

The Bulletin

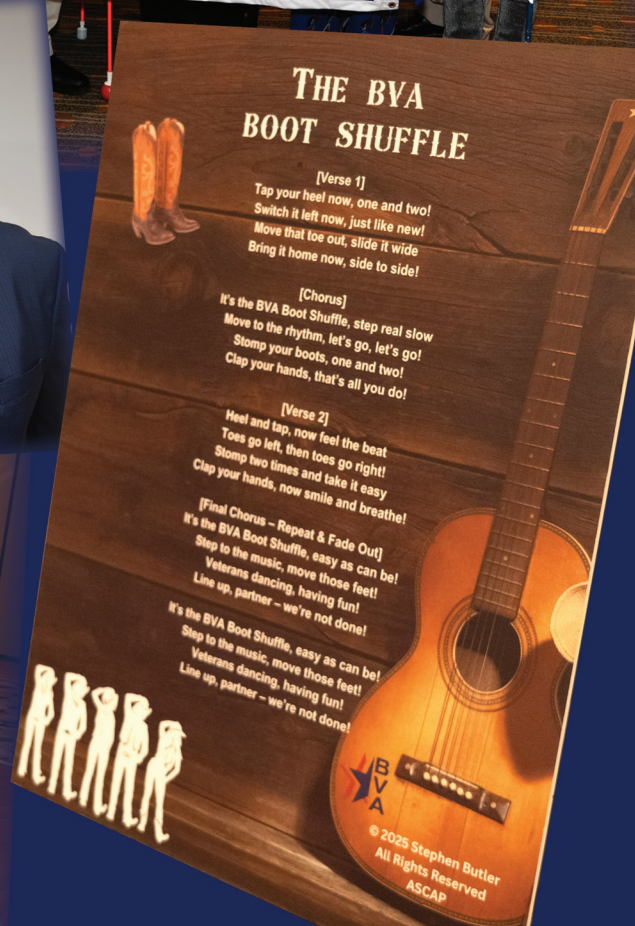
Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans



Summer 2025



CELEBRATIONS AND REMEMBRANCES



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Cover Photos: The celebratory atmosphere that filled the Hyatt Regency Dallas during much of the BVA 80th National Convention in early summer turned to sadness only weeks later for BVA members and friends as two beloved national leaders passed away just ten days apart. A recap of the Texas gathering and tributes to both Paul Mimms and Elizabeth Holmes highlight this issue of **The Bulletin**. See Page 10 for more information about the BVA 80th National Convention.

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Published quarterly by and for blind and low vision veterans and their families. All versions of the publication are available without charge. **The Bulletin** informs BVA members about their Association and the issues that affect them.



President's Page

by Wade Davis

It is with great humility that I step into my new role as BVA National President. My pledge to you is that I will be honest and

transparent. With that in mind, starting in the month of September every third Thursday at 3:00pm Eastern Time, there will be a Town Hall for you, our membership. The Town Halls are for you to have access to the Board of Directors to ask questions.

BVA receives no federal funds; we survive on donations. Many of our corporate sponsors ask, "How many of your members help support your mission?" So, I ask all of you to become a BVA Visionary. The group of BVA Visionaries is a special team of loyal and dedicated supporters who make recurring monthly donations to help the organization carry out its mission in support of America's blind and low vision veterans. Your thoughtfulness in lending this support makes possible the committed and ongoing services our veterans provide to one another free of charge as they remain true to the recently adopted motto for Team BVA: "One Vision, One Team, One Fight."

Please visit the "Ways to Give" page on our website. The page is located at <https://BVA.org/ways-to-give/>. Once there, click the button labeled "Become a BVA Visionary." When you donate to BVA on a recurring basis, you help to support continuously the following programs for blind and low vision veterans:

BVA's Team BVA Initiative, serving as the Association's premier outreach program

for blind and low vision veterans adjusting to sight loss via peer-inspired adaptive recreation activities, integrated community support, and whole health rehabilitation. These support mechanisms empower us with greater dignity, independence, and self-worth.

BVA's Ambassadors Program, serving as peer-inspired mentors advocating on behalf of blind and low vision veterans, their families, and caregivers, ensuring that they receive their earned benefits and services.

BVA's VetTech Program, analyzing, educating, and advocating for assistive, adaptive, and accessible technologies that enhance the lives of blind and low vision veterans.

BVA's Care Review Program, evaluating the full continuum of care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers, thus ensuring safe, productive, and less complicated access to care for blind and low vision veterans.

BVA's Claims Assistance Program, assisting blind and low vision veterans with navigating and filing their VA disability claims, helping to ensure that all blind and low vision veterans receive the benefits they have earned as a result of their service and sacrifice.

BVA's Government Relations Team ensures that blind and low vision veterans have their voices represented and heard before Congress and other government entities in order to better the lives of not only blind and low vision veterans, but all veterans nationwide.

Please make your commitment to support the programs of BVA today. Ask your family and friends as well to become BVA Visionaries.



Legislative Update

by Lea Rowe

As the federal legislative branch moves through a period of transition on Capitol Hill, BVA remains steadfast in its commitment to serve as an effective advocate on behalf of our members. Our recent annual testimony before the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, delivered by then National President Paul Mimms, underscored our dedication to ensuring equitable access and support for blinded veterans across the nation. This quarter, BVA is actively engaged in a range of legislative initiatives that address the diverse needs of the veteran community.

A key focus has been the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act (H.R. 1147), which recently passed the House of Representatives with unanimous bipartisan support. The Senate VA Committee has also passed its version of the bill, S. 1383, and it is now headed to the Senate floor for a vote. This crucial legislation proposes the establishment of a Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee. The committee will play a vital role in advising VA on accessibility matters, ensuring that blinded veterans have equal opportunities in all aspects of life. The Veterans Advisory Committee will focus on improving access to electronic information, services, benefits, and healthcare facilities for disabled veterans.

In a significant legislative victory, S. 1383 was included in the most recent National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) package bill. NDAA, which encompasses a wide array



Wade Davis, Lea Rowe, and Tracy Ferro pose prior to National Convention Gala.

of defense and military-related legislation, has served as an effective vehicle for advancing critical veterans' issues. Other notable bills included in the NDAA package were measures that authorize a pay raise for military members and civilian defense employees, and provisions to improve access to healthcare, housing, childcare, and spousal support for military families. It also included provisions to strengthen the defense industrial base and invest in emerging technologies. The inclusion of the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act in this omnibus bill highlights the broad, bipartisan support for its mission to improve accessibility and underscores the importance of BVA's advocacy efforts in a complex political environment.

BVA is also closely monitoring the progress of the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans Act (SAVES Act), H.R. 2605. This important bill has been passed by the House Committee and is awaiting action on the House floor. If it passes the House, it will then be sent to the

Senate for consideration. The SAVES Act aims to expand access to service dogs for veterans with a wider range of disabilities, including PTSD, TBI, and other conditions. It would provide grants to nonprofit organizations that train and place service dogs, covering the costs associated with training, veterinary care, and other related expenses. This legislation is supported by various veterans' organizations and would be a major step forward in empowering veterans to live more independently.

BVA celebrates another major victory with President Trump signing H.R. 1815, the VA Home Loan Program Reform Act, into law. This act establishes a permanent partial claims program within the VA Home Loan Program, which will help veterans who have fallen behind on their mortgage payments. The reform brings VA's program in line with those of other federal agencies that assist homeowners and is a critical step toward preventing veteran homelessness. This measure will ensure that our members can achieve and maintain the American dream of homeownership without fear of losing their homes due to financial hardship.

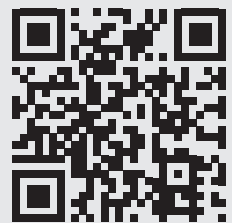
BVA's advocacy efforts have been further bolstered by strong support from the highest

levels of VA. During the BVA 80th National Convention, Secretary Douglas A. Collins delivered a powerful speech reaffirming his commitment to the needs of blind and low vision veterans. In his address, he emphasized his singular purpose: to serve veterans and ensure they receive the benefits they have rightfully earned. This demonstration of solidarity from Secretary Collins underscores VA's dedication to working with BVA to address the unique challenges faced by our members and to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all blinded veterans.

BVA remains optimistic about the future of veteran legislation. By maintaining a steadfast commitment to our mission, fostering strong partnerships, and amplifying the voices of our members, we are confident that we can continue to achieve meaningful progress. Passage of H.R. 1147 in the full House and S. 1383 in Committee, along with the enactment of H.R. 1815 and the progress of the SAVES Act, are powerful reminders that persistent advocacy, combined with strong partnerships, can lead to real, positive change for the veteran community.

Additional Accessibility Options for Reading The Bulletin

Readers of the last few issues may have noticed the absence of the Voiceye codes in the top right corner of each page. With the codes no longer available to BVA, the QR code at right will take readers directly to **The Bulletin** page on the BVA website, where current and past issues are accessible in PDF, Word, and audio format.





