

AMERICAN VETERANS HERITAGE CENTER, INC.

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

2014 was another very successful year for **American Veterans Heritage Center, Inc.** (“AVHC”).

10th Annual Patriot Freedom Festival

AVHC’s Patriot Freedom Festival, held on May 24 and 25, celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2014. The event, which honors the nation’s military, is an annual event on the Dayton VA Medical Center campus. The Patriot Freedom Festival, organized by AVHC’s Events Committee (**Cindy Dafler**, Chair) and not supported by federal funds, is dependent on a dedicated group of volunteers, donors, contributors and supporters. Participants in 2014 included the 101st Airborne WWII Reenacting Association, Jim Crabtree as Abraham Lincoln, Herb Pfaff as General U.S. Grant, Gary Chambers as Robert E. Lee, Rick Williams as George Custer, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Sons of Union Veterans, G Co. 31505th PIR, 82nd Airborne Division, the League of WWI Aviation Historians, the Fifth Independent Battery of Ohio Night Artillery, the Third Army Living Historians, the 4 Freedoms Equestrian Team and the Kettering Civic Band, to name just a few of the many groups involved. Among the special events held in conjunction with the Patriot Freedom Festival were the Freedom 5K Run/Walk/Roll, an open house at the Miami Valley Military History Museum, a ceremony honoring Native American Veterans, a memorial service at the Grotto, the Blue Star Mothers flag refresh ceremony, the Gold Star Wives’ annual memorial service, the always popular bus tours of the campus by Margaret Kruckemeyer and an awards ceremony for the annual student art contest. An estimated 6,000 guests attended the event and had a great time, capping 10 years of growth and success.

The 11th edition of the Patriot Freedom Festival is scheduled for May 23-24, 2015 at the Dayton VA Medical Center from 11-6 daily.

Grotto Garden and Tree Dedication Ceremony

Under the leadership of AVHC trustee and volunteer **Robert Kincses** and the **Master Gardeners**, led by **Bob Neff**, the improvement of the historic Grotto area of the Dayton VA Medical Center campus continued during 2014. A major project included the planting of multiple thematic gardens within the Grotto and the planting of donated memorial trees throughout the Grotto. On August 18, 2014, the Medical Center, the Master Gardeners and AVHC sponsored a Grotto Garden and Tree Dedication Ceremony. More than 300 people attended the dedication thanks to a very informative article on the Grotto in the *Dayton Daily News*. The thematic gardens include a perennial garden, a natural springs garden, a tranquility garden, a boulder garden, a butterfly garden, a purple heart garden, a landmark garden and memorial planters. The AVHC Board of Trustees joined many other memorial tree donors by personally contributing funds to purchase two memorial trees, in memory of former trustees **General Ferguson** and **Clay Daley**.

Ohio Historic Preservation Award

In October, 2014, an Ohio Historic Preservation, Preservation Merit award was presented by the Ohio Historic Preservation Office (associated with Ohio History Connection, formerly known as the Ohio Historical Society) to AVHC and the Dayton VA Medical Center for their joint work (along with the Master Gardeners recruited by AVHC) in restoring the Grotto area of the Dayton campus. AVHC trustee **Robert Kincses** and Dayton VA Medical Center Interim Director **Mark Murdock** accepted the well-deserved award on behalf of their respective organizations at the Columbus presentation.

AVHC SCORE SWOT Analysis; Governance Development

Beginning early in 2014, the AVHC board worked with **Wally** and **Carolyn Nugent** and other volunteers from the Dayton Chapter of the **Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)** to analyze AVHC's organizational Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), a traditional part of the strategic planning process. AVHC had initially contacted the Dayton Foundation regarding the likelihood of being able to fund an AVHC executive director position using grant sources. Both the Dayton Foundation and the SCORE representatives were discouraging regarding the availability of grant funding for that purpose and recommended that AVHC take a longer-term approach towards cultivating its own large donors over time. SCORE recommended that a first step should be to conduct the SWOT analysis and then develop strategies to address each critical issue and an action plan to address the strategies.

The AVHC trustees met with several members of SCORE, including the Nugents, in a Saturday off-site session to work on the initial aspects SWOT on March 29, 2014. The trustees further refined the results of the SWOT analysis during the remainder of the year and, at their annual December planning session, began exploring adoption of a "working board" governance model for AVHC which would push much of the ongoing work of the organization to active committees. Further work on implementing such a governance model is continuing into 2015.

