



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 5, Issue 7 ★ July 2025



★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

Please join us for Veterans Day in Springfield on August 10th and DuQuoin on August 24th at the Illinois State Fairs where we will celebrate all veterans, along with the 250th anniversaries of the United States Army, Marine Corps and Navy. The State Fair Days will be packed with ceremony, fellowship, and resources for veterans and their families. As always, Veterans and their immediate families are admitted to the grounds for free where they will enjoy a free lunch, discounts on all of the rides, veterans resource area and of course, the annual State Fair lapel pin--A true collector's item and keepsake to remind you of your big day. It's an opportunity for veterans to connect with old and new friends and to share stories and experiences. I always leave these days energized and grateful for the valuable time spent with my fellow veterans so please continue reading for the schedule and details for the day.

Later this year, IDVA will host a cake-cutting ceremony on November 10th in Springfield, commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States Marine Corps. Look for an announcement soon with all the details. We encourage all Marine Corps Active-Duty Service Members, veterans, and their families to attend.

IDVA recently welcomed its new Director of Human Resources, and we have created an ambitious recruiting and hiring campaign. Want to make a difference by serving those who served? The State of Illinois offers incredible opportunities for state employment, including work in any one of IDVA's Veterans' Homes, Veteran Service Offices, or at our Headquarters in Springfield and Chicago. We offer meaningful and secure employment with some of the best health care and pension benefits around. Serving veterans is meaningful work and IDVA strives to create a positive environment that helps veterans, and our employees, truly thrive in Illinois. Read on to learn about our virtual job fairs and access the link to state-wide job openings.

As we head into August, I hope you continue to enjoy the summer, and all that Illinois has to offer.

Thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely,

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

2025 Illinois State Fair

Veterans and Gold Star Families Day at the 2025 Illinois State Fair

Celebrating 250 years of the United States Army, Navy, and Marine Corps

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), the Illinois Department of Agriculture, and the [Illinois State Fair](#) invite veterans and their family members to enjoy a free day at the Illinois State Fair on Sunday, August 10, 2025. This celebration marks the 250th Birthdays of the United States Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. The speaking program will include readings and music relevant to the histories of the branches, and period clothing displays. The all-day veterans resource fair features representatives from veteran service organizations to provide valuable information and resources to veterans. The annual Veterans Day parade through the fairgrounds will conclude the celebration. A complimentary lunch is offered to veterans and their immediate family.

Veterans and their families may present any form of military ID for free admission. Parking is not included.

The schedule of events is as follows:

- 10:00 am JROTC Competition begins
- 11:30 am Welcome to Veterans Day: Lincoln Stage
- Noon Lunch (complimentary for veterans and immediate family)
Keynote Address: **Retired Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. Loren Easter**
- 3:00 pm JROTC Awards Ceremony
- 4:00 pm Veterans Parade (line up at the Firehouse)

Please contact Crystal Womack at crystal.womack@illinois.gov if you have additional questions.



IDVA 2024 Employee of the Year

IDVA is pleased to announce, Veterans' Home at Manteno's Pamela Shipp, RN, is the 2024 IDVA Employee of the Year. Pam's nomination referenced her extraordinary nursing skills, compassionate care, teamwork, and professional and positive attitude. Pam joined the Manteno Home in 2020 after a 24-year career at the Riverside Medical Center, where she served in medical-surgical, orthopedics, CCU, and obstetrics. Pam began her nursing career after earning her associate's nursing degree from Kankakee Community College. She says that joining the Manteno Home was the best decision she ever made. She loves what she does every day, taking care of our veterans. Pam has two children and grandchildren who bring her great joy.

In celebration of her selection as Employee of the Year, Pam will be awarded a Certificate of Achievement from Governor JB Pritzker, a designated parking spot, an identification badge, and a commemorative plaque.

The nominations included over 30 stellar IDVA employees. The common thread was a shared commitment to their colleagues, work environment, and their abundance of positivity and energy. Our committee evaluated each candidate on the following criteria: commitment, creativity, leadership, positive attitude, professionalism, teamwork, and versatility.



Veterans' Home at Manteno Administrator Tanya Smith, Employee of the Year Pamela Shipp, and IDVA Director Terry Prince.

