

VETERANS JOURNAL

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

FEBRUARY 2024



New Veteran Service Office opens in Passaic County

From the State of New Jersey

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Mark C. Olsen



Leaders from the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; state legislators; and local and county officials join veteran and community organizations in opening a new NJDMAVA Veteran Services Office in the Passaic County Administration Building in Paterson, New Jersey, Oct. 18, 2023. The new office will serve as a one-stop resource for veterans and their families.

In conjunction with the Passaic County Administration, Gov. Philip D. Murphy announced the grand opening of the Passaic County Veterans' Services Office in Paterson, following a ribbon cutting ceremony hosted by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Oct. 18, 2023.

"Our veterans and service members deserve access to local support that will help them and their families get the benefits they need," said Governor Murphy. "The opening of this new Veterans' Services Office in Paterson builds on our efforts to provide assistance to our heroes within the communities they call home by expanding these offices to every county in our state. We will continue this work on behalf of the many courageous heroes who have served our country."

The opening of this facility is enabled by funding in New Jersey's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget to expand veterans' access to the services they need by ensuring that each one of the state's 21 counties has its own Veterans

Services Office.

"The opening of a State of New Jersey Veterans Service Office in Passaic County reflects the Murphy Administration's ongoing efforts to ensure service members, veterans, and their families receive essential state and federal benefits," said Brig. Gen. General Lisa J. Hou, D.O., Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and The Adjutant General of New Jersey. "This office will serve as a helpful, one-stop resource for those who have served, as we work to expand access to assistance in every county throughout the state. I wish to thank our partners in the Legislature and Passaic County government for their shared commitment to providing accessible services to our Garden State heroes."

The Fiscal Year 2024 Budget included \$500,000 for the expansion of the state's Veterans Service Offices to Camden County, Cape May County, Union County, Middlesex

County, Salem County, Warren County, and Passaic County. This is a significant step as the Murphy Administration works to reach historically underserved communities with limited access to services.

Prior to the opening of the Paterson office, DMAVA operated 14 regional Veterans Service Offices. Staffed by trained and certified Veterans Service Officers, these offices provide information and guidance on filing claims, assisting with employment issues, and facilitating access to state and federal education, counseling, housing, social and medical services.

**PASSAIC COUNTY
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
401 GRAND STREET
PATERSON, NJ 07505
PHONE
(973) 977-6370 / 6371
FAX
(973) 977-6372**

VETERANS JOURNAL



Philip D. Murphy
Governor

Lisa J. Hou, D.O.
Commissioner, New Jersey
Department of Military and
Veterans Affairs

Vincent Solomano III
Deputy Commissioner of
Veterans Affairs

Lt. Col. Agneta Murnan
State Public Affairs Officer

Mark C. Olsen
Editor-Design

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Cover: Thanksgiving

New York Giants placekicker Graham Gano, center, has his photo taken with residents at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Paramus, New Jersey, Nov. 17, 2023. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Michael Khan)

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State of New Jersey Update

As we begin a new year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the collective achievements of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs team in 2023.

New Jersey expanded state delivered programs and services while also improving the quality of care we provide the Veterans, Veterans Spouses, and Gold Star families who call our facilities home. This success is a direct result of public and private sector efforts to ensure that the Garden State leads the way.

Veterans Homes

In 2023, ensuring the health and welfare of the residents of the Veterans Memorial Homes at Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland remained a priority for The Adjutant General and our organization.

Both the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), acting as agents of the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), completed annual recertification surveys of Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland. I am profoundly grateful to our team for their hard work and attention to detail to ensure the success of these surveys. Their commitment was borne out in the results of these visits and the improvements in clinical areas and infection control that were documented during each one.

In an effort to improve communication not only with residents and loved ones, but also our own team members who form the backbone of daily operations, in 2023 the CEOs of each veteran's home and I deliberately created opportunities to solicit ideas and feedback. For residents and families, that took the form of regular virtual and in person town halls to answer questions, share information, provide updates, and address concerns.

From a DMAVA team perspective, TAG conducted "Coffee with the Commissioner" sessions at each facility. I met with our partners in organized labor to better understand the

challenges their members face. I also visited all three homes to talk with folks during and after each shift. Our goal is to foster a culture of mutual respect and transparency and I am grateful to those who attended these sessions.

Significantly, we also implemented an electronic medical records system (EMR) that simplifies tasks for providers and caregivers and results in better quality of care for our residents. The new EMR complements the digital learning management system we introduced earlier this year.

Veterans Services

In 2023, DMAVA began to make reality the Governor's call to expand the state's footprint of Veterans Service Offices from 14 to one in every county. We cut the ribbon on offices in Passaic County and Camden County and by the end of this fiscal year, Garden State heroes will have 21 points of entry to access the federal and state benefits that they and their families have earned. In 2023, DMAVA's 19 Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) conducted over 48,000 direct contacts with individuals, filed over 7,600 VA claims, and secured over \$100 million in federal benefits for Garden State Veterans and their survivors.

Our team continues to tackle veteran suicide head on. In this area, our work will never be done and there will always be room to improve. Under the umbrella of the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families, DMAVA partnered with the New Jersey Hospital Association and the Mental Health Association of New Jersey to provide statewide Mental Health First Aid training. These day-long events increase



suicide awareness and provide participants with the tools they need to recognize the common signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges, how to interact with a person in crisis, and how to get them the help they need.

Last year, DMAVA's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) counseling program (free to Veterans and families) assisted over 3,800 individuals over nearly 9,000 sessions and our Vet2Vet peer support line (1-866-838-7654) supported more than 7,600 calls.

The Brigadier General William C. Doyle Memorial Cemetery continued to be one of the busiest state veterans cemeteries in the United States. Over the course of the year, our team facilitated the interment of over 2,500 deceased individuals. Team members made much needed repairs to the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial and we executed a \$5.5 million VA grant to improve infrastructure and expand cemetery capacity.

Veterans Haven North and South continued to set the example on how to provide veterans transitional housing. Our teams at both facilities are force multipliers whose passion for their mission is reflected in successful resident outcomes. And while I read through the reports that reach my desk, I was

personally moved – and the work of our team brought into focus – when I visited each facility and met directly with the individuals that we serve.

This year, DMAVA's State Approving Agency achieved an overall satisfactory rating and ensured that public and private institutions met the required standards to provide job training and education to eligible individuals. In addition, our Veterans Benefits Bureau hosted over 150 outreach events and conducted 19 state medals ceremonies.

Taken together, these achievements reflect our shared commitment to doing our best to deliver services and programs to New Jersey heroes. From High Point to Cape May, New Jersey is moving decisively to enhance the services that we provide to Garden State Service Members, Veterans, and their families. We could not do this without you. I offer my personal thanks and appreciation to the entire team for their service to our state.

