

## The Sons of The American Legion

P.O. Box 1055  
Indianapolis, IN 46206

U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Non-Profit Organization  
Permit No. 431  
Indianapolis, IN



# NATIONAL UPDATE

Official Publication of the Sons of The American Legion

April 2010



8

## Michigan Sons are making things happen

Can a wolverine be a busy beaver? Sons in Michigan have been hard at work developing and perfecting programs that are benefiting veterans.

### The ALPHA Program

The purpose of the ALPHA Program is to provide Michigan's Squadrons and Districts with financial assistance to purchase materials that are used in projects directed toward elderly or disabled veterans. The program may also be applied to home services of immediate family members of active duty deployed servicemen and women.

The ALPHA Program has evolved from the Sons' National Veterans Assistance Day, a signature project within our organization. The original concept for a nationwide day spent serving vets came from Jeff Meulendyk of *Grand Rapids, MI Squadron 179*. The idea

became a reality when it was officially adopted by the S.A.L. in the Spring of 2008. A year later, Meulendyk was asked to develop a program that would help Michigan Squadrons and Districts with a means of financing projects each year. What he proposed has come to be known as ALPHA (American Legion Personal Home Assistance) Program. Funds are raised throughout the year and invested by Michigan's Legion Department Adjutant. Ideas for projects are submitted on an official form. Projects selected for funding require Squadrons and Districts to file a report at the end of each project that must include receipts for materials purchased and photographs taken throughout the project.

### Getting New Laws Passed

In November, Michigan Governor

Jennifer Granholm invited Legion Family members to attend a ceremony where she signed House Bills 5245 and 5246 into law. The first of the new laws will allow Michigan funeral directors to release information about unclaimed cremated ashes. The second new law says if any of the unclaimed ashes are identified as the remains of honorably discharged veterans, they will be entitled to interment in a state or national cemetery with full military honors.

The State Representative who sponsored one of these bills, who is also an American Legion member, stated that the Sons of the American Legion was instrumental in keeping this issue in the forefront. He also said he hopes Sons will be the ones who step up and offer to serve as escorts that will accompany these Heroes to their sacred resting place.

## Looking for enthusiastic Sons

By **Laura B. Balun**  
*Director, Voluntary Service Office*  
*U.S. Veterans Administration*

As the Director, Voluntary Service, I am always aware of the role volunteers play in comforting our Veterans, wherever they may be. Our volunteers and community partner organizations help us meet critical missions, improve veteran satisfaction, improve health care services and access to care. We cannot achieve some of these goals without our volunteers.

The Department of Veterans Affairs VA Voluntary Service (VAVS), the largest volunteer program in the Federal government, has 64 years of service to Veterans. Our mission is to provide a structured volunteer program under the management of VA employees. These VA employees work in cooperation with community resources to serve America's Veterans and their families with dignity and compassion. We are very pleased that the Sons of The American Legion are helping us meet the mission of VAVS.

In fiscal year 2009, the value of the hours of service contributed by our volunteers totaled more than \$240 million. Donations to the VA were in excess of \$82.5 million, bringing our total donation value to more than \$323.5 million. These significant contributions allow VA to assist direct patient care programs, as well as support services and activities that may not be fiscal priorities from year to year.

The Sons of The American Legion visited 14,000 times and gave 16,262 hours with

*Continued on Page 2*



Our volunteers and community partner organizations help us meet critical missions, improve veteran satisfaction, improve health care services and access to care. We cannot achieve some of these goals without our volunteers.



(Above) VAVS Director Laura Balun addresses Sons at the N.E.C. meeting in Indianapolis in October.

(Left) National Commander Arneson and members of his family present a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknowns. Sons joined other members of The Legion Family in early March for the annual Washington Conference, fanning out across Capitol Hill to gain support for legislation important to veterans.

## Veterans Assistance Day set for May 15

Now is the time to start preparing for the National Veterans Assistance Day to be observed on or around May 15th. It's a day Sons of The American Legion are asked to give some time to our veterans to show respect for their role in securing the freedoms we enjoy everyday.

Every Squadron in the S.A.L. should do something to mark National Veterans Assistance Day. Here are some suggested ways of doing that:

- Promote May 15, 2010 as National Veterans Assistance Day in local communities at city hall, county court houses, and State Capitols, schools or veterans' facilities.
- Encourage participation within your Squadron, Post and Unit with one or more special events designed to honor the men and women who have served the nation.
- Obtain the National Veterans Assistance Day Poster from the S.A.L.

