



Roberto "Bobby" Barrera addresses an enthusiastic convention delegation being unanimously elected National Commander of the 1.2 million member Disabled American Veterans.



election as National Commander. "I'm here because my comrades refused to leave their wounded behind. I'm here because others cared enough to make a difference in my life.

"You, too, are here because you care enough to make a difference; you are here to build better lives for America's disabled veterans and their families. And I am living proof that it works."

Barrera is a service-connected, combat disabled Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War and a life member of Chapter 5, San Antonio, Texas.

In September 1969, Barrera was seriously injured when enemy forces exploded a land mine beneath the armored personnel carrier he was traveling in. The explosion and fire ball that ripped through the vehicle resulted in serious facial burns, the loss of his right hand at the wrist and his left arm at the shoulder.

During his recovery, Barrera came upon one veterans service organization that stood out from the rest. "In the DAV, I discovered a family of disabled veterans who, through friendship, compassion and mutual support, are dedicated to a single purpose: building better lives for America's disabled veterans and their families," he said.

Barrera also called on current members to reach out and inform other veterans on what the DAV offers.

Delegates Elect Barrera as National Commander

By Thom Wilborn
and Joseph R. Chenelly

From the stirring tones of bagpipes which ushered in the presentation of colors at the Opening Session to the thunderous standing ovation given to unanimously elected National Commander Roberto "Bobby" Barrera at the close, the 88th National Convention was filled with vital information on a wide range of veterans issues, our successes and the challenges we face

and the reaffirmation of DAV's mission to serve our nation's disabled veterans and their families.

More than 2,000 delegates and guests converged on the Denver Sheraton, to elect a slate of National Officers to lead the DAV and set the organization's direction for the year ahead. (See page 20 for a complete listing of newly elected DAV and Auxiliary National Officers.)

"I'm here on this momentous day because others looked out for me," Barrera told the delegates following his

“Membership strength must always be a priority,” Barrera said. “And you and I have an obligation to convince those who remain part-life members and those with a trial membership to become full-paid life members. We must also reach out to the remaining two million disabled veterans who are eligible for membership and educate them about the DAV.”

Barrera is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 1998; LIFE’s (Leaders In Furthering Education Foundation) Presidential Unsung Hero Award for 1998; and Department of Defense Outstanding Employee with a Disability Award for 1997. The late Jesse Brown, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, selected Barrera’s personal story of overcoming disability for inclusion in his book, “The Price of Their Blood.”

A hallmark of the National Convention were the powerful reports that celebrate DAV’s mission of service, the successes of the organization during the past year and the plans to address remaining issues affecting veterans and their families.

National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson told the convention that despite a significant decline in the nation’s economy, the DAV has continued its programs of service without interrup-

tion. “Not one of our programs of service to disabled veterans has been cut,” he said. “We have tightened our belts and initiated savings, but our service has continued unabated.”

“Our strategic planning and oversight has positioned us to take the hits and still deliver the goods,” said Wilson.

He cited DAV’s unmatched leadership in public policy as another area in which the organization succeeded due to the tremendous grassroots support of our membership for the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act (H.R. 1016).

“This historic legislation will ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding for the VA health care system,” said Wilson. “It will strengthen and sustain the delivery of medical services to millions of veterans, particularly disabled veterans.”

The legislation was developed, proposed and promoted by DAV as part of the Stand Up for Veterans initiative. “When your legislative team meets with members of the House and Senate, they walk through the door armed with our stellar reputation, something that you have all helped to empower and enrich,” said Wilson. “If you are one of the thousands of our members who contacted members of Congress urging them to support DAV’s legislative agenda, you know that you have

played a vital role in helping us develop a broad and bipartisan coalition of supporters on Capitol Hill.”

Adjutant Wilson’s report featured a video which highlighted the success of our mission of building better lives for disabled veterans and their families. “It is just a glimpse of some of the things that set us apart from other service organizations,” he said. “What really distinguishes DAV is our commitment to direct service and advocacy for those who have given so much for our nation — our members.”

