

VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 4, Issue 3 ★ March 2024



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

This month, we presented the Agency's fiscal year 2025 operating budget to the Illinois House and Human Services Appropriations Committee. Our budget is based on IDVA's mission, vision, and main areas of our strategic plan: people – operational excellence – and the veteran experience. IDVA serves 552,000 veterans in Illinois, in addition to the countless family members, caregivers and survivors, who look to us for guidance and support. Our veteran population reflects the diversity of our state, and much more. It includes people from six branches of the military, who served in peace and wartime, both at home and abroad. They come from different backgrounds, and communities big and small. To serve such a diverse population, we need to meet veterans where they are so we can support their diverse needs, which requires staffing and resources.



Team Budget (l-r): Special Advisor to the Director for Budget David Moody, Chief Fiscal Officer Steph Heckenkamp, Director Terry Prince, Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, and Legislative Liaison Sara Augustinas.



This month we honor women veterans as part of Women Veterans Recognition Month. We are proud to serve the more than 50,000 women veterans in Illinois. Our Women Veterans Program is inviting women veterans to join its community and learn about benefits and services that meet their unique needs. We also offer special programs for women veterans to share experiences and discuss important issues they face in transitioning from military service and beyond. Come join us: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/programs/women.html>.

As always, thank you for staying connected with IDVA.

Sincerely,

Terry Prince

U.S. Navy Veteran and IDVA Director

Women Veterans

Women Veterans Recognition Month

In honor of Women Veterans Recognition Month, IDVA hosted a Women Veterans' Panel including IDVA's Women Veterans Coordinator Margo Watson and IDVA Central IDVA Region Supervisor Kimberly Yantis. Held at the Elks Lodge in Springfield, women veterans shared their military experiences and discussed their unique challenges, particularly healthcare in the Springfield area, applying for VA benefits, and benefits specifically for women. IDVA's Women Veterans Program will continue to offer opportunities, resources, and community for women veterans. If you would like to become part of this supportive community, visit: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/programs/women.html>



(l-r): Jim Dixon, Kimberly Yantis (IDVA Central Region Supervisor), Carry Kasten, Marilda Eadie, Rose Connolly, Lauralee Treece, and Margo Watson (IDVA Women Veterans Coordinator).

Veterans' Home Residents

The Illinois Veterans' Homes are proud to care for women veterans. We thank you for your service and accomplishments in service and for making our Veterans' Homes communities richer and more diverse.

Veterans' Home at LaSalle



*Betty Altschwager
U.S. Air Force Veteran*



*Donna Kelly
U.S. Navy Veteran*



(l-r): Betty Altschwager and Donna Kelly

Women Veterans

Veterans' Home at Manteno



*Gloria Smith-Deanes
U.S. Army Veteran*



*Gloria Smith-Deanes
U.S. Army Veteran*



*Diane Richardson
U.S. Marine Corps Veteran*



*Diane Richardson
U.S. Marine Corps Veteran*



*Susan Peters
U.S. Air Force Veteran*



*Jessica Stegmeyer
U.S. Army Veteran*



*Loretta Zvibas
U.S. Navy Veteran*

Women Veterans

Veterans' Home at Quincy



Leonara "Lee" Behra
U.S. Air Force Veteran



(l-r): U.S. Army Veteran Violet Connoyer, U.S. Navy Veteran Carol Jardine (seated), U.S. Navy Veteran, Betty Shankman, and U.S. Air Force Veteran Vicki Kurtz.

National Women Veterans United Women's History Month Event



Veteran Service Officer Shynae Murphy attends the National Women Veterans United Women's History Month Event.

VA Benefits for Women

In 2023, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs VA celebrated 100 years of providing health care for women veterans. Illinois is home to more than 50,000 women veterans, and the community is growing. Across the nation, more than 600,000 women veterans receive health care through the VA including these important services: [comprehensive health](#) and [gender-specific care](#), including [fertility services](#), [mental health care](#), and [maternity care](#).

