

DAV Arlington-Fairfax Chapter #10

Electronic Newsletter

Chapter 10 is largest chapter in Virginia with over 3,000 members. However, we were struggling to have 12 or more members attend a meeting. We were using social media such as Facebook; however, we needed to find a way to reach more members. Due to our large membership base, it was costing the Chapter approximately \$700.00 to issue and mail one paper newsletter. In 2010, Chapter 10's leadership attempted to try electronic newsletters but it was voted down by the chapter membership. At one point in 2010, they were considering closing Chapter 10 as they were not getting enough members for quorum.

Impact of the Newsletter

In the fall of the 2013, Chapter 10 voted to start exploring companies that provide email marketing services. Chapter Adjutant John Maki and then Commander Shane Liermann reviewed 3 different companies. The DAV Chapter in San Diego was issuing an electronic newsletter and using Constant Contact. After some research and free trial periods, we decided on Constant Contact. The charges are for the number of emails stored not the number of emails sent.

We contacted DAV National Membership Department and received an electronic spreadsheet of our entire membership with contact information to include emails. We received around 1100 email addresses of our 3,000 members. The service, Constant Contact, gave us a discount for purchasing for the year with a discount for being a non-profit. Our cost was \$294 for the first 12 months.

We released our first electronic newsletter in January 2014. Chapter 10 does not meet in January. February we released our second newsletter. Later that month we had our first meeting since the release of the newsletter. Close to 30 members attended the meeting to include 4 new faces. Within the first 4 months of the newsletter, we went from 12 members to nearly 30 members a meeting and had a total of 24 new faces at those 4 meetings. 4 of those new faces became new officers of the chapter in May.

We started sending electronic meeting and event invitations as well. This increased the number of members and veterans attending our Mobile Service Office and Information Seminars. Each year we host a Chapter Picnic and Holiday Banquet for Veterans at the

Washington DC VA Medical Center Long Term Care Unit. Due to the electronic invitations, we had the largest turnout at each event in the last several years.

For 2014, we sent out over 20,000 emails. The national average open rate for a nonprofit membership based organization is 10%. We had over 5800 emails opened which is an open rate of 29%. We had 34 new faces at our meetings and over 15 new faces at our events. Due to the newsletter, we had over 50 new faces at our meetings and events in 2014. We increased our meeting attendance by 100%. We had 2 members join Chapter 10 through the newsletter. Due to the newsletter, we had several members attend meetings for the very first time. One member joined in 1980 and he attended our meeting in October 2014. It was his first DAV Chapter meeting ever. He cited our electronic invitation as his reason for attending. We had several members attend our meetings for the first time. Some had been members for 10 years and some 2 weeks.

At the Department of Virginia Spring Conference in 2014, we introduced our newsletter to all of the chapters in Virginia. Within a few months, 4 other chapters in Virginia started their own newsletters.

At the Department Convention in June 2014, the Department created the Social Media Committee. Chapter 10 Adjutant John Maki and then Commander Shane Liermann were appointed to the Committee.

At the Department of Virginia Fall Conference in 2014, John and Shane were requested to give a Social Media and Newsletter Seminar. The District 6 National Executive Committeeman Bennie Harris was in attendance. After the seminar, he requested John and Shane to present this information to the District 6 meeting in December in Maryland. They provided this information to the Departments of West Virginia, Maryland, Puerto Rico, and Washington DC.

Based on the success of Chapter 10's newsletter, the Department of Virginia decided to start their own electronic newsletter. Then Department Commander Jim Procnier gave the Social Media Committee the responsibility for all newsletters and Social Media. In other words, they turned to John and Shane to create and publish the Department newsletter and social media sites as they proved successful with the Chapter 10 newsletter.

In February 2015, the Department of Virginia released their very first electronic newsletter. The Department of Virginia has now released 7 newsletters, 1 National Legislative Alert to Attendance at events on Capitol Hill, 1 Pre-Convention Newsletter, and recently a newsletter directed solely to our 140 elected state officials in Virginia. The Department has sent 162,994 emails, to an average audience of 17,500 members. 28,439 of those emails have been opened and read.

The Chapter Newsletter

Our monthly newsletter always include upcoming Chapter events, local community veterans events, articles are changes in VA benefits, pending National legislation, Veteran interest stories about overcoming disabilities or the impact they have on the veterans community. We have many useful links in every newsletter ton include to our Chapter website, Facebook, and twitter accounts, the Department of Virginia website, the National website, Membership benefits, Legislative links, Employment links, and links to VA sites to include eBeneifts, MyHealtheVet, VA Women Veteran's Call Center, and the VA Veteran's Crisis Line.

