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A December to Remember

By: Jennifer Windham, Executive Director

December came and left like a whirlwind. It’s seems like, no sooner did it start, it was all over. Now here we are already starting the second month of 2015. For me, as the Executive Director, December means end of year audits, meetings deadlines to wrap up the year, before we closed for the holidays. Not to mention, the last minute shopping that was on many of our minds. However, in all the commotion, I stop and remind myself of all that our Chapter does to help on another and those in our communities.

The spirit that December brings humbles me with the love that we, as a community, share for one another. A love that we could all use a little more throughout the year. We tend to go out of our way to brighten the day of others. Serving our members is our priority, but supporting our communities is just as important.

December started off with the 15th Annual Christmas House Toy Run, hosted by the Chapter on December 7th. What a very powerful way to honor Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day than to see more than 200 motorcyclists, of all walks of life, put their differences aside if only for a couple hours, to bring hundreds of toys. These toys were donated to the Fort Gordon Christmas House. This program identifies families in need through an application process, junior enlisted service members in ranks E-1 through E-5, but service members outside the ranks may be considered on a case-by-case basis, and provides each child up to age 12 with three new gifts, and teenagers with two. In addition to the families children receiving the toys, a gift card was provided to used at the commissary to ensure that they would have a wonderful holiday dinner.

Another of my favorite events of December took place on the 10th. As I do not get out to the SCI Unit at the Augusta VAMC, it is a big treat for me to be part of the annual Christmas luncheon that the Chapter hosts for the patients, both in-patient and clinic, family members of patients, and staff of the SCI Unit. This year we had several members of the US Air Force stationed at Fort Gordon volunteer to serve the meal to roughly 200 people.

It was touching to see the younger, current serving men and women visit and interact with veterans. The stories and smiles that were shared were heartwarming. Spirits were raised with visits from two Santas: One in traditional attire and the other in ACUs, as well as, an ugly Christmas sweater contest among the staff. Being able to visit with our members, the patients and their family members made for very enjoyable afternoon.
Experiment with different pictures and sizes to find the right image, without wasting time. Swap pictures by dragging and dropping one of the pictures onto the other.

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By: Alphonso (Al) Evans

On December 30, 2014, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Southeastern Chapter lost one it’s hardest working supporters and Members. Our Chapter’s Past President and National Director, David E. Vaughn, pasted onto PVA’s Eternal Chapter.

First, I must thank both Wanda, David’s wife and Jennifer, his daughter, for all the time they gave up to allow David give to PVA and the Chapter. David served in the United States Air Force from December 1957 to December 1962, was injured in November 1982, and joined PVA in September of 1983. He immediately went to work for the Chapter recruiting and seeking veterans with Spinal Cord Injury. It always troubled David that veterans weren’t always getting all their benefits and health care issues taking care of. David would approach any person he saw in a wheelchair, or having problems motoring and ask, “are you a veteran?” If they said yes, his next question would be, whether they were using the VA for health care and getting their benefits? David would carry a copy of the PN magazine so he could give them the number to the nearest PVA Chapter in their area and Service Officer for their State.

PVA was David’s passion along with Trap Shooting and Hunting. It was a hunting accident that gave him, his T-5/6 Spinal Cord Injury. When David joined the Chapter, there were only 189 members. David volunteered to become the Membership Officer and started visiting the Augusta VA SCI Unit daily and talking to every veteran there. David’s would always say, “PVA’s work starts at the Spinal Cord Injury Unit, and our most important work is there.” By the end of his first year as Membership Officer the Chapter’s membership grew to over 1,000. He was select by the then Chapter’s Board of Director to represent us on PVA’s National Board of Directors. Everyone at the National level soon found out just how passionate David was about veteran’s Health Care and Benefits. While sitting on the National Board of Director, David also served as Chapter Vice President, working with then President Charles Littleton, and the Chapter membership continued to grow. David will be greatly missed by all that knew him. David believed in the mission and business of PVA, “TAKE CARE OF THE VETERAN and THEIR NEEDS.” I “Salute You” Friend and Mentor.

