

# VETERAN NEWS & NOTES

## Assisting Blinded Veterans Is Their Mission

(NAPSA)—Many veterans have found that a sudden physical disability can change the course of their life. However, that change can often be as fulfilling as the path the person was on before the disability.

The Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) credits these positive life changes experienced by blinded veterans, in large part, to the modern, world-class blind rehabilitation programs and services of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). BVA has been a major catalyst for these programs since its founding in 1945.

### An Advocate For Service

Soon after its founding, BVA urged members of Congress to pressure the Veterans Administration (VA)—now known as Department of Veterans Affairs—to establish appropriate services for men and women returning from World War II who had been blinded.

When that effort stalled for a time, the organization went to the executive branch of government. That action resulted in an executive order from President Harry S. Truman in 1947 that required VA to establish a residential Blind Rehabilitation Center (BRC) at the Hines, Illinois VA Hospital just outside Chicago. Some 66 years later, at BVA's urging, an additional 12 BRCs now dot the national landscape.

### The VIST

Recognizing in the late 1960s that many blinded veterans were still experiencing the isolating effects of blindness, BVA pressed for greater help from VA.

The result was the establishment in 1968 of the Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) concept. VISTs employ full-time Coordinators who identify eligible



**Suzanne Bennatt received a Certificate of Appreciation for her work as a VIST Coordinator. Here, she is with BVA's Executive Director Al Avina and National President Sam Huhn.**

veterans and encourage them to take full advantage of a wide array of VA benefits and services offered by the Team.

VIST Coordinators invite and encourage blinded veterans to come in for an annual assessment of their physical, social and psychological needs and a review of their benefits and potential benefits. They then recommend the appropriate services for veterans with vision loss.

BVA regularly honors outstanding VIST Coordinators with Certificates of Appreciation at nearly every national convention. This year, for example, recipients were Suzanne Bennatt of the Spokane VA Medical Center and Edward Richards of the Northport (N.Y.) VA Medical Center.

Membership in BVA is open to all legally blind veterans who have served in the U.S. military. It is not restricted to veterans whose blindness is service connected, nor must veterans be a member of BVA to receive assistance from the organization, which is always free of charge.

For more information, call BVA at 800-669-7079 or visit the Association's website, [www.bva.org](http://www.bva.org).