The VA offers a podcast sponsored by the Office of Women's Health in the Veterans Health Administration, She Wears the Boots, which interviews experts on a wide range of relevant issues to women and the aligning VA programs. New programs are released regularly, so be sure to subscribe: [She Wears the Boots: A Podcast for Women Veterans \(speaker.com\)](#)

Women Veterans Town Hall, Resource and Employment Fair

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Join the Cook County Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County, National Women Veterans United, Merging Vets and Players (MVP), the Illinois Department of Employment Security, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs for the inaugural Women Veterans Town Hall, Resource and Employment Fair.

Lunch will be provided

Date:
Saturday,
March 30, 2024

Time:
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Doors open at 9:30 a.m.

Location:
Malcolm X College Auditorium
1900 W. Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60612

What:

Women veterans and current service members are invited to a safe and welcoming environment to share stories of service and challenges with key stakeholders, decision-makers and organizations that support veterans and military families.

Participants and guests will have the opportunity to meet with more than a dozen veteran and military service providers, as well as employers. The event will include a self-defense class for women veterans.

To Register, Visit: <https://cookgov.me/TownHall>



How the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Transformed Its Identity: A Personal Reflection

This blog post is published with permission from its author and designer of the new IDVA logo Jessika Savage, U.S. Army Veteran.



I'm excited to share a little piece of my journey – one that's deeply intertwined with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and its incredible mission. My connection to the IDVA didn't begin with this project - it started back when I was in college in Springfield, IL - I was serving in the Illinois Army National Guard and was hired to work for the IDVA as a work-study. I had the privilege to work with amazing individuals like Senator Tammy Duckworth. After serving a tour in Iraq in 2004 the IDVA played an important role in helping me access my Veterans benefits. I never imagined that my path would lead me to play a part in reshaping the identity of an organization that means so much to Illinois veterans, including myself.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs has long been a pillar of support for local veterans, but there was something missing in their visual representation – a connection that truly reflected the diverse and vibrant community of veterans they serve. So, armed with passion and purpose, we set out to change that. Our journey wasn't just about designing a new logo; it was about capturing the essence of what the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs stands for. We delved deep into research, strategy sessions, interviews, and surveys, all aimed at understanding what resonated most with Illinois veterans.

It was important that this new logo was steeped in symbolism that would connect to the modern Veteran. The V in the logo became more than just a letter; it became a tribute to the brave men and women who've served our country. Each stripe, representing the six branches of the military (Army, Marines, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Space Force), weaved together a story of unity and strength. The star at the center symbolizes the guiding light of the IDVA, always focused on the welfare of the veteran. And the silhouettes? They represented the heart and soul of the veteran community – diverse, resilient, and united in service.

But creating a logo was just the beginning. We wanted to ensure that every aspect of the IDVA's identity reflected the honor and respect they deserve. So, we developed a comprehensive style guide and design system, equipping the IDVA with the tools they need to reach Veterans effectively and authentically.

As I look back on this journey, I can't help but feel grateful for the opportunity to be a part of something truly meaningful. Working with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs has not only shaped my career as a branding expert but has also reaffirmed my commitment to serving those who've served our country.

So here's to the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs – a beacon of hope, support, and camaraderie for veterans across the state. And here's to the countless veterans whose stories inspire us to keep pushing forward, creating a world where their sacrifices are honored, and their voices are heard.



News From the Capitol

FY25 Budget Hearings

On Thursday, March 7th, IDVA testified before the House Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee to present the FY25 agency budget. The agency is requesting \$237.5 million to support IDVA's five Veterans' Homes, field services, programs and operations, State Approving Agency, Central Office, and more. Director Prince and the team testified for almost an hour and will also testify before the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee Hearing on Wednesday, April 17th. The legislature will release the budget bill in May.

Confirmation Hearings

On Wednesday, March 15th, IDVA Director Terry Prince and IDVA Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn appeared before the Senate Executive Appointments Committee requesting reappointment to their respective positions. The Director and the Assistant Director received unanimous consent. Having passed out of committee, their appointments move to the Senate floor for confirmation.