In our April 2014 issue, we highlighted the new VA Medical Center ID Cards. We provided a brief explanation and a link to the VA website for veterans to ensure that they have received their new ID card. This link was one of the most accessed links in the history of our newsletter. It brought awareness about the change. The link to that issue is below.

[April 2014 Newsletter](#)

In our July 2015 newsletter, we introduced the new state of Virginia benefit. All veterans receiving VA disability are now entitled to receive FREE disabled veteran license plates. The issue clearly outlines the benefits, who is eligible and how to apply. We included links to the applications and forms needed to apply for the benefit. Many members applied for this benefit and received it. It was all due to the newsletter. A link to that issue is below.

[July 2015 Newsletter](#)

We are having an impact on our community as well. Several of the other local Veterans Service Organizations, local elected officials, government agencies, and the Washington DC VA Medical Center (VAMC) Voluntary Services receive our newsletter.

Every other month, we feature an article on the need for Volunteer Drivers for the DAV Transportation Network at the Washington DC VAMC. The Director has advised us that they experience an increase in inquiries about volunteering and volunteer drivers after each issue that it is mention. We also provide links directly to the VAMC Volunteer website.

Due to the newsletter, we have now networked with many other local VSOs. Earlier this year, we were able to use those connections to assist a Vietnam Veteran who was facing foreclosure and needed assistance. Chapter 10 was able to assist and use our new network. Other VSO's such Vietnam Veterans and American Legion Post 177 also provided assistance and the veteran was able to avoid foreclosure.

We have our monthly meetings at the American Legion Post 177 in Fairfax, VA. They receive our newsletter and also post it in their social media sites. They advertise our Service

Officers and make several referrals to us for assistance; all because of the newsletter and social media.

The newsletter also gives us a format to engage the members who do not attend meetings. We had over 30 different members send us emails in response to our newsletters. They had inquiries about DAV membership cards, VA claims, DAV member benefits, State of Virginia benefits, and Legislative issues. We have a member who currently resides in Portugal. He sends us emails periodically in reference to the newsletter. These members have not attended any chapter meetings or events, but we have still engaged them.

One of those members, who do not attend meetings but receives our newsletter, contacted us last fall. She was interested in adding a new benefit for veterans in the state of Virginia. Veterans in Virginia who are 100% permanently and totally disabled receive real estate tax exemption on their home. She wanted to start a petition to include property tax exemption on one vehicle per year per veteran who is qualified. We explained the DAV legislative process. She asked us to introduce it as a resolution. In May 2015, this was introduced as a resolution to DAV Chapter 10. It was passed. It was then sent to the DAV Department of Virginia. At the Department June 2015 Convention, that resolution was voted on and approved by the Convention body. In August 2015, the Department of Virginia released our first newsletter directly to our 140 elected officials in Virginia. That resolution is mentioned and introduced to our legislatures. A link to that newsletter is below. The newsletter engaged a member, inspired a new resolution, and ultimately, the newsletter was used to introduce it to our state legislators. This is a huge impact.

[DAV Virginia August 2015 Legislative Issue](#)

We have used our newsletter to enhance our social media and vice versa. We post every newsletter on our website, Facebook page and twitter feed. Anyone can sign up for our newsletter on our Facebook page. We also include our social media links in our newsletters. Our number of followers in both mediums increase every month with every newsletter release.

At every chapter event, we had members sign in to include their email addresses. After each meeting, we add new email addresses to our distribution list. We also do this at all of our outreach events. After our March 2015 Information Seminar, we added over 50 new email addresses. This resulted in several new faces at our April 2015 meeting. Four of them became life members or transferred their members and received direct assistance on VA claims and benefits.

At our June 2015 meeting, we had over 50 veterans in attendance. This is the largest attendance we have had at a meeting, probably ever. We provided claims assistance for nearly 20 of them after the meeting. A link to that electronic meeting invitation is below.

[June 2015 Electronic Meeting Invitation](#)

The electronic newsletter has proven to be one of the greatest tools the chapter has ever used. We have had a monumental impact in our veterans' community, in our chapter and with our members. Prior to the newsletter, we were only averaging 12-15 members a meeting. We noticed a 100% increase in meeting attendance directly related to the newsletter. At our last meeting we had 50 members. That is a 300% increase in meeting attendance directly due to the newsletter.

Some closing numbers, since January 2014 through September 2015, Chapter 10 has sent over 37,000 emails including newsletters and event invitations. Over 10,500 of those emails have been opened and read, which is an average of 28.5%. Our distribution list has gone up and down since January 2014. Many bad email addresses have been purged monthly and we continue to add new ones. At one time our lowest number of emails was 1022. Our distribution list is currently 1310 members.

Respectfully,

Shane Liermann

Immediate Past Chapter Commander

Chapter Judge Advocate