

InService



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

ARIZONA

Gold Star Mother Debbie Lee has been an active, vocal supporter of U.S. troops and their families ever since her son, Marc Alan Lee, was killed on August 2, 2006, the first Navy Seal to lose his life in Operation Iraqi Freedom. She created the nonprofit organization **Mighty Warriors** in response to her son's last letter home, and more recently she founded **Heroes Hope Home**, located in Surprise, AZ, as a retreat for the families of fallen service members.

After Lee spoke to members of **West Valley Chapter 1043** at a recent chapter meeting, they decided to help renovate the backyard of **Heroes Hope Home** in order to better accommodate guests. Chapter 1043 hired a contractor who designed and built a stone gas fire pit that incorporated the logos of each branch of service and a flagpole.

"I was out there before everybody started showing up," said chapter member **Tim Clark**. "It's peaceful. It's perfect, I think."



DC METRO AREA

Chapter 958 in **Washington, D.C.**, donated \$500 to purchase new coats for homeless and at-risk veterans who attended the 20th annual **Winterhaven Homeless Stand Down** at the **Washington, D.C., Veterans Affairs Medical Center** on January 25. In addition

to the chapter's donation, chapter vice president **Lawrence Carter** and his wife **Delores** personally donated more than 40 coats. All in all, VVA was able to provide more than 400 new winter coats to homeless or at-risk veterans who attended the event. **Sharon Hodge**, VVA Associate Director of Government Affairs, along with members of **The Dean K. Phillips Memorial Chapter 227** in **Arlington, VA**, and **Chapter 641** in **Silver Spring, MD**, also assisted with the clothing giveaway.

OREGON

On Memorial Day 2014, representatives of **VVA's Oregon State Council** will see the culmination of their efforts to dedicate **Interstate 84** as the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway**. The renamed 370-mile highway, from the **Oregon/Idaho** border to **Portland**, will be a tribute to all Vietnam veterans as well as the first highway in Oregon honoring veterans of the Vietnam era. It will be dedicated on May 26 at the **Oregon Veterans Home** in **The Dalles**, which overlooks the highway and the **Columbia River**.

To accompany the renaming, 15 signs will be placed along Oregon's **Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway**, seven in the eastbound direction and eight westbound. **VVA State Council** representatives are raising money to purchase and install the signs.

The **Oregon State Council** also held a series of **Agent Orange Town Hall** meetings for the month of May, to educate **Vietnam Veterans** and their families about the effects of **Agent Orange** on both veterans and their descendants. More information on this subject can be found in the **May/June 2012** issue of *The VVA Veteran*, which is now online at vvaveteran.org.

>> More chapter news inside.



VVA CHAPTERS ACROSS AMERICA



From Left: Al Paolucci, Gene DiGiacomo, and Dr. Joe Coppola.

NEW YORK

Each year, **Thomas J. Tori Chapter 421** in **Staten Island** holds a Day of Remembrance to recognize the 85 Staten Islanders who lost their lives in Vietnam. But as Chapter 421's members grow older, they are increasingly concerned about who will take care of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park in West Brighton, which they dedicated in May 1988.

After obtaining the rights to maintain the memorial more than 10 years ago, Chapter 421 upgraded the lighting, installed a sprinkler system, redid the fencing, provided trees, power-washed the memorial, and hired a landscaper to care for the grounds.

"This is hallowed ground as far as we are concerned," said chapter president Gene DiGiacomo. "We take it seriously."

To raise funds for the resurfacing of the memorial park, Chapter 421 is now selling memorial stone pavers that can be engraved with dedications to loved ones or friends. The dedicated pavers will be placed on the memorial's grassy portions, which will allow the park to remain pristine even without regular maintenance. "We know we will not be here forever," said DiGiacomo, "and we want to make sure this stays intact and retains its beauty."



NORTH CAROLINA

In 2013, **Moore County Chapter 966** donated more than \$6,500 to help active-duty servicemen and their families, as well as more than \$900 for veteran support programs. Chapter members also donate their time and talents to other veterans service organizations, aiding those in need.

One young serviceman recently approached the chapter because his son was born with a cranial deformity and their insurance would not cover the costs of a corrective procedure. The family was able to raise half of the funds and the chapter provided the other half.

