CALVET
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

NEWSLETTER

All veterans are reminded that the fastest way to inquire 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.

AUGUST 2013

Diane Vanderpot, Undersecretary for the Veterans Homes of California

Mirtha Villarreal-Younger, Deputy Secretary, Minority Veterans Affairs

NEW CALVET STAFF

CalVet welcomes the Governor's newest appointees: Diane Vanderpot, Undersecretary for the Veterans Homes of California and Mirtha Villarreal-Younger, Deputy Secretary, Minority Veterans Affairs. The Executive Team is now complete.

Ms. Vanderpot is a retired Army Colonel. She was senior policy officer for arms control at the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense from 2010 to 2012, a professor at the U.S. Army War College from 2009 to 2010 and intelligence director for the Multi-National Force-Iraq Force Strategic Engagement Cell from 2008 to 2009. She served in multiple positions at U.S. Army Europe in Heidelberg, Germany from 2003 to 2007, including chief of intelligence operations and community commander. Vanderpot was intelligence director for the Coalition/Joint Task Force-Kuwait at Camp Doha, Kuwait from 2001 to 2002 and served in multiple other positions as an officer in the U.S. Army from 1985 to 2012. Vanderpot earned a Master of Science degree in national security and strategy from the U.S. Naval War College.

"Ms. Vanderpot will help ensure CalVet's continued ability to provide the quality living experience and professional medical care the disabled and older veterans living in our homes deserve," said Secretary Peter J. Gravett. "Her years of leadership experience will also help ensure our homes continue to run as effectively and efficiently as possible."

Ms. Villarreal-Younger is a retired Army National Guard Lieutenant Colonel and was director of state personnel at the California Military Department. In that capacity, she served in multiple positions since 2001, including deputy director of state personnel programs, state equal employment officer, deputy director of public affairs and command information officer and chief of community relations. Villarreal-Younger was a force integration officer at the California Army National Guard from 1997 to 2001.

"We are delighted with Ms. Villarreal-Younger's appointment," said Secretary Gravett. "Her prior leadership roles and her experience with military personnel position her well to understand the needs and address the challenges of the State's minority veteran community."

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Secretary's Message

This month I would like to mention some very exciting news for veterans in California.

In response to the "backlog" of disability claims currently being experienced by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), Governor Brown recently authorized approximately $30 million and 36 limited-term positions for the creation of "Strike Force Teams" to help alleviate this major problem.

These Strike Force Teams, consisting of 12 Veterans Claims Representatives, will work alongside USDVA staff in Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego, focusing on backlogged claims, ensuring they are properly developed and have all documentation needed for adjudication. We have already begun advertising to fill these limited-term positions.

Governor Brown's recent budget also includes a one-time augmentation of $3 million in support of California's network of 56 County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO). CVSOs have proved time and time again that they are effective advocates for California veterans. This augmentation recognizes their hard work and provides them with the additional resources they need to better serve our veterans.

In addition, preliminary plans and working drawings for the California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery will soon see the light thanks to General Fund loan of up to $1.5 million. This cemetery will be built on the grounds of the former Fort Ord U.S. Army post located on Monterey Bay.

And finally, we are moving ahead with conversion of 84 beds from skilled nursing level of care to independent living at the West Los Angeles Veterans Home. This change will allow the California Department of Veterans Affairs to serve a broader population of veterans. This, coupled with the opening of the Fresno and Redding Veterans Homes later this year, is great news for California's veteran community.

As you can see, there are many exciting developments in California that will greatly improve the quality of life for our deserving veterans.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Gravett

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

CALIFORNIA CLAIMS BACKLOG STRIKE FORCE

Long-pending benefits claims submitted by California veterans and caught in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) "log jam" could soon see the light of day. The newly signed Governor's Budget has authorized $3 million and 36 limited-term positions that will allow CalVet to work with USDVA in alleviating its massive veterans' claims backlog.

