



The Alabama Veteran

“Proudly Serving America’s Finest”

VOL. 3 - ED. 4

FALL 2008

IMPORTANT DATES

- January 1 - New Year’s Day
- January 9 - SBVA Meeting
- January 19 - Martin Luther King Day
- January 20 - Presidential Inauguration Day
- February 16 - Presidents Day

INSIDE THIS EDITION

Commissioner’s Corner	2
Around the State	3
ADVA Feature Article	6
News to Use	8
VA National Update	11

Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs is deeded property to site of state’s fourth veterans home

November 13, 2008, will go down in the record books as an important date for the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. That’s the day the ADVA became the new owner of 27 acres in Pell City that will become the site of the state’s fourth veterans home.

The St. Clair County Economic Development Council deeded the property to the ADVA at a deed signing ceremony held at the Jefferson Community College in Pell City. The site is adjacent to the college and near the location where a new St. Vincent Hospital, and possibly a Jefferson State Community College nursing school, will be built in the near future.

“It’s a city within a city, and it’s going to bring economic value to the area,” said Ken Rollins, chairman of the State Board of Veterans Affairs Veterans Home Committee.

Clyde Marsh, ADVA’s commissioner, and members of the State Board of Veterans Affairs accepted the property deed on behalf of all Alabama veterans.

“This is a great day for Alabama Veterans,” said Marsh. This is a good deed and the epitome of caring for those who sacrificed so much for our nation. I salute the St. Clair County Commission, Pell City and the Economic Development Council on behalf of the 420,000 veterans in our great state.”



Tommy Bowers, chairman of the St. Clair-Blount Economic Development Council (seated right), deeds the site of the state’s fourth veterans home to the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. Commissioner Clyde Marsh (seated left) and State Board of Veterans Affairs members (standing left to right) Ken Rollins, Bill Wyatt and Wayne Dial take part in the deed signing ceremony.

Ed Gardner, Jr., executive director for the St. Clair County Economic Development Council said the veterans home, hospital and other projects planned for the area will move St. Clair County forward by providing services that will increase the quality of life for all its citizens. “The St. Clair County Commission and the City of Pell City worked hard to make this a success. Without their cooperation and forward-thinking, we would not be where we are today,” said Gardner.

The construction of the 280-bed veterans home should begin in 2010 with the allocation of the approved federal funding.



Pell City Mayor Bill Hereford (left) and St. Clair County Commission Chair Stan Batemon congratulate ADVA Commissioner Clyde Marsh (right) .



Commissioner's Corner - W. Clyde Marsh

"The ADVA will continue to function by providing quality assistance and services to veterans, widows and orphans even with the economic downturn."

system either did not pay the beneficiaries, or if paid, the federal government recouped the payments from their personal accounts. This is most unfortunate and heartbreaking as many of those who deserved the payments are no longer living to reclaim their spouse's VA benefits.

The good news is that the federal VA is moving aggressively to resolve this problem. Retroactive payments to beneficiaries are expected by the end of December. Survivors who believe they were denied benefits during the month of a veteran's death should either call the Survivors' Call Center at 1-800-749-8387, or the state VA claims office at 1-334-242-5077.

General Eric Shinseki nominated as U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs

President-elect Obama has tapped this distinguished retired general officer and former service chief to take the helm of Veterans Affairs. As a Navy commander, I had the privilege of interfacing with the general's staff in the preparation and execution phases of the Iraqi Campaign in 2003.

General Shinseki is a proven leader of courage and conviction. As a seasoned veteran on the battlefield and on Capitol Hill, I know that under his leadership veterans benefits will be maintained and even improved in quantity and quality.

I look forward to working with his team during the next administration.

Proration

In December, Governor Bob Riley declared proration of the Education Trust Fund (ETF) appropriations for the 2008-2009 Fiscal Year at 15.5% of the original and supplemental appropriations.

However, pursuant to the Rainy Day Constitutional Amendment, withdrawal of 1.5% from the ETF Rainy Day Account will be used to reduce proration of appropriations from the ETF to 9%.

The state proration will reduce the ADVA's ETF budget by \$2 million, which the department will reflect in a revised budget following the adjusted appropriations.

Deficit Reduction

Governor Riley has also implemented a Deficit Prevention Plan, which will go into effect in

Fiscal Year 2009.

The goal of this plan is to reduce expenditures from the state general fund by 10%. The Deficit Prevention Plan includes: a hiring freeze on state workers; discontinuing the purchase of new state vehicles; a limit to equipment purchases and professional service contracts; and the curtailing of non-essential travel by state employees.

Agencies are also expected to institute a freeze on annual merit pay raises beginning January 1, 2009 through December 31, 2009.

