



HOME OF THE FREE, BECAUSE OF THE BRAVE: SALUTE TO VETERANS OF THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

PR Communications, Inc Gordon C. James Public Relations and Phoenix VA Health Care System Veterans' Medical Leadership Council, Jan 1, 2010 - Silver Anvil Award

Summary: 2010 SILVER ANVIL AWARD WINNER - COMMUNITY RELATIONS - GOVERNMENT
As America faces unprecedented economic challenges and continues into its 9th year of war, the Department of Veterans Affairs reminds Americans that the price of freedom is paid by our 1.6 million active-duty military, 23 million Veterans and their families.

Along these lines the Phoenix VA Health Care System ensures our nation's heroes are not forgotten by spearheading a VA Veterans Day Parade community relations initiative. The theme for the event was "Home of the Free, Because of the Brave" which saluted Veterans of U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, also called the War on Terror..

Full Text: OVERVIEW

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Along these lines, the Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS) ensures our nation's heroes are not forgotten by spearheading a VA Veterans Day Parade community relations initiative. The theme for the event was "Home of the Free, Because of the Brave" which saluted Veterans of U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, also called the War on Terror.

RESEARCH

Formal and informal research included an analysis of previous years' events and public opinion revealing:

- o Awareness and understanding of the VA's overall mission and service provided was solid at 35% but in keeping with VA objectives, there needed to be more awareness of the medical center's role in supporting Veterans of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.
- Seventy-two percent of citizens were aware of the parade with nearly half saying they had heard about it in the news media.
- In 2008, there were 95 entries in the parade, attendance was 225,000 and about 5 million positive media impressions were generated.
- VA's Public Affairs Office and partner organizations would need to work strategically and purposefully to maintain and improve on success from prior years.

PLANNING

The parade team began by ensuring that parade objectives were strategically aligned with medical center and VA's national objectives to maintain a positive image among stakeholders and to focus on our nation's newest Veterans. The result was an alignment model outlined in a chart that demonstrates how public affairs and parade efforts tie directly to strategic objectives of every level of VA leadership.

Planning also included expanding the reach and scope of activities by sponsoring a series of

events, together with leaders of corporate, non-profit, government, and Veterans' organizations. Key stakeholders included VA employees and patients, the Phoenix community, Veterans and families, active-duty military and families, corporations, the news media and Veterans' organizations.

Objectives were to:

- With the parade, increase the favorable image of VA in the community from its 2008 level of 36%
- With the parade, increase the favorable image of Veterans from its 2008 level of 46%
- Through frequency of positive parade-related media coverage leading up to the event, increase or maintain the 95% favorable image of the community who believe the VA plays an important role in the community;
- Increase the positive impact of the opinion of employees from the 2008 level of 57%;
- Maintain or increase the sponsorship funding levels of VA and Veterans by \$300,000 or more.
- Extend media coverage and obtain increased visibility of the PVAHCS through pre-parade events and stories;
- Enhance the media platform on the web by creating the parades' first ever electronic media kit;
- Create a beautiful event to honor Veterans focusing on those from the Global War on Terror (Iraq and Afghanistan);
- And promote attendance at the parade to meet or exceed the 2008 level of 225,000.

EXECUTION

The expanded events, together with a more robust outreach program, included:

- A new logo and theme for the VA-sponsored parade with more than 100 entries, including helium balloons, marching bands and a military aircraft flyover;
- Organize the events through a timeline,
- A Grand Marshals display and opening in the VA lobby where 2,000 patients walk through each day. Several Veterans, including those fighting the Global War on Terror, were featured;
- Participation by winners of the VA's National Veterans Wheelchair Games;
- A state wide essay contest for school children;
- A day of patient visits by the Celebrity Grand Marshal
- A "Heroes One and All" luncheon for sponsors, Veterans, veteran service organizations, government officials and business leaders; with two videos one from the VA on supporting Veterans and the second a special Salute to Veterans from the War on Terror.
- A Parade Awards Banquet in which the top parade entries were recognized;
- VA Veterans Day Parade Committee member breakfast to review the events and capture suggestions for the next year.

Tools and tactics included media kits including news releases, public service announcements, events listings, etc; features in local magazines, inserts in city water bills, a parade program and extensive live coverage of the parade. The internal campaign for employees and patients included newsletters, lobby displays, email blasts and talking points for managers.

EVALUATION

The results of the PVAHCS 13th Annual Veterans Day Parade were solid, demonstrating that the team not only met but exceeded objectives:

- Thanks to the parade the favorable image of VA in the community increased from 36% to 40% a 4% increase.
- Thanks to the parade the impact of opinion on Veterans jumped from 46 to 62% a 16% increase;
- In the community 95% of those polled said VA plays a vital role;
- And the positive impact of the opinion of VA from employees due to the parade increased by a staggering 17% from 57% to 74%.
- Sponsorship funds remained steady at more than \$300,000, despite the continuing economic crisis; with U.S. Airways joining as a partner sponsor;

- Positive media coverage of parade and associated events remained strong with millions of positive impressions and more than 100 positive stories; inserts in city water bills generated another 436,000 positive impressions;
- And the parade's media platform on the web with the new electronic media kit jumped from 2077 visits in 2008 to 4271 a more than 200% increase with 3741 of those hits specifically marked to the electronic media kit.
- Parade entries increased from 95 to 108 and included an emphasis on Veterans who served in the Global War on Terror (Iraq and Afghanistan);
- Parade attendance remained strong at 225,000 attendees!

In its 13th year, the event was one of the premier Veterans Day parades in the nation. The parade and associated events touched millions and significantly heightened awareness of both the Phoenix VA Health Care System and our role in caring for our nation's Veterans.

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