*Continued on Page 3*

## Peterson picks events contributed by Sons

Country music star Michael Peterson has followed through on the offer he made last fall to partner with Sons on special events around the country.

Peterson, a member of *Donelson, TN Squadron 88*, told Sons at this year's National Convention that he wanted them to help him plan six or more personal appearances in their communities with the ultimate goal of promoting American Legion programs and conducting fund raising activities that will benefit those communities.

*Continued on Page 6*

## The importance of VAVS Reps

By **Mark Arneson**  
National Commander

As Georgia's Department Adjutant Charlie Knox always says, "If I can get you to go to the VA just one time, I will never have to worry about your membership ever again." One main focus of Operation Proud Son is to increase the S.A.L.'s involvement with the Veterans Administration. As you read this edition of the *National Update*, you will better understand why it is so important for Sons to create a greater presence and involvement within the VA.

According to our 2009 consolidated report forms, Sons reported donating 252,055 hours helping veterans during 14,262 visits to VA facilities. However, numbers reported by the VA itself are drastically different. They show Sons reporting 14,000 visits but only 16,262 hours. It's very likely that the VA is under reporting our visits.

With the assistance of Laura Balun, Director of the VA's Voluntary Service Office, we are working to close this reporting gap. One problem area that has already been identified is that Sons who are volunteering "after hours" are not being properly recorded by the VA. Most Sons work at other jobs and cannot spend time at VA facilities during regular business hours. They might hold a BBQ or a Bingo party on the weekend.

Sons are familiar with our own reporting process, but may not understand the VA's. This is why we need to have an S.A.L. VAVS Representative at every VA hospital in the country. There are currently more than 120 VA facilities across the country without any S.A.L. representation. (See Page 4)

Once a Rep is in place, there are no more "missing" hours because he can make sure Sons are getting credit for the work they are doing. He can keep a calendar of S.A.L. events and follow up with Squadrons if those hours are not reported. The VA facility will also become more aware of what the Sons can do for veterans.

Another value that Reps bring to the table involves acting as liaison between the VA and S.A.L. Detachments. Reps can alert their state leaders to important issues, concerns and needs that exist. Our membership can not take action if they are not kept informed. When we gather at meetings, we need to discuss the issues of the day at nearby VA facilities. Detachment VA Committee reports should include a summary of activities and concerns compiled by the Reps.

We often worry and focus our attention on how to improve the retention rate of S.A.L. membership. But I am convinced that my Department Adjutant is absolutely correct. When we encourage the recruitment of S.A.L. VAVS Reps, we raise awareness of veterans' issues throughout our membership. We offer a complete package that will keep our ranks strong and keep us faithful to the words we recite so often, "Proud possessors of a priceless heritage...."



## Balun from Page 1

donations valued at \$155,310.40. These contributions are made to Fisher Houses, veterans homes, VA medical centers and outpatient clinics in many states. And, your organization is growing in its level of commitment every day.

Commander Arneson is making the call for members and volunteers. He is asking for members to become VAVS Representatives in many of our VA facilities and to seek out opportunities. Please know that our VAVS Chiefs and Programs Managers are looking for you and your enthusiasm. There are many opportunities for you to be a part of meeting the mission of the Sons of The American Legion at a VA facility. Veterans have made many sacrifices and now it is time for us to do our part.

If you are already part of the volunteer team at a local VA medical center or clinic, THANK YOU! If you are not, please consider joining us as we find ways to enhance the Veteran experience. We want to help meet the mission of VA by serving those who have served. Start the process by visiting [www.volunteer.va.gov](http://www.volunteer.va.gov). Someone from your local VA facility will contact you.



