

Foley Veteran Wins National VA Arts Gold Medal

Poet, photographer, and Veterans Service Dog Advocate wins VA national creative arts festival, gold, and silver

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- Lon Hodge came to South Alabama to teach a Course in Service Dog rules, regulations and access for police, fire and hospitality leaders in Orange Beach in 2022.

He had been friends online For seven years with the woman he just married in September of last year. They met in real life at the conference and the rest was history.

Lon, anxious to integrate into the community and the region, entered the Veterans creative arts festival for the South Alabama region. The event was held in Biloxi last year. Hi, just received Ribbon in photography and creative writing.



Foley veteran Lon Hodge with Service Dog Mae

Across the country each year, Veterans enrolled at hundreds of VA health care facilities compete in a local creative arts competition. The competition includes categories in the visual arts division

that range from oil painting to leatherwork to paint-by-number kits. In addition, there are categories in writing as well as the performing arts of dance, drama, and music. Local creative arts competition top winning entries advance to a national judging process and first, second and third place entries are determined at the national level. First place winning Veterans are invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival hosted by a

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Poetry, painting, photography and other forms of art, our powerful healing tools for veterans.”

Lon Hodge

different VA facility each year.

This year's event is in Denver and Hodge will travel there, May 13-18, as the only first place winner this year from the south Alabama region.

Hodge, after a long career of teaching psychology worldwide, went back to school for a master of fine arts in creative writing. "The Arts are so important for healing. Especially with vets like me who struggle with mobility issues and PTSD."

Hodge, who teaches classes in photography in Orange Beach now hopes to add creative writing to a list of offerings and especially those that explore self discovery through Art.

Hodge still travels the country, giving free seminars to universities, civic groups, hospitality organizations, K-12 schools and law enforcement agencies how about the value of service dogs and the laws responsibility surrounding them. He founded a group over a decade ago that, while during his travels, supports acts of kindness for homeless, veterans, and veterans families in need. He, his Pharmacy Service Dog Gander, and his current Service Dog, Mae, have traveled to 46 states in total.

Juan, first place for the poem about his father who died from injuries during the Vietnam war and the second place medal for a poem about his last Service Dog who passed away in 2020.

Lon's Photography is currently on display at the Coastal Arts Center in Orange Beach. He hopes to soon have a second book of [poetry](#) out and a collection of photography from the South Alabama area within the next few months.

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