

MORE THAN 140 WAYS YOUR LODGE CAN SUPPORT VETERANS AND MILITARY MEMBERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

**BY
STEWART ISRAEL
ENVSC VETERANS PROGRAMS CHAIR**



Featuring
the VAVS program to serve veterans in VA and other facilities
the Army of Hope program to support military members & their families
the Adopt-a-Veteran program to connect with veterans in your community

SUGGESTIONS FOR VAVS REPS, DEPS & LODGES SERVING AT VA FACILITIES

Here are a few tips on how to get started, and important information to know before you plan.

- Many VA's have homeless programs with a Domiciliary. Be sure to include them and find out their special needs.
- The Community Living Center (CLC), formally known as the Nursing Home Care Unit, may include short term rehab and hospice units. CLC's also have day treatment units.
- Don't forget the local nursing home veterans. Private nursing homes usually have a recreation director to work with.
- As a rule, VA hospitals have their outings during weekdays to avoid paying overtime.
- Plan your luncheons or other activities during normal work hours.
- Remember that there may be veterans of all ages at these facilities. Plan activities that cater to different groups. Don't forget about Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Don't assume all veterans are male.
- Work with partners! Don't be competitive with other groups serving at the VA. You can accomplish more together.

Veteran's Administration Hospital Suggestions

1. Sponsor small concerts at the CLC or hospital open area. Arrange this through volunteer services.
2. Bingo: veteran's hospitals have all the materials. Procure Canteen books ahead of time to be used as prizes. Four or more volunteers needed.
3. Hospital-Wide Events: Hot dog luncheons, sub sandwiches, and ice cream socials. Meats should be all-beef for religious reasons. Ice cream in three-gallon tubs may be ordered through the hospital. Toppings, spoons, dishes, and scoops need to be brought to the event. Live music or a DJ could make the event more festive.
4. Fine dining event at the CLC/nursing home. Have a special meal served by tuxedoed waiters. Cater this under hospital direction.
5. Dance. Bring in a band or have a DJ at the CLC. You may want to decorate with a special theme. Music should match the population of the CLC.
6. Comfort care kits for CLC or incoming patients. Use Federated Wholesale or other sources.
7. Horse Racing: The staff usually has a track, wooden horses, and dice to move them. You'll need Canteen books to pay win, place, and show. Four or more volunteers needed.
8. Poker Party: Use Canteen books for winners with the most chips. You'll need dealers. Patients could choose from Black Jack, Texas Hold 'Em, or Stud-type poker. Cards can be ordered through the Elks Playing Cards for Veterans program. Check out the order form at www.elks.org/vets/volunteers.cfm.
9. Coffee Cart with cookies and bottled water. Go room to room, or in a commons area.
10. Sponsor a Super Bowl or All-Star game party, as well as sports rivalries like Army-Navy, USC-Notre Dame, Texas-Texas A&M, etc.
11. Sponsor arts and crafts contests. Work with an art therapist, provide ribbons. Donate to the Creative Arts Festival.
12. Theme Parties: New Year's, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Mardi Gras, Easter, baseball Opening Day, Cinco de Mayo, Kentucky Derby, Fourth of July, Christmas in July, Sea Cruise, Stay-cation, Luau, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas.

13. Sponsor a New Year's Eve party. Bring munchies, snacks, canapes, and nonalcoholic champagne.
14. Coffee and donuts after religious services. Work with Chaplin Service.
15. Sponsor Wii sports tournaments.
16. Bowling and pizza parties. Work with a local ally.
17. Bring a bean bag toss game (cornhole) game and hold a tournament.
18. Karaoke: Bring a karaoke machine and a good singer.
19. Trivia Game: Sports, Military, or general knowledge. Give canteen books as prizes.
20. Donate or volunteer with a popcorn machine in commons area for out-patients.
21. Every VA has a program for former POW's. It is usually administered by a social worker. These are from the surrounding communities and meet once a month.
Possible POW Programs:
 - a. Music/entertainment during meeting time. One-man band, magic, or comedy.
 - b. Visit Lodge for a dinner or luncheon (private or with CLC).
 - c. Catered luncheon at VA (pizza, subs, chicken).
 - d. Sponsor fruit/cookies at meeting.
 - e. Bowling and pizza.
22. Pass out small desk flags with stands to Vets in hospitals or nursing homes. Order these from the ENVSC at www.elks.org/vets/volunteers.cfm.
23. Give flowers or candy to nursing stations as a thank you for their patriotic work.
24. Host a tea party. Check hospital for food policy.
25. Get involved with female veterans' program at the VA. Some have baby showers or donate gifts or baby items.
26. Work with hospital Chairperson in putting on the monthly Elk program.
27. Hold an amateur, veteran, variety show put on by volunteers, staff, and patients.
28. Volunteer at a community based VA clinic by offering coffee, food, and being a morale booster.
29. Sponsor or help with horticulture projects such as serenity gardens and raised-bed gardening. Get the Master Gardeners Association, garden clubs, or county extension service to help.
30. Pizza parties for various hospital units. Think beyond CLC (nursing home) and offer to psychiatric, substance abuse, and day treatment units.
31. Collect new toys and books for the women's clinic.
32. Do something special for patriotic days: Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, July 4th, Marine's Birthday, Patriot Day, Pearl Harbor Day, Armed Forces Day, POW/MIA Day.