The money will be used to hire a "Strike Force" team of 12 Veterans Claims Representatives (VCR) for each of the USDVA regional offices in Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego. The teams will focus on backlogged claims to ensure they are properly developed and have all necessary documentation needed for adjudication.

"We appreciate the leadership of the Governor and the Speaker on this initiative as well as the Legislature's continued support of CalVet and its efforts to ensure the well-being of California veterans and their families," said CalVet Secretary Peter J. Gravett. "Helping them get the benefits they so richly deserve after their honorable service to our country is the very least we can do for them."

CalVet has already begun advertising to fill the limited-term positions and is looking to hire VCRs with previous veterans' benefits claims processing experience. The USDVA will provide office space, computers, phones and other equipment for the Strike Teams which will work under the supervision of CalVet regional office staff.

To view the VCR announcement for positions open to those with current list eligibility, go to http://jobs.spb.ca.gov/wvpos/more_info.cfm?recno=519425. Those not currently on the VCR eligibility list may view VCR exam information at www.calvet.ca.gov/Files/Exams/Other/VetClaimsRepIIRevJuly2013.pdf.

TROOPS TO TRADES

Veterans looking to become carpenters, electricians, locksmiths, HVAC technicians or other trades people now have help. A program, initiated by the California State University (CSU) Chancellor's Office, is accepting veterans into a skilled-trades vocational training course available at several pilot campuses in the CSU system. The veterans are taught one of 10 skilled trades and are paid a stipend while learning. The effort is a joint venture between the campus and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Education Program. CalVet was instrumental in coordinating the resources and the marketing to veterans needed to ensure successful program initiation.

The first set of veteran apprenticeship candidates is currently being interviewed for trainee positions at CSU, San Bernardino and others will soon follow. This is a win-win situation for California State colleges and for our veterans.

For more information about the Troops to Trades program, go to www.calstate.edu/veterans/index.shtml.

CALVET, STATE LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP EXTENDED

A veterans service partnership between CalVet and the California State Library will be extended and expanded. The year-long pilot program, with funding provided by U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services and with direction and staff training provided by CalVet, established veterans resource centers in libraries in San Diego, Bakersfield and Redding. The centers offer veterans and their families information about the state and federal benefits they've earned through military service, how and where to file a benefits claim, and local services and service providers available to them.

Additional funding, announced at the recent State Librarians' Summit, along with continued direction and support from CalVet will enable the program to open veterans resource centers in five additional libraries in the state. A State Library focus group is working with CalVet to determine how best to expand the program, including how many and which library locations to add.

WEST LA RESIDENT MEDALS IN NATIONAL WHEELCHAIR GAMES

By Jeanne Bonfilio

Competing for his second year, 71-year-old Air Force veteran and West LA Veterans Home resident, John Smith, brought home a Silver Medal at the National Wheelchair Games. At this year's event, held in Tampa, Florida, Smith earned his medal in the team soccer category.

Last year, Smith won medals in the 200-meter race and the motorized wheelchair relay. The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is the largest wheelchair sports competition in the world!

Smith could hardly contain his excitement when he talked about his experiences at the Games. "Oh my! It was one of the most exciting things that I have ever attended," he said. "I have memories that will last forever." A member of American Legion Pacific Palisades Post 283, Smith is looking forward to competing in the games in Philadelphia next year.

"We're very proud of John's accomplishment. He overcomes adversity and no challenge is too great for him," said West LA Home Administrator Louis Koff.

The Games are presented each year by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America. They 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 and showcase some of the world's greatest wheelchair athletes. More than 500 veterans from across the United States, Puerto Rico and Great Britain compete each year.

For more information about the National Wheelchair Games or to volunteer, go to www.wheelchairgames.va.gov.

FEDERAL GRANTS WILL HELP HOMELESS VETERANS

More than 14,000 veterans across the nation will benefit from job training, job placement, housing help and other services, thanks to federal grants totaling almost $29 million. The grants, recently announced by the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service, were awarded through the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program. That is the only federal program that focuses exclusively on employment of homeless veterans.