Vincent Solomeno III
Deputy Commissioner of
Veterans Affairs
Administrator of Veterans
Affairs
New Jersey Department of
Military and Veterans Affairs

New platform modernizes veteran services

From the State of New Jersey; New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Mark C. Olsen

During a Veterans Day ceremony at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Holmdel, Acting Gov. Tahesha Way announced the implementation phase of "Unite New Jersey Veterans" – a digital platform designed to empower frontline veteran service providers to quickly and securely refer New Jersey veterans to the resources and services they need. The platform will modernize the way veterans will be connected to assistance with benefits, employment, education, housing, and mental health programs.

"As we recognize Veterans Day, our Administration reaffirms its ongoing commitment to supporting New Jersey's heroic veterans," said Way. "Today, we announce the Unite New Jersey Veterans platform, which will launch on Jan. 1, 2024 and connect service providers throughout New Jersey. Unite New Jersey Veterans will streamline the process for veterans and military families seeking access to the care and benefits they have earned."

Unite New Jersey Veterans will enable hospitals, social service agencies, and other case managers to send and receive secure electronic referrals and records to help improve health outcomes and otherwise address the needs of veterans and their families through this shared technology platform.

Following a planning period in coordination with the New Jersey Office of Information Technology and Department of the Treasury, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is now beginning to on-board and train providers so that they can start using Unite New Jersey Veterans beginning Jan. 1, 2024.

"The number of people and organizations wanting to help veterans inspires me daily," said Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., Commissioner of Military and Veterans Affairs and The Adjutant General of New Jersey. "This digital referral network is a way to further



New Jersey Acting Gov. Tahesha L. Way, Esq. announces the implementation phase of "Unite New Jersey Veterans" – a digital platform designed to empower frontline veteran service providers to quickly and securely refer New Jersey veterans to the resources and services they need during the State Veterans Day ceremony at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial at Holmdel, New Jersey, Nov. 11, 2023.

empower them in support of our heroes."

The implementation of this secure digital platform was made possible through legislative support for a \$3 million state appropriation in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget Governor Phil Murphy signed earlier this year.

"We provided this support because we believe in our veterans and we want to ensure they receive the support and assistance they have earned," said Senate President Nick Scutari, who sponsored the legislative resolution in the Senate providing \$3 million to implement the Unite New Jersey Veterans digital platform. "This platform is a centralized source that allows veterans and their families

to more easily obtain available resources for their benefits, including employment assistance, housing and mental health programs. We honor the sacrifices of the men and women who have served our country by ensuring they have easy access to these vital services."

"Members of our Armed Forces make tremendous sacrifices to uphold our nation's freedom and we have a moral obligation to provide them access to the broadest array of services available," said Assemblywoman

Cleopatra Tucker, Chair of the Assembly Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee and sponsor of the legislative resolution in the Assembly providing \$3 million to implement this digital platform. "With this new digital platform, service providers can match New Jersey veterans with the resources that best fit their needs. I look forward to seeing the impact this platform has on our veteran community in the months and years ahead."

"Navigating the complexities of identifying, applying for and obtaining veteran benefits can be quite challenging," said Phil Pesano, President, New Jersey Vietnam Veterans of America State Council. "To that end, I commend Governor Murphy and Acting Governor Way for this proposed gateway to lessening those challenges and look forward to learning more to share with my fellow brother and sister veterans."

"The State of New Jersey is implementing a major improvement in the way veterans obtain services with this new easier access to benefits system," said retired Air Force Col. Nelson L. Mellitz, Jewish War Veterans. "We look forward to using this centralized system for Veterans to obtain much needed and earned services."

"On this Veterans Day we remember all who lost their lives, but we honor all our veterans and those serving now. We are veterans serving veterans," said Larry Bishop, Commander, American Legion Department of New Jersey.



New Jersey Acting Gov. Tahesha L. Way, Esq. addresses the audience during the State Veterans Day ceremony at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial.

NJDMAVA and NJHA deliver Mental Health First Aid training

By Maj. Agneta Murnan, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office
New Jersey National Guard photos by Mark C. Olsen



As part of the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the New Jersey Hospital Association announced the implementation of a statewide Mental Health First Aid training program Aug. 23, 2023 at the National Guard Training Center, Sea Girt, New Jersey.

The state funding will support two individual eight-hour training sessions in each of New Jersey's 21 counties for a total of 42 Mental Health First Aid classes in the next 12 months. The training is intended for community organizations that interact with service members, veterans, and their families at the local level, but is open for all interested participants.

"One veteran lost to suicide is too many, and every minute, every second, counts," said Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. "From my view, that is why Mental Health First Aid training is so important. Just like on the battlefield, we do not want to leave a service member behind."

The training program is designed to help participants identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and

substance use disorder. It provides information and skills individuals can use to provide initial help and support to someone who may be experiencing a mental health problem or crisis. This particular initiative will provide targeted mental health first aid training for groups and individuals who interact with the community of veterans, service members and their families.

"This new partnership with DMAVA expands our commitment to mental health first aid training throughout the State," said NJHA President and CEO Cathy Bennett. "For more than a decade, the NJHA team has included a corps of U.S. Veterans experienced in a wealth of health services who provide our nation's military heroes and their families with critical support. The mental health needs of our veterans and their families is such an immensely important topic, and with our longtime partner, the Mental Health Association of New Jersey, we applaud the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans and Families for shining a light on this issue."

While the rate of veteran suicides has been declining since 2019, it continues to outpace the suicide rate for the non-veteran population. In 2020, the rate for veterans

suicide was 57.3 percent higher than that of non-veteran adults, according to the National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In that year, the most recent data available, there were 6,146 veterans suicides documented in the United States – an average of nearly 17 suicides per day.

Established in 2020, the Governor's Challenge is co-chaired by NJDMAVA and the New Jersey Department of Human Services. Partner agencies

and organizations meet quarterly.

The Governor's Challenge three priority areas are based on the federal Veterans Administration National Suicide Prevention Strategy. These include identifying service members, veterans and the families and screen for suicide risk; promoting connectedness and improve care transitions, and lethal means safety and safety planning.

For more information on registering for a Mental Health First Aid class, please call the NJHA at 1-877-422-7365.



U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., left, The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, discusses the statewide rollout of a Mental Health First Aid training program with join Dr. Mary Ditre, Vice President of Community Health New Jersey Hospital Association, at the National Guard Training Center, in Sea Girt, New Jersey, Aug. 23, 2023.



QUILTS OF VALOR HONOR MENLO VETERANS

By Maj. Agneta Murnan, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office
U.S. Army National Guard photos by Spc. Michael Schwenk

Seventy-five residents received quilts during a ceremony at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park in Edison, New Jersey, Jan. 24, 2023.

