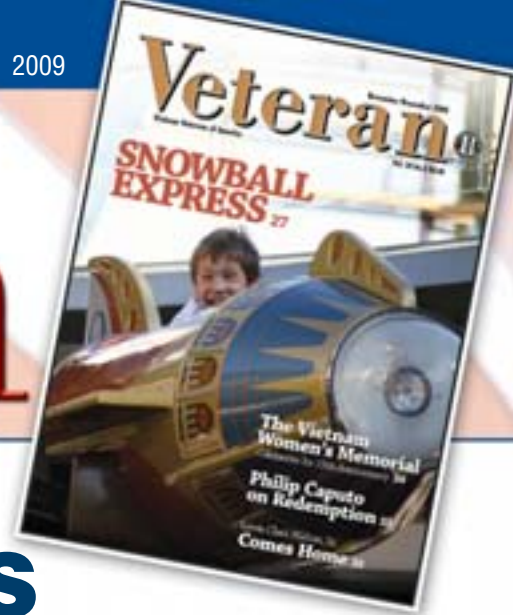




# Report to Action



## VVA Reaches Out to the Families of the Fallen With SNOWBALL EXPRESS

**VVA** Chapter 785 in Orange County, California, has worked since 2006 to help Snowball Express, an all-volunteer charity, in its mission to “provide hope and new memories to the children of military fallen heroes who have died while on active duty since 9/11.” Starting in December 2006, when Snowball Express hosted 900 participants from across America on a week-long, all-expense-paid trip to southern California and Disneyland, the annual project has been a source of fun and camaraderie for all concerned—the participating families and also the volunteers.

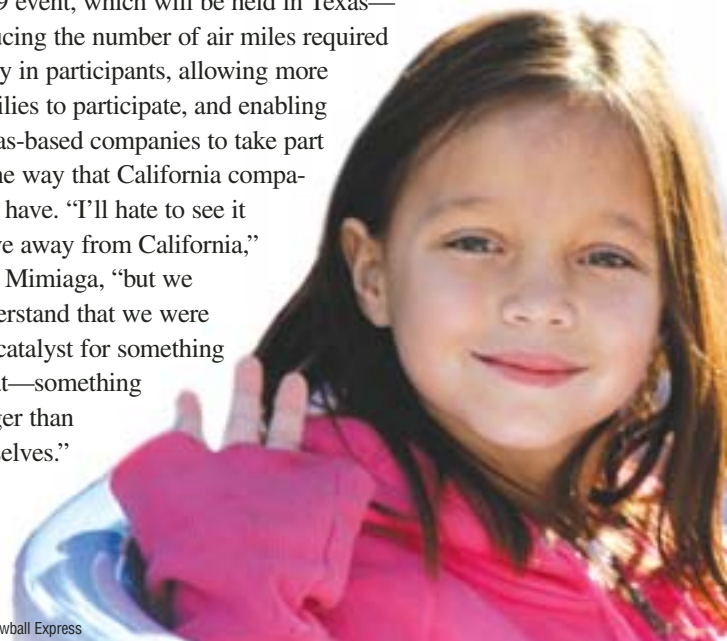
“What better way is there to live up to the VVA founding principle of ‘Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another’?” asked Snowball Express trustee Major Bill “Monsoon” Mimiaga (U.S.M.C., ret.), a former president of Chapter 785 who is VVA’s liaison to the organization. “The amount of goodwill from ordinary people from across this nation is awe-inspiring. You can’t help but be transformed by it.”

The project has, in effect, snowballed: Snowball Express’s 2007 trip hosted 1,100 participants, and the latest one, in December 2008, brought more than 1,400 children and family members to southern California. Members of local VVA chapters eagerly volunteered their time, greeting participants at airports, driving vans back and forth to the hotels, and serving as “hotel captains”—sometimes dressed as Elmo and other kid-friendly TV characters.

