



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

Summer in Illinois does not disappoint whether on the shores of Lake Michigan, the hills of Galena, or one of its many small lakes. Throughout the summer, team IDVA dispersed throughout the state to attend state and county fairs, events, and programs to educate veterans about how we can help them. We listened intently to their stories and offered tactical solutions for addressing their unique situations. While summer has come to a close, we will continue to go out into the community to meet veterans where they are and build relationships with our veteran partners, veterans, and their families. Our mission is to ensure that veterans thrive in Illinois, and this team is poised to do all it can to make this a reality for Illinois veterans.

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness month. At IDVA, veteran suicide prevention is front and center of our efforts. We have a team of professionals working to educate the community about veteran suicide prevention and to inform veterans in crisis that we are here for them – that there is help available. We have teamed up with the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Illinois Governor's Challenge to harness our resources and knowledge to develop meaningful programs to prevent suicide among service members, veterans, and their families. Our mission is to save lives.

Veterans are one and a half times more likely to die from suicide than those who have never served in the military. The average of veterans who die from suicide ranges between 17-22 a day. VA data shows that from 2001-2019, the suicide rate amongst veterans rose by 36 percent.

We must be bold, even aggressive in reaching out to veterans. Something as simple as a text message or phone call letting them know, "How are you doing? I've got your six. I've got your back." You may never know the tremendous impact this simple gesture could have on the veterans and may even save a life. I challenge everyone to contact a veteran once a week. Imagine if just a quarter of all Illinoisans made that call, that would be 3 million calls a week, easily 3 times as many calls as there are veterans in Illinois.

Recently, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number changed to a simple three-digit number – 988. The 988 Suicide & Crisis line offers 24/7 call, text and chat access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing suicidal thoughts, substance use, a mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. People can also dial 988 if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. Veterans who are calling, can be routed directly to the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 and Pressing 1. Pass this information on to all those in your life.

Earlier this month, we sent out a Suicide Prevention video message. [Click here to listen](#). Please join me in raising awareness and supporting veterans in our mission to save lives.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

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.



Monthly Highlights

Veterans Day at the Springfield and DuQuoin State Fairs

Veterans Days at the Springfield and DuQuoin State Fairs were an amazing success where hundreds of veterans and their families joined in a full day of programs and events. Gold Star Families and their heroes were honored at Gold Star Family Celebrations of Life. A main program spotlighted the theme of the day, "Veterans Build Illinois," and keynote speakers offered their experiences and perspectives. Lunch was offered to veterans and their families. The veterans day at the state fairs is an annual tradition that honors veterans and their families, and Gold Star families. It is an opportunity to connect with one another and build community.



Celebration of Life Ceremony at the Springfield State Fair



Battlefield Cross Memorial



IDVA's Dan Wellman, Veterans Education and Training Services (VETS) Administrator and master of ceremonies, reads the Veterans Day Proclamation along with Governor JB Pritzker and Director Terry Prince at the Springfield State Fair.



Team IDVA represents at the Springfield Veterans Day Parade



Crystal Womack, IDVA Programs Manager/Senior Public Policy Advisor and coordinator of Veterans Day at both fairs, is joined by Amanda Gray and Director Terry Prince in DuQuoin.



Monthly Highlights



Director Prince enjoys lunch at the DuQuoin State Fair Veterans Day with Rod Thompson, CDR, USN (retired) and VFW Illinois District 14 Commander.



Director Prince is joined by fellow IDVA employees: Dax Griffith, Angela Simmons, Jeffrey Lewis, Tina Griffiths, Mark Patterson, Kourtney Hopkins, and Craig Koch at the DuQuoin State Fair veterans' expo.

Patriot Day

On September 11th, we honor the memory of the 2,977 people who died during the 9/11/2001 attacks. We remember the lives cut short, the strength of the families who lost loved ones, and the extraordinary resilience of the survivors. We also remember the selfless heroism of first responders who ran toward danger, and the bravery of volunteers who showed up at recruiters' offices across the country in the days that followed. We remember 9/11 because we resolve to carry on—to live our lives fully and fearlessly is how we pay tribute to the innocent people who died, embrace our nation's highest ideals, and prove to the world, and ourselves, that there is nothing we cannot overcome.



