

The  
**ARTS GRAM**  
NATIONAL VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL



Army Veteran **Jon Palks**  
2012 Shirley Jefferies Memorial  
Award Recipient  
Photo by Andrew White

# Living Festival Values: The Jon Palks Story

The Shirley Jefferies Memorial Award is presented each year to an individual who exemplifies dedication to the goals of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) and the therapeutic benefits of creative arts. It is bestowed upon the person who displays the core values of the Festival and strives to help Veterans by using creative arts therapy.

This year, we congratulate Jon Palks, recreation therapist at the Washington DC VA Medical Center.

Palks is the 20th recipient of the award since it began in 1994. VA staff are nominated by their peers and selected by Festival leadership.

In addition to serving in the U.S. Army, Palks earned bachelor's degrees from Luther College and Mankato State University. He is a certified therapeutic recreation specialist (CTRS) and has completed extensive graduate coursework at the University of Missouri.

He has touched hundreds of lives through his work around the country while working at VA medical facilities in Columbia, Mo.; Wichita, Kan.; Chicago, Ill.; Brooklyn, N.Y.; and Washington, D.C.

Palks began his career at the Washington DC VAMC as a Recreation Therapy Management Trainee. His career has come full circle as he currently serves there as the supervisory recreation therapist managing a staff of recreation therapists, a music therapist and support staff that provide clinical interventions and services to Veterans.

He brings therapeutic care to residents in the Community Living Center and inpatient units, and to Veterans enrolled in programs in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center, Severe Asthma Research Program, Trauma Service, Polytrauma Service and Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit.

Palks also serves as the Wellness Center coordinator where he schedules patients, encourages employee membership and balances the interests of all stakeholders.

Palks' work with the National Veterans Creative Arts Program began years ago when he entered Veterans into the annual competition in the visual and performing arts. He serves as a team leader at the NVCAF and is a role model to other Festival staff.

Palks has earned the admiration of Veterans, volunteers and staff. Betty Starr, NVCAF



volunteer, has worked with Palks for years, and asked to be assigned to his group because of her knowledge of Palks' fervor for the Festival and focus on the Veterans.

Mary Griffith, a volunteer from the American Legion Auxiliary, agrees.

"Jon is a man who does what needs to be done because it's good for Veterans. He's in it for the Veterans and not for the glory," she said. "He is a humble man deserving the recognition for all he has done, and continues to do, to make a positive difference in the lives of our nation's Veterans."

Elizabeth Mackey, NVCAF Director, has high praise for Palks. "Jon is a caring therapist who has been willing to go above and beyond to serve Veterans, not only at his VA medical facility, but also for the duration of the Festival. He does great work with Veterans and always goes the extra mile," she said. "Jon goes out of his way to involve Veterans from the Washington, D.C. and Maryland areas with creative arts opportunities beyond the Festival, such as organizing Veterans to work on their art at VA's Senior Management Conference in order to demonstrate to VA leaders how Veterans use the arts to overcome physical and mental health challenges."

Recently, Palks worked in coordination with NVCAF co-sponsor the American Legion Auxiliary in Maryland to exhibit artwork by Veterans and arrange performances at their local creative arts event.

They work together for a common goal: to raise awareness and to support the NVCAF. He arranges for professional artists to judge local Veteran art competitions. Becky Dunn and Rusty Beeg, both of the American Legion Ladies Auxiliary in Maryland, are two of Palks' biggest fans.

"Thank God we have Jon," Beeg said. "He helps recognize local Veterans since not all Veterans can come to the Festival."

"Jon epitomizes the vision for this Festival, which is to support Veterans using creative arts as therapy so healing can occur," Mackey said.

*By Pete Tillman*

*Public Affairs Officer*

*Durham VA Medical Center*



## The Shirley Jefferies Memorial Award

Shirley Jefferies was a talented and dedicated recreation therapist and former Chief of Recreation Therapy Service at the VA Central Iowa Health Care System. She served as adviser to the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival until August of 1994 when cancer took her life. Jefferies was a major influence in the establishment of the creative arts program and the drive behind much of its growth. She genuinely loved the arts and believed in its therapeutic value.

The Shirley Jefferies Memorial Award was first introduced in 1994. It is presented to an individual who demonstrates true dedication to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, its goals, and philosophy. By recognizing an individual that displays such dedication, we are able to pay tribute to Jefferies and carry on the therapeutic message she conveyed. Through this award, her amazing legacy lives.

### Past Recipients

- 1994 Don Ziska, former director, Knoxville, Iowa VAMC
- 1995 Jennifer Lewis, music therapist, Temple, Texas
- 1996 Leah Givler, former music therapist, Coatesville, Pennsylvania
- 1997 Linda Colletti, former visual arts assistant, San Diego, California
- 1998 Katharina Ryan, recreation therapist, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 1999 Bill Haworth, NVCAF music director, San Diego, California
- 2000 Elizabeth Nealy, recreation therapist, Houston, Texas
- 2001 Jessie Herndon, music therapist, Chicago, Illinois
- 2002 Jean Calhoun, music therapist, Tomah, Wisconsin
- 2003 Suzanne Anderson, music therapist, Knoxville, Iowa
- 2004 Paula Moran, recreation therapist, Prescott, Arizona
- 2005 Mia Leber, craft care specialist, Chicago, Illinois
- 2006 Maureen Harvey, art therapist, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- 2007 Gary Johnson, music therapist, Topeka, Kansas
- 2008 J. Sheppard Crumrine, music therapist, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- 2009 Donna Lonergan, recreation therapist, Denver, Colorado
- 2010 Barbara MacLean, music therapist, Albany, New York & Rachele Vishneowski, music therapist, Albany, New York
- 2011 Lora Allen, recreation therapist, Fresno, California
- 2012 Jon Palks, recreation therapist, Washington, D.C.

# Mission ReDefined



Congratulations on a great Festival! This week has been filled with your incredible displays of talent. From the artists' workshops to the art exhibit, and rehearsals to the final stage show, you have showcased your hard work and creativity.

For more than 20 years, Veterans have gathered at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival to recognize the therapeutic benefits of creative expression. In fact, this week, we heard firsthand from Dr. Terence Keane about how VA is on the cutting edge of treating PTSD with a variety of methods, including art and literature therapies.

By participating in the Festival, you show your dedication to health and wellness through the arts. But there are Veterans still searching for their mission. Many have suffered injuries, seen and unseen, and for them the road to their objective remains unclear. "Mission ReDefined," the motto of VA's Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events, is our guiding principle as we provide programs to help Veterans navigate a path to healthier lives.

With "Mission ReDefined," Veterans everywhere can find the tools and resources for continued wellness. You can start with our website, [www.va.gov/adaptivesports](http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports), where you can find information on the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival or any of our five other national events.

As we finish another great Festival, I challenge you to take the experience from this week and put it into place in your daily life. Through your art and creativity, continue to push your limits, achieve your personal best and inspire other Veterans to live their own "Mission ReDefined."

Thanks for being here and thank you for your Service.

Semper Fi,

Chris Nowak

Director

National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events

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