



# VETERANS CONNECTIONS

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



## ★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

As we close out May and the somber ceremonies of Memorial Day, I recognize that this holiday holds a special meaning for the people of our country, especially within the community that IDVA is privileged to serve. In our military, men and women were often put in grave danger, and sadly, many of them paid the ultimate price. Memorial Day reminds us to remember those who gave their lives to ensure our freedom. Each flag that was waved, taps that were played, and salutes rendered on Memorial Day symbolized our deep gratitude. As always, the IDVA team was dispersed around the

state at parades and ceremonies. I was especially privileged to be in Rockford at the LZ Peace Memorial. It is a stunning tribute to the men and women from Winnebago County who gave the ultimate sacrifice during the Vietnam War.

IDVA honors the fallen by ensuring veterans and their families truly thrive in Illinois. We do this by providing quality care in our five Veterans Homes and independent living centers. IDVA Veteran Service Officers are deployed across the state to help them access federal, state, and local benefits while countless others receive support and assistance from the IDVA Headquarters team. You can easily see that we all play a role in serving our veterans and their families, especially those who have experienced the unfathomable loss of a loved one who died in the service of our nation.

It is often said that we honor the dead by treating the living well. This is precisely what we do at IDVA. When we care for a veteran in one of our Veterans Homes, guide a veteran through a transformative benefit, or ensure IDVA is running effectively; we honor the life of a fallen hero.

As we move into the summer months, the U.S. Army will soon celebrate its 250th birthday. We also look forward to seeing many of you across the state at the State Fairs in Springfield and DuQuoin, and other gatherings along the way. Be on the lookout for our Veteran Service Officers in your communities—they are eager to learn about your goals and your earned benefits can help you achieve them.

You can find your local VSO on our [website](#).

Sincerely,

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



# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Memorial Day 2025



IDVA Director Terry Prince delivers the keynote address at the LZ Peace Vietnam War Memorial honoring Winnebago County's fallen Vietnam War heroes.



IDVA Legislative Liaison and ILNG Captain, Dylon Hop, and IDVA Director Terry Prince attend Chicago's Memorial Day Parade.



Veterans' Home at Chicago: U.S. Army veteran Robert Fronczak and his fellow veterans attended the Memorial Day Bike Blessing by Leo Alicea from VFW Post 8322.



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Volunteers led by the American Legion Post #37 placed 8,200 American flags on the gravestones of our nation's heroes at the Sunset Cemetery in anticipation of Memorial Day.



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Domiciliary resident Mrs. Betty Balzer, escorted by her sons Rick & Mike, performed the wreath-laying ceremony in memory of her late husband Ken, U.S. Army veteran, and all deceased veterans.

## Veteran's Home at Anna



United States Navy Veteran George Helfrich



United States Navy Veteran Andrew Warner



U.S. Navy Veteran Benjamin Mason



United States Marine Corps veteran Robert Belcher and wife Sherry



# Nurse's Week

The 2025 Nurses' Week theme, "Nurses Make the Difference," resonates with the veterans in our care in IDVA's five Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy. They experience the difference through the compassionate and skilled care they receive from an amazing team of talented, dedicated nurses.

The education and training nurses go through is rigorous and prepares them for one of life's greatest callings. Without nurses, we could not deliver on our promise to care for veterans in gratitude for their service. Thank you to all IDVA nurses for serving those who served.

## Veterans' Home at Manteno



Kelly Vera



Centeria Curry



Felicia Morris

## Veterans' Home at Anna



Layla Bays, Trisha Cobb, Amy McDuffee, Anita Prater, Shelly Miller, Lori Godwin, Cali Basler, Robin Leaton Not pictured: Emily Sherwood, Kristi Fombelle, Sue Randolph, Melissa Waun, Sarah Coleman, Mary Moore, Cathy Furlow, Cathy Chamness, Ellen Strothmann, Heather Stanley.

## Veterans' Home at Chicago



Left to Right: Angie, Josepheena Jose, Trini Doruelo, Biby Sabu, Tincy Tomy, Jasen, Rovenia Silo, Renata Pirga, Sheeba Chunkamthara, Ann Thottichira, Juby MathewKneeling: Jennifer Malone.



