

## NEVADA

For more than two years, **Chapter 17 in Las Vegas** has been collecting power chairs and refurbishing them for veterans with limited mobility. Gordon A.J. Souza is chairman of the Wheelchair Program. Both Chapter 17 and **Chapter 1076 in Henderson** help him collect and distribute the chairs; members of the community also assist by spreading the word about this program.

Souza, a retired Marine with the rank of Master Gunny Sergeant E9, works closely with the local VA hospital. He is often contacted by hospitals and social workers when wheelchairs become available, as well as when they're needed. Souza's website, <http://www.vva17lasvegas.org/wheelchair-program>, describes how the program works: "In 2013, there was a family reunion in Vegas and seven of the members were Vietnam veterans.... [One of them, a Marine] needed a wheelchair to get around with the rest of the family. They called on a Friday night and by Saturday morning they had what they needed."

Over the past two years, Souza has issued at least 30 electric wheelchairs, 20 scooters, 40 sit-down walkers, and 60 wheelchairs. Along the way, a computerized artificial leg was donated. "It took about a year," recalled Souza, "but finally I

found the right person who needed the limb." It was adjusted and fitted for a Marine who could not use the limb that had been provided to him and was not able to get the one he needed. This intervention improved his life substantially.

Souza has also helped Veterans Village, a transitional and permanent housing residence for United States Veterans, obtain scooters with headlights, to add to their mobility fleet at a time when they had no funds available for repairs. Other recipients have included Nellis Air Force Base, which received approximately 15 wheelchairs and one paraplegic chair with voice command; the Shriners, who received wheelchairs, electric wheelchairs, and sit-down walkers; and various seniors in the community.

For his volunteer services to veterans and to the community, Souza has received awards and certificates of appreciation from a number of organizations including Vietnam Veterans of America, the Senior Community of Dorothy Kidd Mobile Park, and the Marine Corps League. ■

## CONNECTICUT

Fourth-grade students in the reading enrichment program at Irving School in Derby, Connecticut, organized a book drive in January to help **Chapter 251 of Milford** in its support of veterans and their families. Besides setting up a collection box in the school gym for "gently used" books, the students contacted local businesses to ask if they could place collection boxes in their stores as well.

Patti Dumin, president of the VVA Connecticut State Council, attended the book drive's kick-off celebration with fellow Vietnam veteran Bob Chechoski. Dumin, an Air Force veteran who served from 1971 to 1986, said the books would be distributed to veterans and their families at VA hospitals and other facilities throughout the state. She addressed the students to thank them for "thinking of the Vietnam Veterans of America." She explained that when they returned from the war they "weren't

treated very nicely and couldn't get their benefits." "Our motto is 'Never again will one generation abandon another.'"

"It's nice to see this," said Chechoski, who served with the U.S. Air Force from 1964 to 1969 and is currently treasurer of Chapter 251. "Now people are recognizing veterans as they should."

Teacher Edwin Croft gave his students credit for coming up with the idea of a book drive as their community service project. He also thanked fellow teachers Holly Smith and Frank Briganti for helping with the project. Along with helping the community, these fourth-grade students had developed their planning, writing, and marketing skills in the process of publicizing the book drive. They had also gained the technical skills to create advertising posters, and produced a video to market the project. Their video can be seen on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/IYvOEjHoNCg>. ■

Let us know what your chapter has been doing to help our veterans, your community, and those serving in harm's way. Call **301-585-4000 x145** or e-mail **InService@vva.org**

Reconnect and get the latest news in *The VVA Veteran*.

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In Service to America

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# InService



HELPING VETERANS, COMMUNITIES, AND THOSE SERVING IN HARM'S WAY

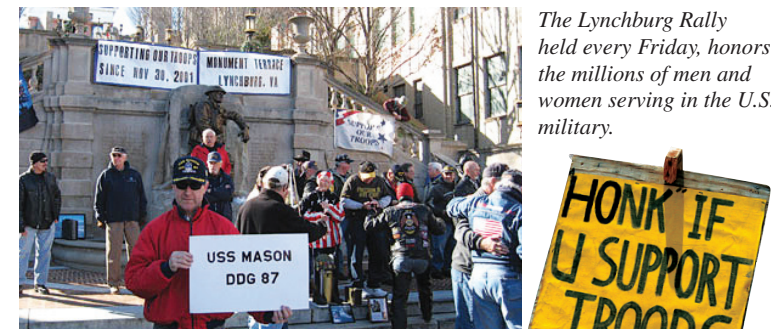
## VIRGINIA

**"Support our troops."** It's been a familiar phrase for a long time. You see it on bumper stickers, you hear it on television. For some, it's just the right thing to say. But for many others, it's a sincere declaration.

Every Friday starting at noon—for almost seven hundred consecutive Fridays now—a group of veterans, including VVA members, meets at the street-side base of Memorial Terrace in downtown Lynchburg, Virginia, and stages a rally in honor of the millions of men and women wearing U.S. military uniforms. They set up signs saying things like, "Thank God for Our Troops," and "Honk if U Support Troops." They hoist American flags, some of which have flown in Iraq or Afghanistan. They make a point of talking with the many passers-by who are drawn to the activity.

