



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 5, Issue 12 ★ December 2025



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

Wow! Are we really at the end of 2025? Looking back on the past year, we are proud to once again have made history in the State of Illinois for our treasured veterans when we opened our new Veterans' Home in Quincy, Illinois. This fantastic example of engineering and a \$300 million investment immediately enhanced the lives of its residents and our IDVA staff who are delivering extraordinary care. The project included an independent living building where we can house up to 88 veterans in studio and one-bedroom apartments, along with the long-term care building for 288 residents. Governor Pritzker visited the Home for the official ribbon-cutting ceremony, where the residents, staff, and community celebrated. It's a momentous occasion when a state opens a new Veterans' Home, and in the past two and a half years, Illinois opened two homes, one in Chicago and the buildings in Quincy. This is a testament to Illinois' commitment to the quality of care for its veterans.

This year, IDVA has advocated strongly for Illinois veterans. While these numbers reflect our fiscal year, July 1st through June 30th, they represent the transformative impact the team has had on Illinois veterans. Our VSOs conducted over 19,000 in-person and nearly 45,000 telephone interviews. These interactions resulted in providing direction, information, and preparation of 18,000 state and federal benefit applications.

If you are out and about at special events, you may have visited one of our VSOs who attended over 300 events across the state. We are growing the Field Services team by hiring additional Veterans Service Officers and outreach coordinators who will continue to get out into the community and find the veterans, where they live and work.

The Veterans Cash Lottery Grant program disbursed nearly \$1.2 million in funding for veterans' programs addressing concerns, including PTSD, homelessness, and job training.

Our program's teams offered a wide variety of events for Gold Star Families, Remembrance Day ceremonies, Veterans' Day at the State Fair, and the 250th birthday of the United States Marine Corps, U.S. Army and U.S. Navy. Also, 25 women veterans were honored in the inaugural class of "25 Women Veterans in 2025."

Our goal is to inform veterans about services, benefits, and programs that support them while also sharing the important events and work taking place across the Agency. We enter 2026 energized to continue building on our successful efforts and innovating new and better ways to serve veterans. It is our privilege and passion to serve veterans, in our continuing mission to ensure veterans thrive in Illinois.

Happy Holidays and may the New Year bring and you and your family many blessings.

Sincerely,

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



Gold Star Christmas Tree Lighting

IDVA presented the 2025 Gold Star Christmas tree at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library on December 8th, dedicated to Illinois heroes who lost their lives in combat. Gold Star families decorated the tree with personalized ornaments commemorating each Illinois hero who lost their life. The tree was lit following a program featuring IDVA Director Terry Prince and Major General Rodney Boyd, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. The tree is available for the public and visitors to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library through the end of December. It is a space to reflect on and remember their sacrifice and commitment to our nation's freedoms. For more information on visiting the Museum: <https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/>



Seeley Smith and IDVA Director Terry Prince hang the ornaments of 333 Illinois heroes.



Adjutant General, Illinois National Guard Major General Rodney Boyd with IDVA Director Terry Prince, Seeley Smith (hero Gerrick Smith), Sue Wieczorek, (hero Robert Weinger), and Gay Eisenhauer, (hero Wyatt Eisenhauer).



Field Services

Field Services is growing its team of Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) to broaden its reach to veterans across Illinois. It has recruited, hired, and trained veterans who are poised and eager to guide other veterans in obtaining their earned benefits. They complete rigorous training to learn about available benefits and the claims process to position themselves to support veterans at the highest level. As veterans, they can relate to the many challenges of transitioning from military service and uncovering what is possible from education to health care to employment and beyond.

Tim Coutu, *Saline County*

Tim Coutu, an Army veteran, joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer for Saline County. Before joining IDVA, he was a patient advocate for the Marion Veteran Affairs Medical Center and a juvenile justice specialist for the Illinois Youth Center in Harrisburg. Tim served two tours in Iraq with Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. He was an All Source Intelligence Analyst stationed at 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and a G2 SSO and Intelligence Training NCO to the Iraqi Security Forces of MND-1North.

Tim is a proud father of three sons, one who serves in the Army, and enjoys drag racing and building engines.

"I am a proud Army veteran who is excited to be given the opportunity to further assist my fellow brothers and sisters in the Armed Forces as the Saline County Veteran Service Officer. I stand ready to assist those in need as well as their families."

