



# The Communicator

The COMMUNICATOR is the official publication of the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO). Opinions expressed are those of contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of CACVSO officers, members, or the editorial staff. The newsletter reserves the right to edit, amend, or reject any contribution submitted for publication.

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## Executive Director Musings

The conference in Concord was one of the best we have had in recent years. The training was outstanding, especially the field trip to the Oakland VA Regional Office. Congrats to Nathan Johnson and his crew from Contra Costa County for a good well done!

Because of CVSO's stepping up and offering to hold conferences in the out years we have a schedule that is tentatively complete through 2022. Below is the proposed conference schedule:

2019	Napa County	Napa Marriott		
2020	Winter	Sacramento	Holiday Inn	23-23 Feb
	Summer	Del Norte County	Crescent City	22-26 June
2021	Fall	Nevada County		
	Winter	Sacramento	Holiday Inn	22-26 Feb
2022	Summer	Tuolumne County		
	Fall	Sonoma County		
	Winter	Sacramento		
	Summer	San Diego		
	Fall	Shasta County		

Please use this schedule for planning purposes. The final dates and hotels will be published as they are determined. So please don't ask for dates and hotels. They will come out in the Communicator or at the conferences. If anyone is interested in hosting a conference, please contact me for further information. I want to thank all who have stepped up to host a conference.

Thank you to all of the CVSO's who continually answer inquiries in our quest to better our funding source from the state. It is so important for all of us. Also please step up and volunteer for committees as they are the lifeblood of the Association. I especially encourage people to sign up for the NACVSO committee as this ultimately leads to the CVSO's and their staffs obtaining NACVSO accreditation and then on to five other cross-accreditations through the NACVSO.

See you in Napa.  
Tom Splitgerber, Executive Director

## This Month's Featured County

Tehama County lies midway between Sacramento and the Oregon border and offers the ultimate in healthful, leisurely living. It is a central point of widespread recreational areas which provide hiking, camping, horseback riding, bicycling, boating, hunting and fishing. The Sacramento River cuts through the central portion of the county and is one of the largest salmon spawning rivers in the world.



# NOT THE NORM

(Richard Garza,  
([cvso\\_emeritus@att.net](mailto:cvso_emeritus@att.net))

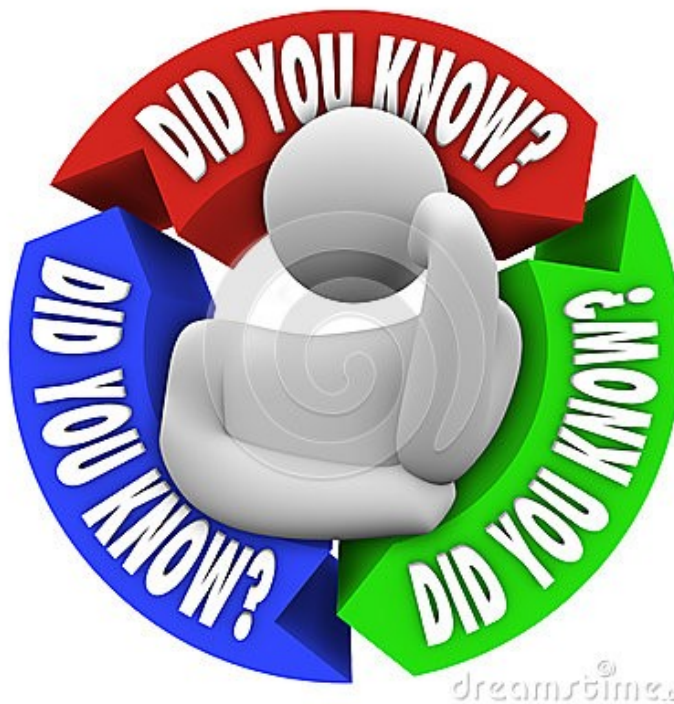
Sometimes we act on the information we know to be correct and stop there. In some cases, even though our knowledge is sufficient to accurately address most situations, there are exceptions that transcend basic rules.