(Above) *Members of Milwaukee, WI Squadron 537 heard about a need for t-shirts, underwear and socks for the patients and residents at the Zablocki VAMC. The group acquired two large barrels, partnered with local businesses and began collecting donations. The project continued over several months and then a group of S.A.L., Post and Auxiliary members, along with Engine 12 of the Milwaukee Fire Department, delivered the goods and spent time visiting with some of the residents. A total of 82 large cartons of various types of underwear and socks worth more than \$16,000 were delivered to the Volunteer Office at Zablocki VAMC.*

## In the running to win the Triple Nickel

Six Detachments are on track to achieve the Triple Nickel. Shortly after taking office, National Commander Mark Arneson announced the launch of the incentive recognition program. In order to earn the Triple Nickel, Detachments must reach three goals by July 1: 1) attain 105% of last year's membership goal, 2) charter at least five new Squadrons, and 3) retain at least 85% of last year's members. Detachments that earn the Triple Nickel will be recognized at this year's Milwaukee National Convention and receive a \$555 gift certificate from Emblem Sales.

Contenders so far: Nebraska (4 charters, 73.39% renewal, 79.4% membership), Ohio (7 charters, 75.68% renewal, 83.4% membership), Kansas (4 charters, 73.60% renewal, 87.7% membership), Georgia (3 charters, 69.92% renewal, 86.5% membership), California (3 charters, 68.53% renewal, 82.3% membership), Pennsylvania (3 charters, 71.53% renewal, 82.5% membership).

### Deadline Reminder!

May 31 is the last day of the current reporting year for the Child Welfare Foundation. This year's goal of \$500,000 depends on every Detachment reaching its own goal.

Do you have a story to share?

Send ideas and pictures to:

**National Update**  
c/o Mike Pipher, Editor  
612 S. State Road 446 - #35C  
Bloomington, IN 47401  
or  
[mpipher@indiana.edu](mailto:mpipher@indiana.edu)

Next deadline is June 1, 2010



(Left) *The Detachment of Minnesota sponsored another Disabled Veterans Deer hunt this fall. Working with the Minnesota DNR, Sons have held this event for three years. The Department of Minnesota owns over 600 acres of land in northern Minnesota. With help from Sons, the veterans experience an outdoor activity they would otherwise only get to read about. Wooded deer stands have been built for ease of access and comfort, large enough for hunters and guides. Guns and ammo are provided. If the hunter is lucky enough to bag a deer, the processing is also provided free of charge.*

## Sons can help Operation: Military Kids

By **Chris Huntzinger**  
National Children & Youth Chairman

Operation: Military Kids is one more way of aiding the dependents of servicemen and women who are deployed.

Along with so many National Guard and Reserve troops called to duty has come a heightened need to provide assistance to families throughout the country. The absence of a parent changes the life of a youngster.

Civilian and military youth join as a team to create 'Speak Out for Military Kids,' an adult-supported project where teens generate community awareness of issues and concerns facing young people. The kids develop technology and leadership skills. SOMK has helped teens produce public service announcements about Military Youth programs and 4-H Club activities.

Funded by the Army and supported by Family Readiness Groups and 4-H, "Ready, Set, Go" training sessions supply tool kits to educate youth social workers, educators, counselors and other community service agencies. Topics include military culture, the deployment cycle, fostering resilience in children and influencing news media.

Mobile Technology Labs have been utilized, providing children with laptop computers, digital video cameras and scanners that allow kids to interact with deployed parents via the Internet. Podcasts have been created to share events with absent parents. Youngsters can be made to feel like they, too, are American heroes by utilizing Hero Packs. Designed as a 'thank you' to military youth for their sacrifices, most Hero Packs contain a camera, day planner, picture frame, stuffed toys and letters of support. And speaking of stuffed toys, there's "Operation: Give a Hug" dolls. The stuffed toy has a clear, plastic face where a picture of the parent can be inserted, allowing the child to be with their loved one at all times.

Operation: Military Kids has expanded to include youth camps for recreational activities in some areas. Focused Youth Outreach has conducted events such as military family days, Family Readiness Group meetings, fishing derbies, mock deployment exercises and mini-carnivals. OMK teams have even implemented training for teen and adult baby sitters.

More information about Operation: Military Kids can be found at [www.operationmilitarykids.org](http://www.operationmilitarykids.org).

