January 2015 | www.calvet.ca.gov

CalVet CONNECT

CalVet Homes Statewide Job Fair

- On-site Testing, Application, and Interview
- Many Positions Available

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

A New Year, A New Design

CALVET
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Secretary's Message

CalVet's Plans for 2015

The holidays are behind us and now it is time to focus on 2015 and the many opportunities a new year provides for the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) to continue with its mission of serving our Veterans and their families. I would like to tell you about some of the exciting projects CalVet plans to roll out during the New Year.

Beginning with our Minority Veterans Division, we will be releasing some White Papers, with our partner the California Research Bureau, on the data gathered during CalVet's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Veterans Leadership Forum held last September. The Division will also be participating in several fundraisers for El Soldado, the Mexican American Veterans Memorial as well as Sierra College Celebration of Latinas during World War II. The Division plans to further cement CalVet's relationship with our Native American Veterans by attending a very important State Tribal Leaders Gathering later this year.

CalVet's Veterans Services Division remains busy planning for its Veteran Service Representative (VSR) Academy training during January 2015. This training program allows County Veteran Service Office VSRs to achieve accreditation, thus allowing them to present claims before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf of CalVet. Our quarterly training increases accessibility and utilization of benefits by our California Veterans and their families, ensuring a consistent knowledge base and heightened focus on advocacy by all CalVet-approved VSRs.

Changes to assist our Veterans throughout California often requires new legislation, and to this end CalVet embarked on an effort to update the Military and Veterans Code to ensure that it meets the needs of California Veterans into the 21st Century. The Code has not been updated and rewritten since about 1946, when all the various veteran programs in California – Veterans' Welfare Board, Veteran Homes, Home Loans, and Veteran Services – were brought together into one department. CalVet continues examining the feasibility of rewriting the Code and plans to be closely involved in proposed bills intended to improve the lives of our Veterans living in California.

As 2015 begins, the CalVet Homes Division will continue to focus on increasing admissions, especially in our newest Homes in Redding and Fresno. Our West Los Angeles Home will see construction of a new kitchen, which will allow the Home to care for more California Veterans. As the year progresses, we will be exploring the needs of our changing population. Lifestyles and health needs evolve as our Veterans age and, as always, CalVet's objective is to provide the most homelike environment for our heroes. Through all of these efforts, the Veterans Homes of California strives to be a comprehensive system of long term care throughout the state.

Our Home Loans Division is pleased to continue working with affordable builders to create affordable housing for our Veterans and their families. Several exciting projects are underway in very desirable areas of our State.

Finally, CalVet continues working in collaboration with the Interagency Council on Veterans and their four pillars identifying and prioritizing the needs of our nearly two million Veterans in the Golden State: Housing, Education, Health, and Employment.

While planning continues on important CalVet conferences and gatherings, I thought it appropriate to bring you up to speed on the exciting work for us during 2015. These exciting projects become realities thanks to the ongoing generosity and commitment of you, our partners, stakeholders, and staff. Welcome to 2015 and the many surprises in store for all of us!

Sincerely,

Peter J. Gravett

Peter J. Gravett, Major General (Ret)
Secretary
California Department of Veterans Affairs

All veterans are reminded that the fastest way to learn about and secure the benefits they have earned is by visiting their local County Veterans Service Office. A listing of these offices is available at www.cacvso.org.

New Veterans Housing Program Underway

Prop 41 Implementation Begins

By Diane Luther, CalVet Home Loans Division

There is good news on the horizon as the State of California begins implementing a voter-approved proposition to provide housing assistance for our homeless Veterans.

The new Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention (VHHP) Program is scheduled to issue its first Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) and application for funds, along with final Program Guidelines, in mid-January of this year.

The VHHP Program was approved by voters as Proposition 41 in California's June, 2014 election. Proposition 41 and its accompanying legislation authorized bond sales totaling $600 million to develop housing for homeless and low income Veterans and their families. The first NOFA will make $75 million available across the State.

Applications from development teams will be due in March or early April of 2015, and awards will be announced in June. For updates on the VHHP Program and to sign up on the listserv go to www.hcd.ca.gov/fa/vets.

CalVet works collaboratively with the Department of Housing and Community Development and the California Housing Finance Authority to design the VHHP Program. The Program emphasizes the provision of high quality housing available at a variety of rent levels, coupled with strong Veteran-specific services.