The quilts, some taking months, and even years to construct, were made by 22 members of the Turtle Creek Peacemakers, a central New Jersey Chapter of the national Quilts of Valor Foundation.

The quilt makers created a theme for each quilt, selecting materials and personalizing through patterns, embroidery, and other embellishments. The quilters affixed a label to each quilt detailing the recipient's name, location and date, along with the names of those who pieced, quilted, and bound the individual quilt.

The project was the chapter's largest since its establishment in 2003. Honoring both the quilt recipients and the quilt makers were New





Jersey Assemblyman Robert J. Karabinchak; Sharon McGreevey, Veterans Advocate for New Jersey Sen. Joe Vitale; Mayor Sam Joshi, Township of Edison; Robin Goodrich, New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park Advisory Council member; Vincent Solomeno III, Deputy Commissioner of Veteran Affairs, along with

Department of Military and Veteran Affairs staff.

“These quilts reflect not only the sacrifices of our military community, but the incredible heart of these volunteers who donated their time, quilting skills, and financial resources,” said Solomeno. “The hours and care placed in every stitch reflect tremendous dedication to our veterans and country.”

Ten representatives of the Quilts of Valor visited the home to present the quilts personally.

“It is our honor to present these Quilt of Valor’s today to these deserving veterans and service members. This Quilt of Valor is an expression of gratitude meant to thank and comfort you,” New Jersey State Quilts of Valor Coordinator, Sharon Rendfrey told the home’s residents. “We honor you for leaving all you held dear to serve, whether in time of crisis, or in time of peace.”

U.S. Navy veteran William Campbell, a submarine rescue chief petty officer who served from 1952-1956, compared the experience of receiving one of the quilts to that of receiving a medal.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” said Campbell. “I feel proud, I want to cry...really, it’s so nice to be recognized.”



“I’ve never seen anything like it. I feel proud, I want to cry...really, it’s so nice to be recognized.”

**U.S. NAVY VETERAN WILLIAM CAMPBELL
SUBMARINE RESCUE CHIEF PETTY OFFICER
1952-1956**



NJDMAVA LAUNCHES DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS

By Robert Fernandez, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

After many months of preparation, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs launched two digital communication tools: digital learning management across the three New Jersey Veterans Memorial Homes at Paramus, Menlo Park and Vineland, as well as a department-wide notification system for time-sensitive information and updates.

“A consolidated digital platform for learning management improves our efficiency and oversight of staff professional training and development across each home,” said Rochelle Guglielmo, Director of Veterans Healthcare Services. “Our staff members have many training requirements and opportunities, so this more modern approach helps keep us up to speed.”

Learning management is far more than ensuring a baseline of knowledge noted Rebecca Resh, Learning Management Administrator at the New



Rebecca Resh, left, Learning management, with resident Frank Pearce at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park, Edison, New Jersey, Sept. 27, 2023. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Mark C. Olsen)

Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park. Digital learning management ushers professional growth.

“As new equipment comes along, new best practices, the way you are always going to be fresh, and really be able to take care

of your residents, is if you keep up with what’s going on in your field,” said Resh.

For situations requiring more urgent notifications to staff, such as an infectious disease control policy updates or an active shooter situation, NJDMAVA

is implementing another digital communication tool.

“We have a platform now for mass communication and targeted information distribution. Considering shift work, and the fact that in total, NJDMAVA employees could be in more than 50 locations on any given day, this system helps us reach our teammates faster,” said Toby Tirrito, NJDMAVA Quartermaster and Emergency Management Assistance team leader.

“This set of upgrades to our operations are part of several modernization initiatives including electronic records management for our homes and support to our Veterans Services offices,” said Vincent Solomono III, Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. “While many of these updates have been taking place behind the scenes, the ultimate goal is to deliver the best possible care and service to our Veterans and their families.”

E-learning at Paramus

Story and photo by Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

On Oct. 18, 2023, we had the opportunity to talk to Susan Collins, Instructor of Nursing at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Paramus, about the incorporation of web-based learning at the home. Collins spent more than 37 years in critical care nursing before coming to Paramus.

“We have a staff of over 400 and the state mandates that every month there’s annual trainings or in-services that we have to do on a variety of subjects, such as residents’ rights, abuse and neglect; infection control. If the nurses feel that there’s a specific in-service that they would like, hospice or IV certification, then we can incorporate that. But beginning January, all the in-services that I gave in the classroom will be online.”



According to Collins, the benefit of e-learning over the classroom experience is when she did the classroom training, it had to be condensed to 30 minutes or less because it’s difficult to pull the CNAs and nurses off the floor.

“We’re pulling them away from our residents for the training.”

Web-based learning changes that.

“Some of these e-learning modules might be 30 minutes; some might be an hour,” said Collins. “You can do it at your own pace.”

Each e-learning module comes with a post-test at the end. Passing score is 80 percent or more.

Like any new system, there are pros and cons.

“If you’re computer savvy, you won’t have any problem. Some of our older employees might have some difficulty. But as long as we provide them with someone

that can help them through the steps, like anything else on the computer, the more you use it, the more familiar and the faster that you’ll get.”

For Collins, the real benefit for e-learning is “better quality of care we can provide for our residents.”

Menlo Park receives zero-deficiency in survey

By Lt. Col. Agneta Murnan, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

The New Jersey Department of Military and Veteran Affairs was notified by the New Jersey Department of Health that the no-notice COVID-19 Focused Infection Control survey conducted June 23, 2023 at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park resulted in zero deficiencies.

This indicates that the facility complies with infection control regulations and the recommended COVID-19 practices from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

"I am proud of the staff of Menlo Park for the hard work they do every day, and the work they have done to continuously improve care to our residents," said U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., Commissioner of Veterans Affairs and The Adjutant General of New Jersey. "The Department remains committed to a continuous evaluation of the care we provide our Veterans, Veterans' spouses, and Gold Star Family mem-



bers, and we will not stop striving to provide the residents of Menlo Park with the highest possible quality of care."

Continuous process improvement and organizational compliance feedback is built into routine and no-notice inspections by the New Jersey Department of Health, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, and NJDMAVA's own internal processes. The survey

outcomes reflect a number of efforts to provide residents of Menlo Park with the best possible care, including NJDMAVA's work with infection control consultants, the department's own internal inspections, as well as staff training and professional development.

"Never does a single inspection or rating mean we rest in our efforts to protect our heroes' health and well-being," Hou explained. "We welcome resident, staff, family, and third-party insights. Professional and community partnerships contribute daily to our residents' quality of life."