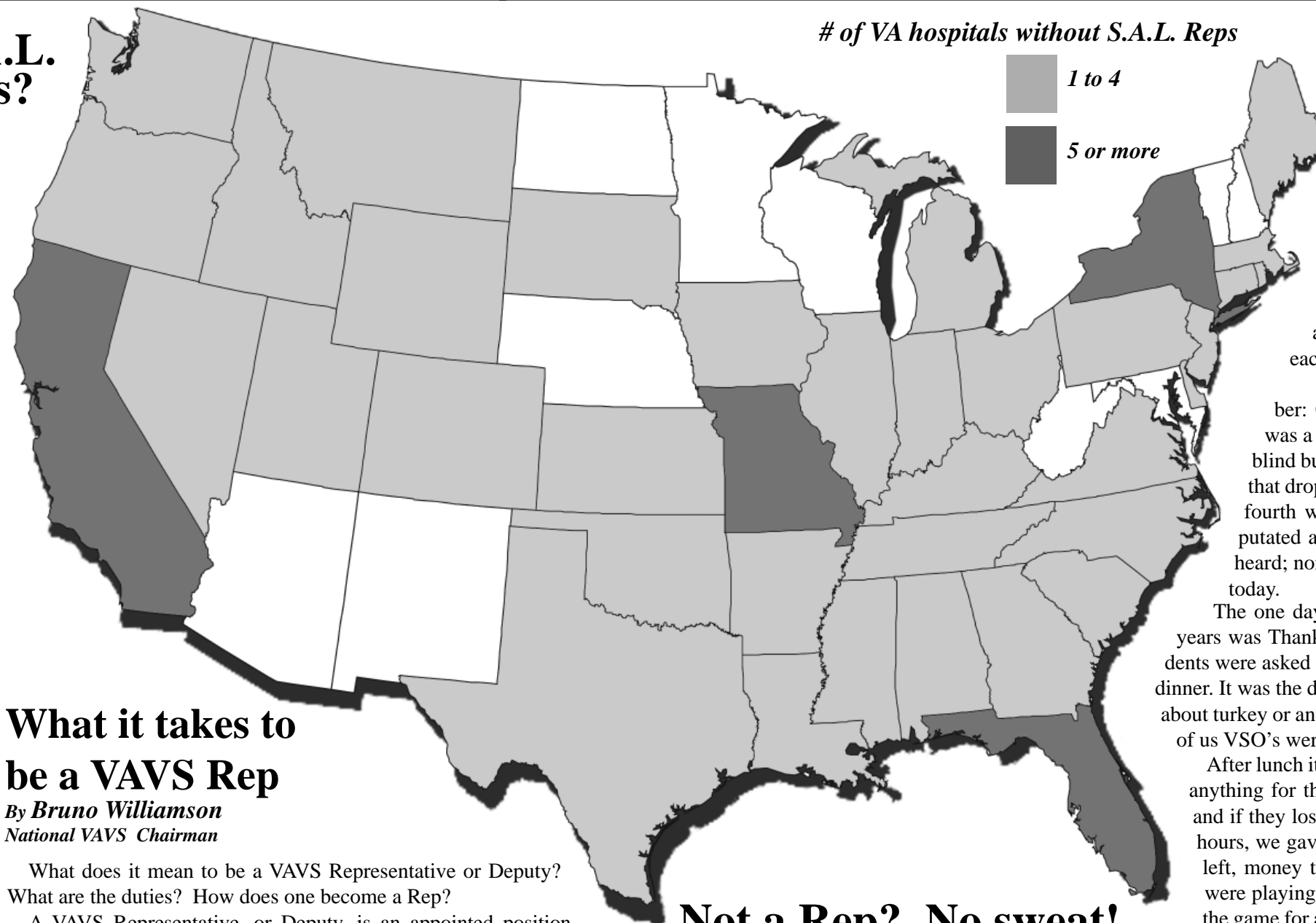
## Which VA facilities need S.A.L. representatives and deputies?

We need your help.

Detachments need to promote the VAVS program and help find and certify S.A.L. members who are willing to serve as VAVS Representatives at Veterans Administration facilities in your own state. Interested individuals need to be trained and certified.