The first NOFA incentivizes the development of supportive housing for homeless Veterans with disabilities, the NOFA will also reward projects that partner with the project-based United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Veterans Supportive Housing Choice Voucher program, commonly known as HUD-VASH.

"We are excited to see the many types of housing projects expected to apply for funds in the spring," said Theresa Gunn, CalVet's Deputy Secretary for Farm and Home Loans. "These projects will go a long way toward ending and preventing homelessness among California's Veterans."

Anyone with questions about the VHHP Program is invited to contact Diane Luther at diane.luther@calvet.ca.gov, or (916) 503-8309.

Why Choose a CalVet Home Loan?

By Mark Walbert and Gary Bonin
CalVet Home Loan Division

When buying a home, Veterans should choose the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) over the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA).

Why? Here is a comparison and contrast of the two programs.

Let's begin with the USDVA. The federal USDVA helps Veterans to become homeowners by providing home loan guaranty services. The USDVA is not a lender and does not provide funding for any loans. The USDVA guarantees a portion of the loan, enabling the lender to provide the Veteran with more favorable loan terms, for example not requiring a down payment or private mortgage insurance.

USDVA-guaranteed home loans are provided by private lenders, such as banks, mortgage companies, and CalVet. To be eligible, the Veteran must have a good credit score, sufficient income, a valid Certificate of Eligibility (COE), and meet service requirements. USDVA loans are obtained through the Veterans' lender of choice once a COE is obtained.

In comparison, CalVet has its own home loan program which provides funding and offers unique benefits for Veterans purchasing homes in California. The CalVet Home Loans program also uses the USDVA loan guarantee to take advantage of the 100% financing opportunity that this guarantee affords Veterans. In addition, CalVet provides several unique benefits that no other lender can provide:

- **CalVet/97 Loan** - A loan to Veterans who are not eligible or have lost their eligibility for the USDVA loan guarantee. There is no better loan available in this case for our Veteran. It offers a 3% down payment with no monthly mortgage insurance.
- **CalVet Products** - We also offer three specialty products (construction loans, home improvement loans and rehabilitation loans) that are not typically available through private lenders using the USDVA guarantee at the price points offered by CalVet.
- **Low Cost Insurance** - Excellent group insurance benefits for fire, earthquake, and flood that provide greater home protection at lower costs. CalVet has a unique portfolio blanket premium policy that results in our Veterans receiving earthquake and flood insurance with terms, rates and deductibles not available in private industry. Many of our Veterans extend their loans just to retain this insurance.
- **Low Cost Loans** - There are no underwriting, processing or additional lender fees. CalVet's charges these fees: appraisal, credit report, and 1% origination fee.
- **No Credit Score Minimums** - All loan files are manually underwritten which results in more Veterans approved for a loan. Private industry uses minimum credit scores as conditions to USDVA guidelines which results in Veterans being denied in cases where they may have had a temporary hardship.
- **Flexible Underwriting** - CalVet loans offer greater flexibility in underwriting than the private sector USDVA products. This reality results in more loans made to the most "in need" Veterans. Private industry typically applies conservative conditions to credit,

HOME LOAN, page 5 >

NOW HIRING: West LA Veterans Home Hosts Job Fair

CalVet Job Fair

Wednesday, January 21, 2015
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
West LA Veterans Home
11500 Nimitz Avenue
Los Angeles, CA

In preparation for the immediate opening of our new Skilled Nursing Unit at our CalVet West Los Angeles Veterans Home, CalVet hosts a huge job fair this month. Our CalVet job fair is unique because for the first time qualified attendees can take eligibility exams and apply for corresponding job openings at one location.

Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) may take the exam in the morning, and if eligible, may participate in a hiring interview in the afternoon. Registered Nurses may also take the exam on site. Applications will be accepted for upcoming exams for Activity Coordinator, Social Workers, Supervising Registered Nurses, clerical, food service, and custodial positions.

All applicants must bring with them any clinical licenses and their employment history to assist in completing applications and exams.

CalVet is recruiting applicants for the following positions:

- 27 Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs)
- 11 Registered Nurses, (RNs)
- Activities coordinator

JOB FAIR, page 6 >

income, and property types. These conditions result in many of the most "in need" Veterans not qualifying for the loan. Private industry financial institutions require these conditions or encourage conservative underwriting to ensure salability to Ginnie Mae and other secondary markets. Private lenders are typically not willing to accept the loan repurchase risk associated with loans underwritten without these conditions.

