

Light. I know of no individuals more deserving of the honor than Fred Downs and Jim Mayer, each a remarkable success story.

Both men were profoundly injured in Vietnam. Mr. Downs lost his left arm; Mr. Mayer lost both legs below the knee. Both were scarred by shrapnel and multiple surgeries. Their stories could have ended there. Instead, they turned their lives and their work into encouragement and inspiration for other veterans and for all who know them.

Mr. Downs and Mr. Mayer have long volunteered to work with those who have suffered traumatic injury in service to their country. Their service began during the 1991 Gulf War. They heard news reports that Saddam Hussein had dispersed a million land mines to maim and kill coalition forces if they invaded Iraq. They strategized to figure how they could best help the wounded, utilizing their own experiences and recoveries and recalling when they most needed someone with whom to talk.

Mr. Downs and Mr. Mayer organized field trips, picnics and hosted backyard barbecues for the injured from the Gulf War. After the war was over, the team continued visiting service members injured in training accidents or deployments. They keep in touch with many of the patients they have met. Twenty-two of the 58 wounded soldiers Mr. Mayer met during the Gulf War showed up at his house for a July 4th barbecue in 1996 for a five-year reunion. He and Mr. Downs also attend the annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games and the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, where they meet with and counsel veterans.

As American troops began the build-up for Operation Iraqi Freedom, Mr. Downs and Mr. Mayer met with military surgeons at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. They shared their insights into traumatic injuries and talked to them about how they felt when they were injured. The pair also discussed how they thought the medical staff could help the wounded soldiers. They have continued to share their stories with servicemen and women who have similar injuries, who come to realize there is life after amputation. Since April 2003, the pair has visited more than 60 amputee soldiers at Walter Reed and the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, as volunteer amputee peer visitors.

The following article from VA's in-house magazine, *Vanguard*, discusses what these two gentlemen are doing to help the young men and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

#### MESSAGES OF HOPE

With their Kevlar body armor and rapid access to medical treatment, soldiers wounded in Operation Iraqi Freedom are surviving what were once fatal injuries. One day they're busting down doors in Baghdad and the next they're lying in a hospital bed with busted-up limbs.

"When you first see them, they're still confused and can't seem to comprehend the magnitude of what happened to them," explained Frederick Downs Jr., VA's chief of prosthetics, describing his visits to wounded troops at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., which has received almost 300 battlefield casualties from the war in Iraq.

Downs knows exactly what they're going through. As a 23-year-old lieutenant with the Army's 4th Infantry Division, he was nearly killed when he stepped on a "Bouncing Betty" land mine on Jan. 11, 1968, near Chu

Lai, Vietnam. He survived the blast, but lost his left arm above the elbow. Now, more than 30 years later, he shares his story with soldiers who have similar injuries. "I want them to understand there is life after amputation," Downs said.

#### A SIMPLE MOTIVE

Since April, Downs and Jim Mayer, director of Leadership VA, have visited more than 60 wounded soldiers at Walter Reed and National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., as volunteer amputee peer visitors. Their motive is simple, according to Mayer, who lost both legs to a land mine on April 25, 1969, while serving with the 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam. "If you've been through an amputation and you see others who are experiencing that trauma, you just want to help them in any way you can," he said.

Their efforts began during the 1991 Gulf War after hearing news reports that Saddam Hussein had dispersed a million land mines to maim and kill coalition forces if they invaded Iraq. "We were concerned there were going to be a lot of casualties and we wanted to do something to help," Mayer recalled. The question was, how could they best help the wounded?

Mayer found the answer when a friend asked if he could remember a particular turning point during his recovery at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. "I remember a former patient who came to visit us one day, it was just a chance encounter. He lost both arms and had these prosthetic hooks. I was mesmerized because I realized he had a life," he said.

The encounter provided hope for his own future, something he said severely wounded soldiers rarely have. "After a traumatic injury, you live hour to hour, day to day and you tend to block out the future. At first you put your hope on the shelf because hope is too far in the future."

And so it was that Mayer, Downs and about a dozen other Vietnam veterans, many who worked for VA, started visiting wounded soldiers and sharing their stories of overcoming traumatic injury. During the first Gulf War, Mayer estimated he volunteered about 800 hours at military hospitals. He organized field trips, picnics and hosted backyard barbecues. He also started bringing milkshakes on each visit, leading patients to nickname him "the milkshake man."

#### UNFORGETTABLE STORIES

The group dwindled after the war, but Mayer and Downs continued visiting servicemembers injured in training accidents or deployments. Some of the stories are hard to forget. There was the soldier injured on the train to Bosnia when electricity arced from a cable to his helmet and blew off his legs. There was the Ranger who broke his back when he fell out of the Black Hawk helicopter during the 1993 raid in Mogadishu. And there was the sailor who lost his legs when he got tangled in a rope trying to rescue a shipmate and was dragged through a porthole.

