



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 6, Issue 7 ★ July 2026



Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

With summer in full swing, it's hard to imagine that in just a few weeks, we will be seeing kids go back to school and welcome the long-awaited start of another NFL season. When I was in the military, this was always a big season for moving. Every three or four years, most of us would get a set of permanent change of station (PCS) orders which meant a new opportunity. As you're reading this, there are incredible opportunities to join the crew of IDVA, along with a number of other jobs with the State of Illinois.

In our five Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy, we care for nearly 1,000 veterans 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We need nurses, certified nurse assistants, dietitians, activities professionals, physical therapists, housekeepers, and engineers, to name a few of the roles.

We employ Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) across the state to assist veterans in obtaining their earned benefits and services. The training is comprehensive and equips VSOs with the knowledge and tools to guide veterans. It's rewarding to assist a veteran in obtaining life-changing benefits, which may impact an entire family.

The State Approving Agency team works one-on-one with veterans in accessing earned federal educational benefits. Thousands of DD214s are provided to veterans through our records department. In our Central Office, we hire the highest level of professionals to support these teams so they can perform their jobs effectively and efficiently.

I am impressed by IDVA's recruiters and human resources teams that creatively reach the community to showcase our open roles and to positions interested candidates with knowledge of how to seek, apply for, and obtain jobs at IDVA. Later in this issue, you will see in-person and virtual career fairs that offer job counseling, resume writing, and guidance on how the state of Illinois hires. You will find IDVA recruiters on site, eager to provide guidance and support. For more information about IDVA jobs, [visit here](#).

Please read on to learn about important Illinois legislation, events, and programs and as always, thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely,

Terry Prince, Director and U.S. Navy Veteran

IDVA is Hiring

Virtual Job Fairs

8/3/2026 2:00-2:45 PM IDVA Extraordinary Employees



8/5/2026 10:00-10:45 AM Interview Tips and Tricks



8/7/2026 12:00-12:45 PM Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward



8/10/2026 1:00-1:45 PM How to Certify Your Veterans Points



8/11/2026 5:30-6:15 PM How to read a Job Bulletin



8/17/2026 9:30-10:15 AM Interview Tips and Tricks



8/19/2026 6:30-7:15 PM Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward



8/24/2026 10:00-10:45 AM IDVA Extraordinary Employees



8/26/2026 1:00-1:45 PM How to read a Job Bulletin



8/28/2026 10:00-10:45 AM How to Certify Your Veterans Points



Learn the Ropes of Working for the State of Illinois

Working for Illinois means being part of a diverse community dedicated to making a difference in people's lives every day. Join us in shaping the future of our great state, where innovation, collaboration, and opportunity thrive.

Illinois offers opportunities in nearly every field and experience. Join the Illinois Career Workshops to learn how to seek and apply for positions leading to life-changing experiences and meaningful careers

Illinois offers excellent benefits for employees and their families.

- Career counseling
- Instructions on building a state profile and reading a job bulletin
- Interview Tips

The first Thursday of each month:

**August 6th
September 3rd
October 1st
November 5th
December 3rd**

**10:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Veterans are welcome at 10:00 AM**

Illinois Department of Employment Security
107 N. 3rd Street, Quincy, Illinois



Taylorville Career Fair

Great energy at the Taylorville Career Fair! The fair was co-hosted by the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Central Management Services, and the Taylorville Chamber of Commerce. With 100 sign-ins, 21 state agencies, and six resume-building classes, the event created valuable connections and career pathways for those exploring state employment. Working for the State of Illinois offers meaningful public service, competitive benefits, and the chance to make a difference in communities across the state. To learn more about IDVA jobs, [visit here](#).



Dylan Clark from Groovy WRAN 97.3 radio station in Taylorville interviews Ann Holladay, IDVA Recruiter and HR Specialist.

Hire a Veteran

Veterans in Illinois Spotlight Workforce Value, Expanding Paths to Employment

Illinois employers marked Hire a Veteran Day this July by promoting the value veterans bring to the state's workforce and by highlighting tools available to support veteran hiring.

Observed annually on July 25, Hire a Veteran Day highlighted how veterans strengthened Illinois businesses through leadership, discipline, and adaptability gained during military service. Those traits supported high performance in civilian roles and helped employers meet staffing needs in competitive and high-demand industries.

Employers that hire veterans benefit from a talent pool with proven work ethic and job readiness, which reduces risk and cost at the start of recruitment. Veterans often bring specialized training that supports efficient operations and improved service delivery. Veterans apply their experience in logistics, technology, health care, or engineering to help employers meet specific operational and staffing needs.

Across Illinois, employers also reported workplace gains beyond technical expertise. Veterans are known for teamwork, accountability, and a focus on mission completion, which supports positive workplace culture and consistent productivity. Their tendency toward reliability and long-term commitment helps stabilize staff levels and reduce turnover.