- **Credit Support Desk** - If a Veteran cannot qualify, we offer a service to help our credit challenged Veterans get back on track.
- **In-House Servicing** - CalVet does not sell its loans on the secondary market. We work directly with the Veterans to keep them in the home during times of hardship. CalVet services its loans for the life of the loan with a uniquely trained "Veteran sensitive" customer service team. This specialized attention is a vital component of the CalVet Home Loan benefit not offered by private industry.

Qualified applicants will enjoy competitive interest rates on loans up to $521,250, with little or no money down, no monthly mortgage insurance, low costs, low cost insurance and CalVet servicing for the life of the loan. The CalVet Home Loans program shows appreciation to our Veterans purchasing property and living in the great State of California. For more information, contact CalVet Home Loans at (866) 653-2510 or www.calvet.ca.gov/homeloans.

CalVet Sets Dates for Veterans Service Representative Academy Training

The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) resumes its Veteran Service Representative (VSR) Academy training in January 2015. Our training program is for County Veteran Service Office VSRs to achieve accreditation, allowing them to present claims before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) on behalf of CalVet.

CalVet's quarterly, two-phase training increases accessibility and utilization of benefits by our California Veterans and their families, ensuring a consistent knowledge base and heightened focus on advocacy by all CalVet-approved VSRs.

- **Phase I** provides training on Veterans benefits, advocacy, interviewing, records review, statement writing, and overall claim development.
- **Phase II** training, which completes course requirements and prepares VSRs to take the accreditation exam, is for VSRs who completed Phase I training and have had three months of on the-job training.

Following are CalVet's scheduled training dates for the first quarter of 2015:

Phase II training for VSRs who already completed Phase I training in April 2014:

- CalVet Headquarters
  Sacramento
  Phase II Training
  January 15-16, 2015
- Orange County CVSO
  Santa Ana
  Phase II Training
  January 29-30, 2014

Phase I and Phase II training for VSRs new to the program:

- CalVet Headquarters
  Sacramento
  Phase I Training
  January 12-14, 2015
  Phase II Training
  April 9-10, 2015
- Orange County CVSO
  Santa Ana
  Phase I Training
  January 26-28, 2015
  Phase II Training
  April 30-May 1, 2015

CalVet worked with Swords to Plowshares to improve the training curriculum, which now is more interactive and places additional emphasis on state and USDVA benefits programs typically of most interest to Veteran clients.

For more information about the Veterans Service Representative Academy and future training dates, you may contact Malachi Smith, malachi.smith@calvet.ca.gov, (916) 653-8379.

< JOB FAIR

- Social worker
- Nursing supervisor
- Plus clerical, food service, custodial, and numerous other clinical positions.

Applicants will have the opportunity to speak with our Human Resources staff about how to get a state job, to take the exams necessary to establish application eligibility (a necessary step in state service employment), and to apply for job openings.

CalVet also has job openings at our Veterans Homes in Barstow, Chula Vista, Fresno, Lancaster, Redding, Ventura, and Yountville. For a complete list of CalVet exams and employment opportunities and to learn about Veterans preference, go to www.calvet.ca.gov/jobs.

Native American Navy Veteran Paved Way for Women Sailors

By Shannon Collins, DoD News

The head woman dancer at a recent Native American Veterans Association pow wow is a retired sailor who helped blaze the path for women in the Navy.

Retired Navy Chief Petty Officer Old Horn-Purdy, from the Crow tribe, took part in the annual Veterans Appreciation and Heritage Day Pow Wow here on Nov. 8-9, 2014. She was one of the first females in the Navy to serve on a combatant ship.

Long before she ever set out to sea, however, Horn-Purdy's journey began on the Crow Agency reservation in Montana.

"I grew up around very traditional grandparents, and my father would pass down stories. We had oral history," she said. "They would teach us from our ancestors. Nothing was written down. I grew up knowing some of my language, but my first language was English. I went to school off the reservation, so I lived in both worlds."

She said it was a culture shock when she went to the school off the reservation, but she had to adapt.