"When someone walks up with a perplexed look, I go up and tell them what's going on and invite them to stick around," says David Stokes, president of **Lynchburg Chapter 196**.

What's going on is essentially a weekly ritual of reminding the public that, regardless of one's political beliefs, American servicemen and women deserve recognition and appreciation. "We're non-political, non-sectarian, and we're veterans from different wars," Stokes says. Those who fought in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan are all represented.



The Lynchburg Rally held every Friday, honors the millions of men and women serving in the U.S. military.



The rally begins around 10:00 a.m. and officially ends at 1:00, when everyone recites the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (on a boom box), a salute of the flag, and the benediction. One week later, it all happens again—with a lot of the same faces. Veteran status isn't required: **Anyone who wants to be part of the rally is welcome.** ■

## LOUISIANA

On Veterans Day 2014, at a ceremony in honor of veterans at the Vinton Town Hall, members of **Chapter 1058 of Jennings** gave two presentations. The first was to explain each piece of the Fallen Soldier Battle Cross, and the second was to describe the symbolism of the POW/MIA White Table. For the past four decades, tables like it have been set across America as a remembrance of service members who have fallen, or who are missing or held captive, in the line of duty.



When a serviceman or woman is lost in the battlefield, it has become customary to arrange their rifle pointing downward along with their boots and helmet. Squad members gather around and memorialize their fallen comrades. Some of the troops will pray, others might recall personal stories. But make no mistake, this is a ceremony that is taken very seriously. Every soldier knows the next ceremony might be for him.

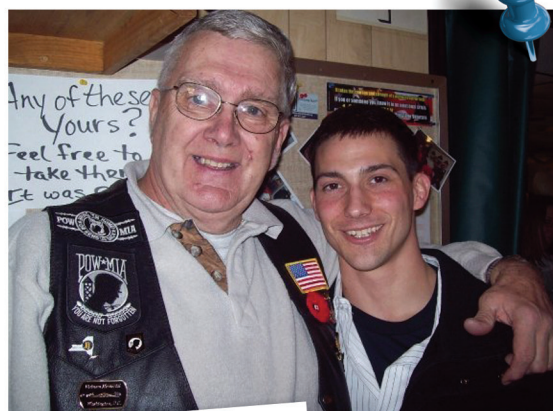
Dog tags identify the soldier's name so she will never be forgotten. The helmet is also a symbol of this great sacrifice. Combat boots represent the final march of the soldier's last battle.

>> More chapter news inside.

★★★★★ WE WILL BE HERE FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES ★★★★★



# VVA CHAPTERS ACROSS AMERICA



## NEW JERSEY

When Greg Mazotta was president of **Chapter 955 in Wildwood**, “The Wall that Heals,” a traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (“the Wall”) in Washington, D.C., visited Wildwood in July 2008. The impact of that event inspired him to initiate a campaign to bring a permanent memorial wall to Wildwood. Following Mazzotta’s death in September 2008, his cousin Vince DePrinzio -- currently treasurer of Chapter 955 -- took over the project. “It was Greg’s dream to have an enduring memorial to Vietnam veterans here in Wildwood,” said DePrinzio, who led the effort to construct a permanent wall.

Groundbreaking for the Wildwood Vietnam Veterans Remembrance Wall was on Veterans Day 2009, and the wall was completed in 2010. Designed as an exact, half-size, black granite replica of The Wall in Washington, D.C., it stretches 240 feet along the sidewalks of Columbus Park, and the names of our country’s 58,913 fallen heroes from the Vietnam War are etched on its panels.

Among the names are those of 22 fallen service members from Cape May County and 9 from Wildwood. To honor these and all veterans, members of Chapter 955 have established a tradition of visiting the memorial with local 3rd graders every Veterans Day, and meeting with a local 6th grade class every Memorial Day. ■



Vietnam veteran Larry Nutt, with an associate member.



Active associate members Wayne Griffith and Lee Hazelton.

## NEW YORK

In Jamestown, members of **Chapter 865** strive to make veterans of all ages and wars feel that VVA is home. The chapter offers a warm and friendly environment where veterans feel comfortable sharing their experiences and struggles.