CAMDEN GETS NEW VSO OFFICE



Leaders from the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; state legislators; and local and county officials join veteran and community organizations in opening a new NJDMAVA Veteran Services Office in the Governor James J. Florio Center for Public Service Building in Camden, New Jersey, Nov. 3, 2023. The new

office will serve as a one-stop resource for veterans and their families. The Camden office is one of seven new locations planned to increase access to veteran services in the state's urban centers and rural areas. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Mark C. Olsen)

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHNNIE WALKER

By Vincent Solomemo III, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

In January, Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Affairs and Administrator of Veterans Affairs Vincent Solomemo sat down for a conversation with Johnnie Walker, the Adjutant of the Disabled American Veterans Department of New Jersey. Walker intends to retire from full-time service this July. A well-known advocate for Garden State Service Members, Veterans, and their families, from Washington, D.C. to the State House in Trenton, when he calls, people answer.

Solomemo: Can you please tell our readers about yourself?

Walker: I am a U.S. Army Veteran. I grew up in Southwest Philadelphia and when I first retired, I moved with my wife Kate to Lower Township in Cape May County. We would visit there when I was a kid in the 1950s and I loved the area. We have four sons, one daughter, fifteen grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Solomemo: What was your military service?

Walker: I graduated high school in 1964 and by October received notice that I was being drafted into the Army. I completed basic training and advanced individual training as a reconnaissance scout at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. I went on to spend seventeen months stationed in South Korea. I was in for a total of twenty-two months and ended as a Specialist Fifth Class (E-5).

Solomemo: What did you do after the Army?

Walker: Like a lot of people, I was unsure of what to do after my military service. I took a job as an insurance agent and was promoted to become a district manager. This took me to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where I was lucky to meet a neighbor who ran a national garbage company. They asked me to help start up their sales department and it was the best move I ever made. I spent thirty-five years in the waste management business and ended up back in Philadelphia. When I retired, my wife and I purchased a restaurant in southwest Philly. We did that for seven years before retiring a second time to New Jersey in October of 2000.

Solomemo: What inspired you to become involved with advocacy for Service Members, Veterans, and their families?

Walker: I grew up in a military family. My mother and father were very involved with the American Legion and my brothers



Johnnie Walker, right, Adjutant of the Disabled American Veterans Department of New Jersey, with Linda Applegate, DAV Auxiliary National Executive Committee, at the DAV 2022 National Convention in Orlando, Florida, Aug. 9, 2022. (Photo courtesy of DAV)

and sister were active in the Sons of the American Legion. From 1971-1972, I served as State Commander of the Sons of the American Legion. Over time, I became more involved with helping veterans in need. This led me to volunteer as a post service officer on the local level. In that job I created VA claims and helped people where I could. I joined the Disabled American Veterans when we relocated to New Jersey and saw it as an important way to assist those in need, especially our disabled brothers and sisters.

Solomemo: What does the DAV do on a daily basis?

Walker: Our organization has over one million members nationwide. We are dedicated to a single purpose: empowering those who served to lead high quality lives with respect and dignity. That takes the form of access to state and federal benefits, advocacy on Capitol Hill, and educating the public about the sacrifice of those who have worn the uniform. For me, I have three personal goals. First, every Veteran who served into the VA medical system, whether they think they need it or not. As folks age, and we saw this with the Camp Lejeune issue, there may be a need for services. Second, the need for veteran's transportation. I worked with DAV Chapter 44 in Cape May County to get a van donated from a local Chevrolet dealership. This helps get folks to appointments. Today, we have eight out of thirty-two DAV chapters with vans in the state. This is the biggest issue not only for DAV, but I think the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and other organizations. Finally, we've seen a growth

in the number of homeless veterans and it's only worsened since COVID-19. Especially as veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq age, we have to continue to work to provide access to housing and services for those in need.

Solomemo: Can you tell us about the Citizens and Veterans Advisory Committee of Cape May County?

Walker: Yes, we call it CVAC for short. On December 12, 2012, I received a call to help a gentleman who was going to become homeless on December 26th. I remember it like it was yesterday. He was a sixty-eight-year-old Vietnam Navy Veteran. I wasn't so familiar with social media at the time but with the help of my grandkids I made a post and right away we had eighteen people ready to reach into their own pockets to donate and help the Veteran find a place at a hotel. One of those fifteen worked for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and he helped us get him into a local housing development. It's where he lives today. I thought, "If we can do this for this one man this quick, imagine what we can achieve if we organize?"

And so, we did. That's how CVAC started and over ten years later we've helped over 200 Veterans with over \$200,000 in donations from the community and Veterans Service Organizations.

Solomemo: And you also publish a quarterly magazine for South Jersey Veterans?

Walker: Nine years ago, we started Veterans Corner News Magazine. There was nothing like it in the area and I think it is so important when you are trying to reach older Veterans who are not as good with the computer. We scan the internet for important information and put it in simple terms for those who need it most. I'm the editor, reporter, proofreader, and with the help of volunteers I deliver the printed issues to Atlantic, Cape May, and Cumberland Counties. We publish in January, April, July, and October.

Solomemo: As you reflect on your time as adjutant, any advice for those who come after you?

Walker: Absolutely. Veteran activism is so self-rewarding. You don't go into this type of work to make money, but no one can compensate you in dollars for the feeling you have after helping a veteran in need. I have made so many lifelong friends along the way. It is an awesome feeling to help your brothers and sisters.

Homes implement Electronic Records Management system

By Robert Fernandez, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

In an ongoing effort to improve resident care at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Homes in Menlo Park, Paramus and Vineland, staff began exclusive use of an Electronic Records Management system for key note-taking functions, Oct. 1, 2023.

NJDMAVA secured the additional software modules required to migrate to a fully automated Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system in April 2023. The transition from paper documents and paper-based procedures to electronic methods has taken place in deliberate phases, involving staff training, data entry, scanning work, file transfers and coordination for each resident and process. Use of this system will continue to reduce medical errors, enhance resident care plans, and improve efficiency in operations.

According to Michael Yannotta, Assistant Chief Executive Officer at Menlo Park, there are many advantages to implementing this system.

"Interoperability is the first thing that comes to my mind," said Yannotta, describing the system's functionality. "At its true core, electronic medical records are communication tools."

The Homes' staff will have the ability to view records in real



Michael Yannotta, right, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, answers Weedmarck Lindor, left, question as Favour M. Tsikata – both Licensed Practical Nurses, checks a patient's record at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park in Edison, New Jersey, Sept. 27, 2023. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Mark C. Olsen)

time, analyze trends in the residents' needs as they age, better track care such as medication administration, and prepare to mitigate issues such as fall risks.

"What's really nice about electronic information is the speed at which you can see it," said Yannotta.

All the details are there.

"When you open it up, you're going to see a picture of the person," said Yannotta describing what a caregiver will see on the screen. "Their demographics, religious preferences; their needs based on actual assessment, their needs based on their perception, their psychosocial assessments, their recreation therapy, dietitian food preferences – everything that you would need to know about the care of that person."

