

# Disabled American Veterans

## Department of North Dakota

# Tri-Annual News Bulletin



DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS

2009 4th STREET NE - JAMESTOWN, ND 58401

MARCH 2012

## DEPARTMENT COMMANDER REPORT



**Jim Haukedahl**  
Department Commander DAV

Welcome to Grand Forks and the DAV Convention. I am looking forward to seeing you at the convention and we hope you can come. As my year as your Department Commander is coming to a close, let me say that it has been an enjoyable and challenging year that we have undertaken. Together we have worked toward

building better lives for our disabled veterans, their dependents and survivors. We welcome our national representative, National 4th Junior Vice Commander Frank Maughan from the Department of Utah. Frank is a Vietnam Veteran who was wounded while serving as a platoon leader in July 1966. We look forward to the opportunity to get to know Frank better. As a final note, I would like to inform you of our annual North Dakota Veterans Home DAV Picnic. This year it will be held at the veterans home on June 14. This picnic is a great opportunity to visit with the residents and help with the picnic meal or bingo in the afternoon. Thank you for electing me to serve as your department commander.

## DAVA DEPARTMENT COMMANDER REPORT



**Fay Litzinger**  
Department Commander DAVA

On behalf of the department, welcome Susan Miller to Grand Forks for our Department DAVA Convention. I am so grateful for the opportunity to hear from you and get the latest information from the national headquarters. It has been a warm and early spring here and by convention time, I expect the trees to have lots of green leaves and the grass will be nicely green. Spring signals a "new beginning" in nature, and as we transition with new leadership after the elections, our organization also displays a new beginning. Congratulations to those who will be leading this great organization in the upcoming year. It has been a privilege to serve as your Department Commander this year and I salute you as we have had another successful year. See you in Grand Forks.



**Wishing All of You a  
Warm and  
Sunny Spring!**

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# JUNE 14, 2012

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## Minnesota Convention May 3-5, 2012 St. Paul, MN

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## Montana Convention June 1-3, 2012 Kalispell, MT

## North Dakota Veterans Home DAV Picnic June 14, 2012 (Starts at 10:00 am) Lisbon, ND

## DAV National Convention August 4-10, 2012 Ballys Hotel and Casino Las Vegas, NV (800) 634-3434



## DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS DEPARTMENT OF NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OFFICERS 2010-2011

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Dept. Web Site:  
[www.tristateveterans.com/nddav](http://www.tristateveterans.com/nddav)

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Adjutant: Warren Tobin  
Member at Large: Dana Baker

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**1st JR. VICE COMMANDER**  
Jackie Saddler

**2nd JR. VICE COMMANDER**  
Marissa Jackson

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Joyce Hastings

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Sandy Dobmeier

**TREASURER**  
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**JUDGE ADVOCATE/INSP. GENERAL**  
Jan Novontny

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Disabled American Veterans  
Department of North Dakota  
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## VA Publishes Regulation on Newborn Care



WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs has published a regulation officially amending VA's medical benefits package to include up to seven days of medical care for newborns delivered by women Veterans who are receiving VA maternity care benefits.

"The regulation change makes formal the commitment VA made to women Veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Erik K. Shinseki. "This falls in line with the broad range of services VA is proud to offer women Veterans who have served this nation."

Newborn care includes routine post-delivery care and all other medically necessary services that are in accord with generally accepted standards of medical practice.

The effective date of the rule is Dec. 19, 2011, but the regulation applies retroactively to newborn care provided to eligible women Veterans on or after May 5, 2011.

VA has women Veterans program managers at every VA medical center to help women Veterans learn more about the health care benefits they have earned with their service. For more information about VA healthcare for women Veterans, visit <http://www.womenshealth.va.gov>.

## VA Announces Changes to Emergency Care Payment Policy

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today a change in regulations regarding payments for emergency care provided to eligible Veterans in non-VA facilities.



"This provision helps ensure eligible Veterans continue to get the emergency care they need when VA facilities are not available," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

The new regulation extends VA's authority to pay for emergency care provided to eligible Veterans at non-VA facilities until the Veterans can be safely transferred to a VA medical facility.

More than 100,000 Veterans are estimated to be affected by the new rules, at a cost of about \$44 million annually.

VA operates 121 emergency departments across the country, which provide resuscitative therapy and stabilization in life-threatening situations. They operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. VA also has 46 urgent care units, which provide care for patients without scheduled appointments who need immediate medical or psychiatric attention.

For more information about emergency care in non-VA facilities, visit [www.nonvacare.va.gov](http://www.nonvacare.va.gov).

## VA Caregivers Support Line Celebrates First Anniversary

### *Program Received More Than 25,000 Calls in First Year*

WASHINGTON (Feb. 1, 2012) – Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs marks the one-year anniversary of the toll-free National VA Caregiver Support Line, 1-855-260-3274. The support line's dedicated staff has helped more than 25,000 Veterans, family members and Caregivers connect to resources and receive access to services they have earned.