*Q. A veteran, rated 100% P & T, states he wants to adopt a soon to graduate high school student (18) to help with college. He would then use his VA benefits to assist the student. What I'm asking, in general, adopting a kid for the purpose of participating, being able to use, VA benefits, is that illegal?*

A. Initially, I was focused on the basic definition of a child under 38 C.F.R. § 3.57(a)(1) "... Except as provided in paragraphs (a)(2)...the term child of the veteran means an unmarried person...legally adopted before the age of 18 years..." However, that's why I like to double check things, because paragraph (a)(2) goes on to say "...For the purposes of determining entitlement of benefits based on a **child's school attendance**, (emphasis added) the term child of the veteran also includes the following unmarried persons: (i) A person who was adopted by the veteran between the ages of 18 and 23 years. Even counting the days when I was an on campus VA rep, this is a situation that I don't believe I have ever encountered.

VA regulations rarely speak to intent. If the adoption is legal and the

adoptee meets the definition of a dependent, as stated in VA regulations, as far as I understand, intent is not an issue. In the context of VA's lack of concern with the reasons behind claims, rather than the regulations that govern them, I'd say that there is no bar to such an adoption. Personally, I might worry about a *quid pro quo* arrangement, but that would be something between the veteran and the adoptee and as far as I can tell, not under VA's purview.



(Don't know if State tuition and fee waiver was part of your question, but, just in case, the California Military and Veterans Code, Division 4, Article 4, Chapter 2, 890(b) states: "Dependent of a veteran" means the natural or adopted child of a veteran, or stepchild of a veteran as defined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for compensation purposes..." Unless there is something in the Education Code or CDVA program instructions that state otherwise, I would say the same provisions apply to the fee waiver program.

In my opinion, since there is no age limit for Part B, once eligibility is established, it continues just like that of any other eligible child.)

To take the question of "is this legal?", solely in the context of 38 C.F.R. reminds me of several instances I can recall where totally disabled veterans married their caretakers. In some cases it was a citizenship issue. In others it was expressly to establish DIC entitlement for the caretaker/spouse. In the former circumstance, there may be immigration laws that speak to getting married for the purpose of establishing legal immigration status. In DIC cases, as long as a marriage takes place at least a year prior to a veteran's death VA will recognize it as a valid for survivor's benefits purposes. But there is nothing, of which I am aware, in VA regulations, which speak to the reasons for a veteran's marriage. So long as there are no known bars to the marriage, there is no basis for VA to speculate why a veteran gets married.

*(Note: It was a fairly active winter for questions, but things have quieted down lately. My concern is that not everyone in every CVSO, who might have benefits questions is aware that I am available to try to answer them. Not all county veterans' reps/claims staff receive the Communicator. It contains items of interest to all VSO staff. If anyone in your office does not receive the Communicator directly, I recommend you forward it or print it out and distribute to them. Names, or offices, of those submitting questions are not shared with anyone. rg)*



*From Left to Right*

*Nathan Johnson, Contra Costa CVSO, Scott Holwell, King County CVSO, Michele Kwok, VARO Oakland Assistant Director, Wendy Torres, VARO Oakland Director, Chris Nolan, PMC Analyst, Zach Chase, PMC Coach*

I think you all will agree, Nathan really rolled out the red carpet and took conference to another level last week! I have received nothing but positive comments, ranging from the venue and training, to the great location, relative to shopping and dining, all the way to the hospitality suite and extra-curricular events! Speaking of extra-curricular events, I believe it would be appropriate to recognize the Vietnam Helicopters Museum and the Concord Vet Center with plaques, commemorating their tremendous support of CACVSO and veterans in general.

As always, thank you to each of you for your own contributions to our success – not only during last week's conference, but every day. Looking forward to Napa!

Gratefully,  
Scott

Scott Holwell  
President  
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# News Release

Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
www.va.gov

June 27, 2019

## VA-Verizon partnership offers unlimited access to department's video telehealth service

**WASHINGTON** — As a result of a partnership with Verizon, Veterans who are customers of the telecommunications company, as of June

27, will have unlimited access to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) [VA Video Connect](#) telehealth app.

