Veterans Day Tribute in Milton
By Mike Guilbault, Community Outreach Director

On November 7, NEPVA was invited to Cunningham Elementary School for a special event they have done the last few years. In preparation for Veterans Day the students are taught about what the holiday is all about, and then they write an essay about veterans. The school has incorporated a “Bring your veteran to school day” where any student with a veteran family member can bring them to school. These students then get to miss a few early class periods to attend this special event with their veteran, whether a grandfather, uncle, cousin, dad, aunt or mom. It is an impressive array of veterans and some active duty personnel. I personally had a great chat with a WWII Army Air Corps veteran.

We assembled in the library and two essays were read by one boy and one girl student who wrote them. I can say they did great public speaking, especially considering the large crowd including dignitaries, their principal and all the veterans. Then a veteran was asked to address the students. This year one student’s vet was a National Guard Brigadier General who spoke a bit about the history of Veterans Day and then took questions from the students. The very impressive part of the event followed; we moved outside where a National Guard Color Guard then raised the colors. The 5th grade chorus then performed three patriotic songs and sounded great, the harmonizing was very impressive and it was a quite moving ceremony. Congrats to the chorus and their music teacher who they made quite proud that morning. The veterans all gathered for a photo and the students then returned to class and their veteran headed home.

This is where my fun begins, our NEPVA group then moved to the gym where we presented our “What’s it Like” program to the 4th grade classes. We spoke a bit about our disabilities and also about how some can be born with a disability, and it’s possible they could meet children their own age or even have a classmate in a wheelchair. Our message to them is that although we may need to do things a bit differently, we enjoy and do many of the same things they and their

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PARALYZED VETERANS of AMERICA
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Monthly meetings are held every first Wednesday of the month at the NEPVA office in Walpole, Ma. The executive board meets at 10:30 a.m. followed by the regular membership meeting at 1:00 p.m.

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First and foremost, I hope all of our Chapter staff, members, VA staff, and volunteers had an enjoyable Thanksgiving. I would also like to extend Holiday wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. It is a wonderful time to catch up with family and friends and to be thankful for all we have in our lives versus what we do not have. With the New Year not far away, many take the time to think of a New Year’s Resolution or two, maybe even doing so with friends or family. Whether it’s losing some weight, quitting smoking, projects, or a hobby you’ve been meaning to do but just haven’t done thus far, think about it and maybe even give a New Year’s Resolution a try.

On November 5th, the day of our Chapter BOD meeting, I had a very productive meeting with our auditor Jason Clauson. He will be conducting our annual audit and we went over financial matters and discussed suggestions pertaining to our organization. Once the audit is completed, we will forward our financial statements to the necessary parties (the State of Massachusetts and the PVA National Office).

While it may be somewhat of a biased comment, I’d like to wish fellow Marine Corps veterans a belated happy birthday. On November 10, 2014, the USMC celebrated its 239th birthday. The following day, I was fortunate to attend Veterans Day ceremonies in Washington DC. National PVA staff, Officers, and I had the pleasure of sitting in the front row of the ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (see photo below). Guests included Master of Ceremonies Jake Tapper from CNN’s The Lead; Robert Vogel, Superintendent, National Mall and Memorial Parks; and the Keynote Speaker was The Honorable Charles T. Hagel, Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense. I would highly recommend a visit to Washington DC to see the various memorials and monuments, and especially on Veterans Day. It is always a very moving experience in remembering our fallen service-members, those retired who honorably served our country, and also those currently serving our country here and abroad.

While at the airport making my way back home from Washington DC, I crossed paths and chatted with a friend of the Chapter & PVA National, Congressman Jim Langevin (D-RI). We had a very nice discussion and the Congressman has always been supportive of our Chapter and needs for veterans and the disabled community.

As always, feel free to visit NEPVA’s web site (www.nepva.org), PVA’s web site (www.pva.org), and the VA’s web site (www.va.gov) for up to date and recent news. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please contact our office or your local NSO.

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Carole Brunelle
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**$25**
Edward Slattery
Port Orange, FL
Executive Director’s Report

What Support Can We Get?

