

The Bulletin

Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans



Autumn 2025



HONORING ALL WHO HAVE SERVED
NOVEMBER 11, 2025

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Cover Photos: BVA members and their families welcome the upcoming holiday season following a flurry of recent White Cane Awareness, Veterans Day, and Interest Group virtual activities. Nestled within the activities are weekly news reports from and about the Association's beloved Ambassadors and the climbing of the world's tallest mountains. Read this issue of the **Bulletin** for the details.

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EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor: STUART NELSON
Associate Editor: KYLIE FITZGERALD
Staff Writers: LEA ROWE,
MEREDITH BUONO-DAGROSSA,
DUAYNE DRISCOLL, LEA ROWE,
MICHAUN HARRISON
Design, Pre-Press, and Printing:
KAREN SMITH DESIGN,
MT. ROYAL PRINTING

PO BOX 90770
WASHINGTON, DC 20090
TELEPHONE: 800-669-7079
202-371-8880
FAX: 202-371-8258
WEBSITE: **BVA.org**
E-MAIL: **bva@bva.org**

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President's Page

by Wade Davis

As the year 2025 quickly comes to an end, I hope you enjoy the holidays of all varieties with family and friends. Similarly, as we begin the year 2026, I would like to leave you with a poem that has helped me many times over the years.

It Couldn't Be Done

By Edgar Albert Guest

Somebody said that it couldn't be done
But he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.
So, he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried, he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it!
Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
At least no one ever has done it;"
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat
And the first thing we knew, he'd begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.
There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
There are thousands to prophesy failures.
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,
The dangers that wait to assail you.
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it.

The Spirit of “It Couldn’t Be Done”: Volunteering for BVA

Edgar Albert Guest’s timeless poem **It Couldn’t Be Done** celebrates the courage, optimism, and perseverance that turn impossibility into achievement. His verses remind us that progress begins not with those who say, “it can’t be done,” but with those who roll up their sleeves and do it anyway. This same spirit shines in every volunteer who serves with the Blinded Veterans Association and on behalf of the organization.

Turning Can’t into Can

For many blind and low vision veterans, losing sight can feel like losing independence. Yet, through the support of dedicated volunteers, they discover that life’s possibilities are far from over. Like the poem’s determined protagonist, BVA volunteers step forward with resolve and compassion, helping veterans reclaim confidence, mobility, and joy.

Whether guiding a veteran through a new piece of assistive technology, driving them to appointments, or simply sharing a conversation, volunteers prove every day that limitations can be overcome with patience and heart. Their acts echo Guest’s message: **“Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing that ‘cannot be done,’ and you’ll do it.”**

The Power of Human Connection

The strength of BVA lies in connection—among veterans, volunteers, and communities. Volunteers don’t just offer assistance but also build relationships that restore dignity and purpose. A few hours of service can mean a lifetime of change for someone learning to navigate the world again.

The poem reminds us that there will always be “thousands to tell you it cannot be done,” but volunteers prove them wrong every day. Their dedication shows that courage isn’t an absence of fear or doubt but choosing to act despite them.

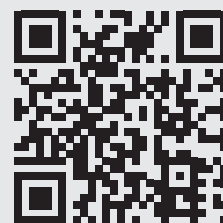
A Call to Action

BVA thrives because of individuals who, like Guest’s hero, “take off their coat and go to it.” Every volunteer embodies the belief that with empathy and effort, even the hardest challenges can be met—and overcome. This could be your year to make a difference in this organization we all love, whether it’s volunteering for a program or finding that newly blind or low vision veteran, or two, and showing them the way to BVA.

If you’ve ever wondered whether your time or skills could make a difference, remember Guest’s words: **Just buckle in with a bit of a grin.** The truth is, it can be done—and you can be the one to do it.

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.





Legislative Update

by Lea Rowe

Funding Secured

Greetings to all BVA members and families. I am indeed honored to serve as your National Legislative Director. As

such, I am pleased to provide an update on critical legislative actions in Washington. BVA continues to work closely with both sides of the aisle to ensure that the needs of our blind and visually impaired veterans are met.

The good news is that full funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 has been signed into law. This action secures the resources necessary to continue delivering essential services and benefits. The final appropriations bill also included two key provisions: Second Amendment Protections (Section 413), which prohibits VA from submitting a veteran's name to the NICS list without a judge's consent, and Emergency Transportation Protections (Section 259), which safeguards funding for private ground and air emergency ambulance services vital for our rural members.

Fight for Caregivers Intensifies

BVA has received strong feedback from our membership regarding the restrictive nature of the VA guidelines for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC), and we assure you that this is a very high priority.

We recognize that current VA guidelines often fail to account for the unique, essential support required by blind veterans—support

that goes beyond basic Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) but that is absolutely necessary for maintaining independence, safety, and quality of life. BVA is actively pursuing this issue on all fronts. We are engaging in direct advocacy with VA and pushing for legislative action to mandate a more appropriate definition of “need for assistance.” BVA is specifically addressing the need to include Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) such as assistance with transportation, navigating public spaces, reading bills, and identifying property maintenance needs.

Furthermore, VA recently confirmed that it will extend the transition period for “legacy” PCAFC participants and applicants through September 30, 2028, providing stability as we continue our advocacy work. In Congress, the bipartisan Veterans' Caregiver Appeals Modernization Act seeks to streamline the outdated PCAFC application and appeals system, which has created unjust delays and denials. This bill is strongly supported by BVA as part of our comprehensive strategy to fix the program.

COLA 2025 Now Official

Congress continues to advance support for veterans and their families. The Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living (COLA) Adjustment Act of 2025 is critical legislation that will increase VA benefits by the same percentage as the Social Security COLA, protecting the financial stability of our disabled veterans and their families against rising costs. The COLA, reported in detail

in this issue's **Of Note**, was finalized at the end of November with the signature of the President.

Miscellaneous Legislation of Interest

The VA Extenders Act (H.R. 5420) continues funding for essential programs like the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE) and extends adapted housing support for disabled veterans, which is essential for our members requiring home modifications.

Additionally, Senators Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced the Fisher House Availability Act to expand eligibility for temporary

lodging at VA-constructed Fisher Houses, to include active-duty service members, reservists, and their families. The Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (P.L. 118-210) removes the time limit for surviving spouses to use the Fry Scholarship, providing crucial educational security. Finally, we were honored by the Senate's unanimous passage of Senate Resolution 210, recognizing the 80th anniversary of the Blinded Veterans Association. This resolution publicly affirms BVA's tireless advocacy and reminds us that we must remain vigilant to ensure equitable access to all earned benefits and services.

The Blinded Veterans Association's National Board of Directors and National Headquarters staff send Season's Greetings to all BVA members and their families, our friends and partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and our many sponsors and donors.

**We wish you
a Happy and
Prosperous
New Year!**





Executive Director's Message

by Lea Rowe

As the Interim Executive Director, I want to begin by reaffirming my absolute commitment to our shared mission. I

recognize that the work of the Blinded Veterans Association is vital, and the challenges our members face, both in securing deserved benefits and achieving independence, require unwavering dedication.

To all our veterans and service members, and especially to the family members and spouses whose support makes independent living possible, thank you. Your strength is the foundation of this Association. We understand that vision loss affects not just the veteran but the entire family structure, and we are here to support every person in your unit.

As we navigate this winter season, our focus must sharpen on two core pillars: outreach and advocacy.

Our fight for the future begins with ensuring that no eligible veteran is left behind. It is an unfortunate reality that BVA remains unknown to too many of our blind and low vision brothers and sisters. I am thinking particularly of those who lost their sight long after separating from service and are unaware of the life-changing resources waiting for them here. They do not know about our world-class National Service Officers (NSOs), who are specially trained to navigate the complexities of VA law and can help secure the benefits they have rightfully earned, including service-connected compensation and access to essential rehabilitation training. They may not realize further that membership



VA Secretary Doug Collins, left, with Lea Rowe at 2025 VSO Veterans Day Breakfast at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall.

is now free to all eligible veterans who qualify for VA rehabilitation services.

We must be relentless in spreading the word within our communities and networks. Making membership free is perhaps the most critical step we have taken to fulfill our duty to reach every single veteran in need.

In this season of reflection, let us extend the hand of fellowship and strengthen our bonds. My wish is that every BVA member not only enjoys the holidays with those closest to them but actively reaches out to comrades from the past—military friends, fellow veterans you met during residential blind rehabilitation, or former BVA regional group or chapter members. Let's reconnect and remind them of our shared history and offer support. We must make the effort to find out how our fellow veterans are doing, living up to the military ethos of not leaving anyone behind. Our strength has always resided in our collective

unity and willingness to support one another through shared experience.

BVA has fought a great fight for 80 years, and our work is far from over. The push for earned benefits, equitable treatment, and necessary program reform will continue with renewed vigor. Our NSOs are constantly on the front lines, and your National Headquarters is actively engaged in high-level advocacy.

For instance, we are vigorously pursuing changes to programs like the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). We recognize that current eligibility criteria often fail to account for the unique daily needs of blinded veterans—needs related to navigation, transportation, and managing written

information. We are committed to demanding that VA recognize the full scope of care required. As former service members and dedicated family members, you understand the importance of mission completion, and our mission is to secure justice and full benefits for every one of you.

