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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Legion volunteers make real difference in veterans' lives

Washington (May 18, 2010) - Practicing what they preach - helping to make a real difference in veterans' lives - members of The American Legion spent nearly one million hours volunteering at VA medical facilities in fiscal 2009.

The nation's largest veterans group is also one of America's largest volunteer organizations, its ranks populated by what VA Secretary Eric Shinseki recently described as "people who are regularly, habitually and deliberately kind."

Shinseki highlighted the critical importance of volunteerism when he addressed graduates May 15 at the University of Maryland-University College. Last month, Adm. Mike Mullen told the Council on Foundations that community non-profit groups are the answer to meeting veterans' needs, once they've left the federal system. Mullen is chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Lately, Secretary Shinseki and Admiral Mullen have been placing an exclamation point on what we've been doing for a long time - volunteering to help out veterans and their families," said Clarence Hill, national commander of The American Legion.

"Lobbying Congress on veterans issues is something we do extremely well, but The American Legion isn't centered on Capitol Hill. We're a huge grass-roots organization that does most of its good work at the local level.

"Everywhere you find a VA hospital or clinic, you're bound to find an American Legion post, too - and Legionnaires from that post spend a lot of their time visiting disabled and wounded veterans," Hill said.

About 6,300 members of The American Legion volunteered 916,598 hours of their time in FY 2009 to visit with veterans. Although that effort saved VA \$18.5 million, Shinseki said that monetary value was only part of equation when it came to veterans reaching out to other veterans.

"There are some things they do that we can't put a price on. What's the price of a 'thank you'? What's the going rate for dignity and respect for a combat veteran? Such values cannot be calculated," he said.

While The American Legion makes a strong contribution every year to VA's Voluntary Service Program and Suicide Prevention Program, its outreach to veterans in need doesn't stop there. The Legion also helps the Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together programs, which often provide quality housing for veterans and their families.

Barry Searle, director of The American Legion's veterans affairs and rehabilitation division, said the Legion's department in Wisconsin is working with Rebuilding Together to construct a new veterans' center in Milwaukee - this year's location for The American Legion National Convention in August.

"We do a lot of volunteer work for the VA, but we also like to get out there with our tool kits and build houses for our veterans community," Searle said. "We've got about two and a half million veterans in The American Legion, and a lot of them are exceptionally good at spreading their volunteer wealth around."

"We also give a lot of volunteer hours to the national Ride to Recovery program, which hosts a lot of bicycling events that help injured veterans with their recovery and rehabilitation," Searle said. "And we're deeply involved with the Heroes to Hometowns program that helps our veterans make their transition to the civilian world."

This fiscal year, The American Legion is pushing to go beyond the one-million mark in the number of volunteer hours its members contribute to VA facilities. To help in that effort, Legionnaires can join the volunteer programs sponsored by their local

posts, or register online at legion.org/volunteers.

The American Legion's new brochure, "[Veterans Serving Veterans](#)," http://legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/vets_serving_vets.pdf is also available online at the legion.org Web site.

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