



UNDER THE BIG SKY

A TREASURE STATE NEWSLETTER

February 2018

MESSAGE FROM YOUR STATE COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Greetings everyone. I would like to apologize on behalf of the State Council for not having an up to date newsletter on our Montana website. As you know this is the responsibility of your State Council Vice-President. Due to his continued illness and inability to serve, Mike Bennett resigned, and a special election was held at the October State Council meeting. Chuck Renevier, Chapter President of the Bozeman Chapter 788 is now the Montana State Council Vice-President. It is our goal to have a quarterly newsletter now posted.

It is that time of year again. Report time. Secretary of State filings are due by April 15th. Financial reports can be filed as soon after February 28th (the end of VVA's fiscal year) as you can. Remember you must have a copy of your 990 acceptance from the IRS before you can send in your report to National. There is a new financial report form on the National VVA website. It has been simplified even more than before. Also, this year all Montana chapters have elections in April. It is a requirement of the VVA National Constitution that a copy of all reports be sent to the State Council Secretary. I would like to personally thank all the chapters for all their efforts every year in making our state compliant.

July may seem a long way off now, but time slips by quickly. This year the Leadership and Educational Conference will be held in Palm Springs, CA. This will be a very important conference because it will be a prelude to the discussion at the 2019 convention regarding the future of VVA. I would like to encourage all chapters to try to find someone to attend. Information regarding costs can be found on the National VVA website.

I will be attending the National CSCP and Board of Directors meeting April 12-14 and will be looking forward to seeing everyone at the State Council meeting in Bozeman the following weekend.
Beverly Stewart, President.

MONTHLY CHAPTER MEETINGS

Glendive-3rd Monday

Billings-TBA (changing)

Helena-1ST Tuesday

Bozeman-1st Tuesday

Bitterroot Valley-1st Wednesday

Kalispell and NW Montana-2nd Wednesday

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR AREA??

CAN YOU LEND A HAND??

CHAPTER 234-GLENDIVE

The chapter helped with the emplacement of new flag poles at the county fairgrounds. We donated the pole-top pies as well as new U. S. and POW/MIA flags. A project to place two stone benches commemorating Vietnam Veterans at the memorial monument at the Eastern Montana Veterans Home is in progress. Additionally, a stone bench for placement at our chapter's local monument is planned. The chapter donated a POWMIA flag for presentation to the family of a missing Vietnam Veteran.

We held our annual Holiday dinner in December. This year Chapter 234 signed up 7 new members. Our chapter continues to work closely with the VFW and Legion in all activities in our area.

CHAPTER 626-HELENA

We conducted our 2nd annual Safety Stop at the Dearborn Rest Stop on the first Saturday of September. We had over 200 travelers stop for coffee, cookies and doughnuts. There were not as many travelers this year and we accounted it to the smoke and fires.

Chapter 626 members continue to do volunteer work at the Fort Harrison VA Hospital along with the other Veterans' groups in Helena.

It turned out to be quite a chilly day but with our new coats and hats, Chapter 626 members marched proudly in the Veterans Day parade in East Helena.

Chapter 626 continues to host a Veterans Coffee Hour at Perkins the first Saturday of every month. Drinks are free. This is not a VVA business meeting and all veterans are invited.

CHAPTER 788-BOZEMAN

Bozeman has an on-line newsletter and webpage-2015 VVA National Webpage of the Year

There are always many activities happening in the Bozeman area and many opportunities for veterans to assist. Just a couple of highlights.

Last year Chapter 788 installed a VVA welcoming plaque at the Bozeman Airport and conducted a dedication ceremony.

Every Friday several members of the chapter have coffee with the veteran residents of the Bozeman Lodge. This includes World War II, Korean, and Vietnam Veterans.

Chapter 788 stacked firewood for one of our deceased members wife.

We participated in several community fundraisers including the Gallatin County Big Give Fundraiser and the Walk Out of Darkness Suicide Fundraiser.

CHAPTER 938-BITTERROOT VALLEY

<https://www.veteransmonument.org>. This is the website for the Veterans Monument located in Hamilton, Montana. This monument was started several years ago and honors all veterans who served in the Armed Forces in the Bitterroot Valley.

Chapter 938 donated \$100.00 to the Hurricane Relief for the Texas State VVA.

We sponsor the Vet to Bet at BJ's Restaurant every Friday. It starts at 7:30 a.m. and is an opportunity for veterans to get help or information concerning benefits and health care.

We continue our outreach efforts at the Ravalli County Fair and the Stevensville Creamery Picnic each year.

CHAPTER 1087-FLATHEAD VALLEY

John Burgess -2017 National VVA Member of the Year



John has been the President of Chapter 1087 since it started in 2013. This chapter continues to work in the Flathead Valley as a team every day. They do many activities with the Columbia Falls Veterans Home including a monthly Bingo. They have an ongoing program with the younger veterans at the Flathead Community College. The chapter participated in the Suicide Prevention Walk. Last September they undertook their biggest endeavor yet of bringing in "The Wall That Heals". This

chapter continues to work and breathe veterans 24/7.

This month they were able to bestow Caroline Collins, the Montana Service Representative in Kalispell, Honorary Life Membership in VVA for all her hard work helping veterans. Visit their facebook page [Vietnam Veterans of America Northwest Chapter 1087](#) for more photos.