At last count, the following facilities DO NOT have an S.A.L. Rep:

**Alaska** - Anchorage  
**Alabama** - Birmingham, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, Tuskegee  
**Arkansas** - Fayetteville, Little Rock, North Little Rock  
**California** - Fresno, Livermore, Loma Linda, Long Beach, Menlo Park, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Sepulveda, Palo Alto  
**Colorado** - Grand Junction  
**Connecticut** - Newington  
**Delaware** - Wilmington  
**Florida** - Bay Pines, Gainesville, Orlando, Tampa, West Palm Beach  
**Georgia** - Dublin  
**Hawaii** - Honolulu  
**Idaho** - Boise  
**Illinois** - Chicago/Jesse Brown  
**Indiana** - Crown Point, Evansville, Marion  
**Iowa** - Des Moines, Iowa City, Knoxville  
**Kansas** - Leavenworth, Wichita  
**Kentucky** - Fort Thomas, Louisville  
**Louisiana** - Alexandria, New Orleans, Shreveport  
**Maine** - Togus  
**Massachusetts** - Jamaica Plain, Brockton  
**Michigan** - Gaylord  
**Montana** - Fort Harrison, Miles City  
**Missouri** - Columbia, Kansas City, Poplar Bluff, St Louis/Jefferson Barracks, St Louis/John Cochran  
**Mississippi** - Biloxi/Gulfport, Jackson  
**Nevada** - Las Vegas, Reno  
**New Jersey** - East Orange  
**New York** - Albany, Batavia, Bronx, Brooklyn, Castle Point, New York, North Point, St Albans, Syracuse  
**North Carolina** - Asheville, Fayetteville, Salisbury  
**Ohio** - Chillicothe, Cincinnati, Cleveland  
**Oklahoma** - Oklahoma City  
**Oregon** - Portland, Roseburg, White City  
**Pennsylvania** - Coatesville, Lebanon  
**Puerto Rico** - San Juan  
**Rhode Island** - Providence  
**South Carolina** - Charleston, Columbia  
**South Dakota** - Fort Meade, Hot Springs  
**Tennessee** - Memphis, Mountain Home, Murfreesboro, Nashville  
**Texas** - Amarillo, Kerrville, San Antonio, Temple  
**Utah** - Salt Lake City  
**Virginia** - Salem  
**Washington** - Tacoma, Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver  
**Wyoming** - Cheyenne, Sheridan



## What it takes to be a VAVS Rep

By **Bruno Williamson**  
*National VAVS Chairman*

What does it mean to be a VAVS Representative or Deputy? What are the duties? How does one become a Rep?

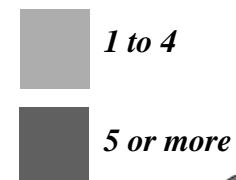
A VAVS Representative, or Deputy, is an appointed position. This person becomes a part of the VAVS committee at a Veterans Administration hospital or medical facility. His job is to serve in an advisory capacity to the Director and other concerned staff, to coordinate plans and policies for community participation in the VAVS Volunteer Program. The committee is, generally, chaired by the Associate Medical Director and the Deputy Chair is the Chief of Voluntary Service. Its members are the Representatives and Deputy Representatives of each service organization that is active at the hospital.

The duties of a Rep or Deputy are simple; attend the quarterly meetings and be an active participant; relay the information learned back to your detachment and down to the squadrons; keep them informed about the policies, procedures, needs and special programs of the hospital; serve on VAVS subcommittees and discussion or work/study groups. Remember, the Rep is the liaison between the hospital and the Detachment.

To qualify as a Rep, one should have sufficient time to attend VAVS quarterly meetings, participate in its activities, and want to help the

*Continued on Page 6*

# of VA hospitals without S.A.L. Reps



## Not a Rep? No sweat!

By **Douglas Murphy**  
*National VAVS Committeeman*

You don't have to be a VAVS Rep to volunteer at your local VA Hospital. Lots of hands and feet are needed to help with various programs and services.

You can't just walk in off the street and start volunteering, but the application process is not as difficult as it may sound at first. All you need to do is meet with the Chief of Volunteer Services at your VA facility and tell them you want to volunteer. They'll have you fill out a volunteer application and you'll be interviewed by a staff member to help match your interests with the programs that are available. You will be tested for TB and have your picture taken for an identification badge. Depending on your assignment, you may also be subject to a background check, based on fingerprints.

*Continued on Page 6*

## Four guys I will never be able to forget

By **Jerry Hjelle**  
*National VAVS Committeeman*

A while back, I lived close enough to volunteer at the Spokane VA Hospital's Nursing Home about three times a week. My main duties were to help the residents get ready for lunch, help them go to therapy, deal blackjack twice a week, and help with a BBQ on the last Thursday of each month.

