



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 4, Issue 9 ★ September 2024



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and IDVA is using every avenue available including the news media, social media platforms, and community events to raise awareness of veteran suicide prevention across the state. We are on a crusade to end veteran suicide, and we will not stop until the often-noted statistic of 22 veterans a day becomes zero. This bold statement is achievable if each one of us engages in ending veteran suicide. How can we do that? It begins with not being afraid to discuss suicide with those who are struggling or in crisis and with one another. Don't be

concerned you may make things worse. Let's open the door so veterans know they have a safe place to turn on a bad day. Ensure them your support is without judgment, help them problem-solve so that their life which may appear dismal, holds great promise. If you don't have the tools, direct them to the appropriate resources. It can be as simple as a weekly check-in call. The most important thing, however, is to ensure that access to lethal means is minimized. That includes using gun locks, removing the weapon's firing pin, storing ammunition in a separate location. Anything that creates a delay between the thought of suicide—and the act.

In this month's edition of Veterans Connections, we share information on IDVA's Veterans Cash Grant recipients. I encourage organizations that serve veterans to consider applying to receive up to \$100,000. Benefiting programs have expanded their reach and service to veterans. Individuals can support the program by purchasing a \$5 Bingo Tripler Scratch Off ticket which benefits designated causes, including veterans' programs. You will also learn about the first-ever online application form for POW-MIA educational benefits and other exciting happenings at IDVA.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely,

Terry Prince, U.S. Navy Veteran and IDVA Director



IDVA celebrates the contributions and the profound impact of Hispanic Americans on the culture and history of the United States. We recognize Hispanic Americans currently serving in the military and veterans who have contributed to preserving our nation's freedoms at home and abroad. Thank you to our staff who enhance our work environment and dedicate themselves to enrich the lives of veterans across our state.



IDVA Awards Over \$860,000 to Veteran Service Organizations

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) granted over \$860,000 Veterans' Cash Grant Program awards to ten Illinois organizations that provide vital services to veterans and their families across Illinois. Awardees will receive funding to address critical issues facing veterans including homelessness, post-traumatic stress treatment, behavioral health treatment, and workforce development.

Illinois is the first state in the United States to designate 100 percent of the net proceeds of a lottery ticket to veterans. Launched in 2006, more than \$20 million in grants have been awarded to approximately 400 veterans' organizations state-wide. The Winter Riches \$2 lottery tickets were sold between November through February. As of July 1, 2024, the specialty ticket has been replaced, and IDVA is now part of the Joint Special Instant Scratch-Off game. Proceeds are shared with nine other causes through the \$5 Bingo Tripler scratch-off ticket, which will be sold year-round.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs awards these funds through Veterans' Cash Grants. Every quarter, 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 veteran's assistance or wishing to expand their services into veterans assistance.

"We continue to be impressed by the high level of applicants for the Veterans Cash Grants," said IDVA Director Terry Prince. "Those selected are offering quality programs to veterans that will launch them into self-sufficiency and manage PTSD and other behavioral challenges resulting from service. We are grateful for our partnership with the Illinois Lottery, which makes these grants possible." The recipients are:

Donka, Inc. (Wheaton, IL): This \$71,000 grant supports individuals with physical, visual, and learning disabilities through adaptive technology, computer training, job readiness services, adaptive technology, education, job skills training, and placement assistance. The program will support 75 veterans in the Chicago area and Northern Illinois.

A Safe Haven Foundation (Chicago, IL): This \$95,000 grant provides homeless veterans permanent housing, prevention services, and rental and utility arrears assistance. Grant funds will address financial crises, provide move-in starter kits, and offer transportation and prevention services to support independent living. This grant will support 40 veterans in Chicago and Northern Illinois.

Mended Hearts Stable Inc. (Metamora, IL): This \$100,000 grant provides equine-assisted therapy and education to enhance the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social well-being of individuals with various disorders. The grant allows Mended Hearts to expand its treatment center by adding an ADA-compliant area and developing a veteran support group to build camaraderie.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs is accepting Veterans Cash Grant applications!