Executive Director's Message

by Vernon Humphrey

Greetings to my BVA family.

Although I am new to the Executive Director position, I am not new to veterans, service members, or the families that make us whole. A special shoutout to the family members who support us to become independent again. I have often said that the hardest job in the military is the position of spouse. After I was diagnosed with legal blindness 26 years ago, I had no idea what my future would hold. Only through the support of my family (marriage, military, and veterans—especially BVA) was I able to see a future that allowed me to continue to live productively instead of being consumed by self-pity.

As we enter the time of the year filled with celebration, family always comes to mind. We have many religious and patriotic celebrations headed our way. My wish is that the BVA family share the celebrations with not only those close to us but that we reach out to comrades from our past to remind them of the great times we had and the love we have for one another. Unfortunately, I have lost contact with many, but through social media I have found once again quite a few. Many were surprised to find out about my vision loss and even more surprised to hear about BVA and my position. Unfortunately, I found that many had already completed their tours of duty and received their Permanent Change of Station (PCS) and their final assignment. Until we make the effort to find out, we will never know how the people from our past are doing.

Another topic on my mind is that BVA is unknown to many of our brothers and sisters. I am referring mostly to those who have experienced sight loss long after leaving the service and do not know that we are here. They have no idea about our world class National Service Officers that could help them secure the benefits they have rightly earned and the rehabilitation training available, not to mention the free membership. I believe that one of the best things we have done is make membership free to all blind and low vision veterans who are eligible for the rehabilitation services that VA offers.

We have fought a great fight for 80 years and we have plenty more left for the future. The fight will continue for blind and low vision veterans until they receive the benefits that they rightly have earned. As former service members and their family members, you understand the importance of mission



Newly appointed Executive Director Dr. Vernon Humphrey assumed a majority of the Master of Ceremony duties at the convention.

completion and not leaving anyone behind. Our mission is to spread the word and help our brothers and sisters find the BVA family to which they most surely belong. Service before self is something we not only understand, but it is who we are.

As we face the uncertainty of the future, we know that we are stronger together than we are alone. I am who I am because of you and the leaders in my past whom I have tried to emulate. As the saying goes, some of these leaders I like as family and some I have sworn not to be like!

Paul Mimms' Sudden Passing Saddens Friends and Associates

BVA's leadership and membership throughout the country were stunned and deeply saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Navy veteran and Immediate Past National President Paul Mimms at his home in Kansas City, Missouri, early on August 22. For as long as most can remember, Paul has been a mentor, a teacher, a beloved friend, and a true light to all with whom he served in the countless pursuits in which he engaged.

"The type of light Paul sees is the same light he has unselfishly shared for the better part of 40 years, and which he continues to share today with his fellow blinded veterans," a feature story of the Autumn 2021 issue of the **BVA Bulletin** affirmed.

Paul Mimms was born in Iowa City, Iowa, on March 6, 1945. He moved to Kansas City, Missouri, in 1960, graduating eighth in his class from the city's Central High School in 1963. He briefly attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, before enlisting in the U.S. Navy on May 16, 1966.

Please join me in a productive autumn season, personally growing, growing BVA, and connecting with both new veterans and those from our past who have positively impacted our lives. Only by working collectively can we secure the future for the veterans who follow us, just as our BVA ancestors have done for us.



Paul and Shadow together at recent BVA 80th National Convention.

Unlike draftees of the 1960s during the Vietnam War, Paul volunteered for military service. His plan was never a military career but to fulfill a commitment and then return to civilian life. He was stationed in San Diego for a year and a half before his deployment to Vietnam. In January 1968 he was assigned to board the World War II-constructed USS Luzerne County, a ship designed to support amphibious operations.

One night aboard the ship, on the waters of the Mekong Delta just a couple of months into his deployment, Paul was injured when a pulley used to load ammunition into storage swung free and struck him directly in the left eye. Although he was not blinded immediately, the residual effect of the accident caused Paul to eventually lose total vision in both eyes a few years later.

Paul went on to higher education and a graduate degree, a successful career with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and as an expert-level advocate for SmartHome Technology, Information Technology, and Guide Dog Handling and Care. BVA is but one of the many benefactors of the light that emanated from Paul Mimms. He shared that light as a gift without a price tag or an expectation of compensation or payback.

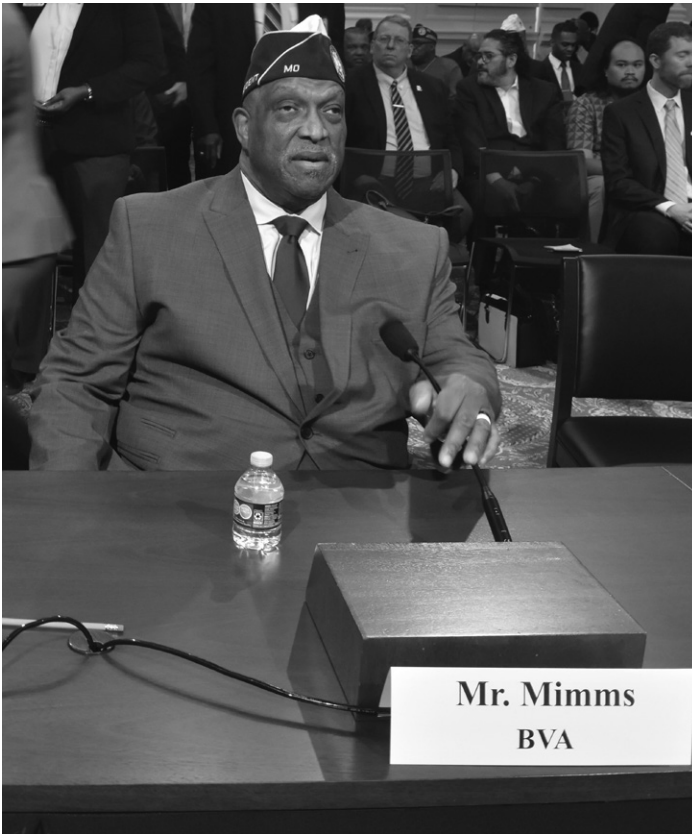
Paul was first elected to the BVA National Board of Directors as National Treasurer at the 68th National Convention (2013) in Spokane, Washington. After serving a full two-year term, he was elected to serve as both National Secretary and National Vice President. Personal issues brought about his resignation as National Vice President in 2018 but he returned to that position in 2022 by both appointment and later election.



Then National President Mark Cornell recognized Paul as the 2014 recipient of the Major General Melvin J. Maas Award for Professional Achievement at BVA's 69th National Convention in Reno, Nevada. The award propelled him into national leadership positions for the next 11 years.



Paul reveled in recognizing the accomplishments of other BVA members and their regional groups. Pictured here, Georgia Regional Group President Dennis Darnes accepts Silver Gavel at 79th National Convention in Jacksonville.



Paul presented oral Congressional testimony three times, the latest in March 2025 before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs.

He served as National President from 2023 until the conclusion of the 80th National Convention just six weeks before his passing.

The expressions and empty feelings, all evidence of how greatly Paul will be missed, came from various BVA members, sponsors and partners of the organization, and leaders of sister organizations from the veteran and blind communities.

Nevertheless, no written tribute could do justice to the life Paul Mimms lived and gave to others. He reiterated many times that the gifts that were untouched by his blindness—his intelligence, his family, and his faith—were his motivation to become something more than he was when he lost his sight. He viewed himself “not so much a blind veteran as he did a veteran who happened to be blind,” the disability always being secondary to what he did for family, church, community, country, and, of course, his fellow veterans.

“My mission became one of appreciating and respecting the gifts I already possessed—to look beyond blindness unless it could be used as an opportunity to help someone else, and to focus on the blessings and gifts I have to empower others just as I have been empowered in my own life,” he said.

Surely BVA was among the fortunate benefactors of the light that emanated from Paul. That light came as a gift without a price tag or a bill.

Did You Know?

- In early 1946, BVA proposed to take over the **Quadrangle Review**, the official Army publication of Avon Old Farms Convalescent Hospital. That decision was soon overturned with the realization that BVA should be devoted to the interests of all blinded veterans, regardless of their branch of service. A separate new publication, the **BVA Bulletin**, seemed more appropriate to the first Board of Directors and Editor Lloyd Greenwood. The need for such a publication was also demonstrated by the more than a thousand responses to a questionnaire distributed by the National Headquarters the previous year. The responses pointed out a serious lack of information concerning adjustment of pensions, conversion of insurance, and the proper way to apply for the benefits for which all blinded veterans were eligible.

BVA Convention Faithful Unite, Celebrate 80 Years

by Stuart Nelson

Stimulating educational sessions, unprecedented camaraderie, unique offsite visits, announcement of elections results, and an exhilarating keynote kickoff address by VA Secretary Doug Collins all highlighted a once unimaginable milestone BVA 80th National Convention.