These budget cost saving measures effects all state agencies. However, the ADVA will continue to function by providing quality assistance and services to veterans, widows and orphans even with the economic downturn.

ADVA Priorities

The FY 2009 ADVA priorities will include: the completion of the design and construction documents for the new state veterans home; securing approval from the State Board of Veterans Affairs and legislative support for creating a state law that will allow the construction and operation of a state veterans cemetery; administrative changes in state law that will allow a veteran receiving care at a state veterans home to pay their daily cost of care directly to the healthcare provider instead of to the ADVA; and improving the G.I. Dependents' Scholarship by adding two additional semesters of benefits to eligible dependents or spouses of deceased or disabled veterans.

Advocate Challenge

My charge to the ADVA is to continue to provide the best possible assistance to our deserving veterans and their respective family members.

I challenge our leadership, veterans service officers and supporting staff to provide information and service with compassion and conviction—providing that service as we would do for our own family, and in the same vain as if we were on the receiving end of the service.

Abraham Lincoln described it best when he said, "a country that does not honor its heroes will not long endure."

We must remember that the sole existence and purpose of the ADVA is to help Alabama Veterans.

With the new year, the ADVA is committed to that purpose as we continue with our mission and journey on behalf of our nation's heroes and veterans.

Greetings and Salutation

to all veterans, supporters and employees. As the current year draws to a close, I am reminded of how fortunate we are to be the leader of the free world.

We are blessed as a nation to have men and women of great courage and conviction, who for generations, have stood vigil and stepped into the breach of battle to keep us free.

Even during this economic downturn, we still have blessings to count as a result of our nation's fighting spirit and the sacrifices made by our military and veterans.

In this newsletter, I will highlight some changes with a constant bearing and decreasing range—meaning the changes are on the horizon and will become effective in due course.

Survivors Benefits

Over the past 12 years, survivors of veterans have been wrongly denied benefits that were due to them during the month of a veteran's death.

A federal law passed in 1996 allowed for widows and widowers to receive their spouse's VA benefits for the last month of the veteran's death. However, an antiquated VA payment

Around the State

Veterans in Wiregrass Region shop for benefits

Alabama veterans had an opportunity to “shop” for benefits and services at the annual “Supermarket of Benefits” (SVB) Fair held Nov. 7, at the Wallace Community College in Dothan, Ala.

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) hosted the SVB Fair as part of a statewide outreach campaign to help veterans and their families obtain information on state and federal VA benefits and services.

The state VA department partnered with Wallace Community College, the city of Dothan and Houston County for the “one-stop-shop” opportunity for current and former members of the Armed Forces.

Army and Vietnam veteran Jessie Griffith said he was able to receive new information on VA benefits by attending the fair.

“I learned that a wife of a veteran can get care, and as a veteran, I can get paid to go to school,” said Griffith.

State and Federal VA officials and other nonprofit service organizations were on hand to



Henry County's Veterans Service Officer Steven Lewis assist a veteran during the 2008 Supermarket of Veterans Benefits.

provide veterans with information on VA programs, health care benefits, job opportunities, claims, counseling, and a multitude of other services. Medical VA professionals provided veterans with free health screenings throughout the day.

“The Supermarket of Veterans Benefits is an opportunity for veterans to come to one central location to gain important information about the entitlements and to receive services they have rightly earned,” said Clyde Marsh, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. “Holding this event in Dothan and partnering with Wallace Community College and Houston County provides a great venue to serve a large veterans population in the Wiregrass Region.”

The Benjamin House in Dothan and Tuskegee VA Medical Center also provided special services to some 50 homeless veterans during the SVB.

The ADVA will hold the 2009 SVB Fair in Mobile.

Houston County Veterans Service Office moves to new location

In Houston County, the demand for veterans' services has steadily increased over the past seven years since 9/11. With the growing population of veterans in the Wiregrass Region, the county's veterans service office was in need of a more efficient office to accommodate the increasing number of veterans in the area.



The Houston County Veterans Service Office is now located at 1685 Ross Clark Circle in Dothan.

In early November, the Houston County Veterans Service Office relocated to the Houston County Farm Center.

Sean Law, Houston County's Veterans Service Officer, said it was a necessary move to the new location.

“More veterans live in Houston County per capita than any other county in the state,” said Law. According to 2007 statistics, 13,453 of the county's 88,000 residents are veterans.

Law said the new location provides the state VA employees with more office space to better serve veterans. Law added that the improved parking is also a plus.

Governor Riley remembers and honors veterans

Governor Bob Riley signed a proclamation honoring America's veterans and visited the fifth grade class at Montgomery's MacMillan International Academy with an Alabama National Guard Soldier to focus attention on remembering and thanking veterans.