Military Benefits

Horn-Purdy said she joined the military for the benefits, such as education, training and travel.

"I needed a place to sleep, something to eat and, for me, that was good enough," she said, adding that she wanted to "learn, that was the main reason." She said she can relate to other military people coming from other countries who are just glad to have some place to sleep, eat and work.

When she got to her ship in 1985, she found out she was among the first group of women on her deployed ship. Then, in 1999, she found out that she was to be among the first group of women on a combatant ship.

"It was hard, but we had to adapt if we wanted to continue and learn and do our job," she said. She was in engineering but wasn't allowed to call herself a machinist at that time. She said that, at her three-year mark in service, the career field opened up to women.

One of the First

"I ended up becoming a machinist, one of the first women in there," she said. "I ended up advancing quickly through that because not too many people wanted to be in there. I don't know if it was because I was naïve or young, but I used to think, 'I'm going to be tough. I'm Indian. I'm going to make it.' It was hard to learn the theories and engineering principles. I'm thankful for the co-workers who helped me through it. It was hard, but I got through it.

"I'm appreciative of those particular men who would look beyond my race and gender and would try to teach me and help me to think the way I should think so I have a lot to be thankful for. They helped me learn," she said.

Serving in the military is also a Native American tradition. Her paternal grandfather, Allen Old Horn served in the Army in World War II and her maternal grandfather, George Thompson, was in the Navy in World War II. Her great uncles Barney and Henry Old Coyote were code talkers in World War II, and great-grandfather James Red Fox was also one in World War I.

Old Horn-Purdy said her father, Sarge Old Horn Sr., encouraged her throughout her time in the military and is proud of her time in the uniform.

Since the Beginning

She said Native Americans have defended America since the beginning.
"Native Americans weren't given medals or accolades that we get now for defending America," she said. "But we still have to protect America, no matter what. It's in our blood."

She encourages people to attend pow wows in their communities to learn more about Native American culture.

"You don't have to be Indian to be at a pow wow," she said. "Many people don't know anything about Indians so it's great to educate them about us, because Indians have a different viewpoint and different stories. It's good for people to learn and see what we're all about."

Reprinted with permission. See also: Face of Defense: Native American Vets Celebrate Heritage, www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123724.

USDVA Expands Eligibility for Health Care Related to Military Sexual Trauma

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), under authority from the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, announced December 1, 2014, expanded eligibility for Veterans in need of mental health care due to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during their military service. This trauma is commonly known as military sexual trauma (MST).

This expansion, which primarily pertains to Reservists and National Guard members participating in weekend drill, gives the authority to offer our Veterans the appropriate care and services needed to treat conditions resulting from MST that occurred during a period of inactive duty training.

This expansion is reportedly the first in a series of reforms recently passed by Congress as part of a massive USDVA overhaul bill aimed partly at increasing access to care amidst rampant sexual violence in the military. Over the next couple of years, the changes will help remove paperwork barriers to treatment for active-duty troops and require new legislative oversight of USDVA efforts."

Secretary McDonald recently met with Ruth Moore, a Navy Veteran and MST survivor for whom the Ruth Moore Act of 2013 is named. Ms. Moore will be working with USDVA to ensure that survivors are treated fairly and compassionately, and that our Veterans with MST can access fair compensation exams and access health care practitioners who are trained in understanding and working with MST issues.

Currently, all USDVA health care for mental and physical health conditions related to MST is provided free of charge. Veterans do not need to have a service-connected disability rating or seeking disability compensation to be eligible for free MST-related counseling and care.

Veterans also do not need to have reported such incidents to the Department of Defense or possess documentation or records to support their assertion of having experienced such trauma. The determination of whether a Veteran's condition is MST-related is strictly a clinical determination made by the responsible USDVA mental health provider. Finally, Veterans need not be enrolled in USDVA's health care system to qualify for MST-related treatment, as it is independent of USDVA's general treatment authority.

Veterans can learn more about USDVA's MST-related services online at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp and see video clips with the recovery stories of Veterans who have experienced MST at http://maketheconnection.net/conditions/military-sexual-trauma.

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Source: USDVA, Stars and Stripes.

Department of Defense Releases Military Sexual Trauma Report

In response to a directive from President Obama in December, 2013, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) released a report detailing major improvements since August 2013 in the prevention of and response to sexual assault, including reforms of the military justice system. Following is the executive summary of the DoD report submitted to the President on November 25, 2014. To read the full report, go to http://bit.ly/1zY0fvY.