National Historic Landmark Marker Unveiling

Although the long effort to have the historic Dayton VA Medical Center campus designated as a National Historic Landmark concluded when that designation was finally awarded in 2012, on May 1, 2014, a ceremony was held on the Medical Center campus to unveil the newly installed marker commemorating the designation. The marker was unveiled by **Glenn Costie**, Director of the Dayton VA Medical Center, **Dean Alexander**, Superintendent of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park, and AVHC's President, Judge **Walter H. Rice**.

AVHC Supports Think TV Great TV Auction

As it has done for the last several years, AVHC again supported the annual Think TV Great TV Auction fundraiser in 2014 through the donation of surplus Louis L'Amour books (donated to AVHC) and Protestant Chapel replicas to be auctioned by Think TV. Not only do these donations of surplus items support a good cause by supporting a fellow local nonprofit organization, they also result in guaranteed publicity for AVHC through the broadcast auction.

Girl Scout Education Event

AVHC volunteers supported an educational event for area Girl Scouts held on the Dayton VA Medical Center in the spring of 2014. It is hoped that many similar events can make use of the historical resources on the campus in the future.

Dayton VA Cemetery

Judge Rice, on behalf of AVHC, has been engaged in ongoing discussions with various interested parties regarding the appropriate expansion for the cemetery, which is operated by the National Cemetery Administration, an organization within the VA but independent of the VA medical operations. The Dayton National Cemetery and the Medical Center share the historic Dayton campus. AVHC is interested in assuring that the cemetery has the necessary space for anticipated future growth but also is intent on protecting the integrity of the historic portion of the campus. Various alternatives have been suggested to accommodate these dual goals, and discussions are continuing with AVHC taking an active role.

VOBOhio

AVHC Executive Vice President and COO **Dennis Samic** has been the source of many good ideas for projects utilizing the Dayton VA Medical Center campus in support of serving veterans. One such idea was an early-stage veteran-owned business “incubator” to be located in currently unused space on the Medical Center campus, an idea informally dubbed “Vets Town.” While the concept initially gained a good bit of traction, it stalled when the VA’s ability to enter into so-called enhanced use leases came into legal question. Meanwhile, AVHC learned of another Dayton-based organization, VOBOhio, which was developing its own similar idea, coincidentally also named “Vets Town.” During 2014 AVHC representatives and VOBOhio representatives met on several occasions to explore the possibility of a closer collaboration between the two organizations to develop the Vets Town concept at the Medical Center. No clear path has yet been identified, but discussions continue.

AVHC Volunteer Recognized by State of Ohio

Yet another AVHC volunteer was recognized in 2014 for his many contributions to his community when AVHC trustee and volunteer extraordinaire **Robert Kincses** was inducted into the **Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame** in November, 2014. Robert joins an amazing seven previous Hall of Fame inductees who have been associated with AVHC. Robert was also honored in 2014 by **Sinclair Community College** for his volunteer work for that organization.

Other Activities

The third annual Veterans Day 5-K race/walk/roll sponsored by AVHC was held in November, 2014. The event helps to raise funds for AVHC.

Amendment to Bylaws

In an effort to clarify and simplify the AVHC Bylaws, at the Board’s annual planning session held in December, 2014, the trustees amended the Bylaws to provide that all trustees will be elected for three year terms in the future, with a third of the trustees to be up for election each

year. Before the amendment, trustees were elected to one, two or three year terms, which was an unusual structure that led to some confusion.

2015 Strategic Priorities

At its annual planning session in December, 2014, the trustees approved five strategic priorities for 2015 (two of which are being carried over from 2014):

1. Location of VA Archives in Dayton (also 2014 priority).
2. Resolution of VA Cemetery Expansion Issues (also 2014 priority).
3. Construction of a “walk of honor” on the Dayton VA Medical Center campus.
4. Renovation of the Protestant Chapel organ to operating condition.
5. Outreach efforts on behalf of AVHC, including a possible membership structure.

AVHC intends to prioritize its efforts in 2015 towards reaching these

Respectfully submitted,
David A. Neuhardt
Secretary, American Veterans Heritage Center, Inc.

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