The gathering, held for the second consecutive year in conjunction with the annual convention of the American Council of the Blind (ACB), concluded on July 11 after a flurry of activities during six days that included nearly 800 participants from BVA and ACB. The two organizations also positioned 82 state-of-the-art booths in the Exhibit Hall for four days and the usual cadre of volunteers at the hotel and local airports invited and trained by Volunteer Coordinator Margarine Beaman.

The sights and sounds of the Blinded Veterans Association's 80th National Convention will doubtless remain in the hearts and minds of those associated with the historic gathering, hopefully for months and years to come.

WayAround Offers Critical Guidance

From the very outset of the week at convention registration and beyond, WayAround Director of Business Development Neva Fairchild provided critical directions and descriptions of the Hyatt via the "WayTags" placed on each name badge.

Kudos to the Hyatt Regency Dallas

Hotel management and staff went above and beyond expectations to support BVA members and their families, staff needs, and visitors to the convention, including the strict security detail associated with Secretary Collins' Monday morning arrival and address. The hotel was professional, accommodating, and treated all like family. Throughout the week, the Hyatt Regency itself placed volunteers of its own outside two main floors of elevators to orient, direct, and guide BVA and ACB members to their desired meeting destinations as they exited an elevator.

Thank you, Generous Partners and Exhibitors

BVA is indebted to our corporate sponsors and exhibitors who attended the convention and made the event possible. Special thanks go to the following:

- Waymo
- Oracle Health Sciences
- Vanda Pharmaceuticals
- Vispero
- OrCam
- American Academy of Ophthalmology
- Bosma
- Palmer Vision
- Biped.ai
- WayAround
- Eschenbach
- Uber
- NaviLens



At Sunday's first-day Emerging Technologies/Navigation Seminar, Biped co-founder Marco Trujillo demonstrated the NOA, a revolutionary vest worn like a backpack to guide people with blindness and low vision. The item functions as a complement to canes and dogs.



Left to right at convention dog walk celebrating the Waymo autonomous vehicles now serving blinded veterans and their guide dogs: Rob Sanchas (Kent), Yoneka Trent (Kellnis), Larry Harper (Leela), Teresa Galgano (Donald), Sheldon McKinney (Nora), and Joe Bogart (Pomp).

- Second Chance for Sight Foundation and Sindoni Family
- NuEyes

Convention registrants who signed up for the Cooking Seminar on July 9 met Debra Erickson, Executive Chef and Founder of The Blind Kitchen, and Neva Fairchild. The two shared helpful strategies, adaptive tools,



OrCam's Corinne Nero welcomes Richard Lane (Mid-Atlantic Regional Group), left, and Randy Holloway (Gem State Regional Group) to the company's Exhibit Hall booth.

and specialized knowledge with BVA blind and low vision veterans interested in cooking safely, confidently, and independently.

In addition to culinary tips, attendees received a \$25 gift card and WayAround tags. A very special thanks to friends at Palmer Vision for sponsoring this event.

Opening Ceremony

BVA National Sergeant-at Arms Brian O'Connell started the convention perfectly with a trumpet solo rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner after directing BVA's own Rob Sanchas and Sheldon McKinney in a presentation of the colors at the opening ceremony Monday morning. Next up were



VA Secretary Collins with BVA staff and Board of Directors following keynote address. In his keynote address, without notes or script, Secretary Collins discussed new innovations and approaches at VA that could improve delivery of services to blind and low vision veterans.



BVA Sergeant-at-Arms Brian O'Connell performs flawless trumpet solo of National Anthem at convention's opening ceremony.



Matt Ater, left, and Chet Frith address current relevant issues and answer questions relating to accessibility and VA compliance with Section 508.

Convention welcome videos by Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs and Executive Director Dr. Vernon Humphrey's introduction of Secretary Collins. The Secretary addressed the gathering for the better part of an hour.

Tuesday's Fireside Chat

Focusing on contemporary issues of accessibility, both at VA and through modern technology, Chet J. Frith (Director, VA Office of Section 508 Compliance) and Matt Ater (Senior Vice President, Vispero), offered brief introductory remarks and fielded a host of questions dealing with current challenges facing blind and low vision veterans as they attempt to navigate VA webpages and other information sources.

BVA Gala

The second annual convention gala was highlighted by a Board of Directors receiving line and a series of video tributes to BVA from current partners and convention sponsors. Vernon Humphrey also recognized all of the convention sponsors. A heartfelt keynote speech by Andrii Smolenskyi followed in which he thanked BVA for presenting him with an honorary life membership in the

Association. Several veterans and family members then took to the dance floor for the next hour or so!



Early arrivals at the BVA Gala included, left to right from the Tennessee Regional Group, Alexander Cade, Terry Richardson, and Calvin Poole.



Despite continuous running, Margarine Beaman, Teresa Galgano, and guide dog Donald make time for a photo prior to BVA Gala.



Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group's Gerald and Judy Newman.



With his wife, Alina, at his side, Ukrainian blinded veteran Andrii Smolenskyi shares his recovery story and hopes for the future at BVA Gala.

Ambassador Breakfast Sponsored by OrCam

BVA members who have completed the ambassador certification program during the past three years, and who were present at the convention, were invited to and rewarded with an early morning breakfast sponsored by OrCam for the fourth consecutive year. Corinne Nero addressed the group of approximately 15 ambassadors, congratulating and thanking them for their service as Ambassadors.

Father Carroll Luncheon and Awards Ceremony, Sponsored by NuEyes Technologies

Convention attendees heard the legacy of BVA's first National Chaplain (1946-1971) and blind rehabilitation pioneer Thomas J. Carroll. They also witnessed first-hand a powerful example of human resilience and the power of possibility in the form of Dan Parker, the event's keynote speaker who urged attendees to never abandon, notwithstanding any adversity, the possibilities they were meant to achieve in their lives. Annual award winners announced at the luncheon are:

- Irving Diener Award: Bill Graves
- Recruiter of the Year Award: Warner Murray
- Distant Darling/Gent Award: Jennifer Troyer
- Superstar Award: Patrick Fischer
- Gold Gavel Incentive Award (numerical membership increase): Carolina Regional Group
- Silver Gavel Incentive Award (percentage membership increase): Captain Buddy Spivey Razorback Regional Group
- Honorary Memberships: Andrii Smolenskyi, Robert Murphy



Bill Graves, middle, receives Irving Diener Award from Paul Mimms, right, for extraordinary service to his New Jersey Regional Group. At left, NuEyes Technologies President of Operations Regina Chatman. NuEyes sponsored the Father Carroll Luncheon and both the Diener Award and Recruiter of the Year Award.

BVA Business

Key Association business items were conducted in the following settings:

- Traditional Opening Business Meeting
- Veterans Service Program Claims Office open Sunday-Friday



Tracy Ferro offers point of emphasis at convention Opening Business Meeting.



Wade Davis and Team BVA Outreach Panel—Anthony Woodson, Sheldon McKinney, and Monique Statham.

- Team BVA Outreach Panel consisting of Committee Chairs Sheldon McKinney (Dog Handlers Group), Anthony Woodson (Adaptive Sports and Activities Group and Book Club Group) and Monique Statham (Gardening Group)
- Learn BVA (presentation of Ambassador and Veterans Service Programs)
- Closing Business Meeting, which included the swearing-in of newly elected BVA and BVAA officers. Election results announced the election of Monique Statham as the new National Treasurer and adoption of the proposed revisions to the BVA National Bylaws. National President Wade Davis, Vice President Tracy Ferro, and National Secretary Doug Ingram had run unopposed for their respective offices.

Recreational and Instructional Activities

Three offsite activities with rave reviews and one stimulating onsite event, all specific to BVA, occupied the otherwise free time of dozens of convention attendees. They included the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza that chronicled the assassination and legacy of President John F. Kennedy, the aforementioned cooking seminar by Executive Chef and Blind Kitchen Founder Debra Erickson, a VIP tour of AT&T Stadium, and a barbecue and line dancing at the Circle R Ranch.



Enrique Sanchez wins Ambassadog for correctly answering trivia question at Circle Ranch Texas Barbecue.



Coupled with her guitar talent, Ruth Hook wows BVA audience with ideas to soothe, lift, inspire, motivate, and encourage. Ruth works as a Professional Music Therapist in the VA North Texas Health Care System.

