



**Veterans Health
Administration**
VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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NEWS RELEASE

LOCAL VETERANS CHOSEN TO ATTEND UPCOMING NATIONAL VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL IN MAY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OMAHA, Neb. – Eleven local Veterans placed nationally in the recent 2023 National Veterans Creative Arts Competition, with six local Veterans placing first in their respective divisions.

Co-presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Legion Auxiliary, the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is the culmination of VA facility competitions in art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music for Veterans enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs national health care system. Veterans exhibit their artwork and original writings or perform musical, dance or dramatic selections in a live stage show performance.

This year, two separate competitions were conducted in the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System region. Local competitions were hosted by the Grand Island VA Medical Center and the Omaha VA Medical Center. Winners of the local competitions then went on to compete at the national level.

Veterans who placed at the National Veterans Create Arts Competition were:

Grand Island VA Medical Center:

- National 1st place: Armando Villareal, Watercolor, “Coffee Soldier”
- National 2nd place: Armando Villareal, Acrylic Painting, “The Rocks Road Home”
- National 2nd place: Ty Andrews, Monochromatic Drawing, “Where Are You?”
- National 3rd place: Anthony Garrelts, Glazed Ceramics, “Rabbit Sitting in Half Shell” (Nebraska Veterans Home Resident)
- National 3rd place: Marlin Seeman, Non-Rhyming Poetry-Military Experience, “Dear Mom”

Omaha VA Medical Center:

- National 1st place: Mike Nickel, Wood Building Kit, “1937 Pre-War Dread-28 Acoustic Guitar Kit: ‘Charley’”
- National 1st place: James Chamberlain, Creative Writing: Humor, “XII Office Coffee Commandments”
- National 1st place: Cynthia Douglas-Ybarra, Creative Writing: Personal Essay-General Topic, “Room 36”
- National 1st place: Robert Allan, Creative Writing: Personal Essay-Military Experience, “The Wall”
- National 1st place: Matt Jones, Music: Original Vocal – Military Experience, “Ghost in My Hometown”
- National 2nd place: Robert Allan, Creative Writing: Short, Short Story, “Costumes”

Veterans who placed first in their respective divisions have now been invited to attend the national festival hosted in Denver, Colorado, May 11-18, 2024.

VA medical facilities incorporate creative arts into their therapy programs to further the rehabilitation goals for both inpatients and outpatients. This annual competition recognizes the progress and recovery made through that therapy and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation’s Veterans.

For more information on the Veterans Creative Arts visit:
www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov

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Additional Information: The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival originated as two separate competitions. Muriel Barbour, then chief of recreation therapy at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va., created the visual arts competition, VET ARTS, in 1981, as an observance of the International Year of Disabled Persons. Shirley Jefferies, a recreation therapist at the Waco, Texas, VA Medical Center, initiated the performing arts competition, The National Music Competition for Veterans, in 1981. The premier live winners’ stage show was held in 1981 at the VA Medical Center in Tuskegee, Ala. The second show was staged in 1982 at the Coatesville, Pa., VA Medical Center.

In 1984, the live stage show was presented in Washington, D.C., and the music competition was renamed “The Music Festival.” The following year, the stage show took place in the historic Constitution Hall.

The Music Festival and VET ARTS merged and drama and dance divisions were added, to create the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in 1989. Designed to spotlight the four creative arts therapies of art, music, dance, and drama, this landmark Festival was performed to an audience of 4,000 in the Fox Theater in St. Louis, Mo. In 2005, a fifth creative arts division, creative writing, was added to the Festival roster.

The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival continues to evolve each year as it showcases the artistic achievements of Veterans from across the country in each of the five artistic divisions. Each Festival features an art exhibit showing the first-place artwork from 50 categories. A live stage show, complete with orchestral accompaniment generously provided by the Music Performance Fund, is performed by Veterans who have achieved medal-winning status in a variety of categories from the performing arts divisions of music, drama, and dance, as well as creative writing. Workshops are offered during the Festival week for participants and staff, educating them in a variety of artistic modalities by utilizing the talents of local community artists. There is no competition at the Festival itself, as it is a showcase for previously judged medal winners.

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Legion Auxiliary present the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival in a new city annually to raise the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation's Veterans. The program is also supported by many other organizations both locally and nationally.

For information on the 2024 Local Veterans Creative Art Competition, including registration forms, please visit:

Grand Island:

[Grand Island Veterans Affairs Local Veteran Creative Arts Competition | VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#)

Omaha:

[Omaha Veterans Creative Arts Competition | VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#)

Veterans interested in participating in the 2024 Local Veterans Creative Arts Competition must register at the location nearest their primary care provider (ex: Norfolk, Shenandoah veterans will register with Omaha; Holdrege, North Platte veterans will register with Grand Island).