

Villages Honor Flight, Inc History of Villages Honor Flight

2011

Spring, 2011, Hal Urban, a WWII vet who lives in Leesburg and had applied for an HF with Ocala HF (OHF) in 2007, wonders when he will be called. Unfortunately for Hal, the answer may well be “never”. The policy of OHF is to give priority to vets from areas in/around Ocala that donate \$. Hal lives too far away. Hal lives in the “donut hole” not well covered by any existing HF hubs in Central Florida.

Allison Metcalf, the marketing manager at Mission Oaks Assisted Living facility, who has just returned from an OHF mission as a bus captain has similar thoughts and wonders if the greater Villages area could support its own HF hub. Allison talked with people involved with OHF who live in/around TV and with others who might be interested in the idea of a new hub and was convinced that TV area could support its own hub; there are enough vets and adequate logistics (volunteers and sources of donations). After some initial planning, Allison applied for a charter from the National HF organization and by July, 2011, VHF was a real entity with an area of responsibility including Lake, Sumter and Southern Marion county areas. OHF gave any vet application for vets who lived in VHF’s new territory to VHF so VHF started with a vet list of 20 or so vets. Hal Urban became VHF vet #1 OHF also agreed to mentor VHF and provide what assistance they could. The name Villages Honor Flight was not meant to focus attention on The Villages, but to define the broad area of responsibility. The name turned out to be quite a mixed blessing over time.

How Did They Get Involved: Debbie Winters

Debbie had lived in The Villages just a few weeks when she saw an article about Allison Metcalf who was trying to start an Honor Flight hub in The Villages.

Debbie’s father was a retired veteran and she had lived most of her life in military housing and communities -- her sense of patriotism is high.

She called the next day and asked how she could help. Applications were coming in from speaking engagements and they needed someone to call the veterans, verify info and tell them what the process and waiting list looked like and file the applications by date received.

Debbie’s previous career was high school secretary and filing and phone were her expertise. Debbie attended the meetings and took notes as the group Secretary and continued contacting and handling veteran applications. As the group progressed Debbie also handled the guardian applications and did a variety of other jobs as well.

After 500 WWII veterans and six years of tirelessly working for the veterans, Debbie felt it was time for new blood, with new ideas to takeover. One of Debbie’s final contributions was a grand reunion which was a highlight of all

our flights combined. Debbie still holds the record for the most times as a guardian or squad leader. Although, Debbie is no longer a formal part of VHF, she is still there in spirit and no one will forget the debt VHF owes to Debbie. Her Disney club has raised over \$25,000 towards Villages Honor Flight, she continues to be involved in fashion shows to raise funds and has attended every homecoming since "retiring."

Volunteers met at Mission Oaks during the fall, planning for an April 2012 charter flight of 150 vets. The vast majority of effort was focused on awareness and raising \$. Allison spoke (along with Jack Kress, a WWII Vet who flew with OHF) to clubs and vet organizations in TV & Lake & Sumter County – looking for WWII Vets to go on the VHF charter flight in April 2012 and for donations. So far the plan is for a single charter flight of 150 vets and then “we will see what makes sense”. This is the same size as the charters OHF mounted so the logic is obvious – just follow what OHF had done. Debbie Winters was on-board as a volunteer. The WW2 History Club became the sponsoring club for VHF within the Villages proper.

How Did They Get Involved: Mark Erdrich (MWE)

Mark first heard about HF in 2008 or so and applied to the Rochester, NY hub to be a guardian. He never heard anything back and just about forgot about it until he encountered some Rochester HF folks at a promotional kiosk at a local fair. He inquired again and was struck by the arrogance of the Roch HF people suggesting that he had not heard from them because he was not good enough to be a guardian. Sounds silly, but that was his impression. They probably were/are a very closed operation, i.e., you needed to know someone to be a guardian. In 2011, Bruce Greenberger, a member of the WW2 History Club, mentioned that an HF hub was starting up in TV. Mark volunteered to do the web site and provide a little project management support to Allison.

The AL Post 347 was assigned as the fiscal agent for VHF – all monies went to the AL & bills were submitted to them for payment. They are a 501 (c) 19 non-profit (Veterans organization). Community fundraising activities started in the fall of 2011. They included dine-in nights at restaurants. Fundraising resulted in about \$800 from dine-in restaurant fundraisers. Approx \$80,000 to \$100,000 will be necessary for the charter flight depending on how much VHF does and how much the company arranging the charter does. An interesting aspect to activities like HF is that companies are available to do as little or as much as hubs want and will do it all if a hub chooses to go that route (the hub simply provides a list of names and \$). Donations for specific vets were accepted to guarantee that the specific vets would fly. This is consistent with the OHF model and turned out to be a very bad idea. As the plan was initially for a single charter flight, flight donors assumed that those vets would be on the 1st flight- this caused hard feelings

when plans didn't turn out that way. No paying for specific vets became one of VHF's first rules. All vets flew on a first come, first served basis regardless of their location (even if outside VHF's official territory).

Perhaps worse than the financial position, the operational understanding of how to pull this off was inadequate and no one other than Allison (as a bus captain) had any real experience in any of this. Even Jack Kress who flew with OHF had only a vet's view of how it worked; he had little understanding of the immense logistical support required. In hindsight, assuming the OHF model of fly big and fly infrequently was probably not the right model for VHF as a startup, but Allison did not see that.

How Did They Get Involved: John Peters

John's father was a World War II veteran. John first heard of Honor Flight while living in Virginia. There was a hub in Hampton, but it was not close enough and John was too busy with his job to get involved. John became aware of Villages Honor Flight in 2011 and participated in a Pancake Breakfast fundraiser at Hemingway Country Club. Afterwards he contacted Debbie Winters and began getting involved.

John spent nearly 40 years in military Public Affairs and his initial contributions were writing news releases and photography. Over the years his involvement broadened and he took on Media Coordination, presentations, and briefly, writing the newsletter. He dropped out of all involvement with the death of his spouse in 2014, but got involved again in 2017. John is back with VHF as the Media and Communications Manager.

Year End Statistics for 2011

- Mission model: medium size charter
- Mission frequency: once or twice a year, TBD
- # missions planned: 1
- # mission successfully executed: 0
- # vets involved successfully: 0
- # of active vols (as measured by club membership): about 25
- # vets waiting to fly: 122
- Finances: efforts had raised about 20% of the estimated cost for the April charter

2012

In early 2012, the VHF model was not much changed. The goal was still a charter flight in April for 150 vets and Allison was still doing most of the work; which became a problem in early 2012:

- researching charter options;
- extending fund raising to market nights (organized by Debbie W); and
- trying to keep all the balls in the air.

How Did They Get Involved: Fran Into

Fran Into met Earl Morse (one of HFN founders) in CT through DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) and found out about VHF through the WW2 History Club when Allison spoke to the club. Fran put in an application and never got called, then approached Allison at one of the dine-in fundraisers asking if she wanted the help or not. Fran came to one of Allison's meetings in early January. She arrived to find that financial reporting was inadequate to have a full understanding of what was going on. Initially the reporting was only the total funds earmarked by the AL as received for VHF. No individual amounts, sources, etc., were available. Fran volunteered to look at all of the receipts and record them (spreadsheet) as to the source of the monies (fundraising/donations/veterans groups). Also thank you letters were being handwritten (Xerox copy of a handwritten note) thanking them for a donation. (IRS requires that we formally acknowledge donations over \$250). Fran quickly became part of the core team and board ... Although Fran is no longer physically with VHF she will always be a part in spirit; VHF owes Fran a huge debt of gratitude.

