

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 2, Issue 11 ★ February 2023



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

Governor Pritzker delivered his combined State of the State and Budget address on February 15th. With the onset of his second term, this was especially important as he presented the status of the state across all functions, and his strategy for funding the many important initiatives of his Administration. IDVA presented the highest budget ever and eagerly anticipates its approval by the state legislature.

Over the course of the past two years, we listened to the needs of those on the front-lines of IDVA – Our Veterans Service Officers (VSO), health care professionals and services staff, and the support team in the Central office. Watching them do their work, I'm thrilled to report they are getting the job done and making a difference in the lives of Veterans and their families. With that, there is always room for improvement. By adding more qualified and motivated staff, improving technology, and streamlining our systems, we will raise the bar even higher on our mission of serving Veterans and their families.

To do that, the Agency developed an ambitious plan to improve on the successes of our 6-point plan and take the organization, and our Veterans, to the next level. As we enter the next four years, I am proud to present our updated mission, vision, guiding principles and priorities we will be working on over the next several years. It all starts with **TEAM IDVA**:

Teamwork: working together

Excellence: delivering superior service to Veterans

Accountability: committed to improving our services and how we deliver them

Motivation: One-team, one fight approach to deliver on our promise to serve those who served

Our top three priorities are our people, the Veteran experience, and operational excellence. We have great expectations for ourselves this year and look forward to hearing your thoughts on how we can be better and what we are doing right. To view the IDVA strategic plan, [click here](#).

Please enjoy this month's newsletter which features information on IDVA upcoming events, new staff assignments, and important Veteran resources.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

IDVA Director



Monthly Highlights



Black History Month



Throughout Black History Month, we celebrate and pay tribute to the contributions of African Americans to this nation through their military service. Throughout our history, African Americans have demonstrated leadership and courage as they paved the way for themselves and military men and women for generations to come. We are grateful for their service and their part in protecting our country and preserving rights that have not always been granted to them. We are grateful to the many African American Veterans that we are honored to care for in our residential homes across the state including:

Veterans' Home at Anna residents Navy Veteran Issac "Ike" Thipewa, and Army Veteran Carl Riley.

Veterans' Home at Chicago residents Naval Air Reserve Veteran Homer D. Tyler and US Marine Corps Veteran Errol C. McCreary.

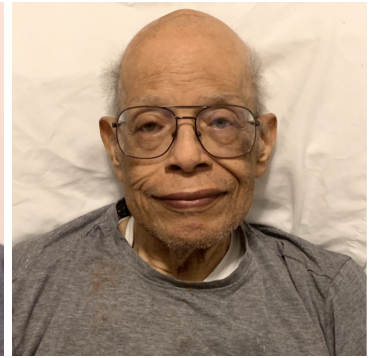
Veterans Home at Manteno residents Navy Veteran William "Bill" Sconiers, Marine Corps Veteran Errol C. McCreary, and Army Veteran Willis Nix.

Veterans' Home at Quincy residents Army Veteran Larry Brewster, Army Veteran James Ferrell, Air Force Veteran Jackie "Hawk" Hawkins, Army Veteran James "Tony" Marshall, Air Force Veteran Marty Martin, Army Veteran Howard Pettis, and Air Force Veteran Don Thomas.

Thank you for your service.



Navy Veteran
William "Bill" Sconiers



US Marine Corps Veteran
Errol C. McCreary



Naval Air Reserve Veteran
Homer D. Tyler



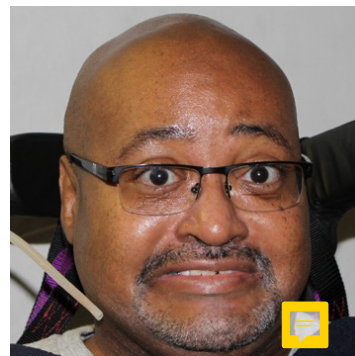
Army Veteran
Calvin Murrell



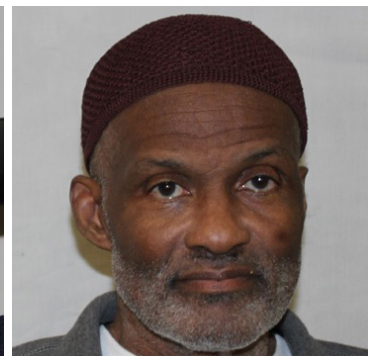
Army Veteran
Willis Nix



Army Veteran
James Ferrell



Air Force veteran
Marty Martin



Army Veteran
Howard Pettis



Desert Storm Gone But Never Forgotten

Operation Desert Storm Remembrance Ceremony

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs invites you to join us in commemorating the 32nd anniversary of the Operation Desert Storm Cease-Fire.

