



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 6, Issue 1 ★ January 2026



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

As we move into the New Year, I want to take a moment to thank you for keeping in touch with IDVA. Whether you are a veteran, family member, staff member, or interested reader, you play a major role in our fellow veterans' lives. This is always a great time to reflect on where we've been, check in on our progress, and recommit ourselves to the veterans we serve every day.

This past year brought incredible opportunities, challenges, and progress for the veterans of Illinois. Through it all, our focus as an Agency remained clear: Helping veterans and their families thrive in Illinois with the care, respect, and support they have earned. I am extremely grateful to our staff for their professionalism and compassion, to our partners for their collaboration, and to our veterans and families for their trust.

In this issue, you will read about the Veterans' Home at Chicago celebrating its fourth anniversary and the opening of its Specialty Care unit, a floor dedicated to providing skilled, long-term care to veterans with memory loss. We also paid a visit to the Manteno Home to congratulate the adjutant and food service manager for their great work in dazzling our veteran residents with new food options. They also opened the Pentagon Café, offering a diner-style service in a welcoming place, to socialize and build community.

We also welcomed new members to our ever-growing lineup of Veteran Service Officers and administrative support team while bidding "Fair Winds and Following Seas" to Chuck Bosko, who served as our appeals representative for over 12 years. Chuck is a U.S. Army Veteran who served in the Vietnam War, and I can't think of anyone better to have represented countless veterans at their VA appeal hearings.

As I write this, we are celebrating the work of our activities teams during Activity Professionals Week. These unsung heroes provide many of the behind-the-scenes events that help our veterans thrive. In our homes, they are hosting concerts, art events, and of course, Bingo! Want to see how you can help? Consider volunteering. We have an incredible group of volunteers. Come on out and join us.

The IDVA Women Veterans Program is excited about the upcoming 2026 class of Women Veteran Leaders. This is the second year of our program that recognizes women veterans who are making a difference in their communities. If you haven't already nominated someone, you have until Feb 1 to do so.

Looking ahead, 2026 will be a year of strengthening services, supporting our employees, and planning for the future needs of veterans. We will continue to focus on the veteran experience, quality of care, operational excellence, and advocacy for the resources necessary to meet a growing demand for services. Your feedback and engagement will remain essential as we move forward together.

Sincerely,

Terry Prince, Director and U.S. Navy Veteran

Veterans' Home at Chicago Opens Specialty Care Unit

The Veterans' Home at Chicago celebrated its fourth anniversary by opening its Specialty Care Unit for veterans seeking memory care. The unit accommodates 44 residents and will be full by the end of February. To celebrate, veterans and their families enjoyed a speaking program, ribbon cutting, and refreshments. The Home welcomed its first residents on January 20th, 2022, and since then has cared for over 150 residents. It is now home to 101 veterans with plans to fill it to capacity with 200 residents.

"For four years, the Chicago team has been diligent in caring for veterans in a Home that facilitates extraordinary care in a dignified and comfortable setting," said IDVA Director Terry Prince. "The opening of the Specialty Care Unit exemplifies IDVA's commitment to continuing to expand the Home and provide another level of care for Illinois veterans."

The Home, located on Chicago's northwest side, is the first Veterans' Home in Cook County, and the fifth in the State. With 56% of Illinois veterans residing in Cook County, the location was selected to bring veterans closer to their families and network. The \$121 million project is part of Governor JB Pritzker's Rebuild Illinois.

The Home offers 200-private rooms for veterans requiring skilled residential or specialty care, delivered by a team of medical professionals and staff, who are committed to the highest level of compassionate care. The state-of-the-art facility is designed around pods of living and dining areas, which creates community and camaraderie. Residents have access to a garden, terrace, library, barber shop, bank, and a physical rehabilitation center. Local artist Indira Johnson created custom, interactive artwork for every floor, themed "Helping Hands," to reflect the commitment of the IDVA staff who are caring for their resident. Additionally, an IDVA Veteran Service Officer is available to assist veterans with questions regarding state and federal benefits.

