

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 4, Issue 4 ★ April 2024



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

This month, IDVA recognized Month of the Military Child, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and Volunteers Week, among many other remembrance and recognition days. While all are critical topics for military service members and veterans, I would like to share important information about volunteerism and the needs of IDVA's five residential homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. Volunteers are central to our promise to care for the whole person at our residential homes. They provide essential services including transportation and food delivery, facilitating programs, workshops, and projects, and visiting with veterans. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, we

have experienced a downturn in volunteers, primarily resulting from visitation restrictions. Building back our volunteer base is critical to providing important services and opportunities for residents in our care.

According to AmeriCorps, volunteers dropped seven percent, from 30 to 23 percent, between 2019 and 2021. In 2021 in Illinois, 2,801,864 formal volunteers contributed 183.5 million hours of service. Additionally, veterans are tracked at higher rates of volunteering than non-veterans. This data indicates that people are still committed to volunteering. Our task is to tap into those who may have stepped aside during COVID-19 and ensure them that while we continue to monitor COVID-19, it is no longer a hindrance to welcoming people into our Homes. There is also an entire population of younger individuals interested in giving back. We have engaged our veteran partners, including Student Veterans of America, VFWs, and the Elks Lodge, for a Volunteer Fair at the Veterans' Home at Manteno as part of Operation Camaraderie to recruit volunteers and build community. We have also invited veterans to join Operation Camaraderie to engage in the special bond between veterans.

Volunteering at a Veterans' Home is unique in that it is an expression of gratitude for a veteran's service. Whether it's transporting to a doctor's appointment, facilitating projects, participating in a celebration, or visiting with a veteran, it enriches the veteran's day and overall experience in the Home. In turn, volunteers learn about a veteran's rich history and experiences while becoming part of a very special community.



Illinois's five Veterans' Homes are located across the state. Each one is distinct in its setting – rural, smaller town, or urban – but, each is committed to the same quality of care. For more information on volunteering and to find a Home close to you, please visit our website on this page: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/services-benefits/homes/homes.html>.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA

Sincerely,

Terry Prince

U.S. Navy Veteran and IDVA Director

National Volunteer Week

Veterans' Home at Anna



U.S. Air Force veteran Malcolm Ross (Vietnam) with volunteer Kathy Call.



The Elks stay closely connected with veterans at the Anna Home by serving a monthly fish fry, enjoying Bingo, and providing snacks and comfort items.



Volunteer Doda Starkey of Disabled American Veterans brought thank you cards to Vietnam Veterans. She is visiting with U.S. Army Veteran Daniel Gogerty.



Volunteer Kenn Carr plays piano and sings for the residents each month.



Volunteer and president of the Home's Advisor Board Bill Hanes addresses the residents and honors World War II Veterans.



The LZ Group entertains the residents with old time country, rock and roll, and Southern Gospel music at their monthly birthday parties.



Volunteers Sandra Britt and Maggie Davis with U.S. Navy Veteran Nick Cinquepalmi (Vietnam)

National Volunteer Week



Volunteer Jenny Bridgeman dancing with U.S. Army veteran Ed Beaupre during a K-n-I Drifters performance.



Volunteer Mike Barrows with U.S. Air Force veteran Mike Barrow (Vietnam)



Volunteer Jenny: Jenny Bridgeman playing Leprechaun Races on St. Patrick's Day with U.S. Air Force veteran Louis Cotton.

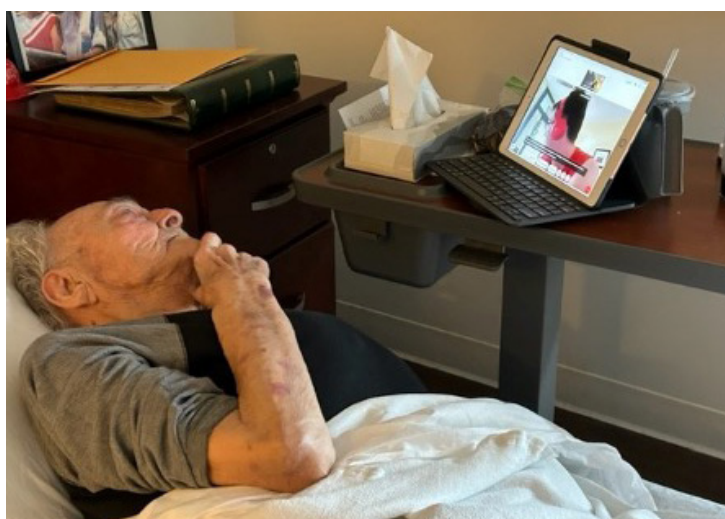


Volunteer Bill Terrill with Army Guard Reserve veteran Bruce Mettlock (Gulf War)



