

# VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 3, Issue 7 ★ October 2023



## ★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

As you will read later in this newsletter, we have welcomed three new Veteran Service Officers, Bradley Gaylord, Deerfield; Anthony (Tony) Krajefski, Marion; and Gerald Enriquez, Manteno. Hiring new Veteran Service Officers is part of IDVA's commitment to reaching out to even more communities across Illinois to meet veterans where they are. As the veteran population in Illinois grows, so does IDVA. Our role is to step in when veterans need us the most, often when transitioning from military service. They have earned benefits that will help lay the foundation of their future through education, training, employment, housing, and health care, which can make the difference

between a daunting and a hopeful future. If you know a veteran who doesn't know about IDVA, please refer them to IDVA's website and register through "Stand Up and Be Counted," <https://veterans.illinois.gov/stand-up-counted.html>. Our Veteran Service Officers (VSO) are poised to support veterans through all their concerns. We also offer programs for women veterans and Gold Star families, and we host events throughout the year to connect veterans. IDVA is a strong community of people dedicated to serving veterans, and we welcome all those who are seeking support and connection. Come join us.

November and Veterans Day are upon us. While IDVA's sole purpose is serving veterans, we join the rest of the nation in amplifying our focus on veterans throughout the month. We are embarking on a campaign to connect veterans with VSOs, attending events and programs throughout the state, and pausing our busy days to reflect on the service and sacrifices of veterans. Many of the employees at IDVA are veterans, and we acknowledge their commitment to serving those who served. Their personal experiences of transitioning from military service provide us with perspectives to better serve Illinois veterans. The nonveterans in our offices are uniquely committed to mission work, particularly IDVA's. On any given day, nearly 1,200 IDVA team members are either caring for veterans in our homes, supporting a veteran through the claims process, creating programs and events, or supporting these efforts in the office. Please know that this team is talented, dedicated, and smart – it has your six.

**To all Illinois veterans, thank you for your service.  
Wishing you a blessed Veterans Day.**

Sincerely, **Terry Prince**, IDVA Director

**NOVEMBER 11**  
**VETERANS DAY**  
★ HONORING ALL WHO SERVED ★

**Veterans Day Parade**  
Saturday, November 11

10:00 A.M.  
Parade begins on 11th and Capitol goes down  
Capitol Avenue ending at the Capitol Bldg.  
**Grand Marshal**  
Ivan Maras  
Korean War Veteran  
VFW Member

11:30 A.M.  
Join us at the VFW Post 755  
For a reception including a program, lunch and entertainment by the Springfield Municipal Band  
(2211 Old Jacksonville Rd)

Sponsored by:  
Interveterans Council of Sangamon County  
Interveterans Burial Detail of Sangamon County  
Navy Club Ship 32  
Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs

# Winter Riches Instant Ticket



On November 7th, The Illinois Lottery will launch the Winter Riches Instant Ticket, the first lottery game in the United States to designate 100 percent of profits toward Veteran support programs in Illinois. The Winter Riches is \$2, with an opportunity to win up to \$20,000. Proceeds from the ticket are distributed by IDVA in the form of Veterans Cash grants to selected veterans' programs that provide vital services to veterans including job training and employment, housing assistance, post-traumatic stress treatments, behavioral health programs, and legal aid. Launched in 2006, more than \$20 million in grants have been awarded to approximately 400 veterans' organizations statewide.

To learn more about how to apply for a Veterans Cash Grant, watch this training video: How to Apply - VA Lottery Program ([wistia.com](http://wistia.com)). Vets Cash is only accepting online applications in Amplifund's new grants management system.

For more information on Veterans' Cash Grants, visit:

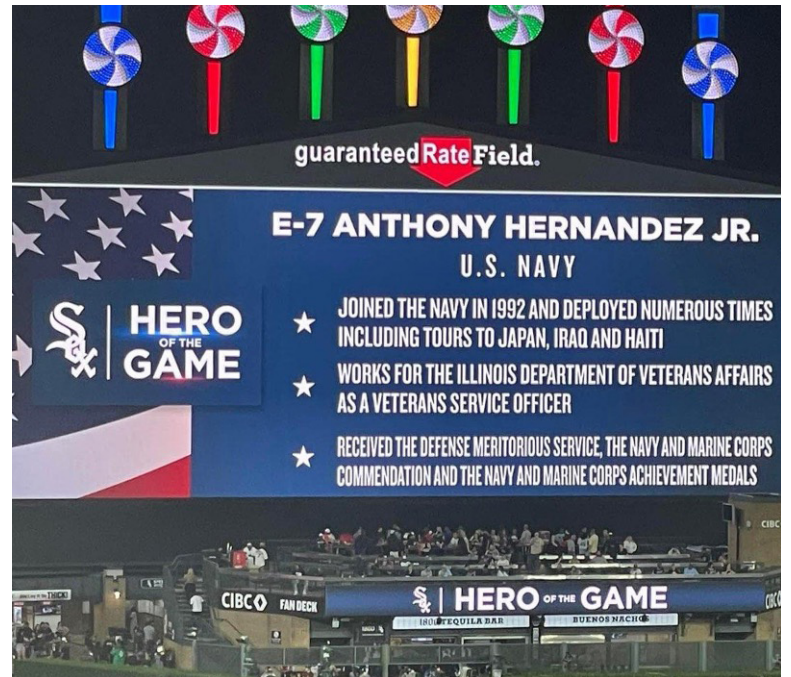
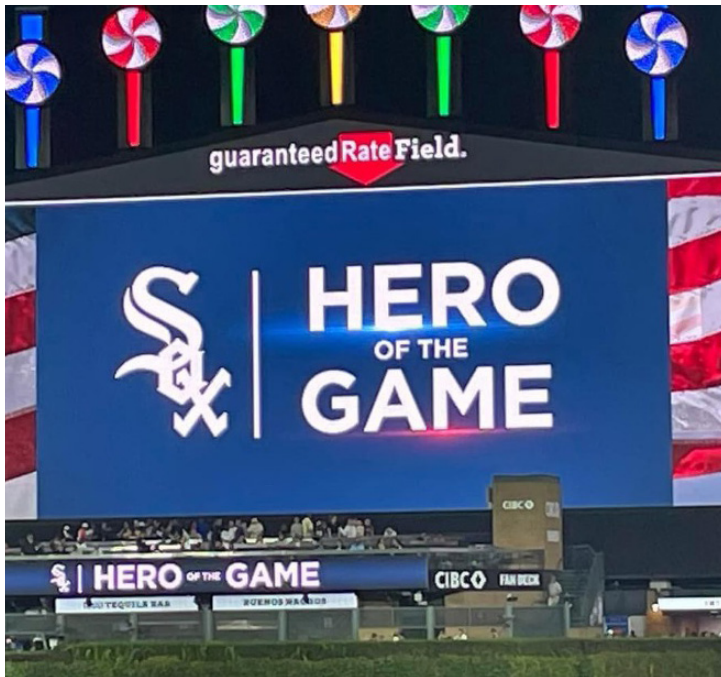
<https://veterans.illinois.gov/programs/veterans-cash.html>

For more information on the Illinois Lottery, visit:

<https://www.illinoislottery.com/giving-back/specialty-tickets/illinois-veterans>

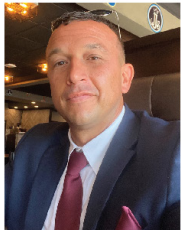


Veteran Service Officer Anthony Hernandez was honored as the Hero of the Game at the Chicago White Sox game during Hispanic Heritage Month. Congratulations to Anthony for being IDVA's hero and 2022 Employee of the Year.



# Field Services

## Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Welcomes Veteran Service Officer Tony Krajefska



### Anthony (Tony) Krajefska

*U.S. Army and Army National Guard veteran*

Joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer serving the Marion County (Centralia) office. While in the Army and Army National Guard, he served many roles including artillery, transportation, infantry, and engineering. He was deployed to Iraq from March 2003-September 2004. He is active in his community having served on the board of directors of the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce and currently serves on the board of directors of the Crossroads Community Hospital in Mt. Vernon. He earned his master's degree in business administration (MBA) from Eastern Illinois University and a pending minor in Geographical Information Systems (GIS). He is also an Elder at Salem Lutheran Church and enjoys fishing, coaching hunting, music, and sports. He has four children and resides in Iuka, Illinois.



Veteran Service Officer Michelle Richards attends the Cook County Veterans Resource Fair.

## Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Welcomes Veteran Service Officer Bradley Gaylord



### Bradley Gaylord

*U.S. Navy, Illinois National Guard, and Navy Reserve veteran*

Joins IDVA serving the Lake County (Deerfield) office. His 11-year military career includes Air Traffic Controller on the USS Theodore Roosevelt for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, and Operation Provide Comfort. In the Navy Reserves, he served for Operation Iraqi Freedom as a Navy Customs Inspector. He also worked as a Border Patrol Agent and a Federal Air Marshall until his retirement in 2021. He earned his bachelor's degree from Western

Illinois University. He is married with three children and resides in Antioch.