There were four gentleman I still remember: One fought in the Battle of the Bulge, one was a Green Beret in Vietnam, another was nearly blind but had been a pilot who "flew the little planes that dropped sticks over Japan" (his words), and the fourth was a veteran who had to have his leg amputated at the knee. You can't imagine the stories I heard; none were the kind you'd find in a schoolbook today.

The one day that sticks out in my mind after all these years was Thanksgiving 2004. To start things off, the residents were asked what they would like for their Thanksgiving dinner. It was the day of the monthly BBQ and they didn't care about turkey or anything else. They just wanted BBQ so a few of us VSO's were happy to oblige.

After lunch it was time for me to deal cards. It didn't cost anything for them to play. Everyone was given 20 chips and if they lost them they were given 20 more. After two hours, we gave everyone a quarter for each chip they had left, money they used at the canteen. You'd think they were playing for a lot of money as seriously as they took the game for a while. We started playing with four people and, as more joined in, the stories and jokes started to fly. As the afternoon wore on the attitude was different. No one really cared about how many chips they had. If a player's pile got low, someone would slide them a few and the dealer took a card every now and then when he probably shouldn't have.

There were no "bosses" around to force an end to the game, so we kept on playing. They acted like young boys playing hooky from school. Some of them got tired but they wouldn't quit. They were having too much fun and being themselves.

Finally, it was dinner time and I got ready to hand out the chits.

Nobody wanted any. They all said that they'd had way too much fun to worry about chits.

I learned later on that those guys talked about that day for quit a while, calling it the best time they'd had for a very long time. I know it was a time I'll never forget.

## Peterson from Page 1

An article in the fall edition of the *National Update* newsletter generated dozens of calls and ideas. Negotiations on about half of those ideas resulted in six being chosen:

- March 11-14 Queen City, AZ
- April 22-25 Manchester, NH
- May 7-9 Columbus, OH
- June 3-6 Milington, TN
- June 18 Dearborn, MI
- October 17-24 Tomah, VA

As a Grammy nominated musician, Michael Peterson is the creator of the "My Real Life" tour. He is also a promoter of the "Tag, You're It" program for schools. He has also become a national spokesman for The American Legion.

*(Right) S.A.L. officers from Steelton, PA Squadron 420 join with representatives of the U.S. Army Recruiting Battalion-Harrisburg and sign a Community Covenant agreement. The program is a formal commitment by local communities designed to foster and sustain effective partnerships with the military, improving quality of life for service members and their families, both at their current duty stations and as they transfer to other states.*



*Members of Loudonville, OH Squadron 257 go to local veterans and nursing homes at Christmas, give gifts, make and serve pizzas. (Left) John Taylor, who served many years as Squadron, District and Department of Ohio S.A.L. Liaison, found himself on the receiving end of a gift from Detachment Finance Officer Bill "Buster" Sutterlin.*

## No Sweat from Page 5

All volunteers go through some education regarding patient safety, HIPPA, hospital rules, and VAVS procedures, but this is usually accomplished with reading materials and a take-home CD.

That's it!

If you want to serve as a regularly scheduled volunteer, you will be given an assignment that will become your routine. Not all jobs are done during the day. Some activities take place at night and on weekends when more volunteer help is available.

You can also sign up as an occasional volunteer, someone who can't work on a regularly scheduled basis. For example, special projects such as a stand down, or a welcome home event, or some other program held periodically. Maybe you can work Bingo once a month, or visit with veterans occasionally.

No matter what you choose to do or when you choose to do it, you will be helping our heroes, our veterans.

## VAVS from Page 4

veterans who use that facility. The Rep should have sufficient leadership ability to gain the respect and support of the Detachment they represent as well as the Squadrons who carry out events at the hospitals. The Rep must be able to understand and explain VAVS programs, the issues affecting the hospital and veterans, and not be afraid to coerce, cajole, plead, and/or beg for the volunteers and donations that will support the programs and events put on by the hospital.

Before serving as a Rep, an individual must be certified by his Detachment and recognized by the National Authorized Certifying Official.