Field Services



IDVA welcomes Melinda Makinney

IDVA welcomes Melinda Makinney, Veterans Service Officer in Peoria. Melinda, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran settled in Peoria with her family following her retirement after traveling worldwide with her military career. She enlisted as a Maintenance Management Specialist and was assigned at several stateside duty stations, overseas to Okinawa, Japan, and Iraq. She also completed a special duty assignment as a Combat Instructor for Marine Combat Training Battalion-East. When she was selected for First Sergeant, she was assigned to Alpha Company, 2D Tank Battalion, 2D Marine Division in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Her final orders took her to Peoria to be the Inspector Instructor First Sergeant. Melinda is very excited to join the team and assist fellow veterans.



IDVA Veteran Service Officer Frank Delatorre attended the Dixmoor Job Fair where over 350 people visited 43 vendors to learn about opportunities available to them. Frank is joined by Jill Stroller of CMS. For information on jobs assistance for veterans visit: [Veteran Services \(illinois.gov\)](http://Veteran_Services(illinois.gov))



Veteran Service Officer Anthony Hernandez visits the Legacy Ranch in Lockport which provides Therapeutic Riding Classes in private and group settings, mental health, occupational, physical, and speech therapies. All therapies include interaction with horses.

Field Services



IDVA Veteran Service Officer Melissa Downey attends the annual People in Need Forum at McHenry County College where exhibitors showcased community resources available to those in need.



IDVA Veteran Service Officer Matthew Allen attended the 217th Engineering Installation Squadron Pre-Deployment event at the VFW 755 in Springfield. The Squadron, which develops engineering packages providing instructions, materials, support requirements and drawings needed to install, remove, relocate or modify communications systems, will be deploying to the Southwest Asia of Operations for approximately 200 days.

Monthly Highlights

Director Prince, dignitaries, veterans, and families commemorated the 33rd recognition day ceremony of the Operation Desert Storm cease-fire on February 28th at the Illinois State Military Museum.



National Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Day



Ruth Kross
Dietary Manager

Thank you to our dedicated team of Registered Dietitian Nutritionists who ensure that the veterans in our care are served balanced, nutritional meals that meet their unique needs and preferences. They bring their talent and creativity to the table so that veterans enjoy meals, which are an essential part of their day. Whether it's a special Thanksgiving dinner, pasta night, or Cinco de Mayo, every meal is intentional to bring nutrition and joy to the veteran. Meals are much more than the meal, it's a time to gather, socialize, and build community.



Veterans' Home at Quincy L-R: Janet Llewellyn, RDN LDN, Clinical Dietician, Brenna Zanger, RDN, LDN, CDCES, Clinical Dietician, and Shelly Watson, RDN LDN, Clinical Dietician

Monthly Highlights

Veterans' Home at LaSalle



L-R: Judith Callahan, Casey Ponder, Katalin Glynn, Amber Thompson, Nathan Endicott, Mary Mejia, Danielle Wise, Yancy Green, Steven Bradley, and Crystal Barnes. Not pictured: Kim Espinoza, John Feehan, Kim Joiner, Lee Kirby, Anna Perez, Mary Perez, Alexis Repsel, Michelle Starkey, Rachel Strait, Nancy Thompson, Shanice Wilson, and Marsha Meuser.

Healthcare Human Resources Week

"Our People" is one of the three pillars of IDVA including Operational Excellence, and the Veteran Experience. Our HR teams have the enormous responsibility of recruiting, hiring, and retaining medical professionals and staff to care for veterans living in our five Veterans' Homes. We rely heavily on them to find the best talent, ensure training is at the highest level, and help create an environment where employees grow professionally, experience job satisfaction, and feel appreciated. The IDVA Healthcare Human Resources Team is also approachable to staff seeking guidance and support. As shared by the American Society for Health Care Human Resources Administration, this year's theme, "Heartbeats of Healthcare: The Irreplaceable Human Connection encapsulates the essence of what makes healthcare delivery truly exceptional – the profound connection between caregivers and patients, nurtured and supported by dedicated HR leaders."