Department of Defense Report to the Present of the United States on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response - Executive Summary

Sexual assault is a significant challenge facing the United States military and the nation. Academia is wrestling with campus sexual assault, professional sports leagues struggle with intimate partner violence, and societies across the globe contend with horrific accounts of sexual violence that appear in daily headlines. For the first time in history, sexual assault has become a part of the national conversation, and a collective awareness and desire for action has emerged. Given its history of leadership on other social problems, the Department of Defense recognizes its vital role in advancing the campaign to prevent this heinous crime.

To this end, the Department's aim is to reduce, with the ultimate goal to eliminate, the crime of sexual assault in the Armed Forces. The Department of Defense-wide strategic approach to sexual assault is prevention-focused with an unwavering commitment to victim1 care. By employing a comprehensive prevention and response system, the Department is taking deliberate, meaningful actions to:

- prevent the crime
- empower victims and facilitate recovery when incidents do occur
- sustain its commitment to holding offenders2 appropriately accountable

With unprecedented leadership engagement, the Department has worked diligently to define the scope of the problem and take appropriate steps to field solutions that will foster lasting organizational change. As illustrated throughout this report, the Department has made notable progress in several areas. While these accomplishments are encouraging, the mission is far from complete, as leadership and Service members alike acknowledge the need for continued growth, persistence, and innovation in eradicating sexual assault from the ranks.

New Study Finds Military Sexual Assault Reports Up, Actual Assaults Down

The RAND Corporation recently released initial results from a 2014 study that estimates the number of U.S. service members who experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment or gender discrimination in the past year. The Department of Defense selected RAND to conduct this congressionally mandated study.

Approximately 170,000 service members, or 30 percent of the 560,000 invited, answered questions for the study, one of the largest of its kind. Among other findings, the report noted that while the number of military sexual assault reports went up in 2014, the number of actual assaults went down. For more information about the report, go to http://www.rand.org/news/press/2014/12/04.html. To read the full report, go to http://bit.ly/1wCagOM.

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EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

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Rates are subject to change.
** Not all buyers will qualify.

California Veterans Board and California State Commanders Veterans Council Advise CalVet

The California Veterans Board serves as an advocate for Veterans affairs identifying needs and working to ensure and enhance the rights and benefits of California Veterans and their dependents. The Board consists of seven members appointed by the Governor, subject to the confirmation of the State Senate. All Board members must be veterans. The Board reports to the Legislature annually regarding its activities, accomplishments, and expenditures during the preceding fiscal year.

The California State Commanders Veterans Council recently held their election of officers at a meeting held at the Fresno Veterans Home. With legislation passed in 2013 (AB 717), the Council is now an official advisory body for CalVet and the CalVet Veterans Board. The new law requires the CalVet Secretary and the CalVet Veterans Board to meet with the Council at least twice a year so the Council can advise them on issues that are of interest and importance to the Council and Veteran organizations throughout the state.

Qualifying Veterans May Receive Belated High School Diplomas

The Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) wants to honor the many contributions of those whose education was interrupted due to wartime circumstance. Current and former Sacramento County residents who left high school to serve in the U.S. Military during World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War, and received an honorable discharge may contact SCOE to receive their high school diploma. SCOE also presents diplomas to Japanese American citizens forced to leave high school due to World War II internment.

Individuals may request diplomas on behalf of themselves or qualifying family members, including persons now deceased. Those who earned a General Education Development (G.E.D.) Certificate or graduated from high school while in an internment camp are still eligible for diplomas.

To be considered for the Spring 2015 awards ceremony, submit applications by April 15, 2015. Applications are available by calling SCOE at (916) 228-2416 or visiting www.scoe.net/or.

Meet Redding Home Resident Stephen Vidal, WWII Veteran

By Gary Moore, Redding Veterans Home

Growing up in Gallup, New Mexico, Stephen Vidal was 12 years old when his father was the Mayor of the City. Coming from a long line of influential people, Stephen's grandfather was the founder of Gallup New Mexico and also an inventor. At age 16, Stephen was a Class A Tennis Player and was ranked in the top 50 in the county. At age 18 he was drafted and went to serve for the Air Force Administration. He began his service in Egypt and was assigned to a unit that secured aerial photographs of landscapes to track certain improvements, installations and developments in post-war territories.