For residents and the family members specifically involved with their care, the system will allow more on-the-spot responses to questions about records, such as test results – the medical record encompasses all of the aspects of care for an individual

"The feedback that I've gotten from the nurses has been 'it's about time. We're excited. We can't wait for this to start,'" said Yannotta. "We know this is going to be a great change for us. We know it's going to make our work easier."

Compared with paper files, multiple care providers can look at a resident's entire file at once. This conversion provides staff members the ability to view and process large quantities of data without having to interpret handwriting.

"Their latest vital signs are right there. If somebody had a fever last night on the last shift, there's no question what their temperature was. It helps you to make decisions clinically," said Yannotta.

The department estimates that full implementation in all three homes will be in place by the end of the calendar year.



"Some people have been here, eight, 10, 12 years. That's a lot of medical records; a lot of nurses' notes; doctors notes; physical therapy notes; the charts get thicker; they get heavier and harder to manage. This takes all of that and puts into a concise format electronically, so it can be saved in perpetuity."

MICHAEL YANNOTTA, ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Patients' charts at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland, June 23, 2010. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Mark C. Olsen)

42,000 FLAGS

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Mark C. Olsen



Every year the day before Memorial Day, New Jersey Scouts place flags on the graves at the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Memorial Cemetery at Wrightstown, New Jersey.

This year was no exception. More than 900 New Jersey Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, Brownies, and family members placed more than 42,000 American flags May 26,



SCOUTS PREPARE CEMETERY FOR CEREMONY



2023. And like each previous year, as far as the eye could see, flags stretched across the cemetery awaiting family members and visitors. The New Jersey Department of Military

and Veterans Affairs thanks all the Scouts, Brownies, Scout leadership, and family members who participated.



MEMORIAL DAY 2023





Two U.S Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons with the 177th Fighter Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, fly overhead while members of the New Jersey National Guard Joint Color Guard stand at attention during the annual State Memorial Day ceremony at the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Memorial Cemetery, Wrightstown, New Jersey, May 27, 2023. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Mark C. Olsen)

VETERANS DAY HONORS NJ VETERANS

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Mark C. Olsen



Above: Veterans, family members, state, and local officials attended the State Veterans Day ceremony at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial at Holmdel, New Jersey, Nov.

11, 2023. Below: New Jersey Acting Gov. Tahesha L. Way, Esq., left; Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., center, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, and Vincent Solomemo III, Deputy



Veterans Day celebrates and honors America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.



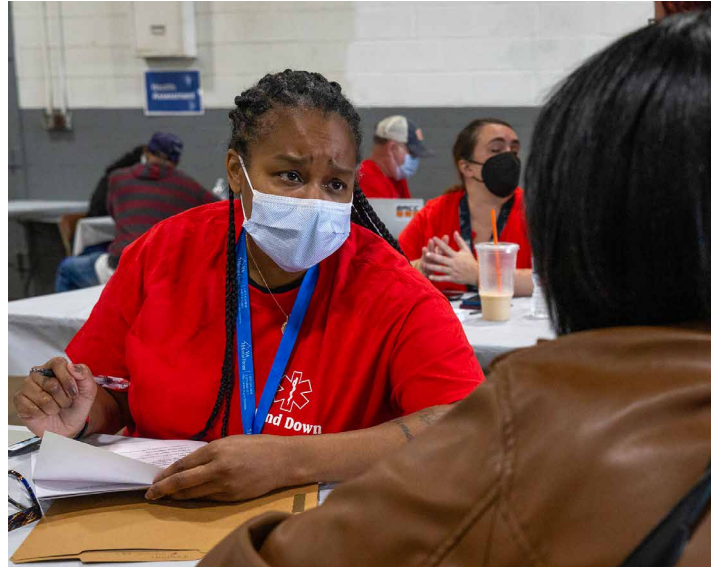
Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, render honors during the singing of the national anthem. Above: Veteran's organizations stand

with their wreaths. Below: An attendee bows his head for the benediction at the State Veterans Day ceremony.



Stand Down serves homeless veterans

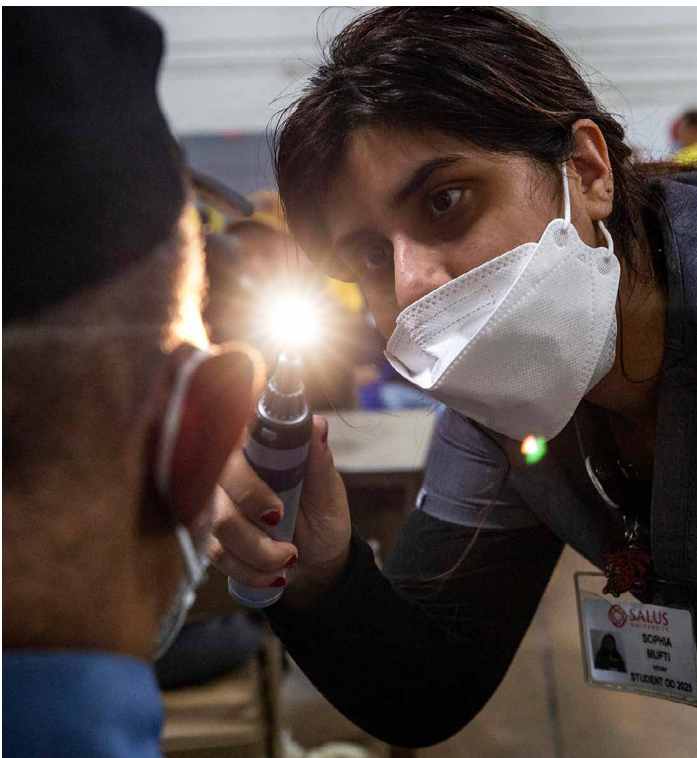
New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Mark C. Olsen



Volunteers; healthcare providers, and social service personnel assist homeless veterans at the Sgt. 1st Class Robert H. Yancey Sr. Stand Down at the National Guard Armory in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, Sept. 22, 2023.

At the Stand Down, co-hosted by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Stand Down of South Jersey, veterans were provided access to healthcare, mental health screening, substance abuse counseling, social services, legal services, religious counseling, and winter clothing.

Since 1996, the South Jersey Stand Down has served as a catalyst that enables homeless and at-risk veterans to re-enter mainstream society. Stand Downs are a nationwide, grass roots, community-based intervention programs to help veterans' battle life on the streets.



CARETAKERS RESTORE CEMETERY

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Mark C. Olsen

Cemetery caretakers from the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs are replacing 70 deteriorated markers and leveling and straightening the headstones at Soldier's Circle at Arlington Cemetery in Kearny, New Jersey.

