

**Department of Arizona VA&R**  
**Western Division Progress Report**  
**Marge Christianson, Chairman**  
**January 5, 2025**

**Department Highlights:**

**VAMCs**

- Two completed Annual Joint Reviews show year-over-year increases in every category! Nearly 2000 aggregate volunteer hours were reported—a year over year increase of 140 hours/8% overall. Over \$20,000 in monetary donations were made, an increase of \$15,000, quadrupling the previous year!
- An ALA volunteer was voted Volunteer of the Year at the Tucson VA.
- A new VAVS Deputy representative for the Phoenix VAMC is in process of being certified.
- 236 Veterans participated in the 3 VCAF events held. All of these programs continue to grow!
- 510 Veterans and approximately 150 family members were served at the 3 Gift Shops held, including 50 robotic “Joy for All” pets provided to the veterans in the Phoenix memory care program.
- National Veterans Sports programs, Patriot Pantry, transportation needs and recreational activity donations for veterans were supported by the Department of Arizona to various VAMCs.

**State Homes**

- A 4<sup>th</sup> Veteran State Home (Flagstaff) was officially opened. The Department of Arizona purchased many games, including a handicap accessible pool table, for the facility and participated in a high-level round table with the Governor to discuss future veteran needs and plans.
- A Purple Heart Wall was established at the Yuma home. It commemorates the names and stories of all Purple Heart recipient residents as well as room for future recipients.
- Four custom therapeutic recliners and \$500 in movie tickets were delivered to the Phoenix State Home
- A plethora of new games, food and clothing (\$5,000) were delivered to the Tucson State home.
- Efforts to engage State Home veterans in the VCAF is underway with the VAMCs.

**External Like-minded organizations/Family support**

- Dept of AZ widely promoted Wreaths Across America to Arizona Units. The program was widely supported at the National Veterans Cemetery, the 3 State Veterans Cemeteries as well as local cemeteries. Unit 132 recruited 2,000 wreaths through their sponsorship group!
- The Department of Arizona’s President’s Special Project P.A.W.S.S. (Patriots and Warriors Side by Side) is an organization that provides training to veteran’s own dogs to become certified service dogs. The organization’s impact goes well beyond supporting the veteran—family members spoke at the Department’s Conference and it ignited a huge interest in support.

**Miscellaneous:**

- VA&R “job descriptions” are being updated to ensure all chairman for VAMCs, State Homes understand their roles, contacts, fiduciary obligations, etc.
- Department Policy & Procedures are being updated.

## **Some Details:**

### **Annual Joint Reviews**

- Both the Tucson and Prescott had modest increases in volunteer hours—driven primarily by occasional hours.
- In aggregate, monetary donations went from \$4,922 to \$20,500 (a 300% increase!!)
- In aggregate, in-kind donations went from \$25,181 to \$31,622 (a 25% increase).
- Phoenix has not yet completed an AJR, but a meeting has been set to discuss.

### **The Department of Arizona held 3 Veteran Creative Arts Festivals (at each VAMC in Arizona).**

The Phoenix VCAF had professional artists judge the works of 96 veterans, while everyone enjoyed art and snacks. People's Choice voting was a hit and the VAMC Director came to the award presentation. As a co-sponsoring organization, it was an honor to address all the attendees.

The Tucson VCAF had a "Wine Tasting" theme (really grape juice) that added an air of elegance to the artworks entered by 97 veterans. Veterans, guests, staff and volunteers enjoyed the charcuterie plate & "wine" while viewing the art. New this year were display boards, donated by the Auxiliary, for the Creative Writing submission which gave them far more visibility than just lying on tables. The winning art was then put on display at the Tucson Mall so the public could view it!

The Prescott VCAF was held for 3 days at the Yavapai County Fair for the second year with 43 veterans participating. The venue enabled far more "pedestrian" traffic than previous years. A beautiful "palette-designed" cake was served during the award presentation.

### **The Department of Arizona held 3 Gift Shops (in conjunction with each VAMC in Arizona).**

The Phoenix VAMC Gift Shop had three separate components which in aggregate served just over 200 veterans.

- Since the VA could not provide space that would accommodate a multiple day event, the primary traditional gift shop event was held for 3 days at nearby Post 1.
- A secondary event was held along with many other exhibitors, on the outdoor patio at the VAMC during the VA's one day annual "Veteran's Extravaganza". Extra garments were given to the Community Living Center for veterans who often come to them from a hospital stay without anything but a hospital gown.
- Finally, and perhaps the most rewarding, was the purchase of 50 robotic pets that went to memory care veterans (both at the VA and through their "At Home" program).

A traditional gift shop was held for 3 days at the Tucson VAMC and served 150 veterans and 114 veteran family members.

- Hospital wards, where veterans were mobile, were assigned timeslots for bringing veterans for their shopping experience.
- For those wards not mobile, gifts were brought to the ward and replenished as to sizes etc.
- Veterans associated with the VA's homeless program were selectively invited by hospital social workers to receive necessity items on the final day.

The Prescott VAMC gift shop served 160 veterans in a three-part single day event.

- It began with a party with Santa and Mrs. Claus, sparkling grape juice, cookies and visiting with the “mobile” veterans in the Community Living Center.
- ALA Volunteers then went to the memory care unit and room to room with treats, gifts and good cheer.
- That afternoon, there was an “assembly line” gift selection, along with food and entertainment, for those in the Domiciliary.

### **The Department of Arizona supported four State Homes**

The ALA & Yuma State Home unveiled the Purple Heart Commemorative wall celebrating the resident veterans honored. A local Unit donated a bench on the grounds, and held a holiday party fulfilling individual veteran gift wishes.

- Flagstaff State Home held an opening celebration which included the Governor, Veteran Services Director and other dignitaries. ALA Department NEC Ficklin attended a veteran’s roundtable to discuss future needs and plans.
- In addition to delivering new games, food and clothing, the ALA holds monthly birthday parties and held both a Holiday decorating party and holiday party for veterans at the Tucson State Home. Local Units and other Legion entities delivered 380 pairs of socks and 7 standard recliners.
- The Phoenix State Home was given \$500 in movie tickets in addition to the 5 custom therapeutic recliners. A local unit fulfilled resident gift wishes.

**Wreaths Across America** was promoted via the Department website and the popular Department Ring Your Bell Facebook page (which has 1,200 members). Units in Yuma, Marana, Safford, Bisbee, Heber-Overgaard, Scottsdale, and the entire Phoenix area participated (in addition to others not yet reported).

### **As always, Units in Arizona have been busy supporting our veterans.**

- Unit 107 held a “bachelor auction” to raise funds to the Phoenix VAMC.
- Unit 16 gathered warm clothing for veterans for the upcoming cold weather in southern Arizona.
- Unit 105 collected models, handmade quilts and cards for veterans.
- Unit 44 donated 85 scarves and \$4,000 to the cancer ward at the Phoenix VAMC and provided gifts to senior veterans.
- Unit 53 hosted art events for women veterans
- Auxiliary Units are supporting events like Stand downs and seminars in and out of their Post Homes.
- Junior members are distributing poppies and helping at fundraising pancake breakfasts.
- **AND SO MUCH MORE!**