Illinois employers have access to Illinois JobLink accounts as a resource to search for veteran candidates. Veterans also receive priority for job openings and other employment-related benefits through Illinois JobLink. In addition, IDVA has several resources available to veterans seeking jobs, such as Helmets to Hardhats.

For more information on the resources available to job-seeking veterans, [please visit here](#).

Excerpts from press release issued on July 15, 2026

Governor Pritzker Signs Legislation Strengthening Support for Service Members and Veterans

Governor JB Pritzker signed three bills into law that will fortify recruitment to the Illinois National Guard with newly incentivized peer-to-peer referral practices, as well as connect our state's veterans to continued education pathways and life-saving breakthrough therapies for suicide prevention.

The bills include:

SB 3737: Requires universities to promptly readmit students following academic military medical leave, effective January 2027.

SB 3818: Incentivizes Illinois National Guard recruitment with peer-to-peer referrals, effective January 1, 2027.

SB 3926: Moves the Breakthrough Therapies for Veteran Suicide Prevention Program Advisory Council under the Department of Public Health, effective January 1, 2027.

Supporting Access to Breakthrough Therapies for Veterans' Mental Health

The Breakthrough Therapies for Veteran Suicide Prevention Program Advisory Council was created to advise the State on the health care infrastructure needed to provide veterans with access to preliminary clinical drug trials that might offer significant mental health benefits. These therapies include MDMA and pharmaceutical-grade psilocybin, which are used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, treatment-resistant depression and anxiety – conditions many veterans struggle with after service and combat.

SB 3926 amends the Department of Healthcare and Family Services Law and the Department of Public Health Act, moving the Council under the purview of the Illinois Department of Public Health, which is better equipped to oversee and support this specific program.

"Veterans are at a 58 percent higher risk of dying by suicide, and as advocates for veterans, we witness the challenges each day," said Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Director Terry Prince. "SB 3926 exemplifies the state's commitment to implementing every strategy available to ensure Illinois veterans receive the resources, therapies, and support they need to avoid a crisis and prevent suicide."

Veterans' Homes

Providing residents of Illinois' five Veterans' Homes with activities and events is central to IDVA's mission to care for the whole person. The activities teams carefully plan theme-based parties which include special menus and entertainment. Flag Day and the Nation's 250th Birthday were recently celebrated and enjoyed.

Flag Day at the Veterans' Home at Chicago

The community came together to offer the residents of the Veterans' Home at Chicago a full day of events honoring Flag Day. The Elks Club offered a Flag Day ceremony and presentation where the residents learned about the history of Flag Day. ChiTown Car Shows collaborated with the American Legion Post #256 in Berwyn to display their dazzling collection of cars, with over 50 vehicles ranging from low-riders, Chevy Impalas, 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air, Cadillacs, Mustangs, and Oldsmobiles.

The Jesse White Tumbling Team, a 67-year-old international performance team, wowed the residents with their impressive gymnastics routines.



Navy veteran Benny Sigler.



Army veteran Victor Chleboun.

Veterans' Home at Quincy Celebrates America's 250th Birthday

The Quincy Home kicked off America's 250th birthday celebration on July 2nd with a festive day of patriotic fun. A campus-wide celebration featured live music and special treats. The Activity Team hosted an ice cream social and served a special red, white, and blue patriotic drink. Residents customized their own delicious sundaes while activity staff carefully prepared each treat to order. The sweet celebration brought smiles to everyone's faces and provided a lively, cheerful way to honor this historic milestone.



Bobbi Mock (Librarian) & Sara Colgrove (Director of Activities) brought the party to the Domiciliary in their patriotic gear.



Domiciliary residents gathered in the dining room and showed their spirit by waving flags.

DeKalb

Veteran Service Officer Christopher Garrett

845 W. Lincoln Hwy, Dekalb, IL 60115

To schedule an appointment or for more information, please contact the RTW Vet Center at 815-517-1094.

Christopher.garrett3@illinois.gov

Office: 224-265-6112

Mobile: 815-904-3573

Tuesday-Thursday: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Aurora

Veteran Service Officer Tanya Reyes

Auroral American Legion Post 84

1677 Montgomery Road, Suite 106-108, Aurora, IL

Tanya.reyes@illinois.gov

Mobile: 815-904-2463

Thursday and Friday: 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

McHenry

Veteran Service Officer Melissa Downey

McHenry CBOC VA

3715 Municipal Drive, McHenry, IL

Please call for an appointment

Melissa.downey@illinois.gov

Office: 815-388-9292

Mobile: 217-512-4033

Mondays: 9:00 AM- 4:00 PM

IDVA Welcomes United States Air Force Veteran Joe Bateman as a Veteran Service Officer Serving Taylorville

Joe Bateman brings years of state government experience as a DCEO grant manager, DoIT Computer Support Technician, IEPA Office Assistant, and ILG Legislative Analyst. Joe spent over 17 years serving on both active duty and as a Traditional Reservist in the Air Force. He is a Comprehensive Dental Assistant Technician, a Dental Hygienist, and a Level 1 Trauma Oral and Maxillofacial Surgical Technician. Most recently, he served as a Flight Chief and is currently a First Sergeant at Scott AFB. Joe has a rich history of military service, where his grandfathers served in the Korean War. He enjoys the outdoors, volunteering with the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and serving at tech. He and his wife Kristen have two sons, Jonah and Elijah.

