

The Bulletin

Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans



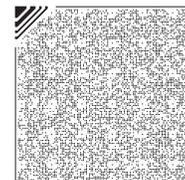
May-June 2019



Dr. Zampieri

Dr. S

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Cover Photo: In the center, BVA President, Dr. Thomas Zampieri is surrounded by his Legislative Committee. From left to right, National Treasurer, Daniel Wallace, Executive Director, Joe Bogart, National Secretary, Joe McNeill, prior to Zampieri’s testimony before a joint Hearing before the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

VOLUME LXXIV, No. 3
May-June 2019

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Combined Federal Campaign #10513

Published bi-monthly by and for blinded veterans, and sent to all blinded veterans without charge. **The Bulletin** informs BVA members about their Association and the issues that affect blinded veterans.



President's Page

by Tom Zampieri



As the president of BVA, I want to express to our past president Joe “Chief” Parker our sincerest appreciation

for his efforts and undying commitment to BVA. The board members were glad that, despite his health challenges, he was able to make it to the March mid-winter board of directors’ meetings.

On February 19, myself, the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) 2018-2019 President Steven J. Fliesler, PhD (SUNY-Buffalo/VA Medical Center-Buffalo, who serves on the NAEVR Board of Directors) and blinded veteran Corporal Steve Baskis (Ret.) jointly had over ten House of Representatives congressional office visits to advocate for military eye trauma research funding for \$25 million in FY 2020. Having the president of the world’s largest vision research association spend time with BVA members demonstrates our growing external partnerships and raises our visibility as advocates.

It was an honor to testify on behalf of BVA before the House and Senate committees on Veterans Affairs. From our founding, 74 years ago to today, BVA relentlessly advocates for blinded and visually impaired veterans.

On March 28 & 29, I was joined by Arkansas Razorback Regional Group Vice President, Marlene Davis-Lilly in 18 visits with members of the United States Senate to discuss a variety of issues.

Marlene even had the opportunity to meet with VA Committee member, Senator John Boozman (R. Arkansas), as well as Senator Sherrod Brown (D. Ohio), known for their strong legislative efforts in supporting BVA.

As your president, I will continue to be an ally to other organizations, non-profits, associations, and corporations for the benefit of all disabled veterans.



BVA President, Dr. Thomas Zampieri, second from right, with Arkansas Razorback Regional Group Vice President, Marlene Davis-Lilly, Senator John Boozman, and BVA Government Relations Assistant, Janei Holder.



BVA Executive Director Joe Bogart's Message to Members



Spring has sprung and that means the flowers are blooming, the birds are singing, and everyone here at BVA

Headquarters are in full swing. We've had a busy year already, and 2019 isn't even half over!



Senator Johnny Isaackson, Chairman, Veterans Affairs Committee, greets BVA National Secretary, Joe McNeill, prior to a Joint House and Senate Hearing on Veteran Affairs.

At the mid-winter meeting, we were able to present our proposed budget to the board for their approval, present testimony in front of the House and Senate Committees on Veteran Affairs, and visit with legislators and their staff. Light Up the Darkness was a success on Blinded Veterans Day; thank you to the veterans of Operation Encore and Nashville songwriters and artists, Kent Blazy and Cory Batten for their performances.

What a year so far, and there's so much more to do! We've continued reaching out to improve relationships with other organizations, researchers, medical providers and more to increase the overall awareness and knowledge of BVA. BVA is creating more fundraisers, improving systems, and joining with other Veteran Organizations to improve the quality of life for all Blinded Veterans. We've met with officials, corporations, health care providers, the VA, Defense Health Agency, researchers, and grant makers. Our staff is meticulously planning for a great 74th convention in Tulsa, while already looking towards our 75th in the Washington, D.C. area.

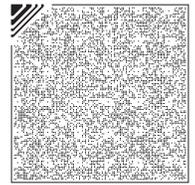
In between all of this, our members are out there getting it done and showing that lost eyesight is merely an obstacle to overcome. With a little grit and effort, they are getting the most out of life through activities, events, and getting together. Members are extending their hand of support and talking about the BVA at Blind Rehab Centers, engaging with large and small business, and laying the foundation for our future's success. We have members getting ready to hike the Appalachian Trail, paddle on the Missouri River, go fishing, skiing, bowling, running, cycling, rowing and most of all, peer mentoring.

It's exciting to be so busy. As spring continues, remember: be active, lend a hand to a fellow Blinded Veteran, and meet some new friends. Thank you for all of your efforts and continue to grow the future for our BVA!



Legislative Update

by Melanie Brunson



BVA President Testifies in Front of Congress

On March 12, BVA President, Dr. Thomas Zampieri, alongside 7 other Veteran Service Organizations, testified before a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs.

The other VSOs included: Fleet Reserve Association, Gold Star Wives of America, Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, Military Officers Association of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, and the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs.

During his remarks it was advised that members of Congress take the following actions:

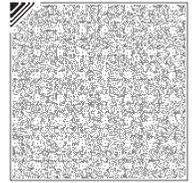
- Ensure VA's implementation of caregiver benefits for catastrophically disabled veterans from previous war eras, is appropriate, timely, and ensures that the eligibility criteria employed by VA does not inadvertently preclude caregivers of blinded veterans from receiving assistance;
- Urge VA to redevelop policies and practices that enable their agencies to identify veterans and VA employees who need access to information in formats other than print by virtue of disabilities, and ensure that VA also has the capacity to communicate with such individuals through the appropriate accessible formats.



BVA President, Dr. Thomas Zampieri with other Veteran Service Organizations testifying in front of the House and Senate Committees on Veteran Affairs.

- Support passage of H.R. 1199, The VA Website Accessibility Act, and conduct oversight hearings on VA's lack of compliance with Section 508 throughout the VHA and VBA Information Technology programs, requiring that VA set timelines, funding levels, and staffing goals for addressing areas of noncompliance.
- Express support to Appropriators for funding of the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program and, Vision Research Program (VRP) at \$20 million in FY 2020.
- Oversee the establishment of the VCE and the Defense Veterans Eye Injury Registry (DVEIR) on resources, program management, and funding. Request similar oversight for the Hearing Center of Excellence.
- Support passage of H.R. 1092, the bipartisan bill to improve resources and care for survivors of military sexual trauma (MST), by U.S. Senators Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-Maine).
- Express support for changing specially adapted housing grant eligibility criteria to enable blinded veterans to qualify based on their legal blindness alone;
- Support the reinstatement of eligibility for blinded veterans to use special mode transportation provided by the VA and its contractors, and also request information from the VA Secretary about the status of Special Mode Transportation Policy for visually impaired veterans.

- Ensure the VA adheres to the high standard of the recruitment of all employees and contractors who provide rehabilitation training to blinded veterans and urge VA to require certification by recognized accrediting bodies.
- Support in appropriation of \$840 million for VA research in FY 2020.



National Treasurer, Daniel Wallace, Executive Director, Joe Bogart, and BVA Member, Russell Nelson, meet with Congressman Phil Roe, Ranking Member, House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

It is our hope that the information and ideas that were exchanged will bear fruit in the form of improvements to programs and services throughout the VA. We expect to see several pieces of legislation from friends in Congress, as well as some new initiatives from the VA in the coming months that have potential benefits for blind veterans. We will share these items in future articles, as well as through our e-mail updates.

In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at the national headquarters.

Blinded Veteran Goes into Business Thanks to BEP

By Chet Curtis

After losing her sight as the result of a brain tumor several years ago, blinded veteran, Doris Jones, has come a long way from her days in the Air Force as a personnel specialist. Today, she owns and operates her own food deli at Fort Lee's Defense Commissary Agency in Prince Georges County, Virginia. All thanks to the BEP.

BEP, Business Enterprise Program, is a training program where business operators with vision impairments are trained and licensed under the federal Randolph Sheppard Act. Established by Congress in 1936, the Act provides an opportunity for blinded individuals to operate businesses on federal and state property by granting a priority.