Wow, Thanksgiving has come and gone with Christmas & New Year’s not far behind. I sincerely hope everyone had a good Thanksgiving and is looking forward to continuing the holiday season in good health, good spirits, and a bright outlook for 2015.

I was grateful to attend the Women Veterans’ Appreciation Day at the State House on November 6th and to honor the Woman Veteran of the Year – U.S.A.F. Colonel Julie Hall. I also attended the Commonwealth of MA’s State Veterans’ Ceremony on the 11th. Thank you all for your service to our country.

Now that elections are over, what exactly does that mean to you the veteran who uses VA services? The Republican party will be running both Houses of Congress for the next two years. I have to state, be careful what you wish for, you just might get it.

I hope you recall I mentioned in a recent article about the visit from VA Secretary McDonald. The Secretary commented that he does not want to dismantle the VA nor does he believe vouchers will be the answer. Yet, The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) of 2014, authorized back in early August, went into effect November 5th, 2014.

From a recent letter Secretary McDonald issued to all Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) via our National PVA office, part of the letter states: “The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA), enacted less than 3-months ago, goes a long way toward enabling VA to meet the demand for Veterans health care in the short-term. VA has put considerable focus and attention on ensuring the law is implemented seamlessly, without confusion, and without creating hardships for Veterans. This legislation provides authorities, funding, and other tools to better serve Veterans in the short-term. . . .”

In another paragraph, Secretary McDonald mentions again what is supposed to be a temporary program: The Veterans Choice Program, part of the VACAA. This will allow veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. Keep in mind, the Choice Program is supposed to be temporary in order for the VA to hire more physicians and other needed personnel. While some were aware of this prior to voting, I would seriously keep this in mind when voting in 2016. At the very least, the current Administration has always provided VA with more funds based on the VSO Independent Budget. PVA is sending you a letter concerning this very issue, please take the time to read it. For me personally, I’ll keep VA healthcare as long as I can, thanks!

Moving on to a more local Chapter issue - Transportation! Many organizations are in the same boat because it is

...the New England Chapter provided approximately 655 rides throughout all of New England from October 2013 through September of 2014... But we are in serious financial trouble. It truly breaks my heart that we may have to shut the program down.

Woman Veteran of the Year – U.S.A.F. Colonel Julie Hall
National Director’s Report

Fall PVA National Board of Directors Meeting 2014

On September 29 to October 1, PVA held its Fall Board of Directors meeting in Dallas, Texas. The meeting was attended by our National President, Executive Committee members, Chapter Presidents and National Directors, and Chapter Executive Directors. Experiencing this for the first time was indeed an educational experience. The business of our organization was handled in a very professional manner closely following Roberts Rules and accomplishing much in a short time. Having Chapter President Craig Cascella, with his years of experience as a National Director close at my side, I was able to look to him to direct me to the appropriate section of the resolutions and other documents being discussed.

One of the many issues discussed and passed dealt with Chapter bylaws. This is a project that the PVA legal staff has been working on for the past several years and they have developed a template, if you will, for all of the Chapters so that we are consistent across the nation in terms of policy and direction. The template had been reviewed by PVA’s legal staff to insure that it complies with the state law for all of the Chapters and after review it was adopted by the body. There is a universal effort to get each and every Chapter is strongly encouraged to have each member of their board of directors trained so they will understand the issues as they may be brought forward by the HLO. There should be an HLO for every HUB and SPOKE in the SCI/SCD system of care and that person is tasked to work closely with the National Service Officer at the respective hospitals.

On the second day of the meeting, I was called out by the medical staff who sent me to the Dallas SCI to be examined secondary to a backward fall that had caused bleeding inside my skull. While all turned out fine and I even got a flu shot before leaving, I have to say that I was most impressed with the Dallas SCI clinic and the fact that our NSO there had an office inside the clinic where our members and anyone else going into the SCI had immediate access to him.

Our donations to medical research, sports programs, and support of individual members far out-stretch a large majority of the other Chapters.

