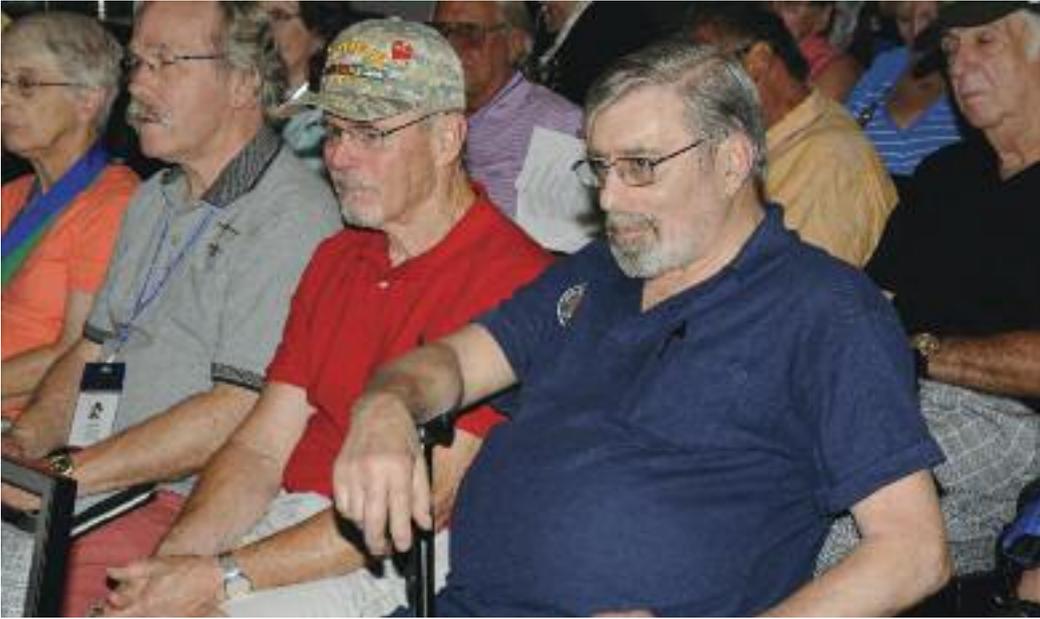
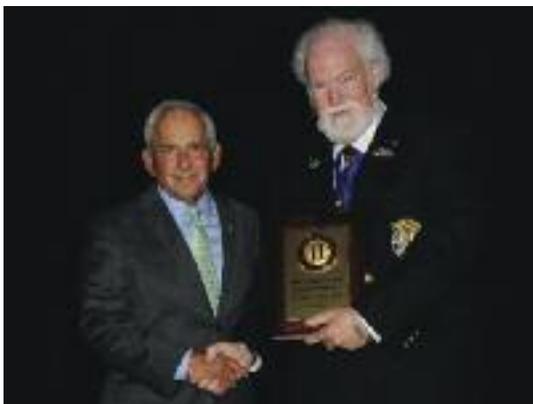


Many members attended Tuesday's Board of Directors meeting (below), then later grooved to the sounds of a Beach Boys tribute band. The South Bay, California, Chapter 53 Honor Guard (right) presented the colors during Wednesday's Opening Ceremonies.



Past, Present, AND Future

VVA's 2018 Leadership & Education Conference



STORY AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL KEATING

Yeah, it was hot. Record heat even for Palm Springs, with temps topping at 122 degrees and never dropping below 90. Later in the week the situation was intensified by the Cranston fire, which at dusk glowed ominously behind the mountain and pushed smoke and dropped ash on the desert resort. All but the hardy were discouraged from leaving the hotel, and even they went out predawn then scurried back in vampiric haste.

"Oh, but it's always 70 degrees in the seminar rooms," VVA's meeting planner, Wes Guidry, joked. In the main, he was correct. The seminars began in trios Wednesday morning, July 25, following Tuesday's registration day, and wrapped up Saturday morning, July 28. They covered a broad range of issues and subjects of special interest to veterans and their families and for those who will take leadership roles in VVA.

Seminars reviewed the duties and responsibilities of VVA officers and provided an overview of parliamentary procedure. Constitution Committee Chair Leslie DeLong reprised her two-session discussion of state and chapter bylaws, this time adding some role-playing. Many of the seminars were repeats from VVA's Tucson Leadership Conference, including Pete Peterson's "Federal Laws Covering Children with Disabilities," the Doctor Toms' "Veteran Suicide Risk & Prevention," and "Recognizing Secondary PTSD." Discussions of those seminars ran in the September/October 2016 issue.