"The first step is to experience Blind Rehab Training at the VA. If you're a veteran and haven't completed training, you can go through the State Blind Rehab Training. Once completed, you have classroom training for 6 to 18 months; from HR, to communications, to food safety, anything you need to know to run your business is covered in class," said Jones. "You take quizzes and tests, as well as, conduct site visits. During training, they administer the ServSafe test, a certification required to operate your business, which is good for 5 years."

The curriculum and time cater to the student. After graduation, they become eligible to bid on and become an operator of a BEP food service facility in their state. An operator receives their license after completing a satisfactory 6-month probationary period.



Doris Jones (Center) surrounded by her staff at Fort Lee's Defense Commissary Agency.

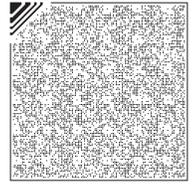
"It's exciting to start this new career. I'm an owner and operator of my own business. I can create a team to help me make this a success. It's going to be a challenge, but it's my responsibility.

My hope is to inspire others to put the work in, so that they are able to own and operate something of their own."

Did You Know?

- In Virginia, blind vendors voluntarily employed 5 persons with visual and other disabilities, as well as 604 other individuals

Breaking Down Barriers to Access: The Blindfold Games



By Chet Curtis

During BVA's 2018 National Convention, I visited a booth entitled, "Blindfold Games." Operated by Marty Schultz, Blindfold Games is a set of 80 accessible audio games for the iPhone and iPad played by more than 20,000 visually impaired individuals worldwide from ages 7 to 80.

They have games of all categories: sports, cards, TV game show, action, puzzles and word games. "You name it, we probably have it," said Marty.

In 2012, he volunteered to teach students how to design an application at an app club at the school his daughter was attending. "We wanted something really different, so we said let's design an app that doesn't need the screen, and that led to our first game called "Blindfold Racer," said Schultz.

"In this game, you hold the device like a steering wheel and drive with your ears instead of with your eyes. If you drive too far left, then it's louder in your left ear, but too far right, and it's louder in your right ear. You aim for the noisy prizes like popping popcorn and avoid obstacles like barking dogs."

"This game jumped to the top of the list of favorite accessible games in the App Store," he said. "We started hearing requests; can you build a monopoly game, can you build solitaire, can you build word games? The ideas kept coming, so I've been publishing once a month for the last four years."

"Some games are being used by visual rehabilitation specialist to help improve skills," said Schultz. Anyone interested in Blindfold Games can visit blindfoldgames.org or search the Apple App Store.



Blindfold Games table at Convention.

Operation Peer Support (OPS) News



Operation Peer Support (OPS) is a program designed by the Blinded Veterans Association to assist blind and visually impaired veterans and their families with educational resources and adaptive sports in order to regain independence, social skills, and confidence through rehabilitation.

A Friendship Forged for Advocacy

By Danielle Petty

A bond that has stood the test of time. When Honorary member, Joe Amerling, and Life member, Daniel “Danny” Wallace met 30 years ago, neither of them could have imagined that they would still be on a joint mission to make a difference in other people’s lives. They met in October 1989 at Camp Frank D. Merrill, the Mountain phase of the U.S. Army Ranger school, located near Dahlonega, Georgia.

Danny was a young Sergeant and Amerling was his Platoon Sergeant; their job was to train and evaluate Ranger students while operating in mountainous terrain. After completing the assignment, both Rangers were reassigned to Charlie Company 1st of the 508th Airborne Infantry Battalion, located in the Republic of Panama. Joe was the First Sergeant and Danny was a Squad Leader.

Joe retired from the Army in 1995 after 20 years of service, and went to serve 21 years in law enforcement before retiring in 2016. On December 9th, 2003 while assigned as the First Sergeant of Bravo Company 1st Battalion of the 187th Infantry 101st Airborne

Division Air Assault, Danny was blinded from a car bomb blast in Iraq.

After many surgeries, he retired in 2005, after 20 years of service. While attending Hines for the first time, he became a member of the Blinded Veterans Association and began to get more involved. Throughout the years, Joe and Danny have stayed in close contact. Based out of Georgia, Joe started volunteering with BVA in 2014. He was instrumental in our first annual Ranger Camp trip and has been our sighted guide on trips to Chicago, Washington, D.C., Long Beach, California, and Tucson, Arizona. Last year’s first ever Blind Appalachian Trail (BAT-1) would not have been possible without his support and dedication to our veterans; he goes above and beyond to raise funds, encourage community support, and bring awareness through media coverage. “In my opinion, Joe is the epitome of the type of volunteer our association needs and, more importantly, deserves,” says Danny.

For the first time ever, they are planning to support an all-female contingency of guides and blinded veterans navigating the rest of the Georgia portion of the Appalachian Trail.

Upcoming OPS Events



Our Women Take on the Appalachian Trail

The four blinded female veterans will hike over 30 miles of the North Georgia Appalachian Trail, starting on May 28, 2019 to foster fellowship, esprit de corps, team work, and provide a wilderness challenge. The men and women combined will have completed the entire state of Georgia.

The team will carry required equipment and rations to sustain themselves between mission support sites (MSS) where additional supplies will be located. MSS sites will be pre-established by a support team that will provide a spartan, but adequate camp for the teams each evening. The blinded veteran participants are as follows:

Jeanie Murphy, Manhattan, Kansas, Retired Sergeant of the U.S. Army, who served as an Administrative Assistant

Shianti Lee, Los Angeles, California, Retired Sergeant of the U.S. Army, who served as a Counter Intel Agent

Marlene Davis-Lilly, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Former Specialist of the U.S. Navy, who served as an Aviation Fueler

Monaca Gilmore, Knightdale, North Carolina, Retired Sergeant of the U.S. Army, who served as a Transportation Instructor.

This diverse group of women are dedicated to persevering through the tasks of this event. The start date is May 30, 2019 and end date is June 1, 2019. The start point vicinity will be Amicalola Falls, Georgia and the finish point will be Camp Frank D. Merrill, Georgia, home of the 5th Ranger Training Battalion. The blinded female veterans will team with their sighted female guides, consisting of the following:

Major Lisa Jaster, West Point Class of 2000; Graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger school

Amy Quoqueze-Copeland, Accountant Assistant for a realtor group.

Kelly Wallace, Billing supervisor of Champ VA / TriCare Specialist for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Brittney Davis, Medical Tech / volunteer for the Blinded Veterans Association.

Janet Reyes, School teacher.

Jennifer Grove, WSBTV Channel 2 Atlanta News Reporter

Kristin Love, Programs Registrar and Facility Operations Manager at Elachee Nature Science Center

As the first female blinded veteran team, we will prove that vision loss is no more than an obstacle that can be overcome with hard work and a never dying spirit.

2019 Project Gemini BVUK Exchange Program:

May 17th-25th, 2019 in Brighton, UK, three OPS veterans and one sighted guide will participate in the exchange program with BVUK veterans. During which, the veterans, including those of the South African war, will experience the BVUK veterans program to share knowledge, insights, and friendship for seven days. We will address the similarities, goals, and partnership in military eye trauma, Traumatic Brain Injury, vision research, and history from World War One to today.

Vision rehabilitation programs offered to veterans within each of the three countries will be represented. Adaptive sports for the blind and a variety of events are planned for the week, including a tour of the Blind Veterans UK Rehabilitation Brighton center and visits to nearby historic sites.

The three groups of veterans will discuss coping with blindness and the “war stories” that are part of their personal peer support adjustment to blindness and subsequent rehabilitation.

Participants include the following: U.S. Army Captain Rain Rich (Ret.), Former U.S. Navy Petty Officer Lonnie Bedwell, Former U.S Navy Seaman Lawrence Harrison, and sighted guide U.S. Army First Sergeant Reynaldo Reyes (Ret.).

Contact Persons for Interview:

Rain Rich

Phone: 850-781-3221

Lawrence Harrison:

Phone: 202-247-1954

Blind Endeavors Ranger Endeavors:



OPS has partnered with the Blind Endeavors to host a Blind Endeavors Ranger Endeavor on June 2–8, 2019. This event will consist of members of the Blinded Veterans Association who will complete complicated ranger tasks and skills on the Northern Appalachian Trails. Some of the tasks include: climbing, rappelling, range shooting, and possible water operations. The team will carry required equipment and rations to sustain themselves between mission support sites (MSS) where additional supplies will be located. Mission Support sites will be pre-established by a support team that will provide a spartan, but adequate camp for the teams each evening. The participants will prove that vision loss is no more than an obstacle that can be overcome with hard work and a never dying spirit.