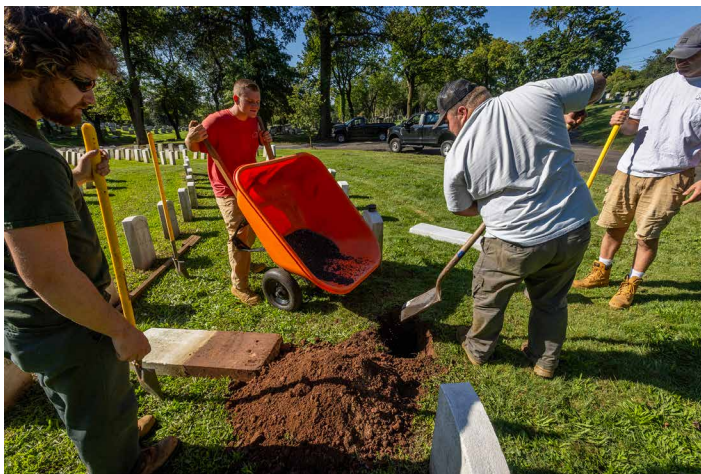
Also known as Arlington Memorial Park, Soldier's Circle has 754 graves with service members from the Civil War through the Vietnam War buried there. Two caretakers can straighten 24 markers per day, four can double that number.

Before the VA can provide a replacement headstone, each veteran's status must be verified. This requires detailed research, which has been undertaken by Doreen Bloomer of the Hudson County Genealogical and Historical Society.

The project is expected to be completed by the end of this year.



Cemetery caretakers from the Brig. Gen. William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery straighten headstones at Soldier's Circle at Arlington Cemetery in Kearny, New Jersey, Sept. 14, 2023.



Top left: Jacob W. Jones, second from left, pours gravel while Christopher G. Byles, second from right, both cemetery caretakers with the Brig. Gen. William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery, prepare the ground for a replacement headstone for World War I veteran U.S. Army Pfc. Alexander Crawford Jr., Charlie Company, 11th Machine Gun Battalion. Top right: Henry G. Heisse, left, senior cemetery caretaker, and Travis T. Greene, cemetery caretaker, lower Crawford's replacement headstone. Bottom right: Travis T. Greene, left; Henry G. Heisse, second from left; and Jacob W. Jones, second from right, and Christopher G. Byles, have their photo taken with World War I veteran U.S. Army Pfc. Alexander Crawford Jr.'s replacement headstone.



LEGISLATION PROTECTS VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

From the State of New Jersey; New Jersey Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Schwenk



To help protect veterans from exploitation, Gov. Philip D. Murphy signed legislation (S-3292/A-3286) to establish standard requirements that must be followed if an individual is seeking compensation for providing assistance or advice to veterans and their families regarding veterans' benefits.

The requirements apply to situations in which an individual assists with the preparation or representation of any claim for benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

The ceremony took place at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1333 in Neptune, New Jersey, Aug. 25, 2023.

The legislation establishes the circumstances under which compensation may be sought in these situations; requires terms of service and compensation to be in writing; prohibits individuals from guaranteeing any specific result when offering their services; and requires individuals to disclose any affiliations they may have with the VA, NJDMAVA, or other federally chartered service organizations prior to entering into an agreement with the veteran or their family. Under the bill, any violation of these terms will be considered an unlawful act under the New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act, which may result in monetary or other penalties.

"Our veterans put their lives on the line in service to our country and have more than earned the benefits for which they and their loved ones are eligible," said Murphy. "We must protect veterans and their families from unscrupulous individuals who would take advantage of them by overcharging for assistance with those benefits. This legislation will help ensure these bad actors either follow all applicable federal standards or face the consequences."

"Our Garden State veterans, who exemplified honor and integrity during their service in uniform, rightfully deserve honest support from those who assist them in securing their hard-earned benefits. The New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has federally trained, and certified Veterans Service

Officers employed throughout the state for the express purpose of providing free-of-charge help to veterans navigating claims and appeals for state and federal benefits," said Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, NJDMAVA Commissioner and The Adjutant General of New Jersey. "In addition to our state offices, there are Federal VA offices and a number of volunteer organizations that also seek to help veterans better understand and pursue their benefits and entitlements, providing a wealth of experiences and lessons learned free-of-charge. I encourage all New Jerseyans who have worn the uniform to connect with our VSOs by visiting <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/> for a list of offices, or call us, toll free at 1-888-865-8387."

"New Jersey veterans deserve to be treated with respect for the sacrifices they've made, not financially exploited in their time of need," said Cari Fais, Acting Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs. "This legislation makes it easier for the Division to hold accountable those who cheat veterans under the guise of helping them access benefits they earned while defending our country and our freedoms."

The law was sponsored by New Jersey Sen. Vin Gopal and New Jersey Assemblyman Joe Danielsen, as well as New Jersey Sen. Shirley Turner and New Jersey Assemblymembers Sean Kean and Michele Matsikoudis.

"Veterans who served and protected our country from our enemies abroad now find themselves in need of protection here at home from bad actors, scammers and dishonest brokers who would target them for ill-gotten financial gain," said Gopal. "This law adds a layer of transparency concerning those who seek to advise veterans about benefits and claims, bars these unaccredited consultants from receiving any compensation for services that aren't now recognized under federal law and keeps our veterans safe from unscrupulous operators who would prey upon them."

"It is important our veterans know there are plenty of public offices and non-profits able to assist them in obtaining their VA benefits,

at no cost to them. If someone is asking you to pay for their assistance, they are likely trying to take advantage of you," said Turner. "This legislation will ensure veterans are not being taken advantage of, by prohibiting individuals from receiving compensation for helping a veteran to navigate obtaining benefits."

"We cannot allow veterans and their families to be preyed upon by corporations looking to make money off of services that are provided free of charge by numerous government and non-government organizations," said Danielsen. "This law will better protect New Jersey's veterans and ensure they are not taken advantage of."

"It is my honor as a public servant to stand up for those who sacrificed and fought for our freedoms. Helping veterans access their earned benefits is a privilege, not an opportunity to pad one's pockets. This law protects New Jersey veterans and their families from the bad actors out there who want to take advantage of their service," said Kean.

"Navigating the web of bureaucracy that stands between veterans and their benefits is not only difficult, but it also makes veterans more likely to seek help from people who promise to cut through the red tape on their behalf. New Jersey owes it to our veterans and military families to protect them from unscrupulous business practices that target their vulnerabilities and exploit their service to this nation and state. I would like to thank Governor Murphy for signing A3286/S3292 into law, and my legislative partners for their leadership on this important initiative," said Matsikoudis.

"The VFW thanks the New Jersey Legislature for their bipartisan support of S3292 which led to today's action by the Governor on this law making it a violation of the consumer fraud act for persons to receive compensation for advising or assisting, or referring any individual to another person to advise or assist, with any veterans benefits matter, except as is permitted under federal law," stated the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of New Jersey.