“I hope everyone will thank the men and women of our military for safeguarding our Country and for preserving our freedom,” said Governor Riley. “We continue to live in freedom because of the contributions and sacrifices made by those who serve.”

Alabama Army National Guard Lt. Col. Leah Compton, who served with the 231st Military Police Battalion in Iraq, spoke to the students about her experiences in the war.



Gov. Bob Riley and Lt. Col. Leah Compton speak with fifth graders at MacMillan International Academy in Montgomery about the importance of thanking America's veterans for their service.

Around the State

Alabama National Fair Salutes America's Veterans

The 2008 Alabama National Fair had the traditional sites, sounds and thrills that only a fair can provide. But this year, the public experienced something different - a special tribute to America's veterans.

Patriotism and a lot of red, white and blue provided the backdrop as veterans were honored at the opening day of the Alabama National Fair on Oct. 3.

The national fair's "Salute to America's Veterans" included a special tribute to World War II veterans who traveled to Washington D.C. the next day as part of the Prattville and Central Alabama's Honor Flight program. The Patriot Guard Riders escorted the veterans from America's "Greatest Generation" to the fair where they received a heroes welcome from military and state officials upon their arrival to the Montgomery's Garrett Coliseum.

The Army's 98th "Silver Wings" Band from Fort Rucker provided patriotic music and members of the Marine Corps League Iwo Jima Reenactment Group recreated the raising of the American Flag atop Mount Suribachi at the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II.

"The Woodlawn Warblers" from Woodlawn Baptist Church in Birmingham paid tribute to all veterans by singing the



World War II veterans stand as their service song is sung at the Alabama National Fair's "Salute to America's Veterans."

Blue Angels make veterans' day

Veterans from the William F. Green State Veterans Home in Bay Minette were honored guests of the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels aerial demonstration team during a recent visit to the Pensacola Naval Air Station. With front row seats, the veterans enjoyed a day of high performance flying and a trip down memory lane.

The special day included a tour of the National Naval Aviation Museum and lunch at the Cubi Bar Café, another site of naval aviation history. Veterans spent time with the Blue Angels and were paid a visit by Captain William P. Reavey, Jr., commanding officer of the Pensacola Naval Air Station.

Shelly Bates, activities director at William F. Green hosted the trip with assistance from the Gulf Coast Patriot Guard and the Fairhope Chapter of the Disabled American Veterans.



Dr. John Carter and his wife Dr. Francis Carter entertain veterans with their personal stories about World War II.

military's service songs. State VA Commissioner Clyde Marsh was the keynote speaker for the special event. "It is because of you that our flag yet waves over the land of the free and the home of the brave," Marsh told the veterans.

Noah Galloway, a veteran of the Iraq war, spoke about courage on the battlefield and respect for those who have worn our nation's uniform. While serving his second tour in Iraq, Galloway was severely wounded and lost an arm and a leg in an IED attack. He recognized all veterans of America's conflicts and gave special recognition to the WWII veterans.

Dr. John Carter, a paratrooper in World War II, and his wife, Dr. Francis Carter, shared their personal experiences during the war. Dr. Francis Carter is the founder and first president of the American Rosie the Riveter Association, which recognizes the history and legacy of the working women who supported the war effort. Other veteran service organizations in Alabama also took part in the salute.

Randy Stephenson, general manager of the Alabama National Fair, said the "Salute to America's Veterans" was the first time in the fair's 53 history that it had set aside a day to honor veterans.

"Honoring veterans will become an annual event at the Alabama National Fair," said Stephenson.



Veterans from the William F. Green State Veterans Home in Bay Minette were honored with an air show performed by the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels.

Around the State

Fraternity brings holiday cheer to veterans

No matter what the season, the Phi Beta Sigma alumni have a charitable cause.

Following a Halloween treat for the residents at the Floyd E. "Tut" Fann Veterans Home in Huntsville, the fraternity also set its sights on bringing holiday cheer to the veterans during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"This will be the second year for our Meadow Hills Initiative," said Kenneth Joshua. "We provide full turkey dinners for struggling families.

Joshua, who attended Southern University and Calhoun Community College, said he joined Phi Beta Sigma because of its service tradition.

"Personally, I chose a fraternity that was community-based and could enhance what I was doing," said Joshua, who is co-chairman of the chapter's fall community-based program with Damien Turner.

In the veterans project, Joshua said the brothers gave out candy last year and spoke with the veterans. This year they made a change.

"This isn't a time for candy," he said. "It's a time for remembrance."

The fraternity presented a plaque to the residents as a token of appreciation for their service and dedication, and it read, "There service will never be forgotten."

"It was very, very nice," said Sharon Hallock, director of recreation services at Tut Fann. "We had all the residents for the monthly birthday party. It was a good time for it."

