



National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

November Article

(Submitted by Commission member Gabe Cinquegrana)

THINK OUT OF THE BOX – BE AN INTERACTIVE VOLUNTEER

Support to VA Medical Centers, Homes, and facilities by the Sons of The American Legion, is fulfilling one of the Pillars of our Legion Family. Across the United States Sons continue to show that support every day. In 2017 we provided almost 410,000 hours at VA Centers, the equivalent of 197.1 FTE employees. Our mission is to continue those efforts, and expand our support in directions where we can best comply with what is best for our Veterans, and the greatest assistance to the VA facilities we work with.

An increasing trend in many VA Centers is to offer more events and activities that require greater interaction from their resident Veterans, and increase their mental and physical activity with volunteers and Organizations. It's not only a mission that helps to provide them with something to occupy their time, but in many cases can also work to be part of their therapy, health, and well-being.

We do a great job at bringing pizzas to the VA residents, we eat and chat with them, maybe play some bingo. We often bring Ice Cream with all the toppings, maybe some cake as well, and have a social gathering to spend the afternoon. Once in awhile we have a bus load of Vets brought to a Post home and feed them breakfast, or even a picnic lunch, then they return. These are all good things to do, and continue to be the backbone of many services we provide. But many VA Centers are now trying to lessen the dormancy of their residents, decrease the food intake, and increase their interaction and the types of inter-active activities they participate in.

Let's look at some examples:

- Instead of spending \$75 to \$100 on Pizza, find a couple of local musicians and ask them to play some songs for an hour or so for the Veterans. You probably have some of them in your Squadron. While they enjoy the music, have some popcorn or other light snack they can enjoy, along with some lemonade.
- Instead of a large all you can eat BBQ costing several hundreds of dollars, have a carnival. It's not that difficult to "cobble together" a few games of chance, have a "pretend" palm reader, a little duck pond, topple the bowling pins game, maybe even a dunking booth for the brave of heart. Again, a few snacks would be OK, some nice prizes for winners, and they can then have the opportunity to interact with the activities you are providing.
- Casino events are great as well. Everybody has a source for some simple spinning wheels and card game tables. You would be amazed at the interaction these games can provide, and they often times will trigger memories long forgotten. It is a great opportunity to provide some enjoyment, and allow them the opportunity to use their minds and thought processes instead of just being dormant.
- Sponsor a "Board Game Bonanza" with a few Board Games and maybe assistance from some kids, engage the Veterans with games that can challenge their minds and entertain their afternoon. Provide refreshments, and it is a low cost event that all can enjoy.
- And there are always the Zoos to visit, or a boat ride, fishing, baseball games, bowling, movies, even a little league or high school football game. Changing the scenery is important, involving them in an activity is essential to their alertness. Anything to avoid being dormant in one spot.



Volunteering at a VA facility is so much more than helping to file papers, taking a Veteran to an appointment and then going home, making phone calls reminding Veterans of an appointment, or calling in a pizza order every 3 months for your quarterly visit. Those are all good things, but we could be doing so much more to get our Veterans residing in VA Centers engaged and involved. The amount we feed them or the things we give them are not nearly as important as the improvements we can make in the quality of their lives.

Think “out-of-the box”, be creative with your activities, interact and you will see more interaction from them. Try it; you’ll be surprised at the results.