320 E Raymond St, Harrisburg, IL 62946

Office: 618-253-2005

Mobile: 618-926-1918

Tim.Coutu@illinois.gov

Hours: M-F: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Patrick Unzicker, *Livingston County/Pontiac*

Patrick Unzicker, an Army veteran, joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer in Livingston County/Pontiac. Patrick joins IDVA after teaching High School Shop Class, including woodwork, automotive, small gas engines, and welding. For ten years, he owned a custom cabinet shop. His 24-years of service in the Army included 17 years in Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), four years in Infantry, and three years in the Army Reserve. He was deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. His final duty station was Fort Hood, TX, where he commanded the 79th EOD Battalion.

110 West Water Street, Suite 4

Pontiac, Illinois 61764

Direct Line: 217-558-8345

Cell: 815-419-4448

patrick.unzicker@illinois.gov

Hours: M-F: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Patrick Sergeant, *Champaign*

Patrick Sergeant, Army Reserve veteran, joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer located in Champaign. Before joining IDVA, he served in various roles at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, where he retired as the Director of Facilities for the College of Veterinary Medicine. Patrick served in the Army Reserve for 17 years and continues his service as a Master Sergeant Army Reserve Career Counselor with the Army Reserve Careers Group, Ft. Knox, KY. His grandfather enlisted in the Army Air Corps in January 1941, where he spent two years in the Pacific Theater and retired from the Air. His wife, Melissa, is a 2nd-grade teacher at Northeast Elementary in Danville. Patrick enjoys boating, fishing, camping, and spending time with his family.

201 W. Springfield Ave., Suite 502

Champaign, IL 61820

Office: 217-278-3388

Mobile: 217-714-8518

Patrick.sargent@illinois.gov

Hours: M-F: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Christopher Burton, *Peoria County*

Christopher Burton, a Marine Corps and Army veteran, joined IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer in Peoria County. Before IDVA, he was a Veterans Employment Representative for the Illinois Department of Employment Security. In the Marine Corps, he was an Air Traffic Controller and Direct Air Support Net Operator, and as a Respiratory Therapist in the Army. His family has a rich history of service, including a brother, a cousin, a nephew, and two sons. His wife Rebecca is a hospice nurse, and together they have four sons and three granddaughters. He enjoys camping, fishing, woodwork, and spending time with family.

401 Main Street, Suite 650

Peoria, IL 61602

Office: 309-671-3080

Cell: 309-271-3486

christopher.c.burton@illinois.gov

Hours: M-F: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM



Field Services

Ryan Anderson, Galesburg/ Knox County

Ryan Anderson, a U.S. Army veteran, joins IDVA serving Galesburg/ Knox County. Before IDVA, he was a youth counselor/correction officer for the Mary Davis Youth Detention Center, and a canine trainer for the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in Muscatine, Iowa. He served seven years in the Army as a Mine Dog Handler/Trainer and was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. He was stationed at Fort Stewart, GA, and Fort Leonard Wood, MO. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and a Master's in Business Administration from Upper Iowa University. He enjoys fishing, camping, traveling, and dog training. He has two daughters and a granddaughter.

"Service doesn't stop when the uniform comes off."

311 East Main Street, Suite 202

Galesburg, IL 61401

Cell: 815-441-8382

Ryan.K.Anderson2@illinois.gov

Hours: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Chad Faxon, Mt. Vernon

Chad Faxon, Marine Corps veteran, joins IDVA as the Southern Region Office Coordinator. He served from 2001 to 2008 as a Parachute Rigger in Okinawa, Japan. Chad currently lives in Macomb but will be moving to Mt. Vernon once the office is established.

Errol Britt, Vermillion County

Errol Britt, United States Marine Corps veteran, joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer in Vermillion County. Errol brings 40 years of Illinois state government experience to his role. In the Marine Corps, he served three years at Camp Pendleton as a Traffic Management Specialist. Other duties included Shipping Receiving Clerk and Manager, Household Good and Claims Clerk, and Passenger Travel Clerk. He also served three years in Indianapolis as a USM-RC Reservist Supply Manager with Electronic Maintenance Company. He also served as USMC Weapons Training Coach while serving during active-duty military enlistment in Okinawa, Japan.

Errol is an avid sports fan, including football, basketball, racing, baseball, bowling, tennis, boxing, and cross-training sports (weight-training, running, cycling), fishing, and marksmanship. He enjoys traveling and video gaming.

"Strive toward generosity, kindness, and peace with whom ever you come across, as much as possible, whenever it's possible because you never know what their story is and what they've experienced or had to carry with them. Love, effective communication, and understanding of others is the message. Peace and blessings."

