



# News Release

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*For Immediate Release*

**Air National Guardsmen and Women, Who Just Returned from Service in Iraq will assist former ABC 20/20 Co-anchor Hugh Downs and Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient Fred Ferguson in Decorating the Peace Dove Float for the 2003 VA Medical Center's Veterans Day Parade**

Twenty Air National Guardsmen and women, who just returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom, will help to create a symbol of peace as they assist former ABC 20/20 co-anchor Hugh Downs and Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient Fred Ferguson in decorating the "Peace Dove" float for the 2003 Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center's Veterans Day Parade. **The decorating will begin at 6 a.m. on Monday, October 27<sup>th</sup> in front of the VA's Ambulatory Care Center on Third Street and Indian School Road.** The float-decorating event is expected to last about four hours. The Guardsmen and women will serve as Veterans Grand Marshals while Downs will serve as the Celebrity Grand Marshal and Ferguson will serve as Congressional Medal of Honor Grand Marshal for the 2003 VAMC Veterans Day Parade.

"I am so honored to be amongst these veterans and to help honor all veterans by serving as this year's Celebrity Grand Marshal," said Downs. "There are service men and women who are still in Iraq and other areas around the globe protecting our freedom with a tremendous job to be done. They are doing it very well and we hope to honor them with this float in the VA's Veterans Day Parade," he added.

As Celebrity Grand Marshal, Downs will ride down Central Avenue on Veterans Day in a specially decorated HUUMV from the Arizona Army National Guard. Prior to the parade he

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*The Carl T. Hayden Veterans Affairs Medical Center has been serving veterans in Maricopa County since 1951. We are a level one tertiary care facility that offers a variety of services to more than 50,000 veterans. We currently have 150 inpatient beds for medical and surgical patients, 110 beds for nursing home patients and 48 inpatient beds for mental health patients. We are actively involved in training new medical and surgical residents to become certified physicians and are committed to medical research to help find cures for illness and disease. We are honored to serve our veterans.*

## Parade Marshals Decorating Float

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will visit with staff and patients at the VA to help instill enthusiasm for the event, which is designed to help educate citizens about the special honor, and recognition veterans so richly deserve. Downs is a World War II veteran who served in the Army.

The Air National Guardsmen and women will serve as the Veterans Grand Marshals for the parade. As such they will march with the “Peace Dove” float and will help carry the state’s largest flag, the Heroes Flag in the event.

“Our returning guardsmen and women are honored to be here to help participate in the parade,” said Captain Paul Aguirre, military liaison for the parade committee. “They know that there are many others still serving and we want to be able to help honor them through this event,” he added.

“Everything we are as a country, or ever hope to be we owe to our veterans,” said Congressional Medal of Honor Grand Marshal Fred Ferguson. “I am honored to help with the parade that truly helps to bring recognition to all our veterans,” he added. Ferguson was awarded his medal for the heroic act of saving of five men during the Vietnam War. He is a highly decorated pilot and one of the state’s three living Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. He will also ride in the parade on November 11<sup>th</sup>.

The VA Medical Center’s Veterans Day Parade started in 1997 as a small event that has blossomed into the largest Veterans Day Parade in the state. In this year’s parade there will be 100 entries consisting of floats, bands, color guards (units carrying the American flag), veterans groups, novelty units and a 40-foot helium balloon that will depict Uncle Sam.

The parade is held on Veterans Day (November 11<sup>th</sup>) and begins at 11a.m., which coincides with the signing of the Armistice that took place on November 11<sup>th</sup> at 11 a.m. in 1918 officially ending World War I. The parade runs southbound on Central Avenue from Indian School to McDowell Road.

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***(Media please note: the front of VA’s Ambulatory Care Center offers excellent opportunities for live shots.)***