Veterans' Home at LaSalle



Michele Hansen, Diane Spiegel, Courtney Suarez

Veterans' Home at Anna



Noah Smith SSW, Melissa Campbell Dietary Manger, Kristen Barrett Cook I, Sue Hironimus Cook I, Craig Price SSW Not pictured: Barb Doublin Cook I, Lisa Colboth Cook I, Maria Lingle Cook I, Terry McDowell SSW, Amy Shepherd SSW, Sharon Bracken SSW



HR Representative
Tammy Wieseman.

Veterans' Home at Manteno



L-R: HR Representative Danel Peters, HR Associate Elizabeth Bartke, HR Associate Miki Doris, HR Representative Adrienne MacQueen, HR Specialist Rhonda Boudreau.

Monthly Highlights

Veterans' Home at Chicago



HR Specialist Ben Davis, HR Specialist Teresa Menendez, HR Representative Kelly Torres, and HR Representative Dan Kerr.

Veterans' Home at Quincy



L-R: HR Assistant Sierra Burcham, HR Assistant Danell Tullock, Interim HR Specialist, Lisa Wand, and HR Associate Kasaundra Morelock.



Save the Date

Be a part of Operation Camaraderie
Learn about volunteer opportunities at the Veterans' Home at Manteno while enjoying lunch from local food trucks!

Friday, April 26th
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Veterans' Home at Manteno, Veterans Hall, One Veterans Drive

2024 Michael Curry Summer Internship Program

Choose IDVA for a meaningful, exciting summer experience.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs serves nearly 600,000 veterans across Illinois. Interns are promised a rich learning experience in many areas including Field Services supporting Veteran Service Officers working directly with veterans, Human Resources, Fiscal, Government Affairs, and Communications.

The internship stipend is \$2600 per month/\$16 per hour. The Michael Curry Summer Internship Program offers college juniors, seniors, and graduate students who are Illinois residents an opportunity to work in one of the agencies under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Governor on a full-time basis for ten (10) weeks during the summer.

Applications open until April 6th.





Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center

Thrive Beyond Your Tribe

Submitted by Jim Dolan, Director of Veterans Outreach

Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center (AnB), located on Chicago's Westside at 2942 W. Lake Street (Lake and Sacramento, is a walk-in, addiction and trauma-informed behavioral health center). All are welcome regardless of their ability to pay. No appointments are needed, no waiting to begin your journey to recovery.

We help our clients uncover their meaning, love themselves, and set realistic goals. We offer intensive outpatient counseling, Brainspotting, job readiness coaching, housing-first assistance, stress yoga, acupuncture, rage reduction, alone-lines alleviation, trans-generational trauma, and many other unique trauma-specific groups.

For generations, men and women have returned from military service unwilling or

unable to talk about their experiences. The constant stress and strain of service or battle leave them with tangible, genuine scars ~ physical and emotional. It's often these invisible wounds and the stigma they still carry that make it difficult for Veterans to seek care and healing. At AnB, our initial goal is not to press them to reveal or relive those experiences but to help them understand the impact of their trauma and begin to heal.

Experience has taught us the root cause of addiction is not the substance itself, but a lack of connectedness, a longing for community and purpose. At Above and Beyond, we begin with community. Veterans receive care alongside those they fought to protect. The ultimate goal is to fully reintegrate back into civilian life.

Professor Peter Cohen argues that "...human beings have a deep need to bond and form connections. It's how we get our satisfaction. If we can't connect with each other, we will connect with anything we can find — the whirr of a roulette wheel or the prick of a syringe."

He says, "...we should stop talking about 'addiction' altogether, and instead call it 'bonding.' A heroin addict has bonded with heroin because she couldn't bond as fully with anything else."

So, the opposite of addiction is not sobriety. It is a human connection.

Service members understand the need for and the value of such bonding and naturally find it easiest to bond with other Veterans. However, to fully transition into civilian life - where you will spend the rest of your life – it is critical to establish other bonds with family, old friends, and community ~ to thrive beyond your tribe.

[Jim Dolan](#) is Director of Veterans Outreach at [Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center](#). All clients and Veterans struggling with addiction and trauma are served regardless of their ability to pay. jdolan@anb.today. 630-750-5522 Reach out TODAY!

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.

IDVA ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS

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