

BLINDED VETERANS
ASSOCIATION OF
NEW JERSEY BVA REGIONAL
GROUP NEWSLETTER



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Section 25, Part 5

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PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

**OUR NEW WEBSITE IS:
bvargnj.org**

Executive Director's Summary: 14 June 2019

HAPPY 244th BIRTHDAY U.S. ARMY!
Yes, board, like the Marines are always a Marine, I will always be a proud U.S. Army Soldier. I spent over half my life in uniform and cannot think of a more rewarding career. Because, now I get to continue that military service in a Veteran Service Organization to include ALL the branches of our DoD! HOOAH!!! But you all have waited patiently for three weeks for me to get an EXSUM drafted and you shall wait no longer.

As you all know that last week of May started with Memorial Day Activities at Arlington National Cemetery. BVA did our fallen proud as color guards, presenting a beautiful wreath and honoring those that gave all. Tom Z was

in town and together with Mishaun Harrison and Chet Curtis, presented the wreath. The next day, Tom and I metroed up to Silver Springs to visit with COL Reynolds and Dr. Dave Eliason of the Vision Center of Excellence. They are doing great DoD and VA partnership and helping us work to ensure the EHRM is fully accessible also. After those discussions, I took Tom to see the new property. He was impressed at how much nicer it is than both where we are now and what we had in Chinatown. It is a beautiful place and we are eager to get moved in.

Wednesday, I personally treated the staff to a lunch where we discussed the new employee handbook. They caught a couple issues that we quickly clarified and implemented the new book on June 1st. Later, as I traveled to Baltimore, I joined you all on the board call. The following day Tom and I had a discussion with our lead attorney regarding the Letter of Agreement with Buckingham Corporation regarding the donation agreement. Then I traveled to the North American and Caribbean Regional Group World Blind Union Meeting.

While at the WBU meeting I met with the leaders of various blind agencies from the NA & Caribbean Region to discuss many ways to further the cause of all blind and visually impaired. Then we discussed silent cars, self-driving cars, access to publications, blinded veterans around the world, and how to mentor other countries with less access to technology.

Later that same day we did more Strategic Communications Planning and met with our event planner for next

year's Blinded Veteran Day Concert. Thursday the BVA attended our first Military Coalition meeting where many of the members personally said how glad they were for us to be there and that we bring a lot to the team. BVA asked to be on the legislative and veteran's committees, which helps leverage some of our particular strengths and longstanding relationships.

We closed my week in the office with a visit from a furniture company to take bids for the furniture we will need in our new property. Then I logged out and took most of the weekend off spend some R and R in Chicago to attend a 100-year celebration for the NFL's oldest team, Da Bears!

My weekend wasn't all down time, I also met with our contracted CFO, Brian Teague of Smith-Bucklin where we discussed finances and BVA. Monday, I went to Hines VAMC to meet with the BRC Chief Denise to discuss more ways to work together then I met the over 30 Blind Veterans attending the center. While I knew a couple there, I also met many more, and with the help of Daniel Johnson and Anthony Woodson of the Illinois Regional Group, we took down many names to sign up for membership. I also met a couple veterans in attendance that are not yet legally blind but would love to be members of the BVA. Prospective members that were getting great mentoring and fellowship from current members sitting at their table.

While awaiting my flight home, I called in for the BRS Committee call to report on many things brought up to me the past month, as well and gather a few

more. This fed the following day's monthly call with Niki and her BRS team. During this meeting she shared an accessible format for the Mission Act information packet that you all may have receive in the mail. We then shared that to the District Directors to push out via email. We are still fighting accessible notifications that are too easy to fix. Tuesday rounded out with Melanie and I as guests at the Foundation for Fighting Blindness where two serving Congresspersons and the Petrou's were honored for their work on the Eye Bonds Bill. While there, Melanie and I discussed many research topics with Jim Jorkasky and members of the Akin-Gump team that were in attendance.

Wednesday, Krissi and I worked our salesmanship to close several outlying vendors for this year's convention. We even have some first-time vendors with interesting new products. Tim Hornick worked with Krissi and staff to help on the education session scheduling. Thursday, I spoke with an eyeglass company to work on discounted glasses for our BVA family members. This could be another benefit to membership and I will meet them next week and continue developing this relationship. Our work with Buckingham is not yet complete, but they still sound optimistic on their plan to donate to the BVA according to product sales. We are still working the logo placement agreement.

Friday, some of the staff took some needed time off, while I caught up on phone calls and emails. During this time, I was able to speak to another company about partnering with them and they agreed to donate a product to us for a blinded veteran. We will work out a way

to select a blinded veteran to receive this product.

And to close the week, we received a nice bequest that we never expected. It wasn't huge, but it does go toward our revenue this year and shows that we need to keep talking about the Blinded Veterans Association as a worthy charity to leave in a will. I will continue working with Tom Tobin to develop a planned giving message to help recruit philanthropic folks to mention us in their wills. That is where the big donations come from. So, help me out and talk to your friends about leaving a percentage of their estate to the BVA. I don't have a lot myself, but do have BVA as a beneficiary in mine.

And now, for those that have wondered about my wife's progress on her Appalachian Trail thru hike, she is over the halfway mark from Georgia to Maine. She is less than 1000 miles from the end and will cross over from Pennsylvania to New Jersey this weekend. And as always, I remain honored for the privilege to serve as YOUR Executive Director.

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