

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 3, Issue 3 ★ June 2023



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

June is PTSD Awareness Month. Please join me in taking time to learn more about PTSD, reach out to a Veteran in need, and engage in the effort to end Veteran suicide. There are 12 million people living with PTSD in the United States, and it's important to remember the source of PTSD. It is long-term trauma resulting from experiencing or witnessing a life threatening event. It can be debilitating and result in severe anxiety and depression. However, there is help available. It is proven that treatments are effective in helping people manage PTSD and can lead to a better quality of life. Treatments include therapy, medication, exercise, and service dogs. To learn more about PTSD

and how you can be involved in helping a Veteran manage or overcome PTSD visit: [PTSD: National Center for PTSD Home \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/PTSDHome)

IDVA is engaged with the Governor's Challenge, a nationwide effort to end Veteran suicide. PTSD can lead to Veteran suicide, and we are on a crusade to end this crisis through a three-pronged approach:

Hear the call – look for the warning signs. Does someone you know seem down, distracted, or distant?

Spread the word – learn about PTSD and Veteran Suicide. Talk about it with one another.

Safety by all means – ensure that lethal means are secure. Keep everyone safe.

Additionally, we have an ambitious goal of training 70,000 people in Veteran suicide prevention. Learn how you can become trained here: [IDHS: Illinois Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families \(state.il.us\)](https://www.state.il.us/governorschallenge)

June is also Pride Month where we take note of LGBTQ+ service members and Veterans. It is startling to think that it wasn't until 2011 that gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals were accepted to serve their nation, and 2021 for transgender individuals. A new Center for American Progress analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Federal Reserve Board finds that the roughly 79,000 LGBTQ+ individuals currently serving in the armed forces—and an estimated 1 million LGBTQ+ Veterans—face higher levels of economic insecurity, housing instability, and mental health concerns than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. This is unacceptable and IDVA pledges to stand by all our Veterans-this month, and ALWAYS!

We also honored Women Veterans on June 12th. At IDVA, we employ several women Veterans in our Field Offices, Homes and Headquarters. Better still, a majority of our Senior Leader positions are held by women. It is important that we come together and uplift our women Veterans who have unique experiences and challenges that many face. Through our Women's Program, we are committed to building this community.

Summer is a very active time for IDVA. You will see our VSOs at county and state fairs and other community events sharing information with Veterans. Please put Veterans Day at the Springfield (August 13th) and DuQuoin (August 27th) State Fairs on your calendar. As always, it will be a full day of activities and programs, and most importantly, a wonderful way to connect with fellow Veterans. More information to follow.

Enjoy this start of summer, and as always, thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely, **Terry Prince**, IDVA Director



Message from the Field Services Manager Mark Patterson

The annual training conference was a huge success. Our team has a vast range of experience and expertise, which they share throughout the week. It is inspiring to see the communication and collaboration. The conference includes valuable insight from speakers who share information that is integral to the success of a VSO. Ken Bonner, with support from the regional supervisors, developed and facilitated an amazing mix of presentations and instruction to improve the skill and knowledge of Veterans Service Officers (VSO). We understand the importance of providing opportunity for professional growth. We also appreciate the undying support of IDVA staff and leadership that contributed their time to helping us build the program but also presenting important information about their work. Time is always a precious commodity and is extremely important while we work through staffing shortages. I commend all those that attended for being focused, courteous, and professional.

Additionally, we hosted members of our Veterans Assistance Commission partners. Any time advocates get together is a win for the Veteran community we serve. Together, we are a force multiplier and produce more efficient and convenient services.

I will wrap this up by saying to all the IDVA VSO's, you represent IDVA daily in the most public fashion in our agency. A simple thank you is never enough to express my gratitude for your devotion and professionalism. You are the face of IDVA. It is with tremendous pride that I can serve in my role and perform a small part in such a significant responsibility in the IDVA mission you perform, providing benefits and services to the most deserving in our society. Thank you!



Anthony Hernandez receives the IDVA Employee of the Year Award for 2022 for going above and beyond his main duties. Pictured with Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager and Director Prince.