"VA recognizes the importance of Caregivers to our Veterans' health and well being. We also recognize the sacrifices the daily care of their beloved Veteran requires," said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. "It is the care and commitment of Caregivers that allows Veterans with chronic illnesses or severe injuries to remain in the homes they defended, surrounded by the loved ones they hold dear. I am proud we have been able to help so many Caregivers in this first year of the support line's operation."

Since the program began, the Caregiver Support Line has received more than 25,000 calls and email queries through VA's main page [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov). Local Caregiver Support Coordinators at each VA medical center have responded to more than 8,000 referrals. Callers to the support line are spouses, children, other family members and friends of Veterans as well as Veterans themselves. Caregiver Support Line responders listen to the callers and assess how best to offer support, appropriate direction, and connection to needed resources.

Responders serve as a resource for Caregivers by providing guidance, education on VA programs and benefits, information on

community resources and emotional support through brief supportive counseling, if needed. The support line responders can also connect callers to VA's other support lines such as the VA Veteran Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255) and Coaching Into Care Line (1-888-823-7458) when these lines better meet the callers needs.

"Caregivers play such a critical role in the lives of our nation's Veterans, often at great cost to themselves. VA recognizes this sacrifice and the Caregiver Support Line is just one way we seek to support Caregivers," said Deborah Amdur, VA's Chief Consultant for Care Management and Social Work. "Caregivers often give so much of themselves and the social workers on the support line recognize this. They understand the challenges faced by Caregivers and are able to offer a listening ear, education and connection with needed resources."

If a Caregiver or Veteran who calls the line needs additional guidance, a referral is made to their local Caregiver Support Coordinator, located at every VA medical center, who is the key contact for Caregivers at VA and an expert in VA and community programs available to Veterans and their Family Caregivers.

Veterans and Caregivers can reach the VA Caregiver Support Line toll free at 855-260-3274. Operating hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., ET, and 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., ET, on Saturdays. VA also features a Web page, [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov), with general information on other Caregiver support programs available through VA and the community.



## DAV Midwinter Conference Conducted

The Disabled American Veterans held its Midwinter Conference in Washington, DC from February 25 through 29. This annual event is highlighted by the testimony of the national commander and visits to congressional delegations by members of department legislative committees.

This year, several members of our Department Legislative Committee were in attendance. The delegation was headed by Warren Tobin, Chair; Mike Dobmeier, PNC and National Judge Advocate; Joe Litzinger, 14<sup>th</sup> District National Executive Committeeman; and Roy Fillion, PDC and Department Finance Committee member.

National Commander Donald Samuels, TN, provided testimony to a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. In his testimony, Commander Samuels outlined the DAV's legislative priorities for the year. These priorities are: funding the VA to the level as recommended by the Independent Budget, continuing to provide advance appropriations for VA healthcare, opposition of legislation which would attempt to diminish compensation by offsetting it against any other government benefit, and reform of the VA claims processing system.

The Department Legislative Committee met with Representative Berg, Senator Conrad, and representatives from Senator Hoeven. These visits highlighted the national legislative program, emphasized local impact of these programs, and provided an opportunity to provide additional information about other legislative initiatives. For example, we discussed the impact of increased fees on Tricare health insurance program for both active duty and retired military personnel and their dependents.

During the committee's visit with Representative Berg, we spent some time discussing HR 303 (Concurrent Receipt of VA Disability and Military Retirement Pay). The committee is pleased to report that Representative Berg has co-sponsored HR 303 as a result of our discussion.

As budgets and bills concerning veterans' programs are being considered by Congress, our national legislative office will provide additional testimony to the committees. In addition, our Department Legislative Committee and other members will be working closely with our representative and senators.



Committee Members Joe Litzinger, Mike Dobmeier, Roy Fillion, and Warren Tobin in front of the Capitol Building.



After the visit, Mike and Sandy Dobmeier, Representative Rick Berg, Warren Tobin, and Roy Fillion.



From Senator Conrad's meeting room. Roy Fillion, Joe Litzinger, Sen Conrad, Dakota, Sandy Dobmeier, Mike Dobmeier, and Warren Tobin.

# VA Announces New Clinic at Devils Lake

Fargo, ND - The Department of Veterans Affairs Fargo VA Health Care System will be opening a Primary Outpatient and Telehealth Clinic (POTC) in Devils Lake, North Dakota.

"We are honored to join the Devils Lake community in providing our Veterans with greater access to high quality healthcare," said Michael J. Murphy, Medical Center Director.

The POTC will provide full-time telehealth services with a part-time physician and on-site staffing by nurses so Veterans can be seen by a health care professional five days a week. Direct access to specialists at the Fargo VAHCS will be available through telehealth.

Telehealth uses videoconferencing and remote controlled video cameras to link the patient with the Fargo Health Care System. The POTC will ensure Veterans have access to the healthcare services they have earned and deserve.

