Building Trust
VA makes changes to better meet veterans’ needs

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Veterans have long turned to art or music therapy as a way to heal from trauma. The act of creating something new can often help a former service member better understand an old set of emotions. Some not only benefit psychologically from the work; they discover, or rediscover, an unexpected talent.

Since 1981, the Department of Veterans Affairs has given its artistically able veterans enrolled in a VA program a chance to display their work at exhibits. The program has evolved and expanded into today’s National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, held in October in Durham, N.C.

For a chance to participate in the festival, more than 3,300 veterans from across the country entered art, music, drama, dance and creative writing competitions earlier this year. The festival showcased the work of 130 medal winners.

“This annual competition recognizes the progress and recovery made through that (creative) therapy, and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation’s veterans after disease, disability or life crisis,” the VA said on its website.

During the festival, the attending artists also had the opportunity to participate in workshops with local artists.

“I believe art in any form relieves stress, keeps minds active and has the ability to put a person, who might otherwise be solitary, around people with a common interest,” Air Force veteran Jessica Herrera told the VA’s Inside Veterans Health blog.

Her painting, Trading In My Heels for Combat Boots: My Tribute to Women in the Military, was showcased in this year’s event.

Take a look at the incredible talent of America’s veterans.
ARTS

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AMERICAN TAPESTRY
Original design in fiber arts
Mark Lubich
U.S. Army
Olympia, Wash.

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ORPHAN’S OPUS 68
Graphics
James Fallon
U.S. Army
Hoboken, N.J.

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RIDING WITH PRIDE FOR ALL THOSE WHO SERVED
Model building
Michael Fisher
U.S. Navy
Cincinnati

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
INSIDE OUT
Color photography
Ted Master
U.S. Army
Henrico, Va.

COLORS
Woodworking
James McClain
U.S. Army
Wichita Falls, Texas
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THE PALO DURO SHEATH
Leather stamping
Robert Crain
U.S. Army
Granbury, Texas

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SENSUALITY
Metalwork
Stephen Feher
U.S. Air Force
Albuquerque

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CHICKADEE TWO
Carving
Steve Kostiw
U.S. Air Force
Phoenix

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HONORING OUR HISTORY
Combined kit
Daila Cox
U.S. Army
Dunedin, Fla.
“I believe art in any form relieves stress, keeps minds active and has the ability to put a person, who might otherwise be solitary, around people with a common interest.”

— Jessica Herrera,
Air Force veteran