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

11:30am

at the

Illinois State Military Museum

1301 N. MacArthur Blvd.

Springfield, Il. 62702



www.illinois.gov/veterans
1-800-437-9824



Illinois Veterans Advisory Council Elects New Leadership

The Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) elected its new leadership following the completion of the two-year terms of its former leadership Chairman Colonel Mike Peck, and Vice-Chair Jerry Field.

“We are grateful for the leadership of Chairman Peck and Vice-Chair Field,” said Director Terry Prince, “Since I joined IDVA in April 2021, they have offered tremendous support and provided insight and ideas for how we can continue to serve Veterans across our state.”

Chairman Keith Wetherell of Springfield was elected to his two-year term at the December IVAC meeting. After graduating from Springfield Sacred Heart-Griffin in 1995, Keith joined the United States Marine Corps where he served until 2003, four years active duty and four years reserve. After returning from active duty in 1999, he worked at the Illinois Veterans Leadership Program (IVLP), the beginning of a long career in serving Veterans, their families, and communities. In 2002, he joined Illinois Amvets where he currently holds the position of Executive Director. Mr. Wetherell serves on many committees and boards including Governor Pritzker’s Hero’s Transition Team (2018), Illinois Veterans’ Advisory Council (delegate from 2008 to present), Illinois Amvets Service Foundation (2015-present), Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs State Fair Committee (2014-present), Illinois Veterans’ Memorial Commission (delegate from 2011 to 2012), and the Illinois Department of and Veterans’ Affairs Lottery Grant Committee (delegate 2006 to 2007). Mr. Wetherell earned his bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from the University of Illinois Springfield and his master’s degree in Business Administration from Western Illinois University. Mr. Wetherell was named non-for-profit Executive Director of the year by the Springfield Chamber of Commerce in 2017. He resides in Springfield with his wife Dana and two sons Charles and Tyler.

Newly elected Vice-Chairman Bob Tyler served on active duty in the Marine Corps for over 30 years. He was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam and later commanded a KC-130 squadron. Following a tour as Director of Aviation Safety at Headquarters Marine Corps, he earned a doctorate in Applied Psychology. That afforded him the opportunity to be on teams supporting the Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense and the United States Navy. Since returning to central Illinois in his second retirement, Dr. Tyler has become involved in Veteran advocacy and has for the past several years been the president of the Illinois Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Council of Chapters. He hopes his service with the IVAC provides continued opportunities to bring Veterans’ issues to Illinois legislators in a forum conducive to constructive resolutions.

The Illinois Veterans’ Advisory Council under 20 ILCS 2805/15, was established by Public Act 93-0779 on July 21, 2004. It meets quarterly or at the call of the Chairman, Director of Veterans’ Affairs or the Governor. The Council is empowered to:

- Advise IDVA with respect to the fulfillment of its statutory duties.
- Review and study the issues and concerns that are most significant to Illinois Veterans and advise the Department on those issues and concerns.
- Receive a report from the IDVA Director or the Director’s designee at each meeting with respect to the general activities of the Department.
- Reports to the Governor and the General Assembly annually describing the issues addressed and the actions taken by the council during the year, as well as any recommendations for future action.

To view the IVAC annual reports, [click here](#).



Myron Kirby: An Illinois Hero

This past year, Illinois lost a hero who dedicated his life to advocating for Veterans, Myron Dean Kirby. An Illinois National Guard Veteran, Myron served as the Chairman of the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) from 2019-2021 where he championed integral legislation in the interest of Veterans across Illinois, including the Medal of Honor Highway designation. He graciously co-hosted the IDVA staff retreat where he shared the history of the "Red Poppy." He also served on the State Fair Committee ensuring that Veterans and Gold Star Families Day was a memorable day for Veterans and their families. His other work in the Veteran community included Commander of the Legion Post 55; 19th District Commander, 4th Division Commander, Department Commander, Department Treasurer, National Finance Vice Chairman, Past Chef DeBare of Voyager 238 of 40/8; and member of Farmer City Masonic Lodge #710 A.F. & A.M.

"Myron was dedicated to Veterans in Illinois and a strong supporter of IDVA," said Crystal Womack, IDVA, Senior Program Policy Advisor, "We are grateful for having had the opportunity to work alongside him in improving the lives of Veterans in Illinois."

Myron was a farmer, owner of a tile and excavating company, and Kirby Trucking. He was actively involved in the local business community as the DeWitt County Soil Chairman of the Board and State President of the Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts. He was also a member of the National Child Welfare Foundation.