National POW/MIA Day

September 16th: National POW/MIA Day. On this day, we recognize the special debt we owe our fellow citizens who, as prisoners during wartime, sacrificed their freedoms so that we might enjoy ours. We also remember the unresolved casualties of war whose families and friends still feel the pain and bitterness of war.



Suicide Prevention

September is recognized as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month—a time for all to pause and raise awareness about a topic that is often stigmatized. This month, IDVA will be sharing information and resources surrounding Suicide Prevention on our social media platforms. We invite you to join the conversation. Research has shown that a circumstance that protects against suicide risk, known as a protective factor, is connection. Feeling connected, whether that be to the community, family, friends, school, and other social institutions has proven to help protect against suicide risk. Always remember you are not alone, and help is available. Contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline if you are experiencing mental health-related distress or are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. Dial 988 and Press 1 to be connected to the Veterans Crisis Line. You DO NOT have to be enrolled in VA benefits of health care to connect.

 **Veterans
Crisis Line**
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

**You don't have to go
through a crisis alone.**

Dial 988 then Press 1 to reach the
Veterans Crisis Line day or night.



Monthly Highlights

Resource Center



Are you looking for help in encouraging a Veteran to get support or mental health care? The US Department of Veterans Affairs' Coach-

ing into Care program offers a free service to families and friends of Veterans to offer guidance and help for starting conversations with the Veterans in your life and motivating them to seek treatment if it is needed. Coaching Into Care is a confidential telephone-based program developed that helps you help the Veteran in your life. Call **(888) 823-7458** for more information or visit [Coaching Into Care | When a Veteran you know needs help - MIRECC / CoE \(va.gov\)](#)

Illinois Joining Forces



IJF helps service members, veterans, and their families navigate the "sea of goodwill" to find the support they need, when they need it. No one organization can do it all. But veterans shouldn't have to wander from office to office – or

website to website – to determine who does what and which organization can best meet their needs.

Call **833-INFO IJF (463-6453)**
[Home | Illinois Joining Forces](#)

Rush: Road Home Program



The Road Home Program is dedicated to the mental health and wellness of veterans, service members, members of the National Guard, reservists and families at no cost and regardless of discharge status.

312-942-8387 (VETS)
[Road Home Program | Center for Veterans & Their Families at Rush](#)

Illinois Department of Human Services' Division of Mental Health (DMH)



DMH is responsible for assuring that children, adolescents and adults, throughout Illinois, have the availability of and access to public-funded mental health services for those who are diagnosed with a mental illness or emotional disturbance and an impaired level of functioning based on a mental health assessment.

IDHS Help Line (not a crisis line) **1-800-843-6154**
[IDHS: Mental Health \(state.il.us\)](#)

Vets4Warriors



Vets4Warriors, housed at the Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care National Call Center, is a one-of-a-kind, 24/7 peer support network. It is committed to ensuring that every member of the military community in need of support always has direct and immediate access to a peer who understands what they are going through.

1-855-838-8255
[Vets4Warriors | We've been where you are and we're with you now](#)



Women Veterans

Did you know?



Under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, there is a team of dedicated professionals working to monitor and coordinate the VA's administration of health care, benefits, services, and programs for Women Veterans known as the Center of Women Veterans. Established by Congress in November 1994, the Center for Women Veterans mission is to:

- Monitor and coordinate VA's administration of healthcare, benefits, services, and programs for Women Veterans.
- Serve as an advocate for cultural transformation in recognizing the service and contributions of Women Veterans and women in the military.
- Raise awareness of the responsibility to treat Women Veterans with dignity and respect.

Please take the time to visit their website at [Center for Women Veterans \(CWV\) \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/cwv) and consider subscribing to their communications to receive weekly women veteran centric updates and news!