In February 2012 we held a pancake breakfast fundraiser (organized by Debbie), raising \$3,000.

February 2012 turned out to be a very crucial month for VHF. Allison backed out due to illness and the VHF effort taking too much time from work & family. The organization was in a state of flux. Without Allison many issues were not well understood; the path to the charter or anything else was unclear. A new start was required.

Several of the remaining volunteers organized a lunch at Tierra Del Sol for all volunteers & Jim Johnson from HFN. After typical discussions, a small group of people who wished to step up and make VHF really happen met separately and elected the first board:

- Tony Kamas, President;
- Mark Erdrich, VP of Operations;

- Cheryl Courtright, VP of Admin;
- Debbie Winters, Secretary;
- Fran Into, Treasurer;
- Jim Schaefer, Medical,
- Bruce Greenberger who initially was Grounds Coordinator.

The board had a new focus and sense of urgency; and the addition of Mark was important as his background was engineering and project management. What the group needed immediately was a clear goal and a plan to get there. The group agreed that a flight of 25 vets and 25 guardians was much more realistic than a charter. With 25 free tickets from SW & guardian fees, we had enough for a 25/25 flight. We had nowhere near the money or expertise for a charter flight so any thought of a large flight was put on hold. In addition to deciding on mission size, the group agreed on several key mission parameters:

- **Up and Back in One Day:** there was never much discussion about this point. Both of the hubs Mark flew with during the spring of 2012 as well as Ocala Honor Flight flew up to DC in the morning and back at the end of the day. This makes for a long day but the vets are so excited that the length of the day probably does not make a great deal of difference. That said, other hubs use different approaches, some stay overnight 1 night, others stay overnight 2 nights. The Board has discussed, but dismissed, the overnight concept due to potential medical, logistical and liability issues, especially since we use the no family member concept.
- **1 vet per guardian.** This 1:1 relationship is not universal; some hubs have as many as 3 vets per guardian depending on mobility. At the end of the day, the real determination is what is the hub trying to achieve? Maximize the number of vets who fly or provide the best possible experience. Without really discussing it, VHF opted for the latter.
- **5 vet/guardian teams per squad.** The idea of a squad was adopted from Dayton HF. Their approach was not as formal as ours, but they did have squads. The number of vet/guardian pairs, i.e., 5 per squad was again taken from Dayton and seemed to be about right.
- **Color coded squad names.** Nothing special here just a simple way to differentiate among the squads.
- The **squad leader** would be the most experienced guardian
- We also had "**squad medics**"; each squad had at least one person with some medical background. Unfortunately, in some cases that background was 40 years old. In time, we eliminated the squad medic and went with dedicated medical personnel who had no guardian responsibility. Different hubs have quite different philosophies regarding medical staff. Some have none and rely totally on 911; others make sure they have several EMT/nurses and a doctor. VHF went with a middle ground solution.

We also recognized from almost the beginning that an extended experience between the vet and the guardian was ideal; that would include the vet's family, the guardian's

family and a relationship that endured long after the flight. We have had some wonderful examples.

We meet 4 days/week – Mark drove the team very hard. Tony Kamus, then president who held a full time job, admitted that there was just too much to do and resigned as president. Tony has continued to be involved in VHF initially as a guardian and more recently as a source for nice gifts for the vets. Mark took over as president. Mark, Fran and Debbie put in the time and effort required to make this happen. Other board members were there and made some contributions but they failed to understand how dedicated one really needed to be. VHF was not a volunteer social activity, this was real work. In fairness to everyone involved, no one probably understood at the beginning (the lunch at Tierra Del Sol) what was going to be required.

Mark was a snowbird and did not want to see preparations and the first flight extend into the summer and early fall. So he drove a stake in the ground to fly by mid May -- few thought we could really do this. To further indicate to the group that he was serious, Mark made reservations for a May 2012 flight & also June 2012. Mark flew with Space Coast as a Guardian in March and with Dayton in April to gain experience. Mark went back north in April and drove back and forth (or flew back and forth) to FL several times before the First flight.

The group leveraged OHF to the extent that they would cooperate. Although we should have been very close to OHF being the spin off that we were, that did not happen and it was never clear why. The VHF Board met with OHF principles in March and outlined their plan to fly by the end of May. OHF just shook their heads and said that VHF would probably not fly until next May – that was how long it really took to launch a first flight (a year). NOTE: this is also what the National organization recommends.

But few people were prepared for what this little team was going to do. We did not let anything get in our way. We had a few unfortunate run ins with people and organizations that got in our way, but we prevailed.

Debbie Winters served as both the Veteran and Guardian Coordinator. That means that she received the applications, talked with the vets on the phone, entered relevant info into “the data base”, filed the applications and updated the data base after each PF meeting and similar. She also went to many vet’s homes to verify information received. That task was eventually moved to the medical community but in the beginning Debbie did it. Mark became the data meister keeping the master data for all VHF records. Debbie and Mark communicated by sending an extract of “the Master” which included vet and guardian data back and forth electronically as needed. We started with what OHF was using and began tweaking it as we went. We had some challenges, but persevered. Six months into this we should have revamped the entire data structure so that the data structures for vets and guardians would be more consistent and some

other changes to create something that was generally more what we needed, but we never quite found the time.

How Did They Get Involved: John Driscoll

John, a retired banker from Western NY, was drawn in initially as a guardian in June 2012 (upon hearing of our need for guardians at the Civil War History Club) and later as a major player. John was instrumental in finding WWII Vets in the 5 counties by sending out invitation letters to them (mailing list from the various AL's in the area). He also spoke at or arranged many speaking engagements at clubs/organizations & assisted living facilities for Vets & for donations. He was an instrumental in starting our annual golf tournament which is our biggest fundraiser each year and working with Parady and other organizations to do fundraising events for us. John eventually became VP of Marketing before retiring from VHF at the end of 2014.

How Did They Get Involved: Liza Walters

Liza was at a democratic party meeting in March 2012 when Allison stood up and gave a talk on Honor Flight. Liza had never heard of it but it sounded very interesting so she thought she would attend a meeting. The meeting was at Saddlebrook, in a small room with 10 people busily stuffing bags and envelopes. Liza went to additional meetings looking for opportunities for involvement but everyone was so busy, she did not find much. Liza eventually flew on M3 and began to become more integrated into the organization and started taking on one job after another.

The real breakthrough came when she was asked to help out with entertainment for Ground Coordination and that quickly led to Liza taking over as the Ground Coordinator; a job she has been doing ever since. Liza does a great deal for the organization which might not be as appreciated as it should. In addition to Ground Coordination (which she makes look really easy), Liza is currently the ticket meister, coordinates the InfoLine and is the driving force behind the flightless program. The latter is probably closest to her heart. It is a unique program for vets with few other options. Liza was involved from day 1 and loves how this program helps special vets. Liza is also the corporate secretary and a board member.