Myron was born on September 29th, 1950 in Bloomington, Illinois and passed away on October 30th, 2022 in Farmer City, Illinois.



In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.



Education



Student Veteran Of The Year

Story from the Loyola University Press Release

Loyola University Chicago senior Josh Jones has been named Student Veteran of the Year by [Student Veterans of America \(SVA\)](#) – a nonprofit organization that seeks to elevate the academic, professional, and personal development of veterans in higher education through a network of on-campus chapters in all 50 states and three countries overseas.

Jones, an economics major with a minor in biology in Loyola’s College of Arts and Sciences, was named president of Loyola’s SVA chapter in 2021. He is a Marine Corps Veteran who served as a 2311 Ammunition Technician stationed in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina with units such as 2nd Battalion 6th Marine Regiment and 2nd Marine Logistics Group. His accomplishments both in and out of uniform recently received personal recognition from Representative Michael Bost, chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.

“I am extremely honored and humbled to receive the ‘Student Veteran of the Year’ award from SVA,” said Jones. “This organization is deeply passionate about supporting veterans and has provided me with so many opportunities. SVA is essential to the success of student veterans – I hope to continue working with the network for a long time.”

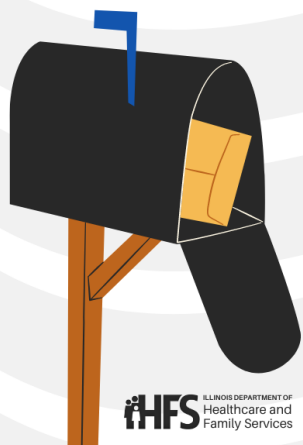
Jones will officially launch his own nonprofit project [Chicago Brigade](#) with a networking social hosted by



IDVA Director Terry Prince and Loyola University SVA Chapter President Josh Jones at the Loyola University Veterans Day Ceremony.

Uber on March 30 at The Old Post Office. [Registration is now open](#), and all Chicagoland veterans in higher education are encouraged to attend for an opportunity to connect with some of the most sought-after employers in the area.

“Josh was selected from 1,500 chapters representing 750,000 student veterans,” said Alex Pirila, associate director for Military Veteran Student Services (MVSS). “He was chosen for his leadership in helping fellow student veterans find community at Loyola, and for his steadfast commitment to improving the lives of student veterans everywhere.”



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Women Veterans



Women Veterans Stand Down Event



Join National Louis University, National Women Veterans United, and the University of Chicago, along with partner organizations across the state, in a Women Veterans Stand Down event on March 25, 2023. Illinois will Stand Down to Stand Up for Women Veterans by sharing helpful resources and information for Women Veterans. The program will also include influential women Veterans who will share their stories and ideas. Join us in-person or virtually on March 25, 2023!

IDVA will be hosting a site in Springfield, IL. Stay tuned for location details via the link provided on the Save the Date flyer and our social media sites.

Take Your Own Notes

Film Featuring Northern Regional Supervisor Melissa Beckford

Melissa Beckford, MS, LPC, IDVA Northern Regional Supervisor, is featured in the documentary, "Take Your Own Notes," about the life of five female Veterans from the Rockford area. The documentary, produced and directed by Nicholas Stange, Madeline Burke, Emily Guske, Kyra Newnam of the Harlem Veteran Project, demonstrates how the five women make an impact in their families and local communities and connect with each other through their shared experiences in the United States military.

"I am grateful to the Harlem Veterans Project for providing the five of us the opportunity to share our stories," said Melissa Beckford, "My hope is that this film will inspire future generations of women to serve in the military. My experience shaped who I am today and the work I do to serve Veterans in Illinois."

The documentary will debut at the Beloit International Film Festival on March 4th and 5th. Learn more about the [film here](#).



Erin Dietrich, Melissa Beckford, Milana Herman, Stephanie Jordan & Melody Brocato

Four New Veteran Service Officers Welcomed

Congratulations to our four newly accredited Veterans Service Officers (VSO), Matthew Allen, Michael Willis, Michele Hansen-Hoback and Anthony Harrison, who completed the 12 weeks of training in IDVA University, preparing them to take and pass the final exam for accreditation.

"There is no better community to care for than the Veteran community," said Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager. "Our four new VSOs have once again answered a calling to serve their country by helping Veterans and their families. IDVA is grateful for your continued service."

