

AMERICAN VETERANS HERITAGE CENTER, INC.

2009 ANNUAL REPORT

Although American Veterans Heritage Center, Inc. ("AVHC") took some very important steps forward in 2009, it was not without some sadness. On September 26, 2009, we lost long-time board member and AVHC Vice President, **Clay E. Dailey**. Clay was a veteran of both the United States Army (joining at age 15) and the United States Air Force. He also was a very active member of AMVETS, having served as Ohio Department Commander in 2005-2006 and National 4th District Commander in 2007-2008. Clay's dedication, guidance and counsel to our organization will be sorely missed.

Following a strategic planning retreat in December, 2008, the Board began 2009 with a renewed focus both on AVHC's overall mission and on a number of specific ongoing projects, including the proposed National Veterans Hall of Fame, the Patriot Freedom Festival (the annual Memorial Day event), the Veterans History Project, a potential archives project and plans for the improvement and adaptive reuse of the historic campus at the Dayton Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

The Board also continued to work on board development during 2009, having named AVHC volunteer **Robert Kincses** as a new trustee in late 2008. In January 2009, the Board also unanimously elected *Dayton Daily News* columnist **Dale Huffman** as an honorary member of the Board of Trustees, in recognition of his long-standing support for veterans affairs and the Dayton VA Medical Center. AVHC further expanded its leadership in February, with the election to the Board of **Colleen Ryan**, former commander of Wright Patterson AFB and current Vice President of Defense Program at the Dayton Development Coalition.

The Board also worked during much of 2009 to develop and fund a plan to clean and stabilize the nineteenth century pipe organ in the historic **Protestant Chapel** at the VA Medical Center. The organ had deteriorated from years of benign neglect after the Chapel was closed and is not currently in playable condition. Funding has been secured for the planned cleaning stabilization which, while it will not return the organ to playing condition, will help to prevent any further deterioration until a full renovation can be planned and funded. The stabilization work is expected to be completed once warmer weather returns in 2010.

Throughout 2009, AVHC also continued to encourage and support a study being conducted by the Midwest Region of the National Park Service to determine the eligibility of the historic district on the Dayton VA Medical Center campus for nomination as a **National Historic Landmark**. By the end of 2009, the exhaustive study conducted by NPS was in draft form and had been circulated for comments from interested parties, including AVHC. AVHC looks forward to seeing this lengthy process completed in late 2010 or early 2011, with the campus receiving the very significant historical recognition it rightfully deserves as a National Historic Landmark.

In early May, 2009, the Dayton VA Medical Center hosted a traveling exhibition honoring the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth. AVHC was well represented at the ribbon cutting for the exhibit, which featured addresses by AVHC President **Judge Walter Rice**, Dayton VA Medical Center Director **Guy Richardson** and **Abraham Lincoln** himself!

May, 2009, also saw another successful Memorial Day event at the Dayton VA Medical Center sponsored by AVHC, now called the **Patriot Freedom Festival**. The event, which included historical displays, living history demonstrations, drill team competitions, commemorations and family

entertainment, was very much enjoyed by all who attended. The festival, which drew an estimated several thousand people to the campus, broke the attendance record for the prior year. Key to the success of the program were a large group of very active volunteers and planning consultant **Emma O'Neal**. In addition, thanks to the very generous support of sponsors led by **BAE, Lockheed Martin** and **Greentree**, the event for the first time produced a small profit. The volunteers were honored for their work in June, at a first ever volunteer recognition event.

AVHC also determined in 2009 to expand the Patriot Freedom Festival concept to include a number of related activities throughout the year. The first of these events was a very successful open house held in the fall at the Putnam Library for representatives of local historical societies and similar organizations.

AVHC took another significant step in its growth and evolution in 2009 by developing a relationship with the Tipp City-based **American Veterans Institute** ("AVI"), led by **Mike Jackson** and **Tara Dixon Engel**. The mission of AVI is similar in many respects to that of AVHC, and includes development of a Veterans Hall of Honor, a veterans research center and educational programs for our schools. With so much in common, AVHC also engaged Integrity Marking, a for-profit affiliate of AVI, to assist AVHC with a significant new strategic planning process. That process is described further below.

One of AVHC's top priorities continues to be reopening the historic **Protestant Chapel** on the Dayton VA Medical Center campus for use by veterans and their families. In addition to planning the stabilization of the Chapel pipe organ, during 2009 AVHC advised the VA on the replacement of the roof of the structure. This major improvement, funded by the VA's capital budget, will go a long way towards preserving the Chapel for the future. As an added benefit, the new roof reflects the original roof design of the building, featuring crosses and other decorations. The roof replacement will be completed in 2010. During 2009, AVHC also discussed with officials of the **3rd District of Ohio VFW** the possibility of that organization donating carpet to cover the (now bare) rebuilt floor of the Chapel, so that it can be used again for its intended function. This project has been delayed by the roof renovation project, by news that, under applicable regulations, the gift must be approved by the office of the Secretary of the VA, and by the untimely death of its chief proponent, **Wesley Willis**, 3rd District Commander of the Ohio VFW and a veteran of World War II; however, AVHC hopes to be in a position to proceed with this very important work in 2010.

As in the past, AVHC was involved in a number of other projects, consistent with its mission, in 2009. Among these were hosting a reception after the annual Veterans Day activities at the National Cemetery, participation in the **Wreaths Across America** program, assisting with a seminar for the Veterans History Project, and assisting the VA in selecting outstanding new historic signage for the campus. Thanks to AVHC volunteer **Mark Conrad** (who also is the mastermind behind the Miami Valley Military History Museum in the Putnam Library), the **Driving Guide** to the historic Dayton VA Medical Center campus was updated and is now available online. Volunteer AVHC genealogist **Carolyn Burns** also continued to respond to history questions submitted through the AVHC website, www.americanveteransheritage.org. AVHC also once again is participating in the Dayton area **Combined Federal Campaign**.

AVHC also worked during 2009 to bring a Community Covenant signing ceremony to Dayton. Begun by the Army and subsequently expanded to include all of the armed services, the Community Covenant program represents a formal commitment by state and local communities to those serving their country in the military, and their families. Plans are continuing to bring such a ceremony to our community in 2010.

As has become AVHC's tradition, the Board concluded 2009 with a strategic planning retreat, led this year by **Mike Jackson** and **Tara Dixon Engel** from AVI. Director **Guy Richardson** reported on the significant ongoing renovation and repair work within the historic district on the Dayton VA Medical Center campus, including the replacement of the roof on the Protestant Chapel, asbestos and lead paint abatement in the historic Administration Building and the preparation of a landscaping plan for the grotto area. While much deferred maintenance work remains to be addressed, AVHC is very appreciative of Director Richardson's leadership in identifying funding and pushing these projects forward. The trustees also examined the Board's priorities, ongoing projects and potential projects and discussed the desirability of working towards hiring an executive director. Based on this strategic review, Ms. Dixon Engel and Mr. Jackson then began the development of a written strategic plan, which has been the subject of much additional effort in 2010 and will, when completed, provide AVHC with a very useful tool in charting its future course and seeking funding for its projects.

Respectfully submitted,

David A. Neuhardt
Secretary

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