Danville VAMC

1900 E Main Street, Bldg. 98

Danville, IL

Phone: 217-584-4077

Errol.britt@illinois.gov

Hours: M-F: 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM



Field Services spreading holiday cheer. Left to right: SAA/VETS Administrator Jeffrey Lewis, Field Training Coordinator Ken Bonner (virtual), Administrator Dan Brown (recently left IDVA), Central Region Coordinator and acting Southern Region Coordinator Kimberly Yantis, Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Beckford (virtual), Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson, and Field Services Manager Mark Patterson.



Field Services

Heather Meyers, Coles and Edgar County

Heather Meyers, Active Guard Reserve (AGR), Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG), joins IDVA as a Veterans Service Officer serving Coles and Edgar County. Before joining IDVA, she was the Outreach Coordinator for The Salvation Army, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). Heather served for more than 26 years in the Illinois Army National Guard Active Guard Reserve. Throughout her military career, she held progressively responsible leadership positions, including Squad Leader, First Sergeant, Senior Human Resources and Medical Branch Supervisor, Administrative and Operations Supervisor, and Physical Security Manager. She was deployed to Germany in 2002 and to Iraq from 2006-2007, where she served as a Squad Leader in a combat environment. Her service has been recognized through numerous military decorations, reflecting sustained excellence, leadership, and commitment to mission success.

Heather comes from a family with a strong military tradition. Her grandfathers served in the Army during World War II. Both of her sisters have served in the Illinois Army National Guard (AGR), with one still actively serving. She also has a cousin who served in the Marines and another who served in the ILARNG. Continuing the family legacy, her nephew has started his chapter in his military career with the ILARNG.

"With over 26 years of experience training and providing administrative support to Illinois Army National Guard service members and their families, I am honored to begin this next chapter by serving the Veteran community. I am dedicated to offering professional, informed guidance on benefit eligibility and connecting Veterans and their families with the resources they need and deserve."

1550 Douglas Avenue

Charleston, IL 61920

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Mobile: 447-449-1532

heather.meyers@illinois.gov

Hours:

Charleston (Main) Office:

Tuesday - Friday Hours: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm

[closed for lunch from 12:00 pm - 12:30pm]

Itinerate Site Mattoon CBOC:

1st and 3rd Monday - Hours: 8:00 am - 4:00pm

[closed for lunch from 12:00 pm - 12:30pm]

Itinerate Site Paris American Legion:

2nd and 4th Monday - Hours: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm

[closed for lunch from 12:00 pm - 12:30pm]



Veteran Service Officer Gerald Enriquez participates in the Nicor Gas special event.



Veteran Service Officer Brandon Yagers at the City of Chicago's Veterans Business Enterprise Day at the Chicago Cultural Center.



★ ★ ★ ★ IDVA is Hiring

Join Team IDVA in serving those who served. IDVA offers meaningful work in a wide variety of fields, including in our Veterans' Homes, field services, and central office. Positions include:

- **Veterans Homes:** Registered Nurses, Veterans Nurses Assistants Certified, Dietary, Social Workers, Activities professionals, engineers, and more
- **Field Services:** Veteran Service Officers, Office Coordinators
- **Central Office:** Fiscal, Human Resources, Support Services

Working for Illinois offers excellent benefits and flexibility.

- Top health insurance benefits
- Generous time off benefits
- Pension, Deferred Compensation Multiple, scheduled pay increases
- Paid Holidays annually
- Pay Differential
- Tuition Reimbursement
- Much more!

IDVA provides a supportive environment that encourages growth while giving back to veterans in gratitude for their service.

To learn more about opportunities at IDVA, visit:



Participate in one of IDVA's virtual job fairs to learn resume, interviewing, and applying tips.

Veterans' Home at Quincy is Hiring Registered Nurses

Serve Those Who Served

Benefit from meaningful work in a supportive work environment. Receive excellent benefits, retirement plans, competitive salaries, and work-life balance. Deliver compassionate, person-centered care to Illinois' heroes.

Learn More: Job Fair
January 8, 2026
10:00 AM to 2:00 PM
Veterans' Home at Quincy
Lippincott Hall
1707 North 12th Street, Quincy, IL

Excellent Benefits

- Top health insurance benefits
- Generous time off benefits
- Pension, Deferred Compensation Multiple, scheduled pay increases
- Paid Holidays annually
- Pay Differential
- Tuition Reimbursement
- Much more!