The following activities can be held at the VA or at Elks Lodges.

1. Car Show: Hold a car show at the VA or your Lodge. Ideally this would be done with other events and Lodge visitations.
2. Start an Adopt-A-Vet program for individuals in nursing homes, VA, State hospitals, or in the community that don't have many relatives, visitors, or are homebound.
3. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) events or welcome home events. VA has an OEF/OIF coordinator. Operation New Dawn (OND- the current war in Afghanistan) returnees or send-offs from local guard or reserve units can be held at the Lodge. Have a picnic or party for their families while they are gone.

4. Invite veterans to meals at the Lodge. Steak dinners, picnics, pig roasts, BBQ's, holidays, or any event. Beware of religious restrictions and hospital policy. Don't forget nursing homes and senior residences.
5. Christmas Gifts: Gifts can be donated or use a "giving tree" for specific Vets. Empty stockings can be filled by Elk families. General gift program with donated money can procure cases of items ordered through Federated Wholesale. Generally, there is no alcohol, glass, or sharp items permitted. Stores like Wal-Mart or Target may give you discounts or make donations. It never hurts to ask.
6. Have the Easter Bunny visit the CLC or nursing home and give sugar-free candy.
7. Special events for Elks November remembrance month, and National Salute to Veteran's Hospital Week (Valentine's) in February. This could include off station visits to the Lodge for dinners. Do a hospital-wide event.
8. High Schools could assign Oral Histories and have students find out what the veteran did, where they were stationed, and other stories. This could also be an Antlers project. This would be especially good for nursing homes.
9. Christmas dinner or party: Carter food or have them at the Lodge.
10. Sponsor events for POW meetings, which are held at the VA. Sponsor lunch, snack, or provide entertainment such as a band, comedian, or musician.
11. Monthly birthday parties with balloons, cake, and ice cream. Special entertainment or musicians can add to the festivity.
12. Promote schools/youth to make cards and/or decorations for Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, and other holidays. This could be an Antlers project. Work with members who teach to make it a part of their lessons. Offer to deliver the cards and decorations to the VA or nursing home.
13. Sponsor the moving wall. Have it at the VA or Lodge for community access.
14. Sponsor a veteran job fair by working with community or private employment services.
15. Have a collection of gently used clothing for veteran homeless shelters in metropolitan areas, or new items for the VA, State homes, and nursing homes.
16. Form a choral group, or recruit school or church choirs to serenade veterans with patriotic songs and classical standards from the past. Do Christmas carols, Irish folk songs for St. Patrick's Day, etc.
17. Help recruit for pet therapy programs where members can visit hospitals and nursing homes with their pets. Many rescue shelters have programs like this.
18. Do the Elks Flag Day service at the VA, nursing homes, or senior residences.
19. Possible donations: Electronic Readers (e-Readers), satellite radio, hand-held and Wii electronic games, phone cards, coats and sweaters, toiletries, a pool table, barber chair. Donate ramps for veterans in wheelchairs, and offer other changes to accommodate Vets with disabilities.
20. Potential partners and events: USO, Fisher House, VA adaptive sports tournaments, The Mission Continues, Stand Downs, Wounded Warriors, or the Red, White and Blue Group.
21. National VA cemeteries offer free burial to any veteran and their spouse. They are administered by an Advisory Counsel and government administrators. Activities for National Cemeteries:
 - a. Color Guard (veterans organizations only).
 - b. Tour guides for presentations (training available).
 - c. Guides to help people locate a grave.
 - d. Office help in answering phones and doing clerical work.
 - e. Help on special days such as Memorial Day and Veteran's Day.

