

## VETERANS

# Art provides outlet for soldiers

## Pieces featured in Phoenix exhibit

By Marge Christianson  
SPECIAL TO INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Some United States military veterans find healing from their experiences overseas through art.

More than 100 submissions were made to the Veterans Creative Arts Festival, conducted annually in February at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 650

E. Indian School Road. The Veterans Creative Arts Festival, which features more than 150 categories in art, music, dance, drama and creative writing, is co-presented across the country by local VA medical centers and the American Legion Auxiliary. The competition is part of the VA's recreation therapy program designed to further rehabilitate both inpatients and outpatients.

VCAF officials recognize the progress and recovery made through art therapy, and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of the nation's veterans after disease, disability or life crisis.

One featured piece was a drawing of a soldier and a dog while deployed in the Paktia Province of Afghanistan in 2010. The soldier's unit rescued a puppy, not even weaned from its mother, on the border of Pakistan. The puppy was wrapped up in Constantine wire and left for dead. Unit soldiers cut the puppy out of the wire and brought her back to base. They named her Connie (short for Constantine wire). Connie was nursed back to health and the unit raised \$3,500 to get her back to the United States. Connie now lives on a small ranch in

Vermont with a loving family.

"Some veterans find therapeutic value in expressing and honing their chosen craft; others find value in expressing their pain through their art," said Jan Cushing, Surprise resident and ALA Department of Arizona president.

Another participant's essay was titled, "Would You Remember Me if I Was a Number," and addressed the reality that 22 veterans commit suicide in this country every day. Women veterans are twice as likely to commit suicide than their civilian counterparts. The essay ended with the ominous line, "My silent war would be over, because I could not tame the beast within."

Among the attendees at this year's public event was National American Legion Auxiliary President Mary E. Davis. An art student in her past, Ms. Davis was a judge in the competition.

"The creativity and skill expressed in the work is amazing," said Ms. Davis. "As difficult as it was to select among the entries, I was honored to be one of the judges."

Ms. Davis also thanked the many ALA volunteers for their devotion to helping veterans heal, and reminded them to take some time to appreciate the impact they

are making. Also attending the exhibition was Rima An Nelson, Phoenix VA Medical Center director; and Michell Dorsey, Phoenix VAMC acting associate director.

The Veterans Creative Arts Festival is an annual event conducted at the Phoenix and Tucson VA medical centers and is open to the public. Visit [www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov](http://www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov).

The American Legion Auxiliary members have dedicated themselves for nearly a century to meeting the need of the nation's veterans, military and their families, both here and abroad. They volunteer millions of hours yearly, with a value averaging \$8 billion each year. As part of the world's largest women patriotic service organization, ALA volunteers across the country also step up to honor veterans and military through annual scholarship programs, teaching high school juniors to be leaders grounded in patriotism and Americanism.

Visit [www.ALAForVeterans.org](http://www.ALAForVeterans.org) or email [ALAdeptAZpr@gmail.com](mailto:ALAdeptAZpr@gmail.com).

**Editor's Note:** Ms. Christianson is a public relations volunteer with the American Legion Auxiliary Department of Arizona.



Drawing of a soldier and a dog his unit rescued while on deployment overseas that was submitted to the Veterans Creative Arts Festival. (Submitted photo)