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Resources for Warriors, Families, Military Leaders and Medical Professionals

- Facilities, services, and benefits:
www.woundedwarriorresourcecenter.com
- Medical and non-medical resources:
www.nationalresourcedirectory.org
- Defense Centers of Excellence for PH and TBI:
www.dcoe.health.mil
- Service-specific information and resources:
www.militaryonesource.com
- After-deployment concerns:
www.afterdeployment.org
- Armed Forces Foundation:
www.armedforcesfoundation.org
- Deployment Health Clinical Center: www.pdhealth.mil
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1(800)273-TALK (8255)
<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov>

Pottawattamie Commission of Veteran Affairs UPDATES

June/July 2009



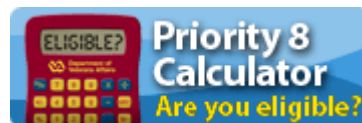
Senate File 2134 – effective July 1, 2009 The *County Veterans Office Hours and Accreditation Bill* establishes statewide standards for county veteran service offices and employees. Each county in the state will be required to have a veteran affairs office that includes an employee occupied in veteran affairs duties for a minimum amount of hours as follows:

- Counties with a population of 30,000 or less - 20 hours
- Counties with a population of 30,001 to 60,000 – 30 hours
- Counties with a population of 60,001 or greater – 40 hours

This legislation places into Iowa Code a job description for county Executive Directors and Administrators. This description includes that county offices will assist veterans in applying for state, federal, and county benefits. In order to fulfill this job description, each county Executive Director or Administrator must be certified by IDVA as being accredited by the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers. Executive Directors and Administrators will also be trained on e-mail, the internet, and general computer usage.

Certification by the department (national accreditation and continuing education), is a condition of employment and must be obtained within one year of employment. This bill will utilize a \$1 million appropriation in Fiscal Year 2010 that provides \$10,000 to each county and to the department for complying with the requirements in this bill. IDVA will use this funding to provide a school in Des Moines where county employees can become accredited and maintain their continuing education requirements.

Counties will also be able to continue utilizing 28E agreements to share an Executive Director or Administrator between two counties and the bill allows counties the ability to appropriate funding for training of employees.



Priority Group 8 Enrollment Relaxation Changes

VA eligibility rules changed on June 15, 2009, making it easier for more Veterans to enroll in VA's health care system. Under this new regulation, VA relaxed income restrictions on enrollment for health benefits. While this new provision does not remove consideration of income, it does increase income thresholds. A [web-based calculator](#) is available for Veterans to enter their income information, dependents, and zip code to assess if their income would fall within the proposed income threshold adjustments. Veterans are encouraged to contact VA's Health Resource Center at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit the [VA health eligibility website](#) for more information.

USFSPA & DIVORCE Update 04: On 12 FEB the Iowa General Assembly unanimously approved House Bill 170 that will enhance Federal statutes designed to protect veterans' disability compensation from attachment in divorce settlements. The bill was modeled on legislation created by the West Virginia legislature early last year to combat the very same problem. Veterans' service-connected disability compensation is intended to financially compensate a military veteran disabled in the line of duty. This compensation is not an asset, or property, and should not be used to calculate a veteran's net worth. Disability compensation is awarded to a veteran that has lost some/all physical or mental ability to work, or maintain a daily routine. Veteran's disability compensation is tax exempt and not classified as 'income' by the IRS. VA disability compensation is non-transferable and cannot be awarded to a third party under any legal process whatsoever. Even after the veteran has deposited these funds into their personal bank account they are federally protected from attachment or seizure. Disability compensation belongs solely to the disabled veteran that has suffered the disability.

USC, Title 38, Section 5301 reads in part; Payments of benefits due or to become due under any law administered by the Secretary shall not be assignable except to the extent specifically authorized by law, and such payments made to, or on account of, a beneficiary shall be exempt from taxation, shall be exempt from the claim of creditors, and shall not be liable to attachment, levy, or seizure by or under any legal or equitable process whatever, either before or after receipt by the beneficiary. Although United States Code, Title 38, Section 5301 is very clear in its wording and intent, many civil court judges routinely circumvent the wording and intent of this Federal statute by factoring in veteran's disability compensation for spousal support, alimony, and child support awards. The Iowa effort was spearheaded by U.S. Army veteran Jerry Bohr of Ossian, Iowa . Bohr is Operation Firing For Effect (OFFE) Director of Operations for the state of Iowa. He is also employed as a service officer for the Iowa State Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition, Jerry Bohr is a member of the 5301 Club, a grassroots group devoted to the protection of disability benefits from third party awards in civil courts. OFFE is currently monitoring 38 individual divorce cases nationwide in which veterans' disability compensation has been misused as a divisible asset in a divorce settlement. [Source: OFFE press release 12 Feb 09 ++]