Volunteer Allen Pickett

Veterans' Home at Chicago



Volunteer Brad Bardley chats virtually with U.S. Navy veteran Robert Musial (World War II).



Volunteers Tracy Moreno and Brian Bardsley play UNO with residents.

National Volunteer Week



Volunteers Mary Ann Miller and Donna Dye of Niles VFW Post 3579 with U.S. Marine Corps veteran Frank Allen (Vietnam)



Volunteers Mary Ann Miller, Donna Dye (bunny costume), and Merna Shira, Niles VFW Post 3579

Veterans' Home at Quincy



Back Row: U.A. Air Force veteran Mike Smith, U.S. Navy veteran Jeff Carnahan, U.S. Marine Corps veteran Tom Spohr, U.S. Army veteran Bobby Weisenburger; Front Row: Connie Bottorff – veteran spouse, U.S. Army veteran Maury Wells, Joan Queroli – veteran spouse, U.S. Army veteran Tom Markovic



Connie Bottorff – veteran spouse, Betty Bradshaw – veteran spouse, Margie Rose – veteran spouse



Volunteers Janet Long & Carol Shutts from the VFW Auxiliary helping with Bingo at the Fifer Building

Veterans' Homes



Prince Home

On April 9, 2024, Rosalyn Williams, Senior Stakeholder Liaison with the IRS Communications & Liaison Division, presented important information on IRS military tax benefits to the Prince Home residents. Her presentation provided resources and education on the Recovery Rebate Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit, and tax breaks that are available to military members and their dependents and locations for free tax preparation. Rosalyn is a tax specialist who serves as a liaison between the IRS and individuals seeking information.

Photo One: From Left to right: Prince Home Program Supervisor Mr. Wali Lewis, Travell Lacey, Benard Moore, Kevin Butler, IDVA Senior Program Manager/Women Veterans Margo Watson, and IRS Senior Stakeholder Representative Rosalyn Williams.

Photo Two: Margo Watson and Rosalyn Williams

Total Eclipse of the Sun

The Veterans' Homes across the state gathered to view varying eclipses of the sun.

Veterans' Home at Quincy



Veterans' Homes

Veterans' Home at Chicago



Left to right: Dr. Denise King, T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson (Back Row) Luz Gonzalez, Stephany Palomino, Karen Boleaga (Middle Row) Ana Huizar (Front Row)



Veteran Tom Riesterer



Resident John Ridenour



Karen Boleaga and Luz Gonzalez



The Veterans' Home at Quincy's Advisory Council met on Saturday, April 13th for its spring meeting. Chief Engineer of the Home Dave Clifford led a tour of the new domiciliary and long-term care buildings, which are part of a \$300 million renovation and rehabilitation project that will provide a 260,000 square foot residential long-term care facility and 80,000 square foot independent living facility to Illinois veterans. The project is slated for completion this year.

Each of the five Illinois Veterans' Homes, Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy partners with an advisory council where they share information, discuss issues and develop solutions for veterans' concerns.

Employee of the Year

2023 Employee of the Year

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) proudly announced Justin Buchanan, Property Manager in the Central Office, as the 2023 IDVA Employee of the Year.

Justin was selected from a talented pool of 16 other nominees for his steadfast commitment to the mission, vision, and guiding principles of an agency serving over 550,000 veterans and their families. He approached every assignment with the highest level of professionalism, innovation, and positivity. He was tireless in ensuring that every office was fully equipped with the technology needed to serve Illinois veterans effectively and efficiently. He contributes to a positive work environment and his impact is recognized across the Agency.