- f. Supervise youth volunteers in grave stone cleaning (scouting project).
- g. Flowerbed weekly cleaning.

Elks Lodge or Off-site Suggestions

1. Have clothing drives for the hospital clothing store, or homeless Veteran's program.
2. Sponsor fishing on piers, small lakes, commercial chartered fishing, or member's boats.
3. Sponsor boat rides and scenic cruises. Use a commercial tour boat, or members with boats or boat club membership would work.
4. Support and help USO or Veteran lounges at the airport.
5. Sponsor therapeutic horseback riding. Arrange with a local stable.
6. Baseball, football, or other sports game outings, including college or semi-pro leagues in your area. Don't forget zoos, museums, aquariums and other local attractions.
7. Segway tours of cities or parks.
8. Work with Patriot Riders for funeral processions of fallen soldiers. Feed them and have lodge motorcyclists join them.
9. Donate cookies or cases of fruit to Veterans homeless shelters or transitional housing of the VA.
10. Support Stand Downs for homeless Veterans. Offer to donate the Lodge, money, articles of clothing, toiletries, and playing cards from the Elks card program. Volunteer to host or escort. These events can be from 1 to 3 days and offer medical, clothing, and legal aid.
11. Participate in the Army of Hope by adopting the family of an overseas soldier and provide assistance in mowing, shoveling snow, and general repairs. Invite them to the Lodge for a meal.
12. Participate in the Army of Hope by adopting an overseas unit of member's son, daughter, or grandchild. Send snacks, toiletries, or other comfort items.
13. Work with sportsman's clubs for skeet or target shooting, or hunting or fishing trips.
14. Collect and salt down deer hides for the leather program. Instructions available at www.elks.org/vets/leather.cfm.
15. Google "Homeless Veterans" plus your city's name to find non-government facilities that serve veterans.
16. Promote regular volunteering of the members at VA and State facilities.
17. Recognize outstanding volunteer work and make volunteers feel appreciated.
18. Do fund raising for large items: Casino night, poker run, patriot quilt raffle, spaghetti dinner, golf outing, bike rides, 5k Walk/Run, silent auction, yard sale of donated items and rent tables for others, bake sale at Lodge events and dinners, breakfasts, chili cook-offs, polar plunge, wild game dinner, "support the troops" party/dinner.

ARMY OF HOPE

In February, 2003, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission announced the "Army of Hope" to assist military members, including active duty military personnel, deployed units, military reservists, Coast Guard, the National Guard, and their families.

The Army of Hope allows the military member to safely concentrate on his/her duties without worrying about the family at home. It has many facets and any activity that supports our troops and their family falls under this vital program. Lodges are partnering with local and state organizations, VFWs, churches and scout groups to adopt units and families to help them through these trying times.

The first step in setting up your local program might be to identify a lodge chair. That person's first priority should be to establish a list of volunteer members who are willing to provide their individual expertise. In addition, a subsequent list identifying the specific skills of each volunteer will also be helpful in matching the needs of families with the skills of the volunteers. (for example: Volunteer John Doe-minor plumbing repairs, Volunteer Jane Doe-tutoring students).

After you have established your "Army of Hope" volunteers, contact local groups like Reserve and/or National Guard units, Blue Star Family groups, and other groups for military members. Explain how your Lodge can help. (It is understood that not every Lodge will be able to handle every request). You can provide the list of volunteers along with their expertise directly to the local Reserve or Guard units. The military families may contact the Lodge or the volunteers directly, depending on how you set up your local program.

Examples of aid assistance include:

- ❖ School lunches
- ❖ Medical and dental emergencies not covered by insurance
- ❖ Minor home repairs (plumbing, electrical, painting, etc.)
- ❖ Auto repairs or transportation when needed
- ❖ Full-time or back-up babysitting
- ❖ Phone cards to contact loved ones
- ❖ Lawn mowing, snow shoveling, landscaping, sprinkler repairs
- ❖ A/C and major appliance repairs
- ❖ Clothing, shoes
- ❖ Dinners at the Lodge
- ❖ Subscription to hometown newspaper
- ❖ Welcome home party

Another aspect could be to send goods to units overseas. Snacks, craft kits, and various comfort items are welcome. Avoid sending alcohol, pork products, anything affected by desert heat (like chocolate) or things that could be crunched in shipping (like bagged chips).