"To me, being a VSO is more than a profession; it's a calling to serve those who have already sacrificed so much for our country. Every veteran I help is a reminder that service doesn't end with the uniform."

Joe Bateman

1100 North Cheney Street, Taylorville, IL

Joseph.bateman@illinois.gov

Cell: 217-820-1928

Office: 217-287-7474

Monday - Friday: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM



Veteran Service Officer Brandon Jagers participates in the Pets & Patriots 250: A Celebration of Heroes and Healing hosted by FTD Ministry. A day dedicated to honoring veterans and raising awareness for the mental health benefits of service animals. The event took place at the Two Brothers Roundhouse in Aurora and featured an American Muscle Car Show, live music, and activities.



Veteran Service Officer Joe Bateman hosting his first table at the Illinois State Hiring Fair in Taylorville.

Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Highlights Veteran Services During Statewide Community of Practice

The Veteran Community of Practice, part of the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH), as well as the Illinois Homelessness Response Collaborative (IHRC), hosted a virtual training led by Senior Program Manager Jessica Smith from Corporaion, for Supportive Housing. The virtual meeting brought together community partners and Continuum of Care leadership from across Illinois who are committed to preventing and ending Veteran homelessness.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) was pleased to participate in the training, with Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Brandon Jagers serving as the featured presenter. Brandon provided attendees with an overview of the vital role Veteran Service Officers play in assisting veterans and their families. He explained how VSOs help connect veterans to the benefits, resources, and support they have earned through their military service.

During the presentation, Brandon also highlighted the wide range of programs and services available through IDVA, including benefits assistance, advocacy, and support services designed to improve the lives of Illinois veterans. In addition, he shared updates on the Veterans' Homes, including ongoing renovation and modernization projects that are enhancing the quality of care and living environments for veterans across the state.

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs values opportunities to collaborate with statewide partners and community organizations. By working together and increasing awareness of available resources, we can strengthen our collective efforts to ensure every veteran has access to the services, benefits, and support they need to thrive.

For more information about the Veteran Community of Practice or to learn how to participate, please contact Jessica Smith at jessica.smith@csh.org.



Women Veterans Program

25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders in 2026



Lourdes Hurtado Fernando, Army

Lourdes Hurtado Fernando is a Chicago-based realtor and an 11-year Army National Guard veteran who has dedicated her career to helping veterans build financial stability through homeownership. After using her own VA loan to purchase a multi-unit property and create passive income during a difficult period in her life, Lourdes made it her mission to ensure other veterans understood the full power of their benefits. Today, over 90% of her real estate business is VA-focused, and she is widely recognized for her expertise in guiding veterans through buying, investing, and using real estate as a tool for long-term wealth.

In 2022, Lourdes co-founded VA Housing Education, a program designed to teach veterans how to strategically leverage their VA home loan. She is deeply embedded in the veteran community, volunteering with Chicago Veterans, Merging Vets & Players, and the Travis Manion Foundation. She also created and leads the All-Women Veterans Program with Chicago Veterans and founded Healing Barracks / Operation Wholeness, a 12-week bootcamp-style transitional program focused on healing, structure, and empowerment for women veterans.

Lourdes serves on the Keller Williams Agent Leadership Council, where she has chaired the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee for the past three years, and serves on the International Agent Leadership Council. She is the Keller Williams Midwest Military Representative, supporting agents and military families across the region.

Lourdes' work continues to prove that real estate is more than a career, it is a vehicle for empowerment, education, and transformation in the veteran community.

25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders in 2026



Dr. Glenisha Foreman, Marine Corps

Dr. Glenisha Foreman, PhD, CCMHC, LCPC, CAMS-II, CCISM, EMDR is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC), Marine Corps Veteran, Founder and Clinical director of Verdure Counseling, a counseling organization focused on bringing growth and wellness to the clients they serve. After completing active-duty military service, she obtained a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Concordia University and a Doctorate in Counseling Education and Supervision from Governors State University. Serving in the military enabled her to travel to various places around the world providing her with rich multicultural experiences forming the foundation of her culturally affirming practices. Dr. Foreman is a board certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor, specializing in Trauma, with experience working with both mental health and substance abuse issues. She is also a nationally certified anger management provider, internationally certified in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy and certified in Critical Incident Stress Management.