Justin joined IDVA in 2022 as a Property Manager and has also supported other roles including Telecom Coordinator, Vehicle Coordinator, and Agency Technical Service Requestor (ATSR).

Justin is a U.S. Army veteran who served for eight years around the globe including deployment to Iraq in 2010. Additional assignments were in Fort Benning, Georgia, and Fort Stewart, Georgia. He transitioned from active duty to the Illinois Army National Guard in 2012 where he attended Robert Morris University. His service concluded at Camp Lincoln in Springfield as an E5 Sergeant.

"Congratulations, Justin, on this well-deserved recognition. You were nominated for your invaluable contributions to IDVA. Thank you for offering your talent, professionalism, and positive attitude. We are grateful for your work in serving Illinois veterans," said IDVA Director Terry Prince.



Congratulations to the other nominees for their outstanding service to Illinois veterans.

Janese Byrd – VNAC – IVHQ

Greta Fankel – Social Services – IVHQ

Tracy Ford – RN – IVHQ

Angela Gifford – RN2 – IVHM

Jennifer Goad – RN – IVHM

Jeff Lewis – VSO Supervisor – Southern Region

Kringle Lindsey – Office Associate – IVHQ

Janet Llewellyn – Dietician – IVHQ

Julia Moreno – Activities Therapist – IVHC

Malon Norfleet – VSO – IVHM

Dena Robbins – Acting Home Administrator – IVHL

Byron Saathoff – Banker – IVHQ

Pamela Shipp – RN – IVHM

Tim Splear – VNAC – IVHM

Matthew Taylor – VSO – Machesney Park Field Office

Amy Whitmore – Support Service Worker – IVHQ



The General Assembly is in its ninth week of the legislative session. IDVA's Legislative Liaison Sara Augustinas is tracking 40 bills this spring, all of which directly or indirectly affect the agency. Of those 40 bills, 30 reference military or veterans, and 10 bills impact agency operations such as labor relations or procurement.

Below is a snapshot of bills that are moving through the process:

House Bills

[HB 4757 \(Kifowit/Porfirio\)](#): HB 4757 mandates that IDVA creates a veterans' and service members' benefits, services, and protections poster containing important information about benefits and services. The Illinois Department of Labor will make the poster available at no cost. The bill is effective on 1/1/2025.

[HFA#1 to HB 612 \(Kifowit\)](#): HFA #1 to HB 612 makes four major changes to the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities section of the Property Tax Code.

- It changes the name of the "Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities" to the "Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities and Veterans of WWII," creating a property tax exemption for all WWII veterans, regardless of their disability ratings.
- It provides that beginning with the taxable year 2024, for veterans that are rated 70% or higher, "the first \$250,000 in equalized assessed value of the property is exempt from taxation," regardless of the value of the property.
- It provides that beginning with the taxable year 2024, the definition of "veteran" no longer requires an "honorable discharge." Rather, the veteran must have a service-connected disability for which the veteran receives disability compensation.
- It specifies that the Act cannot be used as the basis for a property tax appeal for previous tax years. The bill has an immediate effective date.

Senate Bills

[SB 2769 \(Hastings/Schweizer\)](#): SB 2769 creates a "Veteran Internship Pilot Program," to provide internships for honorably discharged veterans to participate in the General Assembly's existing legislative staff internship program. The two-year pilot program will begin on July 1, 2024, and is reliant on appropriations. The bill has an immediate effective date.

[SB 3479 \(Porfirio/Kifowit\)](#): SB 3479 amends the Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act, section 2YYY titled, "Deceptive practices targeting veterans and military members."

- It adds language to the definition of "Veteran or military benefits services" to include "consulting or coaching in the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of claims or other attempts to obtain benefits" as a service.
- It adds additional language to the disclosure that all businesses providing veteran or military services must post.
- It adds more stringent language including that failure to provide a veterans services disclosure orally and in writing at the outset of the business relationship is an unlawful practice. This change reflects that all county veteran service officers must now be VA accredited.
- The bill is effective 1/1/25.

Additional bills will be introduced before the end of May. Stay tuned!