Contact Persons for Interview:

Name: Steve Baskis

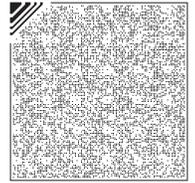
Phone: 970-260-1380

Name: Joe Amerling

Phone: 678-983-3873

Did You Know? Vision and Blindness Fact

- The population of people with vision loss and blindness is estimated to increase by approximately 150% and direct medical costs are expected to skyrocket with an increase of 250% by 2050.



New Jersey Regional Group to Host Golf Outing

The New Jersey Regional Group will host a golf outing on September 12th, 2019, at the Mountain View Golf Course in Ewing Township, New Jersey.

Registration begins at 8:00am and golfing begins at 9:00am.

Golfers will be treated to breakfast during registration, sandwiches at the “turn,” a buffet lunch at the end, and complimentary gift bags. A golf cart will be provided for teams of 4. There will also be a “hole-in-one” special for golfers to try to win a new car. The cost is \$125 per person. Please indicate your T-shirt size when you send in your registration form.

The outing will be a “shot gun” type of golf. We will accept golfers with or WITHOUT sight. All proceeds will be used to fund activities for veterans in NJ State run nursing homes, at the blinded rehab centers run by the VA, and veterans’ drug and rehab centers in NJ. To help support this event please contact Leonard Pope.

Make checks payable to:

Blinded Veterans Association, RG, NJ.
20 De Cou Ave. Ewing, NJ 08628.

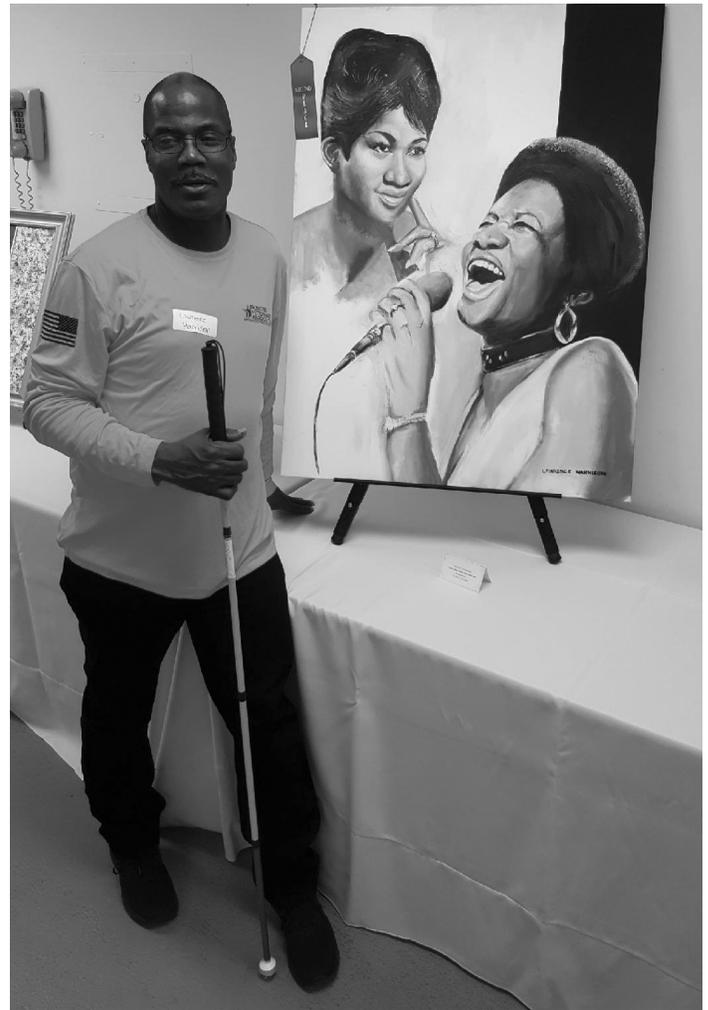
For questions or more information, please call:

Name: Leonard T Pope

Phone: 609-333-3828

E-mail: sclaus50@gmail.com

BVA Member Wins 2nd Place in Art Competition



BVA member Lawrence Harrison won second place at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival being held at the Washington, D.C. VA Medical Center for his portrait of singer Aretha Franklin. Lawrence also placed second in the Acrylic Painting category for his portrait of Oprah Winfrey.

VA Association of Workers for the Blind celebrating Centennial

The Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind, Burkeville, located at 341 Oak Street, Burkeville, Va. 23922 is having our Centennial celebration on Saturday, July 6th, 2019. We are a 501 C 3 organization. The event will run from 11am - 4pm. Food and souvenirs for sale, games, swimming, music and a tour of our lodge will be provided. We will be giving out info about resources. Check out our web sight www.vawb.org for information about the event and our association. We hope to see you there!

Contact Persons for more questions or information:

Richard W. Stone

Phone: 757-468-0277

National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic now Accepting Applications

Applications are currently being accepted for the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic (San Diego, CA 9/15/19 – 9/20/19).

Blind Rehabilitation Services BRS Program Office is partnering with National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events to bring awareness to Veterans with a visual impairment on the value of rehabilitation through a variety of summer leisure activities and adaptive sports.

- Applications are available through www.summersportsclinic.va.gov
- Funding support is available for first time Veterans if they need financial assistance.

The Summer Sports Clinic offers adventure sports and recreational activities such as sailing, surfing,

kayaking, cycling, archery, and pickleball. Complimenting the therapy provided in daily BRS programs, the Clinic shares a glimpse of the many exciting recreational opportunities awaiting those Veterans who accept the challenge.

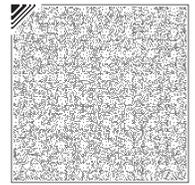
Please contact David Tostenrude or Leif Nelson at 206-445-3519 if you have any questions or need additional information.

Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group hosting Annual Banquet in Gulf Coast

LOUISIANA / MISSISSIPPI REGIONAL GROUP (LA/MS RG) is preparing for its Annual Banquet to be held in Gulfport, MS. Representatives from the Biloxi BRC, VIST, BROS, other organizations and some vendors will be joining the blinded veterans at the banquet. This is the first time that the Mississippi Gulf Coast has hosted the Regional Banquet.

They have contacted Governors, and County/Parish Presidents and Mayors of a number of cities within the region to inform them of “Blinded Veterans Day” and of the many Veterans in their area who are represented by the BVA.

The offices were all given a brief history of the BVA and how it helps the veteran take their rightful place in the community by creating a world built upon equality; and by helping them to regain their independence, confidence, and self-esteem through rehabilitation, training, and assisting their



fellow veterans. The LA/MS RG has received almost 30 proclamations from the various officials.

Hampton Blinded Veterans Recognize Blinded Veterans Day 2019

Hampton, VA Medical Center



Left to right: Hardy Alexander, Treasurer MARG, Forest Black, Treasurer, Hampton Chapter, Robert Byrd, President, Hampton Chapter, and Leland Jarrett, Vice President, Hampton Chapter.

BVA National Convention Update

Get ready to celebrate BVA's 74th National Convention in Tulsa, Oklahoma!

You are invited to join friends new and old at BVA's convention August 12-16, 2019 in the "Oil Capital of the World"!

Registration Packets: Coming in May!

Hotel Reservations:

Marriott
Tulsa Southern Hills
1902 East 71st Street
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74136

Call 1-800-228-9290 before July 24, 2019 and use code BVA2019 for special BVA rates. The room rate is \$94 per night, plus tax of 13.517%. Marriott Southern Hills offers complimentary standard Wi-Fi in guest rooms, self-parking, as well as use of our pool and fitness center.

Book your flight to Tulsa on Southwest Airlines at www.swabiz.com using Corporate ID 99867703, for special BVA rates. Southwest is offering 8% off anytime and business select fares and 2% off wanna-get-away fares. Also, offers 50% bonus Rapid Rewards points. We anticipate it's ready for booking date to be March 1st for travel dates August 10 - 18. Last day to book is 27 July, 2019.