“We are clearly the best, because we continue to give our best to all those we serve,” Wilson said. “We are pledged to a mission of service.”

Washington Headquarters Executive Director David W. Gorman credited member support that defeated an ill-conceived proposal to bill private insurance companies for VA health care provided to veterans for their service-connected disabilities.

“You protested with deserved outrage,” he said. “Congress heard you, and they protested. Ultimately, the White House heard us and they withdrew the proposal.”

Gorman praised the membership for their support of legislation calling for advance appropriations of VA health care. “No longer will VA have to wait weeks, sometimes months, for their budget to be passed,” he said. “No lon-



Left, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki, a DAV life member, addresses convention attendees. Right, Washington Headquarters Executive Director David W. Gorman educates delegates on the DAV’s legislative initiatives, including the Stand Up for Veterans initiative.



ger will veterans be forced to wait for appointments. VA will no longer have to wait to hire health care providers or delay buying needed medical equipment due to the lack of a budget.”

Gorman said the challenge of the future is addressing the problems and solutions to the lengthy VA disability claims adjudication process. “Many say the disability claims process is complex and poorly understood,” he said. “But, for the men and women

who have served and sacrificed for our nation, this is an unacceptable response. We deserve a system that meets our needs without hassles or undue delays.”

Gorman said DAV has proposed bold, creative and imaginative steps to resolve the delays. “We have presented our ideas to Congress and to VA,” he said. “It’s a starting point to change a system burdened with yesterday’s process and mindset to one that is in

touch with the realities of today.”

National Commander Raymond E. Dempsey’s report on his year of service reflected the power of unity of the DAV membership. “Our members have written a page of history that truly is a tribute to commitment and resolve,” he said.

The approval of the advance appropriations bills in Congress, which authorizes VA health care funding a full year in advance, was a victory for all

(Continued on page 17)



Disabled Veterans Commemorative Coin Design Unveiled



Edmund C. Moy, Director of the United States Mint, and Diane Musselmann unveil the designs for the 2010 American Veterans Disabled for Life Silver Dollar.

Those attending the DAV National Convention in Denver gave thunderous applause as Edmund C. Moy, Director of the United States Mint, unveiled the designs for the 2010 American Veterans Disabled for Life Silver Dollar.

“We are honored that the United States Mint has designated a special commemorative coin to honor our country’s disabled veterans,” said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson and President of the Disabled Veterans’ LIFE Memorial Foundation. “Not only will the coin forever be a reminder of the brave service men and women who risked, and continue to risk their lives, but each coin sold will bring us one step closer to building a long overdue permanent tribute to disabled veterans in our nation’s capital.”

The coin’s designs, approved by Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner on July 30, are emblematic of the service of our disabled veterans who made enormous personal sacrifices defending the principles of our democracy. The obverse, or heads side, of the coin depicts the legs and boots of three disabled veterans. The inscription in the banner along the coin’s upper rim, THEY STOOD UP FOR US, pays tribute to the courageous disabled veterans who fought to preserve our freedom, Moy told the audience. Additional inscriptions on the obverse are IN GOD WE TRUST, 2010 and LIBERTY.

The reverse (tails) design depicts a forget-me-not flower at the base of a wreath wrapped in a ribbon that cradles and supports clusters of oak branches. The oak branches represent strength, while the forget-me-not is a widely accepted symbol of remembrance for those who sacrificed their blood and their

health for our country’s cause, Moy explained. The main inscription reads Take This Moment to Honor Our Disabled Defenders of Freedom, while the rim is imprinted with UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, E PLURIBUS UNUM and ONE DOLLAR.

Under the American Veterans Disabled for Life Commemorative Coin Act, the U.S. Mint will issue commemorative coins in honor of veterans who became disabled while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The agency will mint proof and uncirculated versions of the commemorative \$1 coin in 90 percent silver. The coins will bear the “W” mint mark of the United States Mint at West Point. Mintage is set at 350,000 coins across all product options.