Field Services



IDVA welcomes Russell Brian Tappenbeck as its new Services Coordinator responsible for fielding questions, requests, and concerns of veterans reaching out to IDVA for support. As the first point of contact, he will ensure that veterans are referred to the appropriate person or department. Russell is a U.S. Army veteran and served nearly 15 years including two deployments to Baghdad and once to Afghanistan. His roles included AIT instructor and Honor Guard NCOIC. He was inducted into the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club, is the recipient of the Army Award for Maintenance Excellence, and graduated from the Air Assault School.

"Russell is instrumental in ensuring that a veteran's first impression and experience with IDVA is positive and reassuring," said Field Services Manager Mark Patterson. "We are grateful for his commitment to providing excellent customer service to Illinois veterans."



Veteran Service Officer Mark Robinson (Peoria) and Veteran Service Officer Melinda Makinney (Peoria) attended the National Guard Crossroads at Heartland Community College for Veterans. The program was intended for service members within nine months of their Expiration Term of Service (ETS). Pictured left to right: Shannon Yount, Office of the Attorney General Program Specialist, Livingston County Veterans Assistance Commission(VAC) Mike Haerr, IDVA VSO Mark Robinson, IDVA VSO Melinda Makinney, and Livingston County VAC Natash Furlano.



Veteran Service Officer Michele Richards (Chicago) attends the 2024 Senior Expo at Drury Lane Theater in Oakbrook Terrace.



IDVA represents at the Prairie State College Job Fair. From left to right: IDVA VSOs Frank Delatorre, Malon Norfleet Enrique Cabrera, and Gerald Enriquez

Women Veterans



Margo Watson, Senior Program Manager/Women Veterans Coordinator, discussed Suicide Prevention at the 95th American Legion's Annual Patriotic Conference. More than 200 people attended the program at the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Springfield. Margo is pictured with Jill Layton, the American Legion's National Security Chairman.



Pictured from l-r: VSO Cynthia McKee (Chicago), IDVA Senior Program Manager/Women Veterans Coordinator Margo Watson, and VSO Michelle Richards (Chicago).

Chicago Cook Women's Veteran Town Hall

IDVA co-hosted the Chicago Cook Women's Veteran Town Hall & Resource Fair along with the Cook County and City of Chicago's Department of Veterans Affairs at Malcolm X College. Director Terry Prince was a keynote speaker, and more than 25 women veterans shared their stories of military service. A resource fair was offered to support women veterans interested in learning more about their benefits and services. Lunch was provided by Jus Sandwiches, a women veteran-owned business. A self-defense class concluded the day.

Veterans Assistance Commission of Will County Recognizes IDVA's Charletta V. Lutcher-Hayes



In a Facebook Post on March 27th, the Veterans Commission of Will County recognized Charletta V. Lutcher Hayes, IDVA Veteran Service Officer serving the Joliet community.

This is what they had to say:

March is Women's History Month, a time to celebrate and honor the remarkable contributions of women in the U.S. military: Charletta V. Lutcher-Hayes

Charletta has worked for local state government for 24 years serving the Veteran Population and their families to ensure they receive the benefits they are entitled to. She began her career with the Illinois Department of Employment Security in 1999, where she held the position as a Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist providing individualized career services to veterans with Barriers to Employment through enhanced case management. She would later accept a promotion to become a Local Veteran Employment Representative

where her responsibility was to actively advocate for employment and training opportunities with business, industry, and community-based organizations on behalf of Veterans. Also working with federal contractors to inform them of the process they can use to recruit and hire Veterans. Charletta seized a lateral conversion in 2007 taking a position with another Agency dedicated to serving Veterans. She is presently a Veteran Service Officer with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs.

Charletta received her (AAS) associate degree in criminal justice from The College of DuPage in 2002. She received her (BBM) Bachelor of Business Management from Benedictine University in 2004 and she graduated receiving her (MSW) Masters of Social Work from The University of St. Francis in 2015.