New Adjutant General for Iowa Guard



Senator Daryl Beall - General Orr - Senator Steve Warnstadt



Senator Michael Gronstal - General Orr - Senator Daryl Beall

On Tuesday, March 24, Timothy Orr was unanimously confirmed by the Iowa Senate as the new Adjutant General of the State of Iowa. As chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Senator Daryl Beall floor-managed his Senate confirmation. Colonel Warnstadt serves in Army Intelligence for the Iowa National Guard.

General Orr has served as chief of staff for the Iowa Army National Guard and was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General the same day the Senate confirmed him. Not a bad day's work! Born in Winterset and raised in Earlham and Boone, General Orr joined the Guard during his senior year at Boone High School in 1979. During his nearly 30 years in the Army, he rose through the ranks from private to general.

General Orr holds an associate's degree in business from Des Moines Area Community College, a bachelor's in business and education from Drake University and a master's in education, and community college certification from Iowa State University. He also earned a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College.

His military awards include the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Ranger Tab, Pathfinder Badge, Parachutist Badge, and Canadian Airborne Badge.

General Orr is married to Lt. Col. (ret.) Suzanne Orr. They have a son, Jacob, and daughter, Elizabeth.

VA Announces 15% Decrease in Homelessness Among Veterans

The number of veterans homeless on a typical night has declined 15 percent in the past year, thanks to the services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and its partners in community- and faith-based organizations, plus changing demographics and improvements in survey techniques.

The reduction of homeless veterans from more than 154,000 to about 131,000 was revealed in the 15th annual Community Homeless Assessment, Local Education and Networking Group (CHALENG) report on homeless veterans.

The decline in veterans' homelessness was attributed, in part, to improved methodology, VA program interventions, changing demographics, and recent events such as the recovery from Hurricane Katrina in the south.

The report also showed a 24 percent increase in the number of homeless veterans with families over the number of homeless veterans with families in 2007, from 1,038 to 1,282. While still only a fraction of the approximately 70,000 veterans seen by VA specialized homeless programs over the course of a year, this increase may reflect the impact of the HUD-VASH expansion which allows VA staff to work with veterans and their families in Section 8 housing placement.

Research suggests long-term housing, dental, medical, and mental health care are central to the rehabilitation of the homeless. Homeless veterans' responses in the CHALENG survey indicate that many of these critical needs are either well "met" or, as in the case of housing are becoming increasingly met. The VA's highly integrated health care model has made medical, dental and mental health treatment readily available to Veterans. Homeless veterans in this year's CHALENG report identified nine of their top ten unmet needs as a legal, financial or family issue.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that Veterans can begin submitting applications on-line for the Post-9/11 GI Bill.**

Veterans, service members, reservists and National Guard members with active duty since Sept. 10, 2001, may be eligible for this benefit. Veterans will remain eligible for benefits for 15 years from the date of last discharge or release from a period of active duty of at least 90 continuous days.

Eligible applicants must have served for an aggregate period of at least 90 days since Sept. 10, 2001, or served at least 30 continuous days on active duty since Sept. 10, 2001, and received a discharge for disability.

Benefit payment rates range from 40 percent of the maximum benefit for a person with at least 90 days, but less than 6 months, of aggregate service and up to 100 percent of the benefit for people with at least 36 months of aggregate service or 30 continuous days and a discharge due to a service connected disability. Prospective beneficiaries may apply on-line through the GI Bill Web site at www.GIBILL.VA.gov.

Qualified Veterans will receive a "Certification of Eligibility" as well as additional information regarding benefits they may qualify for under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which will become effective on Aug. 1, 2009.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill, passed by Congress last year, is the most extensive educational assistance program authorized since the original GI Bill was signed into law in 1944. It provides eligible applicants with tuition payments to assist them in getting a college education. For many participants, it also provides a housing allowance and a stipend for books and supplies.

Information about the new program and VA's other educational benefits can be obtained through www.GIBILL.VA.gov or by calling 1-888-GIBILL1 (1-888-442-4551).

