

Robert Hilliard

2020 DISABLED VETERAN OF THE YEAR
Lifetime Member DAV Chapter 27

Rank, Service

E-3/Seaman ~ Navy

Veteran of:

Persian Gulf Era ♦ 1985 ~ 1986



Rob is an excellent example of making a “come back” in life. After contracting autoimmune disease of the skin; severe atopic dermatitis, as a result of exposure to environmental toxins, and also developing glaucoma in both eyes, which is secondary to the autoimmune skin disease and a byproduct of medication to treat the disease, Rob went through a great series of therapy and treatment, lasting over the course of 33 years and still ongoing. He suffered 5 traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), several of which occurred during his BUDS training in the Navy. His disabilities are many, ranging from lower leg atrophy and neuropathy from a spinal cord injury, to Concussion Syndrome from multiple TBIs, cataracts in both eyes, detached retina, loss of peripheral vision, urticarial (additional skin disease), scarring, and ongoing skin infections – all secondary symptoms to autoimmune skin disease.

Rob suffered in many ways, including intense, constant pain. Over time his cognitive skills, such as speech, memory and walking, slipped in 2011, and his hands trembled. In 2012 he began Aqua Therapy at Tomah’s VA facility and, with a lot of willpower and 3 classes, back to back, he regained his ability to walk and speak more easily and to reduce and manage his pain. Rob went on to be an instructor for the program.

Victoria Brahm, wrote, “I am so honored to be able to work with this veteran in my role as Director of the Tomah VA...” “As a result of his own fortitude and strength he worked to overcome his disabilities and regain his athleticism. His positivity is contagious as Rob has been a major influencer to motivate veterans to participate in adaptive sports programming. I can’t say enough about how deserving Rob is of this award and how much he has meant to the Tomah VA and the veterans we serve.”

Achievements include:

- Aqua Blue Foundation President – Programs to save the coral reefs and rain forest ecosystem in South and Central America
- Ombudsman – Tomah VA
- VISN 12 VEC Board
- Voluntary Service Board and Executive Board
- Initiated LZ Vector Golf Therapy incentive at Tomah’s veteran golf course
- DAV Chapter 27 Commander, SR Vice Commander, BPTL and LVAP rep.
- DAV Dept. of WI District Vice Commander and Commander
- DAV Dept. of WI Deputy Legislative Director, Deputy Benefits Protection Team Leader
- DAV Dept. of WI 1st Jr. Vice Commander
- DAV National Commander’s Aide de Camp for Wisconsin – 2018
- WI Senator Tammy Baldwin’s Military Academy Selection Committee
- WI Congressman Ron Kind’s Military Advisory Board
- LVAP hours – more than 2,000 hours

CONGRATULATIONS ROB ~ THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!