In addition to helping active-duty military and veterans, the chapter gives back to their community by working with Meals on Wheels, the St. Susan Center, and other charities. Recently chapter members raised more than \$4,000 for a local toddler diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. ■

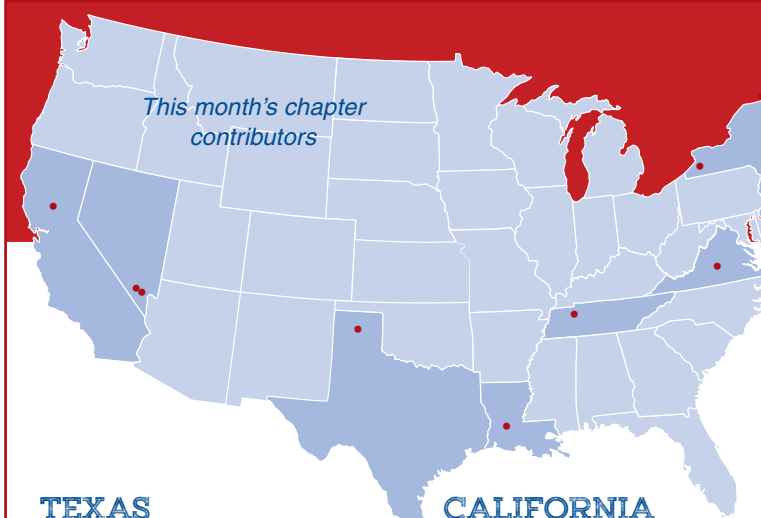
Dennis Forster in 1969 with 101st, D Co., 158th Avn. Bn.



Mike Kitterman with his ship at Fort Hood museum.

## SHADOWS OF AN ERA COLLECTION

Throughout each issue of InService, we will be featuring photos from the *Shadows of an Era Collection*. All photos in this issue from the Vietnam War era were submitted by the veterans depicted in the photos or by their family and friends. ■

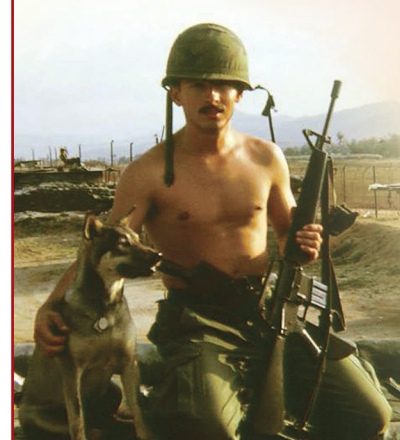


## TEXAS

Members of **Chapter 1029 in DeWitt County** recently built an 18-foot ramp with hand rails and installed a new storm door for a local veteran who is partially disabled. To help make Dennis Pargman’s house accessible, Kenneth Buenger loaned his trailer and donated wood for construction of the ramp, while Steve Kolhoff, manager of Alamo Lumber Co., donated a new storm door and other necessary items. Veterans who volunteered to do the work included Lloyd Kimes, Bill Bertholf, and Frank Ybarra.

For Chapter 1029, this was just one way to carry out VVA’s dedication to the fellowship and ideals of Vietnam veterans and their families. The chapter meets on the second Tuesday of each month in Yorktown, and welcomes requests from anyone who knows of a local veteran or his family in need. ■

Paul Dufault and Honey Dew, Americal, Div, LZ Bronco, Duc Pho, Vietnam 1970.



## CALIFORNIA

As part of their commitment to helping veterans readjust to civilian life, members of **Chapter 582 in Butte County** are working with younger veterans to address the problem of PTSD. Chapter members Stephen “Tank” Konstenius and Carl “Butch” Frederickson, who both suffered PTSD following their service in Vietnam, now meet to share their struggles with veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.



Vietnam War veterans Stephen “Tank” Konstenius and Carl “Butch” Frederickson during an interview at the Veterans Hall in Chico.

Chapter President Frederickson is executive director of VECTORS, a transitional housing facility for homeless veterans. “We don’t give them money, but we pay directly for expenses,” said Frederickson. “That could be a PG&E bill, building a ramp for a home, or bus passes to medical appointments.”

Konstenius served three tours in Vietnam. Despite suffering from PTSD and battling with substance abuse, he later received a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Oakland University, as well as degrees in medical psychology and psycho-pharmacology from Harvard Medical School. Acclimation to everyday life continued to be a struggle for Konstenius, though, until he found a VVA chapter and connected with others who were experiencing the same issues.

With the benefit of relatively new understanding and acknowledgment of PTSD, Konstenius and Frederickson now enjoy helping other veterans in their community readjust and move forward. ■

## TENNESSEE

**Chapter 1089 in Smyrna**, formed less than a year ago, has already donated five refurbished motorized wheelchairs to veterans in need. Chapter President Keith Rudlaff found the first wheelchair on Craigslist, and connected with a fellow Vietnam veteran who had years of experience working on chairs. Together they were able to restore the chair, and they now continue to locate, refurbish, and distribute chairs as part of their Wheels for Veterans program.

One of the first recipients was Hubert Tolgroves, a disabled Vietnam veteran in need of a chair. Tolgroves had been confined to his home for four months while waiting for a chair from the VA. He’s still waiting to meet with a doctor to determine whether he qualifies for a motorized wheelchair from the VA, but in the meantime he has mobility thanks to Rudlaff and Chapter 1089.

After hearing Tolgroves’ story, another veteran contacted Rudlaff and donated his used chair so that the chapter could give it to a disabled veteran. The chapter has also recently installed ramps at a local church, and hopes to become the go-to place for veterans who are in need of crutches, hospital beds, rehab chairs, and other medical equipment. ■



Greg Jayne on the day after the Camp Evans ammo dump conflagration.

