BVA Happenings – November 13

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Around BVA

ANC and Beyond: Coming Together to Remember and Celebrate All Veterans



Photo 1: Secretary Doug Collins, right, greeted Wade Davis at VA-hosted breakfast for VSO national commanders and presidents.

BVA National President Wade Davis, National Vice President Tracy Ferro, and Executive Director Lea Rowe took to the Nation's Capital earlier this week to represent blind and low-vision veterans throughout the country in a series of events on Veterans Day that occurred at both Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) and Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. Among such highlights was BVA's participation in the flag processional within the Memorial Amphitheater and a VSO wreath-laying at the adjacent Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The three were joined by a larger-than-usual cadre of National Headquarters staff members and BVA members from several southern and midwestern states.



Photo 2: BVA member Luerinza Dearborne, Jr., left, and wife Veda of Alexandria, Louisiana (LA/MS Regional Group), await start of 79th Veterans Day Remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery.

With the BVA and U.S. flags firmly in waist-high harnesses, Mid-Atlantic Regional Group members Lawrence Harrison and Michaun Harrison marched in the ceremonial Parade of Colors, Lawrence with the assistance of sighted guide and National Director of Development Meredith Buono-Dagrossa.



Photo 3: BVA National Treasurer Monique Statham and Director of District 3 Kenneth Mitchell prepare for remembrance ceremony.

Accompanied by representatives of approximately 40 other organizations, Wade, Tracy, and Justin Davis (Wade's son) presented the BVA wreath at the Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The symbolic gesture paid tribute to all veterans and served as the needed exclamation point to the end of an unseasonably warm, sun-drenched autumn day of memorable activities that contrasted with the bitterly cold temperatures of Veterans Day 2025.



Photo 4: Perfectly attired Lawrence Harrison and National Administrative Coordinator Michaun Harrison, both members of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Group, covered every detail in preparing for their participation in the traditional ceremonial Parade of Flags.



Photo 5: Left to right in Parade of Colors march, Michaun Harrison, Lawrence Harrison, and Meredith Buono-Dagrossa.

The laying of the organizational wreath followed the traditional Presidential wreath laying that occurred precisely at 11:00am, witnessed by Wade and his son, sighted guide Justin, and performed on this occasion by President Donald J. Trump, who then joined Vice President J.D. Vance, VA Secretary Douglas Collins, and Army-Navy Union National Commander Norman T. Heninger, Jr. in addressing veterans and a near capacity crowd of approximately 5,000 in the adjoining Memorial Amphitheater.



Photo 6: Meredith Buono-Dagrossa, BVA Director of Development and impromptu sighted guide for Parade of Flags, with BVA flag bearer Lawrence Harrison, Mid-Atlantic Regional Group.



Photo 7: National President Wade Davis with son Justin, Francis Arceneaux (obstructed by wreath in front) in wheelchair seat, and National Vice President Tracy Ferro prepare for wreath presentation.

Heninger's address occurred by virtue of the Army-Navy Union's turn as the 2024 host organization. Wade took his place on the same stage with the four speakers and the national officers of the organizations designated as original members of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Day National Committee, of which BVA is a member.

The 79th National Veterans Day Observance also featured music by the United States Coast Guard Band and the Air Force Singing Sergeants, and welcome remarks by Master of Ceremonies Matthew Webb, VA Senior Advisor for Outreach and Engagements.



Photo 9: Caption: BVA wreath bearers move briskly toward Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Photo courtesy of Ernesto Fonfrias.

Several hours prior to the annual Remembrance, at 6:30am to be exact, Wade and Justin reported to Spates Hall Conference Center at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall for a traditional Veterans Day breakfast hosted by VA Secretary Doug Collins for VSO leaders and other dignitaries.