I also wanted to address: Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. This was developed to lower the wait time of veterans’ access to care in the VA’s Health program. Veterans have begun receiving their VA Choice Cards. Please remember just receiving the card will not automatically make you eligible to use the program. There are questions that need to be asked prior to going outside the VA for Health Care. Everyone should have received their letter from National PVA explaining the program and questions you need to be addressed to both the VA and Health Care Provider prior to trying to use the program. If you do choose to try to get into the program you must enroll online at www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll, or in person at a VA Medical Facility, or by calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

The staff and I here at the Chapter Office wish everyone a HAPPY NEW YEAR. ♦

PLEASE NOTE: Any articles or dates to be included within our next newsletter and/or calendar are to be submitted to Jennifer Windham by March 13, 2015 to meet publication deadlines.
HLO News:
The Augusta VAMC SCI Unit remains under bed limits due to the staffing shortage. This has become a very serious concern to both the Chapter and National PVA. It looks as if the construction issue may be coming to an end. The E-Wing and new office spaces and patients rooms have been turned over to the VA for installation of their equipment and computers. But this only gives the rooms back; there still is the problem of a nursing staff storage. This storage is causing the SCI Chief to limit the number of beds for inpatients. The Chapter has checked with our feeder Medical Facilities and they are starting to develop a back log of veterans needing in-hospital SCI Care. All new injuries are being seen but inpatient annuals are being delayed. This must be addressed and more effort needs to place on getting our staffing levels up.

An issue that seems to go in circles is patient rooms is cleanliness. There is no excuse for a patient room to be untidy or not kept clean. Things are dropped during the day, patient knock items off their tables and bedside cabinets. We are just asking that all staff assist in picking things up and putting items away. The Chapter has provided plastic shoe boxes to the unit for patient personal items (toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, etc.) to assist in keeping bed tables as clear as possible.

One of the issues that keeps coming up is the answering of call lights. Most patients will admit that it has gotten better. There still are times that nurses are slow to get to a patient’s bed when called. Patients are informing us that they are having problems getting turned or receiving pain medication. Please remember, pain medication is a control item that has to be closely monitored. There may be times the nurse must check with your physician prior to passing additional doses. This has been addressed to the Nurse Managers. Remember if you become a patient or care giver at the Augusta SCI Unit and are having problems, please request to see the Ward Nurse at the time of the incident. Issues need to be addressed as it occurs to ensure that they are cared for right then.

The Chapter is still working with the Augusta Medical Facility on the issue with housing veterans with SCI that come to the Augusta SCI Unit and must stay overnight. Contracting is looking into finding another location for SCI patients that are more Accessible (Wheelchair and SCI/D) Friendly. We will stay on this issue and will keep you updated on its status.

Parking for SCI Unit. If you haven’t gotten your SCI parking decal stop in at the SCI Clinic and get it. Please remember, just because you have a handicap tag or plaque, you can still be ticketed and towed if parking in an SCI Parking Space without having your SCI parking decal. Since the Parking Garage has begun we lost the parking at the back of the SCI Unit. The construction seems to be on schedule, and hopefully, will be completed on time.

One Prosthetic Purchasing Agent at the Augusta VA retired at the end of December. If you have any delays in receiving new prosthetic equipment or replacement items contact your National Service Officer. The Augusta Service Officer needs to keep track of these issues. Also, the Chapter was requested to remind members that it is time for filing Non-Reimbursable Medical Expenses. Even though you have until July 31 to file for Clothing Allowance it time to start thinking about it. Again, contact your National Service Officer if you have questions pertaining to this.
We Must Be Our Own Advocates

By: Paul Stewart, Board Member

To all veterans and caregivers, please make sure you are your own advocate about your care at the VA hospitals, CBOCs, and medical care centers. If you notice a problem or have concerns, please address them to nurses, doctors, patient advocates, VSO officers or the PVA organization. Our board is willing to look into the situations you may have and help resolve them. Also, I know there are good things our medical staff and the VA facilities are doing. Let us know about them as well. Everyone deserves Kudos!

