CALVET
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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NEWSLETTER

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.

NOVEMBER 2014

CalVet's New Website Wins Award

CalVet is pleased to announce our recently revamped web site received a Digital Government Achievement Award from the Center for Digital Government. The annual awards recognize outstanding city, county, state, Federal, and international government web sites and digital projects.

Our new site is much more user-friendly and intuitive than its predecessor. Our myCalVet feature allows our Veterans, Veteran family members and Veteran stakeholders to create a secure, personal profile. The next time the user logs onto our site, the information pushed to them is based on their profile and interests.

Launched in March, 2014, our new web site offers detailed information about Federal and state benefits and location-specific local services available to our Veterans and their families, including eligibility requirements and how to apply. Our site enables CalVet to leverage technology as a more cost-effective means to reach the growing number of California Veterans. Our site also provides CalVet the opportunity to merge existing databases and provides a platform for information exchange with other Federal and state agencies.

Our myCalVet tool is one of many CalVet efforts to increase the number of California Veterans and family members connected to the benefits they earned through their military service.

To view a full list of Digital Government Achievement Awards recipients, go to http://bit.ly/1qhvSd1.

To visit the CalVet web site and create your own myCalVet profile, go to www.calvet.ca.gov.

CalVet/USDVA Joint Claims Initiative Update

In July, 2013, the California Legislature authorized an additional $3 million in CalVet funding and 36 positions for a CalVet-U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) Joint Claims Initiative. The initiative allowed CalVet to create "Strike Teams" in its District Offices in Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Diego to focus on reducing the current backlog of claims at USDVA.

CalVet Strike Teams include Review Teams, which focus on claims pending 125 days or more, and Support Teams, which focus on incoming fully developed claims to identify gaps in development, obtain supporting documentation, and return fully developed files to the USDVA for ratings decisions.

As of October 23, 2014:
Claims Reviewed= 33,627
Lump Sum Awards*= $29,845,975
Total Monthly Awards= $3,841,931
Monthly Annualized**= $46,103,259

*Lump sum awards consist of retroactive, one time payments.

**Monthly annualized awards continue each year after approval.

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Secretary's Message

This month, we remember the incredible service and sacrifice of our men and women who served in military uniform. Regardless of gender, era, branch of service, rank, or assignment, we are grateful to America's Veterans who worked and fought to preserve the liberty, democracy and unmatched opportunity we treasure as a Nation.

The Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance honors our fallen service members, from the Marine barracks bombing in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983, including the 1991 Gulf War as well as the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Wall also honors civilians and first responders who died during the terror attacks of 9/11. The Wall is inscribed with 11,000 names and contains a full-color timeline of events since 1984.

Designed and built by Vision2Victory (V2V), the Wall was built to be displayed only once to honor the 10-year anniversary of 9/11. The wall became popular, began touring the country, and has traveled more than 10,000 miles in the last three years.

V2V is a California nonprofit organization serving our wounded warriors. The organization created the Wall of Remembrance to help heal hidden wounds of war. V2V's Pass the Helmet program raises funds to grant wishes to wounded war Veterans. The organization's mission is to reach all those impacted by Global Terror here at home.

The Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance will be open for public viewing 24/7, November 7-11, and will be guarded by Veterans and other community volunteers. A formal ceremony scheduled for November 9, 2014 at 1:00 p.m. is also open to the public. Veteran service organizations will be on site that day to offer information to our Veterans and their families.

CalVet Undersecretary for Operations, Michael Wells, a retired Army colonel and Iraq War Veteran, will be speaking at the event.

I invite you and your family to visit the Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance and to join CalVet as we honor all Veterans this month.

Sincerely,

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

CalVet Launches Veteran Affordable Housing Program and Partners with Homes for Families

Last month, CalVet launched a new affordable home ownership program, Residential Enriched Neighborhoods (REN), for our Veterans and their families through a partnership with Homes for Families. This important new program offers manageable loan payments and enrichment services, with permanent home ownership for California's Veterans.