Second Chance For Sight Provides Memorable Convention Trips

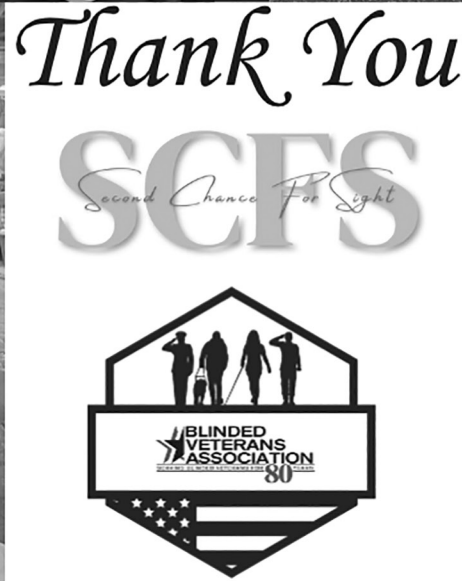
Dozens of BVA members were able to discover Dallas in July, thanks to the generosity of Second Chance For Sight (SCFS). In honor of Janet Blanchard, the Foundation aims to empower individuals and families impacted by visual impairments. That aim was most assuredly with SCFS's support of several offsite activities achieved at the BVA 80th National Convention.

Blind and low vision veterans visited the Sixth Floor Museum which chronicles the assassination and legacy of President John F. Kennedy. They also took a VIP tour of AT&T Stadium – Home of the Dallas Cowboys. The last ride included a trip to Circle R Ranch



A joyous David Hackett, Georgia Regional Group, kneels at 50-yard-line during convention offsite visit to AT&T Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys.

where attendees enjoyed an authentic Texas barbecue and line dancing. A tip of the hat and a howdy to the Foundation and Sindoni family for providing a memorable experience for BVA members and their families.



Challenges Met, Rewards Reaped at Memphis Games

by Michaun Harrison

BVA Administrative Coordinator Michaun Harrison attended the Golden Age Games in late spring. Michaun offers some thoughts about the Games and the benefits to veterans with sight loss.

Adaptive sports play a critical role in enhancing the lives of blind and visually impaired veterans by providing opportunities for physical activity, competition, and community engagement. These activities help veterans regain confidence, independence, and a renewed sense of purpose. Through structured programs like the National Disabled Veterans Golden Age Games (NDVGAG), veterans can challenge their limits in a supportive environment.

For those who have experienced vision loss, adaptive sports can become a gateway to physical health and mental well-being, empowering them to continue living active, fulfilling lives.

NDVGAG, held May 30-June 6, 2025, in Memphis, Tennessee, was a landmark event that underscored the value of adaptive sports. With more than a thousand veterans in attendance, this was the largest turnout in the 39-year history of the games. This record-setting number demonstrated the growing interest and impact of these inclusive sporting opportunities.

Originally, about a hundred blind and low vision veterans registered to participate this year, a testament to the increasing awareness and accessibility of adaptive sports. However, around 33 percent canceled prior to the event, highlighting the ongoing need to address



Left to right at Golden Age Games shuffleboard competition: BVA members Calvin Poole, Sheldon McKinney (Ambassador Nora), Anthony Woodson, Michaun Harrison, Terry Richardson, and Gwendolyn Barr.

barriers to participation such as transportation, confidence, or lack of awareness.

Despite these challenges, blind and visually impaired veterans were successfully integrated into various sports, including cornhole, Boccia, shuffleboard, basketball free throws, horseshoes, air rifle, fishing, swimming, power walk, and archery. In addition, fishing, bowling, kayaking, and powerlifting (bench press and deadlift) exhibitions provided inclusive experiences for all. These sports are more than just physical activities. They are also vehicles for social connection, mental healing, and personal growth.

Increasing the number of low vision and blind participants, particularly women and veterans aged 55-64, is essential to fostering a



Visually impaired participants in the free throw basketball toss gather for a brief instructional session prior to competition.

more dynamic and representative competition field. It also ensures that these veterans do not have to compete solely among themselves

but can engage more broadly across classifications.

Participation in the Golden Age Games instills a deep sense of pride and accomplishment among veterans. The spirit of these games is not about winning or losing in the traditional sense, but about striving, showing up, and celebrating progress. Every veteran leaves the host city with their head held high, regardless of placement. At these games, there are no losers, only last-place champions! This mindset transforms lives, proving that even in the face of adversity, we see resilience, camaraderie, and determination prevail. Adaptive sports activities for blind and visually impaired veterans are not just events, they are essential lifelines for continued service, strength, and success beyond the uniform.

Travel Assistance Available for All Adaptive Sports Clinics

By Teresa Galgano

The BVA National Board of Directors has approved a new benefit to the membership via the Team BVA initiative, providing up to \$500 per calendar year to assist with travel or lodging costs to attend one of the six VA National Adaptive Sports and Arts Clinics. This reimbursement is designed to help BVA members access these valuable events that promote health, wellness, and camaraderie through adaptive sports.

Join us in the Adaptive Sports and Recreation Zoom meeting on the second Tuesday of the month to learn more about this

opportunity. The next call will be October 14 at 7:00pm Eastern Time. Visit <https://bva.org/calendar> and look for further announcements in **BVA Happenings** the week prior to the meeting. The reimbursement is subject to the availability of funds.

To take advantage of this opportunity, follow these steps:

1. Acceptance and Fund Request: Once you have been accepted to participate in a clinic, fill out the Fund Request Form available on the BVA website under Programs and Team BVA. Please submit this form 45 days prior to the event.

2. **Approval Notification:** About 30 days before the event, BVA will notify you via email if you have been approved and for how much. This email will also remind you of the necessary documentation and provide a link to upload your documents for reimbursement.
3. **Documentation Requirements:** To qualify for reimbursement, keep all receipts for travel and lodging expenses. You will also need to provide proof of attendance, such as a photo of your badge or vest, an email from a BVA staff member who attended, or confirmation from the event director.
4. **Reimbursement Process:** You can choose to receive your reimbursement via check or electronic deposit. Remember that if another group covers part of your airfare or lodging, you can only request reimbursement for the portion you personally paid. You can request less than \$500, such as \$250, for two separate events within the calendar year.
5. **On-Site Assistance:** Typically, a BVA staff or board member will be present at these events and may be able to assist you if needed.
6. **Membership Verification:** Ensure that you have your BVA membership number handy. It is required to complete the forms.

For more information on the events and to plan your participation, visit the VA National Adaptive Sports and Arts Clinic page, <https://department.va.gov/veteran-sports>.



The Winter Sports Clinic is just one of six VA National Adaptive Sports and Arts Clinics eligible for travel or lodging cost assistance.

All eligible BVA members should take advantage of this opportunity and participate in these transformative clinics. Your involvement not only enhances your personal growth but also strengthens our community. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact us at membership@BVA.org.

Honoring the Fallen: Memorial Day 2025

Memorial Day 2025 brought BVA members throughout the country to a remembrance of the heroism of those who made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in defense of the nation's freedoms and way of life. Many paid their respects privately while others participated in public events near the Nation's Capital and in the Deep South.

At Arlington National Cemetery, only seven miles from BVA National Headquarters, National President Paul Mimms and newly appointed National Executive Director Dr. Vernon Humphrey represented BVA in the presentation of an organizational wreath to members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, also known as "The Old Guard," at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier immediately following the 157th Memorial Day Observance in the adjacent Memorial Amphitheater. The two were assisted by Lawrence Harrison and National Administrative Coordinator Michaun Harrison (no relation to one another but both members of the BVA Mid-Atlantic Regional Group) who reside in Washington, DC, and Central Virginia, respectively.

Lawrence, guided by his pastor, Stan Wright, and Michaun marched with the BVA flag and the U.S. flag in the traditional "Parade of Colors" featuring Veterans Service Organization (VSO) flags and marchers. The procession was witnessed by some 5,000 seated in the Amphitheater and millions more via television and internet livestream. The procession, marching to the music of the "National Emblem March" played by The President's Own United States Marine Band,



Michaun Harrison, Stan Wright, and Lawrence Harrison are primed and ready to participate in the procession of flags at annual Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington National Ceremony.

signaled the start of the Annual Remembrance Ceremony.

Addressing the crowd were Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, Vice President JD Vance, and President Donald J. Trump. Additional music was offered by



Moving in sync one step at a time with guide dog Shadow, BVA wreath layers make their way toward Honor Guard to present wreath at Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

the Marine Band and the United States Navy Band Sea Chanters.

“The cost was everything to them and to their families, and each of the service members who have made the supreme sacrifice for our nation have also left an unfillable void and an unbreakable silence in the lives of all who love them,” President Trump stated during his remarks. “For the families of the fallen, you feel the absence of your heroes every day.”

Trump’s speech touched on a similar theme found in a Memorial Day message from VA Secretary Doug Collins earlier in the weekend: “This Memorial Day and throughout the year, we at the Department of Veterans Affairs honor and remember the brave heroes who gave their lives in defense of our nation. Their sacrifices have helped make America the greatest place on Earth, and their legacies of courage and commitment inspire us to reach new heights.”