Travel Reservations:

Flying? The Tulsa International Airport code is (TUL). The Marriott Tulsa Southern Hills has a shuttle that will take you to and from the airport/hotel, reservation required. Call 918-289-5661 to make a complimentary airport shuttle service reservation request.

Need Travel Assistance? Contact Brenda McDaniel, daughter of a BVA member and an Independent Travel Agent, (915) 204-0101 (Mountain Time Zone), or email Brenda_mcdaniel@sbcglobal.net.

Kayak with BVA



This year, we have planned kayaking on the local river to promote health and healing, sponsored by Team River Runner on Monday, August 12, 2019. 25 veterans will be provided with the boats, guides, and

PFD's by Oklahoma Kayak. We will be gone for the day, with a BBQ lunch provided on the river. To sign up, contact Convention Coordinator, Krissi Spence-Gilbert at kspence-gilbert@bva.org. Spaces are limited.

We hope to see you there!

Call For Papers!



Have suggestions for our education sessions? Papers/abstracts in the fields of Education, Advocacy, Business, Health and Wellness, and all sub-fields below are welcome. All abstracts/papers should adhere to the required format and be submitted to kspence-gilbert@bva.org. Submissions shall pass the double blind paper review first in order to be presented in the conference. Topics are listed, but are not restricted to the following:

- Economics
- Education
- Humanities and Culture Studies
(including Art and Design)
- Blind Research and Development
- Caregiver Support
- Psychology
- Business & Management

13th Annual MR340 July 16-19, 2019



Imagine a race across the entire state of Missouri, just you and your boat thrown against 340 miles of wind, heat, bugs, and rain. This ain't no mama's boy float trip. This race promises to test your mettle from the first stroke in Kansas City to the last gasp in St. Charles. Just entering it will impress your friends. Finishing it will astound them... and winning it? Well, you always thought you were sort of a legend anyway, didn't you? It's time to prove it.

The Missouri 340 is an endurance race across the state of Missouri. Competitors will start in Kansas City and finish, some of them anyway, in St. Charles. With numerous towns and hamlets, the course offers plenty of opportunity for resupply while en-route. The Missouri River is also incredibly scenic and isolated in some stretches, with wildlife and beautiful vistas to rival any river in North America. But if you're trying to win this race, you won't have time to enjoy any of it.

Participants are allowed exactly 88 hours to complete the course. There are nine checkpoints along the route where paddlers are required to sign in and sign out. Cutoff times will be associated with these checkpoints based on the 88-hour pace. Failure to miss two consecutive deadlines is grounds for disqualification. To finish this race in 88 hours is a huge accomplishment. Only 2/3 of the teams were able to do that last year.

There are no dams, locks, or portages on this stretch of the Missouri. You could, conceivably, finish this race without ever having left your boat. (We don't recommend it.) This doesn't mean that the race is without danger. Any time you put yourself on the

water, especially moving water, you assume a certain amount of risk. The Missouri 340 course is all on Class I water. The current is about 3 mph and there are no rapids. The biggest hazard to paddlers would be motorboats, mostly fisherman, and the occasional towboat pushing barges. In river obstacles would include wing dikes, buoys, and bridge pilings.

Thanks to the United States Coast Guard, the river is marked over the entire course with mileage and channel markers. It is almost impossible not to know, within a mile or less, your exact location. At the pre-race meeting and safety check, racers will be briefed on how to read these markers, how to handle a tow and barge passage, and what constitutes public property on the river. Paddlers will also be provided with a series of dispatches to prepare for the race. Dispatches from most recent race can be found here for reference: <http://www.rivermiles.com>.

The purpose of this event is to showcase the ability of our Association, to gain awareness, and raise funds for our 2020 Veterans day event.

Participants:

Joe Amerling will be our service and support lead. 1SGIC (First Sergeant in Charge). Working with Joe will be Bob Williams The President of The Mountain Ranger Association.

The teams will be as follows:

Steve Baskis (Blinded Veteran)
and Andrew Palmer

Boat # 0508

Boat Name: Paddle Blisters

Kennan Horn (Blinded Veteran) and
Joseph Haverstick

Boat # 0706

Boat Name: The Blind Squirrel

Larry Gunter (Blinded Veteran)
and George Carpenter

Boat # 1294

Boat Name: The Swappers

Danny Wallace (Blinded Veteran) and
Scott Murphy

Boat # 1203

Boat Name: The Soggy Bottom Boys

Timothy Hornick (Blinded Veteran)
and Matt Battiston

Boat # 1958

Boat Name: Veteran Jayhawkers

The numbers represent the month and year we were blinded.

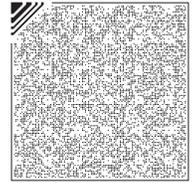


Kayakers participating in the Missouri River 340 in 2018.



Chaplain's Corner

by Chaplain Jay McLeod



Greetings and Blessings to all of you today. I am once again honored to be able to share what God puts in my heart with you in this Chaplain's Corner. As we enter the spring season and head toward the hot summer months, it is time for outside activities to begin again. I was at the Las Vegas, Nevada main VA a couple weeks ago and watched our Las Vegas BVA women hand out water bottles at the VA with grace and pride.

A couple of weeks prior to that, I was at another BVA fundraising event at Costco here in Las Vegas. There are so many things happening here and it's mesmerizing to see the response of the community. When my wife and I arrived at the Costco fundraiser, the number of our members present was a joy to see. I was glad to see the way the community stepped up and donated to the cause.

People were able to see the information as to who we are as the BVA organization and learn about blind etiquette. Having been in other organizations that fundraise, I have seen many things go wrong. However, that was not the case here; I saw the integrity in the members of this local BVA when the donations were counted at the change of shift and noted down.

By mid-afternoon, they had collected over \$200.00 in donations.

It made me feel as though this Las Vegas BVA crew has it together and acts in complete transparency. I was glad to see the pride and integrity the men and women show in our events. I am reminded of how Jesus taught the Apostles to do all things.



Eph 6:7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

Eph 6:8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

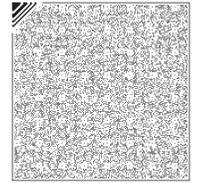
As we move and do things using all our ability to carry things out, we may not have 20/20 vision with our eyes, but God has given us his heart to help others. Please do not let your inability to see perfect hold you back. Continue to develop your other gifts and use them to build. My wife and I are proud to serve with you all in every event we can. God loves you and so do I.

Stay safe and remain encouraged in the Lord.



Auxiliary's View

By Edna Dixon



The National Blinded Veterans Association Auxiliary (BVAA) was established in 1977 to educate and offer

assistance to friends and family members of blinded veterans.

BVAA seeks to strengthen the spirit of fellowship that naturally exists amongst its members. Any friends, family members, or individuals age 18 and over who are interested in helping blinded veterans are eligible for membership. Founding member, Catherine McCracken Burnett, designer of the BVAA emblem, best summed up our mission and the character of its members when she penned the following:

- A — Answering the commitment to assist, serve and support BVA.
- U — United in purpose, we stand as one.
- X —pecting the achievement of our goals to make a difference.
- I — Individually and collectively, we dedicate ourselves to this endeavor.
- L — Learning together to be patient, kind, slow to judge, and quick to forgive.
- I — Inspired by our strong determination to succeed, we...
- A — Acknowledge that only as we devote our lives to others are we...
- R — Rewarded by the realization that we can do anything that we set forth to do when Supported by Almighty God and our most important member...
- Y — You.

If you haven't been to Tulsa, this is the time to go. The hotel will provide free shuttles to and from the casinos and anywhere within five miles of the hotel. Pat Stancliff has been busy organizing an informative program for the BVAA. There will be fun times, and possibly a beauty consultant available to offer suggestions for hair and makeup.



Don't forget our Silent Auction – you may bring items to the Convention or mail them directly to me. After you order your items, I will notify you when they arrive. We have added a new selection of items that will be “Pick up, pay and go.” You don't have to bid – these are cash items. Hurry! We are still accepting applications for the two scholarship awards. Available on-line or e-mail me.