The group also discovered a charter member of the Alabama A&M chapter of Phi Beta Sigma is a resident there.

"We all visited with him," Joshua said. "We're going to do what we can for him and his wife."

For Christmas, the chapter has its Blue and White Santa Program.

"This is valley-wide," Joshua said. "It's like the Angel Tree. Last year, we supplied bikes."

"It was really rewarding and uplifting."

This article was contributed by Budd McLaughlin, staff writer for the Huntsville Times.



State VA Commissioner Clyde Marsh (center) presents an Alabama Flag that was flown in Afghanistan in honor of the veterans at the William F. Green State Veterans Home. Also pictured (left to right) are Kathy Voll, WFG Home Representative, Kim Justice, ADVA's Veterans Home Coordinator, and Larry Weappa, Home Administrator.

Soldiers honor veterans with Alabama Flag

Veterans at the William F. Green State Veterans Home in Bay Minette were honored for their service at a ceremony held Aug. 27 by officials from the home and the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs.

State VA Commissioner Clyde Marsh presented the veterans with an Alabama Flag that was flown in Afghanistan by Task Force Phoenix V, 41st Combat Brigade Team, during Operation Enduring Freedom. The brigade flew the flag in honor of all Alabama Veterans.

The flag was first flown over the Alabama State Capitol in Sept. 2006, and was later sent to soldiers of the Alabama National Guard who were supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The soldiers were attached to the 41st Brigade Combat Team, which is based in Oregon.

Commissioner Marsh presented the flag to the veterans on behalf of the men and women of the 41 Combat Brigade Team and the citizens of Alabama. Marsh thanked the veterans for their service and sacrifice. He added that the staff at William F. Green are committed to providing them with the best possible care. Marsh also introduced plans to renovate the common areas in the home with new amenities that will better serve the veterans and their families.

"Patriotism is not a short and frenzied outburst of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime."

Adlai E. Stevenson, Jr.

Around the State

Life's work leads to hall of fame

Mike Kehoe didn't serve his country with the idea of raking up a lot of recognition for himself.

In fact, he finds recognition somewhat embarrassing.

But this retired colonel has received his share of medals and awards for his service in Vietnam and throughout his military career. Recognition also followed him in a civilian career as a teacher.

And now, as he goes about his work as a veterans service officer in the Madison County office of the State of Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, recognition has found him again. Kehoe has been inducted into the Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame for 2008.

"A man from my track vehicle in Vietnam called me out of the blue and told me he had heard that if an OCS graduate ended up making full colonel, then that was one of the thresholds to be eligible for the Hall of Fame," Kehoe said.

"He thought that would be cool. I found it a little bit embarrassing."

But his war buddy wouldn't let it go. He filled out the paperwork and Kehoe was selected for the honor. Kehoe traveled to Fort Benning, Ga., earlier this year to be inducted in the OCS Hall of Fame.

The induction ceremony was impressive. Kehoe had to admit that maybe, just maybe, recognition isn't a bad thing after all.

"It was blow away cool," he said of the ceremony. "I think even my wife went 'Wow, this is a big deal.' It made my son and daughter really proud. It was an opportunity for my family. It was more of an honor than I anticipated."

And now along with his Legion of Merit, Bronze Star with Valor, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal and Parachutist Badge, and 2007 induction in the Madison County Hall of Heroes, Kehoe can add his OCS Hall

of Fame status. He even has an OCS coin that is engraved with his name on one side.

Though he appreciates the recognition, Kehoe chooses to be low key about it.

"I'm not sure recognition is all about us (veterans)," Kehoe said. "I think it's important for the current generation to see what can happen in their careers.



Retired Col. Mike Kehoe at his desk in the Madison County Veterans Service Office.

It's more important that current military serving see that our country puts a value on people who serve."

Kehoe comes from a family that proudly serves its nation. He is the son of a World War II veteran. His daughter, Kimberly, who is a major and a doctor in the Army, is a combat veteran now serving at Walter Reed Army Hospital. Looking back, Kehoe knows he's come a long way from the day he was drafted as an enlisted Soldier.

"I was drafted in the Army in 1965. I didn't ask to do it. But then they needed officers for Vietnam and they asked me 'How would you like to go to Officer Candidate School?' If I went, that meant adding a couple years to my service," Kehoe said.

"When I was in Vietnam, if I committed to one more year I would make captain. But then I got wounded and spent half of my time as captain in a hospital. So after I got out, I decided to keep serving."

In the '60s, there were three primary OCS locations - Fort Benning, for infantry, Fort Sill, Okla., for field artillery and Fort Knox, Ky., for armor and tanks (now OCS is located solely at Fort Benning). Kehoe chose Fort Knox for his OCS training.

