

This year Kelly Frederickson, Region 9 Director, and I were invited to participate in the 2023 Region 8 and 9 Pre-Convention Conference in Reno, Nevada on June 28th. We began our planning in April and slowly but surely we implemented a marvelous conference.

Dick Southern invited us to individually present opening remarks introducing ourselves and sharing current AVVA updates that would benefit VVA. As I began to speak it suddenly occurred to me to ask the audience (primarily VVA Region 8 and 9 membership) just how many AVVA Dual members were in attendance? Approximately 90% of the room raised their hand! I was astonished and I might add that most of them are very enthusiastic about AVVA as their legacy.

In one instance, during the break, the VVA President from Alaska, Craig Wade, approached me and said "Here is a packet of dual membership applications along with their payments. Can you please assist me in helping them form a Chapter in Anchorage?" How exciting it is to know that our VVA brothers are serious about merging together and working side by side. I know that we are in the beginning stages of opening AVVA membership up to them and we will be voting soon to update our Bylaw (Article #III, Section 3.02 c.) to read: "Dual Members shall have the right to vote and chair committees at the chapter level. They are eligible to serve as voting members on state and national committees. Etc."

I did speak to Sharon Hobbs to determine the right course of action as she stated that this had not happened before, and we will be voting in August. I mailed in the applications under Chapter 904 along with payments via (certified mail) and hopefully all will work out. I am planning on traveling up to Alaska to attend a state council meeting so that I can meet some of these wonderful members. Often it is just a matter of time when the right doors open, and a way is made.

The conference continued after lunch as Kelly, and I presented our AVVA topics to a small group. We are appreciative of each member that attended and were supportive. I presented From Heartbreak To Hope on Nina Schloffel's behalf as she was not able to attend. I am grateful to have been able to complete the training and in preparation dove into the material even more as I wanted to present this well. As many of you know, my husband Bruce Ellis, suddenly passed

away November of this last year. FHTH is near to my heart as I have a unique perspective on the importance of support groups for our surviving spouses. Indeed we do not want our widowed members to just “float away like a helium balloon” and not stay connected with our chapter communities. Obviously, we are not counselors or therapists, but we do have the ability to walk alongside one another and offer what support we can. Our local community here in Douglas County is beginning a FHTH support group to hopefully begin late September.

Back to the conference: We then shared ideas about fundraising. I spoke of our Welcome Home Dinner and Auction, BBQ’s for Vietnam Veterans, Potlucks and Sponsored events by a group of organizations to benefit our Vets. We opened up the floor to share ideas regarding other opportunities to fund raise.

At the conclusion, I shared about our Moods In Music guitar program for Veterans, when it began, how we established it financially and how it has grown to where it is today. Currently we are in our second session (6 weeks long) post pandemic season. It was quite a challenge to begin again but with the determination of many we accomplished it.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with Kelly Frederickson and look forward to once again putting our heads together and presenting another conference in the future. I purposefully left out what Kelly presented as I know she too has a Region report to submit and would like her to share her own contributions. I did speak with Francisco Ivarra, VVA Region 8 Director, about combining the conference instead of splitting up in the afternoons so that the presentation can benefit everyone. I believe our dual members would appreciate learning more about our programs and how their participation will be essential. Together again!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the State Representatives in Region 8: Ruth Feliciano from Oregon, Willa Burgess from Montana and Steve Jordan from Washington State. You have done a wonderful job in creating new relational bridges within your state’s chapters which takes time to develop. Keep up the good work.

Thank you.
Jennifer Ellis