To learn more and apply:

Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs **Illinois Department of Employment Security**

★ 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
1/2/2026	10:00-10:45 AM	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
1/5/2026	12:00-12:45 PM	How to read a Job Bulletin
1/6/2026	2:00-2:45 PM	Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward
1/6/2026	5:30-6:15 PM	Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward
1/7/2026	9:00-9:45 AM	Interview Tips and Tricks
1/9/2026	10:00-10:45 AM	How to Certify Your Veterans Points
1/12/2026	5:30-6:15 PM	Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward
1/15/2026	2:00-2:45 PM	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
1/20/2026	9:00-9:45 AM	How to read a Job Bulletin
1/20/2026	5:30-6:15 PM	How to read a Job Bulletin
1/21/2026	12:00-12:45 PM	Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward
1/22/2026	1:00-1:45 PM	Interview Tips and Tricks
1/28/2026	1:00-1:45 PM	How to Certify Your Veterans Points

Alexa Koziol

Alexa Koziol joins IDVA as its Director of Legislative Affairs. She brings 11 years of experience as the Legislative Liaison for the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), where she engaged and built relationships with legislators and child welfare lobbyists. She tracked an average of 115 pieces of legislation every session. She worked alongside DCFS's Policy and Communications teams to ensure that new laws were implemented and that the public was educated about the changes. Alexa has four siblings and a two-month-old niece.

"I'm excited to join IDVA. Everyone on the team has been incredibly helpful and welcoming. I come from a family of service members and can't wait to represent this agency at the Capitol."

Veterans' Homes

Throughout December, the Illinois Veterans' Homes celebrated the holiday season with a variety of events, programs, and parties. The veterans enjoyed cookies, hot chocolate, and were serenaded by carolers, all while receiving goody bags, among many other festivities. As part of their approach to care for the whole person, the Homes activities professionals create activities and programs so the residents enjoy holidays, changes of season, sports, music, and more.

Veterans' Home at Manteno



Bruce Mettlock, US Army, Gulf War with Santa and Mrs. Claus.



Leroy Schweitzer, US Army, Korean War, lighting up the holiday.



Bill Skowronski, US Army, Vietnam, finds the Grinch to be very friendly.



Larry Boyer, US Navy Vietnam Veteran, and his wife Lou. Larry enjoy a holiday meal.

Veterans' Home at Chicago: Fiscal Team



Top Row (left to right): Mechella Willis, Becky Ronneberg, Tasheema Bray, Grinch, Best Ezekiel, Kirsten Berman, Maria Doruelo Bottom: Julia Moreno, Jennifer Malone, Danial Villarreal, Sonia Segarra, Luz Gonzalez

Call for Nominations for the 25 Illinois Women Veterans Leaders of 2026

We are seeking women Veterans in Illinois who demonstrate leadership, mentoring, and advocacy in their Veteran communities. Nominate yourself or another women Veteran to be recognized.

Nominations are open from **December 1, 2025 at 8:00 AM** and will close on **February 1, 2026 at 12:00 PM**.

Nomination Criteria

- Must be an Illinois Resident
- Military Service and Accomplishments
- Leadership and Mentorship in the Veterans' Community
- For full details on the Nominee Criteria, please review the survey
- Individuals honored in 2025 will not be eligible for consideration in the 2026 selection cycle

Website Link for Submission or scan QR Code

- <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/J59SKP2>



For any further questions

- Email: Angela.stpaul@va.gov
- Womenveterans@illinois.gov



★ ★ ★ ★ Women Veterans



For the very first time in history, we are proud to announce that IDVA's Women Veterans Program has exceeded its goal of registering over 500 women veterans in the Military Women's Memorial's (MWM) National Register, earning the distinguished Gold Status for the first time. Women veterans from across the country are engaging in the Strive for 500 campaign by sharing their stories of military service in the MWM's register.

The mission of the Military Women's Memorial (MWM), located at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, is to honor, educate, and empower future generations by preserving the stories of women veterans in their own words. Women veterans are encouraged to share their stories at [Home - Military Women's Memorial](#).

★ ★ ★ ★ IDVA Central Office

IDVA Central Office Meets Its State and University Employees' Combined Appeal Goal

IDVA Central Office pulled out all the stops to raise money for its State and University Employees Combined Appeal (SECA) where it met its ambitious goal of \$3,000 for the second year in a row. The team enjoyed popcorn, baked goods, and ice cream. The chili cook-off, Halloween décor contest, and sports week brought out their competitive spirit. They showed their appreciation for one another with deliveries of carnations. Each activity requested a modest donation, which culminated in a generous donation to the United Way. The three months of activity culminated in creatively crafted silent auction baskets, including a Grinch-themed basket, gift cards, baking baskets, and more. Thank you to everyone who participated in helping IDVA reach its goal.





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.