In California, grants totaling nearly $4.3 million were awarded to 17 nonprofit organizations in 11 cities. "These funds will go a long way towards improving the well-being of California's homeless, jobless veterans and their families and helping restore the dignity they so deserve," said CalVet Secretary Peter J. Gravett. "We thank the Department of Labor and offer our congratulations to all our grantees."

The grants will help homeless veterans reintegrate into society and the labor force while providing effective services aimed at addressing the complex challenges that homeless veterans often confront, officials said. The services provided by grantees will include job placement, on-the-job training, career counseling, life skills and money management mentoring, as well as help in finding housing.

Funds were awarded on a competitive basis to state and local workforce investment boards, local public agencies and nonprofit organizations, including faith-based and community organizations. These organizations are familiar with the areas and populations to be served, officials explained, and have demonstrated that they can administer effective programs to help veterans.

To view the full list of grantees, go to www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/vets/VETS20131265.htm.

FURNITURE DONATIONS NEEDED

The Team AMVETS "Welcome Home" furniture assistance program provides furniture, appliances, and other household items to veterans who have been homeless, but are now in the process of rebuilding their lives through the HUDV-VASH housing program. The program is a partnership between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the AMVETS Department of California Service Foundation. Team AMVETS

You can help by donating gently used furniture and appliances. For more information, call (877) 990-8387 or go to www.teamamvets.com/amvets-programs-california.html. If you're in the mood to shop, visit Team AMVETS' online fundraising auction site at www.teamamvetsthriftstores.com.

VETERANS FEED AMERICA

If you are a veteran with a thing for working the land, dig this! The Farmer Veteran Coalition works to connect veterans to agriculture and to create meaningful careers through the collaboration of the farming and military communities. The organization believes that food production offers purpose, opportunity and physical and psychological benefits and that veterans possess the unique skills and character needed to strengthen rural communities and create sustainable food systems for all.

The Coalition serves military veterans of all eras and branches (though a majority of its veterans are from the most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan) interested in the agriculture industry. The Coalition works with veterans, their families, employers and mentors to support those returning to or beginning careers in food and farming.

The Coalition helps match veterans with job and internship/apprenticeship placement and networks with the agriculture industry to determine employment needs and gaps that can be filled by veterans. Internships and apprenticeships allow veterans with little or no agricultural background to grow their knowledge and experience outside of an academic (four year university) setting, while focusing on the practical application of everyday farm operations. Mentorship matching is available for farming veterans looking for assistance with their agriculture venture.

The Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund assists veterans beginning a career in food and farming, and assists current Farmer Veterans with business expansion. Fellowship Fund grantees are awarded not only monetary assistance but also in-kind supplies, one-on-one farm advice, as well as mentorships. This exchange of knowledge and support between panel members and grantees is what makes the Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund unique, and contributes to sustainable futures for our Farmer Veteran grantees'.

To learn more about the Farmer Veteran Coalition, including how to become a Farmer Veteran, how to become a Farmer Veteran mentor, how to find your local Farmer Veteran, and how to donate new or used farm equipment or supplies to the program, go to www.farmvetco.org.

MILITARY SKILLS TRANSLATOR

Have you ever tried to tell a civilian employer about your military experience? It isn't easy! The VA for Vets Military Skills Translator can help you best highlight your active duty role and responsibilities, including:

- Specialties and sub-specialties;
- Certifications, training and education;
- Collateral duties technical and soft skills.

With your talents translated into civilian-friendly language, you can craft a resume that best highlights your professional strengths. Get started today by going to https://mst.vaforvets.va.gov/mst/va/mos-translator. For further assistance, call a VA for Vets career coach at (855) 824-8387 (TTY (855) 824-8833).

VETERAN JOB SEEKERS BEWARE!

A company calling itself Monument Secure (not to be confused with Monument Security) is sending out e-mails targeting veterans. The company claims to be a security services provider seeking to hire security personnel. They require a $300.00 "refundable" deposit to obtain a "guard card." If you see their advertising or receive an e-mail from them, don't fall for the scam!