Veterans will be able to access VA Video Connect, which uses the cameras on computers, smartphones or tablets, to let Veterans talk and interact with their VA care team over a live, encrypted video stream, anywhere across Verizon's nationwide 4G LTE network, without incurring data charges.

"VA's telehealth app for streaming live video sessions between patients and health care providers is another testament to our shared journey

to fully integrated, seamless access to health care for our Veterans, no matter where they live," VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said.

Accessing VA Video Connect is easy: For iOS devices, [VA Video Connect](#) is available at the Apple App Store; for all other devices, a

telehealth session launches automatically after a Veteran user selects an emailed session.

"We're proud to deepen our support of Veterans," said Mike Maiorana, senior vice president, Public Sector, Verizon.

"Regardless of whether they live in city centers or rural areas, Veterans should be able to access the VA's telehealth resources."



July 29, 2019

## VA achieves critical milestone in its Electronic Health Record

## Modernization Program

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently transferred the health records of 23.5 million Veterans to a Cerner Corp. data center, setting the stage for the records to be processed this summer in support of VA's and Department of Defense's (DoD) common electronic health record solution.

This initial data migration phase of [VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization \(EHRM\)](#), which began in late spring, is an important

milestone reflecting the decision to replace Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) with the Cerner Millennium EHR solution that powers DoD's Military Health System (MHS GENESIS).

"For decades, VA and DoD have been struggling to achieve interoperability and seamlessly share patient records between our health systems

— placing an unfair burden on our Veterans and their families," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "No Veteran, family member or caregiver

should have to carry boxes of paper, medical and service records around. This data migration is the first step to solving that problem for good."

To date, over 78 billion records have been compiled from all VA medical centers, accounting for 50 terabytes (equivalent to about 850,000

hours of music) of data storage across 21 clinical areas of patient health records, which includes lab results; pharmacy prescriptions; inpatient and outpatient diagnoses and procedures; and other medical data of both living and deceased Veterans.

New data will move into the Cerner system automatically from VistA in near real time, and then make its way to the Cerner Millennium

EHR, which will provide shared access with VA, DoD and community care providers. As future phases are completed, service members' medical

records from their years of active duty will reside in one comprehensive EHR.

This modernization effort moves VA one step closer toward achieving an interoperable EHR system that will improve military career

transitions and drive better clinical outcomes.

For more information about VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization, visit <https://www.ehrm.va.gov/>.

# The Association Man

## Name and County unknown

**Communication** – that’s the key. The more effectively we do it, the more successful we are. Even this fine electronic missive extols the concept. The Communicator – the title alone reminds us that we must all be communicators, much as we are all A-Man.

had it pounded into me as a kid. The purpose of communicating is to communicate – to convey something, a thought, a purpose, a need. So at its most basic, the Coast Guardie is adequately communicating the presence of a plane flying overhead when he points and says, “Oooh, shiny.”

But the grunt is more effective when she points and says, “Wow, that’s an F-18E Super Hornet. With those two F414-GE-400 turbofan engines she can hit Mach 2 without breaking a sweat!”

One of the many things I love about our organization is reading, hearing and watching the many expressions of concepts, emotions and complex processes.

At every conference I inch closer to understanding the rules of the VBA, the services of VHA and the passion of those people who have devoted their professional and often personal lives helping veterans and their families.

But more, at every conference I learn tons about different ways to communicate. I stand (sit, actually) in awe at the impassioned, gripping insights from Virginia Wimmer. I applaud Marion Moses’ humor and subtle insights, and cock my head while I work through the tortured syntax coming out of the mind of Pat Jolly.

There are some consistencies. Nearly every single one of us begins sentences with “I’ve got a vet with a problem”. You know, I’ve found that works as a great opener when I call the VA on my Bat Phone™. (We superheroes often share resources, you know.)

But I don’t always think before I call. I admit that sometimes when I call for help I start off cocky, an easy trap for one with such a mighty title, chiseled jaw and powerful physique. (OK, one out of three ain’t bad.)