Dr. Foreman has facilitated the spread of knowledge, mental health, and advocacy through teaching at Northeastern Illinois University and conducting various presentations on trauma, stress management, working with veterans, Navigating the VA. She is passionate about helping those in need, and with the assistance from her team at Verdure Counseling, Dr. Foreman often hosts and participates in events that provide essential services to veterans and families in need within the community.

Road to 500: Military Women's Memorial

Join other Illinois women veterans in registering your story with the Military Women's Memorial in Washington, DC. The challenge? Reach the goal of 500 registrants in 2026 to achieve "gold status" for the second year in a row. It only takes a few moments to make an indelible mark on the history of women who have worn the cloth of our nation. Please see details below.

#StriveFor500

Register at The Military Women's Memorial to collect and preserve our history

The Military Women's Memorial honors the commitment, contributions, and experiences of Servicewomen.

Servicewomen, past and present, are invited to share their stories in the Memorial's registry to archive their contributions.



Women Service Members, Veterans, and Reserve/National Guard, join the 2026 Military Women's Memorial's #StriveFor500 campaign, challenging every state and territory to register at least 500 military women to preserve their powerful stories in the National Digital Repository.

In 2025, Illinois surpassed its goal and registered 533 women veterans, making Illinois a Gold Status state.

Our 2026 campaign is underway. Our goal? Gold Status for the second year in a row, and for more women veterans to tell their own stories.

Join us. Step up. Be counted



It only takes a few minutes to register yourself at www.womensmemorial.org
Every zip code. Every rank.
Every era—from the Revolutionary War to present day.



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS
WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM



Hello Girls

On July 16th, at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Renee Messelin, one of the first group of the U.S. Army Signals Corps Telephone Operators, was honored with the installation of her cenotaph ("In Memory Of") marker. Renee, a Chicago native, was a supervisor of the "The Hello Girls," who served in France during World War I. WI. During the war, 223 Hello Girls, who spoke English and French, connected over 26 million battlefields, supply, and diplomatic calls in 20 months. Most were immigrants or first-generation Americans. They were an international force of American women soldiers. After the war, they were denied veteran status for 60 years until 1977. In December 2024, the Hello Girls received the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian award. The design is currently under review at the U.S. Mint.

Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn participated in the ceremony, which included a speaking program, wreath laying, taps, and a rifle salute. Nearly 30 of the Hello Girls with ties to Illinois, some have found their final resting places in cemeteries across the state.



Renee Messelin Biography

Published with permission from Capt. Diane Boettcher USN Ret.

Chief Operator Renee Messelin was born in Chicago, Illinois, on September 12, 1890. She was the daughter of Mack and Mamie (Park) Caldwell, a prominent African American couple. Their third child, Ellarane Yvonne Caldwell (her birth name), grew up in Chicago and attended Hyde Park High School. She graduated in 1909 and began work as a teacher.

Ellarane had a brief marriage to Mr. Arthur Brehm in Ohio, although she was soon back in Chicago. She then married Maurice Messelin in 1913 at Grace Presbyterian Church. Since Maurice was a French citizen, she lost her American citizenship under the 1907 Expatriation Act. About this time, Ellarene took the name "Renee" and likely began passing as white. The couple lived in Spokane for a short time, near his mother, brother and sister-in-law. By 1916, they were in California, and their marriage ended in divorce.

When she applied to join the Army, Ms. Messelin was living in San Francisco. She claimed French birth, likely knowing that had she admitted that she was African American, she would not have been allowed to join the unit.

Ms. Messelin was assigned as a supervisor, being a proficient operator and an accomplished linguist. Assigned initially to Paris, Ms. Messelin was later promoted to Chief Operator and transferred to Brest, where she likely helped to organize the redeployment of troops after the Armistice. She returned to the States in September 1919. She then married Sergeant Major Edward Van Gundy, a fellow soldier. This marriage returned her American citizenship. The couple moved to Denver, Colorado, although this third marriage also ended in divorce.

Her fourth and final marriage was to Mr. Robert S. Arthur in 1927. Mrs. Arthur took to the stage, starring in several movies and radio plays as "Renee Rodier." When the couple moved to Florida, Renee retired from acting. They stayed together until Robert died in 1969.

Ellarene Yvonne Caldwell Brehm Messelin Van Gundy Arthur, also known as Renee Rodier, passed away in Florida in the summer of 1977. The myth of her French birth followed her to the grave, and her true heritage was discovered in 2024.

By claiming a French heritage, she was able to serve in the US Army and to perform on stage. This new life likely exacted a price. She may have never seen her birth family again. Renee took control of her story and of her life, in a time when African American women had few options. She is the first documented African American woman to serve overseas in the U. S. Army.



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 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
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