## Veterans' Home at Quincy



*Fifer: Kelsey Terwelp, Jill Stump, Angie Clark, Amy Sandidge, Dana Herring, Supervisor*



*Schapers: Supervisor Jen Cassens, Linda Garner, Emily Kipley*



*Nursing Supervisors: Tracy Alexander (TA Director of Nursing), Dana Herring (Fifer), Jonita Brunier (TA Hammond), Michelle Daugherty (Markword II), Jen Cassens (Schapers), Holly Perrine (Assistant Director of Nursing), Lindsey Kelley (Infection Preventionist), Amy Green (Markwood I), Not pictured, Amanda Tournear (ERH/MDS)*



*Hammond: Robyn Welty, Todd Breuer, Crystal Young, Jonita Brunier, TA Supervisor, Brian Myers*



*Markword: Karen Mittelberg, Angie Bevens, Amanda Hubner (Nurse Practitioner), Amy Green (Supervisor MW1)*



*Markword I: Michele Hogan and Tyler Streeter.*



*Markword II: Angie Bevens, Jessica Campbell, Supervisor Michelle Daugherty*





# National Skilled Nursing Care Week



Veterans' Home at LaSalle: The activities department offered root beer floats for the veterans and staff on the patio to celebrate National Skilled Nursing Care Week. Pictured left to right: Maria Reed (Adjutant), Joe Suarez (Reimbursement Officer), Bailie Bongartz (Director of Volunteer Services), Jamie Peterson (Housekeeping Coordinator). Front row: Katherine "Kasia" Quigley (Activity Therapist).

If you or a loved one is seeking domiciliary or skilled residential care, learn more about IDVA's five residential homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy here: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/services-benefits/homes/homes.html>.



Pictured left to right: U.S. Navy and Air Force Veteran Paul Sweet, Infection Preventionist Kerry Gerding, U.S. Army Veteran Donald Brenner, Stationary Engineer Trent Sexton, and U.S. Army Veteran Frank Montez



# Field Services



U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth and Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford participate in a Veterans Town Hall at the IBEW Local 117 in Crystal Lake, IL. Senator Duckworth fielded questions from veterans about the changes at the US Department of Veterans Affairs. Melissa represented IDVA with a presentation and Q and A. Veteran Service Officer Brandon Jagers participated in the resource fair, where he spoke with veterans and provided them resources and information.



Veteran Service Office William Illa, Lake County, greets an attendee of the Lake County Senior Expo at the Lake County Fairgrounds.

Left to right: Brandon Jagers (Veteran Service Office at the Veterans' Home at Chicago), Candice Rudd (Recruiter and HR Specialist), and Director Terry Prince, represent IDVA at the National Louis University annual Memorial Day Veterans' Resource & Job Expo at National Louis University. Brandon offered VSO services, and Candice directed interested veterans to jobs at IDVA. Director Prince was the keynote speaker.




Veteran Service Officer Anthony Hernandez, Metro Region, at the Lemont Public Library Brief.




Veteran Service Officer Malon Norfleet, Cook County, attends the VSMC Resource Fair.

The Veteran's Assistance Commission of DuPage County and the Office of The DuPage County Recorder are proud to present the 2025



## VETERAN'S RESOURCE FAIR

FREE EVENT FOR VETERANS & ACTIVE DUTY



**AUGUST 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025**  
9:00am - 1:00pm

**DUPAGE COUNTY**  
JACK T. KNUEPFER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING  
1<sup>st</sup> FLOOR ATRIUM & AUDITORIUM  
421 N COUNTY FARM ROAD  
WHEATON, IL 60187

ENJOY REFRESHMENTS, DOOR PRIZES, AND FREEBIES

THE VETERAN'S ASSISTANCE COMMISSION WILL PROVIDE INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS ABOUT VETERAN PROGRAMS

THE RECORDER'S OFFICE IS OFFERING FREE RECORDATION OF MILITARY DISCHARGE DOCUMENTS AND NO COST REGISTRATION FOR THE HONOR REWARDS PROGRAM - USE THIS REWARDS CARD TO RECEIVE DISCOUNTS AND PERKS AT LOCAL BUSINESSES

A FEW OF OUR OVER 50 PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS




Veteran Service Officers Carla Waibel and Tina Paggi, Winnebago County, attending the VAC Veteran Employment Resource Fair at Hard Rock Casino in Rockford, IL.