We had the first pre-flight meeting at the American Legion for M1 & at St Timothy's Church for M2. With the exception of bringing in the guardians first for training which

was taken from Space Coast, Fran and Mark invented everything to do with a preflight meeting more or less from scratch:

1. What to cover
2. what type of venue
3. How long
4. How to check people in
5. How to train guardians
6. How to get vets and guardians together into squads and have table time to socialize
7. Handouts
8. Updating of our records
9. First red hats

The idea of two PF meetings instead of one was taken from OHF. They argued that you need the four weeks between meetings to sort out problems you discover at PF1. Much has changed in how PF meetings are conducted but the basic framework laid out by Fran and Mark continues to this day.

Even though the flights were small, things were cramped and congested, It was quickly apparent that finding proper space for meetings would be a challenge. We petitioned The Villages for special dispensation and they allowed us the use of their facilities. Preflight meetings were quickly moved to the Colony Cottage Rec Center and have been there most missions since.

A Villages social club called Villages Honor Flight was formed by Cheryl with meetings held at Saddlebrook Rec Center to raise interest in those wanting to become involved. It also had the extra benefit of getting VHF into the Rec Center infrastructure legally (as a true club). Cheryl was unable to be around when the club met so the club was quickly taken over by Debbie as the real leader.

From early meetings to the actual day of the first flight, Mark, Debbie or Fran were in charge of & responsible for almost everything: spaghetti dinners; pancake breakfasts; pre-flight meetings; ground coordination; and, all flight prep and logistics. Jim Schaefer handled most of the medical side of things with help from Marie Randolph. Ground Coordination was one of the sore points early on – lots of work and little recognition. Everyone on the board did ground coordination at least once but it was not until Liza Walters took it on permanently that it became the smooth operation it is today.

About half way through the initial flight prep phase Mark realized that there was just too much for a normal flight director to do comfortably and no backup if he were to be unavailable. So he invented the MXO (Mission Executive Officer) as the second in command and the person who would share many of the flight director's duties and be able to step in if the Flight Director went down or had to do something unexpected. Debbie became our first MXO and a model for all future MXO's. She took to the job like a duck to water. The success of M1 was due in large part to the relationship developed

between Debbie and Mark. It worked very well with each keeping the other informed and everything on the list eventually getting done.

Shirts: Many hubs use t-shirts supplied by National for flight day. Space Coast and Dayton used these t-shirts. We decided that they were a bit tacky and went with a more elegant cotton polo shirt embroidered with our logo. We also put the flight date on the shirt and continued to do so for individuals who flew multiple times. There was initially a little push back to the idea of dates on shirts but eventually everyone understood why Mark wanted this. We settled on a royal blue shirt for everyone. Coordinating shirts turned out to be quite the hassle trying to get everything right, i.e., size, name, and date, in very little time with people changing at the last minute. It was bad enough when we were working with a local (in TV) vendor, even more difficult when we moved to an Ocala-based firm whose prices were much better. NOTE: we struggled with this for several years. In 2017, several changes were made to make shirt management easier.

Fund raising efforts were generally successful with Spaghetti dinners in April & Aug each raising about \$4,000 and Market nights in the spring & fall raising \$4,000. But not all fund raisers were successful -- we had a fundraiser at Cousin Vinny's in Leesburg that did not raise much money and was a lot of work. This taught us an important lesson about value for effort in fundraising.

Everything was not smooth and some early decisions came back to haunt us: Four vets from Water Oaks had been identified in 2011 as HF candidates and Water Oaks raised the \$2000 for these vets. When it became obvious that most would not be on the first 25/25 flight (based on first come, first served), the Water Oaks Vet Group was furious and threatened to ask for a refund. Mark spent a rather uncomfortable few hours with them one day trying to explain what had happened and gain their confidence. But the relationship between Water Oaks and The Villages generally was not a good one even before this incident and the Water Oaks Vet Committee was holding their ground. The turning point came when it was revealed that Mark too was a vet and, thus, could be trusted. Another lesson learned: vets are more trusting of other vets. In 2013 or 2014 Water Oak Veterans Committee continued to think that they needed to "pay" for their Vets to fly. They thought that we sent them a bill for their Vets who flew. Fran talked at length with their president at that time, explaining that no Vet pays and that no one gets billed when one of their Vets flies. They finally understood, helping relationships. Also a Water Oak knitting group made lap blankets for all Vets on a flight which helped VHF become more inclusive with the Water Oak Community. Debbie visited and kept in contact with many Vets and her caring of Water Oak Vets also helped,

Never an original goal, one of the longer term benefits of VHF's existence has been an improved image of The Villages to outsiders.

VHF was incorporated in May 2012.

VHF first flew in May of 2012 and again in Jun of 2012. The flights were very successful and few vets understood the problems we faced and solved behind the scenes. For example, one of the vets needed an O2 during the trip. Jim Schaefer and Mark rented a small portable O2 concentrator for the flight portion of the day. The device turned out to be faulty and by the time we got to the airport in the AM, its batteries were about drained and the pilot said that the vet could not fly (we also did not have the proper paperwork for an O2 concentrator). After some conversation with Mark, the pilot reneged and allowed the vet to fly. But we learned a very important lesson – research everything and make sure you are prepared for any equipment failure. Write everything down that needs to be done and check and double check everything.

One of the unexpected traditions that started with M1 was the use of DC Tour Guides. MWE was reasonably confident that he could provide a continuous dialogue as the bus moved about DC but he also recognized that his knowledge was nothing compared to those who lived and worked in the area. We contacted the HF DC Support organization and inquired about a tour guide assuming that we would use a tour guide once or twice until one of us was comfortable performing that function. Mark met with Major Bob Mebane when he was in DC with Dayton HF. They hit it off right away and Bob became our tour guide for M1. Little did we realize at the time that Bob would continue to be our tour guide for every subsequent mission including flightless missions held in FL.

After our initial successes, more volunteers began to get involved. As is true with virtually all organizations, volunteers come with many different expectations. Some really wanted to get to work and help VHF be successful. Others were initially just curious and still others wanted a donut and a cup of coffee.

How Did They Get Involved: Jim Dow)

Jim Dow moved to the Villages in 2012. He had previously worked with the Ozarks Honor Flight (closed its doors when they had flown all the WWII vets) and with Honor Flight of the Ozarks (picked up where the other left off). When Jim arrived in The Villages, he saw that VHF was just forming and decided to get involved. Jim became part of the core group very quickly and has subsequently been an MXO, Flight Director, VP of Admin, guardian several times, Special Projects Director and Vice Chairman of the Board. In addition, he pitched in wherever he was needed to ensure that every project and every event was a success.

How Did They Get Involved: Joe Hambright

Some time in the late 2000s, Joe watched a special about the Chicago Honor Flight on the local Chicago PBS station and was intrigued. After purchasing a house in The Villages he thought it would be a rewarding experience to be an

HF guardian. He found an HF hub in Ocala and applied to be a guardian but never received a response. He filed that idea in the "oh well" file and forgot about it. He is not sure how he heard about VHF. It may have been a brief item in the Daily Sun. But somehow he contacted VHF; Debbie Winters responded and told him about VHF and the meetings at Saddlebrook. With no experienced guardians, VHF selected as squad leaders those guardians who seemed like they could do the job. Joe was one of the first squad leaders. He remembers coming back from the flight with some amazing and emotional observations about the Vets' reaction to the day. All he wanted to do was go on a flight as a guardian. Nobody warned him about drinking the Kool-aid. Joe has since flown twice as a squad leader, 9 times as the MXO, 5 times as the FD and several times as a VIP or observer. He has also been heavily involved in all the flightless missions and all the MAAD initiatives. In 2015 Joe became the VP of Operations and joined the Board.