LEGISLATIVE NEWS

Senator Jon Tester's Desk

2017 was a very productive year as Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. I was honored to work with Montana veterans, Republican Chairman Johnny Isakson, and President Trump to get eight bipartisan veterans bills signed into law.

Our legislation will cut the time that veterans wait to get a decision on their disability ratings, increase the number of doctors, nurses and psychologists serving veterans at the VA, and strengthen benefits for rural, elderly, disabled and women veterans.

I have made it clear that I'll work with anyone – veterans, Republicans, Democrats and President Trump – to make sure that we're doing right by our veterans. Our eight bipartisan laws are proof that when we focus on what we agree on – and not on what we disagree on – we can get a lot done.

Now it's time for the VA to put our reforms into practice.

The VA needs to communicate with veterans, VA and local doctors and the VA employees who help veterans get their benefits and health care so there is no confusion about new policies. The VA needs to make sure that any changes are transparent and accountable to veterans and taxpayers. And at no point, under any circumstances, will I allow this Administration to privatize veterans' health care or gut the VA to justify sending taxpayer dollars elsewhere.

As winter rolls into spring, I'm eager to keep building on our bipartisan success of the last year. That's why we must scrap the Choice Program and replace it with something that works better. We all know the Choice Program has not worked for Montana.

That's why I crafted the bipartisan *Caring for Our Veterans Act* with Chairman Isakson to replace the VA's seven community care programs, including the Choice Program, with one, easy-to-navigate community health care system with one set of rules. Our bill puts the decision of where a veteran goes for health care in the hands of that veteran and his or her VA doctor, invests in medical staff to better serve rural veterans and it expands the VA Caregiver Support Program to veterans of all eras.

It's time to end *The Choice Program* and cut out the bureaucracy that has delayed and prevented Montanans from getting the care they deserve. And veterans agree. That's why our bill has earned the support of 26 Veterans Service Organizations that represent millions of people across the country.

Veterans who were injured or disabled while serving our country deserve the best support that we can give them – regardless of when they served or what part of a country they set foot on. That's why I'm working to expand the VA Caregiver Support Program to veterans – and those who care for them – of all eras and get Blue Water veterans the benefits and care that they have earned.

Over the last year, we've given the VA a toolbox full of tools. Now the VA needs to start using them. If you have any ideas about how to improve services and benefits for veterans or hold the VA accountable to veterans, please reach out to me. The best ideas I get come from Montanans. By working together, we can honor those who have bravely served us.

Senator Steve Daines Desk

Miles City VA Complex-On December 4th, I asked the VA to reaffirm its commitment to serve the community of Miles City, as it conveys ownership of the physical property in compliance with the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000. This commitment will provide assurance that the VA will maintain its existing services for the foreseeable future on a lease basis.

Veterans History Project-On December 5th, I presented a collection of 50 interviews of Montana veterans to the Library of Congress for inclusion in the Veterans History Project(VHP) repository. The library preserves the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war.

Tricare changes in 2018- On September 21st, I sent a letter to the President and CEO of Health Net Federal Services(HNFS), Billy Maynard, articulating concerns from Montana healthcare providers and setting expectations for a new TRICARE contract it will begin executing January 1st. The letter was cosigned by Senators Enzi, Barrasso, Crapo, and Gardner. Together, we plan to meet with Mr. Maynard in early January.

Check www.vva.org for more legislative news.

Check www.va.gov for news happenings in the VA

Check www.montanadma.org/montana-veterans-affairs for Montana veterans affairs

MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identification of three American servicemen who had been missing in action from WWII and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Molder 1st Class Kenneth B. Armstrong** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Armstrong was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack.

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class Arthur Glenn** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Glenn was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack.

-- **Army Pfc. David Baker** was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. On Nov. 25, 1950, his unit was attacked by Chinese forces while positioned near Yongbyong, North Korea. The battalion suffered heavy casualties and Baker was listed as missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950. Later reports indicated that Baker was, indeed, captured by the enemy.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- 25TH Anniversary of the Vietnam Woman Memorial-see info on website
- March 9th HELENA: NEW Vet Center ~ Open House, 1301 Elm St., Helena
- April 7th Team Rubicon ~ RUN as ONE Missoula and Bozeman
- Questions: Anne Marie, (406) 381-9383, anne.scott@teamrubiconusa.org
- Glendive Gun Show-March 2-4
- March 3-Veterans Coffee 9 am Helena Perkins
- March 29th Welcome Home Vietnam Veteran Ceremony 2 pm Columbia Falls Veteran Home
- Eastern Montana 50th Commemorative Anniversary Honor Ceremony-Details to be announced
- Eastern Montana Agent Orange Town Hall Meeting-Time and place to be announced

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA WEBSITE: www.vva.org

VFW ACTION WEBSITE: <http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>

TIDBITS

Life Memberships in VVA are now \$100 permanently!

As of January 31st VVA membership was 82,455

For a list of military bases of contaminated water as posted in a 1992 released study go to http://www.gmasw.com/ao_bases.pdf

IF YOU RECEIVE A LETTER TO "OPT IN"

There is a letter attached to this newsletter from the VVA Director of Veterans Benefits Program, Kelsey Yoon regarding the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program(RAMP). Please discuss this letter with the service representative in your area before making your decision whether to opt in to this program or not. Here in Montana our accredited service representatives would be the employees of the Montana State Department of Veterans Affairs.