After graduation in 1967, Kehoe's first assignment was as a battalion training officer for the Army's Training Center at Fort Lewis, Wash. In 1968, he was sent to Vietnam, where he spent seven months and 13 days serving as the third platoon leader for Alpha 36, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (Blackhorse). Thirteen days before he was to leave on R&R, Kehoe's life almost came to an end.

"I was wounded and left Vietnam unexpectedly," he said, recalling the firefight where he was shot in the left side of his face.

His Army career has included serving as commander of three different companies - a basic training company, tank company and armored cavalry troop - as a lieutenant and a captain. He also served as an assistant professor of military science at North Carolina State University, was the first participant in the Army's Training with Industry Program at Turner Broadcasting in Atlanta, commanded the Armed Forces Radio and Television Network in Vicenza, Italy and served as the tank modernization coordinator for the Army's Forces Command in Atlanta. His last assignment was as the director of public affairs for the Army's Health Services Command at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

His military career accomplishments are reflected in his OCS Hall of Fame selection.

See WORK on page 7.

Around the State

Work

continued from page 6

“They make the choice for the OCS Hall of Fame based on your body of work,” Kehoe said. “If you graduate from OCS and stay in the Army, it’s difficult to get promoted all the way to general because you are competing against the West Point graduates and the college graduates who were tops in the ROTC program.

“An enlisted Soldier who graduates from OCS and is lucky enough to make it 20 years normally gets out as a major. It’s very unusual to make full colonel. It is so amazingly competitive.”

Kehoe retired from the military in 1992, and went on to own a marketing business, and then to teach communications and speech classes on the high school level, where he was nominated “First Year Teacher of the Year.” He came to Huntsville in 2005, where he first worked as a speech communication and career management teacher at Virginia College and earned “Teacher of the Quarter” before joining the Madison County VA office.

About six years ago, Kehoe took a trip back to Vietnam with his son and an old battle buddy.

“It ended up being a great trip,” he said. “My son’s observation was very meaningful to me. Michael said ‘All of my life, my dad, my coaches, my teachers, my counselors and all the male role models in my life were Vietnam veterans. But when I watched the news on TV, my perception was that all Vietnam veterans are druggies.’ He realized how poorly treated we were when we came back and how bad the media made us look.”

Kehoe, who is the only Vietnam veteran now working in the Madison County VA office, enjoys his job assisting veterans and veterans widows, most of them associated with World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam.

They are not any different than society as a whole. Some of them are down and out, and I’m here to help them. The payback to me is tenfold,” he said.

“The cool thing about this job is I get to help veterans all day long. Many of them don’t realize the benefits that are available to them.”

Kehoe is grateful that veterans of today’s Global War on Terrorism are being given the appreciation and respect they deserve.

“It makes me feel great for them because it’s such a cool thing to see how communities are welcoming them back home. It’s great the way we are doing as a country toward our veterans,” he said. But it also makes me realize all over again how badly Vietnam veterans were treated.”

No matter his feelings about the outcome of the Vietnam War, Kehoe thinks all young people should consider military service.

“It’s just a splendid opportunity,” he said. “Even if you only do three years, it’s such a broadening experience. It’s very worthwhile. I was drafted and I didn’t want to go. But because of the Army, my life has been a whole lot of opportunity.”

Kehoe is already anticipating his next opportunity. He is the only employee of the state VA program who was recently chosen to participate in a six-week legal internship with the Board of Veteran Appeals in Washington, D.C.

“I get a lot of satisfaction from this job,” Kehoe said.

And, recognition.

This feature article and photo were contributed by Kari Hawkins, staff writer for the Redstone Rocket, a publication of Redstone Arsenal.

Bill Nichols State Veterans Home celebrates Veterans Day

Veterans at the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home in Alexander City were honored at a Nov. 11 Veterans Day program that celebrated the men and women who have defended and preserved our nation’s freedom.

“The program was devoted to honoring all who have served in the America’s Armed Forces,” said Kathryn Fuller, Bill Nichols home representative for the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs.



John Hopson, Alexander City Honor Guard, plays Taps at the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home on Veterans Day.

To commemorate the special day, members of the Alexander City Honor Guard, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alexander City Police Department, Benjamin Russell’s Junior ROTC, and Alexander City’s Cub Scout Pack 169 took part in the program.

The ROTC cadets and Cub Scouts escorted the veterans to the Parade of Service Flags where Air Force CMSgt. Brye McMillon from Maxwell AFB delivered the keynote address.

The program concluded with a 21-gun salute by the Alexander City Police Department and the playing of Taps by the Alexander City Honor Guard.