The Home is licensed to operate by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and certified by the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs (USDVA).



IDVA Director Prince, United States Air Force Veteran and President of the Homes' Residential Council Thomas Souter, and Home Administrator Jennifer Malone cut the ceremonial ribbon opening the Specialty Care Unit.



US Air Force Veteran and President of the Resident Council Thomas Souter delivers remarks regarding his positive experience with the Home's care and calling the Veterans' Home at Chicago, "home." He is accompanied by Home Administrator Jennifer Malone.



IDVA Director Terry Prince congratulates Home Administrator Jennifer Malone on the opening of the Specialty Care Unit. He thanked her for her dedication to ensure veterans receive the highest level of care in a welcoming community.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Veterans' Home at Chicago

St. Ignatius College Preparatory Students Volunteer at the Veterans' Home at Chicago

Senior Students from Chicago's St. Ignatius College Prep volunteered at the Veterans' Home at Chicago as part of its Capstone program. Capstone, in its inaugural year, allows seniors to spend the first three weeks of the second semester of their senior year volunteering at selected sites. The students engaged with veterans playing games, giving manicures, sharing stories, and enjoying meals. At the Fourth Anniversary celebration and opening of the Specialty Care Unit, the seniors acted as greeters and served veterans snacks and drinks at the reception following the program.

"The students brought energy and smiles to our veterans," said Administrator Jennifer Malone. "They built relationships, brightened the veterans' days, and were invaluable to our staff."



Students cheer on U.S. Navy and Air Force veteran John Galbreath (Jack).



*Front row: left to right: Home Administrator Jennifer Malone, Pilar, Lucy, Grace, Lili, Lizzy, Kate, Frank, Peter Corrigan (Capstone Program Director).
Back row: Brady, Ben, Aidan, Patrick, Jay, JD, and IDVA Director Terry Prince.*

New Field Services Staff

Tyler Janiak, *Sterling, Whiteside County*

Tyler Janiak joins IDVA as a Veteran Service Officer in the Sterling, Whiteside County office. Tyler is a U.S. Army veteran and former IDVA VSO in LaSalle, comes back to IDVA after serving as a Rating Veteran Service Officer for the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Tyler served from 2012-2015, where he was a paralegal specialist in Ft. Campbell, KY, and was deployed with the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade to Afghanistan in 2014. He is married to Autumn and has two sons, Jeremiah and Jaxson. He enjoys youth sports with his children.

"I am excited to be back with IDVA, helping veterans and their families."

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Tyler.Janiak@Illinois.gov

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

Northern Office Coordinator Heather Judd

Heather Judd, U.S. Army Veteran, joins IDVA as the Northern Office Coordinator. Heather brings 28 years of experience in real estate title work, real estate law, liens against properties, probate, divorce, and guardianships. She also has personal experience with the VA claims process, having worked with Veteran Service Officer Tina Paggi, where her experience was positive and seamless.

Heather served as a 77F before transitioning from field operations to office operations due to an injury.

Machesney Park Armory

10451 North 2nd Street

Machesney Park, IL 61115

Phone: 815-420-0214

Fax: 815-633-6392

Heather.Judd@Illinois.gov

Hours: M-F: 7:30 AM - 3:30 PM



Veteran Service Office Brandon Jagers and World War II U.S. Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient Joseph Pensa.

Success Story: Field Services

On Tuesdays and every other Thursday, Veteran Service Officer Brandon Jagers sets up shop at the Evanston Vet Center, where he meets with veterans to discuss their earned benefits and services. In July 2025, Brandon met World War II U.S. Army Veteran and Purple Heart recipient Joseph Pensa. Joseph served in the Battle of Magdeburg in Germany and was wounded by shrapnel from a tank explosion. When Brandon informed Joseph and his niece Doreen Jamison that he was entitled to benefits, he immediately filed Joseph's first military-service-connected disability claim, yielding a 100 percent service-connected rating.

