



# VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 5, Issue 2 ★ February 2025

## ★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince



We are pleased to announce the domiciliary at the Veterans' Home at Quincy welcomed residents on January 28th. The 37 residents moved from the original domiciliary to the new, state-of-the-art home featuring individual rooms and bathrooms with expansive windows overlooking the Home's picturesque campus. Other amenities include a dining room, fitness center, and gathering spaces. The residents are ecstatic with their new home intentionally designed to provide them with private space in a communal setting. Residents chose their units from the three-story design which includes studio,

and one-bedroom apartments, each equipped with a refrigerator, microwave, furniture, ample closet space, and a wall-mounted television. The main floor units offer a sliding glass door leading to a patio and every room has plenty of natural sunlight and views. The domiciliary is part of a \$300M federal and state partnership and is part of Governor Pritzker's Rebuild Illinois. A new, 210-bed skilled care home is near completion, and we look forward to welcoming residents soon.

IDVA is proud to provide residential and skilled nursing services to Illinois veterans. We offer five Homes across the state in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. The Chicago Home, where veterans living in Cook County can be close to their families, opened in 2022 and offers private rooms, bathrooms, and living spaces for veterans to socialize and share meals. Recent renovations and improvements at the Anna, LaSalle, and Manteno Homes ensure that the Homes are maintained and modernized. Illinois continuously invests in its homes to provide stellar care to veterans.

What many people don't know is that the staff of our homes are second to none. Every one of them understands their role in delivering on our promise to ensure veterans thrive in Illinois. Their love of service, coupled with the incredibly reasonable cost of care, easily makes us the best option around. This is Illinois' expression of gratitude for veteran's service. We are committed to a high level of compassionate care that is dignified and modernized. To learn more about each home, eligibility, and admissions, visit: [Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

Please read on to learn more about important benefits, services, and programs.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely,

**Terry Prince**, U.S. Navy Veteran and IDVA Director





# Veterans' Home at Quincy: Domiciliary

## Photos of domiciliary courtesy of Dan Schwalm



Housekeeping supervisor Chris Dever assists resident Patsy Hill during the welcome home luncheon.

Director Prince and Sara Colgrove, Director of Activities and Volunteer Services, serve lunch to the residents in their new dining room.



## Fishing and Hunting Licenses

Illinois is home to acres of beautiful landscapes for hunting and hundreds of lakes for fishing. In gratitude for their service, veterans who receive 10% or greater service-connected compensation or total disability pension are provided a fishing and hunting license free of charge. Veterans are required to present a DD214 and a Disability Affidavit, and both can be obtained through IDVA.

To contact your local IDVA VSO for assistance, visit: [VSO Locator County List](#)

To learn more about hunting in Illinois, visit: <https://dnr.illinois.gov/hunting.html>

To learn more about fishing in Illinois, visit: [Places to Fish](#)



## Field Services

IDVA's Veteran Services Officers continue to extend their services beyond their office hours assisting veterans by attending community events across the state. At Veteran Resource Fairs and other events, VSOs are available to discuss IDVA's services and how they can obtain their earned benefits and services. The conversations often lead to the start of unlocking valuable solutions for veterans. If you are interested in a VSO attending one of your events, please visit: [IDVA SPECIAL EVENT ATTENDANCE REQUEST](#).



*Veteran Service Officer Gerald Enriquez (Manteno) attends the VFW Post 311 Event in Richton Park.*



*IDVA Recruitment Specialist Candice Rudd and Veteran Service Officer Cynthia McKee (Chicago) attend the Olive Harvy Veteran Resource Event.*



*Veteran Service Officer Michelle Richards (Chicago) attends the Talk Saves Lives event at the Edward Hines VA Hospital.*



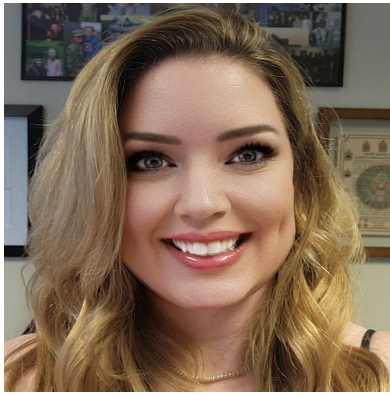
*Veteran Service Officer Brandon Jagers (Veterans' Home at Chicago) attends the Veterans Chamber of Commerce event with Frank Gutierrez, Founder of the Veterans Chamber of Commerce and Inaugural Board President, and Veterans Chamber of Commerce Board Director Sarita Connelly.*



*President of American Cares Homer Lee Bizzle, III M.A. Ed. and IDVA Veteran Service Officers Michael Willis (SE Cook), and Brandon Jagers (Veterans' Home at Chicago) present at the America Cares Too Veterans Claim Clinic.*



# Field Services and IDVA Job Fairs



## Veteran Service Officer Profile: Tina Mocaby

Veteran Service Officer Tina Mocaby (Marion/Williamson County) is a 13-year Illinois and Indiana National Guard veteran who joined IDVA in 2022 after serving as an Academic Advisor for the Veterans Office and the VA School Certifying Official at John A Logan Community College.