Some of these suggestions may seem like small things, but their impact could be much larger for the families you help!

ADOPT-A-VETERAN

VA and State Hospital activities should be coordinated with the hospital, VAVS Representative, Voluntary Services, and recreation staff. CLC is the Community Living Center which was formerly known as the Nursing Home Care Unit and may include short term rehab and hospice units. Don't forget the local nursing home veterans. Private nursing homes usually have a Recreation Director to work with. As a rule, VA hospitals have their outings during weekdays so as not to pay over time. Plan your luncheons or other activities during work hours. Many VA's have homeless programs with a domiciliary. Be sure to include them and find out about their special needs.

Try to do something special on our country's patriotic days, such as Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, July 4th, Marine Birthday, Patriot Day, Pearl Harbor Day, Armed Forces Day, POW/MIA Day.

Many veterans are lonely during the holidays, so be sure to include them in your plans for Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Memorial Day, 4th of July.

If your Lodge has a VAVS Representative, work with him or her to support the local hospital, nursing home, Outpatient Center, USO, or domiciliary. VAVS Representatives meet quarterly with the staff of the hospital and have exact knowledge of the hospital's needs and wants. If your Lodge does not have a VAVS Representative among your Members, promote Veterans Service programs and recruit members to volunteer on a regular basis at local facilities.

If funding is a problem, don't forget to apply for grants offered by the Elks National Foundation and the Elks National Veterans Service Commission.

1. Bingo. Ask the hospital if they have all the materials needed. Procure Canteen books ahead of time to be used as prizes. You should have four or more volunteers.
2. Horse racing: check with the hospital to see if they have a track, wooden horses and dice to move them. You'll need Canteen books to pay off win, place and show. Four or more volunteers needed.
3. Start an Adopt-A-Vet program for individuals in nursing homes, VA, State hospitals, or communities that don't have many relatives, visitors or are shut in. Give them certificates of adoption available through Grand Lodge. You can make up your own computer-generated certificates. See Grand Lodge program.
4. Sponsor small concerts at the CLC or hospital open area. Arrange these events through Volunteer services.
5. Sponsor fishing on piers, small lakes, commercial party fishing or member's boats.
6. Sponsor boat rides. Members with boats or boat club membership could help.
7. Car show at the VA or at the lodge. Ideally with other events and lodge visitations.
8. OEF/OIF or OND (Operation New Dawn) welcome home events. The VA has an OEF/OIF coordinator. Send off or welcome home events from local guard or reserve units can be held at the Lodge.

9. Have Veterans from hospitals, nursing homes, or senior residences come as guests to Lodge meals: Steaks, Picnics, Pig Roasts, BBQs, Holidays, or any reason. Beware of religious restrictions and hospital policy.
10. Fine dining event at the CLC/Nursing home. Have a special meal served by tuxedoed waiters. Cater this under hospital direction.
11. Hold a dance with ladies of the Elks. Bring in a band or have a DJ at the CLC. You may want to decorate with a special theme. Music should match the population of the CLC. Have as many ladies as possible.
12. Christmas gifts can be donated or you can use a giving tree for specific Veterans. Empty stockings can be distributed and filled by Elk families. In general, no alcohol, glass or sharp items are permitted. Stores like Target and Wal-Mart may give you good prices or make donations.
13. Have the Easter Bunny visit the CLC or nursing home and give sugar free candy.
14. Have clothing drives for the hospital Clothing store, or homeless veteran program. (Note: Hospitals will only accept new clothing, but homeless shelters usually accept used outerwear.)
15. Give Comfort Care Kits from Federated Wholesale, Inc., the VA hospital Canteen Service, or other sources to the CLC or incoming new patients.
16. Special events for Elks Veterans Remembrance Month in November, and National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans (Valentine's) week. This may include volunteering for a Valentines for Veterans concert. This could include off station visits to the Lodge for dinners. (You have special events in
17. Hospital wide hot dog or sub sandwich luncheons and ice cream socials. Ice cream in three-gallon tubs may be ordered through the hospital. Toppings, spoons, dishes and scoops need to be brought in to the event. A band or just a musician could make the event more festive.
18. Miniature Golf at a course or make one at the facility on carpeting. 2 by 4's could be placed to guide the golf balls. Bring balls, clubs and practice holes.
19. Poker, black jack, Texas Hold-Em or stud type poker party with Canteen books to the winners with the most chips. You'll need dealers. Cards may be ordered through the Elks' Playing Cards for Veterans program.
20. Promote schools/youth to make cards and/or decorations for Veterans Day, Memorial Day and other Holidays. This could be an Antlers project. Work with members who teach to make it part of their lessons. Offer to deliver the cards and decorations.
21. High Schools could assign Oral Histories and have students find out what the Veteran did, where they were stationed and other stories. The Library of Congress sponsors the National Veterans History Project and you can find useful tools and guidelines at: <http://www.loc.gov/vets/> This would be especially good for Nursing Homes.
22. Coffee cart with cookies and bottled water. Go room to room, or set up in a commons area.
23. Sponsor therapeutic Horseback riding arranged through a local stable.
24. Sponsor a POW luncheon. The VA also has special events for POWs.
25. Baseball, football or other sports game outings. Include college or semi-pro leagues in your area.
26. Sponsor trips to zoos and other local attractions.
27. Bowling and pizza parties at local bowling alley.
28. Monthly birthday parties with balloons, cake and ice cream. Special entertainment or musicians can add festivity.