Field Services Annual Training

The Field Services Annual Training took place in May in Peoria where the statewide Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) and Supervisors gathered to learn new information and connect. Each year, an extensive, four-day program is crafted to educate VSO on new benefits and programs so they guide Veterans with the most relevant, up-to-date information.

Many topics were covered including:

- The National Veterans Legal Services Program provided extensive training about the PACT Act and provided reference material to guide VSOs as they manage an influx of PACT claims.
- The Mesothelioma Center offered training around asbestos claims and resources for valuable free, expert assistance.
- IDVA's Veterans Education and Training Services Coordinator Dan Wellman provided updates on applications processes.



Metro Supervisor Robert Iverson, Central Region Supervisor Kim Fuiten, Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford, and Southern Region Supervisor Jeffrey Lewis.



VSO Charletta Lutcher-Hayes



(L-R) Seated: VSO Tina Paggi (Stephenson County), Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford, VSO Carla Waibel (Rock Island), and VSO Claudia Bautista (Cook County). Standing: VSO Debbie Fuehrer (Winnebago) and VSO Melissa Downey (McHenry County).



Josh Layton, VSO Effingham, receives the Five Year Service Award from Director Prince and Field Services Manager Mark Patterson

Field Services



VSO Tina Griffiths receives the Employee of the Quarter (3rd Quarter) from Director Prince and Field Services Manager Mark Patterson.



Carla Waibel, Rock Island County, Moline, receives the Employee of the Quarter Award with Field Services Manager Mark Patterson and Director Prince.



Melissa Downey, VSO McHenry County, receives the Five Year Service Award from Director Prince and Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager.



VSO Malon Norfleet, Kankakee County receives the Employee of the Quarter Award with Director Prince and Field Services Manager Mark Patterson .



VSO Michelle Richards (Chicago) participates in the Soul Survivors "Walk in Purpose" Mental Health Awareness Day.



Veterans Town Hall with Congresswoman Lauren Underwood and Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Mark Takano. Many Veterans concerns were addressed, particularly health care. (L-R) Congresswoman Lauren Underwood, Director Terry Prince, VSO Matthew Taylor (Winnebago County), and Congressman Mark Takano, CA.

Field Services



VSO Shynae Murphy attends the Allen Force Women's Conference.



Veteran Service Officer Shynae Murphy, her son Xavier Nicholuson, and daughter Sharlyne Mcalurin attend "Play Attention," programming for military families. The museum partners with community organizations serving veterans and active duty military personnel to invite military veterans, active duty military personnel, and their families to the Museum to explore and play in the exhibits free of charge while the Museum is closed to the public.

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs is hiring Veteran Service Officers

IDVA is recruiting combat-era Veterans eager to help Veterans, retirees, spouses, and dependents obtain their earned federal and state benefits and services.

In this role, the VSO will:

- Work one-on-one with Veterans to identify the benefits and services that will help them achieve their goals including employment, education, housing, and healthcare.
- Partner with county, state, and federal agencies to ensure Veterans have access to all available benefits and resources.
- Represent IDVA at community events to educate Veterans about IDVA and how it is poised to serve them.
- Receive comprehensive training.
- Be part of a community of Veteran Service Officers dedicated to supporting, advocating, and serving Illinois 600,000 Veterans.

For more information and to apply:



News from the Capitol

The Spring 2023 legislative session has ended.

The legislative session started in January and thousands of bills were filed. At the height of the legislative session, IDVA's legislative liaison flagged up to 178 bills that had a direct or indirect effect on the agency. As time went on, this list became smaller, because many of these bills did not make their way through the entire legislative process. By the end of session, 43 bills passed out of both chambers and will be sent to the Governor's desk.