The day after meeting Joseph and filing his claim, Brandon invited Joseph and Doreen to view the Veterans' Home at Chicago, which is Brandon's home base. He assisted Joseph with the Home's application process. Joseph now calls the Veterans' Home at Chicago Home, at no cost to him and his family.



Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson III, Field Services Manager Mark Patterson, and IDVA Director Terry Prince congratulate Claims Management Center Veteran Service Officer Charles Bosko for his retirement after 12 years of representing veterans in appeal hearings.

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



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Activity Professionals Week

January 26-30: Beyond the Ordinary

Activity Professionals bring the fun! IDVA's five Veterans' Homes in Anna, Chicago, LaSalle, Manteno, and Quincy offer their creativity, energy, and enthusiasm to enrich the lives of veterans in our care. The activities are endless, from game watches to crafts to spa days. Each day, veterans may participate in an event or activity that engages them with the community and keeps them active. It brings them joy and purpose. Activities professionals are central to IDVA's holistic approach to the overall well-being of its veterans. "Beyond the Ordinary" is this year's theme, and IDVA's activities professionals are certainly extraordinary in every way. IDVA is grateful to the talented activity professionals who chose to serve veterans.



Veterans' Home at Manteno: left to right: Laura Bernal, Erin Keenan, Deb Harris, Justin Copeland. Not pictured: Mariah Sims, Isamar Andrade, Rachel Cunningham, Virisa Brock.



Veterans' Home at Quincy: Left to right: Tammy Baehr, Sandy Heaton, Whittany Flambeau, Kathy Bernard, BJ Spangler, Sara Colgrove, Scott Alberts, Mia Meacher, Susan Nowell, Bobbi Mock, Rachel Stuckman, Kim Gilley. Not available for photo: Marikkia Velez



Veterans' Home at Anna: Activity Professional Alinda Heron and Activity Aide Tamara Graves with Elvis.

News from the Capitol

Illinois Representative Maurice West (67th District), the Chiefs of Staff for Senator Steve Stadelman (34th District) and Representative Dave Vella (68th District), Rockford Alderman Tamir Bell, and members of the VFW and American Legion toured the Veterans' Home at LaSalle, where they got a sneak peek at the ongoing renovations. Following the tour, the group participated in a round table discussion about Illinois Veterans' Homes.



left to right: Army Staff Sergeant (retired) Jeff Metheney, VFW State Adjutant/Quartermaster Scott Swinford, IDVA Director Terry Prince, Illinois State Senator Steve Stadelman's Chief of Staff Mark Bonne, VFW of Illinois Chaplain Gary Holmes, Illinois State Representative Maurice West, VFW of Illinois Surgeon Doug Jameson, American Legion Post 340 Commander Ray Richmond, and Rockford Alderman Tamir Bell.

IDVA is Hiring

IDVA is hiring across the agency in its Veterans' Homes, Field Services (Veteran Service Officers and staff), and Central Office. Join a team in serving those who served in a supportive environment where the team is encouraged to grow. State benefits include generous paid days off and retirement plans. To support those interested in state employment, each month IDVA offers virtual job fairs to learn best practices on applying for state jobs, utilizing veterans' benefit points, and tips for interviewing. Register for a class from the schedule provided. IDVA job postings can be found here: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/about-us/idvajobs.html>

2/2/2026	9:00-9:45 AM	IDVA Extraordinary Employees	
2/2/2026	5:30-6:15 PM	Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward	
2/3/2026	10:00-10:45 AM	How to read a Job Bulletin	
2/4/2026	9:00-9:45 AM	Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward	
2/4/2026	5:30-6:15 PM	Interview Tips and Tricks	
2/5/2026	12:00-12:45 PM	How to Certify Your Veterans Points	
2/6/2026	2:00-2:45 PM	IDVA Extraordinary Employees	
2/20/2026	10:00-10:45 AM	How to read a Job Bulletin	
2/24/2026	10:00-10:45 AM	How to Certify Your Veterans Points	
2/24/2026	5:30-6:15 PM	Interview Tips and Tricks	



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
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

★ Follow us