I am honored to serve this vital cause and build upon the extraordinary legacy of BVA leaders and members before me. It is only by working collectively—by focusing on growth, outreach, and connecting with our community—that we can secure the future for the generations of veterans who follow us. Join me in dedicating this season to strengthening our BVA family. *Service before self* is who we are.

Reverencing All Veterans on Their Day

Arctic Air at Arlington? No Problem!

BVA National President Wade Davis ventured to the Nation's Capital on November 10 to represent blind and low vision veterans throughout the country in a series of events on Veterans Day that occurred at both Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall and Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). Among such highlights was BVA's participation in the traditional flag procession and a Veterans Service Organization (VSO) wreath laying at the Cemetery in wind chill temperatures below the freezing mark.

With the BVA and U.S. flags firmly in waist-high harnesses, Mid-Atlantic Regional Group members Yoneka Trent and Bill Barnes braved the cold and marched in



Secretary Collins and Wade Davis at Veterans Day Breakfast.

the ceremonial Parade of Colors with the assistance of their sighted guides, respectively guide dog Kellnis and Bill's wife, Monica. Yoneka and Kellnis were the first veteran-



Left to right, President Trump, Vice President Vance, Secretary Collins, and member of the Society of the Honor Guard walk in unison toward Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for Presidential wreath laying.



Bill and Monica Barnes catch a few sun rays, the only source of warmth prior to their participation in Parade of Flags.

guide dog duo ever to participate in this annual procession without the help of a second human guide. Kellnis also assisted with the VSO wreath presentation.

Accompanied by representatives of approximately 45 other organizations, Wade, Yoneka, and Interim National Executive Director Lea Rowe presented the BVA wreath at the Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The symbolic gesture paid tribute to all veterans and served as the needed exclamation point to the end of a frigid but memorable Autumn morning.

The laying of the organizational wreath followed the traditional Presidential wreath laying that occurred precisely at 11:00am on the 11th day of the 11th month, witnessed by Wade and Lea and performed on this occasion by President Donald J. Trump, who then joined Vice President JD Vance, VA Secretary Douglas A. Collins, and AMVETS National Commander Paul Shipley in addressing veterans and a crowd of approximately 3,500 in the adjacent Memorial Amphitheater. Numerous Cabinet Secretaries were also present and seated in box seats at the event.



Wade Davis, seated behind and to the left of Vice President JD Vance.



It was “survival of the fittest” in the bitter cold at the 2025 ANC Veterans Day Observance. Left to right, Yoneka Trent, Monica and Bill Barnes, Michaun Harrison, and Lea Rowe.

Shipley’s address occurred by virtue of AMVETS position as the 2025 host organization among members of the Veterans Day National Committee. Wade Davis took his appropriate place on the same stage with the four speakers and the national officers of the organizations designated as original members of the Committee dating back to the 1950s.

The 72nd National Veterans Day Observance also featured music by the United States Army Band and Chorus, directed by Colonel Bruce Pulver, and welcoming remarks by Master of Ceremonies Matthew Webb, VA Senior Outreach Officer.

Several hours before their ANC arrival, at approximately 6:30am, Wade and Lea had reported to Patton Hall at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall for a VA-hosted breakfast for the VSOs. An AMVETS-hosted reception at the Military Women’s Memorial, located at the ANC entrance, followed the ceremony and wreath laying.



Left to right: Lea Rowe, Wade Davis, and Yoneka Trent salute Society of the Honor Guard members as they present the BVA wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Guide dog Kellnis (Yoneka) provided escort assistance.

Key to the success (and perhaps survival) of the BVA contingent was the always prepared but often behind-the-scenes Michaun Harrison, BVA’s National Administrative Coordinator. Among her many heroic deeds were prepping the flag bearers with instructions and guidance, furnishing extra handwarmers and gloves, and directing other staff members to their seats.

NYC Parade Attracts BVA Faithful from Three States

BVA members from the New York, New Jersey, and Illinois Regional Groups participated voluntarily and enthusiastically in the 2025 New York City Veterans Day Parade, one of the nation’s largest celebrations honoring military service. Blinded veterans traveled to Manhattan to represent their regions and showcase the unity and strength of the BVA community.

Riding up Fifth Avenue beneath crisp November skies, BVA members joined thousands of other veterans, service organizations, and supporters. For participants, the parade was more than a public event but a meaningful reminder of resilience, pride, and the shared commitment to support one another.

Regional Group Coordination: District 1 Director John O’Connell welcomed members from all three states and coordinated accessible staging and arrival points, ensuring that every blinded veteran felt supported. The New York and New Jersey Regional Groups participated in strong numbers, accompanied by caregivers, family members, and volunteer guides who embodied the type of teamwork that is central to BVA’s mission. The Illinois Regional Group, represented by President Anthony Woodson, also made the journey. Anthony, participating for the second time, described the experience as “deeply moving and unforgettable.”

A Service Emphasis: Spectators along the route offered warm thanks, salutes, and personal stories, creating powerful moments of connection. BVA members used the occasion to highlight the organization’s 80-year mission of advocating for the independence and well-being of blind and low vision veterans and their families.

Unity and Fellowship: Following the parade, members gathered to share a meal, to exchange stories, and to reflect on the significance of the day. For the regional groups of New York, New Jersey, and Illinois, the event served as a meaningful symbol of fellowship, remembrance, and cross-state unity. The presence of BVA members in the parade was a strong reminder that while vision may fade, courage, service, and community remain unwavering.



New Jersey Regional Group President Bill Graves, far left, takes center stage on Veterans Day float on which blinded veterans from three states rode in the New York City parade. Seen to his left, Bill’s wife and BVA supporter Brenda Way, and New Jersey Regional Group member James Draper.

Finding His Way Back to Music: The Story of Stephen Butler

A BVA Happenings and BVA Bulletin Original

When Navy veteran and current BVA Judge Advocate Stephen Butler lost his vision, his world went dark in more ways than one. Then a diagnosis of advanced diabetes took the feeling in his hands and feet, leaving him without spatial awareness, and without the tactile feedback needed to navigate the world or play the musical instruments he once loved.

“I went from being a warrior, capable of completing any mission, to holding onto someone’s elbow just to avoid tripping over a curb,” Stephen recalls. “It was humiliating, and I didn’t see a way forward.”

For the first few years after losing his vision, Stephen isolated himself. Anger, frustration, and a deep sense of loss became his daily reality. As both a veteran and a musician, the inability to physically interact with the world—and especially his instruments—cut deeply. The man who once lived on purpose now felt like a burden, stripped of direction.

But everything changed when his VA Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST), alongside his loving family, gently but persistently encouraged him to enroll in a residential Blind Rehabilitation Center (BRC) program.

“Honestly, I didn’t want to go,” he admits. “But they didn’t give up on me, even when I had given up on myself.”

The decision to go marked the beginning of Stephen’s journey back to life.

Rediscovering Independence

Stephen’s first experience with blind rehabilitation was at the BRC in Waco, Texas.

Like many, he started with basic but transformative skills: pouring a glass of water without spilling it, learning to walk independently with a white cane, and navigating new environments safely and confidently.

“Those might sound like small things,” Stephen says, “but to someone who’s lost their independence, they’re monumental.”

From Waco, he continued his training at the BRCs in Hines, Illinois; American Lake, Washington; and Biloxi, Mississippi—each center building on the last. The Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) teams taught him everything from adaptive daily living skills to advanced assistive technology. He learned how to use a screen reader, how to work with tactile cues, and eventually how to make music again using adapted instruments and technology.

Through the dedicated work of BRS instructors and the camaraderie of his fellow veterans, Stephen found not only a renewed sense of purpose but also a renewed sense of hope.

“The staff didn’t just teach me skills. They cared. They showed me I wasn’t alone.”



BVA Judge Advocate Stephen Butler adorned in one of his many hats, both literally and figuratively.

Returning to Music, His First Love

With the help of accessible tech and training, Stephen returned to songwriting and recording, proving that vision loss does not mean the end of creativity. Using adaptive musical software and a keen ear, he began to write, record, and produce his own music. Then, in 2025, Stephen's song "Love Her Like Christ" was named a Top 10 Finalist in the Texas Country Music Association's (TCMA) Songwriter Contest in the Christian Country category. Out of 446 total submissions, Stephen was selected as the third runner-up—an incredible accomplishment for any artist, let alone one who once believed his musical journey was over.

"Ten years ago, I thought I'd never write again. I was wrong."

Today, Stephen's music is streamed worldwide. His story isn't just about loss but about perseverance, renewal, and the power of community. He proudly serves his fellow blinded veterans as a longtime BVA member.



Stephen Butler, left, and Tracy Ferro in costume relish a little of their inside humor at the Hyatt Regency Dallas this past July.



In his role as National Judge Advocate, he has served under three BVA National Presidents. He even took time out of his otherwise busy schedule earlier this year to compose and write the lyrics for “The BVA Boot Shuffle,” a western-style country piece played and used on the dance floor at the historic BVA 80th National Convention in Dallas, Texas.

The Power of the BRC

Stephen’s success is a shining example of what’s possible when veterans take full advantage of the services offered by VA’s Blind Rehabilitation Centers. From teaching the basics like labeling clothing and managing medications, to complex skills like coding, adaptive computing, and music production, BRCs provide vital tools and confidence to veterans with vision loss.