Mayer keeps in touch with many of the patients he's met over the years. Twenty-two of the 58 wounded soldiers he met during the first Gulf War showed up at his house for a July 4th barbecue in 1996 for their five-year reunion. He sees others at two of VA's National Rehabilitation Special Events—the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. Some even come to his April 25 "Alive Day" celebrations, an event he has held every year since 1970 to mark the day he almost died.

#### THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF INJURY

As American troops began the build-up for Operation Iraqi Freedom, Mayer and Downs,

along with their buddy Jack Farley, a Vietnam veteran and amputee who serves as a judge with the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, expanded their volunteer role by meeting with military surgeons at Walter Reed to share their insights into traumatic injury. "We talked about how we felt when we were injured and how we thought the medical staff could help the wounded soldiers," said Mayer.

Dr. Artie Shelton, a retired Army colonel who commanded a field hospital in Somalia and now works as a consultant in VA's transplant program, helped arrange the meeting. He said the Army physicians are extremely qualified and well trained, but they may not fully understand the emotional and psychological complexities of traumatic injury. "The doctors know the medical side, but Jim and Fred can tell them about the full impact and repercussion on these soldiers," Shelton said.

Among the aspects of recovery Downs stresses are encouraging the soldiers to do things on their own. "Never tell a guy he can't do something," he said. "You need to encourage him to try, to test himself and see what he can do. It speeds up their psychological healing and helps them get back into life again."

If they have doubts about what they can accomplish, Downs tells them about his own life after injury: going to school, getting married, starting a family, writing three books, and leading VA's multimillion-dollar prosthetic and sensory aids service.

He also has gained international recognition for helping establish land mine survivor programs in several countries. The U.S. Agency for International Development recently asked for his assistance with a land mine eradication program in Afghanistan. (To learn more about his recovery and land mine eradication efforts, visit the Center for Defense Information Web site at [www.cdi.org/adm/1250/Downs.html](http://www.cdi.org/adm/1250/Downs.html).)

Mayer and Downs volunteer because they've been there and because they care. But also because they want to bring a little dignity to American troops who suffer traumatic injuries.

"Vietnam vets, to put it politely, never actually felt welcomed home," said Mayer. "But these guys coming back from Iraq, we're going to welcome them home and become their friends, help them reconcile their injuries, and bring them a little dignity."

Mr. Speaker, the selflessness, compassion and humanity of Fred Downs and Jim Mayer—all the more profound considering their own experiences—have been important to the young men and women recently injured in service and frightened about what such traumatic change can mean in their lives and how they can overcome it. I know my colleagues join me in expressing our gratitude and respect for their good works.

#### PAYING TRIBUTE TO ROBERT HARTH

#### HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 10, 2004

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise to pay tribute to the memory and life of Robert Harth. Robert's gift and legacy to Colorado will be the Aspen Music Festival and School, which he deftly guided for twelve years as president and chief executive officer. His recent and all-too sudden death at

age forty-seven is a great loss to music lovers worldwide, but those who knew him will not forget the joy and zest he had for life.

Robert was a natural leader who brought success and renown to the organizations he directed. In his early twenties, he served as vice president and general manager for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. By the time he was thirty-three, he took over the AMFS as president, and switched it from a fledgling event to one of the premier cultural festivals in the country. Most recently, he served as artistic director for Carnegie Hall, adding a new venue for more progressive performances.

During his twelve years with AMFS, Robert quadrupled the size of its endowment. This allowed for his undertaking the building of the Harris Hall and the Benedict Music Hall. He also established the American Academy of Conductors at Aspen, which provides opportunities for up and coming conductors from around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Robert Harth's death is a great loss to the Aspen community and for music lovers worldwide. It is my honor to pay tribute before this body of Congress and this nation to the life and legacy of Robert Harth.

CONGRATULATIONS TO SARAH  
SWORDS ON RECEIVING THE  
MARY P. OENSLAGER SCHOLASTIC  
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**HON. RUSH D. HOLT**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 10, 2004*

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate one of this years Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D) Mary P. Oenslager Scholastic Achievement Award winners, Sarah Swords, who I am proud to say attended Princeton University in my district. The award is presented annually to college seniors who are blind and who have demonstrated leadership, scholarship, enterprise, and service to others.

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic is a non-profit organization based in Princeton, which has as its sole mission opening the pages of books to all people who cannot read standard print because of visual, perceptual or other physical disability.

Mr. Speaker, over the years RFB&D has worked hard to live up to the philosophy of its founder, Anne T. Macdonald, who believed strongly that "education is a right, not a privilege." Currently Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic has almost 240,000 titles available to its members worldwide. I commend Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic on the wonderful work they do, and I am so honored that they are located within my district.