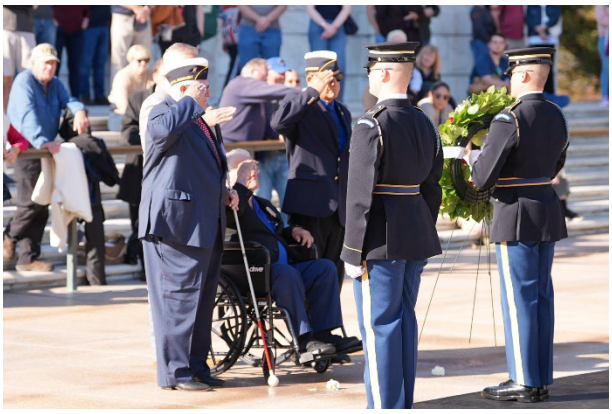


Photo 8: Presenters offer solemn salute after handing off BVA wreath to members of the Third U.S. Infantry Regiment (Old Guard). Photo courtesy of Ernesto Fonfrias.

Accompanied by National Treasurer Monique Statham, Director of District 3 Kenneth Mitchell, National Executive Director Lea Rowe, and National Program Director Domonique Lawless, Wade, Tracy, and Justin joined the leadership of other VSOs for an Army-Navy Union-hosted lunch reception following the VSO wreath-laying.

Additional details relating to Veterans Day 2026, including activities of BVA members visiting New York City November 11-12, will be highlighted in next week's **BVA Happenings**.



Photo 10: Left to right: National Executive Director Lea Rowe, Wade Davis, Justin Davis (son), and Tracy Ferro. Seated: Francis Arceneaux of Lafayette, Louisiana (LA/MS Regional Group).

Please Send Veterans Day Experiences and Impressions to *BVA Happenings*

How did you spend Veterans Day this year, and what were some of your thoughts and impressions throughout the day? **BVA Happenings** is compiling comments to share in a future edition and in the **BVA Bulletin**—with permission of the authors. Simply type out a few sentences that will fit into a single paragraph and send them to info@bva.org to share with other newsletter readers.

Local Media Coverage Continues for AI Meta Glasses Distributions and Trainings

BVA members Anthony Woodson and Karl Robinson, blinded veterans from Illinois and Oklahoma, respectively, were two of the most recently highlighted veterans on local television news segments in the past week as they were receiving their new Ray-Ban Meta AI glasses at events in Rosemont, Illinois, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The Rosemont event attracted about 50 veterans with vision loss, while the Oklahoma distribution and training brought more than 120.

The glasses are part of a nationwide pursuit by Meta, supported by BVA, to put the camera-equipped, voice-activated devices into the hands of veterans who have lost some or all their vision. View the two segments that included Anthony (Fox 32 Chicago) and Karl (KFOR-TV)

Woodson : Veterans with vision loss get AI-powered glasses before Veterans Day

Robinson: NewView Oklahoma and Meta Give AI Glasses to Visually Impaired Veterans

Ahoy There! Register Now for 2027 Convention Cruise

Registration is open for BVA members and their families who would like to attend the April 12-16, 2027, BVA 81st National Convention Cruise to the Bahamas aboard Royal Caribbean's **Oasis of the Seas**. Visit BVA.org under the Convention tab for cruise details and the registration link, or use the registration button below this article. Don't forget next week's Town Hall (see



Photo 11: Royal Caribbean Oasis of the Seas, site of the BVA 81st National Convention

information below) to learn more about the pre-cruise hotel and available excursions during the cruise.

Important Registration Information

All attendees must register online to submit the required information securely. BVA staff can answer general questions but cannot register attendees. For registration questions and assistance, email bvacruise@landrykling.com during business hours, Monday-Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm Eastern Time. An agent will respond as quickly as possible. Please do not attempt to contact Royal Caribbean directly.

Within two weeks of registering, you will receive a confirmation email with your reservation/booking ID and instructions for completing required forms for special needs and guide dogs. A group rate for guests arriving Sunday, April 11, 2027, the night before departure, is being finalized. Details will appear shortly in **BVA Happenings** and on the Convention webpage at BVA.org. Prepare to make waves with BVA in 2027!

Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas Cruise to the Bahamas: Basic Schedule

- **Monday, April 12, 2027** – Leave Fort Lauderdale, Florida (Port Everglades) at 4:00pm; embarkation expected to begin around noon, and guests are required to be checked in and onboard the ship by 2:30pm (90 minutes prior to the scheduled departure time).
- **Tuesday, April 13** – Day at Sea/Cruising
- **Wednesday, April 14** – Nassau, Bahamas; 7:30am-5:30pm
- **Thursday, April 15** – Perfect Day at CocoCay, Bahamas; 7:30am-5:00pm
- **Friday, April 16** – Return to Fort Lauderdale, Florida (Port Everglades), by 6:00am, guests to disembark the ship between 7:00-9:00am (flights home should not depart prior to noon)

BVA National Convention 2027

Register for the National Convention

Thursday's Board of Directors Town Hall to be Dedicated to National Convention

Make a mental note and set your notifications for the next National Board of Directors virtual Town Hall dedicated to the topic of the National Convention. The Town Hall is scheduled for Thursday, November 19, at 3:00pm Eastern Time. The session will cover key registration information, excursion and package updates, the pre-cruise hotel, and the latest news about the Royal Caribbean Oasis of the Seas cruise. Click the button below to join the Zoom meeting.

Town Halls and Educational Series of November 19, 2026

Lighthouse of Houston to Host Wednesday Meta Glasses Demonstration

The Assistive Technology staff of The Lighthouse of Houston is collaborating with the BVA Greater Houston Regional Group to provide hands-on Meta AI Glasses training to eligible veterans this Wednesday, November 18, from 12:00 to 4:00pm. Please register in advance using the QR Code in the electronic flyer accessible below.

The training will demonstrate how Meta AI glasses can support greater independence, mobility, and connectivity. The training is most specifically for BVA members who were unable to attend a similar training course held on September 23 at the same location, 3602 West Dallas Street, in Houston. Please prepare for the event by bringing with you your iPhone and Meta glasses.

Register for Houston Meta Glasses Training

Choose Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Services for Expert, Individualized Blind Rehabilitation

BVA Happenings **thanks Lisa-Anne Mowerson, MA, CVRT, Chief of Blind Rehabilitation Service for the VA Connecticut Healthcare System in West Haven, Connecticut, for submitting the following article through BVA Care Review Coordinator Richard Lane. Although many of the characteristics of the Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center (EBRC) are shared with other BRCs, each BRC also has its unique qualities. The uniqueness of the West Haven facility is shared here. The information below could be especially useful to new BVA members who have not yet become familiar with the world-class blind rehabilitation programs offered to veterans by VA.**



Photo 12: The EBRC in West Haven, Connecticut, shares a unique bond with BVA. The EBRC's first Chief was World War II veteran George "Buck" Gillispie, a stalwart BVA member as a two-time National President and the Association's Executive Director during 1961-63.

When sight loss limits a veteran's independence, admission to the Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center (EBRC) at VA Connecticut Healthcare System can open the door to new skills, greater confidence, and renewed participation in everyday life. Located in West Haven, EBRC provides comprehensive, goal-driven training for eligible veterans and active-duty service members who are blind or have low vision.

Veterans tell us our people make the difference. Veterans who have attended other programs—and those who return to EBRC—frequently describe our team as knowledgeable, friendly, attentive, and impressive. Blind rehabilitation specialists, nursing and medical staff, optometry, and ancillary teams work together around each veteran's needs. Staff continually expand their knowledge of emerging rehabilitation methods, assistive technology, and prosthetic devices so that veterans can benefit from current options and informed instruction.

Training is intensive, practical, and personal. Instructors may spend more than 20 hours working directly with a veteran in a targeted area, helping build the competence and comfort needed to return home more independently. Services can include orientation and mobility, power-mobility assessment and training, living skills, communication, diabetes education, and an extensive technology curriculum. Training may cover smartphones, computers, accessibility software, artificial-intelligence tools, and devices such as Meta smart glasses when clinically appropriate. EBRC's expanding group classes complement individualized instruction and evolve as new information and devices become available.