"CalVet and Homes for Families are making it possible for our low-income Veterans and their families to achieve home ownership and self-sufficiency," said Theresa Gunn, CalVet Deputy Secretary Home Loans. "Through our CalVet REN model, our Veterans who honorably served our nation should significantly improve their standard of living."

The CalVet REN model is unique because it tailors home design and enrichment services for our Veterans and their families to meet their physical, wellness and mental health needs. Many of the services offered are Veteran-to-Veteran, and a crucial part of this model trains Veterans' in financial self-sufficiency. This model provides the tools and resources to move our Veterans into the middle class.

"By working with CalVet, I believe we will enhance the quality of life for each and every Veteran we serve," said Donna Deutchman, Chief Executive Officer, Homes for Families, "Veterans deserve the best possible services available through this collaboration between state government and non-profits."

Homes for Families plans to continue working closely with affordable home builders to ensure the CalVet REN model is replicated appropriately and services are customized for Veterans moving into each community. The Enriched Neighborhood® model developed and trademarked by Homes for Families has collected evidence for more than a decade showing the program addresses the needs of its community members.

CalVet recently completed an affordable 12-home community Enriched Neighborhood® pilot project in Sylmar, California. CalVet currently has five CalVet REN Communities in development throughout Southern California ranging in size from 12 to 87 homes.

For more information about the CalVet REN Communities Program, please visit www.calvet.ca.gov/calvetren.

Lancaster Veterans Home Installs New Putting Green

By Jeanne Bonfillio

The William J. "Pete" Knight Veterans Home of California in Lancaster broke ground on a new putting green during a ceremony was held on September 29. Golf enthusiasts at our Veterans Home will soon be able to chip, putt and improve their form in their own backyard!

The community rallied around this project for more than four years. Lou Gonzales, owner of Antelope Valley Chevrolet and a Veteran himself, and Frank Belt, a World War II Veteran and President of Kidz Golf, are at the forefront of the project. The putting green further enhances our residents' quality of life, is expected to take three to four months complete, weather-permitting. A dedication ceremony is scheduled for early 2015.

An exciting golf tournament held in July at the Antelope Valley Country Club, along with the dinner, raffle and auction that followed, raised the $25,000 needed to finance the putting green, plus another $5,000 to support recreational activities for Veterans Home residents in Lancaster.

Veterans Home Administrator Norman Andrews was joined at the groundbreaking ceremony by Lancaster Vice-Mayor Marvin Crist, Lancaster Councilwoman Sandra Johnson, Senior Deputy for Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich, Norm Hickling.

CalVet appreciates the support of Antelope Valley Chevrolet, Kidz Golf, and everyone involved in this project which honors our Nation's Veterans.

Military Service and ALS

Watching ALS "Ice Bucket Challenge" videos on social media is a hoot. However, the disease is no joke. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), better known as "Lou Gehrig's Disease," is a progressive neurodegenerative disease characterized by the death of motor neurons in the brain and spinal cord. ALS also strikes Veterans at higher rates than civilians, according to scientific research.

As motor neurons die, persons with ALS begin to lose muscle function and the ability to stand, walk, grasp objects, speak, swallow, eat, and even breathe. Within 2-4 years from the onset of symptoms, most patients die, often from respiratory complications. The cause of ALS is unknown, and there is no effective treatment. Most commonly, the disease strikes between the ages of 40 and 70, and as many as 30,000 Americans have the disease at any given time.

SERVICE CONNECTION PRESUMED

Based on strong scientific evidence and the advocacy of Veterans, in 2008, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) established a presumption of service connection for ALS for any Veteran who develops the disease at any time after separation from service, thus making the Veterans eligible for monthly USDVA disability compensation benefits and free USDVA healthcare.

Expanding the regulations in 2012, USDVA amended its disability rating scale to assign up to a 100-percent disability evaluation for any Veteran who has service-connected ALS.

Late last year, the ALS Association, a national nonprofit organization that enhances the quality for ALS sufferers while providing treatment and searching for a cure, published a report that discusses the connection between ALS and military service.

According to the report, "Military Veterans, regardless of the branch of service, regardless of the era in which they served, and regardless of whether they served during a time of peace or a time of war, are at a greater risk of dying from ALS than if they had not served in the military."

