



NEWS

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Montgomery County Commissioners Join Members of Disabled American Veterans Chapter 25, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 349 to Dedicate POW/MIA Chair on POW/MIA Day

Norristown, PA (September 16, 2016) – The Montgomery County Commissioners were joined by members of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 25, the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 349, and American Legion 901 at a ceremony to recognize POW/MIA Day on Friday, September 16th. The ceremony, which took place in front of the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial on the Montgomery County Courthouse grounds, culminated with the dedication of a POW/MIA chair donated by DAV 25 and VVA 349.

“The dedication of the POW/MIA chair is a way for us to recognize, remember, and honor our service men and women, especially those who were prisoners of war or missing in action, and reflect on their sacrifice for our County and our Country,” said Montgomery County Board of Commissioners Chair Josh Shapiro. “This chair from our local chapter of Disabled American Veterans and the Vietnam Veterans of America reminds us not only of those who we have lost or who went missing in service to our country, but also of our obligation to honor our veterans when they return home.”

The “honor chair” has become a common fixture at non-veteran organization facilities as a way to show support for POW/MIAs. The empty chairs represent Americans who were or are missing from each of the services – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard – and civilians, all with us in spirit. The new POW/MIA chair, donated by DAV Chapter 25 and VVA 349, will remain on display next to the grand staircase in the Montgomery County Courthouse as a permanent memorial.

“This chair, which we are donating, is a symbol of the great sacrifices made by those who have served our country,” said Bill Keyes, Commander of DAV 25 and Vice President of VVA 349. “Many lost their lives or were missing in action and many others returned home broken in body and mind. We can never forget their service, never forget their sacrifice, and never forget our obligation to embrace our

veterans, thank them for their service, and support them with respect, compassion, and understanding. We hope that the dedication of the POW/MIA chair will serve to honor our POW/MIAs and their families each and every day.”

Chapter 25 of Disabled American Veterans has a proud 75 year history of service dedicated to all U.S. military veterans and the community. Disabled American Veterans works to empower veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. The Vietnam Veterans of America seeks to promote and support the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans, to create a new identity for this generation of veterans, and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans. VVA Chapter 349, led by Ralph Nealman, sponsors The Central Montgomery County Veterans’ Honor Guard.

“We are honored to receive this gift from local chapters of Disabled American Veterans and the Vietnam Veterans of America and to recognize those who have served. Bill Keyes, who has a leadership role in both organizations, is an asset to veterans in Montgomery County,” said Val Arkoosh, Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners. “Over the last few years Montgomery County has implemented new services to support veterans throughout the community, and at the beginning of this year, the County eliminated veteran homelessness, reaching ‘functional zero,’ which means that all veterans who were located and were willing to accept housing have been permanently housed, or are sheltered and on a path to permanent housing. It also means that in the future homelessness among veterans will be rare, brief, and non-recurring thanks to preventive measures taken to keep veterans from becoming homeless.”

The Montgomery County Veterans Affairs Department also provides information to Montgomery County veterans, their dependents, and survivors regarding their rights and the various county, state, and federal benefits they may be entitled to receive and assists them to apply for these benefits. So far in 2016, the Veterans Affairs Department has assisted County veterans to receive over \$2 million in VA benefits. Last year, the Department began a shuttle service for veterans seeking to go to Veterans Administration (VA) healthcare facilities. The free service transports veterans and caregivers from four county locations to three healthcare centers operated by the VA. So far this year, the Veterans Affairs Department has assisted over 100 veterans to enroll in VA healthcare services, and provided roughly 220 rides to veterans seeking care at a VA medical center. Due to logistical barriers, many of those veterans would have gone without access to those healthcare programs without the shuttle.

“It is imperative that we honor the lives of those who have risked theirs so that we may enjoy our freedoms,” said Montgomery County Commissioner Joe Gale. “We must never forget those we have lost in the line of duty.”

POW/MIA Day was established by Congress in 1998 as part of the Defense Authorization Act. The day is observed every third Friday of September and is one of only six days the POW/MIA flag can be flown. POW/MIA Day serves as an important reminder of those who were captured while serving in conflicts and those who remain missing, and of the government's commitment to account for these veterans and repatriate their remains.

Veterans in need of assistance may call the Montgomery County Veterans Affairs Department at 610-278-3285.