VSOs – your benefits connection

From the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Division of Veterans Services

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Veterans Service Officers are your connection to state and federal benefits.

Veterans Service Officers assist New Jersey's veterans and their dependents with information and guidance in filing claims.

VSOs also help veterans with issues ranging from employment; education; burial; counseling; housing; social and medical services, and other areas of concern to veterans and their families. NJDMAVA also conducts community outreach events where VSOs are present to help and assist any veteran.

All of this ties into a broader continuum of care – the Department connects veterans with both state benefits and federal mental health services such as the Vet Centers and VA healthcare.

These services are complemented by the partnership NJDMAVA established in 2021 with the University of Pennsylvania's Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic. The Cohen Clinic provides no cost telehealth support to veterans.

NJDMAVA also provides Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder counseling services. The Department offers free treatment for veterans and their families. Contracted clinical staff who are experienced in PTSD counseling help determine the best course of treatment for the veteran and the veteran's family.

Seeking treatment is a proven way to reduce the risk of suicide among vulnerable populations.

To date, in Fiscal Year 2023, NJDMAVA has provided counseling to more than 4,000 Veterans in need through over 10,000 counseling sessions.

VISIT WWW.NJ.GOV/MILITARY/VETERANS/ TO ACCESS THESE ONLINE RESOURCES.

NJ VETERANS TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

THIS PROGRAM OFFERS RIDES TO:

- VA MEDICAL CENTERS
CLINICS
OTHER HOSPITALS
- PRIVATE PHYSICIANS
VA REGIONAL OFFICES
VETERAN SERVICE OFFICES

SCAN THE CODE AND CALL YOUR LOCAL VSO FOR MORE INFO, OR
CALL: (888) 865-8387
EMAIL: VBB@DMAVA.NJ.GOV

YOUR VETERANS BENEFITS

A Resource Guide for New Jersey's Military, Veterans and Families

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

GOCADA GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM & DRUG ABUSE

New Jersey Veterans' Benefits Guide

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

VA adds new satellite location in Vineland

From the Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced the addition of a new Vet Center Outstation in Vineland to improve access to counseling for Veterans and service members Dec. 1, 2023.

This Outstation is in the leasing phase, with the anticipated opening date to be determined.

Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services, including no-cost professional counseling to eligible Veterans, service members, and their families. Services include counseling for needs such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and the psychological effects of military sexual trauma. Vet Centers also provide referrals to connect Veterans with their VA health care or benefits. In Fiscal Year 2023, more than 115,000 Veterans, service members, and their families received counseling at VA's 300+ Vet Centers nationwide.

"In 300 communities across the country, Vet Centers provide Veterans, service members, and their families with quick and easy access to the mental health care they need," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "We're expanding this program to make sure

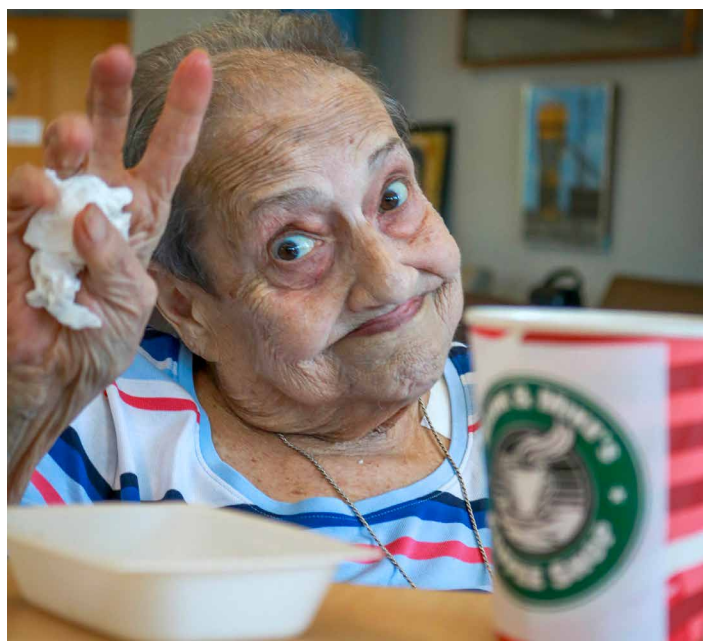
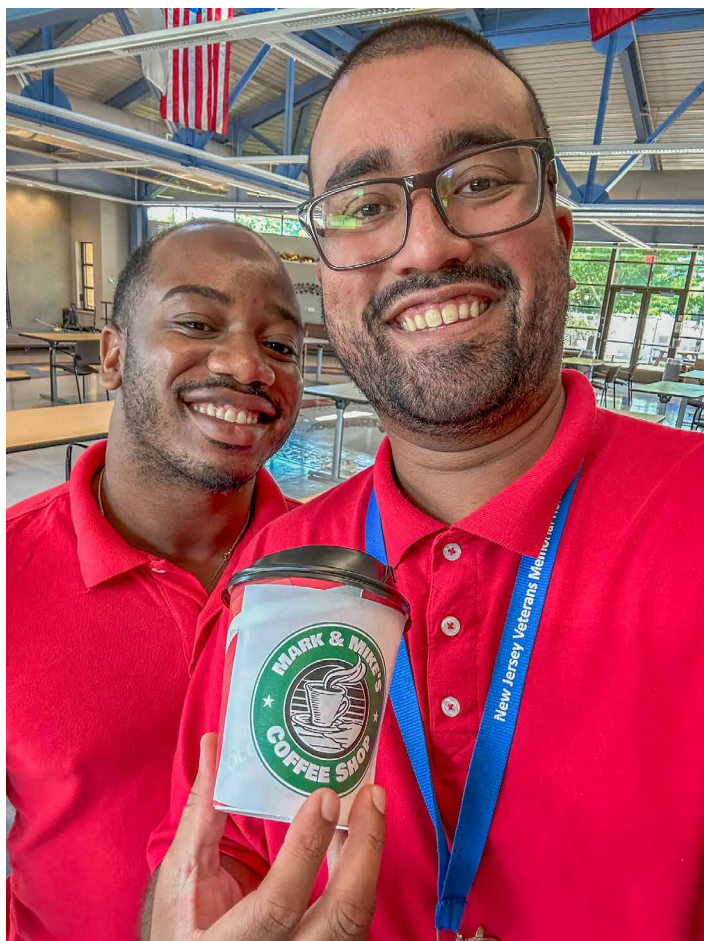
that these heroes get the support they so rightly deserve – no matter where they live."

"Vet Centers provide Veterans with high-quality counseling, community engagement, and referral services in nearby and comfortable environments," said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D. "Expanding this program throughout the United States and its territories reaffirms our commitment to meeting Veterans, service members, and their families where they are and improving the overall mental health and wellbeing of those who served."