More importantly, the BRCs restore a belief in what’s possible.

“The BRC didn’t just train me—it gave me back my life,” Stephen says. “Every blind veteran deserves that chance.”

A Message to Fellow Veterans

To any veteran facing vision loss, Stephen offers this message: “You’re not alone. There’s a team ready to help you, and a brotherhood that still has your back. You can find joy again—you must simply take the first step.”

Whether it’s walking confidently with a cane, brewing coffee without a spill, or taking the stage as an award-winning songwriter, Stephen Butler’s journey shows what’s possible when courage meets community.

Paul Mimms: True Friend, Confidante, Example

by Tracy Ferro

On September 6, 2025, in Gladstone Missouri, a gathering of family, friends, and brothers in arms came together to celebrate the life and memory of BVA Past National President Paul Lawrence Mimms. During the heartfelt ceremony and service, family and several close friends told stories and reflected on all Paul was and always will be to them. The memories were touching and left many in tears and occasional bits of laughter.

For me, Paul was a great friend, leader, and mentor. I spent many hours on the phone with him, sometimes late at night as he would get excited by a new idea for growing BVA and providing for our members. Never once did he

take on a mission for himself but always for the BVA flock. He would ask me for my ideas and thoughts, even assigning me to provide them.

Paul would regale me with stories of his life, his memories of his wife Kathleen, his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. He was especially excited to talk about his mother and was truly heartbroken when he lost her. I was able to call Paul on her hundredth birthday, and he allowed me to praise her for raising such a wonderful person.

Paul was also so excited to take his sisters on vacation in late 2025. The last information



Paul Mimms, third from left, following swearing-in of 2025-26 Executive Committee. Also pictured, left to right, are Monique Statham, Douglas Ingram, Wade Davis, Tracy Ferro, and Stephen Butler.

I heard was that the sisters still planned to go to commemorate and remember him.

Paul's daughter, Paula, transmitted both his funeral service as well as his burial service via Facebook Live. The recording remains on her Facebook page. If you have a personal Facebook account, simply type in the name of Paula Mimms in the Search function. Upon reaching her page, scroll down until locating a photo of Paul's guide dog Shadow, a photo link to the burial service, and then a link to the church service.

Paul was interred at the Fort Leavenworth Kansas National Cemetery on September 8 under a cloudless blue sky and warm temperatures. Military veteran motorcycle riders presented a certificate to Paula and the

Navy Ceremonial Team presented her with the ceremonial U.S. Flag. As expected, the cemetery is beautifully maintained, solemn, and a place of reverence. According to Heartland Regional Group President Jeanie Murphy, Paul had a Bronze Braille U.S. Flag in his possession at home that he was planning on donating to the Cemetery.

BVA was represented in person by National President Wade Davis and wife Brenda, me (Vice President Tracy Ferro) and wife Kathy, Director of District 2 Ann Dixon, Heartland Regional Group President Jeanie Murphy and husband Robert, Executive Director Vernon Humphrey, National Outreach Director Teresa Galgano, Sheldon McKinney, Joseph Bogart, Tim and Kate Hornik, and Steve Smith.

BVA Community Mourns Neil Appleby Passing

Cornelius (Neil) J. Appleby, a devoted advocate of all veterans who tirelessly served his fellow blinded veterans, passed away at his home in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, on December 1. He was 92. Neil was BVA's 34th National President, serving from 2003-05. Prior to his tenure in that position, he served in all three of the other National Officer roles as Treasurer, Secretary, and Vice President.

Accounting also for his position as Immediate Past National President, where he continued to be an active leader, Neil served for ten years on the BVA National Board of Directors.

Notwithstanding his service to BVA at the national level, Neil was perhaps known even more for his service to the membership of BVA of Pennsylvania, the official name of his regional group. Beginning in 1982, he assumed the role of Secretary-Treasurer and relinquished it only sporadically throughout 34 years. One of Neil's most significant gifts and contributions to the blinded veterans of today was his instrumental leadership in the creation of the Visual Impairment Services Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR) program at the Lebanon VA Medical Center, a pioneering effort that grew rapidly and which now exists in several VA facilities nationwide.

Born on January 4, 1933, in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, to the late Russell and Anna (Guidas) Appleby, he was raised in Branchdale. He graduated from Pottsville Catholic High School in June 1950 and, just



BVA National Secretary Neil Appleby, second from right, in March 2000 as he visited the office of then Senator Paul Wellstone, a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. Also pictured, left to right: Senator Wellstone, National President Robert L. Smith, 3rd, Director of District 5 George Stocking, National Vice President Joe Burns, and Executive Director Tom Miller.

18 hours after the start of the Korean War, enlisted in the United States Navy on June 26, 1950.

Trained as a teletype operator, radioman, and cryptographer, Neil advanced quickly, achieving the rank of Chief Petty Officer at the very young age of 25. Neil's Navy service brought him to some of the most significant diplomatic and military assignments of his time. His duty stations included the Office of the U.S. Naval Attaché in Rome, Italy; the Office of the U.S. Naval Attaché in Baghdad, Iraq; and NATO Forces Southern Europe in Naples, Italy. He was a plank owner of the

aircraft carrier USS Saratoga (CVA-60) and served briefly aboard USS Forrestal (CVA-59). Neil was a non-combat veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam Wars and retired from active duty in the summer of 1970.

In 1959, while stationed at Pensacola Naval Air Station, Neil met Mary R. Snyder—the woman who would become his wife and partner for 56 years until her passing ten years ago. Together, they raised five daughters: Mary Ann Appleby (Manny Borbon), Betsy Appleby (Paul Sommerfeld), Kathleen Keadan, Cornelia Appleby, and Margaret Appleby. Neil devoted himself to giving his daughters a strong foundation grounded in education, personal responsibility, and a clear sense of purpose. He believed that learning was both a privilege and an obligation, and he worked quietly but persistently to ensure that his children had every opportunity he could provide.

Following his distinguished military service, Neil embarked on a second career that spanned nineteen years in the telecommunications field across industry, state, and federal government roles.

Undoubtedly of interest to blinded veterans and their families, despite his many successes and passions, his obituary states that the chapter that reflected his heart most fully was his decades of service to blinded veterans, where he painstakingly prepared his two oral Congressional testimonies and his many presentations at BVA national conventions.

Neil also held memberships in the American Legion, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Fleet Reserve Association, Marine Corps League, and Veterans of Foreign Wars. With BVA, he served as a nationally accredited Service Officer. Beyond formal roles, he gave back

in quiet ways as well. For example, he was a lifelong blood donor and a volunteer for the Retinitis Pigmentosa Foundation, believing that even small acts of service could ripple outward to help others.

A memorial and committal service will be held at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery on a date to be announced later. In lieu of flowers, the obituary states that the family kindly invites memorial contributions to the Blinded Veterans Association. Donations may be made online, or by mailing a check payable to “Blinded Veterans Association” or “BVA” at PO Box 90770, Washington, DC 20090.

Scholarship Details Announced for 2026-27

DESCRIPTION AND QUALIFICATIONS:

Owing to generous financial support in perpetuity and in honor of a dedicated supporter of the Blinded Veterans Association at all levels, the BVA Board of Directors announced in 2024 the renaming of the Association’s scholarship program. It will heretofore be known as the Sue Cantrell Scholarship Program. The Cantrell scholarships are available to spouses, children, and grandchildren of BVA members to assist them with their higher education tuition. Applicants must be accepted to an accredited institution of higher education or business, secretarial, or vocational training school.

The Cantrell Scholarships are awarded based on merit through an application process evaluated by a committee. The scholarships for veterans’ dependents are for one year only but recipients can reapply and receive the award up to four times.

QUANTITY:

Four \$2,500 Scholarships Annually

DEADLINES:

- Applications are due on Thursday, April 30, 2026 at 12:00 midnight Eastern Time (late applications will not be accepted).
- Internal selections must be made by June 1, 2026.
- Recipients will be contacted by June 15, 2026.

APPLICATION AND REQUIRED DOCUMENTS FOR QUALIFICATION:

- A Complete Application
 - Incomplete applications will not be accepted. It is the responsibility of the applicant (not BVA) to ensure a completed application.
- Transcripts
 - If applicants have attended an institution of higher education (or several of them), they must submit a transcript of record from each institution.
 - If applicants have not attended an institution of higher education, they must submit a transcript of high school record.
 - If applicants have been to college only one semester, they must submit their high school transcript in addition to college transcript.
- Three Letters of Reference in the current Calendar School Year
 - One letter of academic reference related to academic achievements. This reference must be formalized using letterhead or business stationery from the affiliated organization. Letters of academic reference must be related to the school the applicant is attending or will be attending and must be no later than six months old.

- Two letters of personal reference in which the authors must identify their relationship with applicants.
- All letters of reference must be typed and signed.
- Letters must be addressed to the Blinded Veterans Association.
- Letters of reference used for previous scholarship applications are not accepted.
- Letters of reference may not come from a family member.
- Merit of Career Goals/Personal Narrative
 - Must be typed.
 - Previous applicants must submit a new statement with each application.
 - Applicants must describe in no more than 300 words their post-education, lifetime, specific career goals, and aspirations (i.e., what they plan to do after completing their education) and outline their plans to pursue them.
- Additional Evidence of Achievement (optional)
 - Applicants may submit other evidence of achievement in the academic and/or the non-academic fields that they believe qualifies them for a scholarship award.
 - Evidence must be corroborated by documentation, (i.e., a copy of certificate documenting the award, a copy of a citation, etc.).