Another young veteran, Ethan Young, needed a heat pump for his family's home but didn't have the money. He and his wife were worried about their 16-month-old daughter being cold. After learning of the Young family's situation, Chapter 966 members worked with heating contractor Matt Bialer, the owner of TempControl, who donated his time to install a used heat pump. The chapter also bought replacement parts.

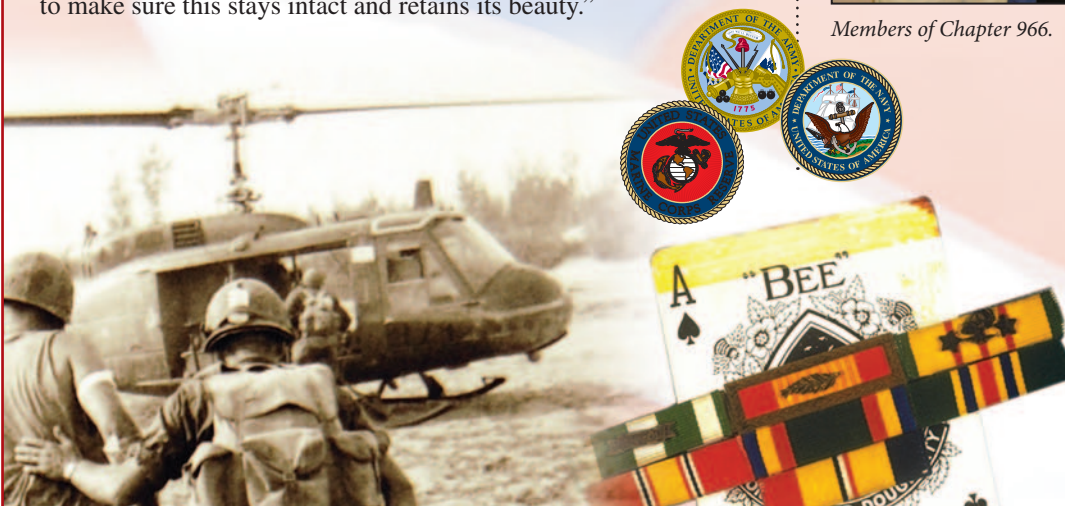
Now in a better financial situation, Ethan's wife, Kate Young, recently handed an envelope to AVVA member Sandy Carl. "Can you take this back to the chapter, please?" she asked. "We'd like to be able to help someone else." ■

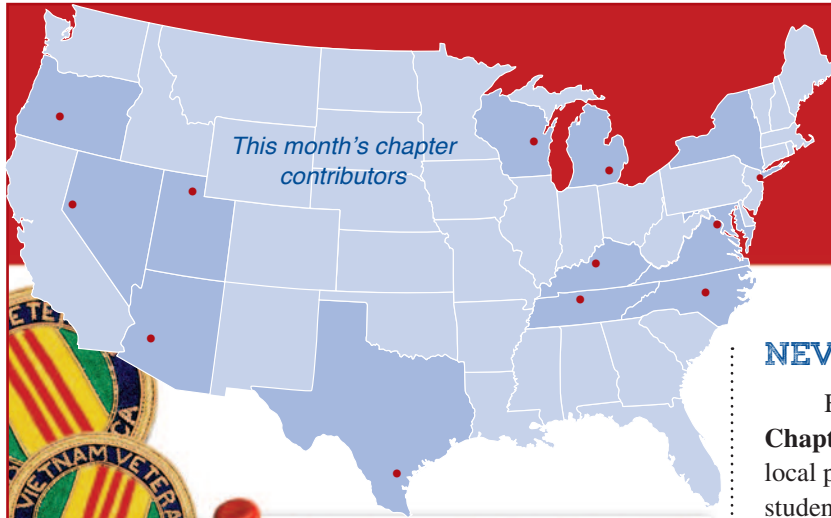


Members of Chapter 966.



Chapter 966 helped veteran Ethan Young and his wife Kate with a heat pump.





Ram Chavez stands next to fellow veterans at the 2014 U.S. Army All-American Bowl.

TEXAS

Corpus Christi Chapter 910 was honored at the All-American Army Bowl in San Antonio. Chapter president Ram Chavez led the chapter members to the game, where they were recognized during a pre-game ceremony. "The All American Army Bowl has been honoring and recognizing our Army veterans for a while; this will be my fourth Bowl," said Chavez. "The recognition of Vietnam veterans has been late in coming, but it has finally arrived for many Vietnam Veterans," he added.