I would like to share some of what I’ve recently experienced, noticed or have been asked about. These situations have taken place in the Salisbury, Asheville and Augusta VA Hospitals. First off, is the Asheville hospital. While attending the VAVS (Veterans Affairs Volunteer Services) meeting we learned of some concerns in Asheville. We addressed the closing off of the 3rd floor while the 4th floor was being renovated, and what was going be moved to the 3rd floor after the renovation on the 4th is completed. We questioned the problem with wheelchair services not having the appropriate tools to do the repairs on all the wheelchair (electric and manual). We have been informed of concerns regarding the smoking areas and the doors near the smoking areas being left open. The 3rd floor’s surgical waiting room has a vending machine with difficult access due to the information desk was right in front of it. The staff told us they were going to investigate all of the 3rd floor closing concerns, smoking issues and wheelchair repair problem. We, the Chapter, are looking into what can be done about the vending machine access area in the 3rd floor surgical waiting room.

Secondly, is the Augusta VA Hospital. During my recent stay at the VA hospital, I have found a few concerns, as well as, positive happenings. There has always been the shortages of nurses and staff on the SCI unit. How the patients are divided amongst the nurses seems somewhat strange to me. A nurse may have one patient in a one room, a second patient in another and a third down the hall. The hospital’s reasoning behind this, is to spread out the work load among all of the nurses. It may seem like it works but, as I see it, the nurses are essentially doing more work or just plain running around more than necessary.

I did however, appreciate the nurses that assisted me during my stay, though they weren't my scheduled nurses. Yes, they could have told me that I would need to wait for my nurse to assist, but they didn't. During my stay, I observed some of the concerns of other patients. I had assisted by making sure either the patient or the caregiver of the patient were getting the help/care that they needed, or by directing them to the right parties. One patient was suppose to get a bath every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but they hadn’t received one for 4 days. We addressed the issue at once and resolved this. During the first couple days of my stay at the Augusta VAMC, my roommates were unaware that I am a PVA member. During this time I did observation and assisted them. Later on I shared with them that I am a member of PVA. I made the point to tell them, to make sure if something wasn't going right during their stay, that it was critical to make someone aware of it immediately. On the same note, that is was also just as important to make hospital staff aware of excellent care received. Any concerns, both positive and negative, should bring it up with a nurse, management, patient advocate, or PVA Service officer or directors, so it can be addressed.

Finally, are concerns and comments regarding the Salisbury Hospital. If you have concern or problems with prosthetics or you feel you are getting the run around regarding repairs/getting equipment, please remember to communicate this with patient advocacy, a PVA service officer, or directors. We have been working with the hospital educate them regarding the variety of sports we are all involved in so that are able to receive the support regarding this. We really need more assistance with the Salisbury VA hospital recreational therapy to get involve with our understanding of the sports we are doing. In the past two years we have been fortunate in having sports clinics and basketball games at the Salisbury VA hospital. An immediate need here is to have recreational therapists more involve in the understanding of the equipment. As well as, why it’s important for the use of the equipment and how it improves our quality of life.

As veterans we need to be an advocate for ourselves, as well as our fellow veterans. By doing this we are making sure we get the care we all need. It doesn’t matter which hospital we are in, we may run into problems. Also, in order to retain the good staff we have in our hospitals, it is important to share your positive experiences. Make managers and directors aware of it; not just the employees. ♦
MEMBERSHIP REPORT

by: Al Evans

To Our Great Members –
HAPPY NEW YEAR.
This will be Our Year to Shine!!!!

Currently the Chapter has 2,037 voting members. Since July 1, 2014, eleven members have moved on to PVA’s Eternal Chapter. Bless them and their families and friends.

As we stated in the President’s Report, our Past President and National Director, David Vaughn Transferred to PVA’s Eternal Chapter on December 30, 2014. David was known throughout PVA for his passion to advocate for Veterans Health Care and Benefits. He will be greatly missed.