EAST AFRICAN CHILDREN'S CHOIR VISITS WEST LA

The Mwamba Uganda Children's Choir and their tour coordinators visited the West Los Angeles Veterans Home as part of their first trip to the West Coast.

The enthusiastic and talented choir sang songs in seven languages and thoroughly entertained Veterans Home residents and staff. The group will be touring the United States for the next three months in an effort to raise funds for their school in Uganda.

FLOWERS FOR WEST LA VETERANS HOME RESIDENTS

As part of "Make Someone Smile Week" and in partnership with the Santa Monica Elks and Santa Monica American Legion, TeleFlora donated over 100 bouquets of colorful flowers in "happy face" mugs for West Los Angeles Veterans Home residents to enjoy.

Staff from the West Los Angeles Veterans Home and the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center deliver flowers to Home residents

NEWS ON THE DISABLED VETERANS BUSINESS FRONT

Ken Shoemake, newly elected president of the California Disabled Veterans Business Alliance (CADVBA), has got a laser focus--increasing disabled veteran business commerce and contract opportunity. At the recent Central Valley Chapter meeting, Shoemake took the podium and inspired disabled veterans with his vision of more business opportunity being directly impacted by the work of the non-profit all-disabled veterans group.

For the last 20 years, CADVBA's mission has been helping California's disabled veterans realize the dream of becoming their own boss and gaining financial independence. CADVBA has nine chapters statewide, and most services are free to California disabled veterans.

Severely Disabled Veteran Entrepreneur Training, a pilot program soon to be rolled out by CADVBA, will work with returning troops who have the potential to help themselves and other disabled vets through cooperative business creation. As CADVBA Executive Director Rich Dryden noted, "These men and women are used to working together, so extending the 'squad' concept to this option was a natural."

To learn more about CADVBE, its services and its accomplishments, go to www.cadvbe.org or call (916) 446-3510.

Also noteworthy in the disabled veterans business world, The Elite Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Network (SDVOB) will hold its 10th Annual Conference in San Diego August 21-23, 2013. The Elite SDVOB Network is a national organization comprised of certified Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses headquartered in San Diego. Its mission is to assist service-disabled veterans start and grow their businesses.

The goal of this conference is to further that cause and provide SDVOB opportunities to meet and partner with government agencies and prime vendors who understand the value of utilizing SDVOB partners. To learn more about the Elite SDVOB Network Conference, go to www.sdvobconference.com.

For information about CalVet Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise resources, go to www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/DVBE.aspx.

USDVA BRIEFS

USDVA HEALTH CARE FACILITIES ON 2013 "MOST WIRED" HOSPITALS LIST

The Department of Veterans Affairs, representing 152 VA medical centers, was recently named to the 2013 "Most Wired" hospitals list. The list, which is released by Hospitals & Health Networks, in partnership with McKesson, the College of Healthcare Information Management Executives (CHIME) and the American Hospital Association (AHA), is the result of a national survey aimed at ranking hospitals that are leveraging health information technology (HIT) in new and innovative ways.
http://1.usa.gov/1aVqEhY

USDVA HAS CONVERTED OVER 30% OF DISABILITY CLAIMS INTO DIGITAL FILES

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reached another milestone in its disability claims transformation process – over 30 percent of the current disability claims inventory is now digital and accessible to claim raters in VA's electronic claims processing system, which has now been fielded ahead of schedule at all 56 Regional Offices across the country.
http://1.usa.gov/1auZMVZ

USDVA ANNOUNCES $300M IN NEW GRANTS TO HELP END VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki has announced the award of nearly $300 million in grants that will help approximately 120,000 homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families. The grants have been awarded to 319 community agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.
http://1.usa.gov/16ej7My

USDVA GRANTS WILL EXPAND TRANSPORTATION IN HIGHLY RURAL AREAS

Veterans will have improved access to health care under a Department of Veterans Affairs initiative that supports new transportation services for those living in highly rural areas.
http://1.usa.gov/13U1AHI

POST-9/11 GI BILL CELEBRATES FOURTH ANNIVERSARY

August 1, marks the fourth anniversary of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. VA has issued approximately $30 billion in Post 9/11 GI-Bill benefit payments since its inception in August 2009 and helped nearly 1 million Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families pursue their education.
http://1.usa.gov/18IZLgl

VETERANS

Getting the benefits you've earned?