Of the **43** bills, the breakdown is as follows:

- **14** bills focus on the military, Veterans and/or their families
- **11** bills focus on long-term care
- **7** bills focus on agency operations and labor
- **9** bills focus on miscellaneous topics
- **2** bills are budget bills

The bills that focus on the military, Veterans and their families include legislation that significantly impacts the Homestead Exemption for Veterans with Disabilities ([HB 2507](#)), Veterans assistance commissions and the state charter process ([HB 925](#)), Fort Sheridan National Cemetery ([HB 1635](#)), Veterans who are candidates for the Illinois State Police ([HB 2475](#)), dependency and indemnity compensation claims ([HB 2856](#)), Gold Star families and the Flag Display Act ([SB 1072](#)), veteran homelessness ([SB 1376](#) and [SB 2005](#)), and more.

These bills await the Governor's signature, and once signed, they will become Public Acts. Legislators and staff are working but will be out of session for the next few months.

The General Assembly's fall veto session is scheduled for October 24-26 and November 7-9.



Honoring Memorial Day

Veterans' Home at Quincy

For the first time since 2019, the Veterans' Home at Quincy welcomed the community to its annual Memorial Day ceremony. In three different ceremonies across campus, Veterans gathered to honor all that sacrificed for our nation's freedoms. Programming included a key-note address by Director Terry Prince, prayers, and taps. A picnic for residents and their families was enjoyed on a beautiful sunny day.



The home's mascot Captain Joe Fifer.



Resident Louise Seaver and Director Prince



Quincy resident and U.S. Navy Veteran Richard Atteberry and Director Prince.



Director Prince delivers his Memorial Day message.

"Driving here today...and most days, I thought about you —about those you mourn every day, but especially around Memorial Day. Your Army battle buddy, Air Force wingman, Navy and Coast Guard shipmate and of course, your Marine. Remembering those who gave their lives to protect our nation and our freedoms. The country has engaged in countless conflicts where sons and daughters, husbands, wives, and partners, friends and family have left loved ones behind knowing the ultimate risk they were taking. In a moment's time, the news of loss changed the lives of those left behind forever. Today is significant because we are united in our remembrance. United on this sacred Quincy ground. As Jennifer Granholm once said, "Ceremonies are important. But our gratitude must be more than visits to the troops and once a year Memorial Day Ceremonies. We honor the dead best by treating the living well."

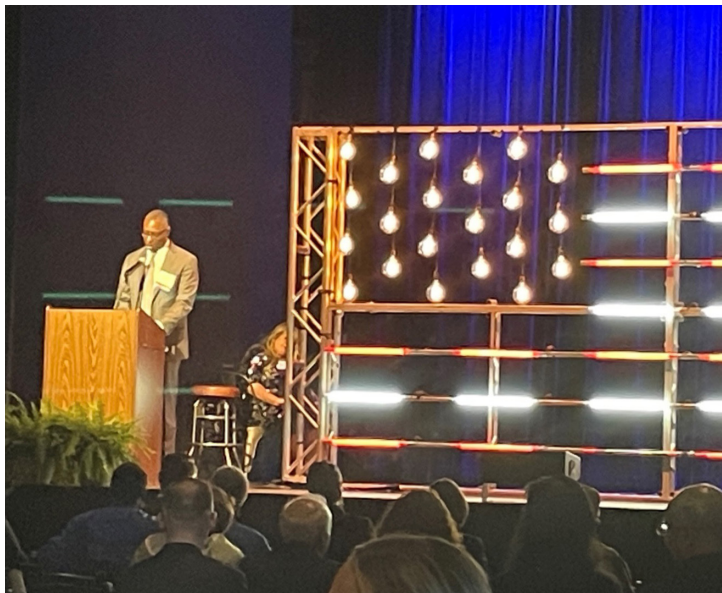
-Excerpt of Director Prince's Keynote address.



(L-R) Adjutant Rick Gengenbacher, Director Prince, and Superintendent Troy Culbertson

Honoring Memorial Day

Veterans' Home at Chicago Ceremony



Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn represents IDVA at the "Salute to Veterans in the Legal Profession," hosted by the Decalogue Society of Lawyers held at Theater on the Lake in Chicago.



