



# Tyson Elected National Commander at 89th National Convention

*President Obama Addresses Delegates*

**W**ith one unanimous vote, delegates at the 89th National Convention on Aug. 3 selected a service-connected, disabled Vietnam era veteran to lead the organization for the next year.

Pledging to lead the DAV in its mission to build better lives for America's disabled veterans and their families through unsurpassed advocacy and service programs, Wallace E. Tyson, was elected National Commander at the culmination of one the best-attended National Conventions in years.

(See page 38 for a complete list of newly elected National Officers.)

"This is a momentous day for me," Commander Tyson said in his first appearance before the National Executive Committee as Commander. "Being elected as your National Commander is a privilege I never ex-



*Wallace E. Tyson*

pected when I joined the DAV to serve my fellow disabled veterans. Today marks the pinnacle of my years with DAV."

Commander Tyson is a life member of Chapter 46, Fayetteville, N.C. He joined the DAV in 1985 following medical retirement as an Army sergeant first class, and began his DAV service as a Chapter Service Officer and Chapter Adjutant. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1972.

"We are a powerful force united on behalf of disabled veterans. And the singular purpose of our mission has enabled us to obtain remarkable results," Commander Tyson said.

"But we still have wounded veterans returning home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must think of them, not ourselves. We must reach out to them and welcome them into the fold. We must make them feel at home among us. And we must make our DAV their DAV as well.

“There are many veterans groups in our nation today. Some are dedicated solely to the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. And that’s all right,” he continued. “But I tell you now that no veterans service organization does more for our wounded warriors than the DAV.”

Susan Henry was elected National Commander of the DAV Auxiliary Aug. 3. A charter member of Unit 116, in Millington, Tenn., Commander Henry joined the Auxiliary as a senior member in 1981. Her membership eligibility is through her late father, Robert F. Henry, a Korean War era Marine.

Commander Henry is a regularly scheduled volunteer at the VA medical center in Memphis and at the Millington Healthcare Center. She also volunteers for the Millington Crisis Center and the Bogota Community Center.

Before the elections, the nearly 3,000 delegates and guests welcomed President Barack Obama at a special session of the National Convention. Obama, pleased delegates with his praise for disabled veterans and his support for their federal programs.

“I valued your advice and counsel when I was a Senator,” he said. “You were one of the first veterans organizations that I called upon when I began my presidential campaign. And most recently, to sign advance appropriations into law so that veterans health care would never again be held hostage to the budget battles and the political games in Washington,” President Obama said.

“I’m proud of the progress we’ve achieved together. But as one of your outstanding DAV members from Illinois just reminded me, [advance appropriations] is a promise I made during the campaign. It was a promise made and it was a promise kept. And I intend to keep on keeping my promises to veterans of America.”

“Thanks to advance appropriations, the delays for funding for veterans medical care are over,” Obama said. “Just as those delays were unacceptable, so too are long delays in the claims process.”

President Obama noted the wartime accomplishments of four veterans: Nicholas Bernardi of Newark, N.J., Dan Knabe of St. Louis, Mo.,

Matt Seidl of Milwaukee, Wisc., and Patricia Ruiz of Albuquerque, N.M., who returned home to heal their wounds and then serve other veterans as DAV National Service Officers.

“Your country is going to take care of you when you come home,” Obama said. “Our nation’s commitment to our veterans, to you and your families, is a sacred trust. And to me and my administration, upholding that trust is a moral obligation. It’s not just politics.”

“To the Disabled American Veterans, I want to say to all of you, you are the very essence of America, the values that sustain us as people, and the virtues our nation needs most right now.”

Following his address to the National Convention, President Obama went to the audience, shaking hands and accepting the thanks from the crowd for his steadfast support of veterans.

From the rousing Armed Services Medley to the closing prayer, the 89<sup>th</sup> National Convention showcased the finest of the DAV’s service programs and the far-reaching and successful legislative initiatives. Delegates and guests received the latest information on the continuing legacy of the DAV and its significant accomplishments of the past year.