Plans are underway to open the new POTC later this year, after space is secured and staff members are trained and ready to care for Veterans.



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# VA Introduces Text Messaging to Expand Efforts to Prevent Suicide

## Veterans Crises Line Provides Confidential Help to Veterans and Families

WASHINGTON (Feb. 15, 2012) – The Department of Veterans Affairs is expanding its efforts to prevent suicide through several new initiatives that increase the availability of services for Veterans, Servicemembers and their families.

The new initiatives include a new, free, confidential text-messaging service in the existing Veterans Crisis Line, introduction of toll-free access from Europe, and collaboration with Vets Prevail and Vets4Warriors, two groups providing crisis help to Veterans, Servicemembers and their families.

“Offering text messaging services will help VA reach more Veterans and their friends and families,” said Dr. Janet Kemp, VA’s national mental health director for suicide prevention. “We are working to meet their needs by communicating through multiple channels-- over the phone, through online chat, and now via text, which provides quick, easy access to support. VA wants all Veterans to know that confidential support is only a text message away.”

Since its founding July 2007, VA’s Veterans Crisis Line and the later Chat Service have received 500,000 calls and engaged in 31,000 chats resulting in over 18,000 rescues of Veterans in immediate crisis.

Now, in addition to the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1) and online chat ([www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net)), Veterans and Servicemembers in crisis—and their friends and families—may text free of charge to 83-8255 to receive confidential, personal and immediate support. The text service is available, like the Veterans Crisis Line and online chat, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365

days a year and connects a user with a specially trained VA professional -- many who are Veterans themselves.



As a part of the effort to extend VA’s reach, Veterans and members of the military community in Europe may now receive free, confidential support from the European Military Crisis Line, a new initiative recently launched by VA. Callers in Europe may dial 0800-1273-8255 or DSN 118 to receive confidential support from responders at the Veterans Crisis Line in the U.S.

VA’s Veterans Crisis Line continues to add external resources to provide Veterans with additional support. Two of these organizations include Vets Prevail ([www.VetsPrevail.org](http://www.VetsPrevail.org)) and Vets 4 Warriors ([www.Vets4Warriors.com](http://www.Vets4Warriors.com)).

In December, Vets Prevail launched a chat service that connects Veterans to caring responders who provide information on a wide variety of resources. If the Veteran is in crisis or needs mental health support, the conversation is then seamlessly transferred to a VA Veterans Crisis Line responder.


Vets4Warriors has helped thousands of their peers connect with confidential assistance through a free hotline (1-855-838-8255/1-855-VET-TALK) and online chat ([www.Vets4Warriors.com](http://www.Vets4Warriors.com)). If a Veteran is in need of professional crisis or mental health support, Vets4Warriors’ responders will transfer the Veteran to a responder at the Veterans Crisis Line.

For more information about VA’s suicide prevention program, visit: [http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/)

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## VA Budget Request Tops \$140 Billion for Veterans Programs

WASHINGTON – With more than 1 million active-duty personnel scheduled to join the ranks of America's 22 million Veterans during the next five years, the President has proposed a \$140.3 billion budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1.

"As our newest Veterans return home, we must give them the care, the benefits, the job opportunities and the respect they have earned, while honoring our commitments to Veterans of previous eras," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

Shinseki said the budget proposal, which must be approved by Congress, would fund services for newly discharged Veterans, continue the drive to end homelessness among Veterans, improve access to benefits and services, reduce the disability claims backlog, improve the Department's collaboration with the Defense Department and strengthen its information-technology program that is vital for delivering services to Veterans.

"As we turn the page on a decade of war, we are poised at an historic moment for our Nation's armed forces," Shinseki said. "The President has charged VA to keep faith with those who served when they rejoin civilian life."

The budget request includes \$64 billion in discretionary funds, mostly for medical care, and \$76 billion for mandatory funds, mostly for disability compensation and pensions.

If approved by Congress, the new spending levels would support a health care system with 8.8 million enrollees and growing benefits programs serving nearly 12 million Servicemembers, Veterans, family members and survivors, including the eighth largest life insurance program in the nation; education benefits for more than 1 million Americans; home loan guarantees for more than 1.5 million Veterans and survivors; plus the largest national cemetery system in the country.

## Chapter 5 Donates TV to Heartland Court



Chapter Commander Pete Padilla and Adjutant Gary Bartram present the donated television to Heartland Court residents.

*Sue Kraft - Devils Lake Journal 12/23/11*

On Thursday December 22, 2011, two members of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) put on their Santa hats and delivered an early Christmas gift.

The DAV, which is hailed as the official voice of the nation's wounded warriors and their families, donated a 46" television to the residents of Heartland Court #3.

"There are six vets in the building," said Commander Refugio (Pete) Padilla, "Vets, we never forget each other, we always hang in there."

