

## DAV helping Southern Arizona veterans

By Chanse Hall

[chanse.hall@gvnews.com](mailto:chanse.hall@gvnews.com)

Arizona is home to an estimated 520,000 veterans, with just over 130,000 receiving service-related disability benefits. Ron Bryant and his team at Disabled American Veterans Chapter 38 want to educate more veterans on the benefits they may qualify for while also building a strong community.

Bryant, A Vietnam Era United States Navy veteran, previously commanded a DAV chapter in Seattle. After moving to the Green Valley-Sahuarita area, he founded the local chapter 3 1/2 years ago.

"When I came down here I wasn't going to this. I was a commander at a big chapter in Seattle. I started doing a couple claims for a couple of guys and they were coming to my garage," said Bryant. "My wife comes out one day and asked if it was Shawshank Redemption situation. I'm doing a claim and have two other guys waiting in their cars and we just started talking and started this chapter."

Since then, Bryant has helped file just over 900 claims, with an 80% success rate.

"I think what Ron has done is build an amazing team," said Brian Dorame, Chapter 38 senior vice president and Army veteran. "I'm not the person you want to be speaking to about your ailments and conditions. I don't have that temperament, that quality. I'm big picture, I'm a manager, I know how to put things together. Then you have guys like Jeff [McRoberts] (adjutant of Chapter 38) and Mark [Karuga] that are immersed within the community and know their target audience."

Chapter 38 quickly became the fastest-growing DAV chapter in the country under Bryant's guidance. After outgrowing its original meeting space, the chapter now meets in the ballroom at Rancho Resort and continues to expand its reach to veterans in need

across a service area of an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 veterans. To broaden its outreach, the group recently launched a website ([AZDAV38.org](http://AZDAV38.org)) and posts regularly on social media.

The group doesn't just help veterans file claims and navigate Department of Veterans Affairs paperwork to maximize benefits, Chapter 38 aims to offer even more. The chapter provides education on available benefits and offers resources to help veterans transition to civilian life.

"Claims are a small part of what our goals are and are small compared to what we want to do," said Bryant. "As far as community, we want to educate. Help out where we can."

The DAV also gives veterans the chance to continue serving their community through toy and clothing drives, as well as helping displaced veterans get back on their feet. One toy drive brought items such as Xbox and Playstation gaming consoles and also donated 471 pounds of clothes. Mobile wheelchairs have also been an important donation item.

"A widow in Rio Rico, her husband died and she kind of got booted out of her house, had nowhere to go," said Bryant. "Yesterday I found out a fire damaged a bunch of her furniture and we put out a blast for anyone willing to donate used furniture and we got plenty for this woman."

McRoberts spent the day driving up and down Interstate 19 with his trailer delivering all the donated items.

"She can't even walk around her house anymore." "joked McRoberts, referencing the abundance of donated items.

The work has not been without its challenges, though. Age discrepancies between generations of veterans create distinct hurdles: Older veterans often prefer paper forms

to digital drop-down menus, some struggle to ask for help, and younger veterans are often unaware of the challenges they may soon face.

"You have World War II veterans, Gulf War Veterans, which I am a part of, haven't really come out of the woodwork yet," said Dorame. "Vietnam veterans, the majority of them if you're going to put a stereotype on somebody, want nothing to do with the VA. They got spit on when they were coming home, so they distance themselves. How do you reach that person?"

Reaching veterans across their vast coverage area presents another challenge, particularly in southern Arizona communities like Nogales, Sonoita, and Rio Rico.

"That's the issue. How do we find them," said Dorame. "This year, Ron and I sat down and set some benchmarks that we wanted accomplished by the year end. We wanted a website, social media presence, an auxiliary to help veteran supporters. All of these things we wanted up and running and we understood the challenges but I think we did everything we set out to do this year."

The group continues to grow and look for more veterans that may need help and a sense of community.

DAV meetings are open to the public, and attendance does not require membership. Meetings are held at the Rancho Resort Clubhouse on the third Saturday of each month at 11 a.m.

Those interested in joining can sign up at a meeting or online at [AZDAV38.org](http://AZDAV38.org).