Opening the convention, then-National Commander Bobby Barrera gave a moving report on his year of service to the 1.2 million members of the DAV. “I am

so grateful for the opportunity to help our cause of building better lives for disabled veterans and their families,” he said. “I thank each member for what you do each and every day to help our fellow veterans. With the support of our dedicated membership, we have succeeded in giving comfort to those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom.”

He closed his year as National Commander by giving special thanks to all members. “You serve your fellow disabled veterans with pride and dignity,” he said. “For you, the war has not ended and will never end. Service is what sets you apart from others. Thank you so much for allowing me the honor of serv-



*W. Scott Gould*

*(Continued on page 12)*

## Convention

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ing you.”

Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs W. Scott Gould offered delegates “a peek behind the curtain” of the VA during his remarks to the convention. “We’ve got a lot to do,” he said. “We passed a million disability claims in 2009, and we’re still building. In the last decade, incoming disability claims grew by a staggering 75 percent. And we expect that to grow in the next decade.”

“We need to transform the operations of VA to make it different,” said Gould. “We have to change VA’s culture from adversary to advocate. We need to deliver improved services and benefits to achieve higher standards of quality.”

Gould said more veterans are turning to the VA for health care services, and the number of aging veterans coming to the VA for health care has increased dramatically, citing a forecasted 32-percent increase in veteran patients aged 85 or older in the next decade.

To meet the need for health care services provided by VA, Gould said improvements will be necessary in the agency’s business processes and information technology. “When the new administration began we found the state of VA technology was a disaster,” he said. “Many programs were more than a half year behind and at double the budget.”



*Kay Egan*

of wonder, challenge and achievement.”

“It is the Auxiliary’s purpose to advance the interests and work for the betterment of all wounded, injured and disabled veterans and to co-operate with all agencies devoted to the cause of improving and advancing the condition, health and interests of disabled veterans,”

Looking to the DAV for support, Gould said the organization is “extraordinarily powerful. We are proud to be your partner, and we are proud to be your department.”

Then-Auxiliary National Commander Kay Egan reported that her year was “full



*Lynn Quigley, Ford Motor Company  
Community Relations Manager*

she said. “I wanted all of us to get connected because there is strength in numbers. From the town hall to the halls of Congress, we must make sure our leaders realize disabled veterans fought to ensure our freedom.”

Ford Motor Company Community Relations Manager Lynn Quigley presented the DAV with a \$200,000 donation from the Ford Motor Company Fund to purchase 17 new Transportation Network vans. She also presented a \$25,000 donation for the Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship Program.

“Ford Motor Company is proud to support your work,” she said. “We appreciate the support you’ve shown us with the purchase of 1,300 vehicles.” Ford has donated a total of 148 vans, worth approximately \$3.4 million, to the Transportation Network. In addition to contributing to the Transportation Network and the Brown scholarships, Ford also supports the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic and the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year David Riley, who lost both arms and legs while serving as a rescue swimmer in the U.S. Coast Guard, told convention delegates that his long, painful recovery was taken step by step. “I chose life,” he said. “Now my life is to



*David Riley*

motivate other veterans.” (See page 24.)

Riley was medically retired in 1998 after a bacterial infection caused the loss of his limbs. Since then he has gone on to become an inspirational leader in the local DAV Chapter, a VA hospital volunteer and disabled athlete.



*Adm. Robert J. Papp*

Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Robert J. Papp said he was pleased that Riley was the first Coast Guard veteran to receive the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year award. “Dave is continuing to live out his life by the rescue swimmers’ creed — ‘so that others might live,’” said Adm. Papp. “The only difference is that those others are no longer people in need of rescue from the sea. He now rescues injured veterans returning home in need of an example of how to cope with their injuries.”