Some veterans were on hand when Padilla and Adjutant Gary Bartram made the presentation.

"It's beautiful," marveled one unidentified man. Padilla said the funds for the television were provided by the Lee Anderson family. "He was a World War II vet that passed away and one of the stipulations was a donation to the DAV," he said, noting that another television was also given to Heartland Care Center.

Padilla said he hoped the gift will show the veterans how much they are appreciated. "Sometimes they're recognized on Veteran's Day or Memorial Day, but as far as I'm concerned, every day is Veteran's Day," he said.



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# VA Launches Personalized Health Benefits Handbook

WASHINGTON (Feb. 22, 2012) –Veterans enrolled in the health care system of the Department of Veterans Affairs have begun to receive personalized booklets that



explain their health care benefits and contain other useful information.

“VA is committed to providing our Nation’s Veterans with consistent, clear information about the services available to them,” said

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

The new booklet, called a Health Benefits Handbook, will provide a personalized listing of health benefits based on each Veteran’s specific eligibility. The handbook will also have contact information for their local VA medical facilities, appointment scheduling information, guidelines for communicating with their clinical team and, as applicable, information about copays.

Distribution of the handbooks began this month, with all 8.5 million Veterans enrolled in VA’s health care system scheduled to receive their handbooks by 2013. Veterans will receive updates to their handbook to reflect changes to their benefits or eligibility.

VA operates 152 medical centers and more than 800 community-based outpatient clinics. Last year, inpatient facilities treated more than 690,000 patients, while outpatient clinics registered more than 79 million visits.

For more information about the Health Benefits Handbook, visit [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhbh](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhbh) or call VA’s toll-free number at 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

# New Online Enrollment Application Available For Service Members

To Be Introduced at Demobilization Sites Nationwide

WASHINGTON (Feb. 3, 2012) – The Department of Veterans Affairs partnered with the First Army at Camp Shelby, Miss., to launch a streamlined version of its online application for VA health benefits (VA Form 1010EZ) for Servicemembers returning from deployment. VA will introduce it at demobilization sites nationwide by early spring 2012.

“This online application demonstrates VA’s commitment to work with the Department of Defense to make it easier for Servicemembers to get the care they earned by their service,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The new, online system noticeably reduces the paperwork and reduces a 10-day process to three days.”

The application is used to enroll in the VA health care system, which has more than 1,000 sites of care across the country.

Enrollment for VA health care is done as part of a Servicemember’s demobilization. The online form allows the application to be completed during a regularly scheduled briefing for all Servicemembers on VA benefits.

Quick enrollment is important for returning troops because recently discharged combat Veterans are eligible for five years of cost-free care and medications for conditions potentially related to combat service.

The new application was piloted as part of the demobilization process at Camp Shelby. Based on the results, VA plans to collaborate with DoD to offer this online application at all 61 demobilization sites nationally.

For more information, Servicemembers may contact VA at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit VA’s health eligibility website at [www.va.gov/healthbenefits](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits).

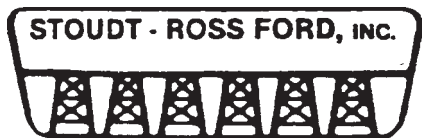
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## Roy M. Fillion Receives Excellence in Service Award



Roy Fillion receives award from Keith Reitmeir.

Roy M Fillion, DVOP Grand Forks local office, was recently presented the Excellence in Service Award for providing exceptional employment and training services to Veterans. Roy's professionalism, occupational expertise, and strong compassion for Veterans prompted his nomination and selection as an award recipient for the year 2011.

Roy is actively involved with many Veteran organizations in the local area and state departments as well. He is dedicated to serving veterans in whatever services they may have a need. Roy has a very personable style and has earned the respect and trust of area veterans, office staff and community leaders.

Roy donated the \$500.00 award to Andy Nomland of Chapter 2 Disabled American Veterans, Grand Forks, ND where he is currently the Commander.

Roy is married to Linda and has four children. He also is the proud grandparent of six grandsons and four granddaughters.

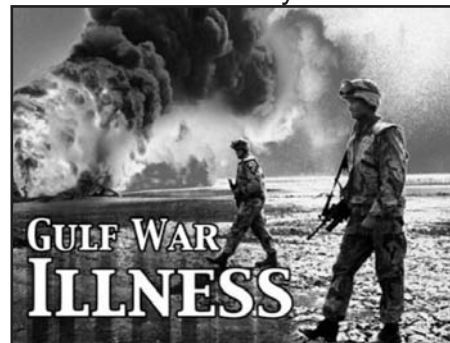


Keith Reitmeir, Roy Fillion and Jim Groven, Chapter 2 Adjutant-Treasurer.