Paul, Vernon, Lawrence, and Michaun made sacrifices of their own during the weekend that typically signals the unofficial beginning of the summer season, often highlighted by picnics, barbecues, sports events, trips to the beach, and openings of local pools. In order to represent BVA, they all got up in the wee hours of the morning to arrive nearly four hours before the ceremony in heavy traffic and amid tight, inconvenient security. They remained for two additional hours to present the BVA wreath.

In Moncus Park in Lafayette, Louisiana, a handful of Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group BVA members joined the Acadiana Veterans Alliance and several other VSOs in another remembrance ceremony. Dignitaries who delivered tributes included Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry; Major General Thomas Friloux, Adjutant General of Louisiana; and Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Luebbert, Rear Detachment Commander of the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT). Luebbert also honored the Acadiana National Guard units with the IBCT that have been activated for duty in Eastern Europe and the Horn of Africa.

“There was also a touching talk by Gold Star Father Buddy Williamson, whose son was killed in 2009,” said Gary Schoelerman, an attendee from the regional group.

The ceremony was followed by a three-mile run/walk in the Park.

“The motto of the day for me comes from General George S. Patton,” Gary said. “It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died – rather, we should thank God that such men lived.”

Around BVA

Association Mourns Liz Holmes Passing

The BVA National Board of Directors, National Headquarters, and Association members throughout the country were saddened to learn of the passing of Elizabeth “Liz” Holmes of Midland, Georgia, on Tuesday, August 12.

A dedicated BVA member and leader in both the Georgia Regional Group and nationally, Liz was foremost a friend to all—with perhaps the highest priority reserved for her fellow blinded veterans.

She was a shining light wherever she saw fit to offer her time, energy, expertise, and resources in service to the communities and organizations she deemed most important. She brightened the lives of others as she went about creating new service opportunities for herself and others—then executing them flawlessly.

“Captain Elizabeth Colunga” Holmes was the first woman to be commissioned to the U.S. Army in the Chicago area and the first woman to complete the men’s ROTC obstacle course, beating what was then the men’s record time. She attended both basic and advanced ordnance courses and Airborne school.

Following her military service, where she traveled throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa, Liz worked in nearly every craft as a U.S. Postal worker before retiring in 2014 due to her sight loss. She was a member of four different unions and held the position of State Secretary of the American Postal Workers Union for three years. She was also the State



With support and assistance from her son, Ben, Liz Holmes involved the Columbus Chapter of the Georgia Regional Group in their local community like never before.

Coordinator for the Post Officer Women for Equal Rights (POWER), representing Georgia at national conventions.

Liz assisted in organizing successful BVA state conventions in Georgia the past ten years. As a participant in the March of Dimes Walk since 2005, she asked fellow BVA members to support her in the walk of 2016 to bring awareness to the Columbus Chapter of the Georgia Regional Group. In 2019, she was elected BVA National Treasurer and in 2021 National Secretary.

Liz served on the Mayor’s Commission for People with Disabilities, playing a major role in the expansion of transportation routes and accessibility in the Greater Columbus, Georgia, area.

Liz is survived by her daughter, Bianca, and son, Ben, the latter of whom is well known to BVA members for his service as a BVA National Auxiliary officer for nine years and

who never left his mother's side throughout five weeks of hospitalization. Also surviving Liz is her granddaughter, Scarlett.

"When we found out Mom was going blind, we asked her if there was anything she wanted to see or do," Bianca posted on Facebook. "She told us that she had already seen and done so much and not to worry—she never wanted to be the center of attention but she demanded respect and stood up for what was right."

Funeral services for Liz were held on August 19 at the McMullen Funeral Home in Columbus, Georgia.

2026 BVA Ambassadors Calendar Coming in October

BVA, in partnership with Large Print Calendar, Ocutrx, and Waymo, is pleased to offer the 2026 (13-month) BVA Ambassadors Calendar/Planner once again this year. This "pawesome" calendar features BVA Ambassadors Teams, programs and services provided to blind and low vision veterans, military and federal holidays, and many more features. This year's calendar is dedicated in memory of Paul Mimms, Immediate Past National President, and guide dog Shadow.

The concept of BVA Ambassadors was inspired by the success of the Ambassadors Scoop Series in **BVA Happenings** as well as the Dog Handler Interest Group, which meets monthly via zoom. BVA Ambassadors (guide and service dogs) provide independence, companionship, and enhanced mobility for our blind and low vision veterans. Although BVA dog handlers are not certified experts, they celebrate the life-changing impact these furry friends have on the BVA membership.

Those interested in purchasing this accessible gem should visit the BVA Store at **BVA.org**. For bulk orders of ten or more,



please contact Meredith Buono-Dagrossa at mbuonodagrossa@bva.org.

Request White Cane Outreach Materials

In 1964, the U.S. Congress approved a resolution authorizing the President of the United States to issue annually a proclamation designating October 15 as "National White Cane Safety Day." President Lyndon B. Johnson was the signer of the resolution and the first U.S. President to issue a proclamation. Although President Barack Obama renamed the day "Blind Americans Equality Day" in his 2011 proclamation and subsequent proclamations, some still prefer and use the "White Cane Safety Day" designation.

Often with support and assistance from VA Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinators and other VA blind rehabilitation



staff, many BVA regional groups and individual members have hosted their own White Cane Day events and activities during the past 20 years. Because October is also Blind Awareness Month, such activities are not required to be scheduled on precisely October 15. They can be carried out on another day that is convenient for the planners or organizations hosting the event.

BVA National Headquarters will send White Cane Day materials—a limited number of brochures, pens in the color and shape of a white cane, and cards that simulate the different causes of blindness—to those planning a White Cane Day event. Also available are extra copies of past issues of the **BVA Bulletin** and one-page handouts relating to the history of White Cane Day and what to do when in proximity of a blind person.

Please send requests, with an ideal number of items to be received, to info@bva.org or call (202) 371-8880, Ext. 316. Please allow 24-48 hours to receive a response and approximately five business days to receive the materials.

Stay Abreast of “Visions of BVA”

Visions of BVA is a deep dive into the inspiring stories of the organization and its members, accounts of resilience, and the achievements of blind and low vision veterans.



Each episode features interviews, discussions on life-changing technology, and glimpses into the BVA community. Included in the series is each issue of **The Bulletin**.

Tina Lemus and Celiann Gonzalez join fellow veteran and host Steve Baskis to reflect on their recent Team River Runner (TRR) experience near Grand Junction, Colorado, in the newest episode of **Visions of BVA**, the Association’s monthly podcast. **Paddling with Purpose: Blind Veterans and Team River Runner** went live on September 1.

Steve, Tina, and Celiann (TRR staff and a veteran herself) together share personal stories of overcoming fear, building trust, and rediscovering confidence through adaptive paddling. The conversation highlights the unique impact of TRR’s Outtasight Clinics, the importance of community, and the powerful role that TRR continues to assume in helping veterans with sight loss reconnect with the outdoors as they simultaneously reconnect with others and with their true inner selves.

Visions of BVA’s recent episode and all others can be located on all major platforms, most notably Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and YouTube. Subscribers are welcome and encouraged to leave their feedback and share their thoughts.

Boucher Presents Generous Pre-Convention Gift to BVA

Longtime BVA member Dr. Gerard Boucher recently contributed \$10,000 to support his peer blind and low vision veterans. Gerard, who served in the Marines during the Vietnam War, was blinded at the age of 20 on October 11, 1967. He received a Bronze Star as well as three Purple Hearts and other commendations from the military.

After his discharge from the Marines and his long stint in VA blind rehabilitation that was typical of the 1970s, Gerard continued his studies, earning multiple degrees in higher education, among them Paralegal Certificate, Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling in 2001, and a PhD in Sociology in May of 2017.

Gerard has been an advocate for the disabled, blind, and elderly. As a valued member of the Blinded Veterans Association for more than 54 years, one of his many noteworthy opportunities to serve nationally came when he was appointed by then National President General Richard Fazakerley as the National Sergeant-at-Arms from 1995-1997. On behalf of the entire Association, especially members past and present with whom he has served so effectively, **The Bulletin** thanks Dr. Gerard Boucher for his generosity and commitment to his fellow veterans.

“VA News” Features BVA Member For Unique Harmonica Talent

“Veteran Finds Healing with a Harmonica” is the headline for a blurb in a recent edition of **VA News** about David Jones, a BVA member and Ambassador from Ooltewah, Tennessee. The piece describes his connection with BVA and his self-taught proficiency with the harmonica that has led him to participate in this year's VA National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

The brief article emphasizes the passion with which David performs as he plays in memory of his father and for his brothers, the latter of whom he now shares a musical bond he didn't have while growing up. He also plays for his fellow veterans and for himself, using music to tell his story of loss but also of connection. Learn more about David's

harmonica talent and how he recently shared it with other trainees at the Southeastern Blind Rehabilitation Center in Birmingham, Alabama, at <https://news.va.gov/141862/veteran-finds-healing-with-a-harmonica>.