The Center for Women Veterans has developed a survey designed to help us understand why **women Veterans are not accessing their benefits and services**. The survey is completely anonymous, takes less than five minutes to complete, is for **any woman who served in the U.S. military**, and includes a Spanish and Tagalog version. The survey is available electronically with a link to the survey, along with a QR code.

This survey is for all women Veterans who are **not using their benefits and services**.

The link for the survey is: <https://survey.voice.va.gov/?cwv-women-veterans>.



Are you **NOT** using VA Services and/or Benefits?

**WE'D LOVE TO
HEAR FROM YOU**

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

<https://survey.voice.va.gov/?cwv-women-veterans>



Kourtney Hopkins, IDVA Women Veterans Coordinator, at the Springfield State Fair.

Field Services

IDVA Winnebago County Veteran Service Officers Matt Taylor, Debbie Fuehrer, and Michael Jay partnered with the Boone County VAC at the Boone County Fair to inform veterans of the services and programs available to them. IDVA VSOs are collaborating with VACs throughout the state to harness their collective resources to better serve veterans.



Matthew and Debbie at the IDVA booth at the Boone County Fair.

Veterans Affairs visits Legion



Tina Paggi, Veterans Service Officer, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, was the guest speaker for Galena's Fickbohm-Hissem Post 193 monthly meeting. Paggi explained how her office assists local veterans. Paggi holds office hours in Galena once per month.

IDVA's Kimberly Fuiten, Acting Central Region Supervisor, named Commander of VFW Post 4763 Chatham



IDVA's Kimberly Fuiten, Acting Central Region Supervisor, is serving her third year as Post Commander of the VFW Post 4763 Chatham alongside Jeanie Howard, Senior Vice Commander, and Stephanie Well, Jr. Vice Commander, to make up the top three leaders at the Post.

The National VFW Magazine featured the trio to showcase the trend in women leadership at Posts throughout the country.

Kimberly, a US Navy veteran, served in the Global War on Terrorism. While in the seafaring service from 2002-2006, she was deployed to the Persian Gulf from 2003-2004. She served as an aviation boatswain mate aboard the USS Boxer (LHD-4).

"I think a lot of the problem with getting women to join has to do with not enough of them who want to be part of the VFW community (because of preconceived notions)," Fuiten told the Magazine. "It's a new generation though. We are trying to make a difference in our communities. We want to be able to bring our families to the Post and to events. This doesn't just include women – many veterans of this generation want to bring their families."

Kimberly's favorite activities at the Post are the ones that involve everyone's families, especially its annual Christmas Party where Santa comes to visit!



Veterans' Homes

White Sox game

Thank you to VFW 2857 for sponsoring Mante-no residents to the White Sox game on Sunday, August 14th. Josephine Bogdanich, Jimmy Struck, Bruce Mettlock, and Gloria Smith-Deanes brought home a winner against the Detroit Tigers, 5-3!



Josephine Bogdanich, Women Army Corps, US Army Corps, enjoys the game. Josephine recently flew on a Honor Flight through Operation HerStory. She is 106-years strong.



Jimmy Struck smiling as he made sure the home team didn't strike out!



Gloria Smith-Deanes takes in the game and the crowd.



Bruce Mettlock takes a closer look at the umps call!

Veterans' Home Outings and Activities



Veterans' Home at Chicago residents take in some baseball at the Chicago Dogs versus Cleburne Railroaders at Impact Field in Rosemont.



Putting practice on the "green," at the Chicago Veterans' Home.



Veterans' Homes

Meet Veterans' Home at Anna Residents James and Sue Wilkins: Missionaries



The Wilkins at the Veterans' Home at Anna

James and Sue Wilkins have been residents of the Anna Domiciliary since July 7, 2022 and married since July 18, 1953 – 69 years. Their journey together has taken them to cities across the United States and around the globe. James, a US Army Veteran, became a Southern Baptist Pastor where he led congregations in the United States for 25 years.