The full report, available on The ALS Association's website at www.alsa.org/files/pdf/ALS_Military_Paper.pdf, includes reviews of numerous studies, reports and other evidence demonstrating the link between ALS and military service.

HOUSING GRANTS AVAILABLE

In March of this year, USDVA announced Veterans and active-duty military personnel with service-connected ALS are eligible for grants to adapt their homes. The new rule affects recipients of USDVA's specially adapted housing grants, which helps pay for the costs for building, buying or adapting a home, up to a maximum of $67,555.

Under the change, Veterans and service members with service-connected ALS will be determined medically eligible for the maximum grant. The program provides grants to eligible service-connected disabled Veterans and service members to construct or modify a home to meet their unique housing needs.

Grants are also available to help eligible individuals purchase adapted homes or pay down mortgages on homes that are already adapted. USDVA estimates this change will save approximately 12 months in the overall process of a Specially Adapted Housing grant.

For more information about USDVA Specially Adapted Housing grants, visit the USDVA website, http://benefits.va.gov/homeloans/adaptedhousing.asp.

For information about other diseases and disorders that may be associated with military service, go to http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/health-concerns.asp.

Redding Boy Supports California Veterans

By Steve Jorgensen

Redding Christian School seventh grader, 11-year-old Ryan Paradis, has for the second year in a row given money to help honor Veterans. Ryan donated his hard-earned money raised by selling prize-winning goats at the Shasta District Fair's junior livestock auction.

Last year Ryan, a member of the Swede Creek 4-H Club, donated more than $1,000 to the Northern California Veterans Museum and Heritage Center in Redding. This year, he donated another $1,000 to the Northern California Veterans Cemetery in Igo for its annual Wreaths Across America program placing wreaths at each our Veteran gravesites during the holidays.

The son of Jonathan and Erin Paradis, Ryan's father is an Army Veteran who served in the Iraq War. Ryan decided to donate a portion of his award-winning goat sale to the Wreaths Across America program after attending last year's ceremony at the Northern California Veterans Cemetery in Igo, California.

Photo courtesy of Redding Record Searchlight

USDVA Grants $53 Million to California Nonprofits

On September 30, 2014, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) announced the award of $53 million in Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program grant awards to 17 California nonprofit agencies. The 2015 SSVF grant awards total $207 million and serve 82 nonprofit agencies nationally.

The grants assist homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families in communities determined to be "high need." During the brief history of the SSVF program, USDVA has helped tens of thousands of Veterans exit homelessness and prevented just as many from becoming homeless.

Under the terms of the SSVF grants, providers offer Veterans and their family members outreach, case management, assistance in obtaining USDVA benefits and assistance in receiving other public benefits. Community-based groups can offer temporary financial assistance on behalf of Veterans for rent payments, utility payments, security deposits and moving costs.

For more information about the USDVA's SSVF program, go to www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp.

To view a complete list of USDVA 2015 SSVF grant awards, go to http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/SSVF_September2014_GrantRecipients.pdf.

New Veteran Driver License and ID Card

By Jessica Gonzalez
Department of Motor Vehicles

Late next year, California's nearly two million Veterans will have the chance to get a special Veteran marking on their California driver license or ID card. The word "VETERAN" on their card will indicate they have served in the United States Armed Forces. The Veteran designation will cost an additional $5.

To get the new card, Veterans must apply in person at a Department of Motor Vehicles field office, indicate they wish to have the Veteran designation on their driver license or identification card application, and present a Veteran verification form from a County Veteran Services Office along with a Driver License or Identification Card Application.

The Veteran designation is designed to assist Veterans access the many state and Federal benefits and services available to them, including education, food stamps, mental health counseling, employment opportunities, health care, and others.

The new law requires DMV to start taking in-person applicant requests for the new card by Veterans Day, November 11, 2015.