Surcharges collected from sales of the 2010 American Veterans Disabled for Life Silver Dollar coins are authorized to be paid to the Disabled Veterans’ LIFE Memorial Foundation. The surcharges will help the Foundation support the construction of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial in Washington, D.C., which was authorized by Congress in 2000.

The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial plans to break ground in 2010. To date, the Foundation has raised 90 percent of the total funds needed to design, build and permanently maintain the memorial. Approximately \$5 million still must be raised before groundbreaking can begin.

Introductory and regular pricing will be established in early 2010. To be placed on the early notification list when the coin becomes available for sale, send an email request to info@dvlmf.org. To make a tax-deductible donation or learn more about the Memorial, visit www.avdlmf.org.



National Commander Raymond Dempsey awards reporter Chris Vanderveen for continuous and enlightening coverage of disabled veterans, their families and the families of fallen veterans. Below, National Commander Raymond Dempsey and National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson receive a check from Jim Vella, president of Ford Motor Company Fund and Community Services. In addition to donating \$200,000 toward the purchase of vans for the Transportation Network, Ford donated \$25,000 to the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Volunteer Scholarship program.

Convention

(Continued from page 9)

veterans. “Without your support and grassroots efforts to let your elected officials know the importance of the issue, victory could not be claimed,” Dempsey said.

“We all called for our government to stand up for veterans,” he said. “And Congress and the administration got our message loud and clear, thanks to you.”

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki, a DAV life member, delivered what he called his seven-month progress report reflecting what the VA has accomplished since he was confirmed to head the agency. He recognized the VA’s shortcomings in the area of claims adjudication and said he was going to reduce the lengthy delay in deciding veterans’ disability claims. “We must do this faster, better and more equitably.”

Citing the need for improved access to health care, Secretary Shinseki said VA is encouraging veterans to make use of the 768 outpatient clinics, 232 veterans centers and 50 new mobile clinics, as well as full-service medical

centers. “Veterans are waiting too long for their claims, and [VA is] going to do something about it,” Shinseki said. By making greater use of information technology, such as DAV’s recommendation for a 21st Century Claims Process, VA can greatly reduce the backlog. “I am personally dedicated to reducing the lengthy processing of veterans claims,” he said.

And Secretary Shinseki said that better use of VA programs for veterans would return today’s 131,000 homeless veterans to productive lives within five years. “We have to attack the entire downward spiral that ends in homelessness,” he said. “We have to do it all.”

In her report, Auxiliary National Commander Sandra J. Dobmeier paid tribute to the more than 14,000 DAV volunteers who each day make a phenomenal difference in bringing joy and comfort to sick and disabled veterans.

“If not for the volunteers working in nearly every area of our VA hospitals

and clinics I don’t know how the VA would even be able to operation,” she said. “Many veterans wouldn’t even be able to get to their appointments without volunteers who work in the transportation program.”

“The need for our work is continuing to grow, and we need to grow to meet the need now and into the future,” Auxiliary Commander Dobmeier said. “I can assure you the work to meet that challenge is underway. Our veterans can count on us to make telephone calls, send e-mails, write letters and make personal visits to our elected leaders calling for their support of legislation benefiting our veterans and their families.”

Edmund C. Moy, director of the U.S. Mint, brought some unexpected good news to the National Convention when he unveiled a new commemorative coin which will help fund the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial to be built in Washington, D.C. (See page 9.)

(Continued on page 28)



Convention

(Continued from page 17)

Diane Musselmann, who was appointed to the Disabled Veterans LIFE Memorial Foundation Board of Directors to replace her late husband, Past National Commander Kenneth Musselmann, told convention delegates that veterans rights were a passion she and her husband shared. "The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial will soon be built in Washington, D.C., and forever serve as a memorial for disabled veterans," she said.

Ford Motor Company Fund President Jim Vella presented to DAV a \$200,000 donation to purchase nine new vans for the Transportation Network and \$25,000 for the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship Program. The aggregate donations by Ford since 1996 have purchased 141 vans for the Transportation Network and funded 113 Jesse Brown scholarships.