Chavez was recently interviewed about his war experiences by students at Del Mar College as part of the Veterans History Project. The VHP, a project of the Library of Congress, allows students and others across the country to take part in recording history by collecting veterans' first-person accounts of war for the Library of Congress. According to the project's website (www.loc.gov/vets/kit.html), a VHP participant may be "a veteran, an interviewer, or person donating a veteran's collection," and "students in the 10th grade and above may also participate."



NEVADA

Following seven months of fundraising efforts, **Sierra Nevada Chapter 989** presented scholarships to four veterans graduating from local post-secondary schools. Working with Wolf Pack Veterans, a student-run organization at the University of Nevada, the chapter had launched the Student Veteran's Scholarship program by selling raffle tickets. In February, Chapter 989 hosted an awards ceremony and presented a total of \$3,000 in scholarship money to four student veterans.



Ashley Walker



Richard Valach



Joe Alton



Matthew Petty

Recipients included **Ashley Walker**, a United States Marine Corps veteran at the University of Nevada, Reno, who is pursuing a criminal justice degree and intends to work in public service. An award for Western Nevada College in Carson City was split between two students: **Richard Valach**, an information technology student and United States Army veteran, and United States Marine Corps veteran **Joe Alton**, an industrial arts student. An award for Truckee Meadows Community College went to **Matthew Petty**, USAF retired, who is a paralegal student. Petty was cheered on by his wife, along with members of the student veteran club and a roomful of proud Vietnam veterans.

Wolf Pack Veterans was founded in 2006 to support returning veterans who are pursuing an education. The organization's president, Zack Totans, said: "On behalf of all of the members of Wolf Pack Veterans, I would like to personally thank the members of the VVA Chapter 989 for their dedication and support of student veterans at the University of Nevada, Reno." He added that the members of VVA Chapter 989 "are outstanding individuals and a great example of the unity that exists between veterans of all generations." ■

TENNESSEE

Walt Peters, a 70-year-old blind Vietnam War veteran and a member of **Sumner County Chapter 240**, has made it his mission to place a plaque of the American flag embossed with the Pledge of Allegiance in Braille in every veterans' hospital in the United States. In March 2014, Peters presented the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Nashville with the first such Braille flag in Tennessee. The plaque was placed at the VAMC's Low Vision Clinic, and dedicated with a small ceremony.

The plaque is made by Kansas Braille Transcription Institute in Wichita, and has been accepted by Congress as the official American Braille Flag. Chapter 240 funded Tennessee's first plaque, and Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA) members have voted to fund a second one, which will be placed in the Veterans Memorial Park on Memorial Day. Chapters interested in providing a plaque for their local VA hospital may contact Walt at 912-210-0332. ■



KENTUCKY

Every month, **Kentuckiana Chapter 454** in Louisville visits a ward at the local VA Medical Center for a “movie and popcorn” night for patients and staff. The chapter also replenishes snacks and drinks for the hospital, and chapter members escort patients to and from various activities.

WISCONSIN

Appleton Chapter 351 recently donated \$500 to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, to help sponsor the VVMF’s Education Center. When completed, the Education Center will be located on the National Mall near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and will tell the story of the more than 58,000 U.S. service men and women who lost their lives in the Vietnam War.

VVMF Founder and President Jan C. Scruggs sent Chapter 351 a thank-you letter in which he wrote: “It is with the help of people like you that our work—and this new Education Center—will go forward for future generations. Thank you for your kindness and for ensuring that those who fell in Vietnam will never be forgotten.”

UTAH

In February, members of **Northern Utah Chapter 1079** were invited onto the floor of the Utah State Senate for the vote on House Bill 275, in which March 29 was designated as Vietnam Veterans Day in Utah. Chapter members received a Senate Challenge coin and a standing ovation. In addition, each Senator shook the hand of all the Vietnam Veterans who were there.

Chapter 1079 president Dennis Howland spearheaded the bill, and on March 29 the Utah Governor signed it into law at a Welcome Home ceremony. Howland’s next mission is to lobby national lawmakers for a national observance day for Vietnam veterans. “We’ve been fighting for this, in a lot of ways, since we came home from Vietnam,” said Howland. ■

Front row, from left to right: Utah Executive Director of Veteran and Military Affairs Gary Harter, third from left Utah State Representative Curtis Oda. Second row: Members of Chapter 1079 with Utah State Senator Peter Knudson.



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

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**.

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