29. Sponsor Art/Craft contests, work with an art therapist, and provide ribbons. Donate to the Creative Arts Festival.
30. Holiday parties, dinners, picnics and bar-b-ques either at the Lodge, hospital, or nursing home.
31. Coffee and doughnuts after religious services. Work with the Chaplain Service.
32. Sponsor Wii sports tournaments.
33. Theme Parties: St. Patrick's, Valentines, Easter, Christmas in July, Halloween, Luau, Mardi Gras, Sea Cruise, Stay-Cation, Cinco de Mayo, Kentucky Derby, Baseball opening day, Super bowl party, as well as other sports rivalries as Army-Navy, USC-Notre Dame, Texas-Texas AM etc.
34. Bring in a beanbag toss game and hold tournaments.
35. Bring in a Karaoke machine with a good singer to inspire others.
36. Do car racing around the dining or day area with remote control cars.
37. Trivia Tournament: sports, Military, or general knowledge. Give canteen books as prizes.
38. Sponsor the moving wall. Have it at the VA or Lodge.
39. Donate or volunteer to operate a popcorn machine in commons area for outpatients.
40. Sponsor a Veteran job fair by working with community or private employment services.
41. Donate cookies or cases of fruit to Veteran homeless shelters or VA transitional housing.
42. Pass out small desk flags with stands to Vets in hospitals or nursing homes.
43. Give flowers or candy to nursing stations as a thank you for their patriotic work.
44. Support Stand Downs for homeless Veterans. Offer to donate the Lodge facilities, money, articles of clothing, toiletries, and playing cards from the Elks card program. Volunteer to host and escort. These events can be from 1 to 3 days and offer medical, clothing and legal aid.
45. Tea for women veterans. Check hospital for food policy.
46. Get involved with female Veterans program at the VA. Some have baby showers or donate gifts of baby items.
47. Participate in the Army of Hope by adopting the family of an overseas soldier and provide assistance in mowing, shoveling snow, and general repairs. Invite them to the Lodge for a meal.
47. Adopt an overseas unit of a member's son, daughter, grandson or granddaughter. Send snacks, toiletries, or other comfort items.
48. Form a choral group, or recruit one to serenade the Veterans with patriotic songs and classical standards from the past. Do Christmas caroling, St. Patrick's Day Irish songs.
49. Amateur, Veteran, Variety show put on by volunteers, staff and patients.
50. Volunteer at community based VA clinics by offering coffee, food, and being a morale booster.
51. Support Wounded Warriors by sponsoring Hunting or Fishing trips. Contact them through the internet.
52. Sponsor or help with horticulture projects such as serenity gardens and raised bed gardening. Get the Master Gardeners association, garden clubs, or county extension service to help.
53. Help recruit for pet therapy programs where members can visit hospitals and nursing homes with their pets.

54. Pizza parties for various hospital units. Think beyond CLC and offer to Psych, Alcohol Abuse, and day treatment units.
55. Hold the Elks Flag Day service at the VA, nursing homes, or senior residences.
56. Google Homeless Veterans and your city's name to see if there are nongovernment facilities to support.
57. Drive Adoptees who are Member of the Elks to Lodge meetings and other Lodge events
58. Visit them and just chat about their service, their former job, sports, weather, and current events
60. Phone them to check on how they are doing.