Yountville Home, Staff Well Prepared for Emergencies

By Terri Mejorado
Yountville Veterans Home Public Information Officer

Located at the end of a long hallway in Holderman Hospital at the Veterans of Home of California, Yountville, is a room that few people know exist. We call it the Hospital Command Center. During an emergency, this room would be filled with personnel, each with a specific duty, and all making sure everything possible is being done to ensure the health and welfare of our Veterans. In charge of the scene is the Incident Commander whose responsibility it is to organize and direct the Hospital Command Center (HCC), giving overall strategic direction for the Homes incident management team.

The HCC is utilized in the management of all emergencies, both small and large in scope. The magnitude of the emergency determines which emergency staff are required to carry out the needs of the HCC: Incident Commander, Finance/Administration, Logistics, Operations, and Planning. Under each of these divisions, duties are further delineated to include: Public Information Officer, Safety Officer, Scribes, Liaison, Medical, Computer Services, to name a few.

Having a complete and well-trained command center is essential to receiving and disseminating accurate and timely information, assisting and getting help where it is needed, and doing so in a concise and quick manner. It takes a whole team of individuals with specific duties handle the duties, avoid duplicate efforts, and quell resident fear and confusion during the chaotic times of an emergency.

Our HCC training and response was recently really put to the test. On August 24, 2014, a 6.1-magnitude earthquake struck in nearby Napa. Thankfully, the HCC was in place, emergency staff responded quickly, appropriately, and effectively, and Yountville Home residents and staff are all safe and well.

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WWW.CALVET.CA.GOV

USDVA Grants Nearly $7 Million for New Veterans Cemetery

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs awarded CalVet $6.8 million to begin construction of the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery at the former Fort Ord Army post in Seaside, California.

The vision to build the CVCC began more than a decade ago following the closure of Fort Ord to most military activity and training. Over the past year, an incredible amount of effort was directed at seeing the project through to fruition. The collaboration of various state agencies, federal partners, community advocates, along with the support of California's Legislature and the Administration has made this dream a reality.

With construction expected to begin in early 2015, the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery Phase I plan will develop 17 acres of the site and include the construction of the main entrance, roads, an assembly area, a committal shelter, columbaria, 5,000 columbarium niches, landscaping, a memorial walkway, and supporting infrastructure. The cemetery is expected to serve more than 100,000 Veterans and their families living within Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito, Santa Clara, and San Luis Obispo counties. CalVet currently operates two State Veterans cemetery, including the Yountville Veterans Cemetery in Napa County and the Northern California Veterans Cemetery located in Igo in Shasta County.

The Central Coast Veterans Cemetery is ideally located to celebrate and memorialize the Monterey Bay area's rich military history. The Cemetery provides a lasting tribute to our men and women from every branch of military service that served and sacrificed to preserve the freedoms we all enjoy.

For more information about the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery, go to http://ccvcf.com/history.htm. For information about Veterans cemetery and burial benefits, go to https://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/Pages/Cemeteries-and-Burials.aspx.

USDVA Develops "Concussion Coach" Mobile App

To better meet the needs of Veterans and others who suffered mild to moderate concussion associated with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) developed, "Concussion Coach," a free mobile app for Veterans, Servicemembers, and others. The app provides portable tools to recognize symptoms and use of coping strategies.

Concussions often come with physical problems (such as headaches, balance problems, and dizziness), emotional challenges (such as getting angry more easily), and cognitive problems (such as difficulties with concentration and memory). The nature and range of symptoms can cause considerable distress and frustration, and training in different coping strategies is often necessary.

The Concussion Coach app includes:

- A self-assessment tool for measuring symptoms, with feedback and a graph for tracking symptoms over time
- Symptom relief tools and relaxation exercises for managing problems associated with concussion
- Planning tools to build resilience
- Educational materials about concussion and options for treatment by brain injury professionals
- Immediate access to crisis resources, personal support contacts, or professional healthcare resources

Concussion Coach is intended to support treatment with a healthcare professional by providing portable, convenient tools for the user to assess symptoms and cope with concussion-related problems. The app can also be used on its own, but is not intended to replace professional diagnosis, medical treatment, or rehabilitation therapies for those who need them.

Concussion Coach was collaboratively developed by USDVA Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services, the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the Department of Defense National Center for Telehealth and Technology. Concussion Coach is available for mobile Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, and IPod Touch) from the App Store.