News to Use

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

STATE COMMISSIONER

W. Clyde Marsh
Brenda Ingram - Executive Assistant

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONERS

Michael E. Northcutt
Willie E. Moore

VETERANS HOMES COORDINATOR

Kim Justice

GENERAL COUNSEL

Sandra Speakman

CLAIMS and TRAINING

William Rumph - Director of Claims
Mark Sullivan - Training Manager

BUDGET / FINANCE

Dixie Black - Senior Accountant
Mary Ann Heath - Staff Accountant
Carol Yockers - Accounting Technician

ALABAMA G.I. DEPENDENT'S SCHOLARSHIP

Shelia Worthington - Eligibility and Adjudication
Kayla Kyle - Account Clerk

MAILING ADDRESS

Department of Veterans Affairs
PO Box 1509
Montgomery, Alabama 36102-1509

Telephone: (334) 242-5077
Fax: (334) 242-5102

INTERNET WEB ADDRESS

www.va.state.al.us

Comments concerning this publication or its contents may be directed to the attention of:

Robert Horton
Public Information Officer
Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs
PO Box 1509
Montgomery, Alabama 36102

E-mail: robert.horton@va.alabama.gov

Department of Defense Launches National Resource Directory for wounded warriors, families and caregivers

The Department of Defense has published the National Resource Directory, a collaborative effort between the departments of Defense, Labor and Veterans Affairs.

The directory is a Web-based network of care coordinators, providers and support partners with resources for wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans, their families, and organizations that support them. The directory offers more than 10,000 medical

and non-medical services and resources to help service members and veterans achieve personal and professional goals from recovery through rehabilitation to community reintegration. The directory includes federal, state, and community based resource information on benefits services that are available to veterans.

The public can access the National Resource Directory at www.nationalresourcedirectory.org.

VA increases travel reimbursement

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has announced that eligible veterans will receive an increase in mileage reimbursement for travel to and from VA facilities for medical care.

The federal VA has increased the mileage reimbursement from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile for all eligible veterans.

Congress, which mandates such increases, recently provided funding to the VA to increase the reimbursement rate.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake said the increase in the mileage reimbursement will provide assistance to veterans during difficult economic times and will assist them with access to the quality health-care they need.

The mileage reimbursement increase went into effect Nov. 17.

Law changes salute policy for veterans

A new federal law that took effect in October now allows veterans and active-duty military not in uniform to render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the National Anthem.

The new provision improves upon a change in the federal law last year that authorized veterans to render the military-style hand salute during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag, but it did not address salutes during the National Anthem.

The provision also applied to members of the Armed forces while not in uniform.

The new law was sponsored by Senator Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, an Army veteran. The provision was included in the Defense Authorization Act of 2009.

News to Use

VA activates mobile counseling centers

The first of a fleet of 50 new mobile counseling centers for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vet Center program was put into service recently with the remainder scheduled to be activated over the next three months.

Each vehicle will be assigned to one of VA's existing Vet Centers, enabling the center to improve access to counseling by bringing services closer to veterans.

The 38-foot motor coaches, which have spaces for confidential counseling, will carry Vet Center counselors and outreach workers to events and activities to reach veterans in broad geographic areas, supplementing VA's 232 current Vet Centers, which will increase to 271 facilities by the end of 2009.

A mobile counseling center that will serve Alabama veterans is expected to arrive at the Vet Center in Birmingham in the next few months. For more information on the VA's mobile counseling center, call the Birmingham Vet Center at 1-205-212-3122.

Priority care for women veterans

The Veterans Benefits Administration has assigned Women Veterans Coordinators in all VA Regional Offices to assist women veterans with development of claims. These coordinators have been trained to assist in handling claims for gender-specific conditions and claims based on sexual trauma.

Women veterans who file claims based on sexual trauma receive priority care at a VA Medical Center even if they do not have a VA disability rating. For more information, call the Alabama VA Regional Office at 1-800-827-1000.

Veterans and their survivors receive Cost-of-Living increase in compensation and pension benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) included a 5.8 percent increase in the disability benefit payments that millions of veterans and dependents received at the end of December.

President Bush authorized the increase that matched the increase in Social Security rates by signing into law the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008.

The new rates apply to benefits earned in December. VA benefit payments routinely are made at the beginning of the month following the one in which they are earned, but with the New Year's Day holiday, checks or direct deposits will generally be received on Dec. 31.

Veterans and dependents receiving the increase includes veterans awarded compensation for disabilities sustained or made worse during their military service, as well as wartime veterans who are totally disabled from civilian-life causes and who receive a pension under an income-based program.

The increase also will go to spouses, children and parents of veterans who died in service or from a service-connected condition, and to those who are served by an income-based program for survivors of wartime veterans.

Most veterans and survivors will receive their increased VA compensation or pension through direct deposit, which VA encourages because of its speed and security. Visit www.va.state.al.us to view the 2008-2009 VA compensation and pension benefits rates.