How Did They Get Involved: Barb Hambright

In 2012, Joe was going to be a squad leader on the first flight. There was a Spaghetti Dinner fund raiser scheduled at the American Legion and he asked Barb to go along to help. Barb agreed. There she met Fran Into, who told her that Joe had volunteered her for everything. Fran inquired if Barb was available for M1, PF2. Barb showed up and worked station one and loved the volunteer position. Barb was hooked and worked every flight in 2012. With the onset of the flying season 2013, Barb was asked to take over the Preflight Coordinator position. She agreed and has run every PF meeting except for 3 or 4 since then. It'd all about the Vets and she loves what she does.

Barb enjoys helping with all Honor Flight functions, the joy on the faces of our Vets makes it very rewarding. Although she is training someone to replace her as PF Coordinator in 2018, She plans on working with that person for at least the year of 2018. Barb has also moved into the position of VHF Club President.

The management team still met weekly with the general meetings held twice per month for the broader community. What to discuss and how to discuss it became a bit sensitive at times with volunteers wanting to know more about the inner workings of VHF than was necessary. Providing the information was not the issue; rather the debate and wasted time that would occur was the concern.

VHF mounted four missions in 2012. Unfortunately M4, the last of the year, was canceled due to Hurricane Sandy. It was a gut wrenching decision to cancel the mission but it was the right thing to do. We subsequently discovered that it takes more

effort to cancel a flight and the surrounding events than to set everything up initially – all of us involved (Debbie, JimD, Mark and Fran) were exhausted – but all working together we did get the word mostly out and only a few people (luckily no vet or guardian) never got the word.

M#	Date	Type	Size	Airline
1	26-May-2012	REG	25/25	SW
2	26-Jun-2012	REG	25/25	SW
3	23-Sep-2012	REG	25/25	SW
4	28-Oct-2012	REG	25/25	SW

Hats: now who would think that a hat could be a big deal. Well, it is. We did not initially intend to provide any special hat preferring to let the vets wear their own military hat. But someone offered to buy hats for all the vets and a short-term precedent was set with donors often handing out the hats at homecoming.

By year end we had flown 76 vets to Washington DC and brought them safely back again. A nice start. We learned a great deal about how to do this, who to rely on, who not to rely on, that the 25/25 model was good for us and a charter was still too big for us to consider. The core team (board plus major players) had expanded and the feeling that we were getting organized and knew what we were doing increased.

Our assumption that showing that we could do what we promised would lead to increased donations was proved right, but we still had a long way to go to prove ourselves to the broader Villages community and to the media.

Year End Statistics for 2012

- # missions planned: 4
- # mission successfully executed: 3
- # missions to date: 4
- # vets involved successfully: 76
- # vets to date: 76
- # vets waiting to fly: 173
- # of active vols (as measured by club membership): approx 100
- Guardian fee: \$500
- Finances: VHF entered 2012 rather cash poor but with three successful flights and much effort finding donations and raising funds, VHF ended 2012 with sufficient positive finances to move forward aggressively in 2013 VHF adopted a financial goal to never be in the red and never have less \$ available than it would take to fly the next years vet's (that was later expanded to all the vets on the waiting list)

2013

One of the many things learned in 2012 was that we had to do a better job with “medical affairs”. We did not have good documentation, or good processes for this very important area. Jim Schaefer was working irregular ER shifts and Marie was changing jobs. They just did not have the experience and time necessary to do the job; and, as we found out, the job was much more than two people could do anyway. Consequently Mark contacted the local hospital looking for some help. Mark and JimD organized a medical affairs meeting at the hospital with as many medically oriented volunteers and outsiders as we could find. Out of several discussions both with this group and with nursing staff at The Villages Hospital emerged two individuals who would have a significant impact on VHF; Maryann Parker and Dr. Christina Thompson. The former, an RN and excellent administrator, took over as “head nurse” and medical coordinator. The latter, became our medical director although she never accepted that title. Together they brought order to the medical side of VHF and we improved the medical side of the organization day by day. Neither one was really satisfied with what we had in place, but it was much better than before.

Unfortunately Dr Thompson, was able to stay involved for only 6 months. Her family demands and work just did not let her put in the time she felt necessary for the job. Maryanne Parker stayed on for several years bringing medical expertise and compassion to her job and became the core of our medical community.

John Driscoll & Jim Dow went to the HFN summit in Baltimore in February. John brought back needed information for applying for IRS 501 (c) 3 non-profit status. By-laws were created and the formal application was filed to the IRS in August 2013 (after many hours & months of preparing the application & documents). IRS non-profit status was approved November 2013. FI state approved tax-exempt status in December 2013. Both were back dated to May 2012. VHF was reorganized into something more akin to a real business; the leadership group was divided into a real board with long term policy responsibility:

- Mark Erdrich, president and chairman;
- Jim Dow, VP admin and vice chairman;
- John Driscoll, VP marketing;
- Fran Into, treasurer

and a Management Team with day-to-day responsibilities under the president. The management team was formally identified in the By-Laws. Its composition (who is on the team) is up to the president.

The board was to meet once a quarter, the mgmt team to continue to meet twice per month.

How Did They Get Involved: Peter Tetrault

In April, 2013 after encouragement from a neighbor, Peter and his wife Jeannette served as Guardians on a VHF mission for two brothers whom they discovered were from Peter's home state of Maine.

Jeannette started volunteering immediately by working with Mike Parker and, eventually, getting Peter to a meeting. His first assignment at preflight was working with Mike Parker, taking over Jeannette's job & neither one has stopped since.

Jeannette is now team leader of Station #1 and Peter is still assigned to Emergency contact info at preflight meetings. But Peter also has a more full time job as Fund Raising Chairman.

The most rewarding part is, they just had another visit from the two WWII brothers who are doing great-now age 92 & 94.

We were learning about fund raisers, i.e., let someone else do most of the work: a Ken McBride Concert at the American Legion (\$5,000), fashion show (\$4,000); Swing Band Concert (\$4,000), Billie Thatcher concert at Church-on-the Square (\$5,000).

Food At Preflight Meetings: who would think that serving food or not at preflight meetings would become an issue. As VHF moved forward and became more consuming of space and resources, the Villages Rec Center management asked that we start using some of our club meetings for preflight meetings thus freeing up some Rec Center space. VHF accommodated that and preflight meetings were held from 10:30 to 2:30. That timing suggested that food should be served and a small group of volunteers started working on that. Soon the food was plentiful and started getting in the way. One needs space for serving, eating, etc. In time, as pre flight meetings were all moved to Sundays, the food issue kept coming up and eventually we decided to cut way back on food – much to the dismay of those providing it.

Coins: it has become a military tradition to acquire and use “challenge coins”. As a result, there is probably not a single organization in the military that does not have its own coin. Coins have become very popular for collecting, trading, you name it. Many hubs had started handing out coins as a memento of the trip. VHF explored several options starting with a custom coin created by a local vendor. VHF then shifted to the “5 service” coin that is presently presented.

VHF continued to use BWI even though Reagan offered the benefit of very short bus rides. We heard through the grapevine that the National Park Service police were providing motorcycle escorts for some hubs. We decided to try that and the rest is history. Not only did they dramatically reduce the ride [time](#) to the airport in the PM but the way they guided the buses the wrong way down streets and bulldozed cars out of the way has turned out to be very popular with the vets. They are being treated like the heroes they are.