In 1981, the Wilkins made the decision to serve as missionaries in Africa, joining a Southern Baptist Missionary to build schools, dentist offices, housing complexes, publication companies, and warehouses. While at the missionary, James served as a construction supervisor and Sue worked as a financial facilitator. James also served as a pastor of the English-speaking churches in the many towns they lived in over the course of their 17 years in Africa. James is most proud of leading the construction of four school buildings at a dramatically reduced construction cost.

Even though the Wilkins prepared themselves for the transition through a 12-week course, they discovered the cultural differences challenging at times. James commented that Sue was able to adjust more quickly to the dramatic changes than he was, which helped him persevere.

"A lot of times people say you sacrificed, we felt like we were in God's will," said Sue. "If we had stayed in America, we would have been out of God's will. It was not a sacrifice."

The Wilkins both retired August 31, 1996, at ages 65 and 63.



The Wilkins with teachers in front of the school in Africa.

Interested in learning more about our Homes?

Visit our webpage at [Veterans' Homes - Homes \(illinois.gov\)](https://www.veterans-homes-illinois.gov) where you can explore the five homes, learn about eligibility and the application process, along with reviewing most commonly asked questions on our Homes.



VETERANS' HOMES STATEWIDE ARE HIRING

Veterans Nursing Assistant - Certified, Food Service, Housekeeping, and More!



Anna Veterans' Home

618-202-6012 - Human Resources

Chicago

773-824-3876 - Human Resources

LaSalle Veterans' Home

815-410-8390 - Human Resources

Manteno Veterans' Home

815-907-3530 - Human Resources

Quincy Veterans' Home

217-222-8641 - Administration

For job postings, visit:

Careers at State of Illinois (jobs2web.com)





Quincy Community Comes Together To Beautify the Veterans' Home at Quincy

Cherish the Moments is a Quincy community effort to restore and revitalize the many historical elements of the Veterans' Home at Quincy that make it unique and inviting for the veterans, their families, and the community. It is led by three women, Quincy resident Linda King and retired Quincy RNs Cathy Sharks and Teresa Pickle, who came together with a shared interest in the home and veterans. Teresa is also a US Army veteran and affiliated with AMVETS.

In 2020, after noticing that ten wrought iron Deer Park benches were in disrepair, Linda reached out to the Quincy community on Facebook seeking help to support restoring the benches. Within 24 hours, 100 volunteers had offered to help. As a master gardener volunteer at the home, Cathy stepped in to co-chair the growing project with Linda. To help generate financial support, Linda and Cathy partnered with AMVETS and Teresa joined the effort. In total, with the help of local businesses, 51 benches were refurbished.

Cathy, Linda, and Teresa formed Cherish the Moments and took on many other ongoing projects to enhance the home including:

- Restoration of the "Soldiers and Sailors Home" welcome sign at the Locust Street entrance
- Repair and painting of urns for the stone building and mansion
- Restoration and relocation of the fountain at the 12th Street entrance to the Shirlee Northern Memorial Garden
- New donor and informational signs to educate the community about the history of the home, deer park, buffalo, gardens, and mansion

"We are grateful to Teresa, Linda, and Cathy for their continued commitment to the Veterans' Home at Quincy," said Home Administrator Troy Culbertson. "Teresa and Cathy, as former RNs, understand the importance of preserving the historical aesthetics of the Quincy home is to our veterans' overall well-being. Partnering with AMVETS has fostered a true community effort. Cherish the Moments project has been instrumental in stewarding and preserving a place our veterans call home."



left to right: Linda King, Cathy Shanks, and Teresa Pickle.

Cherish the Moments is funded by fundraising efforts by AMVETS Post 104, private donations from Quincy residents, neighboring communities, and people from across the United States, and as far away as Australia. In-kind donations have added significantly to the success of the program. Cathy commented on the strong support and cooperation of the home throughout the entire process.

