

## USVH celebrates ten years of service to veterans

*"I remember some time ago I visited a very wonderful home for old people....There was not a smile on their faces, and I asked the sister in charge of them, 'Sister, why are all these people not smiling? Why are they looking towards the door?' And she, very beautifully had to answer and give the truth: 'It's the same every day. They are longing for someone to come and visit them.'" - Mother Theresa*

Almost one decade ago, a small group of college students from Stanford University opened the door of the Menlo Park VA Hospital's Geriatric Unit and changed the course of many lives. Each week these students would visit the elderly patients and spend several hours socializing and engaging in activities. Gradually this small group of student volunteers grew in size until the veteran patients could expect to be visited almost every day. Calling themselves United Students for Veterans' Health, they declared this vision:

*"We live in an age where the elderly and veterans of our nation are increasingly ignored or forgotten. As memories fade away, the past generations who have contributed to our welfare suffer from society's indifference. The responsibilities you are undertaking will reverse this tide... the example of your actions and deeds will reforge the bond between the young and the old."*

It is a bond that has grown stronger with each passing year. Countless students in the years since have visited VA hospitals throughout the United States. Students and veterans have formed friendships and gave each other comfort, inspiration, and insights that have changed their lives forever.

This spring, USVH will welcome its Ten Year Anniversary. In celebrating this special occasion, we are proud to release Living Memories, a compendium of volunteers' personal essays and dramatic photography from VA campuses. Published through the generous sponsorship of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Voluntary Services Office, Living Memories has already drawn a tremendous response from students and veterans. We have been gratified by the outpouring of support for our cause as we continually widen the circle of service to include more campuses and more volunteer opportuni-

ties for America's students to give back to those who have given so much.

**Vance K. Vanier, M.D.**  
**USVH Founder**

**Andre D. Vanier**  
**First National Director**



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## Sugar free and diet: A look at exciting events

**Jackie Hoang, Director of Special Events**

Sugar free cookies, diet soda, volunteers, and lots of vets. Those are the ingredients to a successful USVH event. Fall quarter, USVH held two events at the Menlo Park VA: a Halloween crafts party and a holiday caroling party. The Halloween party, held on A-wing, drew a number of vets and volunteers. With group projects ranging from construction paper bats to felt pumpkins, the room was a flurry of creativity, fun, and bonding. Like the Halloween party, the caroling event was tons of fun. During dead week, a group of dedicated

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# Welcome message from the National Director

As United Students for Veterans' Health enters its tenth year, it is a perfect time both to look back on our previous accomplishments and to set higher goals for the many years to come. Ten years ago, Vance Vanier started this organization in order to give something back to the veterans who give so much to this country. From that one thought a national organization was formed, and it has thrived through the dedication of hundreds of volunteers across the country.

The single most important reason USVH has been able to succeed is that caring volunteers take their time to visit veterans week in and week out, through midterms and finals, year after year. Without the volunteers nothing else would be possible. Another factor critical to this organization's continuation has been the sustainable leadership model of the National Board. Each year a new Board is selected, and each year new and rising leaders are found to continue the tradition. We all will graduate and move on – but making sure that others take up the torch is big challenge any organization faces.

Last year was an exciting one for USVH. We published [Living Memories](#), a collection of essays written by volunteers about their experiences in VA Hospitals. Board members traveled to Indianapolis for the VA Voluntary Services National Meeting to debut the book and connect with VAs across the country. Chapters continued to spring up at West Point, Dartmouth, and several high schools as more in Washington and California are poised to join the ranks. We teamed up with the *Veteran's History Project* to make videos of veterans' stories for the Library of Congress. USVH volunteers helped to create a new video for VA Voluntary Services focusing on how younger volunteers can get involved. All this



## USVH Board members

(Back row) Bryan Choi, Jason Hom, Kenny Gundle, Kristin Primus, Brianna Allred, and Manisha Bahl. (Front row) Angel Tam and Jackie Hoang. (Not pictured) Matt Bricker and Andre Vanier.

and more made for an exciting year.

Seeing what we have done before, I only become more convinced of the potential of USVH today and in the future. This year we will continue to expand, and build an inclusive national network of Chapters, with the goal of organizing the first National Congress of USVH at a conference next year. Others goals include finding more sources of funding, increasing the possible ways we can grow in our service to veterans, and organizing what we hope will become an annual charity bowling event to benefit the local VA Hospital.

As we move forward, the National Board is always looking for motivated people with ideas of how to make this organization forge on stronger and better. Do not hesitate to contact myself, or any other Board

Member, with any comments.

Together we will make sure United Students for Veterans' Health lasts another decade and far beyond.

Sincerely,

*Kenny Gundle*  
National Director

Want to join Stanford USVH?

E-mail Manisha at  
[mbahl@stanford.edu](mailto:mbahl@stanford.edu).

Interested in starting a USVH  
chapter at other campuses?

Email Kristin at  
[kprimus@stanford.edu](mailto:kprimus@stanford.edu).

We are always looking for  
new volunteers!

A lot of United Students for Veterans' Health volunteers are eventually heading to medical school, and they may cite the desire get some experience with a particular patient sector as a reason why they volunteer. I, on the other hand, am a philosophy major and not a pre-med, and that fact has earned me the label of the "unconventional USVH volunteer." Yet I think the only difference between me and a human biology major is just a difference in course work, and not a fundamental difference in motivation. There isn't such a thing as a "typical" volunteer or if there is, that volunteer is only typical because she shares something all of us volunteers share: a sense that public service is the very sort of activity we want to have in our lives. The fact that I'm a philosophy major doesn't illuminate any different, exotic motivation for volunteering; it just means I sometimes spend my time thinking about the root of why we human beings do what we do, and more specifically, why we USVH students do what we do.