As the regular session for the Illinois General Assembly comes to an end, IDVA initiated and tracked significant legislation. Additionally, the team recently attended and supported U.S. Senator Duckworth's Veteran's Town Hall and the City of Chicago's Memorial Day Ceremony. Below is a list of significant legislation that is moving through the legislative process:

## IDVA Initiatives

**House Bill (HB) 2547** changes all references to the "Department of Veterans' Affairs" with "Department of Veterans Affairs." This legislation finalizes IDVA's rebranding project by officially removing the apostrophe from the agency's name. This aligns IDVA with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) and other Departments of Veterans Affairs in other states. The vote was unanimous in both the House and the Senate, and the bill now heads to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.

**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. The vote was unanimous in both the House and the Senate, and the bill now heads to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.

**SB 2175** amends the Personnel Code to provide that State of Illinois (SOI) employees who are veterans shall be permitted four (4) days per year, in addition to standard sick leave, to attend medical appointments for the treatment or examination of a military service-connected condition. SOI employees who are veterans with service-connected conditions may use these days to receive medical care that is authorized by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, at any type of health care provider or health care facility. Additionally, the bill fixes an existing error within the Personnel Code. The vote was unanimous in both the House and Senate, and the bill now heads to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.

## Other military/veterans' initiatives

**Senate Bill (SB) 1675** amends the wording of the Illinois Code of Military Justice for clarity. In the definition of "military offenses," it updates the proper names of the listed offenses. The vote was unanimous in both the House and the Senate, and the bill now heads to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.

**HB 1362** amends the Service Member Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (ISERRA) in the following ways:

- It provides that "work days" are the actual number of shifts (as opposed to days) the employee would have worked during the period of military leave. It provides that "work days" are tabulated up to 24 continuous hours in a shift, regardless if the shift extends into the next calendar day.
- It amends the section titled "basic protections" to provide that a service member whose employment is interrupted by a period of active service can elect (upon request) to use accrued leave during that time; however, the employer cannot require this.
- It provides that orders in lieu of active training qualify for concurrent compensation for public employees. It goes on to specify that public employees may receive concurrent compensation for annual training and for orders in lieu of annual training in the same calendar year, so long as this time does not exceed 30 days in a calendar year.
- It provides that a public employee's right to differential compensation is terminated if the public employee is on voluntary orders for 365 consecutive days. Upon a return to work for more than 90 days, the public employee's right is reinstated.
- It clarifies the definition of "active service" and adds a definition for "orders in lieu of annual training."

This bill has an immediate effective date. This bill passed out of the House and was amended in the Senate. It has returned to the House, so that the House can concur with the Senate's changes.



# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ News from the Capitol

**SB 39** amends the Electric Vehicle Charging Act, specifically section 10 which is titled “Applicability.” It provides that the provisions of the Act do not apply to any tiny home for homeless veterans or veterans at risk of homelessness if the tiny home is constructed by a non-profit organization described in Section 501 (c) (3) or 501 (c) (19) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 that exclusively funds and administers “projects and services” for veterans. It provides that organizations constructing homes for these veteran populations must sign an affidavit stating that all buildings being constructed are for this population. It provides that counties and municipalities cannot adopt building codes or ordinances requiring EV-capable parking spaces for these particular homes. SB 39 defines “tiny home” and includes a definition for “veteran.” This bill has an immediate effective date. SB 39 passed out of the Senate and was amended in the House. It has returned to the Senate, so that the Senate can concur with the House’s changes.

# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ IDVA Is Hiring

IDVA offers a wide range of opportunities for people motivated to serve those who served. In the five residential Veterans’ Homes, positions include VNACs, nurses, activities professionals, dietitians, cooks, engineers, physical therapists, and more. Veteran Service Officer positions are available across the state. Central Office hires human resources and fiscal professionals and other support staff. The State of Illinois offers extraordinary benefits, including schedule options. Attend one of IDVA’s virtual job fairs to learn more about the hiring process and important job search and interview skills. Available positions may be found here: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/about-us/idvajobs.html>.