My inspirational notes for this month: CHOICES. Sometimes, we feel we have no control over our lives or our circumstances. We are where we are and that is that, but is that really true? For the next several months, let us focus on “empowering” ourselves through purpose and love. See you at Convention...

From the Veteran's Service Staff

By Claudia Belk



Understanding the New Appeals Modernization Program

On February 19th, 2019, the VA's new appeal processing system became effective and is processing appeals at a faster rate to reduce backlog. All rating decisions received on or after February 19th, 2019 will be processed under this new program.

The rating decisions prior to that date will have the option to opt-in to the new appeal system. However, both forms for the old and new appeal system must be filed for the claims that are in that limbo stage. The new appeals program has three pathways a veteran can take to appeal the claim:

- **Add new and relevant evidence (file a Supplemental Claim) - (VA Form 20-0995)**

When you file a supplemental claim, you are adding new evidence to the claim which could change the previous decision. The examiner will determine if all the supporting evidence combined will change the decision. This claim takes about 4 to 5 months to complete, so long as there are no further developments in the claim and they must be filed within one year from the rating decision.

- **Ask for a new look from a senior reviewer (request a Higher-Level Review) – (VA Form 20-0996)**

When you request a higher-level review, you are asking for the evidence already submitted to be reviewed to get a different result due to errors found or difference of

opinions in the previous decision. You can request an informal hearing, which can be conducted over the phone, to clarify any errors made in the previous decision. If additional testing is needed to correct an error, or additional medical records are needed, this will lengthen the appeal wait time. The average wait of this appeal track is 4 to 5 months.

- **Appeal to a Veterans Law Judge (request a Board Appeal) – (VA Form 10182)**

When you request for a Veterans Law Judge to review your claim in Washington, D.C., you have the option to add additional evidence to support your claim. If you decide to have a hearing, or add more evidence to your claim, this lengthens the wait time for the decision. If no hearing or evidence is submitted, the average turn-around time is about one year for this appeal track.

The advantage of this new appeal system is that, it allows for a veteran to file appeals more than once. For instance, you can file a higher-level review, by denied, and file a supplemental claim if you have more supporting evidence for the claim; and if still denied, you can then file for a review with a Veterans Law Judge. The BVA Resource Center staff has been working all appeals in this new format and have had exceptionally quicker turn-around times.

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped 2019 Collection Development Advisory Group - May 22-24, 2019)

There's still time to turn in requests to us. We are asking our members who are enrolled and use the Talking Book program to provide us with any topics, magazines, books, or content that isn't being produced by the NLS Talking Book program. BVA sits on the Collection Development Advisory Group, which happens every year in May. NLS works with several libraries and blind organizations to gather material that is requested by the patrons of this service.

If you are interested in submitting a request, please email the request to FieldService@bva.org, with the subject line, "Collection Development Request" or "Talking Book Program Request".

Changing Our Name

We would like to inform our membership that the Field Services Program has changed its name to Veteran Services. The department consists of the BVA Resource Center and six full-time Veteran Service Officers (VSO). Part of this team are our Volunteer Veteran Service Officers (VVSO) whom train along with the VSOs in headquarters. I encourage any interested blinded veteran, member, or family member to become either a BVA Volunteer

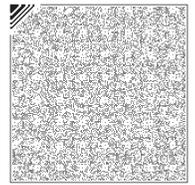
or a VVSO. The position of VVSO is rewarding since you assist your fellow blinded veterans in the claims process, while BVA Volunteers provide resources that improve the quality of life for a veteran and their family.

As President Kennedy once said, "Ask not what can your country do for you, but what can you do for your country." This is a way for a blinded veteran to give back to the community, and truly exemplify the motto of "Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans."

How to Become a Volunteer Veteran Service Officer

The process of becoming a Volunteer Veteran Service Officer is as follows:

- Completion of the online National Veterans Legal Services Program Basic Training course. The Online Basic Training Course is designed for anyone who helps veterans and their family members obtain benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The course is also useful in making claimants more informed about their VA benefits. The course costs \$150; however, BVA Regional Groups have paid for the course for VVSOs who will assist veterans with claims within their region of the BVA Regional Group. The NVLSP Basic Training course can be found at: <https://nvlspbasictrainingcourse.com/product/online-basic-training-course/>



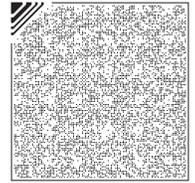
- The course is completely online and the final examination requires a 70% score. The test is open-book. Upon passing the exam, a certificate of completion is provided to get accreditation with Blinded Veterans Association.
- Fill out a VA Form 21 and email it as an attachment to: FieldService@bva.org.
- For a blinded veteran to work on claims, he or she must work from a VA medical center, clinic, or a VA Regional Office. The interested individual should speak with VA Voluntary Services in any VA healthcare facility for space for a BVA office. The hours required do not have to be many, just to be committed to the monthly mandatory training and working with the BVA Resource Center staff when inquiring on claim issues.

This is a team effort, so the VVSO will not be alone in this process. The Chief of Veteran Services will assist in getting the individual accredited with the VA's Office of General Counsel.

The process for an individual to become a BVA Volunteer is as follows:

- Take the VA Voluntary Services orientation training to become a BVA volunteer. You need to let the VAVS staff member know that you would like for your volunteer hours to be donated to BVA, since this is not an automatic thing.

- You can request to become a BVA Representative by attending the quarterly VAVS meetings at the local VA medical center or clinic facility. To become a BVA Representative, the individual needs to make this request to the Chief of Veteran Services for a letter to be sent to the Chief of VA Voluntary Services, please email fieldservice@bva.org for this request.

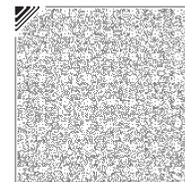


Which ever route you decide to take, we encourage you to give back to your community. The thousands of hours BVA Volunteers and Volunteer Veteran Service Officers provide has awarded many of our fellow blinded veterans with monetary compensation through the VA, or enhanced the quality of life through programs that help the blind. BVA is grateful for those who dedicate their time and effort, to help those who are unaware services that are available.

VA released new appeals video on Friday, April 26, 2019.



<http://bit.ly/AppealsModernizationAct>



Collaboration for the Future

By Joe Bogart

Several times a month, I get a call or email asking what is going on at Headquarters? Quite simply, we have a lot going on each week. With many staff members engaged constantly on the phone, answering emails, advocating, or educating around Washington, D.C., and working on BVA business, we are always busy.

When I was a younger soldier, everything we did was to win; we had to be the best, but we also had to learn about sportsmanship. When we lost, we still shook the winner's hand and if we won, we did gracefully. No matter what, we learned to play fair, by the rules and to be graceful in both victory and defeat.

Winning required teamwork. The more I matured, the better I understood how important it is to work together to accomplish our tasks and goals. This meant improved collaboration across military units, branches of service, and even with our allied countries.

Our Association is no different. We partner with other Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) to advocate to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Defense Health Agency (DHA), and the branches of our government. We work with other blind and visually impaired organizations to raise awareness of the unique issues surrounding the blinded veteran, while working to ensure the best care possible for all suffering with vision loss.



Joe Bogart, Executive Director, Blinded Veterans Association, with Lee Lasehi, President & CEO, VisionServe Alliance and Wen Hwa Lee, Chief Executive Officer, Action Against Age-Related Macular Degeneration, United Kingdom, discuss ways to collaborate and improve the networks to share research data to help recognize or slow the onset of Age-Related Macular Degeneration at American Foundation for the Blind Leadership Conference.

This doesn't stop at our borders; BVA and BVUK partnered on Project Gemini to establish a friendship and provide mutual support in our shared concerns. We lead through mentorships within the VisionServe Alliance (VSA) while nurturing the relationships to share the unique issues of the Blinded Veteran. The VSA connects leaders of local, regional, and national blind and visually impaired services to unify the many issues and organizations operating independently of one another.



Executive Director, Joe Bogart, National Treasurer, Daniel Wallace, and Legislative Committee member, Russell Nelson, standing in front of the Nation's Capitol.