Compile a list of the topics absorbed under the heading "philosophy," and what you see might seem like a bunch of tangential, high-fallutin' babble: Wittgensteinian rule-following, indexical predicates, semantic twist theories of metaphor, Leibniz's monads, en-soi, pour-soi, Being, Time. But you might realize at some point that philosophy isn't just about analyzing this or that in codified terminology and logical notation. Philosophy can also be approached as an art of living, a way of cultivating the sort of questioning mindset that can 1) clarify ideals and 2) try and figure out how ideals might be realized. What is justice? What are our

## Reflections

by Kristin Primus

obligations to fellow human beings? What makes a life—a life lived amongst other lives—worth living? These too are philosophical questions, but questions that can't be easily tossed away as irrelevant; how we would answer these questions reflects how we act in our everyday life.

These, not surprisingly, are the questions that drew me to realized that I didn't want to turn away from an underserved group of people, but instead care for everyone with everything I can muster. We college students are often really good at manipulating cold equations, but we often forget how good we can be at seeing needs that can't be quantified so easily. I personally didn't want to lose that special human sight in a flurry of assignments or to forget my ideals under the stress of school, so I volunteer my time. We college students sometimes fall into the rut of defining ourselves by our major and not as people who live and forge friendships in a community. I didn't want to fall into that rut, so I volunteer my time.

My training in philosophy has taught me to look at things and ask, in a more abstract way, why things are the way they are. I've seen lots of Stanford students volunteer, and what I've concluded is that we all share a particular idea of how our lives should be lived. I've seen that we share certain ideals and a certain tendency to assess how we fit into the world around us; we will always put time and energy into cultivating—by words and by actions—the community we live in. I'm not a pre-med, but I'm not an unconventional USVH volunteer; it turns out I share the trait that everybody here has: a profound respect for a particular kind of compassionate, active life.

### 2003–2004 USVH Board

National Director

KENNY GUNDLE

Director of Volunteer Training

ANGEL TAM

Chief Financial Officer

BRIANNA ALLRED

Stanford USVH Director

MANISHA BAHL

Director of Special Events

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Director of National Recruitment

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National Advisors

ANDRE VANIER

VANCE VANIER, M.D.

## National expansion efforts for USVH

Jason Hom, Director of Volunteering

In the Spring of 2003, USVH National Director Kenny Gundle and I went to Indianapolis for the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) Office 56th Annual National Advisory Committee Conference. Representatives from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Veteran's Association (AMVETS) and other major Veterans Service Organizations were there, along with VA Voluntary Service staff from across the nation. Mr. Jim Delgado, the National Director of the VAVS Office, led the convention along with Ms. Laura Balun, the second-in-command.

The Living Memories book was in high demand at the conference, with requests for copies soon outstripping available supply. People told us that the heartfelt stories were a joy to read and that the professional pictures complemented the vignettes very well. The conference attendees, who were almost all in their 70s or 80s, particularly appreciated the compilation of volunteer experiences from a young student population. The general consensus was that the book would introduce people to VA volunteer opportunities and inspire them to engage in community service.

Philip, a student at Dartmouth and friend of Kenny's, was honored with a scholarship at the conference for his innovative design of the James A Haley VA Junior Intern program. Kenny and Phil have been working closely together to start up a USVH chapter at Dartmouth. While Kenny and I were networking with the conference participants, I met Lorelei Winn, the VA San

Diego Health Care System Voluntary Service Chief. With the wonderful help of USVH Director of Special Events Jackie Hoang and her friend Andrew Dhanasopon at University of California, San Diego, I have been working on establishing an active chapter in San Diego, so meeting the Chief from the area was particularly helpful. She believes that student volunteers are most needed in the spinal cord rehabilitation areas of the hospital.

For Kenny and me, meeting Mr. Delgado and Ms. Balun helped foster future collaboration. Kenny plans to work closely with them in planning the National USVH Conference at Stanford in 2004, a work-in-progress that will involve guest speakers, student representatives from other USVH chapters, and of course Stanford USVH Board Members. Additionally, over the summer, I interned in the Washington DC Office of Mr.

Delgado and Ms. Balun. With their generous support and expertise, I put together a 30-page color booklet that was sent to every middle school in the Bay Area. The goal of the booklet is to encourage student field trips to local VA Medical Centers. These field will introduce students to the volunteer opportunities, service-learning programs, Social Studies curriculum connections, and career exploration activities associated with the VA. Among other things, the booklet included potential lesson plans, information on the Veterans History Project and Healthy Veterans Initiative, and suggested volunteer activities at the VA.

*"People told us that the heartfelt stories were a joy to read"*

### Spring Quarter Events

**Stanford Community Day**  
(April 4)

**Carnival of Caring**  
(May 8)

**Spring Crafts Party**  
(early May)

**Volunteer Recognition Dinner**  
(late May)

### Sugar free and diet

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volunteers brought holiday cheer to the VA with songs and goody bags on each ward. The vets seemed to enjoy themselves, requesting encore after encore despite the lack of musical talent. "Jingle Bells" and "Deck the Halls" were particular crowd favorites. The holiday event was a perfect way to cap off an awesome quarter of volunteering.

In addition to events at the VA, USVH had its first "Fried Chicken and Ice Cream" social this year. Some volunteers expressed skepticism about the fried chicken and ice cream combination, but the combination proved to be a winning team. Taking a break from the stress of midterms and papers, volunteers relaxed in Lantana's lounge and got to know one another. The event succeeded as a study break as well as a day of appreciation for USVH's dedicated volunteers.

After reading about the fall and winter events, are you wondering what you have to look forward to this quarter? Get psyched for a Spring crafts party, fundraisier carnival, and many more. Hope to see you there!