The Guardian Explosion: in 2013, VHF was flying every month and the number of guardians volunteering was not keeping up. The Daily Sun ran an article about our dilemma and we received two or three times the number of applications that we would normally receive over the next two months.

How Did They Get Involved: Barbara 5 sey

Barbara was part of the guardian application explosion that happened after a newspaper article about needing more guardians in the summer of 2013. She started attending club meetings and doing whatever was needed. Her first job was name tags at a reunion. She first flew as a guardian experience in Nov. 2013. Barb was in Sally's squad and she and Debbie Winters encouraged her to be more involved. One thing led to another and Barb was hooked. She became involved in flight management and did a lot of guardian training (she has a background in that area) and worked her way up to MXO (May'15 Flight) and flight director, taking on that responsibility for the first time in Sep'15. She has been flight director on 4 subsequent missions. She was the Guardian Coordinator from early 2014 to early 2016. She has been in charge of presentations and some marketing, was elected to the Board in early 2014 and reelected in Jan 2016. Barb will be taking over as VP of Admin and Development.

The Sep 2013 mission marked an interesting milestone and an important lesson learned. We had been approached by the local Marine Corps League Detachment about an all Marine flight, i.e., every guardian would be a Marine. It was an intriguing and popular idea. It was planned for 50/50 but ended up a 25/25 as there were not enough Marine guardians. The actual flight was a great success with all the Marines in their Marine garb and a nice turnout by the USMC staff at the Marine Corp Memorial. But we subsequently learned that many vets said things like, "the Marines took me to DC". Not something a VHF volunteer who spends hundreds of hours a year making it all work wants to hear. We have subsequently been approached with the idea of an all police flight, an all firefighter flight, etc. We have declined all such requests.

We flew 7 missions in 2013 of 25/25

M #	Date	Type	Size	Airline
5	26-Mar-2013	REG	25/25	USAir
6	27-Apr-2013	REG	25/25	SW
7	25-May-2013	REG	25/25	SW
8	22-Jun-2013	REG	25/25	SW
9	08-Sep-2013	REG	25/25	SW
10	05-Oct-2013	REG	25/25	USAir
11	02-Nov-2013	REG	25/25	USAir

2013 Year End Statistics

- # missions planned: 7
- # mission successfully executed: 7
- Total # of missions to date: 11
- # vets involved successfully: 175
- Total # of vets to date: 251
- # vets waiting to fly: 161
- # of active vols (as measured by club membership): approx 150
- Guardian fee: \$400
- Finances: VHF continued to bring in more \$ than it spent and by year end had achieved the goal of having sufficient monies to fund the entire waiting list. But the waiting list was growing quickly and this would turn out to be a long term issue

2014

The plan for 2014 was for 4 missions tentatively sized at 50/50. We needed to fly fewer missions (2013 taught us that) but fly more vets (the waiting list was growing). The first two missions were 50/50. There were all the problems one might expect when one doubles the size of the flight group and they could have been sorted out; but the second mission of the year ran into weather and delay problems and the organization soured on 50/50 missions. That flight is to this day known as the flight from hell. The first fall flight was back to 25/25. Unfortunately it was one of the smoothest flights ever and some in the organization took that to mean that 25/25 was the right size. We have not tried 50/50 again.

During 2013, MWE looked at the growing number of vet drop outs and wondered what we could do about this. In early 2014, he proposed the flightless mission concept to the board with a first flightless mission in September. This program has turned out to be extremely successful with several extra benefits:

- No excessive walking and pushing a wheel chair so no upper limit on guardian age (some vets who flew on earlier missions were guardians on the flightless program)
- No prohibitively large guardian fee so virtually anyone could afford to participate; fee was set at \$75 then lowered to \$50. NOTE: we discovered that the \$500 we had originally charged for guardians (very typical fee for hubs) was quite a lot for some people so we dropped the fee to \$400 and had some special categories where staff flew for even less
- Lots of local involvement including media (very good media coverage)
- Gained considerable expertise in how to use green screens to emulate pictures taken in DC

Major fundraisers in 2014 were a fashion show (\$2,000); a swing band concert (\$3,000) & the golf tournament (\$27,000) – an unexpected surprise in revenue.

Many events were held by clubs & organizations for us as the beneficiary (Sons of the AL; Parady; Wings of Gold; Korean Vets organization).

HF club meetings changed to 1/month

Over time, VHF tweaked the responsibilities of the squad leader to increase the social interaction in the squad. Some sort of lunch or picnic or something was required between PF1 and PF2. Some squad leaders went all out with quite elegant spreads; others were more modest. VHF eventually started picking up the tab for these lunches (only fair on the squad leaders). All vet significant others were invited. Getting the significant others comfortable with VHF is very important. The more comfortable they are with us, the more likely that they will let us “do our thing” for the max benefit of the vet.

Vet Specific Guardians: A vet specific guardian is a guardian specified by the vet and is likely to be someone the vet knows. Many hubs are perfectly fine with this idea and

the idea of a family member being a guardian. In the beginning, VHF was OK with this as well but over time discovered that vet specific guardians are often not very good. We also had some trouble with family member guardians who wanted to protect the vet from all these foreigners. That is quite counter to what we are trying to do. So we eventually banned vet specific and family member guardians. We will still consider special cases, but in general no longer support it.

For many, the saying “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it” is valid. And that may be so for a static environment with no competition. But in the real world with changing circumstances and many types of competition, a more valid statement is “change or die”. VHF is constantly looking at what it does and how we do that to see if we can get better. We do not have any real competition like another hub down the street, but we are in competition with ourselves constantly striving to find better, more efficient ways to bring a better experience to more vets. We have mission debriefs and watch the performance of our guardians and staff. One area for improvement has been ground time in DC. With the current model up 2 hours is consumed on the bus between BWI and DC and between DC and BWI. The only alternative is Reagan. The overall support at BWI is much better than at Reagan but two hours is two hours. So, during 2014 we mounted two missions flying US Air into Reagan and learned some important lessons:

- We did save a large fraction of the two hours
- Reagan had very little support infrastructure and could not supply wheel chairs, O2 bottles, waters, coolers, etc., as BWI could (for free). We could obtain these things but only through an outside medical supply house at considerable inconvenience (difficult to work with) and cost.
- The meet-and-greet at Reagan was just as good as at BWI
- Entertainment at Reagan was superior
- Food was about the same

We ultimately decided that BWI was the better airport and have flown into BWI ever since. The long bus rides, particularly in the evening, have turned out to be quite a plus for the vets as the NPS motorcycle escort clears the way.

Guardian Fees

VHF started out with a \$500 guardian fee. This was typical of what other hubs were charging and seemed to align reasonably well with actual costs plus a modest “donation”. We discovered that \$500 was a lot of money for some people and that it was preventing many people from applying to be guardians. Early in the process we were tight on guardians so we decided to drop the fee to encourage more participation. We have a policy that everyone should pay something and have adjusted guardian and staff fees for one reason or another several times:

- started out at \$500 for all guardians & staff
- Sep 2012: reduced to \$400 for new guardians & \$375 for experienced guardians because we found that many potential guardians could not afford the \$500. The total for management for the year was \$500.