Aware of benefit changes?

Know where to find services?

Download the CalVet mobile app and stay informed!

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VETERANS, ESPECIALLY FIRST-TIME HOME BUYERS, CAN GET ONE OF THE BEST HOME LOAN VALUES IN CALIFORNIA

CALVET HOME LOANS

The CalVet Home Loan is the best loan on the market especially for veterans purchasing their first home in California. Competitive interest rates and low down to no down payment will help you qualify for a higher loan amount while keeping your monthly payment affordable.

For more information contact the California Department of Veterans Affairs Home Loan Program at (800) 952-LOAN (5626) or visit us at **www.calvet.ca.gov/homeloans**

CALVET VETERANS HOME OF CALIFORNIA BARSTOW

The Veterans Home of California—Barstow is a 400-bed, long-term care facility located on 22 acres with a panoramic view of the Mojave River Valley.

The Home offers three levels of care that provide continuity in the lives of Veteran residents in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.

1. Domiciliary Care (Independent living) for Veterans who are self-sufficient and do not require assistance with activities of daily living.
2. Intermediate Nursing Care for Veterans requiring some nursing assistance to perform activities of daily living.
3. Skilled Nursing Care for Veterans who require a higher level of nursing care and require assistance with many activities of daily living.

Amenities include: room and board – three meals plus snacks; medical care and medications; optical care, dental care and podiatry services; transportation services to all medical appointments and off-campus activities; and much more.

Spouses are also eligible to apply with the Veteran.

For admission information, contact:

Veterans Home of California—Barstow
100 E. Veterans Parkway
Barstow, CA 92311
(800) 746-0606, ext. 1
www.calvet.ca.gov

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

AUGUST 13-17
Blue Star Moms
Annual National Convention
Marines Memorial Club, San Francisco
www.marineclub.com

AUGUST 14
Veterans Hearing
9:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.
City Council Chambers, Fontana
Contact: (909) 626-2054

AUGUST 15
RecruitMilitary
Veteran Career Fair
11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Hotel de Coronado, Coronado
Contact: (513) 677-7040

AUGUST 17
Veterans Mixer
Sacramento LGBT Community Center
1927 L Street, Sacramento, CA
6 p.m.
Contact: (916) 442-0185

AUGUST 22
EDD/CalVet
Job and Resource Fair
9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Hilton Orange County, Costa Mesa

AUGUST 23-25
Veterans Stand Down
Yuba/Sutter County
Begins at 7:00 a.m.
The Pavilion, River Front Park, Marysville

AUGUST 24
HomeStrong/CredAbility
Support and Assistance for
Military and Veterans
9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
CSU San Bernardino, Student Union
Contact: www.hopenow.com

AUGUST 26
San Diego Dept. of Veterans Services
Community Needs Forum
4:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.
Point Loma Library, San Diego
Register by August 24
Contact: Gina Brown (619) 563-2762

AUGUST 28
Navy Gold Coast
2013 Event-DVBE
9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
San Diego Convention Center, San Diego

AUGUST 29
San Diego Dept. of Veterans Services
Community Needs Forum
4:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.
Point Loma Library, San Diego
Register by August 27
Contact: Gina Brown (619) 563-2762

Military/Veteran Career/Education/
Resource Event
10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Pacific Views Event Center, Camp Pendleton

VA Palo Alto Health Care System
Mental Health Summit
3801 Miranda Avenue, Palo Alto
RSVP by 8/16
Contact: christina.bondi@va.gov

Note: To view full calendar, visit www.calvet.ca.gov/Files/Events_Calendar.pdf

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