Integrated care supports the whole veteran. Our low-vision optometry clinic is located within the recently renovated, single-floor unit, making coordinated care convenient. EBRC also partners with Audiology for veterans with combined vision and hearing needs and maintains a close relationship with Prosthetics to support access to commonly used equipment and evaluate newer options. The program can accommodate varying levels of medical and functional need while keeping rehabilitation goals at the center of care.

Learning extends into the community. Recreation and community programming create opportunities to practice skills, build connections, and enjoy meaningful activities. Partnerships have supported adaptive sports, plays and movies with accessible listening options, seasonal fishing, fly-tying classes as part of the year-round "Take a Veteran Fishing" program. Community connections include Gaylord Hospital Adaptive Sports,

Veterans Service Organizations, Yale University and alumni, the University of New Haven, and Southern Connecticut State University.

The location adds to the experience. West Haven is situated between New York City and Boston and offers access to New England history, culture, recreation, and dining. Nearby New Haven brings the energy of Yale's Art and Culture and a celebrated pizza tradition that many consider worth the trip.

Veterans do not need to be totally blind to benefit. Consider admission whenever progressive, recent, or longstanding vision loss interferes with reading, travel, technology use, household tasks, health management, employment, education, or community participation.

To begin the admission process, contact the **Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center** at **VA Connecticut Healthcare System, West Haven campus, 950 Campbell Avenue, West Haven, CT 06516**. Call **203-932-5711, extension 17785**. Program staff can discuss eligibility, goals, scheduling, travel, and the most appropriate level of service.

Help a veteran discover what is possible through expert instruction, coordinated care, modern technology, and deeply integrated community experiences. Start the admission conversation with EBRC today.

Catch Dave Szumowski's Story of Valor Highlighted in November "Visions of BVA"

BVA VISIONS OF BVA

Join the most recently produced episode of **Visions of BVA** in which podcast host Steve Baskis interviews David Szumowski – Vietnam War veteran, Past BVA National President, retired Southern California judge, and author of **Reach for More: A Journey from Loss to Love AND Fulfillment**, a memoir he published in 2019. Don't miss this enlightening personal conversation between David and Steve on the themes of military service, resilience, leadership, and the importance of never losing hope or giving up on life.

The November podcast has been live since November 1. It can be accessed on all major platforms, most notably the Association's YouTube Channel, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify.

Visions of BVA is a deep dive into the inspiring stories of the organization and its members, accounts of resilience, and the achievements of blind and low-vision veterans. Episodes feature interviews, discussions on life-changing technology, and a closer examination of the BVA community. Listeners and subscribers of the podcast are welcome and

encouraged to leave their feedback and share their thoughts with Steve at sbaskis@bva.org, on any aspect of the podcast.

National Research Initiative Seeks Vietnam-Era Veterans, Families, Caregivers

Dr. Ed Benoit, III, a project leader for the Virtual Footlocker Project 2.0, a national initiative funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and led by researchers at Louisiana State University and Kent State University, is currently recruiting Vietnam-era veterans, their family members, and caregivers for online interviews about personal military records and experiences with VA.

The project builds on the original award-winning Virtual Footlocker Project and is dedicated to helping Vietnam-era veterans preserve their personal military records, including letters, photographs, and mementos that tell the story of their service. These records are important for preserving family legacy and historical memory and may also help veterans secure VA benefits and access care, especially when official records are incomplete or missing.

Insights shared during the interviews will directly shape the development of a national program model to better support Vietnam-era veterans in documenting and preserving their histories.

Details about the interviews are:

- **Who:** Vietnam-era veterans, family members, and caregivers
- **Where:** Online interviews
- **Length:** Approximately 30 minutes
- **When:** November 12-24, 2026
- **Compensation:** $75 electronic Amazon gift card

Individuals interested in participating should complete the short survey by clicking the button below. After completing the survey, a member of the project team will contact eligible individuals with additional information about interview scheduling.