By bringing the breadth and depth of BVA's experience, we facilitate deep meaningful conversations about those unique needs that offset the similarities the blinded veteran has from one who never served.

We further the cause of vision research of the Department of Defense through the Vision Research Program by advocating for more funding. We work with the Association of Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) to advocate for more funding and support for independent vision research. Our research partnerships have yielded battlefield treatments that can reduce eye damage, save the eye, and improve the chances of restoring vision. They are developing methods to better treat issues

like glaucoma and retinal detachment, and are even working on full eye and ocular transplants.



We work with the World Blind Union (WBU) by supporting the causes that affect all of us, like silent vehicles, better access to reading materials, and raising awareness of guide dogs for national and international travel.

You may be asking, "so what does all of this mean to me?" It boils down to this: veterans are leaders in our society. We've been in situations that required quick, creative, and critical thinking while under physical, mental, and emotional stress. By looking at the generations that grow and evolve after each major conflict, we can see local, state, national, and international leaders that understand selfless service. We of the BVA must step up and do the same.

Collaboration not only helps to improve services and opportunities for the Blinded Veteran, but it also improves the knowledge of the BVA. We begin to be recognized and heard. The VA takes notice that while we may be small, we don't sit quietly in the corner and mutter or complain. We bring our issues forward and hold the VA accountable, while promoting the great care they provide for us.

Our efforts grow so that even non-blinded veterans know and understand who we are, what we do, and why we exist. By collaborating with other blind and visually impaired organizations and our sister VSOs, the word gets out about the BVA, and our brothers and sisters will learn they are not alone. BVA provides the leadership so that no person who served in the military must experience vision loss alone.

The Relentless Advocate: Jack Ferrante

By Danielle Petty



From left to right, Jack Ferrante with Wayne Allen at BVA's 2018 National Convention.

Originally from New York, Jack moved to Alabama in 1985 after serving eight years in the Army. He was first stationed in Brooklyn, New York, then Staten Island, New York, El Paso, Texas, and Fort Gordon, Georgia. During his tour in Vietnam, he lost his mother, sister, and kid brother in a house fire. He is 71 years old, with two daughters and two granddaughters. He organizes multiple events in order to fundraise for his fellow brothers and sisters.

Jack found BVA when he went to the Blind Center and spoke to Mike Lewis, BVA's past president, who told him about what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. That sparked an interest in him, and he became a member in 2011, after losing his eyesight due to macular degeneration. He serves as one of the delegates and the former sergeant of arms at the national conventions.

First learning to sew, cook, and take care of the house at 6 years old, Jack stresses that he is very independent, and always has been. He doesn't let being blind define his quality of life. He still plays golf when he can, exercises every morning, goes bowling with his kids, takes them to amusement parks, and travels to places like Hawaii for vacation with the family.

"I just take each day as it comes. I look in the newspaper, and if I'm not in the obituary column, I just go. You know. That's it. I don't let anything hold me back."

Jack has been the acting President of the Southeastern Blind Rehabilitation Center for the last three years, and in that time, he has worked hard to be successful. His alumni association, consisting of 700 members, put on their annual Charlie Boswell Memorial Golf Classic, this year sponsored by All Cam, raising upwards of \$7,000 each year. The following Friday and Saturday, they throw a BBQ for all blinded veterans and their family members, and then a host a banquet dinner at a hotel in the area. They hire a seven-piece band for the entertainment, host an auction, and even give away door prizes at the event. The attendance can be up to 150 people, and this year they are pushing for 180.

In September, he throws an "Arm in Arm Walk" at the local veteran's park, where people can pay \$25 to walk with our Blinded Veterans, even push them around the lake, and talk to them. His association has received donations from Ms. Maury's BBQ, Shipley's Donuts, Milo's Tea Company, and many others. The past year was their second annual where they raised closed to \$5,800



in donations. All the revenue they raise and donations they receive go straight to the Blinded Veterans.

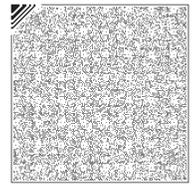
Just recently, when the local Blind Rehabilitation Center's washing machines were in horrible condition, some with the doors broken off, Jack bought two brand new Maytag industrial washers and dryers, and a stainless-steel side-by-side refrigerator/freezer for them.

He goes above and beyond to ensure that his fellow blinded veterans are taken care of. He will clothe them if they need it, and when the VA doesn't cover their travel to the Blind Rehabilitation Centers, due to them not being 100% disabled, they will pay for their travel to and from. "Whatever they need, we will be right there. We help each department in whatever way that we can, in order to better help and serve the Veteran," says Jack. At the Low Vision Center, he has purchased brand new LED lamps with three different kinds of magnifiers, a drum sander for the wood shop, and even an Amazon Echo, for them to teach the veterans how to use.

With so much success, you wonder... How does he do it?

His determination is unmatched. He doesn't believe in getting upset, makes sure to laugh as much as possible, and always tries to be happy. He doesn't just ask restaurants and businesses for their donations, he brings his family, friends, and members so the businesses can see just where their support, donations, and effort go to. He strives to be as successful as possible, and to pass on that same drive and strong sense of motive to the next person, whoever that may be, to keep pushing on and continue to build.

"You can't sit back in a chair, and expect it to work like that. You have to go out and not be afraid to hear 'No.' You have to go back and do it again. They are going to keep saying no, but you have to keep asking, keep pursuing. You have to be a go-getter."



Did You Know?

The Number of Days it Takes the Average Person to Complete a Thru-Hike on the Appalachian Trail

165

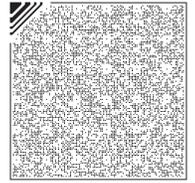
- *Thru-hike durations can range from a full-year to a blistering 46 and a half days (the current speed record), but most will complete their 2,189 mile trek in five to seven months, with the average being "a week or two shy of six months," according to the ATC.*



Group photo of 2018 Blind Appalachian Trail Hikers and Guides.

BVA Member Celebrates 100th Birthday

By Danielle Petty



R. Curtis Ralston, one of the few living founding members of the Blinded Veterans Association.

February 21st was the day R. Curtis Ralston turned 100 years of age. Raised in Omaha, Nebraska, Ralston attended the University of Nebraska, where he was a part of the ROTC program when World War II broke out. "I've never smoked and was always a moderate drinker. I worked quite a bit of the time, and I think that kept me going," said Ralston.

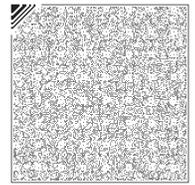
He served in the Army during World War II, participating in Operation Torch in 1942. "I was in combat and there was an explosion at an ammo dump. That started my retinal deterioration," says Ralston.

He was sent to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where they were able to save 25% of the vision in his right eye, but unfortunately, none in the left, leaving him legally blind.

"It came on gradually and it just kept deteriorating. That's how I ended up at Avon Old Farms. There weren't too many of us there at the time. A guy I rented my house from is the one who started the BVA and he got me into it," says Ralston.

Being blind didn't stop Ralston from living a normal life. "I started in the advertising promotional business around 1945. I had about half a dozen people who would get orders for me and bring them into my office. I had a receptionist/assistant who would type up orders for me. I did most of my work by phone, and I was able to run that business for about 70 years, with the help of my wife and 2 sons. We just sold the business last year.

Reflecting on being a member of BVA for all of its 74 years Ralston says, "I think it's a good Association. I think the BVA is doing a good job," says Ralston. "The BVA is here for guidance, if they need it. Look to them and I'm sure they will help."



Releasing Resentment

by Lisa Hutchison

Caregivers love to help people; it's a good feeling to be able to give comfort and aid to someone in need, but this support can also take its toll. There is a great responsibility and, at times, a burden that is felt in the caregiver role. It's important to find a way to express and channel the frustration that naturally occurs in helping relationships over time.

Resentment is the caregiver's dirty little secret. There can be a sense of shame and guilt when anger develops because we want to be seen in our best, most giving light. To ease your stress, I want to let you know that even the most loving and compassionate caregivers experience frustration and resentment; it's part of our human experience.