O'Connell Garner's USA Hockey Award

USA Hockey has recognized BVA Director of District 1 John O'Connell as the National Disabled Athlete of the Year. John was one of 12 individuals honored at USA Hockey's President's Awards Dinner on June 6 at the Denver Marriott Tech Center as part of its four-day annual meeting.

Hockey has been a lifelong love for John, who began playing at age 7 and never stopped throughout his growing-up years in New York City. John is now a member of USA Hockey's Warrior and Blind Hockey disciplines, playing with the New Jersey Warriors and with New York Metro Blind Hockey. He joined BVA in 2019 and has served as the secretary of the New Jersey Regional Group since 2022. He is also a graduate of the BVA Ambassador program.



John O'Connell's sight loss has not impeded his lifelong passion for making a difference in every endeavor – including but not limited to a flying career, a love for hockey, and his advocacy for veterans with visual impairments and other disabilities.

Ken Asam Lauded in Southern California

Longtime Southern California Regional Group (SCRG) officer Ken Asam has been awarded a Certificate of Appreciation at the annual Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) barbecue of Greater Los Angeles. The July 24 event honored Ken following his service as the SCRG president and paid tribute to his penchant for turning adversity into new opportunities.

The Certificate, signed by VIST Coordinators Dunia Lara (Sepulveda) and Lisa Mitchell (Los Angeles and West Los Angeles), reads as follows: “Ken Asam, for your dedicated service to the Blinded Veterans Association and the Greater Los Angeles Visual Impairment Services Team Program.”

“We thank you, Ken, and congratulations,” recently elected regional group president Cheri Owen affirmed, both as the award was presented and afterward in informing BVA National Headquarters of the recognition.

Ken originally suffered a retinal vein occlusion and lost first the vision in his left



Dedicated to helping all BVA members improve their quality of life, Ken Asam demonstrated effective use of the OrCam MyEye during a BVA technology webinar, one of many acts of service leading to a well-deserved Certificate of Appreciation.

eye. He was given an OrCam visual assistance device by VA but, because the manual was inadequate, he wrote a training outline using the skills he learned as a Technical Instructor. Doing so, he said, turned adversity into a learning and teaching opportunity. He meticulously taught himself how to use the device and wrote a lesson plan that was later adopted by VA as the OrCam training document.

Red Dresses Draw Support For Braille American Flags

The streets of New Orleans’ French Quarter were transformed into a vibrant river of red as more than 4,000 participants took part in the annual New Orleans Hash House Harriers Red Dress Run, held this year on August 9.

The lively tradition—equal parts charity fundraiser, fun run, and costume party—saw men and women

alike wear bright red dresses, turning the city into a spectacle of color and camaraderie. The Harriers self-describe as a “local drinking club with a running problem!” The event raises funds for grants to local charities, including



The Hash House Harriers race not yet begun, Shawntina Gibson and Yoneka Trent prepare to go the full distance in their red dresses.



Raquel Welch, Gary Schoelerman, and Joe Burns take well-deserved break during their New Orleans pursuit to the bar!

the Braille American Flag Project of the Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group and the placement of flags in local libraries.

Among those in attendance from the group was BVA Past National President Joe Burns, who rallied a spirited team of BVA members to join him in the run/walk/crawl. Accompanying Joe were President Shawntina Gibson, Past President Raquel Welch, and members Vincent Higginbotham and Gary Schoelerman. Also joining the group was Yoneka Trent of the Carolina Regional Group.

The event’s route began and ended at Armstrong Park, with festivities kicking off at 9:00am local time. The official run started at 10:00am, winding through the historic French Quarter’s narrow streets, past iconic architecture, and into cheering crowds. By 11:00am, participants were treated to a feast featuring a wide array of dishes from local New Orleans restaurants, offering flavors as bold and diverse as the city itself.

Throughout the day and well into the early hours of the next morning, the French Quarter remained awash in red dresses with music, laughter, and celebration filling the air. The annual event not only brings joy and spectacle to the city but also supports charitable causes,

blending the spirit of giving with the city’s love for a good time.

“Grandpa’s White Cane” Enjoys Unending Popularity

Grandpa’s White Cane by Jim Hoxie and Joanna Jones, with cartoonist and former reporter Alex Portal as Illustrator, continues to be universally appealing to both young and older audiences more than five years after its original release. Jim is a BVA member from Spear Fish, South Dakota.

The audio version of the book has been available through Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD), a program of the National Library Service (NLS) for the Blind and Print Disabled of the Library of Congress, since late 2023.

Print copies of **Grandpa’s White Cane** (see graphic) have already been distributed free to hundreds of ophthalmologists, optometrists, schools for the blind, and elementary schools across the United States and Canada since its first printing in September 2020. Jim and Joanna wrote the book primarily for children, but it is also instructive for those with sight loss. The story details the experience of a grandfather





Jim and guide dog Dax during South Dakota classroom presentation about white cane use and guide dog handling for the blind.

with sight loss due to glaucoma, which is diagnosed by an ophthalmologist who suggests using a white cane while relating several benefits of doing so.

Shortly after the diagnosis, because of his status as a veteran of the U.S. Military, Grandpa attends the VA Central Blind Rehabilitation Center in Hines, Illinois, where he regains his confidence to live independently. He receives training in orientation and mobility with a white cane, relearns how to engage in activities of daily living and communication, and is provided with manual skills training for hobbies and household repair.

Accompanied by his guide dog, Dax, who supplements the help he receives from his cane, Jim demonstrates use of the white cane at scores of South Dakota schools.

Did You Know?

- Perusal of 80 years of the **BVA Bulletin** reveals the unique and improbable achievements of members of the Blinded Veterans Association that could fill a very long list. One such example from the past is Dr. Walter Stromer, whom legendary Philadelphia Phillies announcer of 38 years (1971-2009) credited with putting him on the path to radio. “In his class, I recall him encouraging me to pursue a career in broadcasting when he commented: ‘With your voice, you could get a job in radio.’” Kalas repeated that statement many times throughout his career when asked how he got started as a sportscaster. On January 6, 1945, while serving in World War II with the 87th Infantry Division, near Bastogne, Belgium, Walt Stromer was blinded totally in both eyes when a shell hit a tree and sent wood splinters in all directions. After years of recovery, he graduated from Hastings College (Nebraska) in 1949 and received his PhD at the University of Denver in 1953. Walt and his wife, Vivian, then returned to their native Iowa, where he was a well-known and popular professor of speech at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa, from 1953 until his retirement in 1985. He published **On Being Blind** in 1991 and was a fairly regular contributor to the **BVA Bulletin** in the 1990s.

Auxiliary's View

By Kenneth Witt

Dear Members of the Blinded Veterans Association Auxiliary:

It is with deep gratitude and a profound sense of responsibility that I introduce myself to you as the newly elected National President of the Blinded Veterans Association Auxiliary.

Serving in this capacity is both an honor and a calling. I am humbled to follow in the footsteps of those who have led with compassion, integrity, and unwavering commitment to our mission: supporting blinded veterans and their families through advocacy, outreach, and community engagement.

My connection to this community runs deep. I proudly served for 12 years in the United States Army and spent the following decade as a government contractor, working directly to support our warfighters. These experiences have shaped my understanding of service, sacrifice, and the enduring strength of those who wear the uniform. They have also instilled in me a profound respect for the families and caregivers who stand beside them, many of whom are part of our Auxiliary.

As National President, my focus will be on strengthening our organizational structure, expanding our reach, and ensuring that all members feel empowered to contribute their unique voices and talents. I will be working closely with our national board and local chapters to enhance communication, foster new partnerships, and develop initiatives that reflect the evolving needs of our veteran community. In pursuit of that objective, I am excited to announce the continuation of



Left to right standing before BVA Judge Advocate Stephen Butler (not seen) as he administered the oath of office, Reporter Robert Murphy, Treasurer Karin Myron, Secretary Kathy Ferro, Vice President Gail Witt, and President Kenneth Witt all pledge to serve the BVA Auxiliary to the best of their ability.

our bimonthly virtual town hall meetings, beginning in September 2025. These sessions will provide a space for open dialogue, updates on national initiatives, guest speakers, and opportunities for members to share ideas and feedback directly. I encourage every member to attend and take part in shaping the future of our Auxiliary.

Whether through service projects, fundraising efforts, or member engagement, I believe we have an extraordinary opportunity to build on our legacy and shape a vibrant future. I welcome your ideas, your feedback, and your continued dedication. Together, we will honor the sacrifices of our veterans—not only with words, but with action.

Thank you for your trust and for the work you do every day. I look forward to serving alongside you.

