

# NETWORK UPDATE

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May 2016

**VA Midwest**  
Health Care Network  
*Honoring Service. Empowering Health.*

## Honoring Vietnam Veterans for their service

*By Shirley Redmond, Public Affairs Officer*

SIOUX FALLS, SD – Walking the hallways of the VA Medical Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, you may have crossed paths with a Vietnam Army Veteran by the name of “Mike,” A.K.A. Michael J. Fitzmaurice. Mike respectfully served other Veterans as a VA plumber from 1987 – 2011. A very humble man, he is never one to bring attention to his military service or the fact he earned America’s highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor, for his heroic actions at Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam in 1971.

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*On 23 March 1971 at Khe Sanh, Republic of Vietnam. Specialist Fitzmaurice and three fellow-soldiers were occupying a bunker when a company of North Vietnamese sappers infiltrated the area. At the onset of the attack Specialist Fitzmaurice observed three explosive charges which had been thrown into the bunker by the enemy. He then hurled two of the charges out of the bunker; then threw his flak vest and himself over the remaining charge. By this courageous act he absorbed the blast and shielded his fellow-soldiers. Although suffering from serious multiple wounds and partial loss of sight, he charged out of the bunker and engaged the enemy until his rifle was damaged by the blast of an enemy hand grenade. While in search of another weapon, Specialist Fitzmaurice encountered and overcame an enemy sapper in hand-to-hand combat. Having obtained another weapon, he returned to his original fighting position and inflicted additional casualties on the attacking enemy. Although seriously wounded, Specialist Fitzmaurice refused to be medically evacuated, preferring to remain at his post.*

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He was evacuated and treated in Japan and then transferred back to the states where he was hospitalized for 14 months and was discharged from military service in 1972.



He went about life in South Dakota, married his wife Patty, of now nearly 43 years, and became father to two sons (and is a grandfather to four grandchildren). Mike signed up with the South Dakota Army National Guard in April 1973 and was working in a meat packing plant when he was summoned to Washington, D.C. in November 1973. There, President Richard Nixon awarded him the Medal of Honor for his extraordinary heroism at Khe Sanh. In addition, Mike received other honors for his bravery and sacrifices including the Vietnam Service Medal with Bronze Star, Vietnam Campaign Medal, and a Purple Heart. Mike continued with the Army National Guard until discharge in April 1990. In May 1990, he then joined the South Dakota Air National Guard and retired from military service in May 1992 with 23 years of devoted military service.

In recognition for his service to country, South Dakota named the State Veterans Home for him in October 1998. On March 30, 2016 he will help cut the ribbon on the newly constructed State Veterans Home.

The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System is proud and honored to have had Michael J. Fitzmaurice (as well as his wife Patty) as members of the VA team.

# VA volunteer program celebrates 70th anniversary

WASHINGTON – This year, VA Voluntary Service (VAVS)—one of the largest volunteer programs in the federal government—is celebrating its 70th anniversary.

Since VAVS was established in 1946, VA volunteers have given more than 782 million hours in support of Veterans seeking VA health care across the country. This includes many avenues of service, donations, and help to enhance VA health care delivery.

As VA has expanded its care of Veteran patients into the community, volunteers have continued to be involved. In fiscal year 2015, active and occasional VA volunteers combined contributed nearly 10.9 million hours of support to Veterans.

National VAVS Director Sabrina Clark describes the volunteers as a “true force-multiplier” for VA. “We rely on our community, and one of the main ways that the community shows up for our Veterans is through the volunteer department,” she explained. “In this time in VA’s history, and [with] the challenges that we face as an organization, we definitely need people who want to bring their talents, their skills, their donations, and just their hearts and minds to help us meet that mission.”

Though VAVS has served Veterans for seven decades, there is always a need for those ready to lend a hand. There are a number of traditional assignments available—from volunteer drivers to mailroom workers and hospice volunteers. To find out more about volunteering through VA Voluntary Service, visit <http://www.volunteer.va.gov>.

## Upcoming Events

*May 17 – Veterans Town Hall in Alexandria, MN*

*May 23 – Veterans Town Hall in Rapid City, SD @ VFW Post 1273*

*June 15 – Veterans Town Hall in Galesburg, IL*

*June 20 – Veterans Town Hall at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, MN*

*June 21 – Veterans Town Hall in Sioux Falls at the DAV chapter*

*June 29 – Veterans Town Hall at the Central Iowa Health Care System*

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The sixth annual nationwide VA2K Walk & Roll event will occur on May 18, 2016. Last year, more than 23,700 VA employees, Veterans and community members around the country participated, donating money and goods worth more than \$325,600 to help homeless Veterans. The annual Walk & Roll, of approximately 1.2 miles, encourages people to get active and to support homeless Veterans with donated food and clothing items. Many Health Care Systems in VISN 23 are taking part. Please contact your local facility for details on their event.