



Out Front

Michael G. Negrete, Chapter President

A retrospective look at 2020 and COVID's effects on the Chapter as we continue to serve you.

When the year 2020 began, we could have never imagined the effect it would have on us. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed daily life for all of us and taken a significant human and economic toll on the world. Civil unrest following the tragic death of George Floyd emphasized we all have more to do in support of social justice everywhere. This year, more than any in recent memory, we've been reminded how connected we all are.

As we navigate these unprecedented times together, upholding our commitments to our members and the disabled community we serve is one way we can make a difference today, and for the future.

In response to COVID-19, we took decisive steps to protect and support our employees, volunteers and Board members by temporarily closing the Chapter office in March and provided the guidance and ability to work remotely from home. We also shifted much of our fundraising efforts from sports and recreations, since they were canceled due to COVID, to supporting new created COVID-19 relief efforts. Parts of this involved establishing our Member COVID Relief grant and purchasing reusable face-coverings.

To date, the COVID Relief grant has been able to distribute \$11,000 to our members in need throughout New England. We have also shipped, free of charge, nearly 1,000 face-coverings to members, PVA Service Officers, VA Clinics and Long-term Care facilities. These initiatives were made entirely possible through the efforts of our recently hired Executive Director Mark Murphy. Mark was able to secure 6 grants from 4 of the New England states and also made quick connections with other Chapter E.D.'s to source and order the face-coverings.

In response to social injustice, we spoke out alongside PVA National condemning racism, exclusion and marginalization having no place in our society and supported those who have been affected by senseless violence, oppression and injustice.

I would be remiss not to directly point out the inequities in healthcare faced by our members and the disabled communities in New England. Our newly hired Government Relations Director Kristen McCone Gordon had to hit the ground running. Starting with attending the annual PVA Advocacy and Legislation Seminar in Washington, D.C. then having to immediately pivot to addressing the disparities in the Crisis Standards of Care presented by the looming COVID pandemic, while continuing to maintain the efforts required to move PVA's legislative priorities forward.

Mark and Kristen have both quickly become invaluable assets to the Chapter. Each reaching out to make connections and quickly picking up the tasks necessary to ensure our mission has kept moving forward and the needs of our members met regardless of circumstances.

There is no doubt that all we have experienced this past year is bringing about irreversible changes in the way we think and work. It makes me proud to see how smoothly everyone has been able to transition to working remotely. I know for our Office Admin/Bookkeeper Jerry, it was a challenge to start with, but working extremely well now. Previously digitizing our paper workflows and putting in place the remote access infrastructure to accommodate inclement weather have made this possible. We must continue our forward-thinking plans, so we are always prepared for the unexpected.

The world is seeing a crisis of unprecedented nature and effects. All the scenarios experienced up until now have been suddenly overwhelmed by this unstoppable chain of events. This prompts me to share a few thoughts with you.

The first one is the pride in serving an extraordinary organization like the new England Chapter. We are united by a common culture of serving one-another as veterans that makes us unbeatable in the face of events like this, in the face of adversity. The Chapter is going to overcome the difficulties of the moment, and will do so, as always, by not only helping ourselves, but society also.

The second is that we are going to continue providing the necessary resources to meet the needs of all our members, as well as their families and caregivers. To this effect, the Board of Directors, Executive Committee and Staff are in constant communication and meet on a regular basis to monitor the evolution and the effects of the pandemic and to ensure the mission of the Chapter is met in every aspect.

Finally, as we close this year and start the next, please take a moment to consider how you can help us change lives for the better. Volunteer. Donate. Share our message. I wish you all safety, health, happiness and prosperity throughout the Holiday season and into the New Year.

Michael G. Negrete
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and Paralyzed Veteran*