If you are a non-profit or government agency serving veterans, you may be eligible for a grant ranging between \$25,000 and \$100,000.

Grants are awarded to veteran service organizations providing support in these areas:

- Behavioral Health
- Homelessness
- Health insurance costs
- Disability benefits
- Long-term care
- Employment and training
- Emergency financial assistance

The funds are made available through the proceeds from the Illinois Lottery \$5 Bingo Tripler scratch-off ticket.

To learn more about Veterans Cash Grants and to apply, visit:



IDVA
2024-2025 • 06/24

Merging Vets and Players (MVP) (Chicago, IL): This \$68,000 grant supports MVP which provides veterans with behavioral and physical health challenges a safe environment for exercise and peer mentoring that addresses social isolation, substance abuse, and PTSD.

American Legion Department of Illinois (Bloomington, IL): This \$100,000 grant supports the American Legion's Department Service Officers in assisting transitioning veterans in seeking their earned benefits.

Impacting Veterans Lives, Inc. (Midwest Veterans Closet (North Chicago): This \$100,000 grant will employ six veterans as pantry and warehouse attendants to manage donations and perform facility tasks. This initiative offers paid employment to otherwise unemployed veterans providing them opportunity for self-reliance.

Central Illinois Veterans Commission (Lincoln, IL): This \$100,000 grant will furnish tiny homes for homeless veterans in Central Illinois.

Transitional Living Services, Inc. (Crystal Lake): This \$100,000 grant allows Transitional Living Services to hire veterans facing PTSD, homelessness, reintegration challenges, and employment difficulties. While employed, they receive coaching on job skills, housing assistance, behavioral health support, and nutritional services. The program serves 325 veterans in the Chicago area and Northern Illinois.

Goodwill of Central Illinois (Peoria): This \$30,000 grant funds a Stand Down event which provides essential supplies, medical services, and valuable information on substance abuse and PTSD to veterans. Over 300 veterans attended the 2023 Stand Down event.

Veterans New Beginnings (Chicago): This nearly \$99,000 grant provides 200 homeless veterans in the Chicago area housing support, home management, leasing education, health screenings, family support, transportation, life skills, mental health services, and social activities.

IDVA Welcomes Adriana "Ann" Holladay



Adriana Holladay joins IDVA as the Human Resources Recruitment Specialist after serving in Human Resources roles for the State of Illinois for 18 years. Most recently, she was a recruiter for Health and Family Services where she helped expand its recruiting. She also served in three other state agencies as an HR Employee Benefits specialist. She began her career with the State working for the Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) as a receptionist, insurance underwriter, and completed her 13 years with CHIP as an outreach coordinator.



Deceased, Disabled, and MIA-POW Veterans Dependents: Educational Opportunity Grant Applications Open and Available Online

For the first time, applications for Deceased, Disabled, and MIA-POW Veterans Dependents Educational Opportunity Grants are available online. Dependents between the ages of 10 and 18 of deceased, disabled, or MIA-POW veterans may be entitled to grants covering enrollment at an Illinois elementary, middle, junior high, high school, or home school.

Students interested in the education grant may visit the following websites:

[Education \(illinois.gov\)](http://Education.illinois.gov): To learn more about the grant, instructions for the online application process, and the school certification form (necessary to complete the online scholarship form).

[ISAC Student Portal | Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#). Click on Program Applications & Status Checks then scroll down to "GRANT Apply here."

Proof required for eligibility (as applicable):

- Birth Certificate of child;
- Adoption decree for child;
- Court Ordered Guardianship Records for at least 2 years prior to application;
- Marriage Certificate between parent and veteran for stepchild;
- Veteran's DD214 (Report of Separation) and/or Casualty Report (if died on active duty);
- Award letter from USDVA stating veteran is 100% permanent and totally disabled or award letter from USDVA stating veteran 100% permanent and totally disabled based on Individual Unemployability;
- Award letter from USDVA stating veteran's death service connected; and
- If home of record listed on DD214 or Casualty Report is not Illinois, please provide proof of Illinois residency within six months after entering active duty or 15 consecutive years of Illinois residency after entering active duty as of the date of application.