- 2013: staff fees were reduced to \$200
- 2014: FHF guardian fees were \$75
- 2015: squad leader fees were dropped to \$300
- 2016 : FHF fees were reduced to \$50; guardian fees were reduced to \$350 for new guardian, \$300 for experienced guardian & \$100 for staff & squad leader, working EMT fees were zero. The total for anyone was \$500 for the year.
- 2017: fees were reduced to \$250 for new guardians, \$200 for experienced guardians. The total for anyone is \$500 for the year. The drops in 2017 reflect the drop in airline ticket prices (price of oil).

How Did They Get Involved: Wayne Grunewald

Wayne's first involvement with VHF was due to reading about a Washington D.C. flight during the fourth quarter of 2014. He was very moved by the article and sought out a friend who was involved with VHF. After learning more about the program and its cause, he decided he wanted to sponsor a flight in 2015. Wayne was not a vet (luck of the draw) so this was a way to repay all those who served.

Wayne's first flight as a guardian was in Mar'15; he was so impressed with the entire experience, that he flew twice more that year, as a squad leader. During the summer of 2015, Wayne attended a VHF Club meeting where Fran Into requested some help with the Finance function, which is Wayne's area of expertise. One thing led to another and Wayne joined the VHF Board of Directors and assumed Fran's role as VHF Treasurer by the end of 2015.

Early on in the process of trying to offer donor incentives, we came up with a tiered system from modest donations to donations large enough to support a 25/25 flight. For the latter we offer the organization the opportunity to name the flight and a seat on that flight as either a guardian or a VIP. We have had several of these named flights to date and it appears that most flights in the future will be named. We did not originally do anything similar with flightless missions but recently the Board decided that it would name each flightless mission for a deserving VHF volunteer, beginning in September 2017.

How Did They Get Involved: Gary Kadow

At a Villages Rotary Club meeting a guest speaker named Colonel Paul Farinea talked about his experience as a Guardian on Villages Honor Flight and the Veterans he traveled with to Washington, DC. Gary knew two of the Veterans that he spoke about because they were fellow Rotarian's, Gary also knew that they were pretty well off and lived in homes worth close to a million

or more with expensive cars in the driveways. The Colonel said that Villages Honor Flight needed money to help send these Veterans to see their monuments in Washington, DC and asked Rotary to help them out. Not knowing the true meaning behind Villages Honor Flight, Gary thought to himself, "I'm out there trying to raise money a hundred bucks at a time to feed and care for homeless Veterans in the Forest, and these poor guys in their mansions and driving their BMW's need money to go and see their monuments in DC?" He mumbled his thoughts to his friend Jim Dow, not knowing Jim was even in Villages Honor Flight and Jim straightened Gary out right away. It took a while but Gary finally got it. This whole Villages Honor Flight thing had nothing to do with a Veterans wealth or his stature in the community, but rather it was about Duty, Honor, and Sacrifice. Villages Honor Flight was the perfect way to say Thank You for risking their lives so that we could enjoy the liberty and freedom we have today. Seeing that Gary felt like a jerk, Jim invited Gary to a Villages Honor Flight Club meeting, and it was right then and there that Gary drank the Kool Aid and fell in love with Villages honor Flight and our Veterans.

Gary has flown as a guardian many times and has served as a Bus Captain several times. He is currently the VP of Admin and Development and an officer on the Board.

We continued to stick with our model of showing the community that we were for real and the \$ arrived as we anticipated. VHF's reputation as an organization that knows what it is doing was growing and our relationship with the local media was improving every day.

We had a total of 5 missions in 2014 including the first flightless mission.

M #	Date	Type	Size	Airline
12	27-Apr-2014	REG	50/50	SW
13	25-Jun-2014	REG	50/50	SW
14	04-Sep-2014	REG	25/25	SW
15	27-Sep-2014	FHF	15/15	VHFAir
16	05-Nov-2014	REG	25/25	SW

Year End Statistics for 2014

- # missions planned: 5
- # mission successfully executed: 5
- Total # of missions to date: 16
- # vets involved successfully: 165
- Total # of vets who have participated: 417

- # of vets waiting to fly: 251
- # of active vols (as measured by club membership): approx 200
- Guardian fee: \$400
- \$ Finances: VHF continued to take in more \$ than it spent and met both of its financial goals:
 - Spend less than 10% on admin
 - Have sufficient funds in the banks such that we could fly all vets on the waiting list even if donations dropped to zero overnight

2015

VHF still struggled with how to fly more vets but not have to contend with more missions. Flying more than once every two months created a lot of confusion with overlapping schedules. We developed a 35/35 model (Maryanne Parker's idea initially) which turned out to be a very good model:

- It effectively increased the virtual number of 25/25 flights to almost 6 by just adding one bus per mission
- 35/35 was not much larger than 25/25 so it felt OK (sense of intimacy and family)
- two buses turned out to be not very difficult to manage locally and in DC;
- 35/35 gave us lots of extra room on the buses for extra medical staff, VIPs, media, etc. and eliminated the cramped space in the back around the wheel chair lift area. The extra room made things much easier.
- The extra cost of the 2nd bus was not much considering what two buses gave us in terms of utility and flexibility.
- A small change with a big impact.

In October, VHF established another first, a flightless program conducted inside a FL State Prison. Another big success which might have led to one or more additional prison missions but that was not to be.

Management team meetings changed to 1/month. Board meetings continue at 4x per year.

John Driscoll who had been the marketing VP, Newsletter editor and several other things left the board in January. Barb Cooksey & Gary Kadow joined the board & Wayne Grunewald joined the board in Oct as CFO.

VHF has not one but two home comings for every mission. The first is at the airport. The MCO bagpiper leads the group from the arrival gate to the land side arrivals area where a hundred or so people are there to greet the vets including Miss Liberty who has a kind word and a hug for every vet. The second and larger Home Coming occurs when the bus arrives back at the American Legion at the end of a long day. The buses have been met by the Nomads Motorcycle group with an escort of 40 motorcycles for the last few miles. At the Legion are fire trucks (water cannon salutes), twirlers, clowns, bands, an honor guard, live entertainment and hundreds of well-wishers. It is quite the event involving a dozen local organizations.

VHF started working on a flight management training program such that people were formally trained for the several rungs of the flight management ladder and would logically progress up the ladder.

- Squad leader
- Bus captain
- MXO
- Flight Director

With the goal being that we have at least enough trained flight directors, MXOs, etc such that no one would end up having to take more than one mission per year if they did not care to do that. For most people in VHF there is a sweet spot re how much responsibility they want and how much time they are willing to put in. The flight management training program also provided excellent backup and succession panning potential. VHF became more concerned about adequate backups and succession plans.

VHF Club: The VHF Club was formed in the spring of 2012; its president was Cheryl Coutright for a few weeks and then Debbie Winters. It is a Villages social club and operates under rules set down by the Villages Recreation Department. The Rec Department has removed one of the rules, i.e., that only Villagers can attend. The club is open to anyone who wants to attend. The function of the club was to provide an opportunity for interested people to gather, learn about VHF, volunteer for activities, and do some socializing. The club has been very successful -- gaining about 50 members a year and providing virtually all the volunteers that make VHF work. The continuing stream of new people has sensitized VHF to the need to provide them with orientation and a general understanding of who we are, how we operate, what those funny words means, etc. This history will be part of that orientation.

