It’s a good bet that everyone who attended VVA’s 20th National Convention November 3-7 at the Sheraton Four Seasons Hotel in Greensboro, North Carolina, will remember it for many years to come. For one thing, the Convention was held during a pandemic with strict health rules, including mandatory temperature checks, mask wearing in public spaces (including on the Convention floor), and proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test for all delegates, guests, and VVA staff.

For another, VVA National Treasurer Jack McManus, running off the floor, defeated eight-term National President John Rowan and was sworn in as Vietnam Veterans of America’s seventh president at the close of the Convention.

Finally, the Convention’s 702 delegates, after years of often-heated debate, at 11:25 a.m. on Thursday, November 4, voted overwhelmingly and with virtually no debate to adopt a roadmap for VVA’s future. The delegates, that is, voted to keep VVA operating the way it has since we began in 1978—as a veterans service organization with full membership open only to those who served on active duty in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War. In doing so, the delegates shunted aside alternative proposals that would have opened membership to younger veterans or formed a successor organization to carry on VVA’s legacy after the organization went out of business on a to-be-determined future date.

The resolution the delegates approved, officially called Proposed Resolution 11, reads, in toto: “Vietnam Veterans of America, its Officers and Board members [are] prohibited from changing the organization’s name and/or creating any new veterans organization to replace our current one; thus making us a ‘last person standing organization.’”

The Convention, the first VVA national gathering since the 19th Convention in Spokane in July 2019, also gave delegates, spouses, and members of the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, which held its National Convention at the same time, the chance to socialize and renew old acquaintances during the week. The official social events included Tuesday evening Welcome Home party featuring The Beach Bumz band and a Friday buffet dinner and show with the singing impressionist Conner Lorre.

Vaxxed and Maxxed: A COVID-WARY NATIONAL CONVENTION ADJUSTS VVA’S DIRECTION

ARTICLE BY MARC LEEPSON; PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEN WILLIAMSON

Most of the delegates, AVVA members, and spouses arrived in Greensboro one or two days before the Opening Ceremonies, which began at 9:00 on Wednesday morning, November 3. The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians Color Guard, fresh from its appearance at game three of the 2021 World Series in Atlanta, presented the colors, followed by the singing of the National Anthem by VVA member Michelle Wilcox, who did the honors in Spokane in 2019. The Keynote Speaker was retired Army Lt. Gen. Ron Blanck, who served a tour of duty as a general medical officer and battalion surgeon in Vietnam, and went on to become Surgeon General of the Army and the Commander of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, among many other senior military medical posts.

Following an afternoon and evening of national committee hearings on resolutions and regional caucuses, Day Two began on Thursday with the presentation of seven VVA Commendation Medals, the organization’s highest award (see box). The delegates
The delegates then took up the proposed resolutions. In addition to Resolution 11, the delegates approved a resolution calling on VVA to use its resources to help South Korean Vietnam War veteran American citizens gain VA benefits. The delegates also approved a resolution that would allow those Korean-American veterans full membership in VVA, although the VVA Constitution allows membership only to those who served in the U.S. armed forces.

The delegates lined up to vote in the national elections at 9:00 on Friday morning. More awards were presented when the floor reconvened (see right), and after lunch on Friday VA Secretary Denis McDonough addressed the delegates. The voting results were announced Saturday morning. In addition to Jack McManus winning the presidential vote, Tom Burke and Bill Meeks were re-elected as Vice President and Secretary and Linda Schwartz as VVA’s National Treasurer. All of the 19 winning Directors, including the nine Regional Directors, have previously served on the Board (see page 15).

The Convention concluded with the Saturday night Awards Banquet. Three former members of the singing and dancing troupe known as Dean Martin’s Golddiggers—Lezlie Dalton, Deborah McFarland, and Barbara Sanders Joiner—received the VVA President’s Award for Entertaining the Troops in Vietnam. And Richard L. “Sandy” Altvater, the president of the New York Mets who served a tour of duty with the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam and is best known as the Oakland Athletics’ general manager who led the team to a 1989 World Series championship, received the VVA Lifetime Achievement Award.

Right: Juan Eric Cantu explained the Missing Man Table at the porte-cochere entrance of the hotel as part of Friday morning’s POW/MIA ceremony. Below: Friday’s General Session.

Below left: Jack McManus addressed the Region 5 Caucus during his successful run from the floor. Below right: Meeting of the Constitution Committee.

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Convention Awardees

Member of the Year: Thomas M. Yaroz
State Council of the Year: Buckeye State Council
Chapter of the Year I: Jackson, Michigan, Chapter 109
Chapter of the Year II: Watertown, South Dakota, Chapter 1054
Incarcerated Member of the Year: Shon Pernice
Minority Affairs Diversity Award: Marc McCabe
Veterans Service Officer of the Year I: Walter Crazy
Veterans Service Officer of the Year II: Lee McClary
Chapter E-Newsletter of the Year, 200 members or more: VA 1048 E-Newsletter, Chapter 1048, Daytona Beach, Florida
Chapter E-Newsletter of the Year, 199 members or less: The VVA 835 News, Chapter 835, Yuma, Arizona
Chapter Newsletter of the Year, 200 members or more: LZ Nassau, Chapter 82, Nassau County, New York
Chapter Newsletter of the Year, 199 members or less: William G. Byrns Chapter 1059, Clay County, Florida
State Council E-Newspaper of the Year: The Florida E-Recon Report, Florida State Council
Chapter Website of the Year: Chapter 106, Tucson, Arizona
State Council Website of the Year: South Carolina State Council
702 delegates at work on the Convention floor.

Above: Buckeye State Council President Cliff Riley accepted the VVA State Council of the Year award. VA Secretary Denis M. McDonough addressed the delegates on the Convention floor Thursday afternoon. Former Dean Martin Goldbricker Leslie Lake Dalton and Deborah McFarland received the President’s Award for Entertaining the Troops in Vietnam at the Saturday Night Awards Banquet, and Sandy Alderson received VVA’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

Left: South Carolina State Council President Sam Brick made a point of order on the Convention floor.

Above: Outgoing VVA National President John Rowan swore in the newly elected Officers and Board members following the Saturday Night Awards Banquet. Below: VVA Vice President Tom Burke’s table at the Awards Banquet.

Officers and Board Members

President: Jack McManus
Vice President: Tom Burke
Secretary: Bill Meeks
Treasurer: Linda Schwartz

At-Large Directors
Dottie Barickman
Charlie Hobbs
Sandie Wilson
Gumersindo Gomez
Kenwin Stone
Richard Lindbeck
Dan Stenvold
Charles Montgomery
Dennis Howland
Felix (Pete) Peterson

Regional Directors
Skip Hochreich (Region 1)
Ted Wilkinson (Region 2)
Rossie M. Nance (Region 3)
Spence Davis (Region 4)
John H. Riling III (Region 5)
John L. Margowski (Region 6)
Dennis J. Andras (Region 7)
Francisco F. Ivarra (Region 8)
Dick Southern (Region 9)