The George H. Seal Trophy for extraordinary volunteerism went to Joseph Patterson and Barbara Centeno (see page 26). This year’s Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship top recipient was Stephanie Wu, a volunteer at the San Francisco, Calif., VA medical center. The annual Bugle Award was presented to Kelly Kennedy of *Military Times* for her astute and insightful reporting on issues of great importance to veterans.

National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson’s report during the first business session reviewed the DAV’s many accomplishments during the past year, outlined the organization’s future and updated members on the status of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

“We have won advance funding for VA health care,” he said. We have won greater federal support for veterans’ caregivers, women veterans, homeless veterans,

veterans with mental health needs and veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury.”

Crediting the remarkable achievement of the DAV grassroots program, Adjutant Wilson noted the membership’s “support, dedication and powers of persuasion.”

Reviewing the organization’s 90-year history, he said the successes and the hardships have strengthened the DAV over the decades. “The meeting of achievement and disappointment over 90 years has made the DAV the very best,” said Wilson. “We have become the eventual authority on issues affecting disabled veterans.”

“While remaining flexible to changing times, we have always remained faithful to our mission to building better lives for disabled veterans, their families and survivors,” he said. “Our mission is the strength of our foundation.”

Adjutant Wilson’s remarks included an inspiring video presentation reviewing the past year of achievements of the DAV, including the remarkable success with legislative initiatives.

Looking to the future, he said the first phase in building the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial was about to begin and expected formal construction to begin in early 2011. “There’s a need to raise \$3.2 million to complete the construction



*Stephanie Wu*



*Kelly Kennedy*

budget, and we're optimistic that money will be raised," Wilson said. "The fund raising campaign is on track."

He urged members to purchase commemorative memorial coins which will be on sale only until the end of 2010. "We've been working on this coin for about seven years," said Wilson. "Most likely there will not be another coin honoring disabled veterans any time in the near future."

"For 90 years, the DAV has grown from a small group of disabled World War I veterans to the nation's most powerful force of advocacy for disabled veterans and their families and survivors," said Wilson. "It is a testament to our legacy and commitment to our core principles of service, quality, integrity and leadership. That legacy endures, thanks to you, our members, and your dedication to our mission."

Washington Headquarters Executive Director David W. Gorman presented his report on the legislative and service activities citing the success of DAV's legislative campaigns for advance appropriations and new programs for veterans' caregivers, women veterans and homeless veterans.

"None of these successes, accolades or awards could have been accomplished without the work that all of you do back home," said Gorman. "But we can't rest because there is more that needs to be done."

Looking at DAV's proposals to streamline the VA's claims processing system, he said more than a million claims await a decision. "Even more troubling than how long it takes is VA's 20 to 30 percent error rate in the decision making process."

He said the good news is that Congress is focused on the problem and veterans organizations are more united to resolve it.

"It is absolutely crucial that everyone understand that the backlog is not the problem," said Gorman. "It is only a symptom of a much larger problem. Unless we effectively address the underlying problems that created the backlog in the first place — the lack of accuracy, accountability, quality control and training — these problems will persist and it is only a matter of when, not if, the backlog grows."

Gorman insisted that the stated goal should not be to eliminate the backlog, "rather the goal is to reform and modernize the claims processing system. VA needs to focus on doing it right the first time," he said.

By working with Congress and the Administration, Gorman said the disability claims processing system would change. But another element was needed. "We will continue to call on you — our membership — to keep the heat on Congress and the Administration," Gorman said. "Over the past year, we have truly accomplished a lot together, and together we can and will do more."

Following Gorman's report, DAV's Outstanding VA Employee awards were presented to Kathleen Hanley from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Sarah Nowitzke with the Veterans Health Administration and Edward Holmes of the National Cemetery Administration. (See page 23.)

The National Convention included a variety of informative seminars to offer updates on new VA rules and regulations and DAV programs. Among them was the Membership and Communications Seminar, which focused on new methods of social networking on the Internet to make veterans aware of their benefits and the professional services of the DAV.