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VA Means Test Update 01, Net Worth No Longer a Factor

Submitted by John Stansbury, Senior NSO, ME/NH/VT

To align VA’s healthcare program with the financial assessment requirements for other federal healthcare programs, the SECVA has approved a process change to cease collection of veterans’ net worth information for purposes of means testing for health benefits. Effective Jan. 1, 2015, VA will only consider a veterans’ previous year’s gross household income (earned and unearned income) and deductible expenses to determine eligibility and/or copay responsibility for purposes of VA healthcare enrollment/benefit purposes. Note. This does not impact net worth development for purposes of VHA’s Extended Care Services or VBA’s Pension Program. Software changes to remove the net worth prompts from VistA and the Enrollment System are expected to be released in second quarter FY 15. Until the software is implemented, VA intake staff will enter “zero-dollars” ($0) into the net worth prompts for new applicants’ or when updating an existing enrollees’ Means Test. Changes to the online application and VA Forms 10-10EZ/EZR and 10-10HS are expected to be available by January 1, 2015. VA will be sending letters to current enrollees who may benefit from this change. Point of Contact: Ms. Benita Miller, Health Eligibility Center Director, Benita.Miller@va.gov or (404) 828-5300. (Source: NAUS Weekly Update November 07, 2014)
Happy Holidays!
Where did this year go?

I hope everyone has sent in their applications for the Winter Sports Clinic at Mount Sunapee, NH. Once again it promises to be a great week.

For those of you who are unaware, our good friend and one of the hardest workers in Wheelchair Sport and Recreation, Ralph Marche has retired from the VA. Ralph has been instrumental in so many programs including our Winter and Summer Sports Clinics and so many other activities. On a good note I am sure we will still see Ralph at our clinics. From all of us at NEPVA we wish him the best of luck and a happy and well deserved retirement!

I was unable to attend the Paralympic Experience that was held at Harvard University hosted by Adaptive Sports New England, however I received all of the feedback on this great day! On November 16th everyone from Spaulding Rehab, Loon Mt. and Gaylord Hospital in CT and many others came in town to show us all of the adaptive sports that are available to us. The event was well received with many novice and Paralympic athletes attending. Joe Walsh, from Adaptive Sports New England promises this is just the beginning of these clinics.

Of course our Winter Sports Clinic is going on from January 12 thru 16th at Mt. Sunapee and I hope that everyone is registered as I said earlier.

Also coming up on January 18th from 9:30 till 12:00 at Nobles Arena in Dedham there will be Sled Hockey. For those of you who have not tried it, you would love it.

Also, beginning January 26th at the Westin Ski Track (Leo J Martin Golf Course) in Westin, MA we will begin our Cross Country Skiing. Of course that is weather permitting! For these last 2 events please contact Jenny McLaughlin at the Brockton VA for more information.

In next month’s article I will be doing a year in review, to look at all that we have accomplished this year and hope to have lots of photos.

We are also looking for Veterans interested in Curling, please let Jenny or myself know if you are interested in a clinic on Cape Cod? That’s it for this month and once again, there is plenty to do, so get out there and do it!

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A MESSAGE FROM THE VA SECRETARY

An Open Letter to America’s Veterans

At the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), we have one of the most noble and inspiring missions in Government. I accepted this job and joined this mission to better serve you—our Veterans—and improve the delivery of the care and benefits you have earned. It is our privilege to serve you, and I have made clear that as we move forward as a Department, we will judge the success of all our efforts against a single metric—the outcomes we provide for Veterans.

The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA), enacted less than 3-months ago, goes a long way toward enabling VA to meet the demand for Veterans health care in the short-term. VA has put considerable focus and attention on ensuring the law is implemented seamlessly, without confusion, and without creating hardships for Veterans. This legislation provides authorities, funding, and other tools to better serve Veterans in the short-term. We are appreciative of this temporary measure to improve access while we build capacity within the VA system to better serve those who rely on us for health care.

From June 1 to September 30, 2014, VA completed more than 19 million Veteran appointments in our facilities and made nearly 1.1 million authorizations for Veterans to receive care in the private sector and other non-VA health facilities—a 46.6-percent increase over the same period in 2013. This was all done under existing programs prior to the passage of VACAA, and sets the stage for strengthening existing partnerships between VA and the private sector. We have much we can share with one another to the benefit of Veterans.

