

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 2, Issue 9 ★ November 2022



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

Make a Difference—for our veterans, for their families, for our communities, and for each other.

Each day Team IDVA arrives at work, it arrives with one purpose – the veteran. The 600,000 veterans in Illinois each have their own unique story, circumstances, and concerns. Our Veteran Service Officers work side-by-side with each veteran to identify the benefits and services they have earned and determine what they need to reach their own goals and aspirations. We encourage the team to go to events and programs in the community, so veterans know what IDVA can do for them. We realize that the process is confusing – Who do I call? What have I earned? What is my family entitled to? Especially for veterans transitioning from the military. There are so many unknowns—from employment to education to housing to health care. You are not alone. Please reach out to a Veteran Service Officer in your area who can be your guide on your journey. To find a VSO, click here: [IDVA Veteran Service Officers](#).

For our veteran community requiring residential living support, the medical professionals and staff at the five IDVA Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy are dedicated to delivering quality medical care in a compassionate environment. If you or a loved one is interested, reach out to learn more: [Illinois Veteran Homes](#).

On Veterans Day, Team IDVA was dispersed around the state to attend programs, ceremonies, and parades to demonstrate our respect and gratitude to veterans for their service. Thank you to all veterans who have worn the cloth of our Nation to protect our freedoms. We are forever grateful.

Wishing you and your family a blessed and peaceful Thanksgiving Holiday.

Thank you for connecting with IDVA.

Sincerely,
Terry Prince
IDVA Director



Please take a moment to view a message from Director Prince. Click on image above.

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.

Winter Winnings

Illinois' Lottery Ticket Supporting

On November 1st, The Illinois Lottery launched its Veterans Instant Ticket in Illinois – Winter Winnings! The Winter Winnings \$2 lottery tickets are sold between November through February and players can win up to \$20,000. Once prizes are paid out, the funds raised by the lottery tickets are distributed by the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs through Veterans Cash Grants to programs providing vital services to veterans including: job training, housing assistance, post-traumatic stress treatment, health insurance costs, long-term care, disability benefits, and employment.

On a quarterly basis, IDVA's committee reviews applications and awards grants to groups that have demonstrated proven need. Eligibility is open to government agencies, not-for-profits, veterans' organizations, and tax-exempt entities currently providing veterans' assistance or wishing to expand to veterans' assistance. Winter Winnings is the first lottery game in the United States to designate 100 percent of net proceeds to veterans. Launched in 2006, the Illinois Lottery has provided IDVA with the resources to award more than \$18 million in grants to approximately 400 veterans organizations statewide.

In October, IDVA announced the grant recipients for the fourth quarter of FY2022.

- **Goodwill Industries** of Central, IL was awarded \$30,000 to support the Veterans Employment Program and the Central Illinois Stand Down for Homeless Veterans event. This grant will positively impact 320 veterans and their families in Peoria and surrounding communities with employment opportunities and by providing much needed resources and supplies for the upcoming winter months.

- **Impacting Veterans Lives Inc., dba Midwest Veterans Closet**, was awarded \$97,684 to provide a one-stop shopping experience without cost for homeless veterans and those at risk. They proudly bill themselves as, "a super spreader of food, goods, and dignity for our military heroes." They also assist active-duty personnel assigned to the Navy bootcamp and training center in Great Lakes, IL. This grant is expected to impact up to 12,000 veterans, servicemembers and their families.

In announcing the grants, Director Terry Prince said, "Veterans' Cash Grants is an opportunity for organizations to gain critical funds to operate and make a significant impact on veterans. We are pleased to award these grants to Goodwill of Central IL and Midwest Veterans Closet and thank them for their partnership in serving Illinois' 600,000 veterans and countless family members. They represent just two of the thousands of organizations supporting veterans and their families. I encourage other organizations to visit the IDVA website and learn how they can apply for these impactful grants."

To learn more about this ticket, [click here](#).

For more information on Veterans' Cash Grants [click here](#).



Benefits Highlight: Compensated Work Therapy

Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) is a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinical vocational rehabilitation program that provides evidence based and evidence informed vocational rehabilitation services; partnerships with business, industry and government agencies to provide Veteran candidates for employment and Veteran labor, and employment supports to Veterans and employers.

For additional information, please visit the [VA website](#).



Women Veterans

Coast Guard Women's Reserve

On November 23, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Public Law 772 creating the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve program. The Women's Reserve of the Coast Guard later adopted the nick name SPARs, named after the Coast Guard motto "Semper Paratus-Always Ready". During World War II, a total of 978 women officers and 11,868 enlisted women served in the SPARs. The women of the SPARs boldly served our country, but not without challenges. In 1973, congressional legislation ended the Women's Reserve and permitted women to officially join the active-duty Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve. To learn more about the SPARs, please visit [Women in Coast Guard: Historical Chronology \(uscg.mil\)](https://www.uscg.mil/history/women) or [Women \(uscg.mil\)](https://www.uscg.mil/women).





