimated 25,000 volunteers placed nearly 230,000 holiday wreaths at markers in about three hours at Arlington. The wreaths were shipped in a mile-long convoy of 25 trucks on a week-long journey from Harrington, Maine. This year, extra effort was made to decorate every eligible marker-dependant on religious affiliation- at Arlington in observance of the cemetery's 150th anniversary.



“Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'”

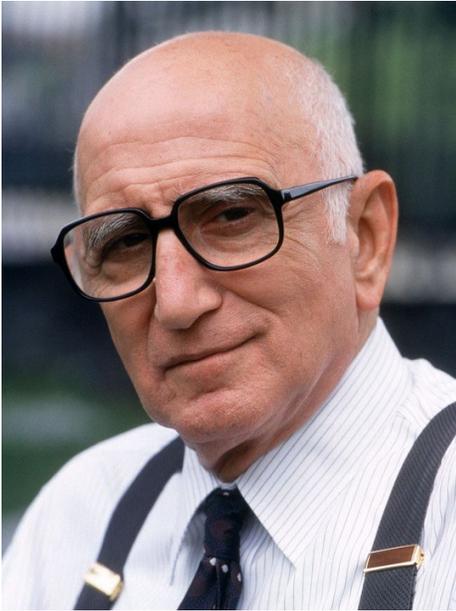
~Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



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2015 NATIONAL SALUTE
CHAIRPERSON



Dominic Chianese
Film and Television Actor

VA Voluntary Service is extremely delighted and honored to have actor Dominic Chianese serve as the chairperson of this year's National Salute to Veteran Patients.

Born on February 24, 1931, in the Bronx, New York, Dominic Chianese is a versatile performer with a career spanning more than five decades, Chianese got his start on the stage. He appeared off-Broadway in the *American Savoyards* in 1952, which led to national tours of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado and Patience*.

Now a veteran stage performer, Chianese has performed in musicals and dramatic productions at the Yale Repertory Theatre, Center Stage, Long Wharf Theatre and the New York Shakespeare Festival, among several other venues.

Film and Television

Chianese made his film debut in 1972 in *Fuzz*. Shortly after, he appeared in one of the classic gangster movies of all-time, *The Godfather, Part II* (1974) which starred Al Pacino. Around this time, Chianese appeared in several of director Sidney Lumet's films, including the explosive drama *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975).

For the next two decades, Chianese continued to carve out a substantial career as a character actor in film, on the stage and on television. He showed his range as an actor by appearing on a diverse mix of TV shows, from the crime drama *Law & Order* to the comedy *Hope & Faith*. He often played the role of the gangster as he did in the HBO biographical film *Gotti* (1996). It would be Chianese's portrayal of another mob figure on another HBO program, however, that would make him a star and a staple of popular culture.

'The Sopranos' and Other Roles

The HBO television series, *The Sopranos*, began airing in 1999, with Chianese on board as Corrado "Uncle Junior" Soprano. Short-tempered with often frustrated ambitions, his character often experienced conflict with his nephew Tony Soprano (played by James Gandolfini) over the family business. Chianese brought this aging mobster character to life, presenting him as a complex human being rather than a stereotypical figure. His hard work paid off: He received numerous accolades for his performance on *The Sopranos*, including two Emmy Award nominations for outstanding supporting actor in a drama series, in 2000 and 2001.

In addition to his work on *The Sopranos*, Chianese has pursued a career in music, releasing two albums: 2001's *Hits*, which features a few original compositions by Chianese, and 2003's *Ungrateful Heart*, a collection of Italian songs. Chianese often gives performances in the New York City area.

**SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS ALIVE
AND WELL IN BATTLE CREEK**

Submitted by Brian Pegouske, Voluntary Service Specialist, Battle Creek VAMC, Battle Creek, MI

The sounds of December in Community and Volunteer Service were heard throughout the Battle Creek VA Medical Center. The ringing heard was not sleigh bells; but the phone with someone from the community asking how they could help. The lobby in Building 10 bustled

not with elves and reindeer; but with volunteers and community partners delivering good cheer. There were new community partners and many other groups that continue to provide support year after year. From the Jewish War Veterans 69th consecutive year Christmas visit and gift distribution to Veterans, the 61st annual Remember-A-Vet campaign through the Battle Creek Enquirer, the 46th annual Brooklyn Community Cookie Distribution, the 15th annual Elks Personal Care Gifts, the American Legion Auxiliary Gift Shop, down to the Wilson family making their first visit to deliver personal care items to Veterans in lieu of gifts, the community ensured that our Veterans were remembered throughout the holidays.