With respect and resolve,
Kenneth Witt



Veterans Service Program Update

by Duayne Driscoll

A Guide to the Automobile Allowance

So, you have been granted entitlement to financial assistance

in the purchase of one automobile or other conveyance. Now what? Not all BVA members qualify for this benefit, but *per capita*, I would wager that BVA has more eligible claimants than any other VSO because so many of our members have vision loss related to active-duty service.

Service-connected vision loss with central visual acuity of 20/200 or worse in the better eye, aka legal blindness, qualifies for an Automobile Allowance. Other qualifying disabilities include loss, or loss of use of, one or both feet, or of one or both hands. Severe burn injuries that limit motion and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis also meet eligibility requirements. An active duty service member with a qualifying disability meets eligibility criteria as well. See 38 CFR § 3.808.

Generally, the VA Regional Office (VARO) grants entitlement to Automobile Allowance as soon as eligibility becomes apparent. In other words, when service connection for vision loss with legal blindness is established, the VARO also allows entitlement to ancillary benefits at the same time. However, the Secretary still requires all claims on the prescribed form, which is 21-4502 for the auto benefit.

The auto allowance claim form consists of four pages. Page 1 contains the initial

application, which must be completed, signed, and dated by the veteran. Only the Social Security Number goes in the space provided at the top of Page 2, and nothing else. Please fax the completed form to the VSP for review and submittal.

Once processed and approved by the VARO, Page 2 of the form becomes your *Certificate of Eligibility*. The Finance Division at the VARO completes Section III with the certifying official's signature and VARO location, then mails it back to the veteran or service member. This is known as the "original" copy, which must be safeguarded because the VARO will not accept any other copy for payment to the seller.

Pages 3 and 4 of the form contain benefits information and very specific instructions to the seller. For auto allowance claims related to vision loss, you may ignore the adaptive equipment guidance as it does not apply. However, all instructions to the seller must be followed precisely for timely payment. Please read and understand Page 3 before proceeding.

When you are ready to make the purchase, take the original certified form to the dealership and purchase a vehicle. With the dealer's assistance, complete Section IV on Page 2 of the form with vehicle and seller information. Answer "No" to Questions 30A and 30B as appropriate. Be sure to sign and date in Blocks 33A and 33B.

You must receive delivery of the vehicle at this point, and this is a deal breaker. If the seller does not agree, you may need to find a different dealership. I would confirm delivery

with the seller before putting their information on the original form because, again, copies are not accepted and it is difficult to get another one.

Then, per the instructions on Page 4, the seller mails or sends via an express overnight service (UPS, FedEx) the original 21-4502 form with an itemized invoice to the VARO shown in Item 23, Section III, attention “Financial Division.” The balance due on the invoice should be at least equal to the amount of the grant in most cases. The VARO then pays the seller directly by check, usually within two weeks. Any deviation from the instructions will result in delay.

Some key takeaways for auto allowance usage:

- Read all of the instructions on Page 3 of the 21-4502 form and ask the seller to do the same before writing anything on the original *Certificate of Eligibility*.
- VA will pay only the seller. Do not purchase a vehicle until you have received the *Certificate of Eligibility*. VA will not provide reimbursement if you pay any other way!
- VA will accept only the original *Certificate of Eligibility*. Faxed, scanned, emailed, or

electronic copies are not accepted. Keep the original safe - it is not easy to get another original copy.

- The seller must deliver the vehicle to you upon receiving the completed and signed *Certificate of Eligibility*.
- The amount due on the invoice should equal or exceed the amount of the grant, unless you are not using the full amount.
- The original *Certificate of Eligibility* and detailed invoice packet must be mailed or sent via an express service by the seller to the attention of the Financial Division at the VARO listed in Item 23 on Page 2 of the form.
- Despite the general instructions for submitting documents that are included in every letter from the VARO, mailing the packet to VA’s intake center in Janesville will result in a delay. Faxing the packet to VA’s intake center will result in a delay. Submitting the packet electronically online will result in a delay.
- Payment cannot be made to the seller until the original and properly completed *Certificate of Eligibility* with invoice has been received by the Financial Division at the VARO listed in Item 23.

Did You Know?

- Just below the street to the immediate south of BVA National Headquarters, a literal stone’s throw from 1600 Duke Street, is the VA-administered Alexandria National Cemetery. First known as simply “Soldiers’ Cemetery” when it opened in 1862, the 5.5 acres with approximately 4,500 interments was one of the 14 original national cemeteries established as burial grounds for mostly Union soldiers who died in battle or in one of the numerous hospitals around the Alexandria area. By 1864, the Cemetery was nearly full, which led to the development of Arlington National Cemetery. Alexandria was one of the principal campsites for Union soldiers sent to defend Washington, DC, at the outbreak of the Civil War.



The Power of Monthly Giving

by Meredith Buono-DaGrossa

The year 2025 marks 80 years that BVA has carried out its mission of providing advocacy, programs, services, and benefits to blinded veterans, their families, and caregivers. As the organization continues to thrive, we are appreciative of the continued and future support that will help sustain the organization and carry us into the future.

As the National Development Director, my focus has always been on securing revenue, stewarding strong partnerships, and building creative marketing strategies that not only tell a powerful story but also bring awareness to the organization.

After the swearing-in of our new Board of Directors during the BVA Annual Convention this past July, I was able to connect with our new National President, Wade Davis. I was thrilled to learn that one of his priorities mirrored mine—increasing our monthly donors who we refer to as BVA Visionaries. Here is a nonprofit secret: Small monthly donations can have just as much impact as a large, one-time donation. Even a few guaranteed dollars a month can help BVA reach its long-term goals and advance its mission of providing programs, benefits, and services to blind and low vision veterans.

Now, just a thought: Currently, BVA has approximately 6,700 members and many of those financially support the organization and their peers. If ten percent of our members contributed ten dollars a month, our revenue

would increase by \$80,000 annually. While it is certainly not expected or mandatory for our members to contribute financially, becoming a BVA Visionary does help to show an engaged and active community. A unified membership invested in BVA's mission, future, and commitment to their peer blind and low vision veterans sends a powerful message.

Here are some examples of the benefits monthly giving provides for donors as well as BVA:

- **Set it and forget it**

Monthly donations are automatic. This means that once you sign up, you won't have to worry again about remembering to donate. In addition, this method helps BVA save money on postage and direct mail printing costs, resulting in more money allocated towards the BVA mission.

- **Visionary Committee**

BVA Visionaries are an exclusive group who share a common goal of making a difference in the lives of blind and low vision veterans. There is power in community.

- **A little goes a long way**

No donation is too small. Every dollar counts and provides a steady stream of income throughout the year and can generally be more manageable for the average donor. Spreading out a donation throughout the year may even allow a BVA supporter to contribute more than they originally thought. BVA receives no government funding and is dependent on the generosity of our donors. Never feel obligated to make a large donation!

- **Provides support during slower months**

While the goal is always to consistently break donation records every month, the reality is that there will be quieter periods throughout the year. During these slower times, BVA relies on monthly donors for financial stability. A guaranteed monthly donation helps to develop the budget, goals, and overall plans for the year.

There are numerous ways to support the Blinded Veterans Association and not everyone is in a position to contribute

financially. We hope that all our members continue to be engaged and benefit from the advocacy, programs, and services we work together to provide. For those who currently support BVA through monthly donations, please be assured that we recognize your generosity and are grateful for your commitment to the Association. For those who are in the market for a meaningful investment, please consider the benefits and impact that monthly contributions can have on the Association and those it serves.

Of Note

ScripTalk Now Available for CHEWY Guide Dog Medications

BVA members can now receive En-Vision America's ScripTalk Talking Prescription Labels on their Guide Dog medications from CHEWY.

"I'm happy to answer any questions you may have ... I'm hoping you'll join us in spreading the word with your wonderful members so that they know this option is available," said En-Vision Director of Marketing Jenna Reed.

According to Jenna, BVA members interested in receiving this free service can call En-Vision America at 1-800-890-1180. "We will work behind the scenes with CHEWY to get them set up," she said.

ScripTalk is a free, user-friendly service available at thousands of pharmacies throughout the United States and Canada that will read all medication information aloud. It has also been available to blinded veterans through VA Blind Rehabilitation Service for the better part of two decades. The first pilot



testing of ScripTalk occurred with veterans at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center at Hines in 2004.

In the United States alone, the Food and Drug Administration estimates that about 1.3 million people are harmed by medication errors each year. For those who cannot read their medication labels, talking prescription labels have been a godsend to ensuring medication safety and adherence.

Traveling with Peace of Mind: Using VHIC As Real ID at TSA Checkpoints

BVA Director of Outreach Teresa Galgano offers relevant points about air travel that came to her attention as she began to advise Association members planning to fly in and out of Dallas for the convention this past July .



It is important to know that your Veterans Health Identification Card (VHIC) can serve as a valid form of ID at Transportation Security Administration (TSA) checkpoints at airports. This is particularly beneficial for those who no longer have a driver's license or who have not obtained a state identification card of any kind.