Michele Hansen-Hoback: Michele, a US Air Force Veteran, served nearly eight years as a Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Journeyman. She was stationed at Offutt AFB in Nebraska, Murted Air Station in Turkey, Soesterberg Air Base in Holland, San Vito Air base in Italy, and Robins Air Force Base in Georgia. Her office is located at 1616 S. Main St in Bloomington, at the Illinois National Guard building, 217-685-3248.

Matthew Allen is an Illinois Air National Guard Veteran having served over 30 years at the Capitol Airport in Springfield where he focused on all aspects of recruiting and retention. He is looking forward to serving Veterans and their families and applying his experience to helping them receive their earned benefits. His office is located at 45 South Central Park Plaza, (217) 517-6076.

Michael J. Willis is a US Navy Veteran having served five years in active duty and three years in the Reserves. He was stationed at the Norfolk Naval Station onboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) and then attached to FRCMA Mid-Atlantic Norfolk. His office is located within the Woodlawn IDES office, 1515 E. 71st St., Chicago, IL. Office: (773) 947-3648.

Anthony Harrison, US Army Veteran, served four years as an infantryman including one year in Afghanistan while attached to 1/25 infantry brigade in Fort Wainwright Alaska. He finished his duty at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He is in the Springfield office in Sangamon County, office number, 217-782-6645.



Veteran Service Officer Cynthia McKee (Chicago) and Elizabeth D. Soto, Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County Superintendent, attend the Veterans' for Unification event at the Oak Park Public Library on February 4th



The beginning of the 103rd General Assembly is off to a strong start. At the time of this update 3,978 House Bills have been filed and 2,530 Senate Bills have been filed. Currently, IDVA is tracking over 100 bills. Some affect veterans and their families, some affect active duty service members, others affect state agencies with 24/7 facilities and others affect nursing homes. Bills become law, and it is important to track and monitor legislation to make sure IDVA is compliant in all areas.

However, of equal importance during the spring legislative session is the FY 24 budget process. On Wednesday February 15th, Governor J.B. Pritzker delivered a combined State of the State and budget address.

IDVA's FY23 enacted budget was \$183.4 million. IDVA's FY24 recommended budget in the Governor's introduced budget is \$213.3 million. This is not the final budget. IDVA will present the FY24 budget to the House and Senate in several weeks. IDVA will make the case for an increased budget to support Illinois Veterans and their families.

This budget includes increases for existing line items and new requests. These include but are not limited to:

- Additional funds for the Illinois Veterans' Home at Chicago to continue to welcome new residents.
- Funding for increased security and safety enhancements at the five veterans' homes.
- Increases across the board to continue to provide

Attorney General Raoul Releases Updated Guidance On Veteran's Legal Rights

Attorney General Kwame Raoul issued an updated guidance for Illinois service members to ensure the legal rights of Illinois veterans, service members and their families are upheld and easily accessible. Raoul's updated "Legal Rights of Illinois Service Members" guide also includes federal and state veteran benefit laws.

Attorney General Raoul's "Legal Rights of Illinois Service Members" guide details new and updated laws that benefit veterans, including:

- **Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA):** Federal service member employment rights law that outlines rights for the employed member and obligations of the employer.
- **Illinois Service member Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (ISERRA):** Law that outlines state service member employment rights.
- **Service Members Civil Relief Act (SCRA):** Active service members can no longer lose custody of a child based solely on deployments, and courts will no longer consider deployments when determining custody.
- **Illinois Service Member Civil Relief Act (ISCRA):** Law enacted to supplement the SCRA. It strengthens existing consumer protections, and provides addition-

al protections for active-duty service members, reservists, members of the Illinois National Guard and their spouses during their periods of military service.

- **Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities:** Qualified veterans or surviving spouses may be eligible for a reduction in property taxes based on the equalized assessed value of the primary residence.
- **Returning Veterans Homestead Exemption:** For the 2007 taxable year and thereafter, a homestead exemption is provided to eligible returning veterans. The exemption is a one-time \$5,000 reduction in the equalized assessed value of the veteran's primary residence.
- **Free credit freeze for Active-Duty Service Members:** Illinois' Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act entitles active duty service members to a free credit freeze if they become victims of identity theft.

For questions or more information on service member and veterans' rights, visit the Attorney General's website or call the Military and Veterans' Rights Helpline at 1-800-382-3000 to speak with a live expert.



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://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/default.aspx>

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/>.



Illinois Department of
Veterans' Affairs



You can lower your risk for heart disease.

Small steps can make a big difference. There are lots of ways to start — like taking a quick walk after dinner or using less salt when you cook. But at the end of the day, the choice is yours. Find a way that works for you!

Visit livetothethebeat.org for heart healthy tips and tricks based on your lifestyle.



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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