Completed projects include restoring and powder-coating 51 wrought iron benches which have been reinstalled at their original sites, painting the wrought iron fence at the deer park and repairing its scroll work, painting other wrought iron fences on the campus, installing an aeration system for Lake Illinois, and buying 19 picnic tables. The remaining projects are expected to be completed by the end of the year.

"This community has been amazing," Pickle told the Quincy Herald Whig. "Like 135 years ago when they came together to buy the land for the facility, this community came together to help us restore some of the historical pieces."



Legislative Update—The PACT Act

The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act was signed into law on August 10, 2022.

Referred to as the PACT Act, the law expands and extends eligibility for VA health care and benefits for veterans with toxic exposures. It is a significant expansion of benefits and services for veterans with toxic exposures and their families, providing them with the benefits they've earned.

Prior to the passage of the PACT Act, some veterans who suffered toxic exposures were granted "presumption of exposure" by the VA. Essentially, if a veteran served at a specific time and place, toxic exposure was presumed. The veteran would be eligible for VA benefits under this presumption. If a veteran with toxic exposure's service did not align with the qualifying time and place, a claim and/or an appeal needed to be filed to establish that the toxic exposure was related to the veteran's military service for the veteran to be eligible for VA benefits.

The VA list of presumptive conditions did not cover all the illnesses related to toxic exposure, and the qualifying locations and time periods of military service did not cover all veterans with toxic exposures.

For many years, veterans and advocates fought for this to be recognized. The PACT Act was many years in the making.

The bill is named for Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, a combat medic who died from a rare form of lung cancer. The goal is for more veterans to access VA health care and benefits so conditions related to toxic exposure can be identified and treated sooner—improving health care outcomes for millions of veterans.

The PACT Act will make an estimated 5 million veterans eligible for VA benefits and health care.

The PACT Act will do the following:

- Expand and extend eligibility for VA health care for veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
- Give post-9/11 combat veterans ten years post-discharge to enroll in VA Health Care rather than five
 - Provide a one-year open enrollment window for combat veterans that do not fall in the aforementioned time frame
- Codify VA's process for evaluating and determining presumptives
- Add 23 presumptive conditions to its current list
- Require VA to conduct new studies on toxic exposure
- Provide regular screenings for veterans in VA health care to determine if there are toxic exposure related concerns
- Require VA to develop an outreach program on toxic exposure related benefits and supports
- Include funding for the VA to enhance claims processing, increase its workforce, and invest in its clinics and research facilities

All of the conditions added to the VA's list of presumptives are considered presumptive on the date of enactment. However, PACT Act related benefits won't be processed until January 2023 at the earliest. The VA's website states that it is likely VA benefits will be backdated to August 10, 2022.

The VA's next steps will include implementing the changes and the regulatory process.

To learn more about the PACT Act, please visit <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/#whats-the-pact-act-and-how-wil>.

Piatt County Veterans Memorial

Honor the Past: Protect the Future

The Piatt County Veterans Memorial is located in Monticello, Illinois in front of the Piatt County Courthouse. [Touch for map](#). It was erected in 2002 by Hamm-Burke American Legion Post #101 and Piatt County Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #5346.

Inscription

*To those who died
we show honor and pray for eternal rest.
To those still missing
we express our remembrance and hope.
To those who returned
we dedicate our eternal gratitude.
The grateful people of Piatt County
thank these veterans for their courage, sacrifice,
and commitment to the preservation of freedom.*

If visiting the area, one can find at least eight other markers within seven miles of the Veterans Memorial:

- [Abraham Lincoln - Eighth Judicial District](#);
- [Lincoln in Monticello](#);
- [Monticello Journeys](#) (approx. 0.2 miles away);
- [Trail of Death](#) (approx. ¼ mile away);
- [Potawatomi Trail of Death](#) (approx. ¼ mile away);
- [Lincoln - Douglas](#) (approx. 1.2 miles away);
- [Railroads Bring Change](#) (approx. 2.1 miles away);
- [Bement Goes to War](#) (approx. 7 miles away).

[Touch for a list and map](#) of all markers in Monticello.



Illinois Department of
Veterans' Affairs

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