VHF sent two representatives to the Annual Summit in 2015. Barb Cooksey and Liza Walters attended and did a presentation on our flightless program. They received a standing ovation

M #	Date	Type	Size	Airline
17	28-Feb-2015	FHF	15/15	VHFAir
18	25-Mar-2015	REG	35/35	SW
19	27-May-2015	REG	35/35	SW
20	10-Sep-2015	REG	35/35	SW
21	26-Sep-2015	FHF	15/15	VHFAir
22	16-Oct-2015	FHF	11/11	VHFAir
23	28-Oct-2015	REG	35/35	SW

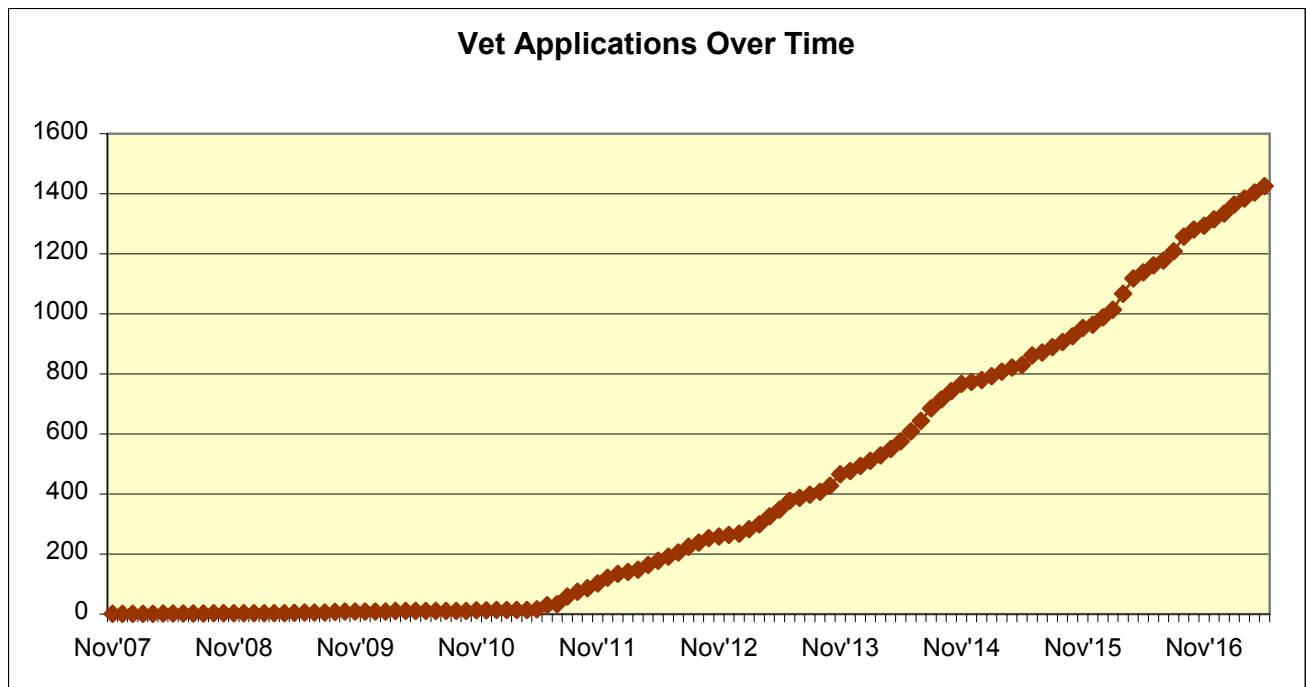
Year End Statistics for 2015

- # missions planned: 6 (4 35/35 and 2 flightless)
- # mission successfully executed: 7 (4 35/35 and 3 flightless)
- Total # of missions to date: 23
- # vets involved successfully: 181
- Total # of vets to date: 597
- Vets waiting to fly: 204
- # of active vols (as measured by club membership): approx 250
- Guardian fee: \$400 with experienced guardians \$375 & staff & squad leaders \$300
- VHF continued the trend of recent years and easily met both financial goals.

2016

Plans for 2016 were again four 35/35 missions and two 15/15 flightless missions. The concern about the growing size of the waiting list continued but no obvious solution was at hand. A dual capability model with two flight teams was considered, one team flying even months and the second flying odd months. It appeared to solve the problem of mission overlap but the lack of support across two teams was a big concern. We would have had to build essentially a duplicate mission support structure. Not impossible but a daunting task. The idea was tabled.

We agreed that a **goal** for the organization should be that the vet waiting list is never longer than a year. At the present plan of four 35/35s and two 15/15 missions per year, the gap would grow every year. Although the vet application rate had been amazingly consistent over time, it was slowly increasing:



Depending on the assumptions for the vet application rate, the # of vets on the waiting list which had been slowly increased into the low 300s, could easily climb to over 400.

We agreed to try 40/40 for the fall flights arguing that it was just a little bigger than 35/35 and would net us 20 more vets per year bringing the total vets per year closer to 200. 40/40 turned out to be about the same effort as 35/35 and has been continued. These small increments in mission size (25/25 to 35/35 to 40/40) were never intended to creep us to some new, ideal size, but they did have that effect and have allowed us to slowly

handle more people and solve smaller problems often rather than confront huge problems that might not be easy to solve.

In June, VHF mounted another first, a flightless program conducted entirely inside a local assisted living facility (Lexington Park). Again, very successful and could have led to many more events like this. However, VHF decided to be very careful here because for-profit centers had different goals in mind and it was not always “all about the vets”. We have turned down several requests to duplicate this type of mission, opting instead to find ways to get the vets from those assisted living centers to our regular flightless missions.

A new program within VHF was formed -- Missions At A Distance or MAAD under Gary Kadow to keep an eye on this type of activity, make recommendations and execute missions if warranted.

A second prison mission was scheduled for 2016 but never happened. Gary met with Prison officials in Tallahassee and it all seemed to line up nicely. But then there was a change in prison management and it all fell apart.

The Villages Homeowners Association identified VHF as one of the three outstanding organizations in 2015/2016.

Fort McCoy Flightless Mission

Fort McCoy, officially VFW Veterans Village, is a VFW Assisted Living home NE of Ocala. VHF had made contact with Fort McCoy in the past exploring various participation options including the regular mission to DC and some sort of flightless event. Transportation always seemed to be a problem.

Under the MAAD program a special flightless program was developed for Oct'16. Not all vets choose to participate but the 40 or so that did plus 4 widows of veterans had a great time as did the guardians and flight staff. In some ways, the Fort McCoy mission was one of the most successful – great relationships were formed; many of the guardians have returned to Fort McCoy to meet with their vet; some several times.

By late fall, VHF decided that it was time to get serious about charter flights as a way to get better control of the waiting list, potentially have fewer flights per year and save significant time during the flight day. A 70/70 model was proposed three times a year which, with the flightless program, would mean that we could accommodate 240 vets per year. This was very close to what we thought we needed. Initial planning began in late 2016 with a target date for the first charter being the fall of 2017. Much of the sorting out process had to deal with the local logistics of managing that many people through the preflight process, at send off and at home coming.

