

Out of Many/One Union
AFGE NVAC/AFL-CIO

Volume 10, Issue 1



April / 2010

Legislative and Grassroots Mobilization Conference

Nearly 1,000 AFGE members and activists gathered in Washington, D.C. to discuss issues facing the federal government employees at the AFGE Legislative and Grassroots Mobilization



NVAC President, Alma L. Lee addresses Convention attendees

Conference held Feb. 21-24 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Capitol Hill. The

Conference got off to a rousing start on Sunday, as National Veterans Affairs Council President, **Alma Lee** welcomed the attendees “We come here today to continue the process of advancing our legislative agenda. We come not as beggars, but as the most powerful Council within the American Federation of Government Employees and the most powerful union within the Department of Veterans Affairs...but this power, this strength, is worthless unless we use it” stated President Lee. Additional presentations, by NVAC Legislative Representative **Marilyn Park**, a panel of Congressional Staffers, and a panel of Veterans Service Organization representatives highlighted the issues facing the VA. These included providing for full Title 38 collective bargaining rights, contracting out of VA jobs held by veterans, the Project HERO contract health care pilot, appeal rights for terminated canteen service employees, claims processing,



Our activists are enthusiastic

and flexiplace, among many others. This was followed by a series of training sessions that provided our activists with the skills needed to advance this aggressive agenda. The classes included effective lobbying techniques, along with more in depth discussion of issues. One of the highlights was a presentation on the new Executive Order, which will be incorporated into future Partnership training.

It was then on to the Hill for the most important part of the week – a coordinated assault onto the halls of Congress. NVAC



Our activists are educated

activists from across the country provided Members of Congress and staffers with cogent arguments on the issues of importance to all VA bargaining unit employees. In follow-up discussions with these staffers, they were universally impressed with the knowledge and abilities of our activists. Now comes the most important part – to follow up in local offices with these same Members and staffers. The Legislative Conference was an effective means of getting our message across – but it will not be successful unless we engage our Members of Congress throughout the year. Plans are to meet again in February 2011 with stories of success and build on those for an even brighter future.



NVAC New Attorney

The National VA Council welcomes Ms. Ami Pendergrass, as our new attorney. Ami graduated



in 2001 summa cum laude from Northern Kentucky University and received her juris doctorate from The Ohio State University, Moritz College of Law in May 2006. Ami has worked for the National Labor Relations Board in Cleveland, Ohio; with Goldstein Gragel, specializing in the representation of unions and employees in labor, employment, and ERISA matters. Ami has hit the floor running, working diligently on various NVAC matters, Ami has set up a call in system to better serve the Locals with legal advice in a timely fashion. Call in times and schedule are as follows:

Tuesday's; 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST

Locals located in states beginning with the letter **A** through **L**

Thursday's; 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. EST

Locals located in states beginning with the letter **M** through **Z**

You can call (202) 306-3664 or email Ami with your questions at pendergrassnvac@aol.com. Please be sure to leave your Name, Local number, Phone Number, and the best time for you to be reached.

National Cemetery Administration

Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, **Steve Muro** provided an update on the programs and initiatives of the National Cemetery Administration. With the opening of the newest national cemetery in Buck's County, Pennsylvania, NCA now operates and maintains 131 VA cemeteries and maintains close to 3 million gravesites in honor of veterans and in commemoration of the service that they provided.

The National Training Center was established in St. Louis in 2004 to ensure operational continuity and consistency has made positive progress in the training of Cemetery Director



Medallion Benefit



National Training Center

Interns. The focus has now shifted to encompass all other key positions within the NCA operational model which include Supervisors, Field Foreman, Program Assistants, Cemetery Representatives, Groundskeepers, Budget Analyst, COTRs, Equipment Operators, and Gardeners.