Also on board were celebrity volunteers, including actor Gary Sinise, who delighted the Snowball Express participants in 2007 with a concert by his Lt. Dan Band and returned to help out in 2008. In addition, the sponsorship of airlines, hotels, Disneyland, and other businesses has been essential, along with the local clubs, churches, and schools that have donated time and resources. “It simply could not

have happened without them,” said Snowball Express’s chairman, retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Roy White. Despite the recent distressing economic news, some businesses increased the scale of their contributions: American Airlines placed six chartered aircraft at Snowball Express’s disposal in 2008, and the hotel industry donated \$500,000 worth of hotel rooms. To account for such generosity, White said, “We believe we are being good stewards of our donors’ money.”

Snowball Express has plans to publish a book with stories told by the children, parents, volunteers, and donors about what the trips have meant to them. Planning is underway for the December 2009 event, which will be held in Texas—reducing the number of air miles required to fly in participants, allowing more families to participate, and enabling Texas-based companies to take part in the way that California companies have. “I’ll hate to see it move away from California,” said Mimiaga, “but we understand that we were the catalyst for something great—something bigger than ourselves.”



Photos courtesy of Snowball Express





# VVA CHAPTERS ACROSS AMERICA

## Help Veterans, Communities, and Those Serving in Harm's Way



### MICHIGAN: VVA Chapter 274

One might not associate a culinary specialty with Vietnam veterans, but **VVA Chapter 274's** “pasties” — pronounced PASS-tees — are famous and growing more so in the Cheboygan area. In fact, these little meat pies have become the foundation of a remarkable fundraising activity. On the third Friday of every month, the VVA hall in Cheboygan is packed with crowds buying the pasties—and helping the chapter continue its community outreach services.

The pies are “a traditional Michigan food that originated with the Finnish immigrants in the Upper Peninsula,” said Sylvia Sanford, wife of chapter president Dick Sanford. The monthly project — which can account for as much as \$1,700 a sale — has become so popular that the chapter has begun to schedule two-day sales, has purchased an industrial convection oven, and has become licensed as a restaurant by the local health department.

What does Chapter 274 do with the proceeds? These funds enable the chapter to continue its involvement and support for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H clubs, and Christmas for Kids, as well as outreach to the new generation of Iraq and Afghanistan

veterans. “We provide space in our chapter hall for a weekly PTSD group,” said chapter member Duke Mayo. “That’s where we’re seeing some of the younger guys. We’re working hard to get the word out to the younger vets about Veterans of Modern Warfare, which I think is VVA’s organizational legacy. We want to let these vets know there’s an outfit for them, one that can help and wants to meet their needs.” Meanwhile, the chapter’s work and its delicious meat pies have become inextricably connected. “People want to support our veterans,” said Mayo. “We’re just making it easier for them to do that, by appealing to their stomachs.”

### CALIFORNIA: VVA Chapter 391 and VVA Chapter 951

In November 2008, the members of **VVA Chapter 391 in Sonora, Calif.**, paid a visit to the Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center, one of just four facilities in the country providing intensive rehabilitative



Photo by Lisa Deppe

care to veterans and service members with severe injuries to more than one organ system. The center is located at the VA Medical Center in Palo Alto.

Chapter 391’s service work last year also included distributing 30 Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets to needy veterans of all wars as well as to senior citizens throughout Sonora City and Tuolumne

County. In addition, the chapter awarded six \$1,000 scholarships to exceptional high school seniors heading to institutions of higher learning. For the seventh year in a row, Chapter 391 hosted a fundraising golf tournament, with half the proceeds donated to Meals on Wheels, the non-profit organization that delivers hot meals to the elderly.

On a Sunday in September 2008, **VVA Chapter 951 of Lakeport, Calif.**, partnering with VFW Post 2015, gave a “welcome home barbecue” for the community’s National Guardsmen who had recently returned from tours in Iraq. Six veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom were honored, all of whom served with the 649th Engineering Unit, providing convoy security in the areas around Baghdad, Sadr City, and Balad. These men reported “trouble sleeping at night and other issues related to dealing with the stress of being in a combat situation,” according to interviews granted to the *Lake County News*.