VA has signed contracts with two private health care companies to help VA administer the Veterans Choice Program (Choice Program) under VACAA. The Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit allowing some Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. It does not impact your existing VA health care or any other VA benefit you may be receiving. We will begin implementing this benefit on November 5, as required by law. A call center is now operational to answer your questions and verify your eligibility for this program.

As part of this new program, we are issuing a Veterans Choice Card to every Veteran who is potentially eligible for the new, temporary health benefit. The Choice Card allows Veterans to elect to receive care outside of VA when they qualify for the new program based on the distance of their residence from a VA care facility, or when wait times for VA health care exceed the standards established in law. The Choice Card does not replace the identification card you already use to access other VA benefits; please do not throw away that identification card.

The Choice Card will be issued in three phases. The first group of Choice Cards along with a letter explaining eligibility for this program is currently being sent to Veterans who may live more than 40 miles from a VA facility. The next group of Choice Cards and letters will be sent shortly thereafter to those Veterans who are currently waiting for an appointment longer than 30-days from their preferred date or the date determined to be medically necessary by their physician.

The final group of Choice Cards and letters will be sent between December 2014 and January 2015 to the remainder of all Veterans enrolled for VA health care who may be eligible for the Choice Program in the future.

We are continuing to work with our partners—Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, and others—to get the information about this health program out to Veterans in as many ways as possible. Please visit our Web site at www.va.gov/opa/choiceact where we have provided helpful information on Choice Program eligibility. We will work with our partners to keep you informed as we improve our delivery of high-quality, timely care.

Thank you for your service and sacrifice.

Sincerely,

Robert A. McDonald
How Can I Protect Myself Against Flu?

Yearly flu vaccination is the best tool currently available to protect against influenza (flu).

While how well the flu vaccine works can vary, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a yearly flu vaccination as the first and most important step in protecting against flu and its potentially serious complications. Millions of people have safely received flu vaccines for decades. Flu vaccination can reduce flu illnesses, doctors’ visits, and missed work and school due to flu, as well as prevent flu-related hospitalizations and deaths.

Recent studies by CDC researchers and other experts indicate that flu vaccine reduces the risk of doctor visits due to flu by approximately 60% among the overall population when the vaccine viruses are like the ones spreading in the community.

A flu vaccination does not guarantee protection against the flu. Some people who get vaccinated might still get sick. However, people who get a flu vaccine are less likely to get sick with flu than someone who does not get vaccinated.

Why should I get the flu vaccine? There are lots of reasons to get a flu vaccine each year.

- Flu vaccination can keep you from getting sick from flu. Protecting yourself from flu also protects the people around you who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness.

- Flu vaccination can help protect people who are at greater risk of getting seriously ill from flu, like older adults, people with chronic health conditions and young children (especially infants younger than 6 months old who are too young to get vaccinated).

- Flu vaccination also may make your illness milder if you do get sick.

- Flu vaccination can reduce the risk of more serious flu outcomes, like hospitalizations and deaths.

One study showed that flu vaccination was associated with a 71% reduction in flu-related hospitalizations among adults of all ages and a 77% reduction among adults 50 years of age and older during the 2011-2012 flu season.

Flu vaccination is an important preventive tool for people with chronic health conditions. Vaccination was associated with lower rates of some cardiac events among people with heart disease, especially among those who had had a cardiac event in the past year. Flu vaccination also has been shown to be associated with reduced hospitalizations among people with diabetes and chronic lung disease.

Other studies have shown that vaccination can reduce the risk of flu-related hospitalizations in older adults. A study that looked at flu vaccine effectiveness over the course of three flu seasons estimated that flu vaccination lowered the risk of hospitalizations by 61% in people 50 years of age and older.

Call the SCI clinic to schedule your FLU Vaccine today!

The Flu vaccine is currently available at the VA, please call the SCI clinic at the West Roxbury Campus at 857-203-6455 or at your local VA to schedule a Flu vaccine. Or stop by the clinic when you are at the VA.