Asheville VAMC:
SMOKING POLICY
Dr. Rectine advised the VA is developing a policy on smoking, e-cigarettes and all tobacco products. Asheville has developed a policy that will not allow inpatients to leave the floors (Wards) to go and smoke. The smoking shelter will be relocated adjacent to Building 4. Veterans admitted as inpatients will not be allowed to leave the ward to smoke.

Dublin VAMC
At the last Membership Meeting at the Carl Vinson (Dublin) VAMC an issue came up in reference to parking problems. Mainly Accessible Parking and the number of spaces. SCI Coordinator Marquita Smith arranged a Walk-Thru of the Facility’s parking lot. Mr. Flaherty, Facility Engineering, Mr. Lord, Veteran/Member, and Al Evans were present. After completing the tour it was determined that the facility has the proper number of accessible parking spaces in the Patient/Visitor parking lots. Some of the spaces are not in areas that are convenient for Primary Care and Specialty Clinics. Some spaces did not meet the correct allocation of space for accessible parking. Some accessible parking spaces were not properly marked (painting of stripes). It was also observed that in a couple of places, curve cuts need to be added to make for easier access to Specialty Care buildings.

The Chapter suggested that the VA Police enforce the contractor’s parking of their vehicles. In some cases, they are parking in any open space. Taking up loading and unloading spaces for accessible vehicles, or next to regular vehicles, making it hard for visitors to get in. Space has been allotted for the contractors. Mr. Flaherty will be meeting with the Chief of the VA Police to take a closer look at parking of the contractors vehicles. Engineering will work on properly marking and relocating accessible spaces for patients and visitors.

Columbia VAMC
We had the Columbia VAMC meeting, December 12, 2014. Mr. David White, RN, from the Office of Non-VA Care, spoke on the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. As stated you must check with Eligibility prior to using the program. He answered questions on the use of Emergency Assistance (civilian hospital or ambulance service). They were advised of the importance of contacting the VA as soon as possible. If you should receive a bill for the service, contact the VA and a National Service Office for assistance.

Veterans Choice Card
Veterans have started receiving their Veterans Choice Card for the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. Please remember to first check with the VA Eligibility to Care office at your VA Facility, be it a Medical Center or Community Base Outpatient Clinic, before going to an outside the VA provider.

Everyone will be getting this card but everyone will not be eligible to use this program. You should have received a letter from National PVA if you are a member, it give questions that should be asked prior to receiving care outside of the VA. PVA still feels that all Spinal Cord, health issues need to be addressed within the VA Medical Center and at a SCI Center or Clinic.

Please check with the Eligibility Office to check your status prior to trying to use this program. You could wind up with a Medical Bill that is over the top and you’ll be fighting the VA to get it paid.

Returned Postage
Please call the Chapter if you know that you will be away and have your mail forwarded. We can either hold your newsletter or send to a temporary address during this time. We continue to incur returned postage fees upwards of $100 quarterly.

This can be reduced or even avoided simply by letting the Chapter know if your address has changed. Please call us or use the form on page 13 if you have a change of address.

Thank you!
Dear Veteran,

You have been taking a medicine that contains hydrocodone (hye droe KOE done). These medicines are used to relieve pain or help with coughing. On October 6th, 2014, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) will change these medicines from a Schedule III to Schedule II medicine. This change means that the medicine will be more strictly controlled. The DEA did this because these medicines can be highly abused, habit forming and potentially deadly if overdosed. It was thought that stricter regulations may improve their safe use.

What you need to **KNOW:**

1. The VA will start switching all hydrocodone prescriptions to Schedule II by **October 3, 2014.** This is a few days before the deadline.
2. Starting on **October 3, 2014,** no refills will be allowed on these prescriptions.
3. Starting on **October 3, 2014,** all hydrocodone prescriptions can only be for a maximum of 30 days.