Sometimes I get rushed and forget to take the time to be gentle and humble, as required in the superheroes credo.

And sometimes I’m just mighty mad and crash right in, righteous indignation blazing.

Yeah, I’m still communicating. Badly.

But when I remember all you’ve taught me over these many years, and settle down and communicate who I’m trying to help, why I need the help, and take the time to say “can you please help me”, I usually succeed.

Y’all are great at communicative multi-tasking. While you ride words bareback with the skill and ease of a rodeo star, you simultaneously convey passion, hope and courage. Some of you do it quietly, some slowly, some with great animation, but every one of you glows like a campfire in the dark when you talk about your vets.

The bottom line? Every time we gather, every time we talk on the phone, every time we correspond, we get more tools to help us do the most gratifying job on this planet.

And that, my dear friends, is an easy concept to communicate.



# C-123 Airplanes and Agent Orange Residue

Fairchild C-123K Provider  
U.S. Air Force



Some Air Force Reservists who were crew members on C-123 Provider aircraft, formerly used to spray Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, have raised health concerns about exposure to residual amounts of herbicides on plane surfaces.

Responding to these concerns, VA asked the Health and Medicine Division (HMD) (formally known as the Institute of Medicine) of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to study possible exposure and increase in adverse health effects in C-123 crew members.

HMD's scientific report on C-123 contaminated aircraft  
HMD released its report, [Post-Vietnam Dioxin Exposure in Agent Orange-Contaminated C-123 Aircraft](#), Jan. 9, 2015.  
According to the report, from 1972 to 1982,

approximately 1,500 to 2,100 Air Force Reserve personnel trained and worked on C-123 aircraft that previously had been used to spray herbicides, including Agent Orange, in Vietnam. Those aircraft were used for military airlift, medical transport, and cargo transport operations in the United States and internationally.

HMD found that Reservists who served as flight crew (pilot, navigator, flight engineer, and loadmaster), ground maintenance crew, and aero-medical personnel had regular contact with the aircraft, and would have experienced some exposure to chemicals from herbicide residue. The report determined that it is possible that this exposure contributed to some adverse health effects.

How Reservists may have been exposed:

TCDD, the toxic substance in Agent Orange, may be inhaled as an aerosol or ingested by contaminated food or water or from hand-to-mouth transfer.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Air Force used C-123 aircraft to spray Agent Orange to clear jungles that provided enemy cover in Vietnam. At the end of the spraying campaign in 1971, the remaining C-123 planes were reassigned to reserve units in the U.S. for routine cargo and medical evacuation missions spanning the next 10 years.

Compensation benefits for health problems

Based on the HMD report, VA has decided to acknowledge exposure to Agent Orange for personnel whose military service involved regular contact with the contaminated C-123 aircraft. This includes individuals who performed service in the Air Force or Air Force Reserve who regularly operated, maintained, or served onboard C-123 aircraft known to have been used to spray herbicides during the Vietnam era.

The following individuals may qualify for benefits related to Agent Orange exposure:

- Active duty personnel who served in a regular USAF unit location where a contaminated C-123 was assigned who had regular contact with the aircraft through flight, ground, or medical duties between 1969 and 1986, and who developed an Agent Orange related disability.
- Reservists who were assigned to flight, ground, or medical crew duties at the following locations between 1969 and 1986, and who developed an Agent Orange related disability.
- Lockbourne/Rickenbacker Air Force Base in Ohio (906th and 907th Tactical Air Groups or 355th and 356th Tactical Airlift Squadron)
- Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts (731st Tactical Air Squadron and 74th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron)
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, International Airport (758th Airlift Squadron)

## Legislative Advocate's article

By Seth Reeb, Legislative Advocate

**LEGISLATION**

As was discussed at the Concord training conference, the Association sought input from the counties regarding the 2020 subvention increase campaign. The information asked for was:

If given the additional funding what are your most pressing needs to improve services to veterans? This could be expressed as outreach to specific underrepresented vets (prison, women, homeless, LGBTQ, students, etc.) and/or increasing the number of county staff.

