

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 4, Issue 1 ★ January 2024



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

It is 2024 and wow – time flies when you are doing great work on behalf of others. I hope this edition of our monthly newsletter finds you sticking to your resolutions and that the holiday season gave you a chance to relax and unwind. At your IDVA, the new year gives us a renewed sense of energy to achieve the goals we have laid out for 2024. We are always looking to capitalize on the successes we see every day by setting even higher goals for serving veterans and their families. As part of our four-year strategic plan, we have committed to our veterans and employees through three focus areas: People, Operational Excellence, and the Veteran Experience.

Under these pillars are several sub goals that work hand in hand to position IDVA to serve veterans at the highest level. We take our role as the IDVA very seriously and are committed to being the North Star for our veterans – a place where they know they can turn when they are ready to thrive in Illinois.

We continue our efforts to hire extraordinary team members who are passionate about our mission to deliver five-star service to the veterans and their families who turn to us for assistance. Our extraordinary human resources director and her team are working closely with the Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS) to ensure open positions are posted, interviews are conducted and most importantly, that only the finest are selected to join our family. It is a painstaking process at times, but the IDVA is committed to selecting not just the most qualified candidates, but those who bring their heart, mind, and strength to the position. Admiral William McRaven mentioned this in his book, "Make Your Bed" where he said, "Only the size of your heart matters." He suggested that "true success and impact in life are determined by the size of one's heart, referring to qualities such as kindness, empathy, integrity, and willingness to persevere and show compassion towards others."

Finally, keep an eye on our social media for a big announcement next month. We will be releasing some exciting news that will forever change the look of IDVA. Stay tuned because it is going to be awesome!

Sincerely,

Terry Prince

U.S. Navy Veteran and IDVA Director

Women Veterans

Calling All Illinois Women Veterans

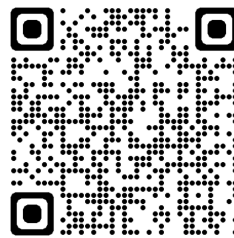


Are you an Illinois Woman veteran and would like more information regarding tuition assistance, obtaining a DD214, housing, military benefits, and bonuses? If so, the IDVA Women Veterans program would like to get to know you. The IDVA Women Veterans program is a resource for women veterans seeking informa-

tion. We've built a community of women who understand the unique challenges of women transitioning from military service and their lives following service. Throughout the year, we disseminate relevant information and host and support programs designed specifically for women veterans.

The survey, found on the QR code below, is IDVA's tool for learning more about the issues, challenges, and needs of women veterans. By filling out this survey, you will help us better serve women veterans.

IDVA also offers Veteran Services Officers (VSOs) across the state, equipped to help veterans uncover the benefits and services available to them. To locate a VSO and request a woman VSO, please visit "[Stand Up and Be Counted](#)," or visit [Veteran Service Officers \(illinois.gov\)](#).



Legislative Corner

On January 16, 2024, the spring session for the Illinois General Assembly began!

The General Assembly is in its 103rd General Assembly, a two-year period that began in January of 2023 and will end in January 2025. At this point, over 7,000 bills have been filed. IDVA is currently reviewing recently filed bills: 17 bills related to veterans and military affairs, six related to long-term care, and three related to State agencies with more bills to follow.

The spring session for 2024 is a few weeks shorter than the spring 2023 session, with the Senate in session for 12 weeks and the House in session for 13 weeks. The budget is likely to be the focus this year; however, substantive bills will go through the legislative process.

All updates on legislation affecting veterans and service members will be here, so stay tuned!



We are now entering into the season when many veteran service organizations, universities, nonprofits, and government agencies are accepting applications for scholarships for veterans, service members, and their dependents. The wide range of scholarships presents opportunities for veterans and their families to grow their skills, expertise, and knowledge for future success.

Below is an outline of several noteworthy programs:

The **American Legion** provides a variety of scholarships for higher education for youth. These scholarships include:

- **Samsung Scholarship for Boys and Girls State participants.** Applications are due by day one of applicants' respective American Legion Boys State or American Legion Auxiliary Girls State.
- Legacy Scholarship for children of Post 9/11 veterans who lost their lives while honorably serving on active duty, or a veteran with a combined VA disability of 50% or higher. **The application deadline is March 27, 2024.**
- **Baseball Scholarship for American Legion** baseball players. **The application deadline is July 15, 2024.**
- **National High School Oratorical Contest Scholarships** are awarded to three finalists and lesser scholarships for state and first-round winners.
- **Eagle Scout of the Year.** Nomination window from November 1 to March 1st annually.
- **Junior Shooting Sports Scholarship for Precision and Sporter** winners in the annual American Legion 3-Position Junior Air Rifle Championship.
- There are also several ANAVICUS scholarships with varying eligibility requirements.

More information about American Legion scholarships may be [found here](#).

AMVETS offers scholarships and grants to veterans, active duty, National Guard and Reserves, as well as their spouses, children, and grandchildren. AMVETS scholarships are designed to fulfill a financial gap after all Federal/State grants and/or scholarships available to an eligible applicant have been exhausted. More information may be [found here](#).

Disabled American Veterans offers scholarships for students who volunteer to assist veterans in their local communities. Volunteers must be 21 years of age or younger. More information may be [found here](#).

Fisher House Foundation provides scholarships for unmarried military dependents under the age of 23. Applications are due by February 14, 2024. More information may be [found here](#).

Folds of Honor provides scholarships to dependents, including spouses, of fallen or disabled United States Service members and first responders. The application window for a scholarship is February 1, 2024, through March 31, 2024. More information [found here](#).

Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs provides the Deceased, Disabled, and MIA-POW Veterans' Dependents Scholarships for dependents of veterans who are either missing-in-action, a prisoner-of-war, died while on active duty, 100% disabled due to service-connected disabilities, or died as a result of service-connected disabilities. More information may be [found here](#).

Illinois National Guard Grant covers tuition and certain fees at all Illinois public universities and community colleges for eligible members of the Illinois National Guard. More information may be [found here](#).

Illinois Veterans Grant covers tuition and mandatory fees at all Illinois public universities and community colleges for eligible Illinois veterans. More information may be [found here](#).

The **Military Order of the Purple Heart Scholarship** program is a competitive program that awards scholarships to Purple Heart recipients and their spouses, children, and grandchildren each year. At least one applicant with military service will be awarded the Navy SEAL LT Michael Murphy Memorial Award. The application window is April 1 through June 30, 2024. More information may be [found here](#).

Pat Tillman Foundation Scholar program is open to veterans, active-duty service members, and current spouses of veterans or active service members, including surviving spouses. More information may be [found here](#).

The **University of Illinois Children of Veterans Tuition Waiver** is a four-year consecutive in-state tuition waiver at the University of Illinois given to natural, step or legally adopted children of service members who are veterans. Up to three tuition waivers per county are awarded each year. Eligible conflicts include World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam Conflict, the Siege of Beirut, the Grenada Conflict, the Southwest Asia Conflict, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The priority deadline for 2024 – 2025 is January 5, 2024, and all applicants will be notified by March 15, 2024. The application deadline for conflicts not awarded closes October 1, 2024. More information may be [found here](#).

The **Veterans of Foreign Wars** has teamed up with Student Veterans of America and Sports Clips Haircuts to provide service members and veterans with financial assistance to complete their educational goals. Applications for the fall semester will be accepted Jan. 1 through April 30, and applications for the spring semester will be accepted Aug. 1 through Nov. 15. More information may be [found here](#).

The VFW also provides scholarships to college and middle school students through *Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen*. More information may be [found here](#).

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

January 21-27th was Activity Professionals Week. IDVA's Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy, are fortunate for their activities teams that create a vibrant community for our state's heroes through creativity, energy, and dedication. Evidence shows that mental, physical, and emotional stimulation are the foundation for the overall well-being of residents in long-term homes. Conversation, companionship, and engagement enhance their overall quality of life. Activity professionals provide these key components and elevate the individual and the entire community. We thank each of our activity professionals for enriching the daily lives of our residents with meaningful activities and programs. They are an integral part of IDVA's approach to caring for all the needs of veterans in our care. Thank you for all you do!



Veterans' Home at Anna: (left to right): Alinda Heron
Recreational Therapist, Tamara Graves, Activity Aide



Veterans' Home at LaSalle: (left to right): Taylor Schott,
Kassandra Seaborn, Mary McDermott, Gerald Bacidore.



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Whittany Flambeau, Mia Meacher, Kathy Bernard



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Kim Gilley, Scott Alberts

Other Veterans' Home at Quincy Activity Professionals staff include: Sara Colgrove, Director, Tammy Baehr, Sandy Heaton, Deanna Marshall, Susan Nowell, BJ Spangler, Rachel Stuckman and Marikkia Velez.



Veterans' Home at Manteno: Back Row: Alison Skaggs, Pat Smith, Debbie Harris. Front Row: Rachel Cunnington, Activity Director, Erin Keenan, and Shaniqua Clemens. Not Pictured: Mary Lee

Veterans' Homes

The American Legion strongly supports IDVA by volunteering and supporting our Veterans' Homes, programs, and events. We are grateful for their partnership and contribution to improving the lives of veterans in Illinois.

To watch the video on the Quincy Home construction project and tour, [click here](#).



David Clifford, Chief Engineer for the Veterans' Home at Quincy, along with Administrator Chuck Newton, led a tour of the Quincy construction project with members of the American Legion National and Department of Illinois Leadership. (New Domiciliary pictured above).



Veterans' Home at Manteno Receives Robotic Pups for its Residents

Finley Appleton, an eight year old attending Manteno Elementary School, spent the summer selling lemonade to raise money to purchase a robotic pup and busy boards for the residents of the Veterans' Home at Manteno. Hearing about Finley's generosity, the Clifton Sportsmen's Club donated funds for the purchase of five additional dogs. The veterans were completely taken with their new companions and spent time engaging with the pups. Ashley was inspired by stories about her grandfather, Michael Appleton, a U.S. Army veteran who served in Vietnam, who she never met. Finley's mother Ashley also spent the last three years working with the Veteran Assistance Commission of Kankakee which further developed Finley's interest in veterans.

Research reveals that robotic pups and "play" improve the quality of life for those, especially with cognitive decline, by providing joy and companionship. The dogs are equipped with built-in sensors and speakers which help them respond to motion and touch. Their heartbeat, soft coat, and authentic sounds create a lifelike dog-owner experience.

"Thank you to Finley for sharing her curiosity, spirit, and heart with our veterans," said Administrator Tanya Huston. "She has brought joy to our veterans, and we encourage her to channel this energy into all the great things she will be."



Finley with her parents Paul and Ashley Appleton



Finley Appleton proudly displays a robotic pup and busy board she contributed to the veterans.



U.S. Marine Corps veteran David Snyder served in the Vietnam War.



U.S. Army veteran Gerald Rizzuto served in the Vietnam War.



U.S. Army veteran Earl Zack served in World War II.

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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