Front Row: Michele Hansen-Hoback and Tina Paggi; Second row: Tina Griffiths, Frank Delatorre, and Matthew Allen (all Veteran Service Officers); Third row: Ken Bonner, Field Training Coordinator. IDVA was invited to attend the annual Veterans Assistance Commissions' five-day training program.

## Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Welcomes Veteran Service Officer Gerald Enriquez



### Gerald Enriquez

*U.S. Army National Guard veteran*

Joins IDVA serving the Veterans' Home at Manteno office. While in service, he worked as an AGR for 18 years, including a deployment to Afghanistan. He also was an area manager for Amazon and Samsclub.com. He earned his bachelor's degree from Governors State University. He enjoys caring for his four dogs and volunteering with his local rescue.



IDVA's Southern Region Supervisor Jeffrey Lewis stands by a mural on Chicago's Navy Pier, featuring his grandfather Rolland Lewis, a United States Marine Corps veteran, who attended the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), when it was located on Navy Pier. Navy Pier was established in 1916 for shipping and recreation. During World War I, it housed Navy personnel, and in 1946, UIC opened a two-year undergraduate program on Navy Pier to serve veterans returning from World War II. Over 100,000 veterans attended classes over two decades. Today, Navy Pier is a central entertainment and tourist attraction in Chicago.

## Veterans' Home at Anna Construction

The Veterans' Home at Anna is undergoing a \$2.9 million construction project designed to update veteran living spaces throughout the building, which are original to its 1991 construction. Veterans will be treated to a renovated bath and shower area to reflect a spa-like atmosphere including a soaking tub and roll-in shower. Individual rooms will be enhanced with new doors, windows, lighting, and HVAC. Infrastructure enhancements include new HVAC rooftop and condensing units. The exterior door will also be replaced. Other maintenance and repairs are included in the construction project scheduled for completion by May 2024.

"The energy of the construction is generating excitement throughout the building," said Amy Keistler, Administrator of the Veterans' Home at Anna. "These upgrades will enhance the feel of the building, including the veterans' rooms and living spaces."

Currently, the home cares for 50 residents in skilled nursing and 12 in six adjoining apartment domiciliary units. It is built on 16 scenic acres which offer vistas, a fishing pond, and walking paths. A lush outdoor garden is a quiet space for residents to read, sit, and visit. Residents have access to a library, housekeeping, laundry, and dietary services to ensure the veterans' day-to-day personal needs are met. Additionally, an IDVA Veterans Service Officer is available to assist the resident with questions regarding state and federal benefits. For more information on the Veterans' Home at Anna, visit: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/ser->

## Veterans' Home at Anna Bench Dedication

The Illinois Veterans' Home at Anna received five outdoor benches dedicated by the Department of Illinois VFW District 15 and its Auxiliary in memory of Marilyn Crawford, Department Auxiliary Representative at the home for 20 years. Marilyn and her husband Elmer were active volunteers at the home. The benches will be enjoyed by veterans in its outdoor seating areas. The VFW has been a valued partner and has supported the home with its many programs and events throughout the year.



Front row from left, Patricia Caraker, District 15 VFW Auxiliary President, Lynn Smith, Department VFW Auxiliary President, Jo Lynn Altvatter, Department VFW Auxiliary Secretary, and Laura Knackstadt, Department VFW Auxiliary Hospital VAVS Chairman. Second row from left, Chelsea Maynor, VFW Auxiliary VAVS representative at the Veterans' Home at Home, Barbara Wilson, District 15 VFW Adjutant-Quartermaster, Amy Keistler, Veterans' Home at Anna Administrator, Brett Nila, VFW Department Commander, Diane Ahrens, Department VFW Auxiliary Junior Vice President, Clarence Caraker, District 15 Senior Vice Commander, Susan Rolando, and Chris Maynor, District 15 VFW Commander.

# Veterans' Homes

## Baseball and Hot Dogs at the Veterans' Home at Chicago

Veterans' Home at Chicago's Hot Dog Day included taking in a Cubs Win against the Colorado Rockies and building your own hot dog with all the fixins — the Chicago standards, as well as melted cheese, chili, and sauerkraut



*U.S. Army Veteran Charles Revor*



*U.S. Army Veteran Howard Elia*

# Monthly Highlights

IDVA and the Military Order of the Purple Heart hosted Gold Star Families weekend in Springfield September 22-24 where nearly 30 families participated in fellowship and programs. The weekend included social time, a scavenger hunt, a comic show by Dwayne Hall, and concluded with The Rose Ceremony and luncheon. The families gathered to honor their heroes as a community.