Resentment builds up when there is no outlet for feeling hurt and angry. When we care for someone who needs us, we often put aside the activities and things we love in order to focus on the need at hand. In the beginning of helping, this is normal. We are finding our way through a new way of life. Over time this invalidation of who we are drains us of our energy and joy.

Rather than fear or resist anger and resentment, let's look at them as signals reminding us to incorporate more balance into our lives. When we experience such feelings it is time to take a step back and reassess.

Give to Yourself

It is wonderful that you are a kind and giving soul, but when was the last time you gave to yourself? It's time to put you back into the equation. Make time for peace and quiet, even if for only five minutes a day. Place your hand on your chest, take a few deep breaths, and listen to your heartbeat.

Ask yourself, what is something small that I can do to bring some happiness into my life today? The answer could be as simple as having a cup of tea, soaking your feet, or even indulging in your favorite chocolate while listening to music. Whatever it is, acknowledge the message, listen and follow through with it. When one is in a caretaking position long term, the expressions of gratitude may arrive less and less. That's due to us getting comfortable with one another.

Even though we know that it is not intentional, that doesn't erase the anger that is felt from being unrecognized. The problem is that holding onto resentment only harms you. Carrying that heavy energy around will affect your health in negative ways. You know that it still feels good to hear the praise, so if you need to, go ahead and tell yourself what a great job you are doing. Verbally acknowledging yourself often is a great way to keep feeling encouraged.

Gratitude puts us back into our heart center by focusing on what we do have, rather than what is lacking. When we write out or speak what we are thankful for, it increases our positive feelings for ourselves and others. This can be another gift that you can start giving to yourself daily.

Friends and Supports

It's essential to have your own set of friends and support in order to replenish the well. You want to give from a place of surplus, not deficit. The lack of emotional support for yourself leads to burnout, but laughing, going out to eat, conversing with friends, or even meeting up for coffee can be a great stress relief. Going to a mental health professional can be encouraging, by giving us a chance to focus on ourselves.

It's helpful to have a person who is not involved in your situation listen and offer advice. Many people feel relieved to have someone to talk to that understands them. Support groups allow us to surround ourselves with like-minded people that share our daily feelings; giving us the chance to socialize with people who make us recognize that our feelings normal.

Forgiveness and Prayer

At times we feel angry with God, although we feel afraid to admit that. If you are feeling angry with God, it's okay. Talk to God about all of your feelings. You can choose to forgive God. What God does not like is when we distance ourselves because we feel anger and resentment. Forgive yourself when you feel guilty for feeling resentful, whether it is with God or another person.

It's natural to become frustrated with the person you are caring for. They may be dependent upon you for their care and frustrated with their lack of wellness. Forgive the person that you are giving care to. Give all of your feelings of resentment and anger to God. Pray that God will show you how to consider you and help yourself. Pray and forgive those who are ill. Letting go

of the hurt is not the same as accepting unacceptable behavior. It is not ok to be abused. If you are in an abusive situation, seek professional help. It's a sign of strength to ask for and seek out help.



Exercise

Whether you go for a walk, join a gym, or exercise at home, you are not only moving your physical body but also your thoughts. Do some of your exercise in nature, as it is good to change scenery frequently. Nature is very healing when you open up to the sounds and sights in your environment. Exercise releases positive "feel good" hormones that naturally fight off resentment; not only will you feel better mentally, but you'll start to look and feel better physically.

Going Even Deeper

People are put into our lives for a reason; to heal a part of our wounded self. If you find yourself feeling impatient or resentful with another's dependency, it may be due to your own dependency. Is there a way to bring some compassion in for yourself when you need help?

Are you open to receiving support, or is there an imbalance in your giving and receiving? Once we acknowledge and work through the resentment and anger, we reconnect with our own power again. We are no longer victims of outside circumstances, but victors of our own mental domain. If you don't take care of yourself, you will not be any good to anyone else. For your own health and for those around you, it's essential to work on releasing resentments.

Lisa Hutchison's work specializes in guiding empathic helpers to reconnect with their passion and enjoyment of life through creative psycho-spiritual services. Lisa is a licensed mental health psychotherapist, spiritual teacher, and a published writer for Chicken Soup for the Soul. Visit www.lisahutchison.net and sign up for her FREE newsletter.

Aging in Place: A Real Choice Courtesy of Today's Caregiver

As people age, they are faced with making the decision of moving out or staying at their existing home, where some have raised their entire family. Too often, these homes are not conducive to the physical challenges that elders may face in their advancing years. A recent study of aging baby boomers shows an overwhelming propensity to remain in their current homes after retirement.

As a result, many home builders and housing associations throughout the country are organizing educational activities to highlight programs and support services, such as healthcare, chore services, and transportation, which will enable elders to age comfortably in place. Consumers who plan to age in place should take proactive steps to modify their homes while they are still financially and physically able. The National Association of Home Builders recommends the following modifications:

There should be at least one bedroom and one bathroom on the first floor. First floor living is a high priority for older adults. Having a full bath and a master bedroom on the main floor makes it easier for those who have trouble climbing stairs.

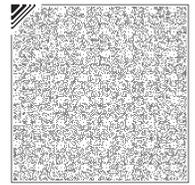
There should be conveniently located and easy to use controls and handles. Raised electrical outlets, electrical switches positioned slightly lower, and thermostats with large, easy to read numbers are perfect for older people. Installing lever handles makes it easier for people with arthritis to open doors.

There should be no-step entrances. Having at least one entry without steps creates easier access for everyone, regardless of ability. It may be appropriate to install a wheelchair ramp in at least one entrance as well.

There should be extra maneuvering space throughout the home. Wider doors and hallways can make a home more accessible. There should be drawers instead of shelves in the lower kitchen cabinets, which would accommodate a person in a wheelchair. In addition, shelves under the kitchen sink and stovetop can be converted from storage space to knee space for those who prefer to clean and cook while seated.

Changing knobs on the kitchen cabinets to D-shaped pulls that are a contrasting color to the cabinet doors make it much easier for the older person to grasp. Changes to the sink area can include changing the faucet to the single-handle lever type and installing an extra-long hose for the faucet sprayer. This would allow the older person to fill large pots that are sitting on the stove.

Bathrooms should be equipped with safety features. One of the most important rooms in the house to design correctly in order to allow homeowners to age in place is the bathroom. Grab bars, a bath chair, and a raised toilet seat can provide stability for the older person and prevent falls. Falls in the bathroom or on the stairs are the second leading cause of



accidents for elders, just behind automobile accidents. It would be prudent to invest in enlarging at least one bathroom in the home. A larger bathroom makes maneuvering easier for people with walkers, crutches, and wheelchairs.

For those who have to handle daily climbing of stairs, it is very important to have proper lighting on stairways. Eyesight changes as people age. Most of the older homes don't have adequate lighting on stairways. Therefore, installing lights with adjustable controls, or dimmers, can help prevent glare and ensure proper lighting. Task lighting is also preferred for cooking, reading and shaving, while softer light is appropriate for night trips to the bathroom.

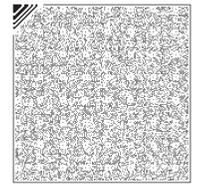
There are some elders who will choose to move to a new home when they retire, many of which will have a number of the above features in place. Many others, however, will not have the ability to make such a move, for a number of reasons. By planning ahead, and making some home modification changes now, elders can choose to remain in their home, comfortable in their surroundings, aging in place, and maintaining their independence and dignity.

Did You Know?

HomeAdvisor has a list of grants for disability accommodation in the home.

- V.A. Home Loans and Grants
- U.S.D.A. Housing Repair Loans and Grants
- Self-Sufficiency Grant from ModestNeeds.org
- The National Council of State Housing Agencies (NCSHA)

Diabetes & Kidney Disease: What to Eat?



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

One meal plan for diabetes, another for chronic kidney disease (CKD). Find out how you can eat well for both. If you have diabetes and CKD, you're definitely not alone—about 1 in 3 American adults with diabetes also has CKD. The right diet helps your body function at its best, but figuring out what to eat can be a major challenge. What's good for you on one meal plan may not be good on the other.