VSP Staff Welcomes Michael Black

The BVA Veterans Service Program has a new staff member in Michael T. Black, who joined Duayne Driscoll, Marlene Davis-Lilly, and Scott Quinlan earlier this Fall to offer some much-needed relief to a heavily tasked VSP crew.

Mike is a VA Benefits Consultant with 20-plus years of claims experience. He was

originally hired as an accredited National Service Officer in March 2007 with AMVETS and the Vietnam Veterans of America. He worked full-time out of the St. Petersburg, Florida, VA Regional Office. During his employment he was promoted several times: to Office Manager, Regional Director, Deputy National Service Director, and National Service Director.



Michael Black

Michael had the honor of testifying in front of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs on “Reviewing VA’s Implementation of the Pact Act” in May of 2023.

Michael is originally from Tarpon Springs, Florida. He joined the Army in 1981 and retired in 2001. While in the military, Michael was assigned to the following units: 1st Cavalry Division, 101st Airborne Division, 6th Light Infantry Division, and 32 ADACOM Task Force 8/43 Air Defense Artillery. He served as Multi-Channel Communications Non-Commissioned Officer in a Patriot / Hawk Missile battery in Saudi Arabia and Iraq during Operation Desert Shield and the ground invasion during Operation Desert Storm.

Michael’s military awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Korean Defense Service Medal, and the Southwest Asia Service Medal. During his career, he served in Alaska, South Korea, West Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

Michael received his Associates of Science degree in Business Management from St. Petersburg College. He lives in Florida with his wife, Janet. He is a Life Member of AMVETS Post 67 in Clearwater, Florida.

Life of Service Chronicled: BVA’s Sergeant-At-Arms

Current BVA National Sergeant-At-Arms Brian O’Connell, a graduate of Norwich University, is spotlighted in the Fall edition of the **Norwich Record**, his alma mater’s alumni magazine. **Flying Blind: From B-52s to the Classroom** by Zack Bennett details Brian’s career as a U.S. Air Force navigator, academic instructor, flight instructor, squadron commander, and several other positions of major responsibility.



One of Brian O’Connell’s numerous talents, this one not mentioned as frequently as others in BVA circles, is his intuition in learning to play musical instruments! Pictured here at the BVA 79th National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida, Brian warms up on his trumpet prior to a National Anthem rendition before an audience of both BVA and American Council of the Blind convention attendees.

The article also traces Brian's progressive but gradual loss of sight, multiple retirements, new connections to important people and adaptive sports through BVA and VA Blind Rehabilitation Services, and the satisfaction he gained from even another career in which he influenced hosts of aspiring youth in both the Junior ROTC Program and on sports teams at Surry Central High School in Dobson, North Carolina.

To read the article, visit <https://www.norwich.edu/news/flying-blind-b-52s-classroom>.

Note: Norwich University, located in Northfield, Vermont, and founded in 1819, is the oldest of six senior military colleges and is recognized by the Department of Defense as the "Birthplace of ROTC."

Fall Gardening Sessions Offer Education, Motivation

BVA members who pre-registered and attended each of the six Fall season Gardening sessions were treated to a potpourri of ideas and suggestions on planting, growing, and harvesting that could well lead to future independence in producing much of their own food. The recently completed program, hugely popular already in 2024, surpassed even the highest expectations this year in both numbers and level of interest.

The group focused on crops that are grown in the Fall season. They learned about three trends of gardening this year: Use of Amazon Cardboard Boxes, Gardening Influencers, and Urban Gardens. They played a fun game of "Name That Plant" in which each participant had to choose a fruit, vegetable, or flower on which the rest of the group would have to guess.

There were also two guest speakers: First, Neva Fairchild from BVA corporate sponsor WayAround, who spoke about using WayAround clips to label gardening items. Second, Gardening Influencer Raushanah Echols, the "JERSEY girl gardener". She taught attendees the art of sowing seeds during the winter.

The series culminated in the much anticipated and heralded scarecrow contest. Participants first learned about the history of scarecrows used in agriculture and viewed the video, "Where do Scarecrows Come From" to help them get started.

"A ton of work went into all pieces, which included creative names, lights, and sounds to scare away unwanted critters," said contest judge Meredith Buono-Dagrossa.

Names of Winners and Respective Scarecrows (see also Final Thought):

Lisa Erhlich - Biker Bertha
Kleveland Jackson - Casey

Runners Up

Sheldon and Phyliss McKinney - Nisi
Michaun Harrison - Ref

Michaun Quote: "My twin sister is usually the creative one. This project allowed me to be creative on my own and I am very proud of my result."

Proud Participants

Anthony Woodson - Dead Man Walking
Monique Statham - Keisha Cornfield

Monique Quote: "Y'all outdid me. I am so proud of the work that went into all the pieces."

Yolanda and Phyllis Bass - Queen Squirrel

Yolanda and Phyllis Quote: "We have lots of squirrels in our yard, so we used that as our focal point for our piece."

GARDENING INTEREST GROUP 2025 SCARECROW CONTEST



WINNERS

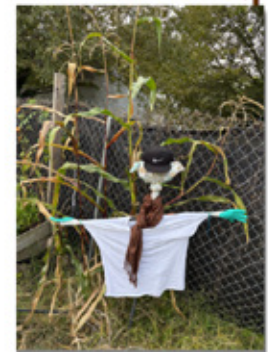


★★★★★
Lisa Ehrlich
"Biker Bertha"

★★★★★
Kleveland Jackson
"Casey"



Thank You to Proud Participants
Who Joined in on the Fun!



Anthony Woodson
"Dead Man Walking"

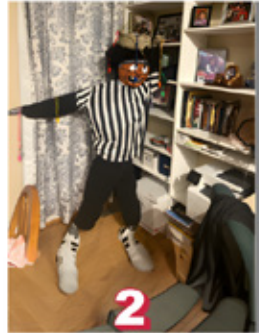
Monique Statham
"Keisha Cornfield"

Gardening Interest Group 2025 Scarecrow Contest



1
RUNNER UP

Sheldon & Phyllis McKinney
"Nisi"



2
RUNNER UP

Michaun Harrison
"Ref"



Thank You to Proud Participants
Who Joined in on the Fun!



Yolanda & Phyllis Bass
"Queen Squirrel"

Annie Dixon
"Mr. Willy"

Annie Dixon - Mr. Willy

Annie Quote: "This project was therapeutic for me. I incorporated lights and tin cans to scare away the birds."

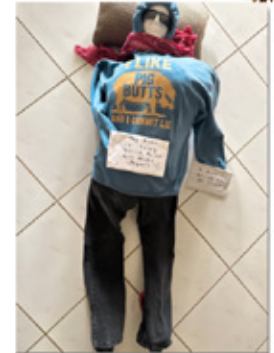
Yoneka Trent - Mr. Tingles

Yoneka Quote: "This project was all about creativity for me. I was able to use pieces that were already in my house to create Mr. Tingles."

Lisa Ehrlich Entry #2 - "Spice Mike"



Thank You to Proud Participants
Who Joined in on the Fun!



Yoneka Trent
"Mr. Tingles"

Lisa Ehrlich
"Spice Mike"

Post-Covid Virtual Meetings Increasingly Popular in 2025

BVA, for the first time in its history, held virtual meetings for its general membership during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the two national conventions of 2020 and 2021 and VetTech, now in its fourth year of presenting a Weekly Wednesday Webinar. The events have become popularized through the formation of several interest groups under the Team BVA Umbrella, even as interest group leaders have rotated or changed permanently.

In addition to **VetTech** at 3:00pm (all meetings Eastern Time) every Wednesday, the **Adaptive Sports and Activities Interest Group** meetings occur every second Tuesday at 7:00pm. The **Dog Handlers Group** meets monthly at 4:00pm every third Tuesday while a **Book Club** meets every fourth Wednesday at 7:00pm. The current Board of Directors has scheduled a **Town Hall** open to all members every third Thursday at 3:00pm Eastern Time. All of the meetings are currently transmitted via Zoom and are accessible via the BVA calendar at bva.org/calendar.

Stay tuned for meeting announcements in the weekly **BVA Happenings** and meeting reminders sent via Constant Contact to all BVA members for whom the Association has an email address. The reminders are most often sent approximately 24 hours prior to the next virtual event. If you do not receive these communications and would like to, please send an email to Kylie at kfitzgerald@bva.org.

BVA VP Recognized for 4,000 Volunteer Hours

National Vice President Tracy Ferro recently received a plaque and personalized Certificate of Recognition from Gulf Coast Health Care System (Biloxi, Mississippi) Director Stephanie A. Repasky, Psy.D. for his



Left to right, Gulf Coast HCS Associate Director Rebecca Strini, honoree Tracy Ferro, and Director Stephanie Repasky.

“extraordinary dedication and outstanding commitment.” The August 28 presentation and special citation highlighted Tracy’s achievement of 4,000 hours of volunteer service.

The certificate continues:

Your tireless efforts and unwavering support have made a profound impact on the lives of our veterans. Through your selfless contributions, you have demonstrated a deep sense of compassion and a remarkable spirit of service. Your exceptional commitment has not only provided invaluable assistance to our veterans but has also inspired those around you to serve with the same level of dedication and care.