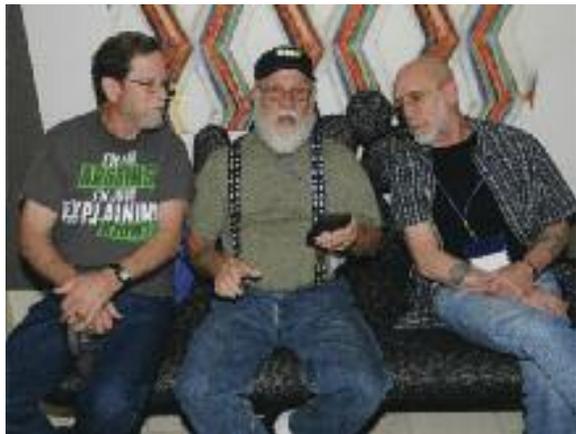
There were some new seminars, of course. Those included Minority Affairs Committee Chair Gumersindo Gomez' "Diversity" session, which broke attendees into small groups that took on specific questions, then reported back to the entire group. The Veterans Incarcerated and in the Justice System Committee Seminar presented much of the material in committee Chair Dominick Yezzo's regular columns in *The VVA Veteran*. Health Care Committee Chair Carol Baker presented "Getting Ready for the Rest of Your Life," which considered options for planning the final stages of one's life, and former Connecticut Commissioner of Veterans Affairs Linda Schwartz emphasized the importance of informing health care providers about one's military service and the health risks involved. Kerwin Stone took on the subject of wills and executors, while the Agent Orange Committee discussed ways of working the media.



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At the Saturday Night Awards Banquet, President John Rowan honored (from top) Dr. Peter Singer, John Olson, and "Mr. Las Vegas," Wayne Newton.

Three VVA firefighters from Northern California (below) kept track of the expanding Redding Fire on their smart phones. Californians Kyle and Jerry Orlemann (right) with their collie service dogs. Members of Denver Chapter 1071 attended the Closing Ceremonies.



View, download, share, and ID more than 350 photos from the Leadership Conference at www.facebook.com/vvaveteran



Opening Ceremonies Keynote Speaker Rick Francona (above). Many attendees had questions (far right) during Saturday's Working Groups Q&A.

The Big Subject

But the seminars were overshadowed by the conference's big subject: the future of the organization. While all the seminars were run three at a time, most everyone attended the meetings of Working Groups I and II, and the Q&A on the conference's final day.

The Working Group I session was held immediately after the Opening Ceremonies on Wednesday. This group was charged with examining how to reach a VVA end stage. Kerwin Stone noted that if no provisions are made, the laws of New York State (in which VVA is incorporated) take effect and the state disposes of the assets. Further, VVA's Constitution contains no provisions for dissolution. Much of the group's discussion concerned a hypothetical end date and the things that must be done prior to that date. So events were couched in terms of "X minus 5 years" and "X minus 3 years." That X date could be as early as 2028.

Working Group II made its presentation the following day. It's charged with proposing a viable fu-

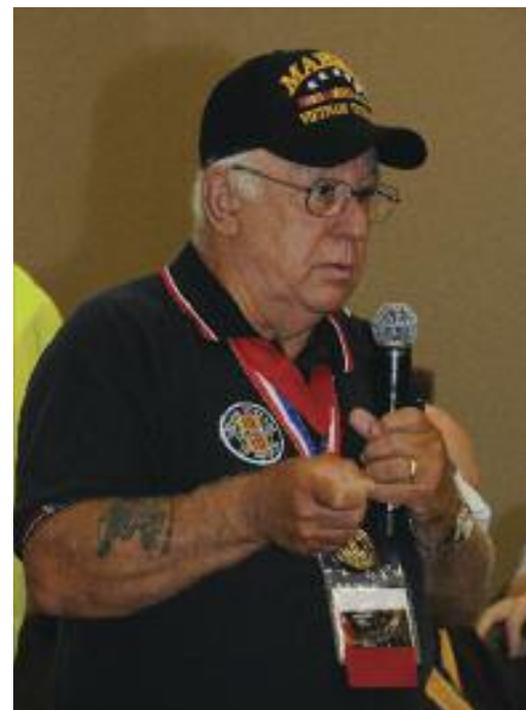
ture for the organization. Various options were discussed. Group member Bud Alley championed the formation of a Vietnam Veterans of America Legacy Foundation, which could preserve VVA's history while helping other organizations take on VVA's mission. Alley acknowledged the difficulty—and the importance—of the task: "We are planting seeds in a garden we won't harvest," he said.

Finally, on Saturday both groups met together for a Q&A attended by several hundred VVA members. Many questions were posed. Some discussed VVA's checkered history of foundation creation—a history unfamiliar to many working group members. Sandie Wilson made an impassioned call for VVA to remain a membership organization that receives its mandate from its members. The working groups gathered much information at the Leadership Conference, which will be incorporated into their plans.

But perhaps some of the most important planning for the future (with a small "f") occurred in the hallways, in the lobby, and by the bar as chapter and state council leaders discussed among themselves the projects they've taken on and the challenges they've faced in launching and maintaining those projects. VVA chapters have often plotted their own courses, and they have developed programs that reflect their communities' needs and their members' skills.