Has outreach been successful to a degree that it has adversely impacted wait times in your office?

What metrics would you suggest to demonstrate success, effective use of money?

This information will be used to create a one-page talking points document that you can use when meeting with your local State Senators and Assembly members this fall, when these legislators are back in the districts for the Interim Recess (September 14 to January 6).

Kudos to the 24 counties that responded. There was a lot of great information and ideas submitted and we may be contacting some of you for more information. We will be putting together the one-pager (or two) in the coming weeks. Here is a rough summary of your responses (in no particular order). Some of the questions below are ours. If we have misinterpreted any of your comments, please let us know at:

Seth Reeb [sethreeb@comcast.net](mailto:sethreeb@comcast.net)

Dana Nichol [dana.nichol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dana.nichol@sbcglobal.net)

**Outreach:** Increased outreach efforts (without commensurate investments in additional staff) may actually exacerbate office wait times, degrade customer flow, and increase errors. Client satisfaction could also suffer, which

leads to reduced inflow of veterans once the word gets out. Increased wait times and multi-week backlogs create unequitable access to claims assistance for housebound disabled veterans, those in hospice care, homeless vets, and student vets. Outreach alone may not be the end-all, be-all solution. Also, some counties have found that after pursuing an aggressive and successful outreach program for a while, word of mouth referrals from positive experiences continued to drive veterans to the CVSOs to seek their benefits.

Need to reach out to the underserved demographic:

Ageing Vietnam era vets:

Presumptive conditions from Agent Orange exposure.

Congressional changes which expand eligibility for benefits, such as Agent Orange benefits for Bluewater sailors.

Veterans over 70 experiencing hearing loss from military activity and in need of very expensive hearing aids.

Veterans in assisted living facilities who may be eligible for Aid and Attendance.

Military bases that regularly discharge service members.

Community Colleges, CSUs, and the UCs.

Jails, Veterans Treatment Courts, and prisons.

*Continued on Page 6*



Elder care facilities, hospices, skilled nursing homes, assisted living, and retirement communities.

Ways to conduct this outreach are through presentations, claims assistance and case management for elder vets who can't come to the CVSO offices.

Another benefit of CVSOs outreaching to seniors is that it ensures these veterans won't fall prey to illegal and semi-legal marketing practices of companies that try to sell veterans assistance, services, and products, while assisting them with their VA claims.

Homeless veterans on the street, homeless assistance centers, other public agencies that deal with the homeless, etc.

Tribes

Women veterans

VA hospitals and VA clinics.

VA Vet Centers

Satellite offices

**Subvention allocation:** A proposal was to include a percentage based on vet population, perhaps 60% pro-rata for WLUs and 40% pro-rata for vet population. Vet population is derived from census data and is very important. Can the CVSOs be involved in assisting the Census effort? Can CVSOs get federal money to be involved in the Census effort?

The 60-40 split would create a dollar value for each veteran.

**Utilization Rate:** Utilization rate analysis may not be entirely effective when speaking about the total number of veterans residing in a county or the state. A 100% utilization rate may not be pos-

sible in much the same way that a zero-unemployment rate is not possible. Some veterans may have previously established benefits at discharge or from other places, veterans are always entering (discharging) or leaving (dying) the popula-

tion, or entering or leaving the state or county. If a 100% utilization rate is not possible, then what is the goal we should be shooting for (national rate, Texas, etc.)? California's Cal Fresh food stamp program has a 50% utilization rate and this is after throwing buckets of funding and outreach all over the place for decades. We are going to need to explain our utilization rates to the Legislature. Should a 50% CVSO utilization rate be seen as an abject failure or a stupendous success? Obviously, it would be a great success, but how do we explain that?

**Staffing/satellite offices:** State funding levels have been stagnating for 10 years. This has forced many offices to be reactive in facilitating claims. If they leave the office to conduct outreach, they fall behind in processing claims. New staff can't be hired and trained without a steady funding stream.