Your 4,000 hours of service signify countless moments of kindness, support, and generosity. Whether through direct interaction with veterans, assisting with programs and events, or providing administrative support, your contributions have enriched our community and enhanced the quality of care we offer.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your exemplary service and dedication. Your efforts embody the highest values of volunteerism and contribute to the well-being and enhancement of the lives of the veterans we honor and serve.

Louisiana Flag Presentations Bring Happy Year End for LA/MS

October was another busy month for the Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group with three Braille Flag donation presentations, one in Destrehan, Louisiana, and another in the Algiers section of New Orleans on October 8 (morning and afternoon, respectively), and a third one on October 27 in the Lakeview area of New Orleans.

The Destrehan presentation occurred at the St. Charles Parish Main Library. According to regional group member Gary Schoelerman, a bronze flag and identifying plaque have been mounted in the library lobby and an acrylic flag and plaque, mounted on an 18" X 24" finished board, will travel to the other libraries in the parish for maximum visibility. The **New Orleans Times-Picayune** newspaper covered the event.

The first of two presentations in New Orleans proper took place later in the day in the Algiers section of the city. One acrylic flag and plaque set was presented to the Algiers Regional Library and another to the Algiers Point Branch Library. While there, Gary and Regional Group Treasurer Joe Burns were able to meet the library system's District Manager and arrange a presentation at the Robert Smith Library in the Lakeview area of New Orleans on October 27.

The latter event was planned as an opportunity to honor longtime BVA member Earl Forstall, who passed away last year at the age of 104, and to coincide with a

regional group World War II Museum visit and guided tour on October 28 with several of Earl's family members arranging their personal schedules to accompany them. Gary reported that the October 27-28 activities in the Lakeview area, which included a hotel stay, were well attended by Earl's children and grandchildren. At the flag and plaque dedication, regional group members and family members shared an abundance of stories about Earl and offered tributes to him.

"The next morning, we met at the entrance of the World War II Museum with 14 veterans and six escorts divided into three groups, each group with a specially trained guide for the visually impaired," Gary said. "The tours were through the Pacific Theater from Pearl Harbor to the signing of the surrender documents on the **USS Missouri**, each guide going into extensive detail on different aspects of the War."

For most, the experience culminated with lunch in the Museum's American Café. A few continued touring the massive museum after the guided tour, highlighted by a view



Left to right at Destrehan, Regional Group Vice President Claude Roberts, BVA member Craig Robinson, Treasurer Joe Burns, and flag project mastermind Gary Schoelerman.

of **Beyond All Boundaries**, a 4D cinematic experience narrated by Tom Hanks that brings to life America's World War II story through the words of those who experienced it.

Murray Poems Offer Tribute To National President Mimms

OUR FALLEN SOLDIER

Our fallen comrade, fought the good fight,
He received His wings, to make the flight,
To His resting place, of heavenly bliss,
His voice and presence, will surely be missed,
His tireless advocacy, a legacy to his life,
He gave His all, no greater sacrifice,
President Paul Minnes, we truly thank you,
Cloaked with Honor, in red, white and blue.

I HAVE MY WINGS, COMRADES, I'M READY TO FLY

A celebration of joy, I'm on my way home
I suffer no more, so please don't moan
keep smiling comrades, when thinking of me
I'm not earthly bound, my spirit is free
try and not cry, or shed many tears
I served America, for so many years
This is a joyous time, we're having today
I'm very happy, to be sent home this way
to my final rest, to the heavens above
a peaceful journey, because of your love
My wings are mounted, I'm ready to fly
until later my friends, I must say goodbye.

composed by
Warner L. Murray
New York Regional Group

Insightful Wolfe Book Encourages Fellow Veterans

BVA Happenings readers who enjoy the Ambassador Scoop Series are already aware that guide dog Hannah's "Mom" is Jill Hinton Wolfe of Walker, Michigan. In addition to being Supermom to a dog with whom she

shares the joys of the great outdoors, Jill is a talented, prolific, published writer with profound perspectives and insights into the adversities and possibilities of post-military life.

Mission, Tribe & Grace: How Veterans Can Lead Change, Find Their Tribe, and Build a Meaningful Life is a guide for what comes after service and sacrifice, for dealing with the adversities and struggles inherent in becoming a

veteran, and for surviving the sleepless nights spent thinking about what to do next in the pursuit of a host of goals and desires. It was written for veterans who are ready to lead in their companies, communities, and the wider world, combining candid storytelling with a clear, actionable framework for impact.

Amazon's summary affirms the book's ability to help veterans reclaim their voice, clarify their purpose, and connect with the people who share their mission after a period of loneliness, disorientation, and feeling overwhelmed. Inside the book, the summary says, the reader will learn:

- How to define a personal mission and lead with purpose. The mission isn't over. It's just evolved.
- What it takes to build a "community" of support—not just a network.
- Why grace is the secret to sustainable leadership.
- A three-part framework that veterans can use to lead meaningful change.

"This is a book for veterans who are tired of being underestimated—and ready to make things happen," the summary concludes.



District Director Welcomed at Club's 50th Anniversary

BVA Director of District 1 John O'Connell appeared by invitation at the Winding River Skating Center in his now hometown of Toms River, New Jersey, on September 13. The occasion was a Saturday launch of the Toms River Hockey Club's 50th anniversary season.

Prior to the drop of the puck, players welcomed both John and Alex DePalma, the latter of whom co-founded the Brick Starts Challenger Organization in 2009 to teach skating and hockey to children and young adults with developmental disabilities.

John addressed the Blackhawks 18UAA team, which was scheduled to face off soon thereafter against the Brick Stars Challenger Organization in the first of a full slate of games that day. He was then honored with a commemorative game jersey marking the club's 50th season. Organizers of the event hoped to showcase community service, inclusion, and hockey spirit, qualities better embodied by John O'Connell than perhaps anyone else, anywhere. John was named USA Hockey's 2025 National Disabled Athlete of the Year.

John is a U.S. Air Force veteran and former pilot who is now legally blind. He competes in USA Hockey's Warrior and Blind Disciplines with the New Jersey Warriors and New York Metro Blind Hockey. Also highlighted during John's appearance at the launch of the season was his role as a leading advocate for veterans and people with visual impairments. He has testified before the New Jersey Senate on transportation issues for disabled veterans and he serves on both the state's Commission for the Blind Rehabilitation Council and BVA's Board of Directors.

Kline Golf Outing Raises Additional \$7K in Ohio

BVA extends heartfelt thanks to Kim Snodgrass and all others who planned, participated in, and otherwise supported the 2025 Mark R. Kline Memorial 8th Annual Golf Outing on July 26. Golfers gathered to do good at the Loyal Oak Golf Course in Norton, Ohio, and raised \$7,000 to support programs, benefits, and services to blind and low vision veterans, their families, and caregivers.

The intense dedication and loyalty to BVA of this group of friends and associates of the late Mark Kline has been nothing short of overwhelming.

Contributions from this annual event, held in memory of loyal BVA advocate and supporter Mark R. Kline, have now raised \$60,000 since its inception in 2018. The event also includes a 50/50 raffle, a silent auction, and prizes during dinner. Additional background information about the yearly outing can be read at birdease.com/MarkKlineMemorialGolfOuting.



Conquering the Seventh And Final Summit

Extreme sports athlete, National Geographic 2015 Adventurer of the Year, former Navy Petty Officer 1st Class, and BVA member Lonnie Bedwell has made his dream of reaching the highest peak on each of the Earth's seven continents a reality, the first blind person ever to do so. On October 17, he and his companions made it to the top of Carstensz Pyramid (Puncak Jaya in Indonesian, literally meaning Victorious Peak), the last on his "beyond this world" visionary bucket list.

"And that's a wrap!" Lonnie exclaimed in his social media posts soon after the latest mission was complete.

Carstensz Pyramid is the highest mountain peak on an island and the highest peak both in Indonesia and within Oceania. The mountain is in the Sudirman Range of the highlands of Mimika Regency, Central Papua, Indonesia. Puncak Jaya is ranked fifth in the world for topographic isolation.

As he described in his speech to BVA 77th National Convention attendees (2022), Lonnie's adventures have sometimes left life and death hanging in the balance. His goal: To inspire others to continue pushing the boundaries of life no matter what their situation entails. Lonnie is the ultimate testament to the resilience and grit required to do so.

Lonnie's life changed in 1997 after a hunting accident instantly took his sight completely in both eyes. Despite this, he miraculously did roof work in his hometown of Duggar, Indiana, and raised three daughters, teaching them to hunt, fish, and, perhaps most incredibly, to drive a car. After his daughters graduated, he turned his



Lonnie Bedwell, right, celebrates the improbable feat of successfully landing at the top of the highest peaks on each of the world's seven continents.

attention to challenging himself and soon became one of the world's most recognized blind extreme sports athletes. Countless BVA members have been inspired by his drive and the encouragement he has provided to them at adaptive sports camps and recreational venues throughout the country.

When the threshold for running the Grand Canyon was placed at 1,000 kayak rolls, Lonnie took his donated kayak to the pond on his farm and rolled it 1,500 times. The rest is history with Lonnie kayaking some of the most challenging whitewater in the world. He is best known for having not only completed the first blind descent of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon 226 miles in 2013, but leading an almost identical subsequent trip with four other blinded veterans and their guides five years later. He is also an avid downhill skier.