“The event gave us all in this community, vets or not, an opportunity to simply say ‘thank you’ to the men who dropped their lives and jobs here at home in order to serve in harm’s way,” said VVA Chapter President Dean Gotham. Gotham recalled, as so many Vietnam veterans do, his own lukewarm reception on returning home. “I had a tough time, as many did. But we didn’t really know what was going on. PTSD didn’t have a name yet. The Vet Centers didn’t exist yet. But over time we learned that ignoring issues of post-combat stress among veterans leads to serious fallout in terms of broken lives. Chapter 951 is committed to doing our part in helping these younger men and women veterans get home and find their footing.”

**VVA and its many chapters stand ready to assist, facilitate, encourage, and support all of our nation’s veterans.**

**[www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)**





## VVA National Headquarters

### Small Hands Create a Prayer Flag



Photos by Michael Keating



Mission of Honor, incorporating all of the veterans groups in the state of New Jersey, with VVA Chapters 899 and 800 being the lead organizations. "Now that the law has been passed," he said, "a protocol is being set up for funeral directors to turn over to us any documents of cremains they currently have in their possession. Then we will check with the VA and the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to make sure they are in fact veterans." Once that has been determined, "the Mission of Honor will pick up the cremains and transport them to General Doyle Cemetery in Wrightstown, N.J., for proper burial." This can include veterans of all wars, he added.

Asked whether there are similar programs in other states, he replied that a few other states have begun them, including Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Oregon. Much of this work was inspired by the Missing In America Project, said Niedzwiedz. "Other organizations like ours are working on state laws," he said. "This bill means that no veteran will be forgotten."

The students and faculty of St. Pius X Regional School in Bowie, MD, are always looking for opportunities to create gifts for the troops. In one of their favorite projects, the Prayer Flag, the smaller kids make rows of palm prints on canvas with red paint to form the stripes, and the bigger kids make thumbprints of white paint to represent the stars. The result looks like an American flag and conveys a unique sense of caring.

One such opportunity came last December, when the students made a Prayer Flag as well as miniature Christmas trees for the recovering soldiers at Walter Reed Medical Center. Each tree had its own card with the student's name and a note written on the back. VVA arranged for some of the students to present the handmade trees and Prayer Flag at a training session of VVA's Veterans Benefits Department. In return, VVA members gave the students key chains and information on Vietnam Veterans of America's history.

Over dinner later that evening, VVA members presented the Christmas trees to young patients at the Walter Reed Medical Center. Both VVA and St. Pius X Regional School hope to continue this tradition in the years to come.

New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine with VVA Chapter 899 members.

## NEW JERSEY: VVA Chapter 899

A bill signed into legislation by New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine in Wrightstown, N.J., on February 4, 2009, allows veterans' service organizations to receive the cremated remains of veterans for a proper burial if the cremains have been unclaimed after one year. Roman P. Niedzwiedz, 1st Vice President of VVA Chapter 899 in Bordentown, was one of the earliest and most outspoken advocates for the legislation.

Explaining how this had come about, Niedzwiedz described how VVA had formed a committee called the

Courtesy of NJ Governor's Press Office / Tim Larsen

Photos by Bill Putnam







# Report to Action

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Reconnect and get the latest news from VVA's bimonthly magazine, *The VVA Veteran*.

## How the VVA's Mission has Grown

Vietnam Veterans of America, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in July 2008, has expanded its mission over the years to welcome and mentor younger veterans as they return to civilian life. One of VVA's many successes has been to ensure the creation and maintenance of the Department of Veterans Affairs' Vet Center program. These storefront readjustment counseling centers, which we fought to establish when we first came home from Vietnam, now exist in 209 communities in 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. The Vet Centers are now being used by veterans coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the words of VVA Chapter 951 President Dean Gotham: "Every Vietnam vet knows how important it is to have a sympathetic ear. Sometimes that's what's needed more than anything else." Gotham added that "VVA has demonstrated the power of the unified voice. We are a model for the new organizations out there, and we want to see younger vets engage and participate. We all know that the long road to recovery from this current war is only just beginning, and vets will need to be organized." Throughout this process, VVA and its many chapters will "stand ready to assist, facilitate, encourage, and support."



Photo by Bill Putnam

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— Dean Gotham, President of VVA Chapter 951