What you need to **DO:**

1. If you are due for a refill **before** October 3, 2014, you may order it.
2. If you need another fill of the medicine **after** October 3, 2014, you need to submit a renewal request to the pharmacy. a. We ask that you request your fill on MyHealtheVet (www.MyHealth.va.gov) through the Secure Messaging function. This can be done 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
   b. If you have not signed up for Secure Messaging, you can call the pharmacy to get your medicine. The telephone numbers are (888) 878-6889 x 84370 or (317) 988-4370. They are open Monday through Friday from 7:30 – 5:30 Eastern Time.
3. Like all medicines, please make your request at least 10 days before you will be out.
4. If you have any questions about this medicine, please talk to your health care provider.

**Other Important Information**

We can help if you do not have a My HealtheVet account or have not yet registered for Secure Messaging. You may visit the My HealtheVet office to register. It is located in Room C-1183. Staff will be located in your primary care clinic to help you register too!

Sincerely,

Pharmacy Service
Thank you to all the volunteers that helped ensure the success of the Toy Run. A special thanks goes out to the Ammons’ Family for cooking up a delicious batch of taco soup!
Medical Expenses Reminder for New and Improved Pension

By Mitchell Hinkle, National Service Officer

It is just about time to report the 2014 unreimbursed medical expenses for those veterans and widows of veterans receiving the “New and Improved Pension” benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). If veterans have received the VA Improved Pension benefits they should contact a PVA Service Office to determine eligibility to file for medical expenses for the new pension-reporting period of January 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014. The Pension Center has mailed letters informing veterans and widows on Non-Service Connected Pensions that they may not need to file Eligibility Verification Reports (EVR’s). Veterans and widows must read the letters carefully because EVR’s may be required.

If veterans have not received an EVR from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by February 2015, and if it appears they may be eligible for reimbursement for medical expenses paid during the 2014-year period, please contact a local PVA Service Office. PVA can ensure that veterans receive proper forms in claiming medical expenses.

There are a number of medical expenses that one can claim, such as parking fees, other fees paid for medical insurance policies and mileage to and from medical appointments just, to name a few. If veterans have paid for any medical item (s) or for services and they have receipts for items or services provided, they can list the item on the medical expense application, VAF 21-8416, or in the area provided on the EVR. The VA will make a decision if it is an allowable expense. Just a reminder that sometimes the VA will request copies of receipts of medical items or services provided, and this is why veterans must keep the receipts in a place for access later.

If veterans have questions or concerns about medical expenses or other VA benefits please contact a local PVA Service Office for assistance.
David E. Vaughn
Dec. 7, 1940 - Dec. 20, 2014

When I really needed you...
You were there!
I thank you my friend.
Darryl Zerbel
both hands on the wheel!

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Helpful Hints from SCI-Homecare
By: Sonya Anderson, RN, CRRN

"Getting Prepared"

Are you prepared for leaving your home in the event of a possible emergency this winter? Some of us are, but most of us are not prepared to leave our homes on a spur of a moment. Initially, we all need a plan. Where will you go? Plan ahead and investigate local shelters, church's and close family member's homes. Another suggestion is to have a "Grab and Go bag" available. This bag will have at least 3 days of basic supplies/items needed for an emergency. This Grab and Go bag needs to be stored where it is readily accessible. During winter month's when the weather may cause emergent situations causing us to leave in a hurry and we need to be prepared, without thinking about gathering items at the last minute. This bag may be a back pack or duffle bag. Everyone's items will vary, but a suggested list of items are, but not limited to;

****Note: Please update items in your bag and check expiration dates routinely.

- Snacks in an air tight zip lock baggy, items that won't spoil
- Bottled water
- Cell phone with charger
- Clothing, socks, hats, gloves
- Medications
- Small amount of cash
- Medical supplies- catheter's, gauze pads
- Medical list/Allergies, This can be your medication list from homecare visits
- Glasses
- List of Phone numbers
February 2015

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1: Super Bowl Sunday

16: President’s Day HOLIDAY
Chapter CLOSED

17: Board of Director’s Meeting
Chapter CLOSED

18: Membership Meeting
Chapter Headquarters
Lunch Served at noon
Meeting begins at 1pm

March 2015

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6: National Veteran Wheelchair Game Applications
DUE to the CHAPTER