High Marks for VA in Cane Activities Nationwide

BVA members and their supporting casts at VA facilities wrapped up White Cane Day activities during the last week of October. Shortly thereafter, reports of the events began circulating and several reached BVA National Headquarters.

Scores of volunteers and VA staff went the extra mile in making these activities successful. The donation of time became a wonderful “Way to Give” to BVA.

On behalf of the BVA Board of Directors, BVA members, and BVA staff, National Director of Development Meredith Buono-DaGrossa has extended a heartfelt thank you to VA Blind Rehabilitation Service personnel, especially VIST Coordinators who went above and beyond the call of duty to bring nationwide awareness to white cane safety. In a late October **BVA Happenings** entry, she thanked them for supporting blind and low vision veterans by involving them in their events. BVA is also grateful to those who requested and then included BVA information and materials in their activities.



With BVA resource materials visible in the background, Jeanie Murphy demonstrates the demeanor offered by her Meta Glasses.

Particularly noteworthy is an account submitted for **BVA Happenings** by Heartland Regional Group President Jeanie Murphy from the Caribbean! Jeanie’s White Cane Day events were not in the Caribbean, of course, but that’s where she and husband Robert went to “convalesce,” or so it was intended. Instead, they unexpectedly awaited Tropical Storm Melissa to hit after a long and challenging summer. In Jeanie’s words from Aruba:

Let me start with our Eastern Kansas Health Care System White Cane Day event in Topeka right on October 15. It was a very good event. There were 50-plus people that stopped by and took the brochures. They listened as I explained some of the tools that I use personally. That would include the bill money reader, the patriot viewer, the OrCam Reader, the Beecher Telescope, Meta Glasses, and the Monocular Telescope. Of course, my focus was on the cane that I use daily.

Robert and I both thought that it was a great event. I was in the lobby of the Topeka VA Medical Center with a display table and caught many people coming in, offering cookies and water provided by Veterans Services. Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinator Dawn Clouse was very instrumental in connecting me with the Veterans Services Coordinator to provide help to set up.

The following day (Thursday, October 16), we had the opportunity to set up a table at the Junction City North Community-Based Outpatient Clinic. Again, Veterans Services provided cookies and water to offer to the veterans and their families/caregivers that came in for their appointments that day.

Happily, BVA member Marlene Williams from Kansas City, Kansas, was able to

accompany Robert and me for a few hours in Junction City. She spoke with several people and handed out information regarding the visually impaired and the importance of White Canes. I again set up some of the tools that I use daily basis and elaborated on the use of the cane.

I hope that all our BVA members enjoyed their own White Cane Day functions as much as we did!

Tom Zampieri Earns First ASOT Advocacy Award

BVA only recently learned that the American Society of Ophthalmic Trauma (ASOT) presented BVA Past National President Dr. Tom Zampieri last summer with its first ever “Advocacy Award” for legislation and policy achievements during his tenure at BVA, both as a staff member (Director of Government Relations) and as a Board Member (National Vice President, National President, and Past National President).

The award was presented to Tom by Grant Justin, MD, President of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and a Navy Ophthalmologist.

The ASOT meeting was held in Houston with more than 190 ophthalmologists, optometrists, researchers, residents, and representatives from the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO). ASOT is committed to the prevention, treatment, and management of eye injuries. The organization brings together experts from various fields to improve patient outcomes through education, research, and advocacy.

Col. Robert Mazzoli, MD (US Army, Ret.) introduced the advocacy award with an overview of some of Tom’s major impacts on both the Department of Defense and VA in improving the care of service members and

veterans from 2007 to as recently as 2021. These include the congressional legislation that established the first joint DOD-VA Vision Center of Excellence (National Defense Authorization Act - NDAA, FY 2008), the increases to the DOD Vision Research Program from \$4 million up to \$20 million between 2009 and 2018, the establishment by the Pentagon and Surgeon General in the United Kingdom of the DOD-UK Joint Ocular Trauma Task Group (JOTTG) in September 2020, and the legislation to establish the four military Ocular Trauma Centers (NDAA, FY 2021).

The accomplishments occurred as Tom closely collaborated for the better part of 16 years with a variety of professional eye care organizations: AAO, the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR), the American Optometric Association (AOA), and other Veterans Service Organizations. Improving ophthalmic trauma care, defense vision research, and international collaboration on ophthalmic injuries and rehabilitation all continue today as Tom serves as a volunteer on the JOTTG representing blinded veterans and as member of three VA research committees.

Tom has credited his advocacy successes to the cooperation and constant support from many associations and organizations. He also credits BVA’s rich history of advocating for blinded veterans since the organization’s founding in March 1945 and the Association’s commitment over decades to improve the care and rehabilitation of all blind and low vision service members and veterans. He accepted the award, he said, on behalf of the generations of them who could not be present but who most assuredly contributed to the award.

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mbuonodagrossa@bva.org



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Auxiliary's View

by Robert Murphy

The BVA Auxiliary extends best wishes for a joyous holiday season to members of both BVA and BVAA. At this wonderful time of year two things pertaining to the Auxiliary come to mind, one past and one future.

First, we are pleased to report on the continuation of our successful bi-monthly Town Halls and invite all to join and participate on the first Tuesday in January, March, May, July, September, and November.

On November 4, WayAround co-founder and manager Darwin Belt joined us as our inspirational Town Hall guest speaker. WayAround is the smart app that provides on-demand details about everyday things for people with blindness or vision loss. For several years, Darwin and WayAround have had a significant presence at our BVA conventions.

Darwin created WayAround after retiring from a 30-year career as an architect and software developer. Working with top national homebuilders, Darwin built an award-winning company that specialized in Building Information Modeling (BIM) software, which creates interactive representations of every aspect of a building. In 2007, that company was purchased by a Fortune 175 company, ITW. Through WayAround, Darwin now uses his expertise to change how people with blindness or low vision obtain information about objects in the world around them.

Darwin shared a small portion of that knowledge with our Town Hall audience last month.

A passionate devotee of innovation, Darwin has pursued leading medical advancements to correct several of his own vision-related and other complications of Type 1 diabetes. He has a unique insight into the challenges of sight loss for those who have served in the U.S. military. Darwin first lost his vision at age 30 and successfully underwent a vitrectomy to restore his sight. Since then, he has been diagnosed with wet macular degeneration, significant peripheral vision loss, and nyctalopia (night blindness). He was the recipient of a kidney transplant from his brother, Craig, in the mid-1980s, and in 2007 he received a pancreas transplant, curing his diabetes of 40 years.

Secondly, it is that time of year to once again announce BVAA's rejuvenated scholarship program. The Auxiliary awards three Renee Feldman scholarships per academic year; two scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 each and one in the amount of \$1,500 made in two installments (fall/spring) to the institution at which the student is enrolled. Please access the scholarship application at **BVA.org/Auxiliary** or contact the Scholarship Chairperson (myself) at (785) 564-2526 or at **bvaanationalreporter@gmail.com**.

To be eligible, an applicant must be a spouse or generational child (i.e., child, grandchild, great-grandchild) of a blinded veteran who is a past or current BVA member. The scholarship is open to full-time students enrolled in an accredited vocational technical school, community college, college, or university. Students may apply each year of study and may receive up to four annual scholarship awards.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the required transcripts, documents, 300-word essay, and letters of reference reach the scholarship committee chairperson by the deadline date of May 1, 2026.

They should also fill out every form completely. If they believe that further information is needed, they should please print/type on an additional sheet, NOT on any of the forms.

Applicants will be selected for the award on the “best-qualified” basis, with the major emphasis for consideration based on need and academic achievements. The 300-word essay that describes post-education, lifetime plans, and career goals also weigh heavily. If the applicant’s veteran is deceased, provide supporting documentation validating your relationship to them. If you have any questions about these forms or requirements, please write or call

Renee Feldman, for whom the scholarship program is named, was a World War II U.S. Army veteran, serving as a Staff Sergeant at European Theater of Operations Headquarters

from 1943-45, stationed in Salisbury, England, and Rheims, France. Married to blinded World War II veteran Leon Feldman, a BVA member, Renee was one of a handful of founding members of the BVA Auxiliary in 1977.

Devotion to her country, her community, her family, and her faith were the guideposts of her life. In addition to volunteering for military service during World War II she contributed many years volunteering with the American Red Cross, Girl Scouts of America, American Cancer Society, Harrisburg State Hospital, Harrisburg Hospital, Blinded Veterans Association chapters and auxiliaries in Pennsylvania and Florida, and Meals on Wheels. She was an active member of Temple Ohev Sholom in Harrisburg and prior to returning to central Pennsylvania in 1994, she and Leon were active in the congregational life of Temple B’Nai Israel in Clearwater, Florida.

Renee passed away in 2012 at age 100.

Did You Know?