*Gold Star Families gather after completing a fun-filled scavenger hunt.*



*Director Prince, Major General Richard Neely, former Governor Pat Quinn, and Order of the Purple Heart Commander Joe Schaler distribute roses to families in recognition of their hero during the Rose Ceremony. Danielle Luevano, IDVA Operations and Programs Division Manager, serves as the master of ceremony.*



*Director Terry Prince and former Governor Pat Quinn, a longtime advocate for Gold Star families.*

# Monthly Highlights

## Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Team IDVA stood by those fighting and surviving breast cancer on Pink Out Day recognized in the Chicago and Springfield offices, and the Veterans' Homes across the state. This year's theme, "Living Beyond Breast Cancer," emphasizes the ways in which people thrive with breast cancer.



Veterans' Home at Chicago staff and Breast Cancer survivors  
Sonia Segarra and Luz Gonzalez



Central Office in Springfield



Veterans' Home at Anna



Veterans' Home at Anna



Veterans' Home at Anna:  
Night Team Services



Veterans' Home at Chicago

# Monthly Highlights



*Director Prince and, Operations and Programs Division Manager Danielle Luevano record, "Conversation with the Director," a Q and A featuring questions from Team IDVA to Director Prince.*



*IDVA Director Terry Prince, State Representative Stephanie Kifowit, State Senator Mike Porfirio, and Howard Robinson, District Staff of the Office of Senator Michael Hastings, visit with residents of the Veterans' Home at Chicago.*

## Team IDVA



IDVA Welcomed LaTanya Law as its new Chief of Staff. Ms. Law most recently worked as the Senior Policy Advisor for the Office of Firearm Violence Prevention (OFVP) at the Department of Human Services. Her responsibilities included identifying viable community partners, working with legislators and stakeholders to address the needs of their communities, partnering with philanthropic organizations, participating on an intergovernmental team, and expanding public safety in Illinois. She has over 30 years of experience in state government having worked for the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Mental Health, and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. In addition to her vast social service experience, she is a U.S. Army veteran and earned both her B.A. and M.A. degrees from Eastern Illinois University. A proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., she is also a member of the Top Ladies of Distinction.

"Ms. Law represents IDVA's commitment to hiring individuals with strong backgrounds and expertise who can bring best practices and experience to our department," said Director Prince. "We are thrilled Ms. Law is here to coordinate and lead the staff across the agency."

"Working at IDVA has been something that I aspired to do for the last 31 years of my state employment. What an honor it is to have served my country and now serve my fellow service members," said Ms. Law.





Connection.  
Camaraderie.  
Community.

The Chicago Vet Center, located on the South Side of Chicago, provides cost-free, confidential, individual, group, family, and couples counseling to eligible Veterans, service members, and their families. Highly trained professionals provide confidential counseling designed to support veterans and service members in managing life during and after the military. While Vet Centers, like the seven Chicagoland area locations, are part of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, they are a community-based program. Vet Centers focus on providing services to veterans and service members who served in combat operations, areas of hostility, state-side deployments, or endured military sexual trauma. It also serves families to support the growth and goals of the Veteran or service member. Eligibility varies based on individual military experience including those in the National Guard, Reserves, and Coast Guard. Enrollment in VA Healthcare or a service-connected disability is not required. Vet Centers were founded by Vietnam Veterans who refused to be forgotten or stigmatized and sought care centered around their unique needs. The Vet Center makes every effort to qualify as many individuals as possible. Call them at 773-962-3740 or [find out more about the Chicago Vet Center online](#). You may also [find another nearest you](#) through their facility locator.

  
MAYOR BRANDON JOHNSON

In Honor of  
**VETERANS DAY**

*The City of Chicago will host a ceremony honoring those who served, in times of war as well as peace*

— ★ ★ ★ —

**Saturday, November 11, 2023**  
**Soldier Field, 1st floor United Club**  
1410 S. Special Olympics Drive  
Ceremony 11:00am ★ Doors Open at 10:00am  
Enter Gate O

**RSVP HERE by November 7, 2023**

Business Attire or Service Dress Uniform  
Complimentary Parking: Waldron Deck Parking Structure  
Exit at 18th Street from DuSable Lake Shore Drive

# 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](mailto: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

★ Follow us