Your first step: meet with a registered dietitian who's trained in both diabetes and CKD nutrition. Together you'll create a diet plan to keep blood sugar levels steady and reduce how much waste and fluid your kidneys have to handle.

Medicare and many other private insurance plans may pay for your appointment. Ask if your policy covers medical nutrition therapy (MNT). MNT includes a nutrition plan designed just for you, which the dietitian will help you learn to follow. Diabetes and CKD diets share a lot of the same foods, but there are some important differences. Read on for the basics.

Diabetes Diet

A healthy diabetes diet looks pretty much like a healthy diet for anyone: lots of fruits, veggies, healthy fats, and lean protein; less salt, sugar, and foods high in refined carbs (cookies, crackers, and soda, just to name a few).

Your individual carb goal is based on your age, activity level, and any medicines you take. Following your meal plan will help keep your blood sugar levels stay in your target range, which will also prevent more damage to your kidneys.

Say No to Herbal Supplements

Herbal supplements aren't safe if you have kidney disease. Some can hurt your kidneys and even make kidney disease worse. Some vitamins can cause kidney problems too and should also be avoided. Always talk to your doctor before taking any supplements or vitamins.

Kidney Diet

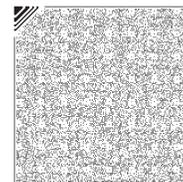
With a CKD diet, you'll avoid or limit certain foods to protect your kidneys, and you'll include other foods to give you energy and keep you nourished. Your specific diet will depend on whether you're in early-stage or late-stage CKD or if you're on dialysis.

Foods to Limit

Eat less salt/sodium. That's a good move for diabetes and really important for CKD. Over time, your kidneys lose the ability to control your sodium-water balance. Less sodium in your diet will help lower blood pressure and decrease fluid buildup in your body, which is common in kidney disease.

Focus on fresh, homemade food and eat only small amounts of restaurant food and packaged food, which usually have lots of sodium. Look for low sodium (5% or less) on food labels. In a week or two, you'll get used to less salt in your food, especially if you dial up the flavor with herbs, spices, mustard,

and flavored vinegars, but don't use salt substitutes unless your doctor or dietitian says you can. Many are very high in potassium, which you may need to limit.



Depending on your stage of kidney disease, you may also need to reduce the potassium, phosphorus, and protein in your diet. Many foods that are part of a typical healthy diet may not be right for a CKD diet.

Phosphorus is a mineral that keeps your bones strong and other parts of your body healthy. Your kidneys can't remove extra phosphorus from your blood very well. Too much weakens bones and can damage your blood vessels, eyes, and heart. Meat, dairy, beans, nuts, whole-grain bread, dark-colored sodas, and lots of packaged foods are high in phosphorus.

The right level of potassium keeps your nerves and muscles working well. With CKD, too much potassium can build up in your blood and cause serious heart problems. Oranges, potatoes, tomatoes, whole-grain bread, and many other foods are high in potassium. Apples, carrots, and white bread are lower in potassium. Your doctor may prescribe a potassium binder, a medicine that helps your body get rid of extra potassium.

Eat the right amount of protein. More protein than you need makes your kidneys work harder and may make CKD worse. But too little isn't healthy either. Both animal and plant foods have protein. Your dietitian can help you figure out the right combination and amount of protein to eat.

Diabetes & CKD Foods

Below are just a few examples of foods a person with both diabetes and CKD can eat. Your dietitian can give you lots more suggestions and help you find recipes for tasty meals:



- Fruits: berries, grapes, cherries, apples, plums
- Veggies: cauliflower, onions, eggplant, turnips
- Proteins: lean meats (poultry, fish), eggs, unsalted seafood
- Carbs: white bread, bagels, sandwich buns, unsalted crackers, pasta
- Drinks: water, clear diet sodas, unsweetened tea

Here's one way your CKD diet and diabetes diet can work together: If you drink orange juice to treat low blood sugar, switch to kidney-friendly apple or grape juice. You'll get the same blood-sugar boost with a lot less potassium.

Late-Stage CKD

Your nutrition needs will change with late-stage CKD. If you're on dialysis, you may need to eat more, especially more protein. Your appetite can change because food tastes different. Dialysis filters your blood like kidneys do, but it doesn't work as well as healthy kidneys. Fluid can build up in your body between treatments. You may need to limit how much fluid you drink, and watch for swelling around your eyes or in your legs, arms, and belly.

Your blood sugar levels can actually get better with late-stage CKD, possibly because of changes in how your body uses insulin. But when you're on dialysis, your blood sugar can increase because the fluid used to filter your blood is high in glucose (sugar). Your need for insulin and other diabetes medicines will be hard to predict, so your doctor will monitor you closely.



See Your Dietitian

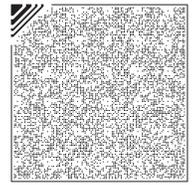
CKD and diabetes both change over time, and so will your diet. Be sure to check in with your dietitian as recommended. You'll get the support and confidence you need to manage your meals, solve any problems, and be your healthiest.

Did You Know?

Vision and Blindness — Today's Burden

- The four leading causes of vision loss in the U.S. are age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and cataracts, all of which are associated with aging.
- Women are at a higher risk for vision loss and blindness. They make up approximately 60% of the visually impaired and tend to live longer with chronic diseases. This trend is expected to continue through 2050.
- African-Americans are nearly two times more likely to develop cataracts and five times more likely to develop glaucoma than non-Hispanic white Americans.

Light Up the Darkness was a Success!



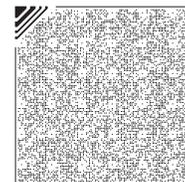
Group photo with Light Up the Darkness performers Kent Blazy, Cory Batten, Dani Figueroa, and Logan Vath, BVA Staff, and attendees.



On March 28th, 2019, the Blinded Veterans Association celebrated National Blind Veteran's Day with our first annual Light Up the Darkness Charity concert event. Thank you to our 150+ attendees for coming out to enjoy the wonderful night we had together. Thank you to Kent Blazy, Cory Batten, Dani Figueroa, and Logan Vath for their awesome performances. Thank you to all of our Supports and Sponsors. Last, but definitely not least, thank you to any and everyone that donated or purchased raffle tickets. Without the generous contributions we received, our organization would not exist to support and advocate for our Blinded Veterans. We look forward to our 2nd annual Light Up the Darkness Charity concert event in 2020.

In Remembrance

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



Alabama R.G.

Luther J. Brown

Cape Cod & Islands R.G.

Leon B. Rogers

Conneticut R.G.

Arthur B. Kane

Maria T. Stewart

Florida R.G.

James Roehm

Jack D. Jones

Edward P. Atkinson

Thomas A. Horner

Georgia R.G.

James D. Horton

Robert A. Kimsey

James W. Daniel

Greater Houston R.G.

Walter H. Farrell

Rudolph A. Fuentes

GEM State R.G.

Jacob H. Timmons

Illinois R.G.

Donald Kanuk

May J. Napravnik

Indiana R.G.

Everado V. Aguilar

Heartland R.G.

Darol E. Kile

Mid Atlantic R.G.

Stephen Collius

Kenneth Carr

NAT- Military Bases & No Stat R.G.

Charles L. sims

Albert Carse

Edward R. Jett

New York R.G.

George Durant

Donald Penny

Pennsylvania R.G.

Edwin R. Seace

Michael Sopko

Dennis Selsky

Puerto Rico R.G.

Harry C. Quiles

Eladio Vega Torres

Tito Soto Mercado

Rio Grande R.G.

Marion Phillips

Sooner (Oklahoma) R.G.

Donny R. Dunn

Southern California R.G.

Kenneth Kalbfleish

South Texas R.G.

William J. Hills

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Final Thought

Spring has arrived in full force with warm weather and blue skies; we should enjoy the beautiful days that are to come with our family and friends. Even in the midst of excitement, we must also remember that this is a time for commemoration. Military cemeteries all over the Nation will be visited and parades will be held to remember those who gave their lives so we could live free. We need to honor their stories of sacrifice and pass them down to our future generations. We need to take a step back on Memorial Day and remember. All of us at BVA are grateful for their sacrifice and honor those who have fallen. Memorial Day belongs to them.

