



Department of Arizona
Office of the Adjutant | CEO
38 W. Dunlap Ave.
Phoenix, AZ 85021
Tel: 602.678.0333
Fax: 602.371.0275
Cel: 602.762.4059

June 13, 2026

Meeting Minutes

Organization: Disabled American Veterans, Department of Arizona Convention

Location: Crowne Plaza Phoenix-Chandler Golf Resort, Chandler, Arizona

Date/Time: June 11, 2026; 0900

Session: Joint Opening Session

1. Opening and Introduction of National Executive Committee Representative

The session opened with remarks by DAV National Inspector General Ryan Burgos, recognized as a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army. His speech is attached. Don Brown, District 18 National Executive Committee Representative was then introduced. Mr. Brown was recognized as a service-connected disabled U.S. Air Force veteran, former Department Commander of Hawaii, and life member of Disabled American Veterans. His military service, awards, DAV involvement, and family background were acknowledged.

Mr. Brown thanked the Department of Arizona for the invitation and addressed the convention. He highlighted DAV's national impact, including claims representation, legislative advocacy, volunteer service, and the importance of integrity, communication, compliance, stewardship, and responsible fiscal management. He encouraged leaders to ensure every resource supports DAV's mission of service to veterans.

2. Introduction of Auxiliary and Department Officers

Department Auxiliary leadership and officers were introduced. Department officers were also presented, including Senior Vice Commander Hage, Junior Vice Commander Burnett, Adjutant/CEO Forkner, Inspector Ingraham, Judge Advocate Hohman, District Liaisons Drake and Billy, Chaplain Crane, Convention Committee Chairs, Finance Committee members, Chief of Staff Stewart, and Past Department Commanders.

3. Guest Presentations

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Director John Scott II welcomed attendees to Chandler and emphasized partnership as the foundation of successful veteran initiatives. He recognized the importance of collaboration between the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services and DAV, noting that state-level infrastructure combined with DAV's grassroots advocacy strengthens support for veterans across Arizona. He thanked DAV leadership, chapter commanders, benefit officers, and members for their ongoing service.

Southern Arizona VA Health Care System

Jenny Wieslewski, Acting Associate Director at the Southern Arizona VA, thanked DAV for its continued support of veterans in southern Arizona. She reported that DAV volunteers contributed nearly 5,000 hours of service in fiscal year 2025, supported patient navigation, transportation, inpatient visits, homebound veterans, advisory committees, residential programs, and veteran activities. She also noted DAV's support for the Fisher House, a forthcoming van, and a wheelchair-accessible tram for the Tucson VA campus. She encouraged veterans not enrolled in VA health care to enroll.

Phoenix VA Health Care System

Chad Lester, Deputy Nurse Executive at the Phoenix VA, provided an overview of current and planned initiatives. He discussed major construction projects, including modernization of sterile processing infrastructure, development of a new infusion clinic, and progress on the Phoenix Fisher House. He recognized DAV and DAV Auxiliary contributions, including companionship, volunteer support, and resources for veterans receiving care. He stated that approximately 135,000 veterans are enrolled in the Phoenix VA health care system and reaffirmed the VA's commitment to quality care and continued partnership with DAV.

Prescott VA Health Care System

Director Steve Sample addressed the convention and expressed personal appreciation for DAV's role in assisting veterans with claims. He emphasized the critical importance of transportation in northern Arizona, especially for veterans in rural and highly rural areas. He reported that DAV supports nine vans and thirty volunteer drivers in the Prescott system, with 1,356 volunteer driver hours, 20,036 miles driven, and 413 veterans transported from January through May. He also discussed expanded routes, a new vehicle donation supporting Flagstaff, the remote claims initiative, five-star facility recognition, service-

connection statistics, residential programs, community living center services, and the Fort Whipple supportive housing project.

American Legion Department of Arizona

Gerald Valle, Department Vice Commander for the American Legion Department of Arizona, brought greetings on behalf of the American Legion. He spoke about the shared mission between the American Legion and DAV and described how the Legion's community-based network and DAV's benefits advocacy complement each other. He encouraged collaboration through outreach events, resource days, and coordinated support so veterans and families can access appropriate assistance.

