

## **SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION CONTINUE TO SUPPORT VETERANS ASSISTANCE DOGS OF TEXAS**

**On January 7, 2015 Rick Trzcinski, who is the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA & R) Chairmen of the Sons of the American Legion (SAL) detachment of Texas, presented two checks totaling \$3,774 to the Veterans Assistance Dogs of Texas (VADogs) at a meeting of the board of directors of the VADogs. Mr. Trzcinski is also a member of the Board of Directors of VADogs.**



According to Trzcinski, the checks represent the continued dedication of the SAL to support VADogs in their effort to rescue dogs, train the dogs to be service dogs for disabled Texas veterans, and then present the dogs to the veterans at no charge. VADogs has recently purchased 5 acres of land in East Kerrville for the purpose of establishing a permanent training facility which will allow the organization to train at least 14 dogs per year for presentation to disabled veterans. Trzcinski, at the presentation of the checks, asked that the funds be directed toward the building fund of VADogs for the establishment of the training facility. The funds were from two (2) separate funds sources from the SAL- \$250 was from the local SAL organization annual Christmas donation to local charities where the SAL donates \$2,000 to eight (8) different Kerrville charities, VA Dogs being one of those charities. The balance of \$3524.00 was raised by the SAL specifically for the benefit of VADogs via a raffle of a hunting rifle this past Veterans day . VADogs is very grateful for the continued dedication of support from the SAL members and organization.

VADogs, which is a 501 (c) 3 organization with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), has as its mission to provided service dogs to qualified disabled veterans which fall into one or more of the following categories of disability:

1. Physical disability
2. Traumatic brain injury disability
3. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
4. Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Once VADogs rescues a dog and it clears veterinarian examinations, it can take from 8 months to perhaps 14 months to train the dogs before training of the dog/veteran team can begin. The length of training depends on whether the training must deal with one or more of the above listed categories. The least time of train applies to dogs for veterans with PTSD or MST alone. The dog/veteran team training is critical because the pair must grow very emotionally close so that the dog can sense changes in emotional state of the veteran.

MST is a relatively new category and is not well known. Quoting various U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (VA) documents and various medical doctors who work with veterans suffering from MST, the category is described as an experience, not a diagnosis or mental health condition, as with other forms of trauma. Most just learning of MST, think that it has to do with rape. Quite the contrary, MST can be associated with rape, but more often it is associated with sexual harassment or “repeated unsolicited verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which is threatening in nature”. It is important to note that it is not limited to female veterans. One VA document states that although their statistics are limited only to those veterans who have chosen to seek health care at a VA facility, but that their data reveal that about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 100 men responded “yes” when questioned whether they had experienced MST. One must consider how many are suffering from MST and did NOT respond with a yes answer and the significant number never asked the question and not under the care of the VA. Fortunately, for VADogs and the disabled veterans, the training for a service dog is the same for PTSD or MST.

**Another motivation for VADogs in their mission goals is that they believe that each veteran that can receive a dog from them will less likely become part of the VA statistic that continues to show that 22 veterans per day are committing suicide. VADogs seeks the financial help of citizens, organizations and foundations to help them accomplish the completion of their permanent service dog training facility here in Kerrville, Texas. VADogs is doing business as a part of the corporation Kerrville Elks Charities, Inc. which was formed here in Kerrville at the Kerrville Elks Lodge #2081. Any gifts or donation to VADogs can be deducted from income taxes because of the corporation's IRS 501 (c) 3 rating.**

**In the photo on the left is Rick Trzcinski, Chairman of VA & R of the SAL presenting the check to VADOGS Vice-President Kirk Storey (also Past State President of the Texas Elks State Association).**