“Thank you for your service and support of the veteran community,” Dr. Benoit said. “Our project team is honored to work alongside veterans, families, caregivers, and community partners to help preserve these important stories for future generations.”

Participate in Virtual Footlocker Project 2.0

Florida Regional Group Town Hall Set for November 17

Attention blind and low-vision BVA members residing in the state of Florida: A special Town Hall is scheduled for Tuesday, November 17, at 1:00pm Eastern Time, BVA Director of District 3 has announced. The meeting constitutes an intent and effort to re-establish the Florida Regional Group into a good-standing status. All BVA members living in Florida are invited and encouraged to attend the Town Hall, directed by Director of District 3 Kenneth Mitchell but coordinated and sponsored by the Florida Regional Group.

Information contained in last week's **BVA Happenings** strongly implied that the Town Hall was open to anyone residing in District 3. The implication was not accurate. The time of the meeting was also incorrect. Please attend this meeting at 1:00pm Eastern Time if you live within the state of Florida. The Zoom link and other joining information will be sent to all BVA members who reside in Florida, and who have an email address, the day prior to the meeting (Monday, November 16).

What's in a Name Badge or Nametag during the Holiday Season?



Photo 13: The idea of a simple nametag worn by a blind or low-vision veteran can make introductions much simpler and more comfortable, especially during the holiday season.

In her latest column in the November issue of the monthly newsletter **Seeing Hope Today**, Tara Aziz, Senior Coordinator of Low Vision Programs at the Prevention of Blindness Society of Greater Washington, acknowledges the challenge of recognizing someone we know is standing three feet away. Based on a name tag she recently observed that was worn by a member of her low-vision community, Tara proposes a badge with the following for upcoming holiday gatherings: "Visually impaired. Please state your name."

Tara asserts that such an identifier does something remarkable, replacing an awkward moment with an easy introduction when voice recognition is difficult, especially in large crowds.

"Simple, clever, and arguably more useful than another holiday sweater," she writes.

Click the button below and turn to page 7 to read Tara's brief column in its entirety. Over the past two years, Tara's insights and wisdom in living with low vision have been valuable resources to BVA.

A Nametag and the Holiday Season

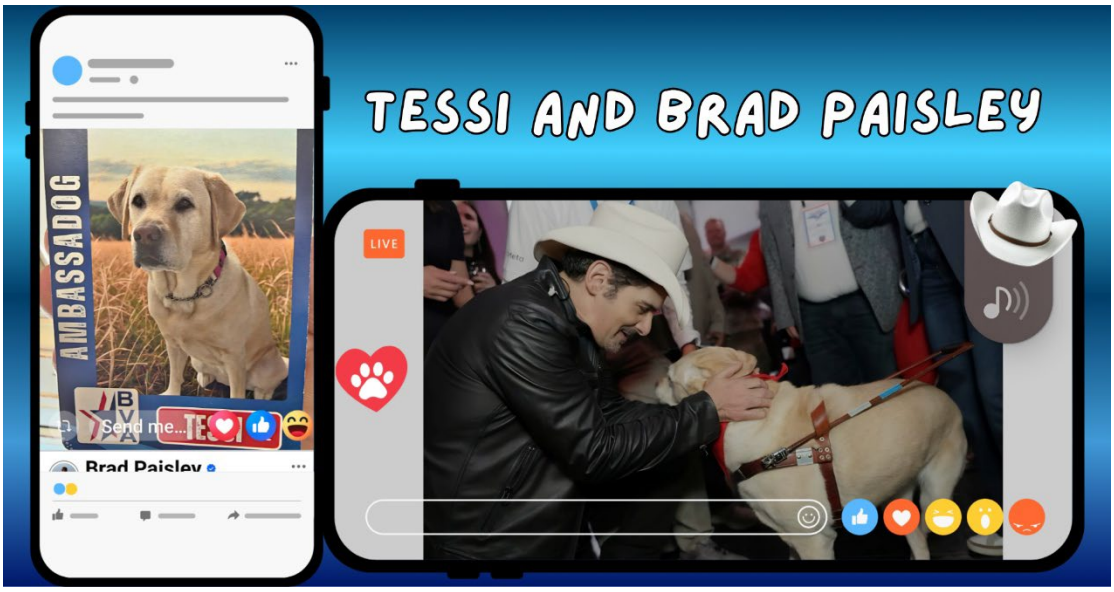
Ambassadog Scoop Series Courtesy of Waymo

