

*** About the Festival ***

Nationwide, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities use the creative arts as one form of rehabilitative treatment to help veterans recover from and cope with physical and emotional disabilities. Across the country each year, veterans treated at VA medical centers compete in a local creative arts contest. This competition includes 47 art categories that range from oil painting to leatherwork to paint-by-number kits. In addition, there are 119 categories pertaining to all aspects of music, dance, drama and creative writing. The creative writing division is a more recent addition to the competition and includes original works in poetry, essay, short story, and personal experience writing. A national selection committee chooses first, second and third place winners among all of the entries. Select winners are invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival each year.

This year, 2,849 veterans from 104 VA facilities entered the contest nationwide, with 130 of the medal-winning veterans earning an invitation to participate in the 2006 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. The Festival is being held this year in Rapid City, South Dakota, October 16–22, 2005, hosted by the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is a week of learning, exploring, fellowship and celebration of the healing power of the arts. Because the gold, silver or bronze medal winners are already selected to participate in the Festival, there is no competition at the event itself; rather, it serves as a showcase for the top national winners. During the week of the event, participants may attend classes in woodcarving, leatherwork, spherical creations, and craft art, all taught by local artists.

As part of the Festival, veterans will visit Mount Rushmore and Crazy Horse, the Journey Museum, the Black Hills Gold Factory, art galleries in Hill City, and the Ellsworth Air Force Base. Festival activities and opening and closing ceremonies will take place at the Ramkota Hotel in Rapid City.

The Festival event will culminate on Sunday, October 22, 2006, with an art exhibit, featuring all first-place art entries, from 12:30-1:45 p.m. in the lobby of Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Theatre in Rapid City, followed by a gala stage show performance at the Performing Arts Center at 2:00 p.m. The stage show is professionally directed with live orchestral accompaniment generously provided by the Music Performance Fund. Tickets are free and actively distributed to assure a full house for the veterans' performance.

The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is co-sponsored each year by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Help Hospitalized Veterans, and the American Legion Auxiliary.