Monthly Highlights

IDVA Welcomes New Labor Relations Administrator



Alicia Harris joined IDVA as its new Labor Relations Administrator. Alicia comes to IDVA with nearly 20 years of state service, her most recent role as Labor Relations Specialist and Training Coordinator for the Illinois Department of Revenue. In addition to her work in labor relations, she has experience in management,

legislation, and communications. She holds a master's degree in Public Administration, with certificates in Public Sector Labor Relations and Mediation. Her goals are to help unify the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs' practices statewide, create a more engaged workforce, and maintain positive union relations.



Women Veterans



National Women Veterans United Memorial Day Program

National Women Veterans United Memorial Day Program was held at the Dignity Memorial Cemetery in Evergreen Park. The National Women Veterans United (NWWU) mission is to advocate, educate and bond with all military women veterans with special emphasis on women who are disabled, homeless, at risk or returning from deployment, to ensure they are connected to appropriate direct services and resources for readjustment and coping skills, as they return to employment, school and family. For more information visit: <https://nwwu.org/>

"I would like to begin by thanking National Women Veteran United for the important work you do in supporting women in military service and women Veterans. The community you have created and the resources you offer are critical to women Veterans, who are the fastest growing population of Veterans. It is estimated that in the future, 1 of 5 Veterans will be women. It is important that we come together and uplift our women veterans who have unique experiences and challenges that many face and continue to face. You provide a haven and a place to share their experiences and stories."

-Director Terry Prince, excerpt from his remarks.



Honoring the fallen.



Director Prince delivers his Memorial Day message.



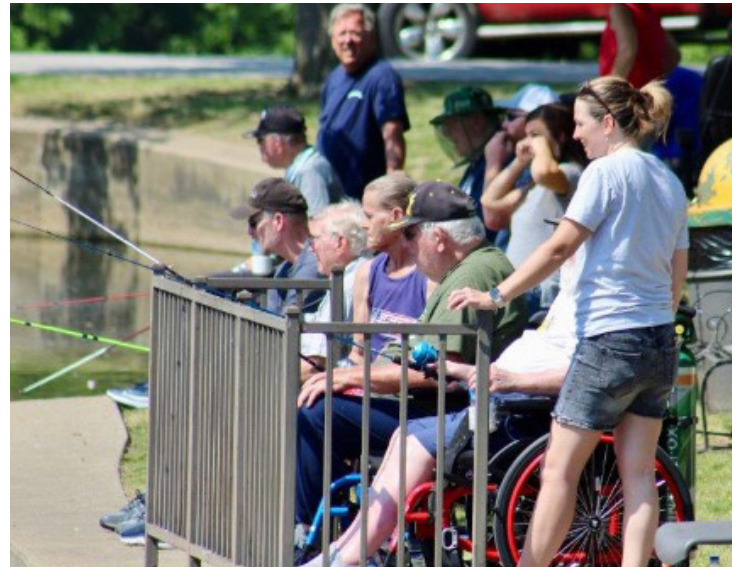
Director Prince with members of National Women Veterans United.



Fishing for Freedom at the Veterans' Home at Quincy

Fishing for Freedom was started in Quincy in 2011 to honor Veterans and active duty personnel with a fun day of fishing on the local lakes, rivers, and waterways. It's a full weekend of entertainment and enjoyment of the great outdoors including fish fry, trapshooting, archery, live music, a Heroes Banquet, and a day of tournament fishing on the Mississippi River. In 2014, the inaugural fishing event at the Veterans' Home at Quincy took

place which includes lunch with special awards and trophy for the most fish caught. The Quincy community and the tri-state area greatly support this event. Residents at the look forward to this event every year as their time to enjoy the beautiful campus, meet wonderful volunteers, and catch several species of fish at Lake Illinois including bass, catfish, sunfish, and crappie.



Floral Arranging at the Veterans' Home at Quincy: Pictured left to right: Nellie Cogdal, Luetta Hall, Dorothy Martin, Marilyn Seymour, Ruby Steele, Marjorie Bisby and Marjorie Harris. These lovely ladies served our nation as spouses.

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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