Please call the clinic if you have received the vaccine in the community so that your medical record can be updated with this information. We all need to do our part to reduce the spread of Influenza!!
families do. Then they really experience “What’s it like” to be in a wheelchair. We break the classes into groups and while some shoot baskets standing up and then try shooting from a wheelchair, others get to get into wheelchairs and try maneuvering them around a course of cones we set up for them. This is great fun and educational for both the students and us. After playing with us we then gather again for a question and answer session. The questions are always very interesting and impress me with how intelligent fourth graders can be, they don’t miss a thing.

While we do quite a few schools each year, it is usually in March or later in the school year that the elementary schools have their disability awareness week. They do a day with the deaf, one with the blind, one with developmental disabilities and we get the mobility impaired day. Only the Milton school has decided to invite us to do our presentation and honor us at the same time with such a well done Veterans Tribute event.

I’d like to thank LisaBeth Weinstein for setting it all up with me and the Cunningham Elementary School for inviting us to this wonderful tribute and for the generous donation that goes toward chapter programs. Also thank you to George Norton, Charles Schena and Mark Sanders for joining me to do the presentation. Without volunteers like them, we wouldn’t be able to offer such a beneficial program to young students at all.

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Executive Director’s Report
continued from page 4

a costly endeavor. However, by not providing transportation, the cost would have been and will be even higher.

The federal government doles out huge amounts of transportation money to states. The states get to determine how that federal money will be dispensed by a grant process. Organizations like ours are seeing less and less opportunities to apply for grant money. Massachusetts has made it extremely difficult by adding requirements and restrictions on the level of transit the organizations can provide also requiring numerous trainings and certifications. All any veteran who uses our service requires is a ride. All the drivers want to do is assist by giving that ride.

VA Transportation is not accessible so the VA has to contract out. DAV vans that provide rides are also not accessible. We are! With five drivers sometimes six, the New England Chapter provided approximately 655 rides throughout all of New England from October 2013 through September of 2014. There were an additional 160 rides that the veteran either was a no-show or canceled for a total of 815 rides.

But we are in serious financial trouble. It truly breaks my heart that we may have to shut the program down. We made changes by charging for services. Even the drivers chipped in by taking cuts in pay and mileage rates. It hasn’t been enough! What support can we get? Where, is probably the better question, can we get support? Any and all suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Our non-service connected veterans are at the most risk of serious health issues. Even if they are allowed to go somewhere closer, the facility may not have the specialty clinics (SCI, TBI, PTSD, Poly-trauma) the veteran is getting care for.

And finally, many of you are aware that yes, even though it seems crazy, Joy, her mother, a cousin of Joy’s and myself have gone to Southern Africa – Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa (Nov 18 through Dec 10). I promise, we were currently closer to EBOLA in Massachusetts than we were in Africa. I hope to learn what, if anything these countries are doing for their disabled communities. Should the Senate finally pass the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it could open up countries you never thought you would see in your lifetime.

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I have just highlighted a couple of the issues discussed and of course cannot discuss those issues that caused us to go into executive session a couple of times. I can tell each of you with total confidence that while I stumbled at times listening to the other Chapter Presidents and National Directors as well, I assure you that we have by far one of the best Chapters in the country. Our donations to medical research, sports programs, and support of individual members far outstretch a large majority of the other Chapters. While that may seem a self serving comment, it is accurate in every way. I look forward to serving the Chapter in this capacity for as long as you want me to. That said, I really think we need some new perspective and strongly encourage the membership to become more involved in all aspects of the Chapter.

Volunteers Needed

Looking for volunteers to help with our ‘What’s it Like’ school program. I can say it is very rewarding working with the students.
It is not only beneficial to them but also to our entire community of mobility impaired individuals. Anybody interested in coming to help out call the office or contact Mike Guilbault by email at RollinGilbo@nepva.org

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Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00am-4:30pm

New England PVA

Officers and Board Members would like to wish our members, their families and friends a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

To all SCI/D Staff and Support Staff throughout VISN-I,

Wishing you a Very Happy Holiday Season