She also served in the United States Navy from 1992 until 2014, both Active Duty and Reserves, retiring after 22 years of dedicated service to her country. Following recruit training she served aboard The Sub-tender USS Holland (AS-32) on the Island of Guam. As a Machinist Mate, she assisted in repairing equipment and systems on several fast-attack submarines. In 1994 Charletta served ashore at Naval Station San Diego, Ship's Information Center with Waterfront Operations. In 1995 she was given Orders to be stationed aboard Ammunition Ship the USS Flint (AE-32) out of the Bay area in Concord and Alameda California. Following the Sea assignment, Charletta completed her last year of Active Duty in the Legal Office at the Shore Intermediate Maintenance Activity in San Diego California. In June of 1996, she transitioned to the Naval Reserves and began actively Drilling at the Naval Reserves Center in Forest Park, IL. Her command assignments included the USS Frank Cable (AS-40), the USS Barry (DDG-52) and Destroyer Squadron 26 (DESRON-26). Her final units of the assignment were the Naval Security Force at Naval Station Great Lakes and (CNREURAFSWA) Commander Navy Region Europe Africa Southwest Asia based in Naples Italy.

The most memorable moments from her US Navy Career were Graduating with Company (K-045) from Basic Training, Being stationed on The Beautiful Island of Guam, and Living in Base Housing on Treasure Island just across the Bay from Alcatraz. She also misses the strong Moral Character, Esprit de Corp, and the Camaraderie she had with everyone she served with.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. A 2016 VA study of 20,563 veterans assessed data on Military Sexual Trauma (MST) among male and female veterans who served during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) eras. These findings are from a study that looked at veterans deployed to OEF/OIF and Veterans who served elsewhere during the same period. The statistics concluded that a high percentage of MST among women, and a smaller but significant percentage of MST among men, indicates that research and health care services that address MST should continue to focus on Veterans of both sexes. To view the complete study results click here: [Military Sexual Trauma in Recent Veterans - Public Health \(va.gov\)](#).

Throughout the month, the VA shared important resources for survivors of MST. The following article is published with permission from the USDVA.

VA Supports Military Sexual Trauma Survivors in Finding Their Path to Healing

April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month — an important time to reach out to Veterans and other former Service members and share that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides free services for military sexual trauma survivors whenever they are ready, at any time of year.

[Military sexual trauma](#), or MST, is the term VA uses to refer to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during military service. People of all genders, ages, sexual orientations, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and branches of service have experienced MST. For some MST survivors, the experience affects their physical and mental health, work, relationships and everyday life, even many years later.

Healing after MST can take time, and VA understands that every survivor heals at their own pace and in their own way. That's why VA offers free MST-related services that are tailored to each individual. VA stands ready to help survivors on their path to healing, no matter how long it's been since they experienced MST or how it's affecting them now. There are more VA resources available for survivors of MST than ever before:

- Every VA health care facility, has an [MST Coordinator](#) — a professional who can assist MST survivors in accessing care.
- [Local VA medical centers](#), offer free counseling and treatment to Veterans and former Service members for any mental or physical health condition related to their experience of MST. VA offers flexible treatment options tailored to meet MST survivors' needs and preferences.
- Community-based [Vet Centers](#) provide free MST-related outpatient counseling and referral services in a nonmedical setting.
- [Beyond MST](#) is a free, secure, self-help mobile app created specifically to support MST survivors' health and well-being.
- [MentalHealth.va.gov/MST](#) provides educational and coping resources about MST for survivors, family members and friends, and healthcare providers.

Eligibility for MST-related care at VA is expansive, and no documentation of the MST experience is required to receive this care. Survivors do not need to have reported the MST experience at the time it occurred or to have sought care within a certain time frame. VA believes MST survivors and is ready to help them heal.

Monthly Highlights

Purple Up Day

April is the Month of the Military Child where we recognize all the children who support their families through frequent moves, separations, and the challenges of military life. They are strong, resilient, and courageous. IDVA teams across the agency wore purple to demonstrate their support of military children. To all military children around the globe, thank you for your service.