Outreach would be enhanced by staffing satellite offices in far flung communities, military bases, VA facilities, etc. Having CVSOs and VSRs travel to various sites to do claims on-site is good, but requires the procurement of tools that will aid in outreach such as laptops, tablets, Wi-Fi access, and the VetPro online claims assistance system.

Outreach to the homeless and other underserved groups may require training to facilitate cultural competency.

*Continued on Page 7*



**Vet Pro, reporting, etc.:**

Track outreach events.

Track assistance to incarcerated vets and vet courts.

Veterans profile to include membership in underserved sub-group.

What are the legal guidelines for collecting this information?

A report should be able to be run at any time and for any time frame to identify outreach to underserved groups.

Ask public and private agencies that CVSOs have partnered with to complete a survey/evaluation which will serve as feedback and also document the effort.

Ask the veteran that is assisted to also complete a survey.

Incarcerated vets and Vet Courts.

Was the vet helped as a result of an alternative funding source, such as Prop 63 MHSA?

Was the vet helped as a result of a collaboration of partnership with the police, housing agency, Veterans Connect @ the Library Program, etc.?

**Military bases:** Targeting veterans at military bases is beneficial because:

It's where the future vets are at. Big bang for the buck.

Enables some claims to be filed prior to discharge.

Enables CVSO to discuss issues with service members that they would have been hesitant to talk about in the middle of their military service; such as Military Sexual Trauma, LGBT, mental



health, etc.

Will help the soon to be veteran from missing critical VA deadlines to file for certain benefits.

**Leveraging other funding**

**sources:** Making use of other funding sources shows the Legislature that CVSOs are thinking outside the box and leveraging all other possible funding sources. This helps to justify an increase in state funding. An example is the Prop 63, the Mental Health Services Act.

**State funding vs county funding:** Make it clear that the counties provide the majority of funding.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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1926

# Humorous Perspective

By Jessica Allmon

Yay, I'm back, or for those that know me, great, she's back LOL. I appreciate all of your understanding in my dereliction of duty when it comes to the communicator. I am striving for better.

I missed you all at the spring conference, and unsurprisingly heard it was a huge success. Well done Nate and his Contra Costa crew and all those throughout the association that stepped-up!!

These last months for me have been full of lessons of not letting outside influences demoralize me. So you are not all left in the dark, I have a brain tumor; a meningioma to be precise. I have been scared, poked, prodded, scanned, counseled, and biopsied these last months. It is slow growing, but now I have to have regular scans as this particular type of tumor likes friends. All in all as brain tumors go, it's not bad, I have named her Stella. My husband says I am too smart and have just decided to grow a second brain. He also likes to blame Stella when I do something that irritates him LOL. You may think I'm crazy, and I probably am, but finding some humor with this news has been one of my best coping mechanisms.

So now I am working on finding my new "norm" with Stella in tow. I know that we all have a "Stella" that wears us down, and my hope is that I can share some tools to stay motivated. I have scoured the internet (well because we know it's all true) and have narrowed down some of the most practical tools. I have left out some of the more impractical tools, because let's face it; we all could use a month long vacation somewhere tropical.

## **Look for your own strengths**

I have had to really think about my strengths. I have felt totally consumed by my weaknesses and my body's betrayal, which has clouded my perspective on the things that are actually good. Communication – could use some work; humor – rocking it; focus – comes and goes; planning – amazing when people do what I say; spelling – terrible, thank goodness for spell check. I really am all over the map when it comes to strong and weak attributes, as I think we all are, and I'm ok with that.

## **Repeat to your inner self positive information.**

**For example: "I can", "I am able to", "this is possible"**

I always default to my favorite quote from Dory, Finding Nemo "Just keep swimming, just keep swimming." Yep you all totally heard it in Ellen's voice didn't you? I love that little fish!! The point is to just keep going, at any pace. Slow moving is still moving.