Source: USDVA

USDVA Mandates Disability Claims Forms; VSOs Object

On September 24, 2014, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) issued final regulations standardizing how Veterans file disability claims and initiate appeals. Specifically, USDVA eliminated the "informal claims process" and mandated a new "Intent to File a Claim." Under USDVA's new requirement, Veterans or survivors file an "Intent," and then have one year to compile the necessary documentation or evidence to support the claim while preserving an effective date of claim.

The new regulations go into effect in late March 2015. Major Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) objected to USDVA's proposed rules last year.

According to USDVA, by mandating standard forms for all disability claims, USDVA can more quickly and accurately identify what the Veteran is claiming or appealing. This allows USDVA to immediately move on to next steps in the evidence-gathering and decision-making process, and thus speed the delivery of earned benefits to Veterans.

Prior to USDVA's new regulation, Veterans utilizing the "informal claims" process could send USDVA a handwritten note to initiate a disability compensation claim or appeal. The note only had to state the Veteran's intent to file a claim or appeal. Once the claim is approved by USDVA, then the effective date of the claim would be the date the Veteran sent in the original note.

Our Veterans and advocates support the informal process because initiating a claim or appeal is supposed to be pro-Veteran and simple. In addition, benefits generally accrued back to when Veterans initiated their claims, often months or years earlier.

However, facing a backlog of claims and appeals in the hundreds of thousands, USDVA complained the informal process lead to guesswork, delays in decisions, and ultimately delays in Veterans receiving benefits. USDVA also argued the existing process is inconsistent with most, if not all, other government and non-government application processes, such as applying for social security, applying for a driver's license, applying for a job or filing for an income tax refund.

In October 2013, the Obama administration proposed the new rule requiring Veterans to use a standard form when they file for disability compensation or appeal a benefits decision. Veterans groups quickly expressed outrage. "Draconian" and "heavy-handed" said the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The American Legion said the proposed rule was "the most serious, egregious attack on Veteran-friendly disability claim system in [USDVA] claim history."

The VSOs worried the time it takes to gather supporting evidence for a claim, such as military records and physical exams, would result in later approval dates and lost benefits. Homeless Veterans, Veterans with limited education, Veterans recently injured, and Veterans with worsening conditions are the most vulnerable, the VSOs asserted. Unless there is a new law enacted by Congress or a lawsuit by a VSO, then the USDVA's final regulations take effect in March 2015.

CALVET
VETERANS HOMES

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www.calvet.ca.gov/jobs

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER 5
Orange County Conference on Veterans' Behavior Health Needs
Delhi Center
505 East Central Avenue, Santa Ana
Contact: (714) 480-6542

NOVEMBER 6
Honor a Hero, Hire a Vet Job Fair
Job Fair
The Proud Bird
11022 Aviation Blvd., Los Angeles
Contact: (323) 290-5139

NOVEMBER 7
Stanislaus County Veteran Stand Down
Modesto American Legion Hall
1001 S. Santa Cruz Ave., Modesto

NOVEMBER 7
VA Rural Medical Outreach Clinic
American Legion Post
11350 American Legion Drive, Sutter Creek
Contact: (209) 267-5764, ext. 9248

NOVEMBER 7-11
Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance
State Capitol Park, Sacramento
Contact: Pete Conaty, (916) 492-0550

NOVEMBER 10
Yuba College Veterans Resource Center
Grand Opening
Noon – 2 p.m.
2088 N. Beale Road, Marysville
Contact: (530) 741-8780

NOVEMBER 11
Veterans Day Observance
Northern California Veterans Cemetery, Igo
Contact: stephen.jorgensen@calvet.ca.gov

NOVEMBER 20
Veterans' Service Fair
American Legion Post 509
3509 N. First Street, Fresno
Contact: (559) 977-3697

DECEMBER 4
Ventura Veterans Home
Founders Day Celebration
10900 Telephone Road, Ventura
Contact: (424) 832-8219

For a calendar of other Veterans Day activities, visit **www.calvet.ca.gov/Pages/Events.aspx**

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

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