



NEIGHBORS
HELPING
NEIGHBORS
SERVICE TOGETHER



SUMMIT ON
VOLUNTEERISM
A Response to
Economic Crisis

Laura Balun, Veterans Administration

Thank you so much for allowing me to be here today. As he indicated, we are a little different in that we're part of the federal government but we rely heavily on more than 350 organizations. We have a very noble mission and that is to provide service to those who have served, those who have borne the battle, for their widow and their orphan is what Abraham Lincoln said many years ago. And so we can only do that with the support of volunteers and volunteer organizations.

We heard this morning that in order to get more out of volunteers, it would be best if we had a volunteer manager to take care of those volunteers. At each one of the medical centers, our CBOC's and our Vet Centers, we have volunteer managers that do exactly that. They recruit volunteers. They train volunteers. They place volunteers. And they more importantly recognize volunteers for their efforts. recognition is so very important with volunteers, as you all know.

People don't do volunteer because they want to get paid. They do it because they really are passionate about the type of work that they do. But it doesn't hurt to recognize them for their efforts.

Last year we had 11 million volunteer hours that were contributed to the medical centers and the cemeteries. If you use the \$19.51 dollar figure that the Independent Sector identifies, that's \$224 million that volunteers have contributed to the Veterans Administration nationwide.

We also rely heavily on donations from these 350 organizations that I spoke of earlier, to the tune of \$82 million that volunteers have contributed to VA nationwide. We bring in about \$306 million in cash and item donations and services that volunteers provide.

It costs the federal government about \$55 million to pay those individuals, to pay for the volunteer meals and any travel for training and the benefits. So \$55 million to pull in \$306 million is not a bad bang for the buck. We could not provide the service to veterans that we do without the tremendous support of organizations such as those in this room.

I thanked the Knights of Columbus earlier and I just want to say that of the individuals, the volunteers that we have volunteering, last year we had 127,000 Knights of Columbus volunteers that provided service to veterans and so we are very grateful for the service the Knights of Columbus provide to us.

Our volunteers do a variety of things. They do things like driving veterans from their homes to the medical center, escorting them once they get there, working in the laboratory, working in cemeteries doing the honor guards when there is a burial. So there is a variety of things that we certainly rely heavily on volunteers to do.



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I think that it is very important again that we let the people know, let everyone know the power is in the 'ask,' as was said this morning and that's one of the phrases that we have used over the past couple of years in VA, the power is in the 'ask.' You need to let people know what the needs are.

We certainly try to do that through our website. We have our website and we ask for people to volunteer their time and we advertise the number of items that we need to care for those who've borne the battle. I know what I will take this away from this meeting in terms of doing more and letting people know what our needs are and how they can certainly help provide service to veterans.

I certainly have learned a lot from this conference and I applaud the Knights of Columbus for pulling this together and allowing other volunteer organizations to hear what the needs are and where they need to go from here. So thank you very much.