### Membership Leaders

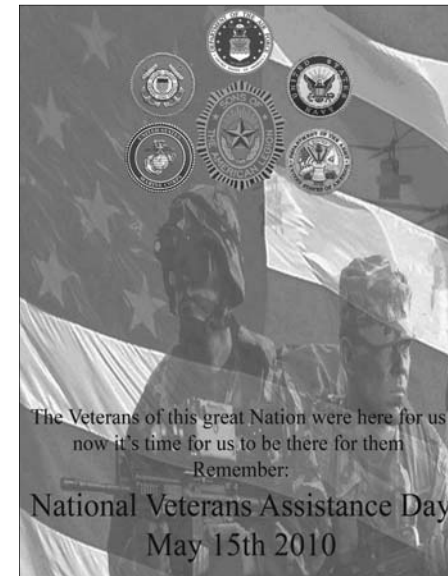
|                |      |
|----------------|------|
| Hawaii         | 151% |
| Mississippi    | 122% |
| Nevada         | 100% |
| Wyoming        | 89%  |
| Minnesota      | 88%  |
| Kansas         | 87%  |
| Wisconsin      | 87%  |
| North Carolina | 87%  |
| Georgia        | 87%  |
| Delaware       | 84%  |
| Florida        | 84%  |
| Michigan       | 84%  |
| Virginia       | 84%  |
| Oregon         | 83%  |
| Ohio           | 83%  |
| France         | 83%  |
| North Dakota   | 83%  |
| South Carolina | 83%  |
| Indiana        | 83%  |
| Pennsylvania   | 82%  |
| California     | 82%  |
| Illinois       | 82%  |
| Maryland       | 81%  |
| Montana        | 81%  |
| Vermont        | 81%  |
| South Dakota   | 81%  |

## S.A.L. volunteer awards handed out annually

Since 1989, the S.A.L. has recognized members for outstanding volunteer work at VA medical centers, hospitals and other facilities that provide care for vets.

Each year at the National Convention, the Sons' VA&R Commission selects a Squadron, a District and a Detachment for recognition based on information submitted in their Consolidated Report Forms. In addition, the S.A.L.'s most prolific volunteer is presented with The Charles B. Rigsby Memorial National Volunteer of the Year Award. Detachments may submit the name of one individual for this prestigious award. Nomination forms can be found in the S.A.L. Administrative Manual or downloaded from [www.sal.legion.org](http://www.sal.legion.org).

This year's recipient of the Rigsby Award is Earsel King of *Olive Hill, KY Squadron 138*, a man on a mission to provide assistance to veterans who are dealing with illness or rehabilitation issues. *(Above Right)*



## Consolidated Report Forms in the mail

The new S.A.L. Consolidated Squadron Report Form 2009-2010 was printed in December and mailed to each Detachment Adjutant in late January. The reporting data and form is basically the same, except for dates. Enough forms were printed to provide one to each Squadron. The number of reports received last year exceeded that of the previous year. Squadron leaders need to be aware of the importance of this annual report. Detailed instructions are contained on the cover of the report form. The reports should not be completed and mailed until the summer months, after Squadron elections have taken place.

*Demand has grown for a logo that encompasses the entire American Legion Family. Artists at National HQ have produced this new artwork. (Right) The logo is unofficial, but may be used throughout The Legion Family.*



## May 15 from Page 1

*national web site at [www.sal.legion.org](http://www.sal.legion.org) and hang in your Post home, nursing homes, or other veteran's halls. Use the poster to publicize your events in the media, on websites and in newsletters.*

We are a T.E.A.M - Together Everyone Achieves More.



*(Above) Sons from Braxton County, WV Sq 33 formed the Appalachian String Band and did some pickin' and grinnin' for patients at the Flatwoods VA.*

*(Left) New poster promoting National Veterans Assistance Day available to download from [www.sal.legion.org](http://www.sal.legion.org)*

## Convention notes

The 39th Annual National Convention of the Sons of The American Legion will be held in Milwaukee, WI this year on August 27, 28 and 29. All convention meetings and exhibits will be housed in the Midwest Airline Center.

Numerous tour packages are already available for booking. Tours will include such popular attractions as downtown Milwaukee, baseball games, nearby wineries, microbreweries, churches, museums and much more.

Judging will be held for all history books that are submitted this year. Now is the time to be working on the books. Bring them to the convention in August. Contact National Historian Brandon Roberts at [bsrdetachment@hotmail.com](mailto:bsrdetachment@hotmail.com) if you have questions about history books or the judging.

Additional information is available at [www.sal.legion.org](http://www.sal.legion.org) and at [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org).