Mr. Speaker, it is my great privilege today to congratulate Sarah Swords one of the 2003 Mary P. Oenslager Scholastic Achievement Award winners. Having lost her sight when she was in the sixth grade due to a serious illness, Sara was fortunate enough to join Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic.

With the audiotapes RFB&D provided to her, Sarah was finally able to enjoy reading for the first time. "At last, I could read all the books I had always wanted to read" she recalls. "All the classics, novels, poetry and even magazines. I ordered a plethora of lit-

erature and have kept right on reading countless books." Sarah entered Princeton University in 1999 after finishing first in her class at Stoneman Douglas High School. During her time at Princeton University, Sarah was a member of student government, served as vice president of Delta Delta Delta Sorority, volunteered at the University Crisis Ministry, and helped out at the Trenton Animal Shelter. Sarah also worked as an advocate and speaker for disability rights for the Nassau Club, Princeton Alumni Organization.

Mr. Speaker, Sarah is a wonderful person whose talents and leadership have blossomed despite her disability. She is a role model for others in her community and a gifted scholar. I am so glad that through the good work of Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic Sarah Swords will continue to be able to make significant contributions to our country and to the world. She is a wonderful example of why RFB&D motto, that "education is a right, not a privilege," is an essential truth.

Again Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Sarah Swords upon being selected as one of the 2003 Mary P. Oenslager Scholastic Achievement Award winners and I wish her the best in all that the future holds for her.

TAKING CARE OF OUR VETERANS

**HON. DAVE CAMP**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 10, 2004*

Mr. CAMP. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss a very important issue to me, and to the veterans in my district. As you may know, the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission recently issued its report to Secretary Principi. While the goal of the CARES Commission is to improve the health care services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to our veteran population, I do not believe this report takes into account the legitimate concerns expressed by veterans in my District.

Specifically, the CARES proposal calls for the closure of acute medical care beds at the Aleda E. Lutz Medical Center in Saginaw, Michigan. The loss of these beds would be detrimental to level of care provided in the region.

Veterans in the northern portion of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan currently have only one VA facility that is accessible to them for inpatient care, the Saginaw VA Hospital. For veterans traveling from the rural portions of Michigan, getting to Saginaw can already be a difficult task. If the proposal is put into place, veterans seeking immediate care will face an unnecessary strain of two hours worth of additional travel.

I certainly understand that the VA is undergoing a change and trying to better fit its facilities with veterans' needs. However, it must do so in a manner that does not establish new barriers for veterans seeking care. Every remedy we propose must ensure that veterans know exactly where to go when they need medical care. Simply put, the solution cannot be worse than the problem. The VA hospital system was established to provide veterans, who have made great sacrifices for this country, with direct access to the care they deserve. We must not back down from that promise.

Veterans have come to rely on the services they receive at the Saginaw hospital, and they should not have to give that up. They have given enough already for this country, and I am unwilling to ask them for more.

I want to be clear: improvements can be and need to be made. Alternatives such as contracting with local hospitals is a promising solution. I also believe we need to pass H.R. 2379, the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act, introduced by the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) and a bill I am a proud to co-sponsor.

This legislation directs the Secretary of VA to ensure at least five percent of the funds for Medical Care are used to improve access to medical services for highly rural or geographically remote veterans. It also allows VA approved veterans to enroll in a program that gives them access to routine health care from a local provider.

In closing, I would like to commend the administration for their dedication to working with this Congress to improve health care for our veterans. The reform of government and the services it provides is a thankless task, but one that is necessary for the well being of this nation.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO MAYOR  
WAYNE R. BROWN

**HON. SCOTT McINNIS**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 10, 2004*

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise to pay tribute to the life and memory of Marble, Colorado Mayor Wayne Brown who passed away recently at the age of seventy-six. Wayne was a true American patriot, and a beloved friend and colleague to many in his Colorado community. In his years spent in public service, Wayne embodied the ideals of integrity and courage that we, as Americans, have come to expect from our public servants. As his family and community mourn his passing, I believe it is appropriate to recognize the life of this exceptional man, and his many contributions to his community, state and country.

Mayor Brown lived an immensely rich and full life, always holding firm to his beliefs in serving his community and country. He worked for the Colorado Highway Department before he retired to Marble in 1983, where he served on the town board and later as mayor. His expertise in construction projects through his time spent with the Highway Department came to good use as mayor. Mayor Brown saw that the town had two needed bridges built across the Carbonate Creek and Crystal River, and most recently obtained the funding to pave the main road through town.

Mr. Brown's commitment to Marble extended to his involvement with numerous civic organizations. He was an active member of the Marble Community Church, the Association of State Highway and Transportation Organizations, the Colorado Mental Health Association, and the Elks Lodge.

Mr. Speaker, we are all at a great loss because of Mayor Brown's passing, but can be comforted in knowing he helped make Marble a better place for future generations. I would like to extend my heartfelt sorrow to his children, David, Daniel, Joseph, and Teresa; his