★ Serve those who served ★

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

Date	Time	Event Registration
6/2/2025	7:30-8:15 A.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin
6/4/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	Creating a Profile
6/6/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points
6/10/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks
6/12/2025	1:30-2:15 P.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks
6/16/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
06/18/2025	12:30-1:15 P.M.	Creating a Profile
6/25/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
6/27/2025	12:00-2:45 P.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin
6/30/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS





# 25 Women Veteran Leaders in 2025

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Program will continue to celebrate its 25 Illinois Women Veterans Leaders of 2025, honored at the first annual luncheon held on March 31, 2025. IDVA, in partnership with the USDVA, received nominations from women veterans who demonstrated extraordinary leadership and support to the veteran community.



## Stephanie Kifowit

Since 2013, State Representative Stephanie Kifowit has represented the 84th District, serving Aurora, Oswego, Naperville, and Montgomery communities. As the only female veteran and United States Marine in the General Assembly, she is

Chairperson of the Personnel & Pension Appropriations Committee, Vice-Chairperson of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and a Committee Member of the General Service Appropriations Committee and Personnel and Pension Committee.

She served at Camp Pendleton, California, and Camp Foster, Okinawa, Japan. Her service culminated in an honorable discharge in 1994, accompanied by commendations including the Good Conduct Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Rifle Marksman Badge, Two Meritorious Masts, Meritorious Unit Commendation, and Certificate of Commendation.

She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and a master's in public administration from Northern Illinois University. Her commitment to public service extended to the City of Aurora, where she served as an Alderman for over nine years. Her son is serving in the Navy aboard the USS Ralph Johnson, stationed in Yokosuka, Japan.



## Cassandra Taylor

Cassandra Taylor, U.S. Army veteran and Founder and CEO of veteran service organization Top Flight Defense, Inc., educates veterans on critical issues that shape daily life from wellness and reproductive health to mental health, financial literacy,

and homelessness. Cassandra recruits experts to foster dialogue and deliver impactful education. She is a published author and has shared her experiences and insights in *Why I Serve*, co-author of "When a Woman's Fed Up." She volunteers with K9 For Veterans, is a member of the National Association of Black Military Women, and proudly represents Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Since 2019, she has resided in Joliet, IL, where she continues to inspire and advocate for service members, veterans, and women leaders.

Cassandra served in the Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield, and Operation Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom. She continues to lead with compassion and purpose, building stronger, healthier communities wherever she serves.



# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Veterans' Homes



## Veterans' Home at Quincy: Dogwood Parade

Left to Right: IDVA employees: Russel Whitaker (Laundry), Bev McPike (Housekeeping), Chris Dever (Housekeeping & who created the float), Chuck Newton (Administrator), and Kelvin Roberts (Social Services). Doug Campbell (Carpenter) pulled the float with his truck.

The Quincy Dogwood Celebration is an annual spring event in Quincy, organized by the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by Blessing Health System. It's a celebration of spring and community, featuring a parade along Maine Street with marching bands, floats, and walkers. The theme for this 55th annual parade was "Celebrating Our Heritage." Educate, Celebrate, and Commemorate. Of the 100 parade entries, the Veterans' Home at Quincy's float earned the Mayor's Award.



**Veterans' Home at LaSalle:** Bailie Bongartz (Director of Volunteer Services), and Maria Reed (Adjutant), participate in the Veterans Expo at the Peru Airport. The event was sponsored by the LaSalle County Veterans Assistance Commission and in partnership with the TBM Avenger Reunion and Air Show.

# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Partners



There's

## More Work

To Be Done

#MFLS2025

[Take the Survey](#)

Blue Star Families **Military Family Lifestyle Survey**

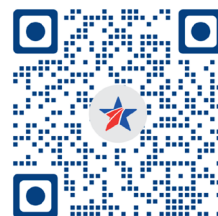
## Blue Star Families Survey

Calling all active-duty, National Guard, Reserve, veterans, and their families! Your voice matters — make it heard. This is your chance to inform decision-makers and shape the resources designed to support you.