The VA is in the final stages of implementing the largest expansion of national cemeteries since the Civil War with five cemeteries that opening in 2009 and one in 2010. These include Fort Jackson, SC; Jacksonville and Sarasota, FL; Alabama National Cemetery serving Birmingham; and Bakersfield and the National Cemetery in California Central Valley. The Washington



First burials at Bakersfield National Cemetery

Crossing National Cemetery, serving the Philadelphia region, conducted first burials on January 20, 2010. Gravesite renovations include the raising and realignment of headstones and markers, repairs to sunken graves, and headstone cleaning. In December 2007, VA was given authority to furnish a medallion or other device that can be affixed to privately purchased headstones and markers, in private cemeteries, to signify the grave as that of a US veteran. This benefit will be available in lieu of a Government furnished headstone or marker, for veterans in privately marked graves that died on or after Nov. 1, 1990. The medallion, depicting a 3-dimensional folded flag surrounded by a laurel wreath with the Veteran's branch of service displayed beneath, will come in three dimensions designed to fit on various-sized private headstones, grave markers and columbarium niche covers.



VCS: Not a Mom and Pop Shop



Associate Director Resources and Support, **Ken Freeman**; updated the NVAC on recent activities. Overall sales for FY 2009 were up 7.1%. VCS had 90 projects completed in FY 2009 with 36 in Retail, 44 in Food and 10 new Coffee



Associate Director Resources and Support, Ken Freeman

Shops. Retail Initiatives included: expansion of Sale Promotions to Class 5 Stores, New “Scrubs Section” – for Nurses, expansion of African American Hair Care Products, Optimize Supply Chain Management while “Going Green” with Blue/Red shopping tote bags, biodegradable plastic shopping bags and reusable coffee/cold mugs.

Food Initiatives start with a New Pricing Policy that allows for competitive pricing to match and/or be lower than competition, eliminate price variances of canteens that are similarly located, recognize market changes faster to eliminate large price increases, and create a smaller price range to ensure more consistency. Also, new Menu Boards, Mobile Food Trailers, a new Catering Manual, Bottled Drinks/Convenient Items, 15 Meals under \$5.00, Hours of Operations – Focus on Service and Grab N’ GO meals. VCS will also be launching a Mobile Trailer to be used as an alternative to boost sales and be deployed when needed with staffing.



Vending Initiatives will start by replacing all vending machines with Energy Star Compliant machines which will be able to keep real time information in order to eliminate out of stock items, ease in filling/ordering and identifying best selling products.

Partnerships with Environmental Management Services are used to enhance local relationships, Recognize contributions, Canteen Of The Year and “Extra Mile Award”, which is a special contribution award. Partnership also promotes National Center for Health Promotion (NCP) to promote healthier life styles, with such programs as MOVE, HealthierUS Veterans, and Champions’ Challenge, and a website to link for VCS nutrition values for foods, special sales events and the Wheelchair Athletes National Conference. Finally what VCS does is give back to the VA/Veterans with National Rehabilitation Events which will amount to \$670 thousand in FY 2010 up from \$455 thousand in FY2009. Thank you VCS! 🇺🇸

Contract Negotiations

It’s your contract...it’s your job!



West Palm Beach, FL ~ October 2009

Article 24, entitled, “Official Travel” was discussed with NO resolution. Management has set this article aside for 3rd party mediation. Also, discussed was Article 19, which is entitled “Flexiplace” in the current contract but has been renamed to “Telework” with some movement but NO resolution. Observers from Local 507 were President, **Terri Tuskes**; Treasurer, Jackie McDonald; and Stewards **Marc Ackerman**, **Luther Woods** and member **Donna Pixley**, representing Local 1594 were VP **Lindsey Campbell** along with members **Veronica Sanborn-Pledger**, **Medha Kulkarni**, **Cheryl Olden** and **Devona Wooten**.



Contract Negotiations, West Palm Beach, FL



Chief Negotiator Alma Lee stands her ground on Contract Articles



San Antonio, TX November 2009

Discussed was Article 22, "Merit Promotion". VA wanted to roll this article over "as is" and add "USA Staffing" (electronic process to apply for VA jobs on-line) to this



**Contract Negotiations
San Antonio, TX**

article. We voiced our concerns of implementing USA Staffing (which comes from OPM) on whether or not they will be able to accommodate our concerns, such as: Would Union representatives have access to vacancy announcements and be able to verify that the correct process information was entered, such as the area of consideration (VA employees only). Would any changes to the features, functions, and required fields will be consistent department wide and facilities would not be able to make changes to the system at the local level. Would applicants have the ability to delete his or her profile from the data base, if they so choose and to create multiple profiles of themselves, such as if you worked in social work service, nutrition and food service, and nursing service at some point during your employment with the VA. Observers from the Executive Board for Local 3511 were Local President, **Michelle Weathers** and Executive VP **Sylvia Ramon**. Local President for Local 4032 was Local President **Virginia Barrera**, and Local President Local 2281, **Melvin Dyson**. We appreciate the hospitality and support that was given to us during this session.