Unified Arizona Veterans

Glenn Hohman, Chair of Unified Arizona Veterans, reviewed the organization's history and its role as a collective voice for Arizona veterans. He discussed the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame, encouraged nominations and volunteer participation, and noted the organization's work with DAV, VFW, and the American Legion on legislative issues affecting veterans. He thanked DAV, the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, VA partners, and volunteers for their continued support.

4. Awards Presentation

The Department Awards Committee was introduced, including the chair and committee members. Joint awards were then presented by DAV and Auxiliary leadership. The awards recognized outstanding service by individuals, chapters, units, businesses, volunteers, and memorial honorees.

- DAV Disabled Veteran of the Year: Ronnie Smith, Chapter 36
- DAV Auxiliary Member of the Year: Shannon Sander, Unit 20
- Distinguished Service Award: Rodney Hage, Chapter 24
- DAV Department of Arizona Chapter of the Year: East Valley Chapter 8
- DAV Auxiliary Unit of the Year: Sierra Vista Unit 14
- DAV Commander of the Year: Lynn Burnett, Chapter 8
- Volunteer of the Year: Tom Henderson, Flagstaff
- Service Officer of the Year: Rodney Hage, Chapter 24
- Small Business of the Year: Lloyd Construction
- Large Business of the Year: Humana
- The Commander's Award for Excellence was presented to individuals who provided exceptional assistance to a Marine Veteran and family in urgent need:
 - Christine Siegel, Chapter 1
 - Ray Drake, Chapter 20

- Lindy Merino, Retired Mesa Police Officer
- John Shultz, Marine Corps Veteran and Pastor
- Department appreciation awards were presented to members nominated by their chapters for exceptional service:
 - Jeri Harwell, Chapter 4
 - Karmen Switzer, Chapter 4
 - Dan Spencer, Chapter 8
 - Lisa Patenge, Chapter 8
 - Don Wyatt, Chapter 8
 - Sue Murphy, Chapter 8 Volunteer
 - Dona Snyder, Chapter 27
 - Gerald McKenzie, Chapter 16
 - Aaron Scott, Chapter 16
 - Frank Giovenco, Chapter 16
 - Charles Hailer, Chapter 16
 - Brodie Keane, Chapter 16
 - Carl Millock, Chapter 16
 - Kenneth Reed, Chapter 16
 - John Larson, Chapter 16
 - Cardiel Vasquez, Chapter 16
 - Dane Hampton, Chapter 16
 - Denis Lueders, Chapter 16
 - Mike Bieluch, Chapter 16
 - John Gerlach, Chapter 24
 - Paul Graham, Chapter 24
 - Wayne Stovall, Chapter 24
 - John Stenzel, Chapter 39
 - Kevin Karvinen, Chapter 39

Additional recognition was given to Dr. Carl Forkner by the *Future Is Now Foundation* through a lifetime achievement award recognizing distinguished leadership, service, and commitment to veterans and the community.

Memorial awards were presented in honor of William “Bill” Burks (Chapter 26), Robert “Bob” Hammer (Chapter 24), and Rick Foster (Chapter 27) for faithful military service and lasting service to fellow Veterans, families, and the community.

5. Announcements

- The Forget-Me-Not lunch was scheduled for noon in the La Ventana/Santan area, with attendees advised to confirm the correct room.
- The awards program, treasurer/BPTL, and resolutions seminar were scheduled after the afternoon business session.
- The memorial service was scheduled for 4:00 p.m. in the main room, and all convention attendees were encouraged to attend.
- Auxiliary trivia night was announced for 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. with a minimum donation requested.
- The Auxiliary business session was scheduled for 1:45 p.m. in the Santan room.
- The Credentials Committee was scheduled to meet at 1:00 p.m.

6. Closing and Recess

The chaplain led the assembly in closing prayer. Attendees were then asked to render honor to the flag. The meeting recessed at approximately 10:30 a.m. / 1030.

Respectfully Submitted,



Dr. Carl B. Forkner
AVHOF Class of 2025
Adjutant & CEO
Department of Arizona
Disabled American Veterans