17: St. Patrick’s Day

20: Spring Begins

PLEASE NOTE:
Any dates/events to be included on our calendars are to be submitted to Jennifer Windham by March 13, 2015 to meet publication deadline.
VAMC Policy prohibits pictures of patients. However, here are some more from our luncheon, of volunteers, hospital staff and SEPVA staff. We enjoyed visiting with the 70 veterans and approximately 10 family members and the hospital staff during this fun afternoon.
**SPORTS REPORT**

By: Al Evans, Sports Director

**2015 NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES**

The 35th National Veterans Wheelchair Games registration packets are now available. If you attended the games within the last three years, you should receive one in the mail. If not and you need one, you can either download it from the National Veterans Wheelchair Games website or National PVA site. Click on ‘Sports & Recreations’ and then on ‘Wheelchair Games’ or you can call the Chapter and we’ll send one to you.

The Chapters deadline for the packets is **4:30pm, Thursday, March 5, 2015.** All applications must be COMPLETE and SIGNED.

The games will be held in Dallas, TX June 21 – 26, 2015, with travel dates of June 20th and 27th. Hopefully you have made appointments for your game exams and the earlier you make flight arrangements the cheaper it will be. We will staying at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel where the room rate will be $125 + 15.26% tax = $144.08 per night. Please **DO NOT CALL THE HOTEL directly.** All applications that are approved by the Chapter will have reservations made by the Chapter. ♦

**NATIONAL PVA SPORTS**

National PVA has developed a new U-Tube video showing PVA’s Sports & Recreation Program. Go to [http://youtu.be/2KVqFt-prcl](http://youtu.be/2KVqFt-prcl). It is a and is really good five minute video. Take a look and see what you think. ♦

**BASS and TRAPSHOOT**

I am in the process of working out dates for the Chapter to host a stop on the National PVA Bass Trail and Trap shoot Circuit. Currently, we are looking at holding the Bass Tournament October 9th, 10th and 11, 2015. The dates for the Trap shoot have not yet been set. We are looking at 2016 around the April/May or June time frame. Keep checking back for finalized dates. ♦

Jan 10, 2015 the Charlotte Rollin Hornets hosted two games of wheelchair basketball against the Georgia Hawks. The games were intense and fun for everyone. We would like to thank the Salisbury VA hospital for the use of the gym as well as the staff that assisted at the games. The Charlotte Rollin Hornets won both of the games: 1st game was 43-52 and the 2nd game was 43-62. ♦

**Development of Sporting Programs**

The Chapter has been contacted by Blaze Sports to begin working together to develop more sporting programs for people with disabilities. We will be working to give develop more sporting opportunities and developmental programs for those with disabilities. We are working on archery, hand cycling, air pistols and rifles to begin. Please contact the Chapter if there is a sport you would like to see started. This is your Chapter and your program. ♦

Please check out the Chapter’s website SoutheasternPVA.org for the latest activities/events taking place in the Chapter and National PVA. You can also go to PVA.org to get updated on Sports & Recreation, Advocacy/Legislation and Research on Spinal Cord Dysfunction.
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www.SoutheasternPVA.org

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SCI COORDINATORS
Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center, Augusta, GA
SCI Clinic Coordinator: (800)836-5561, ext. 3778 or 3710

Atlanta/Decatur VA Medical Center
SCI/D Coordinator: Kim Whitmoyer, (404)321-6111, ext. 2475

Birmingham VA Medical Center
SCI/D Coordinator: Nazaren Hartman, (205)933-8101, ext. 6453

Montgomery/Tuskegee VA Medical Center
SCI/D Coordinator: Karen Peterson, (334)727-0550, ext. 3219

Charleston VA Medical Center
SCI/D Coordinator: Elizabeth Carbonneau, (843)789-7252

Columbia VA Medical Center
SCI/D Coordinator: Mary Maxwell, (803)776-4000, ext. 6402

Dublin VA Medical Center
SCI/D Coordinator: Marquita M. Smith, (478)-272-1210, ext. 5459

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