Orlando, FL ~ December 2009

Management set the new Article 62, entitled "Counseling" aside for third party. Discussed Article 42, "Grievance Procedure", and DO NOT expect resolution to this Article. We also expect Management to set aside all other Articles that remain to be negotiated. This

session ends 6 ½ years of negotiations. At the end of 2009 the following 30 Articles remain to be negotiated: Preamble, Articles 10, 35, 38, 39, 66, 76, 42, 47, 49, 50, 70, 77, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63, 64, 65, 73, 74, 75, 78 and 79. The following 19 articles have been set aside for third party: Articles 20, 9, 13, 13a, 19, 24, 28, 44, 48, 56, 29, 4, 17, 23, 25, 46, 40, 43 and 62. The following 25 Articles have been initialed and rolled over: Articles 1, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 2, 21, 26, 27, 3, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 41, 5, 6, 60, 7, 72 and 8.



**NVAC Negotiator MJ
Burke and David Mollett
review Articles**

Observers for this session were Local 559 President, **Tere Watts**, President; VP, **Paul Lee**; Secretary-Treasurer, **James Aldridge**. Local 548 President, **Tatishka Thomas**, Secretary-Treasurer **Veronica Vann**, and Local 2779 President, **Robert Van Slyke**. Again, thanks to Local 559 President, **Terrence Watts** and the Executive Board who treated us like royalty with their hospitality.



Phoenix, AZ ~ January 2010

Negotiations at the VAMC Phoenix, Arizona, where we discussed Article 42, Grievance Procedure, for the past 3 days with some movement. As expected, Article 42 was set aside for 3rd party by Management. We are began discussing Article 57, Veterans Canteen Service, where we expect no resolution to this article. We are discontinued negotiating because Management is taken positions on the issue rather than listen to the interest of each side and come up with joint resolution. We appreciate the support of Local 2382 President, **Lewis Curry**; Executive



**NVAC Negotiator Dave Dawkins
discusses Article interpretation**

VP/Treasurer, **Christopher Harten** and Chief Steward, **Patrick Morrissey**.



Palo Alto, CA ~ February 2010

Negotiations continue at Palo Alto, CA VAMC. Discussed was Article 57, Veterans Canteen Service. VA has issues with VCS employees receiving the same benefits as title 5 employees; therefore Article 57 has been set aside by Management. Article 35, Uniforms was signed off. We truly appreciate the hospitality and support that Local 2110 gave us during our stay.

Observers from Local 2110 were President, **Lori Bess**; Executive Vice President, **Nelson Spaulding**; Vice President (Professional Unit), **Bill Lutrell**; 1st Vice President (Non-Professionals), **Lovola Cushshon**, 2nd Vice President, **Pamela Robinson**; Sergeant-at-Arms, **Aaron Gerlitz**, Chief Steward, **Harold Rucker**, Stewards, **Tito Amasol**, **Michael Barry**, **Ron Boran**; Consultants, **Victor Allyn**, **Bruce Chorjel**, and member **AJ Tucker**.



Miami, FL ~ March 2010


As negotiations continue we signed off on Article 58, "Research Grants" and also Article 18, "Fitness for Duty", Article 38, "Worker's Compensation" and Article 66, "Job Sharing".

Observers were Local President of #515, **Giselle M. Aponte**, and Jennifer Turnbull. Local President Aponte and the Executive Board of Local #515 have been exceptional hosts and we appreciate the support and hospitality shown!



