

February 27, 2020

The latest on our new initiatives

Outreach to veterans is a priority for NLS and network libraries

First Lt. David Szumowski had been in Vietnam only 40 days when his tank took a direct hit from a rocket-propelled grenade. The fragmentation wounds left him totally blind.

Szumowski was still recovering from his wounds when he was introduced to NLS. In the hospital, “I started reading a lot—it was a way to kill time,” he recalls. One of the first NLS books he read was a time-killer for sure: Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, which—in 1969—was available on a set of 43 16-rpm records.

Szumowski went on to get a law degree. After working for a time as a benefits counselor for the VA, he became a prosecutor in the San Diego District Attorney’s office and later a Superior Court judge—a position he held for 18 years until he retired in 2016.

In the five decades since he lost his sight, Szumowski (shown at right with his guide dog, Speedwell) has read thousands of books, many of them from NLS. He’s also told his own story in a memoir titled *Reach for More: A Journey from Loss to Love and Fulfillment*, which will be added to the NLS collection later this year.



NLS “provides an opportunity to learn things I’d like to learn and travel to places through reading that I’d otherwise never get to see,” he says. “It’s also been a tremendous source of pleasure for me.”

By law, veterans like Szumowski—whether or not their blindness or disability is service-related—receive priority service from NLS. In the past few years we’ve stepped up our outreach to veterans. Again this year, NLS will send representatives to the Disabled American Veterans, Blinded Veterans Association and American Legion national conferences. We’re telling Szumowski’s story in an upcoming blog post for the Department of Veterans Affairs. And each month we meet with veterans who are starting congressional fellowships under the auspices of the Wounded Warrior Project.

This year’s national conference in Lincoln, Nebraska, will have two events focused on veterans. A presentation on Partnering with Veterans Services is scheduled for the general session on Tuesday, May 19. And on Wednesday, May 20, one of the morning training sessions will highlight ways that network libraries can work with the Library of Congress’s Veterans History Project to conduct outreach in their communities.

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A few reminders:

Network libraries should **complete the four FY2019 annual surveys** by March 6. See [OA 20-15 \(February 14, 2020\)](#) for details.

Registration is underway for the **national conference!** Submit the [2020 Conference Registration](#) online form no later than April 15. See [OA 20-13 \(February 10, 2020\)](#) for information on hotel reservations and more.

The **2020 Census** takes place this spring. For resources and tips on how you can help make sure our patrons are counted, see [OA 20-08 \(January 29, 2020\)](#).

Watch for the next issue of *On the Move* in your inbox on March 26!