Monthly Highlights

Team IDVA dispersed throughout the state for Veterans Day events to demonstrate their support and respect for veterans. To listen to a message from Director Prince, [click here](#).



Kourtney Hopkins (center), IDVA Women Veterans Coordinator, participated in a Women Veterans panel at Loyola University Chicago.



Veterans bundle up for the for Anna's Veterans Day Parade.



Team IDVA kicks-off the Springfield Veterans Day Parade: pictured left to right: Senior Program Policy Advisor Crystal Womack, General Counsel Brittany Hawkins, Senior Home Administrator Angela Simmons, and Assistant to the Director Jennifer Franklin.



Robert Iverson, IDVA Metro Region Supervisor, Rochelle Crump, National Veterans United President and former IDVA Assistant Director, and Georges Sanon, Coordinator, Office of Military Student Affairs, Prairie State College at the Prairie State College Veterans Day Event.



Shayne Murphy, VSO Palatine, attends the Town of Cicero Veterans Day commemoration.



Director Terry Prince spoke to student veterans at the Loyola University Chicago Veterans Day program. Dr. Mark Reed, newly installed 25th president of the University, introduced Director Prince.



Monthly Highlights

Operation Rising Spirit



Join hundreds of people around Illinois in sending notes of gratitude to veterans in the five state veterans' homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy as part of "Operation Rising Spirit."

This is a wonderful holiday project for schools, businesses, organizations, communities, families and individuals to bring joy to a veteran.

"Operation Rising Spirit is an effort to thank veterans who courageously served our nation, said Director Terry Prince. "This simple gesture brings more joy to a veteran than you can imagine. Consider gathering friends and family to support this meaningful effort during this holiday season."

To participate, reach out to Crystal Womack, crystal.womack@illinois.gov or you can send a note through the [IDVA website](https://www.idva.org/), and it will be delivered to a veteran in one of the homes.

Warrior Care Month

November is Warrior Care Month, a time to recognize the strength and resilience of our wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans. In 2008, former Secretary of Defense Robert F. Gates deemed November as Warrior Care Month to increase awareness of programs, resources, and services and to facilitate transition back into service or the community. If you or a loved one is preparing to make your transition back into the community, IDVA is here to help you navigate the benefits and services you have earned. Please visit: [Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs](https://www.idva.org/) to learn more about your earned benefits and locate a Veteran Service Officer near you or call 1-800-437-9824.

Serving Those Who Serve



From November 2nd -12th, hundreds of people showed their support for veterans and military families by taking the pledge to participate in providing one act of

service to those who have served. Many schools and organizations mobilized letter writing campaigns for residents of the Illinois Veterans' Homes.



Director Terry Prince and Women Veterans Coordinator Kourtney Hopkins present Governor JB Pritzker's Veterans Day Proclamation at the Women Veterans Recognition Ceremony at Olive-Harvey College. The event was sponsored by IDVA, National Women Veterans United and the IDVA.

Illinois Joining Forces Summit

Director Prince and Veteran Service Officers participated in the Illinois Joining Forces Summit, Operation Connect Illinois, where veteran service organizations came together to share ideas and best practices followed by a resource fair for veterans.



Tracy Trueblood, Veteran Service Officer Peoria office and Anthony Harrison, Veteran Service Officer Springfield office.



(L-R) Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager, Jeffrey Lewis, Southern Region Supervisor, (standing) Anthony Harrison, Veteran Service Officer Springfield, (standing) Kimberly Fuiten, Central Region Supervisor, Robert Iverson, Metro Region Supervisor, and Melissa Beckford, Northern Region Supervisor, Tracy Blueblood, Veterans Service Officer Peoria, Ken Bonner, Field Training Coordinator, Josh Layton, VSO from Effingham.

Veterans Day, a VSO, and Taking an Oath

Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager

The month of November. November is a month for recognition. Recognizing who and what was done to bring us to this point. We have months that memorialize and months that celebrate. This one, I think, is about recognition.