THE NATIONAL TOLL-FREE CRISIS MANAGEMENT, INFORMATION, AND REFERRAL LIFELINE FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES, 1-888-777-4443, seven days a week, 9:00 a.m to 9:00 p.m., Pacific Time. The lifeline specifically addresses the problem of veterans "coming home" and "falling through the cracks." An initial call to the National Veterans and Families Lifeline is met with a live, immediate response--no automated messages. Our call center team listens, immediately assesses the emotional state of the caller, identifies additional service needs, and where appropriate, conferences in third parties that can help. We serve each lifeline caller; and depending on the situation, we will spend anywhere from a few minutes, to several hours, days, or up to several weeks and months of ongoing case management.

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Survivors of veterans have a new voice. VA's Office of Survivors Assistance will advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on all matters pertaining to policies, programs, legislation and issues affecting the survivors of veterans. Established in December under public law, the office will serve as an advocate for survivors, develop outreach programs to keep them informed and serve as VA liaison with agencies inside and outside of government on survivor issues. The Office will serve as a primary advisor to the Secretary on all matters relating to the policies, programs, legislative issues and other initiatives affecting survivors. Though it will not process or handle individual claims inquiries, the new office will regularly monitor the delivery of benefits and services of the Department. It will explore innovative opportunities to reach those survivors who are eligible for but not currently receiving VA benefits. Input will be sought from interested stakeholders. Though not fully staffed, the office is already busy gathering survivor data and identifying programs and benefits currently available to veterans' survivors. For more information, contact the office at 202-461-5159.

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Memorial Day 2009 is a memory but it's also important to remember the vital role VA National Cemeteries play in hosting Memorial Day observances and focusing public attention on the true meaning of a national holiday dedicated to honoring and remembering the ultimate sacrifice a citizen – a veteran – can make on behalf of our Nation. Nearly 150,000 people attended Memorial Day observances and activities at VA National Cemeteries that honored the more than one million men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military during periods of war and hostility -- 655,000 in battle. All these observances were meaningful, but some were unique. At VA's busiest National Cemetery in Riverside, Calif., volunteers read aloud the names of 150,000 veterans buried there. Seven-hundred volunteers read the names during around the clock half-hour shifts. As more than one National Cemetery director put it in discussing Memorial Day preparations with news media, "Every day is Memorial Day at a VA National Cemetery."

HAVE YOU HEARD?





Last week, the President, along with Secretary Shinseki and Defense Secretary Gates, announced that VA and DOD have taken the first step in creating a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record – a comprehensive system that allows the streamlined transition of health care records between DOD and the VA. Both Departments will work together to define and build a system that will ultimately contain administrative and medical information from the day an individual enters military service throughout their military career, and after they leave the military. Creation of this Joint Virtual Lifetime Record will take the next step to delivering seamless, high-quality care, and serve as a model for the nation. At the announcement, President Obama said that the quality of care veterans receive should never be hindered by budget delays and that he had worked with Secretary Shinseki to support advanced funding of veterans medical care that will provide a timely and predictable flow of VA health care funding from year to year. He noted that his proposed FY 2010 budget for VA will:

- Increase funding by \$25 billion above baseline over the next five years.
- Dramatically increase funding for veterans health care.
- Expand eligibility for veterans' health care to over 500,000 veterans who were previously denied care by 2013.
- Enhance outreach and services related to mental health care and cognitive injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, with a focus on access for veterans in rural areas.
- Invest in better technology to deliver services and benefits to veterans with the quality and efficiency they deserve.
- Provide greater benefits to veterans who are medically retired from service.
- Combat homelessness by safeguarding vulnerable veterans.
- Facilitate timely implementation of the comprehensive education benefits that veterans earn through their dedicated military service.

HAVE YOU HEARD?

VA has entered into more than 700 agreements with institutions of higher learning across the nation to participate in the Post-9/11 GI Bill's "Yellow Ribbon Program." This provision of the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows degree-granting institutions to voluntarily enter into a formal agreement with VA to fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed the highest public, in-state undergraduate rates. The school can contribute up to 50 percent of those expenses and VA will match this additional funding for eligible students. Many schools signed agreements for participation in not only undergraduate programs, but graduate and doctoral programs, as well. Some schools entered into one agreement that covered all their campuses throughout the United States. The maximum benefit under the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows every eligible veteran, service member, reservist, and National Guard member an opportunity to receive an in-state, undergraduate education at a public institution at no cost. The Yellow Ribbon Program encourages universities to make up the difference in the costs for out-of-state, private or graduate tuition. VA received more than 60,000 claims for education benefits during the first five weeks since veterans and service members could apply online. Up to 460,000 students are expected to participate in the Post-9/11 program during its first year.