It wasn't all work, however. Opening ceremonies provided pomp as the South Bay (California) Chapter 53 Honor Guard presented the Colors. Then, as the service flags were posted, members stood as their flag was brought forward. Everyone stood and cheered when the Coast Guard flag was hoisted.

After VVA President John Rowan gave the Conference attendees their marching orders, Keynote Speaker Rick Francona discussed his extraordinary career with the military. Partly by plan and partly by chance, Francona became a U.S. Air



Woody and the Longboards (below) performed one night as the Beach Boys, the next as the Eagles.



During the Closing Ceremonies (left) the VVA flag was passed from California State Council President Steve Mackey to Ohio SC President Cliff Riley, who will host the next Leadership Conference. Later, Butch Frederickson chatted with Wayne Newton at the reception before the Awards Banquet. Those attending the Minority Affairs Seminar (lower photos) broke into groups to discuss the issues.



Force intelligence officer fluent first in Vietnamese, then later in Arabic. After the Vietnam War, he served as an advisor and interpreter for Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf. Since 2013 he has provided military analysis for CNN.

Perhaps recognizing that members weren't going to rush out into God's microwave, three evening events were planned during the Palm Beach Leadership & Education Conference. Woodie and the Long Boards performed a tribute to the music of the Beach Boys Tuesday evening at the Welcome Home Party. Although initially reminiscent of an LP left too long in a car on a summer's day, the sound got adjusted and the band did a commendable job recreating that Southern California Sound.

In a second concert the following evening the band took on the music of another California giant, the Eagles. They sounded good; the dancers swayed back and forth.

Friday's dinner and show featured Dave Karl, who reprised his Kenny Rogers and Friends show that was so well received at the Tucson LC. It was a hit again among the heat-averse.

Although Thursday afternoons are usually free, allowing VVA folks the opportunity to explore the host city, this year many members looked at the 114-degree thermometer setting and decided to stay in the hotel. That was a boon for Arts Editor Marc Leepson, who gave a talk on his book, *Ballad of the Green Beret: The Life and Wars of Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler*.

The Board of Directors, too, had an eye on the future as it again debated a suggestion to reduce life member fees and eliminate annual membership dues as financially untenable. Ultimately, though, it punted and decided to gather more information and revisit the question at its October meeting.

AVVA, too, while it was busy with its secondary PTSD seminar, its Board meetings, its luncheon, and other activities, members engaged in long discussions about the future—and its place in VVA's future.

Then, suddenly, it was Saturday, and President Rowan gave his conference summation, awards were presented, the AVVA and VVA flags were handed over.



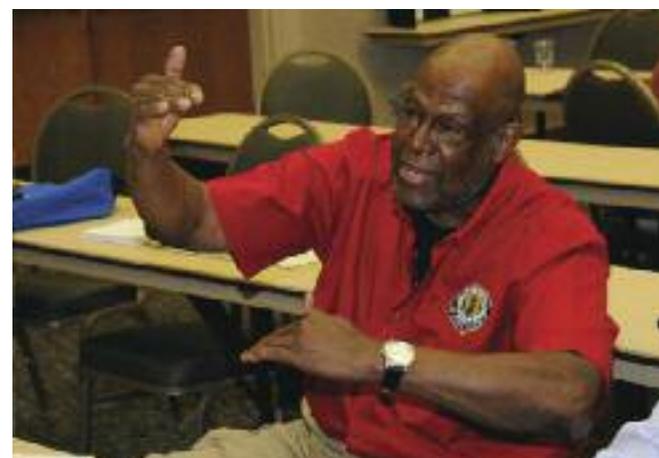
California State Council President Steve Mackey handed the VVA flag over to Ohio State Council President Cliff Riley, who will host the 2020 Leadership & Education Conference in Dayton.

Then attendees wandered out of the Closing Ceremonies to rest and chat or otherwise enjoy the free afternoon. It had been a quiet conference, the days of drunks banging out tunes on the piano until 4 o'clock in the morning long gone. Gone, too, were the cigarettes. At past events great mounds of foul butts spilled out of every ashtray, but now the attending smokers numbered only a dozen or so. And they were condemned to smoke in the outside inferno.

The final event was the Awards Banquet, emceed by VVA member Troy Evans. Well known for his work on *China Beach* and *ER*, as well as many film and TV roles, this year the actor was presenting the Excellence in the Arts awards rather than receiving one.

Three men were honored. Dr. Peter A. Singer received an Excellence in the Sciences award for his work in the field of endocrinology, and especially for his work improving the health and well-being of Third World communities. John Olson was honored for his life's work as a photographer, but especially for his powerful images of the Battle of Hue. Wayne Newton was honored for an ongoing commitment to entertaining the troops that began when he first toured Vietnam at age sixteen.

All three earned additional accolades for the eloquence and humility of their acceptance speeches. ■



Ed Brown and other members of Cincinnati Chapter 10 at the Banquet reception.