ALABAMA BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Governor Bob Riley-Chairman
Wayne Dial-Vice Chairman
Ken Rollins-Dep. Vice Chairman
Brenda Ingram-Board Secretary

American Ex-Prisoners of War

Robert Baker-Selma

American Legion

Dolores "Dee" Hardin-Prattville
Lannon Limbaugh-Birmingham
Larry Sepanski-Trinity
William Wyatt-Harpersville

American Veterans

Spence Stewart-Prattville

Disabled American Veterans

James Graves-Vinemont
Mark S. Moore-Killen
Chad Richmond-Pinson

Veterans of Foreign Wars

Roland Day-Birmingham
Wayne Dial-Talladega
Linda Turner-Gaines- Lisman
Charles Stephens-Fort Payne

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Byron White-Birmingham

Vietnam Veterans of America

Ken Rollins-Oxford

News to Use

VA Announces Changes to Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance - *Traumatic Injury Protection Program Expands Benefits*

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced some severely injured military personnel and veterans will be eligible for improvements to the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection Program, known as TSGLI.

"TSGLI was created to relieve some of the financial burdens on injured military personnel and their families," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "We believe these enhancements to the TSGLI program have made a good program even better."

VA recently completed a comprehensive review to consider whether the program was meeting its intended purpose, whether new injuries or losses should be added, and whether improvements could be made in how the program is administered.

As a result of this review, VA has increased the number of injuries covered as well as liberalized the criteria of other injuries. New injuries covered include the partial amputation of a hand or foot and the degree of injuries based on severe burns.

Another important change to the TSGLI program is the payment of a \$25,000 benefit to service members hospitalized for 15 consecutive days as a result of a traumatic injury. This allows payments to begin earlier and financial help to be provided more quickly.

Changes to benefits are retroactive to October 7, 2001, the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, consistent with the original legislation creating TSGLI.

The TSGLI program is designed to provide severely injured service members and their families with short-term financial assistance. Service members who sustained certain severe injuries are entitled to payments ranging between \$25,000 and \$100,000.

TSGLI was designed to offset the expenses a service member's parents or spouse often incur when they move to be with their loved one during long and difficult treatment and difficult treatment and rehabilitation periods, frequently causing family members to leave their

jobs and homes for extended periods.

Since the program began in 2005, over \$309 million in TSGLI benefits has been paid to injured members and their families.

Veterans whose claims for TSGLI benefits were previously disallowed are being contacted if it appears their loss is now eligible for payment due to these changes.

Service members or veterans who sustained severe traumatic injuries are encouraged to check the VA Insurance website at www.insurance.va.gov for eligibility criteria and contact information.

The Web site contains a link to the TSGLI application form and a complete copy of the latest review of the program.

For additional information about VA benefits, contact VA's toll-free number at 1-800-827-1000, or visit the ADVA website at www.va.state.al.us.

VA opening 31 new outpatient clinics

Veterans will have easier access to world-class health care under a Department of Veterans Affairs plan to open 31 new outpatient clinics in 16 states—including Alabama's Monroe County.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake said the VA is committed to providing the best health care to America's veterans.

With 153 VA hospitals and 745 community-based clinics, VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country. The VA currently operates 10 community-based outpatient clinics in Alabama. The Monroe County VA clinic will become operational in 2010.

Direct Deposit provides an alternative to veterans

Washington - The Department of Veterans Affairs is teaming up with the Treasury Department in a new campaign to protect government beneficiaries against the theft of funds and of their identities.

Every month, 730,000 veterans or their surviving dependents look for their compensation or pension checks in their mailboxes. Nearly all receive them, but theft and mail delays cause problems for some veterans, which can be prevented by direct deposit.

The VA is urging those veterans and family members now receiving paper checks to join nearly 3.1 million others whose VA payments are safely deposited electronically.

A direct deposit can also eliminate trips to the bank or credit union each month to deposit checks.

There are several ways veterans or their family members can sign up for direct deposit. They can call the Go Direct toll free number at 1-800-333-1795, or enroll on-line at www.GoDirect.org.

Beneficiaries can also sign-up for direct deposit by contacting the VA regional office at 1-800-827-1000 or their financial institution.

National VA Update

11,000 Survivors to receive retroactive payments by New Year

WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has identified nearly 11,000 surviving spouses of deceased veterans who will receive a lump-sum payment before the New Year to correct an error in their VA benefits. Also documented were more than 73,000 who had been previously paid.

VA officials are still tracking down eligible survivors.

"I am pleased that our task force working to correct this problem has been able to identify this first group," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "We understand the difference these funds can make for these surviving spouses, especially during the holiday season."