During his time in the military, Stephen was also influenced by music and played guitar and eventually took up playing the piano. He never took one lesson and is self- taught on the piano. To this day, he does not know how to read a lick of music but plays the piano like a world class composer. Before he became proficient on the piano, he liked to play the guitar to entertain other service members. Stephen tells the story of one day while playing his guitar, off in a distance he heard some percussion sounds playing along with him. He came to realize that person joining in on his music was none other than Jimmy Demeara who once played with the famous Les Brown Band of Renown. "Jimmy would use nothing but his own footlocker and his hands and join right in with percussion" says Vidal, who enjoyed the accompaniment.

Among the several mesmerizing stories from Mr. Vidal, the one that is the most moving was his nearly 70 years of marriage with his wife, Jane. Stephen and Jane met in high school when one of his friends asked if he was going to the letterman's picnic. Stephen replied, "well I'd like to but I don't have a date." His friend thought of this beautiful young girl named Jane and suggested he ask her to the event. Stephen knew that all the sports athletes had Jane's attention and never thought in a million years that Jane would consider going with him until his friend told him that he had spotted Jane attending his tennis matches and loved the game and the athletes who played it. Stephen was positively encouraged by that and asked Jane to the social. She agreed to going to the event and, after 6 months of dating, she agreed to take Stephen's hand in marriage. They were married nearly 70 years when Jane passed.

"Never once did she ever get mad at me." Vidal explained that instead of getting angry with him, Jane would just lean in to him and say, "You know Steve, I haven't heard you play 'On Top Of Old Smokey' in a long time." That was her way of soothing the situation. He would play the song and insisted that you can never be angry when playing the piano. It's just impossible. So he would play for her. The two had 4 children and with all the grand children, great grand- children and one great-great- grandchild, there is a total of 36 in all.

Stephen is a Veteran, musician, and family man. He is also an inventor like his grandfather. Stephen currently holds ownership of the patent for the Hydro Courts installed at Wimbledon and at various facilities in China. Over 250 million dollars' worth of Hydro Courts are installed in the world, and Stephen owns the patent on the product. He also has 5 other related inventions that are being processed through the U.S. Patent system today.

Stephen became a resident of the Veterans Home of California in Redding in November, 2014, and already has brought joy and camaraderie to other Veterans and employees at the home. He enjoys his new friends and plays the piano daily. Stephen looked in many states for a Veterans home so he could be close to his children, and California was the only state that had a facility that met his needs. "California is setting the bar for Veteran facilities," says Vidal who also stated that the Redding home is immaculate and a fine example of what Veterans' homes should be.

Two Generations of Vietnam Veterans in the Same Family Fight for Justice and Win

By Camille Soleil, Executive Director, Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program

Mr. McManus, a career Air Force noncommissioned officer, had served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967. In 1985, he filed a claim for benefits for diabetes and an award under the Nehmer decision that awarded disability benefits to Vietnam Veterans suffering from illnesses scientifically linked to Agent Orange exposure. Sadly, he succumbed to complications from diabetes and heart disease in 1991, while his claim was still pending.

His son, also a Vietnam Veteran (he served in Vietnam as an Army medic from 1970 to 1971), decided to pursue his father's claim himself. "I started by getting a computer and surfing the Web," he recalls. For five years, from 2004 to 2009, Mr. McManus filed all the briefs for his appeal pro se, again and again hearing that his father's diabetes was not a condition that was eligible for benefits. Again and again, he looked for counsel who might help him appeal the VA denials, without success. "No one got back to me, or they didn't do this kind of work."

For more than five years, he painstakingly filed his own claims, enduring rejection after rejection from the VA.

What could have been another in a long list of discouraging events instead became a turning point, when he appealed the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims: "That's when the judge said it would be better if an attorney handled things for me at this point." The Court issued an order requesting the Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program (www.vetsprobono.org) investigate the possibility of representing Mr. McManus. The program responded to the Court's order, evaluated Mr. McManus's case, and assigned a volunteer attorney to represent him.