- Korean War combat blinded veteran Stephen Hiroshi Miyagawa completed residential blind rehabilitation training at Hines in 1952. In addition to earning a Bachelor of Arts degree shortly thereafter, Stephen became a prolific writer, creating the newsletter for the Hines Blind Center alumni and authoring the **Illinois BVA Voice** as a member of the Illinois Regional Group. He later edited the **CBRC Torch**, which became the official publication of the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center at Hines. In the early 1990s, Stephen began an in-depth research project tracing the history of blind rehabilitation programs for veterans beginning with World War I, an effort that resulted in the Galde Press publication in 1999 of **Journey to Excellence-Development of the Military and VA Blind Rehabilitation Programs in the 20th Century**. The book, still available from Amazon, details BVA’s critical role in the establishment and growth of VA rehabilitation programs throughout more than 50 years.

History Reminds Us: We Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet

by Tracy Ferro

Wait a minute, wait a minute, you ain't heard nothin yet! That was the first line spoken in synchronicity in the movie **The Jazz Singer** back in 1927. Some 80 years later, Apple sold their first smartphone. Then came Alexa and so many smart devices, mobile applications, and a multitude of capabilities.

Technology hasn't been able to sit still and neither should you. Smart devices and controls can make our lives so much easier and, every day, things become more affordable and efficient. I bought a first-generation Wi-Fi-controlled wall oven from General Electric about ten years ago. At that time, I worked with their engineering department to develop a better and more user-friendly app that was accessible. That wasn't their goal, but they fully understood how smart appliances could open a whole new world for the blind. Today, just about every appliance has this capability at a reasonable cost.

My son got me one of the first Alexas in 2015 while still in the introductory phase. Many thought that the virtual assistants would be an "Ooh, Golly" thing of no use. With time, development, and improvements, virtual assistants are great for the blind and getting better every day regardless of who makes them. Remember the old talking clocks that were hard to adjust, set the alarm, and, worse yet, turn off the alarm? As for me, I'm glad they are gone.

So, here is what's out there and how to get the devices. Let's talk first about controlled devices like lights, curtains, door locks, etc. It used to be that those swirly little lights were

going to be all that and then some. Thank goodness they are also gone. Now we have LED lights that truly do a whole lot better both in efficiency and capability. For the blind, many of us can adjust lighting to provide the best use of our remaining vision. The LED lights on the market now are affordable and, if Wi-Fi capable, controllable in brightness, color, and temperature. Many have apps that can be linked to a virtual assistant so that you don't have to find light switches or stumble around in the dark. Simply program them to your virtual assistant and tell them which lights you want to turn on or off, or adjust them to whatever you would like.

Another big help may be window treatments. Several years ago, at a BVA convention, one of our members who was totally blind had a room on the hotel's first floor. Being totally blind, he did not know whether the curtains were open or closed, but the folks walking outside knew the color of his undies. Daylight can either be a blessing or a curse, depending on time of day, your sensitivity, and your desires. Wi-Fi, or better yet voice control, can make your life considerably easier and less frustrating. Set curtains to open automatically in the morning or close at night without having to fumble around looking for the string or window to find out the position. Program them to open and close automatically and your privacy will be ensured.

Wi-Fi security systems are a must for us as they will include smoke and fire alarms, burglar alarms, and in some cases may have a camera system. The level of security you

desire can vary both in capability and cost. Most companies will work with you to better serve your disability. On this note, be sure to inform your police and fire departments of your visual impairment so that they will be aware of what they are coming into, where to look for you, and how to best serve you.

There are also door locks, garage door openers, television devices, and much more. If you are in doubt as to what is out there, ask your VIST Coordinator or fellow veterans. You don't have to be a techie to use this stuff. In most cases, you merely need to ask out loud and your virtual assistant will come to the rescue.

VA issues these devices to us, typically the most capable ones. However, these systems can be expanded at a reasonable cost. I have an Alexa and 7 Dots. The dots are much less capable for the viewing and poorer sound quality, but they handle all the same functions and can act as an intercom or phone. They can be alarm clocks, timers, reminders, game players, news reporters, weather liars, and encyclopedias. They can be programmed to work with so many other devices, such as a Wi-Fi oven. Alexa talks to the Oven app and will turn it on to a set temperature or at a set time. If your washer or dryer runs off of Wi-Fi, they can interact and control them too. Microwaves and dishwashers are now in that mix too. The best advice is to always ask if the appliance can be controlled with an app. Voice assistant may not always work, but voiceover on your phone does and the apps are remarkably accessible.

So, now, how to get them: In some cases, if you are authorized, a VA grant might be able to step in and help. In every case, however, time will be a help. Everything breaks and

will need to be replaced. Do your homework and find out the costs. When I bought my oven, it was crazy expensive due to the new Wi-Fi capability. I knew that it would be here for a long time, however, so the extra cost was worth it. Times have changed and the costs of these technologies have dropped. The difference now may be only \$100 to have the Wi-Fi capability. Most big box stores are now selling these appliances, so the cost has also dropped for that reason. Lights, Echo Dots, Wi-Fi switches or outlets, and many other devices are now in the realm of affordable.

Make no mistake however, the blind community is small in the grand scheme, and these devices, apps, and capabilities are not built for the blind. They are built for, and the target of sales is, the laziest of people. Unintentionally, however, these things perhaps become indispensable for the blind. BVA continues to work with Congress, VA, and manufacturers to ensure accessibility and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you find that an app does not work well or is not accessible, chances are that it is from offshore and the interest of the blind may not be of concern. If in doubt, call the manufacturer and ask for help, describe your situation, and offer to test their upgrades, I did it with General Electric and they went from an engineering department to creating an accessibility department.

And just remember Al Jolson's famous line, "You ain't heard nothin yet!"



Veterans Service Program Update

by Duayne Driscoll

“I already have a permanent and total rating from VA and cannot go any higher!”

Logically, this makes sense because one may not exceed the value of 100 percent in mathematics. However, it’s not correct for VA claims. There are at least 10 levels of Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) for severely disabling, service-connected disabilities that exceed the total rate, from L to R2.

The current monthly rate of compensation for a single veteran with a 100 percent combined evaluation is \$3831.30. For comparison, a single veteran with a total evaluation and SMC at the highest level receives compensation at the rate of \$10,964.66 per month. For more information, review 38 USC § 1114.

There are many paths to SMC eligibility, including vision loss, limb loss, and other debilitating conditions that cause a need for Aid and Attendance (A&A).

What is A&A? When a claimant’s disabilities cause a need for the assistance of another person in the performance of daily activities, then a higher rate may be paid. Daily activities include medication and food management, hygiene needs, dressing, and ability to leave the home unassisted, among other things.

The basic A&A rate for most veterans is L, but a blinded veteran with visual acuity of 5/200 or worse in both eyes already receives SMC at the L rate. With a demonstrated need for assistance on the form prescribed

by the Secretary, this veteran may receive SMC at the M rate. A blinded veteran rated for service-connected vision loss with Light Perception Only (LPO) in both eyes also receives SMC at the M rate, but it is not based on a need for assistance. A veteran receiving SMC at the O rate, or at the N1/2 rate with SMC K, becomes eligible to apply for the Special A&A benefit, also known as R1.

The spousal A&A benefit pays a higher rate of dependency allowance for the disabled spouse of a veteran receiving disability compensation at a rate of 30 percent or higher. There are also A&A rates for the veteran and spouse in Nonservice-Connected Pension (NSCP) claims, and for the surviving spouse in death claims.

How do I claim A&A? For service-connected SMC, the need for assistance must be due solely to service-connected disability and must be documented by a qualified provider on a properly completed VA Form 21-2680. This form may also be used to claim Housebound with SMC at the S rate, Special A&A, pension, and spousal benefits.

Be sure to use the most recent version of the form, which is February 2023 at press time of **The Bulletin**. Remember to select “compensation” for service-connected claims, or “pension” for nonservice-connected claims in Item 13. The four-page form must be signed and dated by the claimant in Items 15A and 15B. The rest of the form must be completed by a doctor, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse.



A Season for Charitable Giving

by Meredith Buono-DaGrossa

The holiday season has always been my favorite time of year. Setting up holiday villages, time with family, and holiday movies are always on my “To-Do List” during November and December. More importantly, the season brings reflections of the past year and resolutions for the upcoming one. I would like to extend a Happy Holiday season to all BVA members, their families and caregivers, as well as cherished supporters who contribute to the Association. To put it simply, we could not serve our blind and low vision veterans without your continued support.

This season is a time for giving – not only to loved ones, but also to charity. Historically, November and December have been the peak months for charitable giving, with many Americans making their most significant contributions during this period. Whether you are giving through your will or trust, stocks or mutual funds, donor-advised funds or IRA, your gift choice to BVA makes a huge impact on those we serve.

On July 4, 2025, the One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB) Act was signed into law, bringing about three key changes impacting philanthropy and giving as of January 1, 2026.

1. Larger Universal Charitable Deduction—More Donors Receive Tax Benefits

Starting in 2026, non-itemizing taxpayers can deduct up to \$1,000 (\$2,000 for married couples) for charitable gifts. Charitable deductions will no longer be restricted to

those who itemize deductions. This makes it easier for donors to realize tax benefits from supporting charities.

2. New Minimum for Itemized Charitable Deductions

If someone itemizes their deductions, starting in 2026, a “floor” applies to their deduction for charitable contributions. Specifically, the charitable contribution deduction will be reduced by an amount equal to 0.5 percent of their adjusted gross income (AGI). For example, if the AGI is \$200,000, the first \$1,000 of charitable contributions in a year will not be deductible; only giving above that amount qualifies for a tax benefit.