A VHIC is recognized by TSA as an acceptable form of identification for domestic air travel. This means that you can use your VHIC to clear security. By using your VHIC, you can travel with confidence, knowing you have a valid form of identification that meets TSA requirements.

Key Points to Remember:

- Importance of Expiration Date - Before you travel, ensure that your VHIC is current and has not expired. An expired card will not be accepted at TSA checkpoints.

- Benefits of Using VHIC - For many veterans, the VHIC is a practical alternative to a driver's license or state ID, especially if those documents are not available. It provides a hassle-free way to verify your identity when traveling.
- Additional Resources - For more information on obtaining or renewing your VHIC, visit <https://va.gov/health-care/get-health-id-card>. To understand more about TSA's identification requirements, check out their security screening guidelines at <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/identification>.

NIH Identifies Brain Circuits Critical to Visual Acuity

Remarkable recent research results at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), reported in a June 4, 2025, news release, have revealed the specific brain circuits that are vital to visual acuity. The research also identified how such pathways are affected by damaged retinal cells, going beyond the study of vision therapies that replace or repair damaged cells in the eye.

Targeting these circuits suggests significant implications for the development of vision restoration therapies and optimizing the recovery of visual function in the future. The release also referred to an article in a recent edition of the **Journal of Neuroscience** that supported the findings of the research.

New Book Describes Low Vision Challenges, Breakthrough Technology Aids

Some 120,000 U.S. veterans are legally blind and approximately 1.1 million are low vision, estimates from VA Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) reveal. All who meet the criteria for low vision are now

eligible for both VA services and BVA membership.

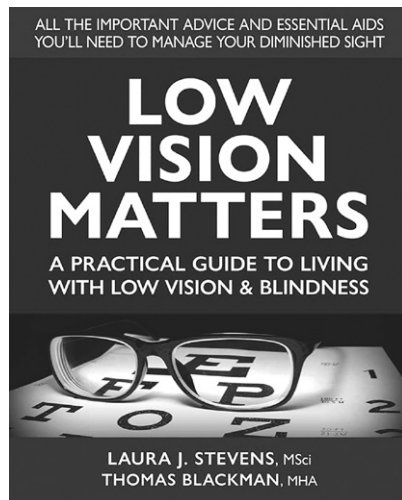
The remaining millions of Americans confronting low vision are not able to access VA rehabilitation programs and the technology

that comes with these programs, or they may be low vision veterans who are unaware of the benefits they have earned as a result of their service. Both groups will find resource material in **Low Vision Matters** by Laura J. Stevens, MSci, and Tom Blackman, MHA. The book was published by Square One Publishers.

Two parts divide the book. In Part 1, Stevens, a resident of Lafayette, Indiana, focuses on the day-to-day activities that low vision has affected in her own life—safety in her home, mobility outside the home, handling of finances, or dealing with home entertainment systems and the seemingly easy, everyday tasks that were once so simple—turning on a light switch, cooking, reading, driving, shopping, starting a dishwasher, or reaching a friend by phone.

In an extensive “Resources” section in Part 2, Vision Therapist Blackman provides a comprehensive guide to all aids and equipment now available to people with sight loss. They will include a few aids that are already available through VA Prosthetics and Sensory Aids and others that may not be.

Stevens and Blackman provide the hope and optimism that are vital to good mental health, offering relevance to the oft-heard



phrase in BVA circles that there is life after blindness and low vision.

CMS, VA Form Partnership to Recover Funds in the Millions

VA and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) could recoup up to \$106 million, thanks to a newly created relationship that has discovered thousands of instances in which both agencies have been billed for the same health care treatment over the past three years.

Some 5.9 million veterans are enrolled in both VA health care and Medicare, with both paying for a variety of services from third-party providers. There was no previous system in place to prevent and uncover double billing. Read the July 22 statements about the partnership from both VA Secretary Doug Collins and CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz at <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-cms-partner-to-identify-and-recover-106m-in-duplicate-billing/>.

Getting Veterans Off Streets

Through September 30, 2025, VA and dozens of partnering organizations are hosting dedicated outreach surge events in real time within every VA health care system in the United States. The objective is to move more than 20,000 veterans into permanent housing. During these events, veterans are approached wherever they are—in encampments, on the streets, in the woods, under bridges—to offer them immediate enrollment in using programs, health care, behavioral health services, and VA benefits.

Dedicated outreach events are 1- to 3-day efforts in which all community outreach teams engage with unsheltered veterans to connect them, almost on the spot, to housing resources. The initiative, originating

with senior VA leadership under the new Presidential administration, requires at least one dedicated outreach surge event by the end of September.

Unsheltered homelessness refers to people sleeping outdoors in public places such as the aforementioned or others not meant for habitation such as motor vehicles, tents, or abandoned buildings. These unacceptable locations are in contrast with sheltered homelessness, where people live

in emergency shelters or other temporary settings.

People experiencing unsheltered homelessness have more significant health issues than those who are sheltered and struggle to access health care and essential medical supplies, including health records, documents, and medications. Moreover, many also lack basic hygiene resources, causing them to face a greater risk of contracting infectious diseases.

Team BVA Interest Groups



For more information
visit the calendar
on BVA.org



GARDENING

Experience the positive
mental and physical effects
of gardening.



ADAPTIVE SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

Enjoy peer-inspired adaptive
recreation activities
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whole health rehabilitation.



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Celebrate, learn, and share
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benefits of guide dogs.



NEW MEMBER SERIES

Learn the benefits of BVA
membership & history.



BOOK CLUB

Explore new literary
horizons, and share the
love of books.

In Remembrance

The Blinded Veterans Association deeply regrets the passing of the following veterans.

Alabama R.G.

Donald Blackburn
Charles Davidson
Billy Jackson
Richard Lee
John Miles
Robert Mixon
Clifford Powell
Alton Thompson
James Thronton

Arkansas R.G.

William Joplin

Carolina R.G.

Vance McGee
David Stackhouse

Florida R.G.

Wilfred Brouwer
Richard Cooley
Ronald Deitel-Baum
Vincent Delilo
Walter Graham
Albert Graves
Richard Johnson
Carmen Vasquez Rivera
Robert Wurm

Gem State R.G.

Arthur Aberg

Georgia R.G.

Charles Alexander
Elizabeth Holmes
Dennis Mayer
Fred Miller
Jerry Orr

Greater Houston R.G.

Paul Rambo

Heartland R.G.

Dayton Beasley
Eugene Lang
Paul Mimms
Howard Raby
Arthur Weber

Illinois R.G.

Dallas Kidd

Louisiana/Mississippi R.G.

James Caranna
Paul Shannon

Michigan R.G.

Carl Dorrance
Joseph Frederick
Francis Haynes

Midwest North R.G.

Steven Anderson
Terence Howard

New Jersey R.G.

Thomas Irwin

New Mexico R.G.

Laurence Hutchins

New York R.G.

Reno Miles
James Ridges
Albert Wilson

Ohio R.G.

Joseph Gramuglia

Pennsylvania R.G.

Milton Cochran
Michael Hegarty
Kenneth Kline
Sherman McIntyre
Geoge Misenhelder
David Young

Puerto Rico R.G.

Andres Alvarado Vazquez

RI and S.E. Mass R.G.

Gaetano Farone

San Diego R.G.

Manuel Soares
Emilio Virata

Southern California R.G.

Nissim Israel
Jane Jeffries
William Marr
Joan Moffet
Darwin Niles
Willie Williams

South Texas R.G.

George Krueger
Gerard Valdez

Spokane Inland Empire R.G.

Wesley Ackerman
Eugene Burya

Tennessee R.G.

Marshall Pierce
Joel Williams

Utah R.G.

Carl Ebert

Washington R.G.

Anton Bina
Martin Murry

At-Large BVA Members, No Regional Group Affiliation

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Steven Bricknell
John Byrne
Arthur Carrillo
Paul Ellner
Raymond Harmer
Joe Hewett
Gerald Nelson
Herman Polk
Richard Sliney
Alexandria Swaika
Emory Weaver
Otto Werner
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Final Thought

Had there been an award for the most photogenic couple at the BVA 80th National Convention, Greater Houston Regional Group President Armsted Chambers and his wife, Lela, would have been one among several other finalists amid some stiff competition. However, both Armsted and Lela also spread their influence in many other ways.

Pictured here at the Convention Gala, Armsted and Lela have a reputation for planning meaningful activities and performing creative, dedicated acts of service for blinded veterans with no expectation of reward or recognition. In early July, that history followed them across Texas from Greater Houston to the Hyatt Regency Dallas.

Lela, in particular, saved the day more than once as a key volunteer in the convention staff-volunteer office throughout the convention week, assisting with assembling convention bags, registering veterans and their guests, putting together display banners, and much more.

Thank you, Armsted and Lela, for your kind hearts and example of selfless service!