## Rules Liberalized for Veterans with Undiagnosed Illnesses *Application Window Extended for Five Years*

WASHINGTON – Veterans of the Persian Gulf War with undiagnosed illnesses have an additional five years to qualify for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“Not all the wounds of war are fully understood,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “When there is uncertainty about the connection between a medical problem and military service, Veterans are entitled to the benefit of the doubt.”



A recent change in VA regulations affects Veterans of the conflict in Southwest Asia. Many have attributed a range of undiagnosed or poorly understood medical problems to their military services. Chemical weapons, environmental hazards and vaccinations are among the possible causes.

At issue is the eligibility of Veterans to claim VA disability compensation based upon those undiagnosed illnesses, and the ability of survivors to qualify for VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

Under long-standing VA rules, any undiagnosed illnesses used to establish eligibility for VA benefits must become apparent by Dec. 31, 2011. The new change pushes the date back to Dec. 31, 2016.

Veterans or survivors who believe they qualify for these benefits should contact VA at 1-800-827-1000.

Further information about undiagnosed illnesses is available online at [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar) and [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/oefoif/index.asp](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/oefoif/index.asp)

**GOT FREEDOM? THANK A VETERAN!**

# VA Launches Acquisition Internship for Returning Veterans

## *“Warriors to Workforce” Offered by VA Academy*



WASHINGTON (Jan. 25, 2012) – A special internship to prepare newly-returned Veterans to become federal contracting specialists was launched recently at the Acquisitions Academy of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Frederick, Md.

“I’m pleased to welcome our new interns to the VA family,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki, who gave the keynote address Jan.

19. “These Veterans know the importance of integrity, and have learned to work together in diverse teams to accomplish difficult objectives. Those are skills we value in our professional acquisition corps.”

Called “Warriors to Workforce,” the internship is a three-year program. Participants will earn the 24 educational credits in business required to become contracting professionals. The program includes courses in leadership, technical acquisition training and on-the-job experience.

“This program is possible because of VA’s steadfast commitment to Veteran employment,” said Lisa Doyle, chancellor of the VA Acquisition Academy. “These Veterans have served and sacrificed, and it is

our turn to give back by making sure they have gainful employment when they return. We hope this program will serve as a model for other federal agencies and private organizations.”

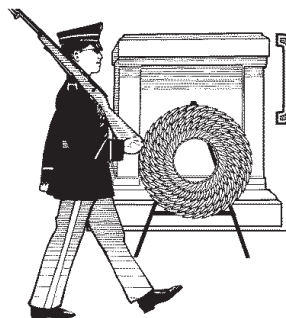


At graduation, participants will have taken the required coursework to achieve a Federal Acquisitions Certification in Contracting, which is recognized throughout the federal sector as evidence of solid education in the career field. Successful graduates will be eligible for contract specialist positions at the GS-11 level.

In the past two years, the government’s contracting force has shrunk, although the volume and complexity of contracts has increased. VA opened its Acquisitions Academy in September 2008 in response to the growing shortage of contracting professionals, both for VA and other federal agencies.

Twenty-three Veterans are enrolled in the inaugural class of the “Warriors to Workforce” internship. Between them, they have seven Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars and over 170 years of military experience.

More information about VA’s Acquisitions Academy is available on the Internet at [www.acquisitionacademy.va.gov](http://www.acquisitionacademy.va.gov).



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# VA Participates in Settlement with Mortgage Banks

## Secretary Announces Protection for Veterans

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs announced its participation in the largest state-federal legal settlement in history that deals with problems within the mortgage industry.

“Through this historic settlement, VA has ensured that Veterans, Servicemembers, and National Guard and Reserve members will continue to receive every possible opportunity to retain their homes,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

VA joined with the Department of Justice, a coalition of state attorneys general and other federal agencies in the settlement.

The nation’s five largest mortgage servicers have agreed to this landmark \$25 billion settlement that addresses past mortgage loan servicing and foreclosure abuses, provides substantial financial relief to borrowers, and establishes significant new homeowner protections in the future.

In addition to cash payments to avoid litigation, the banks also agree to undertake other activities, such as principal forgiveness, interest-rate-reduction refinancing, and forbearance during unemployment.

The settlement also enhances protections available under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act and provides additional assistance when Servicemembers are forced to sell their home at a loss due to reassignment to another location.

“VA will continue its oversight of lenders and servicers to ensure that Veterans and Servicemembers are able to enjoy the benefits of VA’s home loan program, including access to no-downpayment loans and assistance in retaining their homes should they encounter payment difficulties,” added Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey.

VA has always provided assistance to Veterans and Servicemembers who experience trouble paying their mortgage, whether they have a VA loan or not. Depending on the situation, VA’s loan specialists can intervene on a Veteran’s behalf to help pursue home-retention options such as repayment plans, forbearances and loan modifications.

To get help, Veterans and Servicemembers – even those without a VA guaranteed loan – may call a national toll-free number, 1-877-827-3702 to speak with VA loan specialists who will provide information about the process of obtaining a VA-guaranteed home loan, or assistance in retaining their home loan or avoiding foreclosure.