Payments will be released to these survivors on Dec. 29. The total value of the payments is about \$24 million.

At issue is a 1996 federal law that makes a surviving spouse eligible to receive the veteran's VA compensation or pension benefit for the month of the veteran's death. VA failed to properly implement that law in all cases.

Most likely to have been affected by this problem are surviving spouses who never applied for VA survivors' benefits following the death of a veteran.

Eligible for the payment are surviving spouses of veterans who died after Dec. 31, 1996. The Department doesn't have current addresses for many of them, which makes the process of contacting them difficult.

VA has established a special Survivor Call Center (1-800-749-8387) for spouses who believe they may be eligible for this retroactive benefit. Spouses can also call the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Claims Office at (334) 242-5077 for assistance.

VA Supports Digital TV Education Effort

Washington - Television enters the digital age for good on Feb. 17, 2009. That's when Congress has decreed that all television broadcast stations end analog transmissions and broadcast only in digital format.

Most current television transmissions are received through analog television sets. Analog technology has been in use for the past 50 years to transmit conventional TV signals, which vary continuously, creating fluctuations in color and brightness.

Digital TV (DTV) is an advanced broadcasting technology that will transform the television viewing experience. DTV enables broadcasters to offer television with better picture and sound quality. It can also

offer multiple programming choices, called multicasting, and interactive capabilities. The law requiring this change applies only to stations broadcasting over public airwaves. Those receiving transmissions via satellite or cable will have to contact their specific service providers to determine if their current communications box will receive a digital broadcast. If not, they may be required to upgrade to digital to receive local programming.

Those who have old analog sets and don't subscribe to cable or satellite will have to purchase a digital-to-analog converter box to receive programming. That has officials like VA Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Lisette Mondello concerned.

"When I think of those most disadvantaged by this change, I think of the older veterans who rely on VA for health care and income support," she told an industry conference sponsored by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) this fall. "That's why VA is going to publicize this change date prominently throughout our system over the coming year and make sure older and lower income veterans know some help is available."

That help comes in the form of a coupon issued by NTIA worth a \$40 credit toward purchase of a digital-to-analog converter box (two coupons per household). The coupon program began Jan. 1, 2008, and ends March 31, 2009.

For more information on the digital-to-analog conversion and to apply for coupons, visit the NTIA Web site at www.ntia.doc.gov, the Federal Communications Commission site at www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/digitaltv.html, or the commission's DTV site at www.dtv.gov.



By February 2009, all TV signals will be broadcast in digital format only.

National VA Update

VA sends latest Gulf War Illness Report to IOM for review

Washington—The Department of Veterans Affairs has sent an October 2008 report from the VA Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses to the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (IOM) for review and recommendations.

The October report from the advisory committee identified potential causes for—and asserted that research supports the existence of a multi-symptom condition resulting from service in the 1990–1991 Gulf War, which the committee identified as Gulf War Illness (GWI).

Because VA has traditionally and by law relied upon IOM for independent and credible reviews of the science behind these particular veterans' health issues, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake has asked IOM to review the advisory committee's report before VA officially responds to the report's conclusions.

The VA has long recognized conditions, granted benefits and provided health care to Gulf War veterans suffering from a broad range of symptoms, even though the conditions have not been scientifically recognized as a specific disease or injury or GWI. These include chronic fatigue, persistent rashes, hair loss, headaches, muscle pain, joint pain, neurologic symptoms, sleep disturbances, and cardiovascular symptoms.

Peake said the VA will continue to provide the care and benefits Gulf War veterans have earned through their service.

VA announces expansion of Disability Evaluation System pilot

Washington - Wounded service members leaving the military will have easier, quicker access to their veterans benefits due to the expansion of a pilot program that will offer streamlined disability evaluations that will reach 19 military installations, representing all military departments.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the expansion of the Disability Evaluation system (DES) pilot which started in the National Capitol Region in coordination with Departments of Defense (DoD). The pilot is a test of a new process that eliminates duplicative, time-consuming and often confusing elements of the two current disability processes of the departments.

The initial phase of the expansion started on Oct. 1, with Fort Meade, Md, and Fort Belvoir, Va. The remaining 17 installations will begin upon completion of site preparations and personnel orientation and training, during an 8-month period from November 1008 to May 2009. "Providing service members going through the disability process with comprehensive information about their benefits from both departments and delivering their VA benefits as fast as possible is our goal," said Tom Pamperin, deputy director of VA's Compensation and Pension Service. "The program expansion will allow wounded warriors a smoother and more efficient transition to getting services from the VA."



Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs
RSA Plaza Building
770 Washington Ave, Suite 530
P.O. Box 1509
Montgomery, Alabama 36102-1509

ADDRESS LABEL