“Each interaction with a veteran serves as a reminder of my responsibility as a VSO to advocate for their needs, amplify their voices, and facilitate their ability to apply for benefits,” said Tina. “By being present and actively listening to their experiences, I am fostering a culture of trust.”

Tina recently assisted a Vietnam-era veteran in securing a favorable claim decision and significant backpay. Tina achieved this within an impressive three months. This achievement is a testament to Tina’s professionalism and tireless advocacy for those who have served our country. She exemplifies IDVA’s Team of VSOs who use every resource available to assist in a positive outcome for Illinois veterans.

## Serve those who served

IDVA is hiring across the agency including medical professionals in its five residential homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. If you are interested in meaningful work serving Illinois’ heroes, learn more at one of IDVA’s virtual job fairs.

**★ Serve those who served ★**

Join IDVA for a series of virtual job fairs to learn more about becoming part of Team IDVA

Date	Time	HFS Virtual	Event Registration
3/1/2025	9:00-9:45 A.M.	Creating a Profile	
3/3/2025	12:00-12:45 P.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees	
3/11/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks	
3/12/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin	
3/14/2025	1:00-1:45 P.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points	
3/15/2025	9:00-9:45 A.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks	
3/19/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees	
3/20/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	Creating a Profile	
3/24/2025	9:00-9:45 A.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin	
3/26/2025	1:00-1:45 P.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks	



On January 7th, the 103rd General Assembly ended, and on January 8th, new members of the 104th General Assembly were inaugurated. Since then, over 2,500 bills have been filed in the Senate and over 3,800 bills have been filed in the House.

IDVA has three legislative initiatives:

**SB 2175 (Sen. Porfirio)/HB 2777 (Rep. Kifowit)**: This bill amends the Personnel Code to provide that State of Illinois (SOI) employees, who are veterans are permitted four days per year, in addition to standard sick leave, to attend medical appointments for the treatment or examination of a military service-connected condition. The days may be used to receive medical care authorized by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs at any health care provider or facility. Additionally, the bill fixes an error within the Personnel Code, clarifying that this leave will apply to SOI employees who are veterans with service-connected conditions who fall under Jurisdiction B. This bill has an effective date of 1/1/26.

***How will this help veterans?*** Under current law, SOI employees who are veterans receive four sick days per year to visit a veterans' hospital or clinic for examination of a military service-connected disability. Historically, this care has been obtained via veterans' hospitals and clinics. However, under Community Care, a veteran can go outside of the VA system if the veteran lives more than 40 miles away from a VA facility, or if the VA cannot provide the needed care. With healthcare workforce shortages, this is becoming more common. This bill allows SOI employees who are veterans to utilize these days with Community Care providers.

**HB 2547 (Kifowit)**: HB 2547 amends various Acts across the Illinois Compiled Statutes (ILCS) to remove the apostrophe in every reference to "the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs." The purpose of this bill is to finalize IDVA's rebranding project, which included a new logo and this minor modification to the agency's name. The removal of the apostrophe aligns with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) and other state's Departments of Veterans Affairs. This bill has an immediate effective date.

***How will this help veterans?*** This initiative is part of IDVA's rebranding project. Throughout its 78-year history, IDVA was identified by the State seal. For the first time, the agency has its own logo, which has raised its visibility and better connects to its Illinois veterans. It also demonstrates that it is a modern agency poised to serve veterans.

**HB 2572 (Schweizer)**: HB 2572 amends the School Code and the Deceased, Disabled and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Educational Opportunity Grant Act. It provides that the IDVA shall determine the eligibility of persons who apply for a Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Scholarship (a post-secondary education program), or a Deceased, Disabled, and MIA/POW Veterans' Dependents Educational Opportunity Grant Act by rule.

***How will this help veterans?*** This initiative offers clarification on the process for establishing eligibility for these programs.



The IDVA's Executive Leadership Team gathered in Springfield for two days of presentations, discussion, and brainstorming to collaborate on strategies for serving veterans in 2025. Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello, an Army veteran, shared inspiration with the team and provided his perspective about veteran benefits and services. Director Costello participates in IDVA's Gold Star Families programs and Veterans Day at the Springfield and DuQuoin State Fairs. As agency directors, he and Director Prince support and work closely with each other.

## IDVA Leadership Attends the National Association of State Veterans' Homes Winter Conference



*United States Senator Tammy Duckworth and Senior Home Administrator Angela Simmons meet in Washington, DC to discuss Illinois Veterans' Home. Senator Duckworth, an Army veteran, sits on the U.S. Committee on Veterans Affairs*

Senior Home Administrator Angela Simmons participated in the National Association of State Veterans Home (NASVH) Winter Conference in Washington, DC. The conference included presentations and workshops on critical issues for Veterans Homes and an opportunity to share information and ideas with representatives from across the nation.

"This conference provided me with an invaluable opportunity for open collaboration among members, government agencies, and businesses interested in sustaining, improving, and providing benefits and services for our veterans," said Angela. "We exchanged ideas and information, learned from one another, and formed organized responses to issues facing veterans nationwide."