"When [the Pro Bono Program volunteer attorney] got on board it was like a whole weight was lifted off me," Mr. McManus says of the moment his attorney took over his appeal for the accrued benefits and an Agent Orange award owed his late father. "The Pro Bono people organized things really well. They took my thoughts and made them go from regular TV to high-def."

After reviewing the case files, Mr. McManus' attorney determined that the Board of Veterans Appeals had erred in finding that his father did not have diabetes after its own regional office had determined that he did. The Board had also been wrong to contend that the Agent Orange award law did not apply, ruling that the elder Mr. McManus had had no claim pending when he died. In fact, the late Mr. McManus had filed a timely claim.

California Conservation Corps Offers Paid Training for Veterans

California Veterans are invited to take advantage of paid science-based technical training and work experience opportunities through the California Conservation Corps, Veterans Green Corps and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. As part of the Salmonid Habitat Monitoring Project, Veterans will become proficient at collecting important ecological data in Santa Barbara, Ventura, and northern Los Angeles counties coastal areas.

The goal of the project is to assess the effectiveness of coastal and marine habitat restoration techniques designed to recover endangered species and increase fish populations. Experience gained will help Veterans begin careers in agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

For more information about the program, including eligibility requirements and application procedures, contact Keith Peters or Sabrina Roberts at (323) 231-8248.

Connecting Veterans to Their Social Security Disability Benefits

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (SAMHSA) believes access to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is critical to achieving economic and housing stability for Veterans who have disabling conditions.

In its efforts to help end Veteran homelessness by 2015, SAMHSA offers a new issue brief, "Connecting Veterans to Social Security Disability Benefits: A Key Component in Ending Veteran Homelessness." The brief explores Veteran eligibility for SSI/SSDI, how Social Security Administration and U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs disability benefits impact one another, and documents disability for Veterans with TBI or PTSD. The brief also provides guidance on increasing benefits acquisition in Federal, state, and community programs.

Using the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery model, Veterans are able to access Social Security disability benefits in an average of three months, which opens up new housing opportunities and reduces their future risk of homelessness. Additionally, access to Medicaid and Medicare through Social Security disability benefits leads to better health outcomes for Veterans experiencing or at-risk for homelessness.

To view the SAMHSA brief, go to http://soarworks.prainc.com/sites/soarworks.prainc.com/files/Connecting_Veterans_SSI_SSDI_100714.pdf.

CalVet Strike Team Update

CalVet Strike Team claims review efforts in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Oakland as of December 31, 2014.

Number of Claims Reviewed	**41,694**
Lump Sum Payments Total	**$40,770,865***
Monthly Award Payments Total	**$5,198,309**
Annualized Monthly Awards Payment Total	**$62,379,710****

*Retroactive payments based on the time the claim has been sitting at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Payments going to California veterans every year for the rest of their lives.

CalVet Small Business/ DVBE Update

CalVet's November Small Business (SB) / Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) Monthly Report for Fiscal Year 2014-2015 reflected the following estimates:

- Agency Total: **SB increase to 24.24% from 19.84%**
- Agency Total: **DVBE decrease from 5.13% to 5.06%**

CALENDAR

January 13
Recovering Warrior & Caregiver Employment Conference
Camp Pendleton
San Jacinto Road, Bldg. 202850
Camp Pendleton South
Register: http://bit.ly/1rY5a0B

January 14
Sacramento Valley National Cemetery Memorial for Veterans with No Next of Kin
5810 Midway Road, Dixon
Contact: (707) 693-2460

January 20
Vocational Workshop for Veterans, Service Members & Families
Asher College
1215 Howe Avenue, Sacramento
Contact: (916) 366-5453

January 20
Veterans Resource Center Grand Opening
San Diego Central Library, 3rd Floor
12:00 p.m.
330 Park Boulevard, San Diego

January 21
CalVet Job Fair
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
West LA Veterans Home
11500 Nimitz Avenue
Los Angeles, CA

January 23
Solano County Small Business Expo
1020 Ulatis Drive, Vacaville
Contact: (707) 399-3011

January 28
Veterans Center Grand Opening
Fresno City College
101 East University Avenue, Fresno
RSVP: mary.alfieris@fresnocitycollege.edu

January 31
Veterans Expo
9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Beaumont Civic Center
550 E. 6th Street, Beaumont
Contact: (951) 769-9858

Note: To view full calendar, visit www.calvet.ca.gov/home/calendar

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