

VETERANS DAY, 1999

A Report from the Homefront

BY CHERYL BIRCH

It was a remarkable day. The Veterans Day celebration on the West Los Angeles campus of the VA Medical Center—which serves the greatest concentration of veterans in the United States—was fun, exciting, and sometimes profoundly moving. An incredible mix of people attended the festivities, ranging from a 100-year-old veteran who served in WWI, to the Gold Star Wives, a group of women who lost their husbands during WWII.

Once again, at the request of *Compassion in Action*, the crew from *Star Trek: Voyager* came out in support of the vets. They delighted an enthusiastic crowd by visiting with patients and signing autographs.

Dannion entertained the crowd with a wonderful keynote address which was both humorous and poignant and filled with reminiscences of his time in the service. At the end of his talk, VA CEO Philip Thomas presented Dannion with a plaque for *Compassion in Action* which read: "Since May of 1997, *Compassion in Action* has provided comfort and companionship to terminally ill patients in their last hours

at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. Their kindness and loving companionship to dying veterans cannot be measured, nor should there be any attempt to do so. Their commitment not to let anyone die alone is a tribute to the thousands of veterans and their families served by this organization. There is no more fitting tribute to American veterans and the principles they stand for than to be with them in their hour of need."

After the program, Dannion was joined by film star Steven Seagal, a member of *Compassion in Action's* Advisory Board. The two of them continued on to visit terminally ill veterans who were unable to attend the festivities.

The day ended in a very special way. Representatives of six districts of the American Legion came out to the VA Medical Center to present Dannion and our volunteers with commendations expressing their gratitude for our service to dying vets. All the volunteers present were greatly moved. We who volunteer to do this work don't do it for the recognition. Nonetheless, learning that our efforts are appreciated was a very sweet and unexpected gift. ■



CIA's Administrative Conference

BY DOVE RULE

It takes more than a good heart to make *Compassion in Action* work. In order to have volunteers at the bedside in cities around the country, it takes hard core administrative support, both on the local and the national level.

On November 12, 1999, 32 people from 14 major cities converged on the West Coast Long Beach Hotel in Long Beach, California, for *Compassion in Action's* first Administrative Conference. The accommodations were lovely, the weather was perfect, and the view of the bay and the Queen Mary was nothing short of spectacular.

For 20 intense hours, these dedicated individuals gathered information, networked, problem-solved, and ate truly incredible chocolate chip cookies.

Friday evening began with an inspirational message from Chairman Dannion Brinkley, followed by a warm welcome from President Ronnie Kaye. Both stressed that *Compassion in Action* is an idea whose time has come. As the weekend continued, participants were walked through the Start-up Manual, given an update on insurance issues, fundraising and grants, press and publicity, and much more.

People exchanged ideas on the best ways to administratively support a training and to convert the enthusiasm of newly-trained volunteers into service hours at the bedside. The importance of logging volunteer hours was stressed as the critical information needed to succeed with fund-raising efforts and grant applications. Everyone got a chance to explore the newly renovated CIA website, log volunteer hours on line, and print up chapter mailing labels. Tom Bay, a gifted motivational speaker, wrapped up the conference with a talk on the importance of maintaining balance in life in order to be effective as a volunteer. The weekend concluded with a field trip to the CIA national office.



Cheryl Birch and Greg McMillan give an overview of grant proposal requirements.



Marti Coblenz explores the CIA website.