 <p>23rd National Veterans Golden Age Games Birmingham, Alabama June 1- June 5, 2009</p>	<p>National Veterans Golden Age Games June 1-5, 2009 Birmingham, Alabama</p>
 <p>29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games Spokane, Washington July 13-18, 2009</p>	<p>29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games July 13-18, 2009 Spokane, Washington</p>
<p><i>Surfs Up!</i></p>	<p>National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic September 25-29, 2009 San Diego, California</p>
 <p>National Veterans Tee Tournament</p>	<p>National Veterans Tee Tournament September 6-10, 2009 Coralville, Iowa</p>
 <p>2007 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival St. Louis, Missouri October 22-28, 2007</p>	<p>National Veterans Creative Arts Festival October 5-11, 2009 San Antonio, Texas</p>

Veterans Day at the State Fair

Veterans Day at the Iowa State Fair is Monday, August 17th. There will be a parade beginning at 10 am and a performance by the Iowa Veterans Military Band after the parade.

WHY VETERANS REUNITE

"I now know why men who have been to war yearn to reunite. Not to tell stories or look at old pictures. Not to laugh or weep. Comrades gather because they long to be with the men who once acted at their best; men who suffered and sacrificed, who were stripped of their humanity. I did not pick these men. They were delivered by fate and the military. But I know them in a way I know no other men. I have never given anyone such trust. They were willing to guard something more precious than my life. They would have carried my reputation, the memory of me. It was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another. As long as I have memory, I will think of them all, every day. I am sure when I leave this world, my last thought will be of my family and my comrades....such good men."

Author unknown

DID YOU KNOW?

- Filing for VA benefits is a “FREE” benefit to the veteran and his or her dependents. If you are paying for these services; STOP!
- Do you require quality nursing home assistance? Are you an Honorable Discharge Veteran or the widow of an honorably discharged veteran? You may meet the requirements to stay at the Iowa Veteran Home.
- A 0% Service-Connected hearing disability can entitle the veteran to hearing aids through the VA Medical Center.
- A 10% Service-Connected rating can entitle the veteran to hearing aids and or eye glasses through the VA Medical Center.
- Purple Heart Recipients are automatically qualified for medical care Priority Group 3.
- A service-connected disability can be increased when the disability worsens and medical documentation is available as proof.
- Pharmacy co-pays through the VA are \$8.00 per 30 day supply, and are refillable by phone.
- VA Pension is designed to assist veterans with non-service-connected disabilities who meet a minimal income threshold
When you apply for a rating increase three things could possibly happen to your rating:
 1. Rating is Increased
 2. Rating is Decreased
 3. Rating remains unchanged

Office Locations And Hours

Pottawattamie County Commission of Veterans Affairs
223 South 6th Street, Court House Annex, Suite 6
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51501
712-328-5797 FAX 712-328-5726

e-mail: veterans@pottcounty.com

Monday –Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 pm closed 12:00-1:00 p.m.
Assistance can be provided by appointment during
nontraditional hours

Darlene at Avoca Court House Tuesdays 8:00 am – 4:30pm
712-328-5821

Commissioners:

Phil Jacobs, Chairman
Phil Killion, Secretary
Robert Jorgensen, Member

Staff:

Darlene McMartin, B. S.W., Administrator
Peggy Becker, Case Worker III
Lori Swisher, Case Worker II
Michael Grap, Case Worker II
Pamela Wilke, Receptionist

The staff of the Veterans Service Office can assist you with the following subjects:

- **Compensation or Pension**
- **Disability Retirement**
- **Death Indemnity Compensation**
- **Appeal to Board of Veterans Appeal**
- **Hospital and Outpatient Benefits**
- **State of Iowa Benefits**
- **Educational Benefits**
- **Vocational Benefits**
- **Debt Waivers**
- **Obtaining Lost Military Records**
- **Review of Military Discharge**
- **Claims for Insurance Payments**
- **Burial Allowance**
- **SBP/ChampVA**
- **Emergency Assistance**