Monthly Highlights



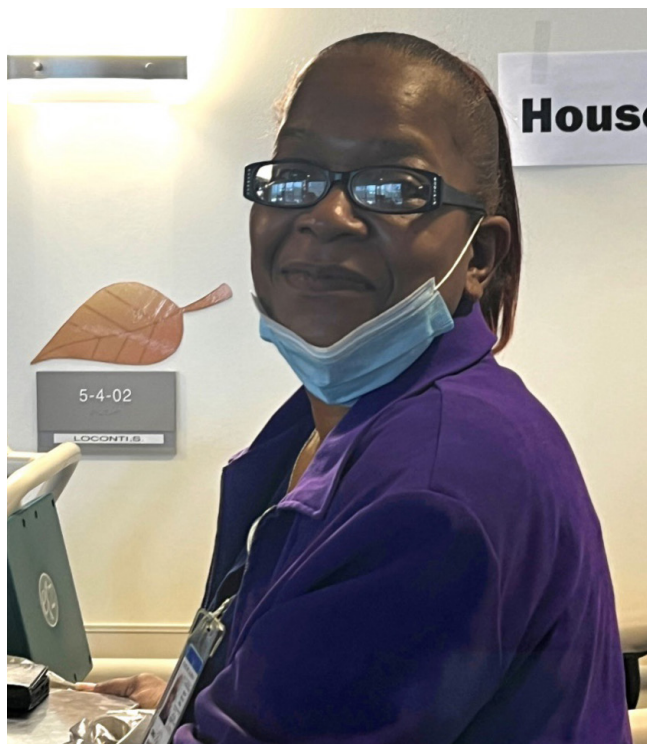
Team Veterans' Home at Chicago



Team Central Office - Chicago



Team Veterans' Home at Chicago



Veterans' Home at Chicago

Monthly Highlights



Team Veterans' Home at Quincy



Team Veterans' Home at Manteno



Team Central Fiscal Office

Monthly Highlights

Director Terry Prince was recognized for his 31 years of service

Director Terry Prince was recognized for his 31 years of service in the U.S. Navy and his leadership at IDVA as part of the Chicago Cubs Military Salute. The crowd warmly welcomed him at the cold and rainy game on April 7th against the Los Angeles Dodgers.



World War II Veteran Receives Highest Distinction from France



Director Prince attended the presentation of the French Legion of Honor medal to Emil G. Hirsch, U.S. Army veteran, for his participation in the liberation of France during World War II. The Legion of Honor is the highest distinction that France can bestow upon those who have achieved remarkable deeds for France. Founded by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, the National Order of the Legion of Honor recognizes eminent service to the French Republic. Recipients of this honor are named by a decree signed by the President of the Republic. Consul General of France in Chicago Yannick Tagand presented the Legion of Honor medal to Mr. Hirsch. Director Prince offered remarks and Mr. Hirsch shared his gratitude and military experiences with the attendees at the Brookdale Home in Northbrook, IL.

Do you have a Compliment, Recommendation, Question, or Complaint?

Illinois Veterans Accountability Unit (VAU)

Let us Know!

If you are an Illinois veteran or other Illinois resident who seeks services from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA); a resident of any Illinois Veterans' Home, a family member of a resident, a visitor of any Illinois Veterans' Home; a vendor and/or contractor of the IDVA; or staff of the IDVA, we want to hear from you.

This office welcomes feedback about the services being provided to the veterans of Illinois. If you received exceptional service or have concerns about poor performance involving any member of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, please let us know.

Email us at

IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov

or Call our Toll-Free Helpline

1-855-660-7011

More information about the VAU can be found on the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs website

<https://veterans.illinois.gov/>

The VAU maintains the confidentiality of investigations, complainants, and witnesses to the maximum extent allowable, but must disclose complaints to the Office of the Executive Inspector General (OEIG).

You can obtain more information about the OEIG or file a complaint with the OEIG directly through its website at **<https://oeig.illinois.gov/>**.

Our mission at the IDVA is very simple. To serve those who have served. In doing so, we serve not only the men and women who have worn the uniform, but also their families. It is our privilege to be able to help our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to our nation. Our goal is to empower our veterans and their families to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We know there are many veterans within our great state who do not require any assistance – but we still want to encourage you to “Stand Up and Be Counted!” by registering with your local VSO. In doing so, you’re helping IDVA to do a better job of planning for services, seeking federal funding and understanding the needs of our veteran communities statewide. [Click here to register.](#)

We thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and we at the IDVA look forward to offering our services to you.



**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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