Community members from City of Jonesville, MI deliver over 300 Christmas Care packages.

During the month of December over 20 holiday events for Veterans were sponsored by Veteran Service Organizations, churches, businesses, and other community groups. Battle Creek also received over 2,000 Christmas cards and hundreds of gifts to distribute throughout the month and 111 volunteers joined us for our VA Voluntary Service Gift Distribution to pass out gifts purchased for the Veteran patients.

Community is one of the four dimensions of Recovery that we teach our Veterans. We emphasize to our community partners and volunteers that an hour or two of their time is a gift that keeps on giving during the Recovery journey of our Veterans, as they strive to meet their full potential and to improve their health and well-being. We are extremely grateful for their generous support of time and donations that help us to meet the mission of the Battle Creek VA Medical Center, and that ensure the Veterans are remembered during the holidays.



LOUISVILLE COMMUNITY PARTNERS COME THROUGH FOR VETERANS

Submitted by Rhonda Parero, Voluntary Service Specialist, Robley Rex VAMC, Louisville, KY

Robley Rex VA Medical Center is part of a community that cares about Veterans. Those in the Louisville Metro area and beyond continuously demonstrate an outpouring of generosity, especially during the holiday season! These phenomenal community partners include individuals, businesses, employee groups, civic and faith-based groups, and Veterans Service Organizations. During the months of November and December they provided support to our Veterans by donating gift cards, household items, clothing, toys, gifts, stockings, care packages, and thousands of holiday cards. They have made a significant difference in the lives of Veterans in homeless shelters and Veterans in the community who have families and who are experiencing crisis.

Thanks to their outreach, the holidays were much brighter for than 129 homeless Veterans! Each Veteran received a holiday box containing a coat, sweater, shirt, pants, socks, underwear, hat, gloves, boots and handmade Christmas cards. The community's commitment to our Veterans doesn't stop there. In addition, more than thirty Veteran families were referred by their social worker for Christmas assistance. The families, which included approximately 70 children, received clothing, toys and gift cards.

In addition to the Christmas project, community partners provided truckloads of much needed household items such as bedding, kitchen items, and cleaning supplies to Veterans in transition from homelessness to permanent housing. Donated gift cards provided much needed assistance to Veterans in a time of crisis.



One Veteran who received a gift card wrote a note addressed "Dear Community" which expressed how grateful she was "to have people care and love us that don't know us." She said that the Walmart gift card allowed her to purchase food and gas for her family "during a terrible time."

Another Veteran was able to have a late Christmas celebration with his young son that he had not seen in quite some time due to personal health issues. What Dad doesn't want to give his child his favorite sports team jersey, clothes, games and other gifts and watch his face light up? They had waited so long to exchange those hugs, laughter, and special time together. Our community partners made it happen!

20+ YEAR TRADITION CONTINUES IN ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Submitted by Beverly Leneski, Chief, Voluntary Service, VA Ann Arbor HCS, Ann Arbor, MI



For over 20 years staff from Washtenaw Community College have sponsored a Christmas Eve Dinner for residents of the Community Living Center (CLC) in Ann Arbor. Dinner consists of Kentucky Fried Chicken, biscuits, mashed potatoes, gravy, fresh fruit, desserts, snacks and drinks. The college enlists the support of local area businesses to provide refreshments and a gift for all CLC residents. In fact, all inpatients in the medical center receive a gift bag of goodies.

There is so much food available that all staff working Christmas Eve are invited to join in refreshments. This is a favorite with CLC residents as they can invite their families to join them for dinner. The CLC is decorated with tons of balloons and it is a great place to be on Christmas Eve.

HOLIDAY SHARING PROGRAM

Submitted by Patrick Gleason, Chief, Voluntary Service, Jesse Brown VAMC, Chicago, IL



Don Jackson, Program Support Specialist at Jesse Brown, with volunteers Sandra and Lemuel as they prepare the gifts for delivery.

Jesse Brown VA Voluntary Service sponsored a Holiday Sharing program for Veterans and family members in need of gifts for the holidays. Social workers were asked to anonymously nominate Veterans that were in need of this service, and then Voluntary Service worked with our generous VA employees, local organizations and faith-based groups to fulfill the requests. The end result: 118 Veterans received wrapped gifts specifically requested for their families. In total, over 500 gifts were distributed! Many of the Veteran recipients were overwhelmed by this program and it gave them a real sense of community and caring at Jesse Brown VAMC.