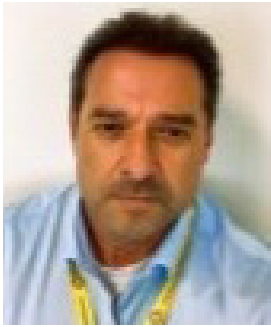
After more than 15 years of advocacy, Blue Star Families remains committed to two key goals:

1. Ensuring military families feel a strong sense of belonging.
2. Providing a platform for families to voice their experiences freely and openly.

Your participation is crucial to inspiring change for the military and Veteran community. Will you take a few minutes to share what matters most to you? Take the survey from now until June 11th and help amplify the voices of military families everywhere.







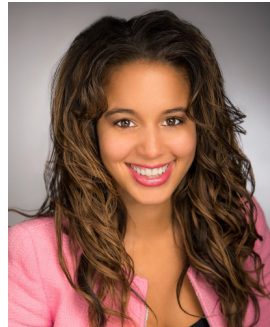
### Shannon Clay

Shannon Clay, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, joins IDVA as the Director of Labor Relations. Shannon brings over 25 years of leadership experience in labor relations, employee engagement, and strategic workforce planning. Before joining IDVA, Shannon

served as the Chief Labor Relations Officer at the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, where he led the daily operations of the Labor Relations Office. In that role, he played a key part in fostering collaborative union partnerships, ensuring the fair and consistent application of collective bargaining agreements, and supporting agency goals through sound labor strategies.

Throughout his career, Shannon has been a trusted advisor to leadership and a skilled negotiator, known for building strong relationships across labor unions, management teams, and oversight bodies. He is passionate about promoting a workplace culture grounded in fairness, accountability, and continuous improvement, and brings a hands-on, solutions-oriented approach to every challenge.

Shannon is headquartered in Springfield.



### Hannah Bonecutter

Hannah Bonecutter joins IDVA as Senior Policy Advisor after completing the Class of 2022 Presidential Management Fellow (PMF), where she served as a Management and Program Analyst for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office

of Enterprise Integration (OEI) in Washington, DC. She also served as a Policy and Communications Analyst for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Global Health Center (GHC) Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) Regional Office in Tbilisi, Georgia, and other surrounding areas.

Hannah earned her Master of Public Health, with a Health Policy and Administration Division, Global Health Concentration, and Health Disparities Research Certificate from the University of Illinois Chicago. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with a Concentration in Mathematics from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Hannah is a licensed educator who taught in Chicago Public Schools and locations across the globe, including Madagascar and Delhi, India.

Hannah is an award-winning filmmaker, actress, spoken word poet, and public speaker.

She is headquartered in Chicago.





# Join CPD



## TEST DATES:

May 30 and May 31

## TESTING TIMES:

8:00 am and 1:30 pm

## LOCATIONS:

Daley College	7500 S Pulaski Rd
Malcolm X College	1900 W Jackson Blvd
Olive-Harvey College	10001 S Woodlawn Ave
Wilbur Wright College	4300 N Narragansett Ave
Kennedy-King College	6301 S Halsted St

## MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS:

21 years of age  
Valid State of Illinois Drivers License  
US Citizen or legal resident  
60 semester hour from accredited college or university.  
Combine or substitute education requirement with military service:  
30 semester hours and 1 year of continuous active duty service in the U.S. Armed Forces.  
**or** 2 years of continuous service in the U.S. Armed Forces.

## COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION BENEFIT PACKAGE:

Tuition Reimbursement  
Paid Vacation  
Paid Holidays  
Paid Sick Days  
Medical, Dental, Vision Plan  
Pension Plan  
Deferred Compensation  
Paid Academy

**Starting Salary \$93,186 (After 18 months)**

The 60 semester hour college or university education requirement will be waived for candidates with experience as:

### 2 YEARS:

- An active duty member of the Armed Forces of the United States
- Peace officer

### 3 YEARS:

- Reserve/National Guard
- Correctional officer
- Detention officer
- Licensed professional security or private security contractor
- Professional in a trade industry
- A social service, health care service or education professional



**THE NEXT GENERATION OF  
CHICAGO POLICE OFFICERS**





# 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.**



**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF  
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★ Follow us