Approval

Once an applicant has been approved, the next fiscal year:

- Upload school certification forms for each previously approved child,
- Upload birth certificate and school certification form for any new child not previously approved.

The veteran's paperwork does not need to be uploaded again unless there is a change.



Veteran Service Officer Michele Richards (Chicago)
at the Taste of Polonia Festival



Veteran Service Officer Nathan Johnson (McDonough County)
attended the Senior & Veterans' Fair, sponsored by State
Representative Dan Swanson and Norine Hammond, with
co-host McDonough District Hospital.



IDVA Attends the 2024 Annual Training for VAC
Back Row: VSO Theresa Guyer, VSO Chad Roach, VSO Matthew Allen,
Field Training Coordinator Ken Bonner, VSO Jon Huffman
First Row: VSO Tanya Reyes, VSO Tina Paggi, VSO Mark Robinson,
VSO Melinda Makinney, VSO Gerald Enriquez

IDVA's newest Veteran Service Officer Deirdre Worple



Deirdre Worple is now an IDVA Veteran Service Officer working at the Illinois Veterans' Home at LaSalle after previously serving as the Home's executive secretary to the administrator, health information associate, and interim Adjutant.

Her military career includes serving as a Supply Specialist (92Y) with the 233rd Military Police Company, Springfield Illinois Army National Guard from 1997 to 2005, including a deployment to Iraq from 2003 to 2004.

Deirdre earned an associate's degree in business technology from Illinois Valley Community College and is pursuing her bachelor's degree in business management from Western Governors University.

Deidre is married with one daughter and lives in LaSalle. She fosters animals, reads fiction, and enjoys time with family and friends.



VETERANS IN THE FIRE SERVICE

UNIQUE, NO COST
TRAINING OPPORTUNITY!



TWO DAY, CHALLENGING TRAINING EVENT
OCTOBER 26-27
IFSI TRAINING GROUNDS, CHAMPAIGN

An Opportunity for Firefighters Past, Present, and Future

This annual event is a unique, personal and professional development program designed for US Armed Forces Veterans who have also served, are serving, or may be interested in serving as a member of the fire service.

The Veterans in the Fire Service Weekend will offer two training schedules for students: future firefighters and current firefighters.

All Veterans (whether currently in the fire service or looking into a future with the fire service) will benefit from a day of hands-on, live fire training activities. Students will engage with an elite group of IFSI instructors who will introduce essential firefighting skills while participating in rigorous training rotations.

- ◉ NO COST TO ATTEND
- ◉ PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
- ◉ INCREASED ESPRIT DE CORPS FOR VETERANS IN THE FIRE SERVICE
- ◉ MEALS AND LODGING ARE PROVIDED

Loaner firefighting personal protective equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) will be available to students. Advance reservations for gear are preferred.




REGISTER ONLINE:
FSI.ILLINOIS.EDU



Housekeeping and Environmental Services



The 2024 Housekeeping and Environmental Services Week's theme, "Everything you touch is awesome," reflects the teams across IDVA that ensure that our veterans and staff live and work in safe and inviting spaces. Living in a clean home contributes to the quality of life for the veterans in our care and demonstrates our respect for them and their service. Our offices, which many times, are our home away from home, set us up for success when they are well taken care of. Thank you for all you do for veterans and IDVA!

Veterans' Home at Chicago



(Left to Right) Emma Mendoza-SC, Estefania Monteagudo-SSW, Tony Carson-SSW, Sherman Elias-SSW, Marquesha Bentley-SC, Sharon Sims-SSW, Manindra Maskey-SSW, Nelson Alcayde-SSW, Jesus Alvarez-SSW

Veterans' Home at Manteno



(Front row – left to right) Megan Brenner, Heather Phillips, and Lana Crum (Back row – left to right) Rogea Mingo, Jonathon Corbett, Jason Arseneau, Amanda Murray, Christie Wackerlin, Shalynn Alexander, Cheri English, Andrew Bester, Debra Scalise, and Renee Davis