Veterans Day isn't about heroism, fame, or glory. It's about recognizing that we can't be free without service members. They step forward for a variety of reasons. What they all have in common is they have no idea what may be asked of them. Will you be in luxurious conditions with tropical weather? Some were prior to December 7th, 1941. Will your duty be to oppose a political and economic belief from encroaching on your freedoms in a free society? Maybe you will come to the aid of a nation or respond to an attack on the country. Will you serve in peace, unscathed from the rigors of conflict? No matter what your service was, is, or will be, the path of your commitment is unknown at the time you take the oath. For that, every veteran should be recognized for the remarkable uncertainty you raised your hand for.

The position of a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) is a unique opportunity to assist those that have borne responsibilities and sacrifices associated with serving our country. Few vocations have the uncertainty and peril that can come with volunteering for service. I was speaking with a member of our janitorial crew. I mentioned that a member of the staff volunteered to do a particular assignment. They said, "the person doesn't get paid?" I told them; it can also mean that you are doing something that you didn't have to do. Serving your country in the Armed Forces is perhaps the ultimate volunteer commitment. Everything we do is tied to a citizen accepting that uncertainty by taking an oath. Even those drafted, ultimately didn't have to honor the selection to serve, although there are consequences. Those that did take the oath, that action, binds them forever with the veterans that preceded them.

Four of our most recent VSO hires have started their formal training for accreditation. At the end of their training and after successfully passing the examination,

they will have the foundation to begin their career-long journey in the art of claims and service to their fellow veterans. Welcome to the mission, Michele, Michael, Anthony, and Matthew, reach out when appropriate, help when you can.



Melissa Beckford, Northern Region Supervisor, and Debbie Fuehrer, Veteran Service Officer, participate in the Rockford Veteran Stand Down.



Carla Waibel, VSO, Moline/Rock Island County, presented a course on Separation Claims (BBD Claims) during the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Course offered at the Rock Island Arsenal. 25 Army retirees and soldiers who are going to discharge participate in this one week course.

For more information on TAPS, click here:

[TAP - Online Courses \(tapevents.mil\)](https://tapevents.mil) [VA TAP Course Catalog - Outreach, Transition and Economic Development](#)



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Construction Update



Troy Culbertson, Administrator for the Veterans' Home at Quincy provided an update and tour of its \$240 million reconstruction project to local news media. The project includes the renovation and rehabilitation of the veterans' home

with a new 210-bed, skilled care facility and 80 additional independent living domiciliary rooms. This upgrade will modernize the campus and provide a cost effective, state-of-the-art facility, with single occupancy rooms and a more intimate setting for Illinois' veterans needing skilled nursing care. Troy offered tours of the model domiciliary and skilled nursing rooms. The renovation is on track to be completed for the domiciliary by mid-2023 and the skilled nursing facility in 2024. The project is a federal and state partnership and is part of Governor Pritzker's Rebuild Illinois.

Additionally, the Illinois Veterans' Home at Quincy (IVHQ) provided a campus tour to a local area legislator and legislative staffers. The tour consisted of a ride through the 210-acre campus and the new construction. IVHQ is currently undergoing a \$240 million renovation of the campus with \$194.7 million of the renovation money reimbursed via a federal U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (USDVA) grant.

Attendees were able to view replicas of the new buildings that will be open on the campus starting next year. The tour concluded and was followed by a presentation on IDVA's five state-run veterans homes and a Q&A so that legislative staffers could better assist and inform veterans and their families on the application process, eligibility and more. The tour took place outdoors and in non-residential buildings for resident safety. IDVA is always mindful that its five-state run veterans' homes are homes to its veteran residents.



Veterans' Home at Chicago veterans shared treasured mementos as part of Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations.



Residents from the Veterans' Home at Anna consider concessions before viewing Bullet Train at the movie theater.





The Veterans' Home at Quincy celebrated Oktoberfest. Prost!

The Employee Recognition Oktoberfest is a special event for IVHQ staff and their families included a special menu of grilled bratwurst on pretzel buns with sauerkraut and all the fixings, American and German potato salad, macaroni and cheese, pumpkin bars, and root beer. The night featured a special family photo booth, trolley rides, smores (four fire pits), and a raffle for one of eleven gift baskets for any employee who attended. The highlight of the event was the German Heidelberg band performing.

Josephine's 106th Birthday

Josephine Bogdanich, Women Army Corps, US Army Corps veteran and Manteno Veteran Home resident, was joined by fellow veterans, staff, and local non-profit Project HeadSpace and Timing – We Stand together, to celebrate her 106th Birthday! Manteno Veterans' Home Administrator Tanya Huston Smith presented Josephine with a letter from Illinois Governor JB Pritzker wishing her a very happy birthday. A special thank you to Project Headspace and Timing founder Eric Peterson for supporting this momentous occasion.

Happy Birthday, Josephine!



Illinois Department of
Veterans' Affairs

★ Follow us