The winter workshops of 2016/2017 confirmed the charter model and actual planning started with a target date of Oct/Nov 2017, a mission size of 70/70 and flying with American Airlines (the preferred charter carrier for HF)

M #	Date	Type	Size	Airline
24	27-Feb-2016	FHF	15	VHFAir
25	30-Mar-2016	REG	35	SW
26	18-May-2016	REG	35	SW
27	23-Jun-2016	FHF	14	VHFAir
28	07-Sep-2016	REG	35	SW
29	24-Sep-2016	FHF	18	VHFAir
30	18-Oct-2016	FHF	40	VHFAir
31	02-Nov-2016	REG	40	SW

Year End Statistics for 2016

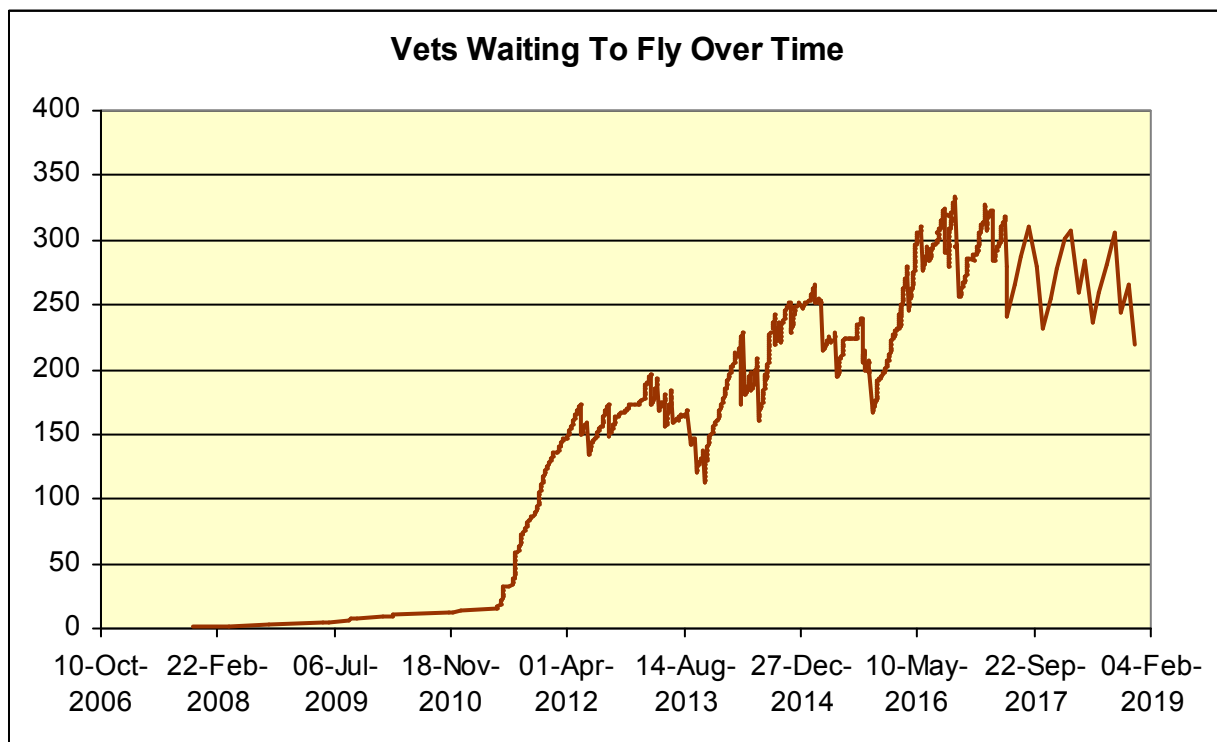
- # missions originally planned: 6 (4 35/35 and 2 flightless)
- # mission successfully executed: 8 (4 35/35 and 4 flightless)
- Total # of missions to date: 31
- # vets involved successfully: 232
- Total # of vets: 829
- # vets waiting to fly: 286
- # of active vols (as measured by club membership): 300+
- VHF continued the trend of recent years and easily met both financial goals:

2017

The plan for 2017 is three 40/40 missions, two 15/15 flightless missions and one 70/70 charter (last flight of the year).

So far the first two regular missions have been successfully completed as has one flightless mission. New Moss and flight directors were assigned to these regular missions and executed very well. MXOs and Flight Directors for the two fall flights will also be new. By year end, the goal of sufficient experienced flight directors, MXOs, etc., will have been realized.

Planning for the third 40/40 mission of the year and the 70/70 charter continues. If all goes according to plan, we will have flown over 1,000 vets by year end and reduced our vets waiting to fly to approx 225 (a significant reversal). Assuming success of the charter experiment, the new model will be two or three 70/70 charters per year plus flightless missions. Given the new model with the ability to fly 240 vets per year, we should have met our 1 year waiting to fly milestone by year end. Of course all of this is based on assumptions about vet application rates.



2017 is turning out to be a landmark year for VHF. Many changes are in the wind. The founder and president, Mark Erdrich indicated in February that he wished to resign as president due to inability to be in FL as much as the job required and some significant medical issues. No senior person in VHF stepped up and volunteered to take the job so

the board searched both inside and outside for likely candidates. Richard McClintock who had been involved with VHF for several years and most recently was the Photo/Video Team Leader was elected president by the VHF board and took over as president as of 01-May-2017. Mark will stay on as Chairman of the Board. Mark has also been the data meister for VHF since day 1; he will be transferring all data responsibilities to others and be clear of all such responsibilities by late fall 2017.

Big Data Project: Given the complexities of the current system in place, it makes more sense to build a new, on-line, in the clouds, database for mission critical data than to try and train people in what is already in place. That project, being headed up by Bill Hecht, is well underway and should be ready for full prototyping by the first flight in the fall.

Joe Hambright, VP of Operations had announced in 2016 that 2017 would be his last year as VP of Operations. He would effectively resign entirely from VHF at the end of 2017 (no permanent attachments) but would be available to anyone at any time for consultation and support. That plan has been modified slightly and Joe still plans to retire from any significant role but will still be a volunteer and might even be a guardian now and then. Joe was made a member of the Board when he assumed the role of VP of Operations. Joe will likely stay on the board to continue to provide experience and guidance.

Barb Hambright, also announced her “retirement” at the end of 2017 but more recently has decided to stay on (at least for a while) as the president of the club.

Jim Dow, who has served in many capacities in VHF since 2012 including flight director several times, as VP of Admin, Special Project Director and Vice Chairman, announced that 2017 would be his last year.

Gary Kadow, VP of Admin and Development, who initially indicated that 2017 would be his last year was able to rearrange other priorities and will remain with VHF at least until the end of 2018. Gary will be giving up his job as VP of A&D; Barb Cooksey will assume that role. Gary will be taking the vice chairman position when Jim Dow retires..

Robert Hempel was selected by the board as the replacement for Joe Hambright as VP of Operations. Rob will be taking over formally as of 01-Jul-2017. Rob is also the designated flight director for the first charter flight so he has a lot on his plate.

The last flight of 2017 will carry the 1,000th vet who has flown with VHF. This is a major accomplishment and at a time when many hubs have decided to close their doors. But it is just the beginning of the second wind for VHF. We intend to be here thanking our vets until the last hand shake with the last vet.

VHF has already established a significant presence in Central Florida and will continue to work its magic for years to come.

Credits and Future Editions

Many members of Villages Honor Flight contributed to this document. Special thanks to Mark Erdrich who did most of the original authoring and to Wayne Grunewald who spent many hours proofing. This document will be updated with relevant information at year end annually.