Information about the VA Home Loan Guaranty program is also available online at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans>. To see videos of Veterans who reached out to VA and were able to keep their homes or avoid foreclosure, please visit [www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/alt-foreclosure.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/alt-foreclosure.asp).

Since 1944, when home loan guaranties were first offered under the original GI Bill, VA has guaranteed more than 19.4 million home loans worth \$1.18 trillion. VA helped over 72,000 (83 percent) Veterans who were in default on their VA guaranteed loan avoid foreclosure in FY 2011, a 10 percent increase from FY 2010. This assistance resulted in a 30 percent reduction in foreclosures over the same year.

VA’s foreclosure rate for the last 14 quarters and serious delinquency rate for the last 11 quarters have been the lowest of all measured loan types, according to a survey by the Mortgage Bankers Association.



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## VA, DoD Secretaries Meet at Pentagon

WASHINGTON (Feb. 27, 2012) -- Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta welcomed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki today to the Pentagon for the latest in a series of regular meetings the two Secretaries have held on issues of common interest to both Departments.

Today's session included discussions with disabled Veterans, two of whom are now athletes with the United States Paralympic team, about their experiences as they left active service and transitioned to Veterans' status. The Paralympic athletes told the two Cabinet members how DoD and VA adaptive sports programs helped them in their recovery from their injuries and gave them new purpose in their lives after the military.

"It is clear that there is a lot of good work being done to help our Service members have the smoothest transition possible to Veteran status and civilian life," said Secretary Panetta. "But there are still too many stories of programs that are poorly connected between our Departments and that are time-consuming and plain confusing for our Service members and Veterans."

"The vision Secretary Panetta and I share is to provide an integrated, seamless experience to our people across their lifetimes -- from when they raise their hands to take the oath, to when they leave active service and join the Veteran ranks, to when they are laid to rest with final honors," said Secretary Shinseki. "Over the past three years, VA and DoD have made significant progress, but more work remains."

At today's meeting, Panetta and Shinseki focused on five areas where the two Departments have joined efforts on behalf of the nation's Service Members and Veterans: the Disability Evaluation System, Electronic Health Records, Transition programs, joint Pharmacy initiatives, and Recovery Coordination for the wounded, ill, and injured.

The two Secretaries were pleased with the status of the development of plans to implement the President's directive to develop a new model for the Transition Assistance Program to ensure that all

Service members are "career-ready" when they depart the military. They also discussed the improvements to the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) as a result of the \$400 million recently added to the Defense Department budget over the next five years and VA's commitment to increase the number of personnel in support of administering the system. With more than 24,300 Service members currently being evaluated for disability ratings through IDES, the Secretaries stressed the importance they are attaching to additional personnel helping to shorten the time Service members spend waiting for their ratings before they can complete their transition from active duty to Veterans' status.



Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki greets Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta at the Pentagon.

Panetta and Shinseki also discussed steps forward on electronic health records, noting that the Interagency Program Office established by the two Departments to provide leadership in building the joint integrated electronic health records system now has new leadership.

The Secretaries were also updated on development of the Graphical User Interface program, reporting that doctors at the James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center at North Chicago can now view both VA and DoD patient records simultaneously on a single monitor. The Lovell Center is a first-of-its-kind partnership between VA and DoD to provide integrated care to Service members and Veterans in the same facility and has been a testing ground for the Departments' efforts to deliver a fully integrated electronic health record for all Service members and Veterans. Panetta and Shinseki are expected to meet again this May in Chicago to visit the Lovell Center and to review progress on deliverables the two Departments have committed to achieve by the end of the year, including: a detailed implementation plan for the revised transition assistance program; spurring development of electronic transfer of patient files, to reduce both the processing and mailing costs incurred by paper transfer and disability evaluation processing times; and finalizing a contract for joint pharmacy capability at the Lovell Center.



# Largest Annual Wheelchair Sports Event in the World Returning to Richmond in June

## Registration Now Open for Veteran Participation

WASHINGTON (Jan. 10, 2012) –Registration is open for the 32<sup>nd</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games, the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world. More than 500 Veterans from across the United States, Puerto Rico and Great Britain are expected to compete in the Games, taking place June 25-30, 2012, in Richmond, Va. – the site of the very first National Veterans Wheelchair Games held in 1981.

“The National Veterans Wheelchair Games are an outstanding event that showcases the abilities and determination of Veterans,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “VA is committed to providing world class care to our wounded heroes.”

The Games, presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Paralyzed Veterans of America, are open to all U.S. military Veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, neurological conditions, amputations or other mobility impairments. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Games will be co-hosted by the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center and the Virginia Mid-Atlantic Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America.