DISNEY ROYALTY VISITS VETERANS

Submitted by Erica Jones, Voluntary Service Manager, Northern Indiana HCS, Marion, IN

VA Northern Indiana Health Care System Voluntary Service department purchased items for and prepared 50 gift bags to distribute to inpatients and Oncology patients at the Fort Wayne campus totaling \$3,000. The Voluntary Service department also invited Elsa from Disney's *Frozen* to visit and help distribute the gifts bags to the inpatients and pass out McDonald's gift cards to Veterans waiting for their outpatient appointments.





PHILADELPHIA COMMUNITY PARTNERS SUPPORT VETERANS

Submitted by Melissa Heinlein, Chief, Voluntary Service, Philadelphia VAMC, Philadelphia, PA



Volunteers from Bristol-Myers Squibb deliver gifts for Philadelphia Veterans and their families.

Philadelphia VAMC VAVS coordinated with Bristol-Myers Squibb for the third year in a row to assist Veteran families in need this holiday season. BMS tripled their family sponsorship this year going from 4-5 families in 2013 to 13 families this year! Voluntary Service has worked with Social Work since September to identify Veterans needing assistance during the holidays. In addition to BMS, Lockheed Martin, a local Steamfitters union, and Philadelphia VA departments (Neurology and Pathology & Lab) also joined in sponsoring families. All in all, 22 Veterans and their families were able to enjoy the holiday season.



Volunteers help sort coats donated during the Coats for Courage drive.

Also for a third year in a row, Voluntary Service coordinated with the local Communication Workers Local 13000 for the Coats for Courage drive distributing over 350 coats to Veterans as a holiday surprise the week before Christmas. Voluntary Service purchased hats, scarfs, and gloves to go with the coats along with holiday refreshments.

Here's what the social workers had to say about their gifts:

"Keith was extremely appreciative. It was very sweet when I delivered the presents. We had to sneak into the house and hide them without his daughter hearing us. He was very grateful and said that they really added to the holiday. He was not expecting this much and was shocked how much he got. Bruce was also thankful and said that he was going to have a large meal for his son due to the help."

"My Veteran and family absolutely enjoyed all of the presents. I was informed that the children were so excited as they did not open presents until Christmas morning. Vet and his spouse were very grateful."

CHRISTMAS MARCH ON THE BATH VA MEDICAL CENTER

Submitted by Lynn Dinehart, Volunteer and Recreation Manager, Bath VAMC, Bath, NY

On Christmas morning Bath Veterans were visited by approximately 20 guests for breakfast. 11 of the individuals marched starting at midnight Christmas Eve from the Wayland American Legion to the Bath VA, arriving around 7:30 am. on Christmas morning. This was a 28 mile march and many wore packs with up to 100 lbs in them.

The initial march was started and coordinated by David Herring, currently home from Baghdad, along with some of his fellow Veterans. He enlisted several others to join the march and raised \$5,000 in gifts, special bracelets, and special coins to be handed to each of our CLC Veterans at the Bath VAMC.

Upon their arrival, the group was escorted by our police department and fire department complete with trucks, sirens, lights to the Community Living Center dining hall. There they shared a Christmas morning meal with our Veterans, much like our original Christmas dinner 136 years ago when our facility was opened as the Soldiers and Sailors home under the Grand Army of the Republic. Family members of those Veterans involved in the march also joined in on the celebration.

2015 JESSE BROWN MEMORIAL YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) are calling for nominees for the 2015 Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship Program. The program is designed to encourage youth volunteers to become active in the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) program and/or DAV's Local Veterans Assistance Program (LVAP).

This scholarship is awarded annually to outstanding youth volunteers engaged in VAVS and/or LVAP. The first place prize includes a \$20,000 scholarship and an expense paid trip to DAV's National Convention. Deadline for nominations is February 6, 2015.

For more information about this scholarship please visit the DAV's [Jesse Brown Scholarship](#) website or contact your local VAVS Program Manager. Program Managers, contact VA Central Office regarding this and other opportunities to recognize your outstanding volunteers.



Shannon Mathew
Recipient of the \$20,000
2014 Jesse Brown Scholarship

★ CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF ★

- Sabrina C. Clark, Director
- Mary Jo Munnely, Lead Staff Assistant
- Tony Burtley, Voluntary Service Specialist
- Christine Feeser, Program Specialist
- Tyrone Green, Program Analyst
- Ginny Hoover, Voluntary Service Specialist
- Kevin Stanford, Health Systems Specialist, Detail