3. Estate and Gift Tax Exemption Increases

The federal estate and gift tax exemption rises to \$15 million per person (indexed for inflation), meaning very few estates will owe federal estate tax. Some states, however, have much lower thresholds. For donors with large estates, planned giving and legacy gifts may offer additional benefits.

What does all this mean for Planned Giving programs? With new changes taking effect, giving through a will, trust, IRA, or making lifetime gifts of appreciated assets remain powerful ways to support causes you care about. When choosing your legacy, please consider the Blinded Veterans Association. Choosing to support blind and low vision veterans ensures ongoing benefits, programs, and services to current and future veterans.

Meta Community Summit Brings Collaboration on Accessibility

A panel discussion at the Meta Community Summit on December 3 brought together key experts from diverse fields—including agriculture, construction, education, medical, and nonprofits—alongside developers to intensively collaborate on real-world use cases for wearables and their intrinsic value to accessibility. The Summit was held near the headquarters of Meta Platforms, Inc., in the San Francisco Bay Area.

BVA Interim Executive Director/Legislative Director Lea Rowe participated in the Summit and accepted the invitation to be a panelist as one of the key experts.

“A highlight of my involvement was serving on the panel discussion, ‘The Value of Wearables for the Accessibility Community,’” she said. Lea summarized the exchanges that took place on the panel:

“Moderated by Maxine Williams, Vice President, Accessibility and Engagement with Meta, the insightful discussion featured fellow leaders in the community, including Saqib Shaikh, Founder and Lead of Microsoft Seeing AI; Louis-Philippe Masse, Vice President of Product Innovation and Marketing at Humanware; and Thomas Panek, President and CEO of Lighthouse Guild International, as we collectively explored how next-generation wearable technology can drive greater independence and inclusion.”

COLA Legislation Passes House, Senate, Trump Desk

The House of Representatives, Senate, and President have all acted on S. 2392, the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2025, sponsored originally by Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS). The measure passed both chambers and was signed by President Trump on November 25, kicking in additional compensation for inflation for wartime disability, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving spouses and children.

The required annual legislation, delayed this year by nearly a month due to the federal government shutdown, follows the announcement on October 24 of the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The payments will increase by 2.8 percent beginning in January 2026 for nearly 71 million Social Security beneficiaries and nearly 7.5 million people receiving SSI payments. Some recipients receive both Social Security benefits and SSI.

The legislation is the formality that requires VA, effective December 1, to increase the amounts by the same as the COLA increase in benefits for Social Security recipients. The bill also requires VA to publish the amounts payable, as increased, in the **Federal Register**. VA is further authorized under the legislation to make a similar adjustment to the

rates of disability compensation payable to persons who have not received compensation for service-connected disability or death.

Over the last decade, the COLA increase has averaged approximately 3.1 percent. The COLA was 2.5 percent in 2025. Although the original Social Security Act was passed in 1935, subsequent legislation ties the annual COLA to the change in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) as determined by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For additional COLA information, visit <https://www.ssa.gov/cola/>.

VA Extends Caregiver Support Eligibility

On November 24, VA announced a final rule, published September 29, which extends Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers eligibility for certain veterans and their family caregivers through September 30, 2028.

The extension means legacy participants, legacy applicants, and their family caregivers will remain eligible for PCAFC and will not experience a reduction in their monthly stipend based on a reassessment for an additional three years, with limited exceptions.

Legacy participants are veterans or service members whose family caregivers were approved and designated by VA as of September 30, 2020. Legacy applicants are veterans or service members who applied for PCAFC before October 1, 2020, and were accepted into the program on or after October 1, 2020. The primary family caregiver must remain the same individual named in the application submitted before that.

Key details of the extension include:

- ° An extended transition period for the legacy cohort.
- ° Continued eligibility and no reduction in stipends with limited exceptions.
- ° Members of the legacy cohort may still be discharged or revoked from PCAFC in certain circumstances, such as at the request of the veteran or family caregiver, or for noncompliance with program requirements.

Suspension of certain reassessments remains in effect. Individuals may still request a reassessment, including if they believe they are eligible for increased support.

VA will continue to consider additional changes to PCAFC, as outlined in a proposed rule published December 6, 2024.

For more information about VA's Caregiver Program, visit www.caregiver.va.gov. Veterans and their family members and caregivers can also call the Caregiver Support Line at (855) 260-3274, Monday–Friday, 8:00am–8:00pm Eastern Time or connect with their local Caregiver Support Program Team using the locator tool at https://www.caregiver.va.gov/support/New_CSC_Page.asp.

MVP Imparts Recent Updates and Initiatives

In November 2023, VA's Million Veteran Program (MVP) made history when the initiative reached the goal of one million veterans enrolled in VA's largest health research effort ever. The achievement paved the way to improved veteran health and wellness in both the near and distant future. Despite the milestone that many believed was the crowning achievement of MVP, the initiative lives on. Additional programs

and more efforts to reach out to individual veterans and Veterans Service Organizations such as BVA are just around the corner.

MVP recently launched the Military Experiences and Toxic Exposures Survey to help researchers better understand how to screen for, detect, prevent, and treat health conditions associated with military experiences and exposures. Once veterans are enrolled in MVP, they can complete the survey online by logging into their MVP Dashboard at mvp.va.gov. BVA members who have previously signed into MVP are encouraged to participate to help improve health care for veterans across generations.

In January 2026, MVP will release the newest edition of **MVP Matters Annual**, the annual newsletter highlighting discoveries made by MVP researchers and stories from veteran participants. **BVA Happenings** and the **BVA Bulletin** will share the link when it becomes available.

GROVEHub Connects Veteran and Researcher

VA's Growing Rural Outreach through Veteran Engagement Center (GROVEHub), in collaboration with the Veterans Health Administration's Office of Rural Health and VA Health Services Research, is offering veterans and their caregivers opportunities to bring their wisdom, individual knowledge, and practical experience to help improve VA health care through collaboration with VA researchers.

The relationships may include individual partnerships, regular engagement group meetings with researchers, or helping with other research activities to ensure that VA is putting veterans first.

GROVEHub's Engagement and Partnership Opportunities webpage lists projects of interest with additional information. Interested parties can reach out via email to determine if the project is a good fit for them. The page can be shared with others who may also be interested. In addition, selected videos and articles are also available to explore why this type of engagement is important in conducting research.

VA Launches VHA Reorganization

With goals of improving health care for veterans, empowering local hospital directors, eliminating duplicative layers of bureaucracy and ensuring consistent application of VA policies across all department medical facilities, VA announced in a press advisory on December 15 its intent to reorganize the management structure of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

VA officials were scheduled to provide official congressional notification of this intent on December 16. Precise organizational and personnel changes, which will occur during the next 18-24 months, will be announced in early 2026.

Multiple independent reviews from VA's Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office and others have underscored the need for reorganizing VHA. Those reviews highlighted governance weaknesses and how the organization's management structure is rife with middle managers who have overlapping responsibilities, slowing decision making and creating unnecessary burdens to serving veterans.

VHA's reorganization will incorporate this feedback by reducing duplicative management layers and putting the right people in the right places without reducing staff.

In Remembrance

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

Arkansas R.G.

Robert Caudle
Derek Mumford

Carolina R.G.

Andrew Shearhouse

Florida R.G.

Donald Johnston
Vincent Lowell

Georgia R.G.

Gerald Jones

Illinois R.G.

Gerald Jones

Mid-Atlantic R.G.

Rodger Vanzant

New York R.G.

John Morgan

Ohio R.G.

Louis Beck

Pennsylvania R.G.

Cornelius Appleby
Henry Rohrmann

Southern Nevada R.G.

Freddie Anderson

South Texas R.G.

Guillermo Aguirre

Spokane Inland Empire R.G.

Lloyd Gabriel

Tennessee R.G.

Jerry Cox

Washington R.G.

Dolores Cooley Todd

At-Large BVA Members,

No Regional Group Affiliation

Leon Hencinski
Ernest McDole
Manuel Olague
Charles Poston



On Veterans Day 2025 at Arlington National Cemetery, Yoneka Trent salutes interred fellow veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. At her feet, guide dog Kellnis.

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Final Thought

The online Monday gardening sessions in October and early November culminated in the much anticipated and publicized scarecrow-making contest. Both the Gardening Interest Group itself and the contest are the brainchild of group facilitator and National Treasurer Monique Statham.

Participants first learned about the history of scarecrows used in agriculture, beginning with children running through fields with noisemakers to scare birds away from crops. Later, the concept brought human-like dolls that came to be known as scarecrows. Now in 2025, keeping birds and other invasive critters out of farmland and gardens depends on machinery to perform the job.

The scarecrows were judged on their creativity, complexity, and their potential to frighten away visiting birds. According to contest judge Meredith Buono-Dagrossa, also BVA's National Director of Development, the competition was so intense that, among the ten entries, two winners and two runners up had to be selected rather than just the one in each category.

Congratulations go to Sheldon/Phyllis McKinney and Michaun Harrison for their runner-up entries, pictured here as Nisi and Ref, respectively.

**Gardening Interest Group
2025 Scarecrow Contest**



RUNNER UP

Sheldon & Phyllis McKinney

"Nisi"



RUNNER UP

Michaun Harrison

"Ref"