Memphis, TN ~ March 2010

Memphis, TN was a very productive week. We signed the following Articles and an MOU which included the Preamble, Article 4 – Labor-Management Training, Article 10 – Competence, Article 17 – Equal Employment Opportunity, Article 22 - Merit Promotion, Article 26 – Performance Appraisal System, Article 39 –

Affiliations, Article 44 – Mid-Term Bargaining, Article 45 - Official Time, Article 49 - Title 38 Advancement, Article 50 - Clinical Research, Article 51 - Title 38 Nurse Pay/Survey, Article 52 - Physical Standards Board, Article 54 – Proficiency, Article 59 - Research Programs and Demonstration Projects and Article 61 - Duration of Agreement. Also an MOU on USA Staffing which went into effective 3/31/10. Observers were Local President, **Kathleen Pachomski**; 1st Executive Vice President, **Judy Brown**; 2nd Executive Vice President, **John Elli**; Treasurer, **Renee Brown**; Chief Steward **Sandy Bigham** and Stewards **Lester Richard**, **John Brown** and **Jane Berry**. We really appreciate the support that Local 3930 have shown us this week. 

VBA What Lies Ahead



Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations **Diane Rubens** reported to the

Executive Board explained that lay ahead. The challenge is as an organization how can they become a 21st Century organization? One of the things brought in was "Today's soldier" to show the differences of today's soldier in terms of real time information, technology and how to make use of the armor plating worn and the protection it will give. It also examined the changes in the injuries that soldiers return home with. The challenge leads us to think about who we are going to serve as we go forward. We looked at how do we do a better job with performance management, leadership and we change the way we look at resources as well as legislative and regulatory changes. Rubens stated, "We talked about looking at things differently from a plain segmentation, should there just be process redesign, and throw technology out there as a last thing, only because while it's very easy to say, for us to meet the needs of that 21st Century Soldier we need to be more technologically savvy, and the reality is, that's not coming anytime soon, and there's a couple of reasons for that."

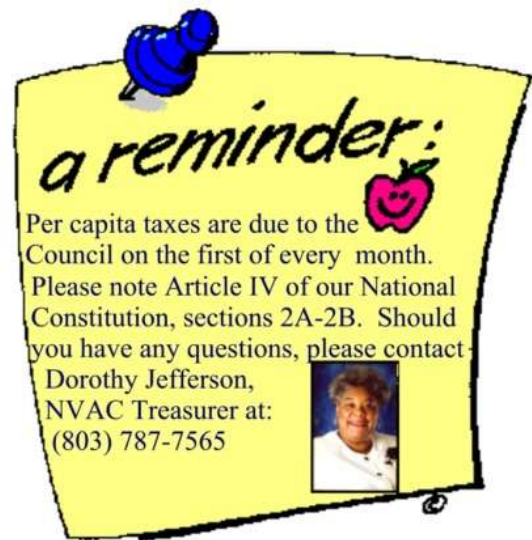
Rubens explained that when the 2011 budget came out some of the things changed for projections in terms of how this year will end and how next year is based. One explanation is that more claims come in the door, which Rubens views as a plus. In FY 2008, we reached out to 300,000 discharged soldiers, whether it was a discharge site or a chemo site, so in FY 2009 the number grew to 360,000 that were touched. The VA continues to try to reach out and bring servicemen in as soon as they are getting out of the service which has a lot of advantage. The Secretary has also added the addition of Agent Orange in which the VA expects close to 200,000 additional claims to come in. 86,000 claims will have to be re-adjudicated under the provisions of the Neimer court decision. This decision ruled that if a veteran comes in and claimed one of these conditions that we have to do special processing for these veterans to go back to see where they denied before and review it again, so that every time something changed throughout that history it can be identified in the medical records and then make the adjustments to what that rating will look like. Also expected will be 100,000 claims from Parkinson's disease and Two types of leukemia.

Right now VA is working to put together plans that address the Neimer cases, and beef up training. There are studies on some of the conditions so we can do a better job on these issues and the many claims. Rubens says "we are making sure that folks are on the ball for what we need to do in adjudicating them (claims)."

The change isn't final or formal, but they are close. The regulations that address the evidence required to service connected PTSD; will be broader in what is acceptable as a stressor and the events surrounding that stressor for that individual. It is expected that there will be a lot of PTSD claims, either new or reopened, which were denied in past because we couldn't get close enough to a stressor for that Veteran,

Rubens stated. Workgroups with over 300 ideas have been working in order to correct this.

Convention Items



Call for NEWS!

Once again, we are making a call for news. What is happens in the field is what makes us a great union!

Let us know what you are doing to make the VA a world-class place to work. If you have had a successful recruiting event, negotiated an agreement to benefit workers, or held a special event of any sort, please contact the editor. Your success will inspire others!