Nominees for the 2024 Employee of the Year

Hillary Beck
Srijana Bhatta
Karen Boleaga
Amanda Bunch
Chantel Baker
Bailie Bongartz
Kenneth Bonner
Miki Doris
Jeff Eagler
Linda Flemming
Jennifer Franklin
Jasmine Freeman
Denise Goins
Anthony Harrison
Adriana "Ann" Holladay

Jackie Hughes
Robert Iverson
Lindsey Kelley
Erin Keenan
Danielle Luevano
Justin Macias
Kyla Mennecke
Malon Norfleet
Alfredo "Freddy" Rocha
Michelle Shear
Tonia Sherwood
Matthew Taylor
Amanda Tournear
Jessica Williams

Field Services

IDVA Veteran Service Officers (VSO) are a resource for veterans at events throughout the state. They are trained and have a wealth of knowledge on benefits, services, claims, and resources. Community outreach is a critical part of their work to ensure veterans are aware of IDVA's services and how VSOs can assist them in obtaining their earned benefits and services. Organizations that are interested in a VSO participating in an upcoming event may submit a request here:

<https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices/idva-special-event-attendance-request.html>



Veteran Service Officer Michele Richards at the VFW/VAC Veterans Resource Event in Wheaton



Veteran Service Officer Frank Delatorre attends the Wheeling Job Fair.



Veteran Service Officer Tanya Reyes (Des Plaines), attended the resource fair in Wheaton, hosted by the VAC of DuPage County.



Veteran Service Officer Dax Griffith attends the Senior Fair in the high school in Red Bud.



IDVA Chief of Staff Jassen Strokosch, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, attends the USMC Week wreath laying at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Chicago.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ IDVA is Hiring

IDVA Welcomes New Director of Human Resources

Alex Bautista joins IDVA with a rich background in public service, where he focused on fostering and maintaining positive workplace cultures. Alex most recently served as the Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Human Rights, as the principal policy advisor to the agency director, where he also administered the agency's civil rights enforcement program. Before this role, he was the Director of Human Resources for the Office of the Mayor for the City of Urbana where he led recruiting, labor relations management, and workforce development. Alex will lead IDVA's ambitious goals for recruiting, training, and retaining IDVA's workforce across the agency. The candidate pool is diverse, including medical professionals for its five Veterans' Homes, Veteran Service Officers, and Central Office staff.

Alex is a certified Senior Professional in Human Resources Management (SPHR) and facilitator in several areas, including the Governor's Office Academy of Leadership (GOAL) program. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"It is an honor and a privilege to serve all who have served our nation," said Alex regarding his new role with IDVA.

He is the son of a U.S. Army Vietnam War veteran.



Left to right: Recruiter & HR Specialist Adriana "Ann" Holladay, HR Director Alex Bautista, Recruiter and HR Specialist Candice Rudd.

As part of its ambitious recruiting campaign, IDVA participated in an all-state hiring event in partnership with CMS and the Greater Taylorville Chamber of Commerce. IDVA advised over 50 job seekers with applications and instructions. Ann Holladay represented IDVA on a radio program on 96.1 FM, promoting the event.

If you are interested in joining Team IDVA, learn more at these virtual job fairs. Available jobs can 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
8/1/2025	3:00-3:45 P.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
8/5/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin
8/8/2025	12:00-12:45 P.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks
8/13/2025	5:30-6:15 P.M.	Creating a Profile
8/14/2025	10:00-10:45 A.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points
8/18/2025	12:00-12:45 P.M.	IDVA Extraordinary Employees
8/19/2025	7:30-8:15 A.M.	How to Read a Job Bulletin
8/21/2025	2:00-2:45 P.M.	Creating a Profile
8/25/2025	10:30-11:15 A.M.	Interview Tips and Tricks
8/27/2025	2:30-3:15 P.M.	How to Certify Your Veterans Points

IDVA ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Women Veterans

25 Women Veteran Leaders in 2025

Meet three additional women veteran leaders as part of the 25 Women Veteran Leaders in 2025. Women veterans were nominated and selected for their extraordinary leadership, contributions, and commitment to the women veteran community. Illinois is home to women veterans who served our nation with courage and sacrifice. They have contributed to the women veterans' community as advocates, innovators, and elected officials. Congratulations to the 25 Women Veteran Leaders of 2025.

★ 25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders of 2025 ★



Jill Henry
U.S. Army Veteran

Jill Henry, a U.S. Army veteran, is the ambassador for the Women's Memorial, a one-of-a-kind tribute to America's Servicewomen, past and present. She is also a member of Post 635's Honor Guard. She helped coordinate the First All-Women Veteran Flight to Washington, DC, Operation HerStory, from the state of IL. She won Legionnaire of the Year for 2021-2022.

Jill began her military career in 1973 at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing Program at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. After graduating with a BSN, followed by commissioning into the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in 1977, she specialized in Intensive Care Nursing. Following six years of ICU nursing, Jill was accepted into the Anesthesiology for ANC Officers Course, where she earned a Masters of Health Science as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA).