## **Keep in touch with people who motivate you and avoid the ones who are negative nellys**

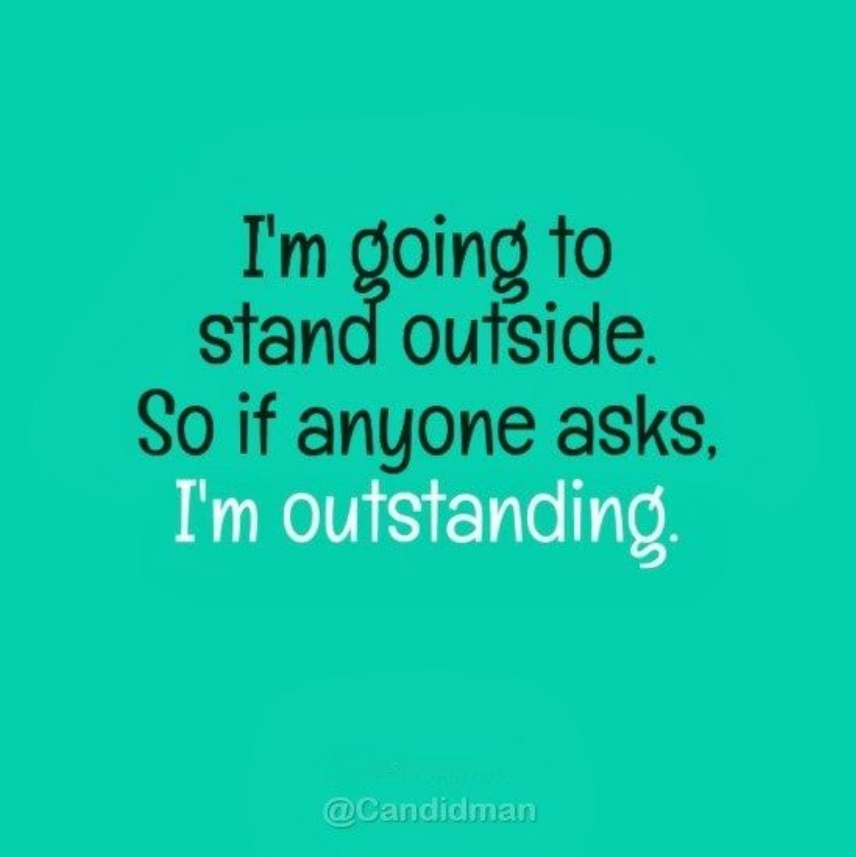
I am an isolator by nature. I prefer to deal in silence (shocking I know) but when things are really tough, I tend to recoil into myself. Reaching out has been difficult, but I have found comfort in my family and friends that are positive and can joke and laugh with me about things that are happening. Thank you Terry.

## **If necessary, look for an expert to talk to who can help you understand your virtues**

We all have virtues, the key is to know them, and nurture them.

Foster your own motivation in play and work and sometimes false motivation is still motivation. Seek actions that inspire you and you will inspire those around you.

I can't wait to see you all in Napa this fall!!



I'm going to  
stand outside.  
So if anyone asks,  
I'm outstanding.

@Candidman



# Upcoming Events

## **2019 Fall Conference**

**Napa, CA**

**Monday, October 28, 2019– Friday, November 1, 2019**

## **2020 Winter Conference**

**Sacramento**

**Monday, February 24—Friday February 28, 2020**

## **2020 Summer Conference**

**Crescent City, CA**

**Monday, June 22, 2020—Friday, June 26, 2020**

<https://thelighthouseinn Crescent City.com/>

<https://www.fly Crescent City.com/>

# DATES OF INTEREST

## August 2019

- 2 International Beer Day
- 4 US Coast Guard Birthday
- 5 Work Like a Dog Day
- 10 Bowling Day
- 13 Lefthanders Day
- 16 National Airborne Day
- 19 Aviation Day
- 24 Waffle Day
- 27 Just Because Day



## Awareness Weeks

- 1-8 International Assistance Dog Week
- 12-17 National Body Piercing Week
- 28-31 Scripps National Spelling Bee

## Monthly Observances

- Back to School Month
- Breastfeeding Month
- Immunization Awareness Month