Veterans' Home at Quincy



Marta Mowen
Hammond

Dawn Whelan
Hammond

Cindy Klingele
Markwood



(Left to right) Jessica Kennedy, Janie Fleer, Ronda Rehfeldt – Not pictured Cindy Klingele, Jennifer Fantz – Markword



Housekeeping and Environmental Services



(Left to right) Denise Rigg, Mary Hoelscher, Susan Demoss – Not pictured Marta Mowen, Dawn Whelan, Brenda Gullion – Hammond



Megan Tipton – domiciliary



Bev McPike – outbuildings



(Left to right) Ashley Baker, Scott Witt, Christy Huner, Taylor Gilker, Darin Lefringhouse – Fifer



David Batterton
Hammond



Jennifer Fantz
Markwood



Brenda Gullion
Hammond



(Left to right) Cindy Conover (outbuildings), Devyn Winters (outbuildings), Michelle Hinks (Schapers), Chris Dever (Coordinator), Rhonda Lightfoot (outbuildings), Collette Douglas (domiciliary), Deanna Lefringhouse (domiciliary).

Veterans' Home at Anna



(Front row) Tonia Sherwood, Kristin Barrett, and Mechelle Greer – (Back Row) Kristina Myers, Anna Aumiller, and Jessica Watson – Not pictured: James Mick and Alma Redcloud

Veterans' Home at LaSalle



(Left to right) Beth Shrum, Myron Klinefelter, David Page, Kim Espinosa, Christine Ernat, Marisol Dobson, Dale Boyd, Will Mabry, and Jamie Peterson



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Illinois Veterans' Home at Manteno Residents Compete in "Bikes Across America"

Contributed by Manteno Volunteer Coordinator Rebecca Wilder

When Manteno Veterans' Home resident Michael "Mike" Gulczynski brought his bike to the Home to enjoy over the summer, he inspired Tanya Fordahl, a Manteno Home Restorative Nurse, to create a competition between residents and units. On Thursday, August 1, "Bikes Across America" began with approximately 60 of the Home's 224 members competing using multiple recumbent and bariatric bikes. For three and a half weeks, members competed to earn awards as individuals and as teams. United States maps were used to track laps and mark progress. For every ten laps completed, the marker was moved on the map. Residents rode on concrete circular paths between units with assistance from restorative staff. They were eager to participate and wouldn't allow a little rain to deter them, "we trained in worse than this," one resident exclaimed.

According to Fordahl and Manteno Administrator Tanya Smith, the goal was for residents to come together as teammates, root for one another, and encourage one another to do their best. The bike area became a venue for socializing and camaraderie. Added benefits were increased strength, mobility, and improved cardiac health.



U.S. Army veteran Bob Palian accepts the winners' cup on behalf of the winning team (unit R-4). Bob was also the top individual finisher with the most laps.



Save the Date

Be a part of Operation Camaraderie Volunteer Fair at the Veterans' Home at Anna

Learn about how you can serve those who served as a volunteer at the Veterans' Home at Anna.

Meet residents of the Home.

Talk with volunteers about the many opportunities including transport, events, programs, and outings.

Enjoy light bites prepared by the extraordinary Anna kitchen.

Wednesday, October 9th
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

792 North Main Street, Anna, Illinois

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Deputy Governor for Health and Human Services Grace Hou visits the Veterans' Home at LaSalle and tours its ongoing construction project.



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



PACT ACT CLINIC

**REPRESENTATIVES FROM JESSE BROWN,
HINES AND VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS
AVAILABLE**



SERVICES OFFERED:

1. VA HEALTHCARE ENROLLMENT
2. TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING
3. CLAIM FILING
4. APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING, AND MORE!

WHEN: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2024

10 AM CT - 2:00 PM CT

WHERE: FRISBEE SENIOR CENTER

52 E NORTHWEST HWY, DES PLAINES, IL 60016



SCAN HERE TO LEARN MORE
ABOUT THE PACT ACT

NO RSVP REQUIRED

PARKING ON SITE



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
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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.



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