Jill served in Washington, D.C., Texas, Georgia, Kentucky, and Hawaii with a deployment to Saudi Arabia with the 15th Evacuation Hospital for Operation Desert Shield/Storm. Jill concluded her 20-year career in El Paso, TX, as an instructor in the Anesthesiology for ANC Officers Course. She attained the rank



★ 25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders of 2025 ★



Treasure Owens
United States Army Veteran

Treasure Owens is a six-year United States Army Veteran who served in Korea and Europe. She is the founder and chief executive officer of *Treasure Marketing*, which specializes in mission-driven businesses and nonprofits, with an emphasis on veteran services, youth programs, and criminal justice reform. Her clients include the National Veterans Art Museum, No Salt Sailing, Strugglebeard Bakery, and Merging

Veterans and Players. She has also provided informal consulting to organizations such as the Veterans Chamber of Commerce and Illinois Veterans for Change.

Additionally, Treasure served as a mentee, Program Facilitator, and past Social Media Manager for Ladies of Virtue, a nonprofit assisting girls ages nine to 18 in preparing for college and careers, and becoming change agents in their community. She served as one of the faces of its "This Black Girl Campaign," and spoke at its 2024 fundraiser, which raised over \$500,000 for the program.

Treasure has earned numerous accolades, including being named a Chicago Innovation Awards Nominee (2024), receiving the Jesse Brown Community Leader Award (2024), and the Project Management Institute's Team of the Year Award (2014). Her leadership, innovation, and passion continue to open doors and create new pathways for veterans, youth, and communities in need.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Women Veterans

★ 25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders of 2025 ★



Elisabeth Pennix
U.S. Navy Veteran

Elisabeth Pennix, an eight-year U.S. Navy veteran, was deployed to Iraq during the surge of forces in 2006-2007 and a Reserve deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba with the Military Commissions from 2015-2016. She began her law practice in the U.S. Navy JAG Corps in 2004.

Elisabeth served as the General Counsel for the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Assistant

Chief Counsel with the Department of Homeland Security, and since 2021, she has been the Deputy General Counsel at Sloan Global Holdings.

In her continued service in the Navy Reserves, Elisabeth is a Captain, Appellate Judge, and is recalled to active duty as the Staff Judge Advocate for the Regional Reserve command at Great Lakes.

Elisabeth is actively engaged with multiple nonprofit organizations, including one she cofounded, Operation HerStory, which honors women in the U.S. Military. She also serves on the boards of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library (PMML) and the Navy League, Chicago Council, and is an active member of Business Executives for National Security (BENS).



Women Veterans Coordinator Margo Watson and Veteran Service Officer Cynthia McKee (Chicago) participate in the VA Benefits Session and Veteran Coffee Chat at the Blue Door Community Center. The event focused on veteran suicide prevention through meaningful connections, conversations, and community support. The IDVA was on site to provide benefits assistance and resources, followed by a Veteran Coffee Chat, an open space for veterans, spouses, and supporters to come together, share their stories, and support one another.

★ #StriveFor500 ★

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

The Military Women's Memorial is a one-of-a-kind tribute to America's Servicewomen, past and present, and a world-class collection of military women's stories. It is the leading memorial honoring the commitment, contributions and experiences of Servicewomen.

Three million women have served in or with the Armed Forces since the American Revolution. By contributing names and information to the Register, you can help record and preserve stories that will otherwise be lost to history and unknown to future generations. Register TODAY and MAKE HERstory!



The Military Women's Memorial's #StriveFor500 campaign is in full swing and the goal is clear: every state and territory is working to register at least 500 military women in 2025 to preserve their powerful stories in the National Digital Repository.

Women Service Members, Veterans, and Reserve/National Guard, we're calling on YOU to help Illinois make history! Illinois is one of the larger states so let's make our registration numbers reflect that! We have thousands of women veterans in our state but last year only registered 231. So far this year, we are at 136. Let's show that Illinois Women Veterans Lead the Way!!



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.



Veterans' Homes

The Veterans' Home at Manteno won second place in the non-commercial category of the 50th Annual Bourbonnais Friendship Festival's Grand Parade.



Veterans' Home at Chicago

Chi Town Car Shows shared its stunning fleet of vintage cars to the residents of the Veterans' Home at Chicago.



U.S. Army Veterans Thomas Ogletree and Gary Kirchen (U.S. Army Veteran) check out a 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air.



U.S. Navy Veteran Benny Sigler admires a 1955 Oldsmobile 88.



Dog Tag empowers veterans with service-connected disabilities, military spouses, and caregivers to find renewed *purpose and community* through a combination of a bakery and an entrepreneurial fellowship program.

Application is Open Now!



SUMMER 2025 PROGRAM

Program Dates: July 15–Nov 20
Application Deadline: **March 28**

Learn More:

dogtaginc.org/fellowship
✉ fellowship@dogtaginc.org
📞 202.527.9388

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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**

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