On Capitol Hill Day, Angela met with federal lawmakers from Illinois to discuss important issues around caring for our nation's heroes. A few of the many topics included high-cost medications, the State Veteran Home Construction Grant Program, and increasing the basic per diem rates for veterans in State Veterans' Homes.

NASVH was formed in 1952 because of the mutual need of State Homes to promote legislation at the national level and share common problems and experiences.

Its mission is: The National Association of State Veterans' Homes Primary Mission is to Promote and Enhance the Quality of Care and Life of Veterans and Families in the State Veterans Homes through Education, Networking, and Advocacy."

Among many programs and initiatives, NASVH hosts annual Summer and Winter conferences.



## Senator Duckworth, Governor Pritzker, and Juliana Stratton Visit the Veterans' Home at Chicago

Senator Tammy Duckworth, Governor JB Pritzker, and Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton toured the Veterans' Home at Chicago, visited with residents, and met with the Home Administrator, staff, and IDVA leadership. At the roundtable, leadership provided an update, and ideas were shared on how the state and federal governments can continue to support caring for Illinois veterans. The home was conceptualized while Senator Duckworth was the Director of the IDVA and Governor Pritzker ensured its completion and opening in January 2022. The \$131M project reflects Illinois' investment in veterans and their care.

Since the Home welcomed its first residents, it has cared for nearly 100 veterans. It is the first Veterans' Home in Chicago which is more accessible to veterans and their families in the region. The open floor plan with living and dining areas creates a community with 200 private rooms. Residents have access to a library, barber shop, bank, and rehabilitation center. Housekeeping, laundry, and dietary ensure the residents' day-to-day personal needs are met. Outdoor areas include a lushly planted garden with a walking path, benches, and a garden terrace. The multi-purpose room is the gathering place for events and family occasions. Local artist Indira Johnson created custom, interactive artwork for every floor themed, "Helping Hands," to reflect the commitment of each medical professional and staff caring for their resident veterans. An IDVA Veterans Service Officer is available to assist the veteran with questions regarding state and federal benefits.

For more information on eligibility and admissions, [click here](#).



*U.S. Army veteran Edward Kulesza, who recently celebrated his 105th birthday, is greeted by Senator Duckworth, Governor JB Pritzker, Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, Home Administrator T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson, and IDVA Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn. Senator Duckworth presented him with a coin in recognition of his service.*



## Providing Comprehensive Care for Traumatic Brain Injuries in Veterans and First Responders of the Greater Midwest

*Article submitted by The Brave Program*

The [BRAVE](#) Program is the Midwest's first Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) clinic specifically for Veterans and First Responders. It is the newest site within the [Avalon Action Alliance](#), a national network of sites dedicated to providing care for the invisible wounds of war/service (TBI, PTSD, and Substance Abuse).

BRAVE is a unique intensive outpatient program that provides treatment for Veterans (regardless of discharge status or Veteran status) and First Responders (past or present) who have acquired a traumatic brain injury (at any point in their life & it does not have to be medically diagnosed/ reported). Our program will also address comorbid physical and mental health issues.

This Program is designed for the diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of the symptoms caused by a traumatic brain injury. We do not uproot anyone from their current care team or their current medication management. There is little to no cost for the program, and we are able to assist with barriers to care (i.e., the cost of care, food, travel, and lodging while the participants are with us).

Our expert care team is comprised of Psychiatry, Psychology and Psychotherapy to address mental and behavioral health. Physical Therapy addresses vestibular, balance, TMJ/TMD, and musculoskeletal pain and concerns. Speech-Language Pathology assesses cognition (i.e., memory, thinking, attention, planning) and language. We also offer social work, case management, peer support, and care coordination to adequately address all aspects of the Veteran or First Responder's concerns while offering them a unique and holistic approach to TBI treatment.

Our BRAVE Program consists of a 3-day comprehensive evaluation to develop a roadmap to care while identifying root causes of TBI symptoms. From there, we can tailor an intensive outpatient treatment plan) and classes based on the Veteran or First Responder's needs and chosen goals.

If you are interested in learning more about the program, please see our website ([hyperlink above](#)) or start the enrollment process for a representative to call you ([click here](#)).





## Recognition of American Heart Month



*The Veterans' Home at LaSalle team raises awareness of heart health, promoting preventive measures, and encouraging people to improve their cardiovascular well-being. Left to right: Tia Krzysciak, Michele Hansen, Bailie Bongartz, Sonya Chipman, Erin Milby, Patricia Miller, Abbi Crow, Donna Nieslawski, Linda Corsale, Courtney Suarez, Jynny Oberholz, Diane Spiegel, Raejean Glynn, Marla Michalak, Maria Reed, Myron Klinefelter, Shantel Soldati, Taylor Schott, Cassandra Seaborn, Mary McDermott, LeeAnn Kirby, and James Peterson.*



*Residents of the Veterans' Home at LaSalle join Wear Red Day. Left to right: Marvin Brooks, John Soberri, Fred Leone, Lynwood Smith, Arvin Bailey, James Crawford, Roy Prose, Gus Bolelli, Glen Glover, Steven Maas, Fred Gullo, Randy Schueler, and Wayne Reynolds.*



# 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](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.**



★ Follow us