Triple amputee Dale Wilson, the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year, told the convention he was "one of the most blessed men in the room and this country" when he accepted the DAV award. "I am truly honored and proud to stand in front of you today." (See page 5.)

Chris Vanderveen, a reporter at KUSA-TV in Denver, received the 2009 Bugle Award for his outstanding coverage of disabled veterans and

their families, Jenny McBride received the DAV Auxiliary Past National Commander's Outstanding Auxiliary member of the Year, Salvator Uccello of Greenacres, Fla., and Katie Critz of Dallas, Texas, were presented the George H. Seal Memorial Awards for outstanding volunteerism, and Jamal Childs of Washington, D.C., received the top Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship. (See page 19.)

VA Employee awards were also presented to the 2009 Outstanding Veterans Benefits Administration Employee Cynthia East, a Benefits Delivery at Discharge office supervisor at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Clifford McGlotten, the senior veterans health care liaison at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, received the Outstanding Veterans Health Administration employee award and the Award for Outstanding Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration employee was presented to Mary Jones, the cemetery representative at the Los Angeles National Cemetery. (See page 18.)

A variety of informative seminars on veterans issues were conducted between the business sessions to give delegates the latest updates on service, legislation, voluntary services and other programs.

The Benefits Protection Team and Legislative Workshop included up-to-date briefings on the Stand Up for Veterans Initiative urging Congress to ensure that VA has the resources, programs and services required to provide comprehensive health care and benefits to disabled veterans. The workshop focused on pending legislation aimed at improving mental health services,

treatment for traumatic brain injury, women veterans health care, support for family caregivers and veterans health care budget reform


The Service and Legislative Seminar featured officials from the VA and key staff members of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee who responded to questions regarding all aspects of VA benefits and services.

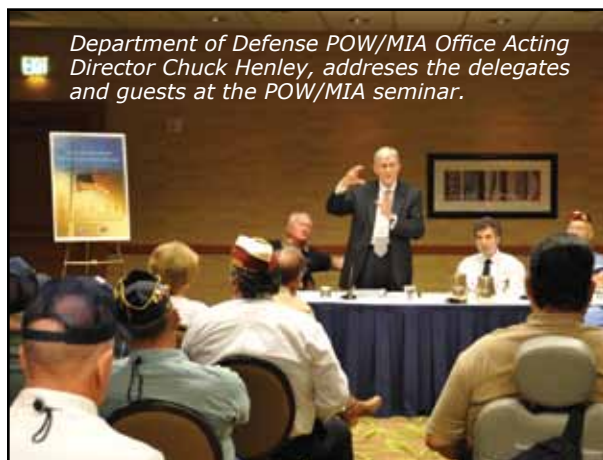
The Voluntary Services Seminar reviewed DAV's programs of recruiting and retaining new volunteers, plus a review of recruiting strategies and tactics. The seminar also featured details of a DAV/VA Call Center, which has had tremendous impact in Long Island and other parts of New York.

Other seminars featured issues affecting women veterans, POW/MIAs, Membership and Communications.

National Convention delegates were also treated to entertainment events including the National Commander's reception, Fun Night with Gary Sinise and his Lt. Dan Band and the introduction of National Officers, featuring dinner and dancing.

As the delegates and guests departed Denver, they carried home with them a clear perspective of what lies ahead for DAV members. The organization will face new challenges in health care and veterans' benefits. But armed with vital information and renewed commitment to our purpose, the grassroots efforts of DAV members remain the strongest of all veterans service organizations.

On the horizon is the 89th National Convention in Atlanta beginning July 31, 2010, where members and leadership will again reassess the strategy and goals, the successes and needs of veterans. The curtain of the first decade of the century came down in Denver, but the needs of our nation's disabled veterans their families remain center stage. The end of the 88th National Convention was just the beginning of the future. 



Department of Defense POW/MIA Office Acting Director Chuck Henley, addresses the delegates and guests at the POW/MIA seminar.