“We’re thrilled to see the National Veterans Wheelchair Games return to Richmond after 31 years,” said Bill Lawson, national president of Paralyzed Veterans of America. “Adaptive sports play a crucial role in getting people back into life after serious injury, and the Wheelchair Games are often a life-changing experience for our athletes, representing a unique combination of competition, rehabilitation and fun.”

The Games are made possible through the generous support of national host sponsors, Altria Group, Invacare and UPS.

Competitive events will take place at the Greater Richmond Convention Center, Hanover Lanes Bowling Center, The Conservation Club of Virginia, Inc., in Charles City, Sports Backers Stadium, Mary Munford Elementary School and Byrd Park. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Games will include competitions in 17 different events such as swimming, basketball, table tennis, archery, and wheelchair slalom, which is a timed obstacle

course. The athletes compete in all events against others with similar athletic ability, competitive experience or age.

In addition to the competitions and the opening and closing ceremonies, the Games will include a “Kids Day at the Games” on Friday, June 29, at Sports Backers Stadium. Local children with disabilities will have the opportunity to interact with the athletes, participate in sporting events, and watch Veterans compete.

Veterans interested in competing may download the registration packet from the Games’ website at [www.wheelchairgames.va.gov](http://www.wheelchairgames.va.gov) or contact Marlene Pratt at (804) 675-5000, ext. 3969, or Kristin Windon at (804) 675-5002. The deadline for interested athletes to complete their registration is April 15.

The public is invited to attend any of the sports competitions throughout the week of the Games, and admission is free.



## Social Networking - Telling the DAVs Story With Social Media

For those of you interacting with family and friends online, there are some important but simple things you can accomplish for the organization with just a little extra effort. Well more than half of American adults now actively use social networking, and the fastest growing demographic is 50 and older. Facebook is widely considered the most accessible form of social media to the Vietnam era generation — those of us who didn't grow up with the Internet. And studies show as much as 95 percent of the generation currently serving in uniform is using at least one social network.

Veterans need each other for support, and now the DAV Facebook page [Facebook.com/TheDAV](http://Facebook.com/TheDAV) is a place where you can find that. I've heard directly from people who've found other veterans that they served with 30 years ago and now are "Facebook friends."

Facebook.com is the largest, fastest growing network in history. For that reason, the DAV has a concerted effort to reach out to our stakeholders on Facebook, offering the latest news on veterans issues, informational materials and legislative alerts. More so, we listen to and address concerns raised by veterans, their families and friends.

Many DAV members are using it to talk to each other about their problems and successes, and it's been great for camaraderie, doing a good job of bridging the generational gap. This tool has allowed members to help each other, ask for help and ultimately create new connections. There are a great deal of questions posed about benefits assistance, membership eligibility and current happenings in Washington. But the most common posts are from veterans telling their stories, praising the DAV and expressing their support for veterans.

We are working hard to harness social networking to improve our grassroots advocacy. Social networking has surpassed email as the number one way to communicate electronically. Gone are the days when sending out

mass emails was the best method to spread the word.

If you are on Facebook, I encourage you to find your elected officials' Facebook pages. We have a tab labeled "Congress" on the DAV Facebook page that can help you find your Representative and Senators on Facebook. Not only will visiting their pages help you stay up to date with their positions and actions, it will give you an opportunity to publicly state your stance on the issues. The officials and their staffs will receive the message, but it will also educate their other constituents about your concerns.

Grassroots campaigns should include encouraging supporters to post on the elected officials' Facebook pages with the aim of making the message "viral," which is when a strong, well placed message is read and shared by so many it eventually spreads to even larger audiences without any additional effort from the originators. The messages we have are often strong enough to go viral—they just need to be shared by more of you initially.

The communication revolution now underway is serving as an excellent opportunity for every member, every person who cares about the DAV to stand up and be heard. Whether you are sharing your experiences as a disabled veteran, reaching out to old buddies or sounding off about legislative action, we need you to make your voice heard.

Some Facebook pages you may want to visit include [Facebook.com/TheDAV](http://Facebook.com/TheDAV) and [Facebook.com/standup4vets](http://Facebook.com/standup4vets). Additionally, many Departments and Chapters now have their own Facebook pages, which should offer further opportunities to connect with veterans in your local areas. As your National Commander, I now have a Facebook page where you can come take part in the Commander's Action Network. Please visit me online even if you are not registered with Facebook. I am at [www.facebook.com/DAV.Commander](http://www.facebook.com/DAV.Commander). I hope to see you there.

## VA's Home Loan Program Continues to Lead Mortgage Industry *Low Foreclosure Rates and High Loan Volume Cap Successful Fiscal Year*

WASHINGTON (Jan. 30, 2012) – Home loans guaranteed by the Department of Veterans Affairs continue to have the lowest serious delinquency and foreclosure rates in the mortgage industry. Veterans have also taken advantage of their home loan benefit in record numbers, as VA loan originations reached their highest total in eight years.

"The continued strong performance and high volume of VA loans are a testament to the importance of VA's home loan program and a tribute to the skilled VA professionals who help homeowners in financial trouble keep their homes," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki.

