

VETERANS NEWS & NOTES

Helping And Advocating For Blinded Veterans

(NAPSA)—Helping deserving veterans secure the benefits they are entitled to through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can be a daunting task. Such was the experience of an Army vet who fought in the Battle of the Bulge and in the Korean conflict.

“For several years, we were totally on our own and didn’t at all know to whom or to where we should turn,” said Margaret Fredmonski of Moosic, Pennsylvania.

Mrs. Fredmonski’s late husband, Adam, was a former bus driver. Later in life, he became legally blind over the span of about one year due to macular degeneration. He eventually sought additional disability compensation for an osteoarthritic condition connected to his military service.

“We would complete the paperwork and get the process started, only to be frustrated by repeated denials,” said Mrs. Fredmonski. On the advice of a VA social worker, the Fredmonskis contacted a gentleman at a VA regional office in Philadelphia—a man she calls a godsend.

Edward Eckroth, a Field Service Representative of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA), provided the assistance the Fredmonskis needed to increase the percentage of service-connected disability compensation he had earned through his service.

“Ed not only helped us navigate the VA bureaucracy with his knowledge and competence of the system that approves or denies these disability claims, he also became our advocate and our friend through his kindness and understanding,” said Mrs. Fredmonski.

Eckroth is one of seven BVA Field Service Representatives strategically placed throughout the United States. The Field Reps and



BVA Field Reps such as Ed Eckroth (back, second from left) and volunteers provide blinded veterans with the help needed to overcome the challenges of blindness.

several additional Volunteer National Service Officers (VNSOs), all blind individuals, make themselves accessible to blinded veterans, helping them take the first steps in adjusting to blindness. They provide inspiration, encouragement and practical help in working with VA claims and benefits, even when the claim might not be directly tied to blindness.

There is no fee for the services of BVA Field Reps and VNSOs, regardless of whether the blinded veterans seeking the help have ever joined the organization as members.

As an organization, BVA also represents the interests of blinded veterans as a whole before Congress and at the VA Central Office in Washington. In addition to its role as a medium of communication for and about blinded veterans and the issues that affect them, BVA promotes access to technology and the practical use of the latest research.

To learn more, visit www.bva.org or call 800-669-7079.