Ambassadog Tessi Kissed by Country Music Star Brad Paisley

You heard it right! BVA Ambassadog Tessi here, reporting back from a paws-itively unforgettable trip to Washington, DC. I joined many veterans, fellow Ambassadog Nora (with her dad, Sheldon), and some brand new Ambassadogs as I guided my dad, David—with our moms along, too—through special monuments and a moving Arlington National Cemetery ceremony! Guiding our veterans is the ultimate privilege of our careers.

Tuesday night, we tagged along for a private Brad Paisley concert! Mid-song, Brad hopped off stage and planted a kiss right on my snoot. Trying not to unleash my excitement, I slipped him my trading card (okay, Daddy handed it over), which Brad tucked into his pocket. Better yet, he posted our moment online, calling me his “favorite service member!”

Talk about a round of ap-paws! Address me now as Tessi, the Paisley-approved Ambassadog. Still, no matter how famous I get, my dad David remains my favorite star!



VA Insider

Homeless Veterans Housed by VA in FY 2026 Number Nearly 49K

VA permanently housed 48,968 homeless Veterans across the country in fiscal year 2026 – an average of more than 4,000 Veterans housed per month. That’s the second-highest number since VA began tracking the number of unique veterans permanently housed each year – the record high was in FY 2025, when VA housed 51,936 veterans.

Click the button below for a breakdown of the number of veterans housed since 2019, related comments from VA Secretary Doug Collins, and additional information provided by VA's top leadership on efforts to further curb veteran homelessness.

VA Houses Nearly 49,000 Homeless Veterans in FY 2026

New Clinic to Expand VA Services in Iowa

Earlier this week, VA opened its 47th new healthcare clinic since January 2025, this one a new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in West Burlington, Iowa. The ribbon-cutting ceremony represented a relocation and expansion of the smaller Burlington clinic that opened in 2021. The new facility is more than five times the size of the old one, serving now more than 3,000 veterans when it reaches full operating capacity. It will enable VA to provide new services that include radiology, physical therapy, and audiology in addition to expanded primary care, mental health, lab, and telehealth.

Read the November 9 VA press release for additional information and comments from VA Secretary Doug Collins about the new state-of-the-art facility.

VA Opens 47th New Healthcare Facility under President Trump

Next Week's Events

Dog Handlers Interest Group

Date and Time: November 17, 2026 (Tuesday)

Meeting ID: 899 4856 6589**, Passcode:** 1945

With the holiday season fast approaching, the session will address the challenges and opportunities present in the preparation of guide dogs for events associated with this festive time, including food, protection from cold temperatures and other extreme weather elements, and the larger, sometimes more intimidating crowds found at holiday parties and other gatherings.

VetTech and Educational Series

Date and Time: November 18, 2026 (Wednesday)

Meeting ID: 873 9159 8202**, Passcode:** 1958

The session will cover a current technology topic of relevance to the blind and low-vision veteran community. A Tuesday reminder will provide additional information specific to next week's session.

Board of Directors Town Hall

Date and Time: November 19, 2026 (Thursday)

Meeting ID: 886 4475 0288**, Passcode:** 1945

The session will update BVA members with additional information from Director of Development Meredith Buono-Dagrossa about the approaching national convention April 12-16. Time will be allotted for attendees to ask questions on any subject related to the convention.