Last year, VA helped 72,391 Veterans and Servicemembers who were in default on their mortgage loan retain their homes or avoid foreclosure, an increase from 66,030 from the prior year. At the same time, foreclosures on VA guaranteed loans dropped by 28 percent.

According to the Mortgage Bankers Association National Delinquency Survey, VA's foreclosure rate for the last 14 quarters and serious delinquency rate for the last 11 quarters have been the lowest of all measured loan types, even prime loans.

In fiscal year 2011, VA guaranteed 357,594 loans, an increase of nearly 14 percent over last year. There are currently over 1.5 million active VA home loans. The program makes home ownership more affordable for Veterans, active duty Servicemembers, and eligible surviving spouses by permitting no-downpayment loans and by protecting lenders from loss if the borrower fails to repay the loan.

Much of the program's strength stems from the efforts of VA employees and loan servicers nationwide, whose mission is to ensure all Veterans receive every possible opportunity to remain in their homes, avoid foreclosure, and protect their credit from the consequences of a foreclosure.

"We are committed to making even more Veterans and Servicemembers

aware of this important benefit and delivering the assistance they deserve when financial difficulties arise," said VA's Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey.

For Veterans and Servicemembers who have trouble meeting their mortgage obligations or anticipate problems in the near future, VA first recommends contacting their loan servicer.

Depending on the situation, VA's loan specialists can intervene on a Veteran's behalf to help pursue home-retention options such as repayment plans, forbearances, and loan modifications. Veterans and Servicemembers can also call VA toll-free at (877) 827-3702 to speak with a VA specialist concerning foreclosure avoidance.

Veterans may obtain a certificate of eligibility and sign up for eBenefits through the web portal at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov). The Department of Defense and VA jointly developed the eBenefits portal as a single secure point of access for online benefit information and tools to perform multiple self-service functions such as checking the status of their claim.

Servicemembers may enroll in eBenefits using their Common Access Card at any time during their military service, or before they leave during their Transition Assistance Program briefings.

Veterans may also enroll in eBenefits and obtain a premium account by verifying their identity in-person at the nearest regional office or online depending on their status, or calling VA's toll free number at 1-800-827-1000.

Since 1944, when home loan guaranties were first offered under the original GI Bill, VA has guaranteed more than 19.4 million home loans worth over \$1.1 trillion. To obtain more information about the VA Home Loan Guaranty Program, please visit the program's home page at [www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans](http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans).



## DAVA Loves Pancake Breakfasts!!!



Mary Restad, Laura Hoefs, Greg Seurer and Kathy Vandrovec. They took turns cooking and serving the pancakes.



Above Right: Mike and Kathy Vandrovec. The kids weren't the only ones that like the face painting.



Right: Thad Elsworth of Birthday Party Magic puttin on a magic show for the kids.



## New Law Change Increases Insurance Coverage for Veterans

WASHINGTON (Jan. 10, 2012) – Some Veterans covered under the Veterans Group Life Insurance program (VGLI) now have the opportunity to increase their coverage to the current maximum coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program.

"Currently, 70 percent of the Veterans covered under VGLI are under age 60, have less than \$400,000 of coverage, and will greatly benefit from this law change," said Allison A. Hickey, Department of Veterans Affairs under secretary for benefits.

Under the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, enacted on Oct. 13, 2010, Veterans can increase their coverage by \$25,000 at each five-year anniversary date of their policy to the current legislated maximum SGLI coverage, presently, \$400,000.

To date, approximately 21 percent of eligible Veterans have taken advantage of this opportunity, resulting in nearly \$113 million of new coverage being issued.

The VGLI program allows newly discharged Veterans to convert their SGLI coverage they had while in the service to a civilian program. Before enactment of this law, Veterans could not have more VGLI than the amount of SGLI they had at the time of separation from service.

For example, those who got out of the service prior to Sept. 1, 2005, when the maximum SGLI coverage was \$250,000, were limited to

\$250,000 in VGLI coverage.

Now on their first five-year anniversary, these Veterans can elect to increase their coverage to \$275,000. On their next five-year anniversary, they can increase the coverage to \$300,000, and so forth.

The additional coverage can be issued regardless of the Veteran's health. To be eligible to purchase this additional coverage, the Veteran must:

- Have active VGLI coverage,
- Have less than the current legislated maximum coverage of \$400,000,
- Request the additional coverage during the 120-day period prior to each five-year anniversary date, and
- Be less than 60 years of age on the five-year anniversary date of his or her coverage.

Eligible Veterans are notified of this opportunity a week before the start of the 120-day period prior to their anniversary date, and twice more before the actual anniversary date.

For more information about VA's Insurance Program or other VA benefits, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call 1-800-827-1000. Veterans are also encouraged to visit VA's web portal [eBenefits - Insurance](#).


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