Other seminars centered on matters related to the day-to-day activities and operations of Departments and Chapters, including fundraising, use of income and financial reporting requirements. The Voluntary Services Seminar focused on the programs that strengthen our commitment to hospitalized veterans and the Transportation Network.

For the first time, the Benefits Protection Team and the Service and Legislative Seminar was broadcast live over the DAV's Web site featuring VA officials and key staff members from the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees commenting on the resources, programs and services required to provide comprehensive health care and benefits to disabled veterans and legislative initiatives.

On the final day of the National Convention, the Harley-Davidson Foundation awarded a second \$1



*David W. Gorman*



*Gail Lione, Harley Davidson Foundation, presents \$1 million grant*

million grant to DAV to continue the Harley’s Heroes Mobile Service Office program over the next four years.

“Veterans have always been important members of the Harley-Davidson family, and partnering with the DAV is an ideal way to support them and recognize their contributions to our country,” said foundation president Gail Lione.

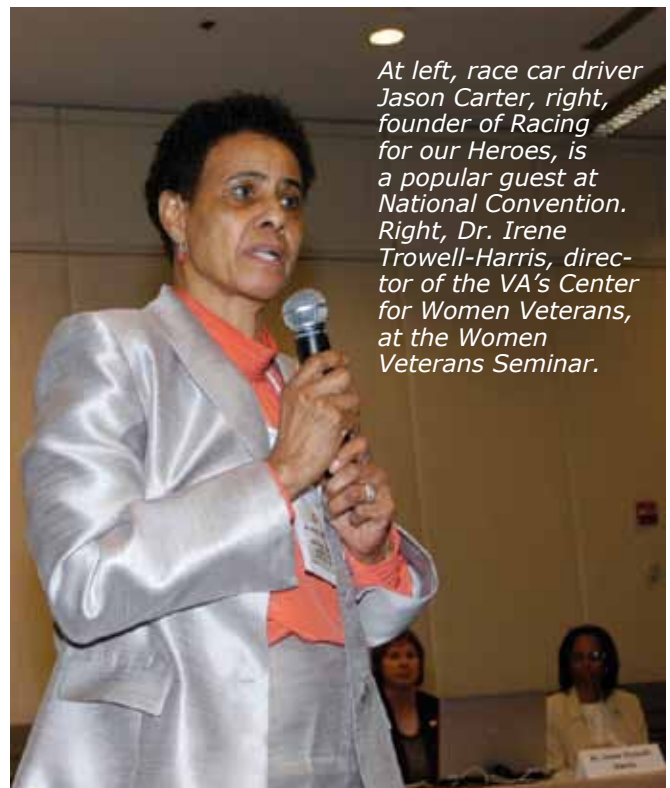
“Through the support of the Harley-Davidson Foundation, DAV representatives have visited nearly

300 dealerships across the nation on the Harley’s Heroes tour, delivering free benefits assistance to disabled veterans and their families through our Mobile Service Office program,” said Adjutant Wilson. “It’s hard to put into words just how much the Harley’s Heroes program has meant to thousands of sick and wounded heroes.”

With the election of National Commander Tyson and his line officers, the DAV concluded its 90<sup>th</sup> year with reflection on the past and confidence that the new issues affecting disabled veterans and their families can be solved in the best interests of those who served and sacrificed for their nation.

As members returned home they took with them the memories of a landmark National Convention, an armload of topical information for their Chapters and Departments and renewed enthusiasm for the task they have undertaken — to ensure that our disabled veterans and their families are served by their nation with honor, as they served their nation.

Looking forward to the 2011 National Convention in New Orleans, more than one delegate feels that they haven’t seen anything yet.



*At left, race car driver Jason Carter, right, founder of Racing for our Heroes, is a popular guest at National Convention. Right, Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris, director of the VA’s Center for Women Veterans, at the Women Veterans Seminar.*