Vet Center counselors and outreach staff, many of whom are Veterans themselves, are experienced and prepared to discuss the tragedies of war, loss, grief, and transition after trauma. Vet Center teams proactively work in the community, reducing barriers to care and improving access to care.

In the coming years, the VA will continue to expand the Vet Center program to meet Veteran demand and provide local support to those who served.

Seen at the Homes



A PERFECT CUP OF JOE

Photo above: Recreation Assistants' Mark Morris, left, and Michael Khan served up their own coffee shop – Mark & Mike's Coffee Shop – at the New Jersey Veterans Home at Paramus, Aug. 2, 2023. Their offerings include caramel drizzles and extra pumps of foam to muffins and pastries. Judging by the resident's expressions, it was a hit. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Michael Khan)

TAG VISITS VETERANS

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., right, The Adjutant General of New Jersey and Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, returns a salute from Army veteran Anthony Orsini, a resident at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park, Edison, New Jersey, May 9, 2023. Hou and New Jersey State Command Sgt. Maj. Mark A. Leonard visited the home's nurses and residents during National Nurses Week, which recognizes and honors the nurses who provide care and comfort for the residents. (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photo by Mark C. Olsen)



THE PACT ACT AND YOUR VA BENEFITS

From the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The PACT Act is a new law that expands Department of Veterans Affairs health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances.

The PACT Act adds to the list of health conditions that we assume (or “presume”) are caused by exposure to these substances. This law helps the VA provide generations of Veterans—and their survivors—with the care and benefits they’ve earned and deserve.

The PACT Act is perhaps the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history. The full name of the law is The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.

The PACT Act will bring these changes:

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
- Adds 20+ more presumptive conditions for burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic exposures.



The new PACT Act

- » Expands toxic-exposed Veterans access to VA care
- » Extends health care eligibility for Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 era combat Veterans
- » Adds more than 20 new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures

EXPANDED VA CARE & BENEFITS

Learn more at VA.gov
1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411)

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation.

- Requires the VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care.

- Helps us improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures.

If you’re a veteran or survivor, you can file claims now to apply for PACT Act-related benefits.

To file a claim, follow this link: <https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/introduction>

If you have questions, call 800-698-2411 (TTY: 711).

VETERANS, SHARE YOUR STORY WITH FUTURE GENERATIONS

By Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

Every veteran has a story to tell.

That’s where the Center for U.S. War Veterans’ Oral Histories comes in.

The Center’s mission to collect and preserve the memories of veterans and Gold Star family members through recorded oral history interviews.

The Center is located at the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey in Sea Girt, New Jersey.

To date, the Center’s collection contains more than 670 interviews of veterans from all branches of service spanning World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and other American military campaigns. More than 460 interviews are available in our [oral history archives](#).

The interviews are recorded at the museum, where



they are accessible to researchers and scholars.

The Center for U. S. War Veterans’ Oral Histories is an official partner of the Library of Congress Veterans History Project in Washington, D.C. A record of each interview is filed with that organization. Each veteran receives a copy of his or her recording in DVD format for personal use.

Interested veterans and Gold Star family members are asked to complete the [Oral History Biographical Questionnaire Form](#).

For further information on access to this collection, or to participate in the program, please contact Carol Fowler at (732) 974-4571 or carol.fowler@dmava.nj.gov.

As Desert Storm veteran Christine Goetz said: “Everybody wants to be remembered for something, and that’s why I think this project is so important.”

VETERANS HAVEN: MAKING A DIFFERENCE SINCE 1995

Story and photos by Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

Since January 1995, more than 3,200 homeless New Jersey Veterans have successfully left the streets and started new lives. The staff at New Jersey's transitional housing programs at Veteran's Haven South, located in Winslow, and Veteran's Haven North in Glen Gardner are the ones who are making this possible.

To be eligible to enter Veterans Haven, applicants must be considered Veterans by the U.S. Veterans Administration. They must be eligible for veterans' benefits: specifically, medical care. After being medically evaluated at a VA Medical Center, eligible veterans must agree to a long-term program focusing on psychological, social, and vocational rehabilitation. Veterans have up to two years to get their lives back on track – with lots of help from the staff.

The average stay of a veteran is between seven to 10 months with a success rate of 80 percent. Success is measured by the veteran being fully employed; living on their own, and free of substance abuse.

Each facility can house 100 veterans in a coed setting. Every veteran has his or her own room with a sink, bed, armoire, dresser, night table, and television. Bathrooms with toilets, showers and bathtubs as well as laundry facilities are located on each floor or wing.

During their stay, residents must attend group sessions and other meetings that address subjects such as life skills, job resumes, job searching, alcohol and drug abuse and anger management. The men and women must be drug free when they arrive at the program and they are subject to random testing. Veterans who break this rule are asked to leave the program.

Veterans are given the first five months after the initial in-processing to address medical and legal problems, as well as begin their job or school searches. Most are in an employment status by the end of their third month. By the end of the seventh month, the veteran must maintain gainful employment, which will enable the veteran to pay for all their day-to-day expenses once they are back on their own.

Veterans can choose from three different programs.

Bridge Housing is designed around an individual service plan for the short-term with the focus on the rapid move to permanent housing. Rather than the completion of treatment goals, veterans are expected to receive case management and support, which should be coordinated with the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, or other available

community-based programs. Veterans will receive support in accessing services as needed/requested by the veteran.

Clinical Treatment programs incorporate strategies to increase income and housing attainment goals. Individualized assessment, services and treatment plans are tailored to achieve optimal results in a time efficient manner and are consistent with sound clinical practice.

Program stays are individualized based upon the individual service plan for the Veteran. Staff are licensed or credentialed for the substance-use disorder/mental health services provided.

Finally, there is service intensive transitional housing. This program incorporate tactics to increase the veteran's income through employment and or through benefits and obtaining permanent housing. Services provided and strategies used by the Veteran will vary based on the individualized needs of the veteran and resources available in the community.

It takes a lot of support to keep the Veterans Havens a real haven for these veterans.

"Corporate donations such as the Hard Rock Casino and Hotel, have provided more than \$70,000 directly to Veteran's Haven South," said Patrick Kennedy, superintendent, Veteran's Haven South. "We have countless others that are too long a list to mention that contribute time, money, food and other resources that have a positive effect on our Veterans."

"We recently started receiving donations from the Kenvue Corporation (formerly Johnson Consumer Products)," said David Culley, superintendent, Veteran's Haven North. "Wyndam Hotel Group also has a veteran association that has been very generous to us recently."

In addition, numerous veteran service and civic organizations have provided supported



Above: Veterans's Haven North, below: Veteran's Haven South.



the veterans at both Veteran's Havens.

"We also benefit from grantee organizations that provide art therapy and music programs, such as Voices of Valor," said Kennedy.

"Most of our donations come from individuals in the community looking to make a difference," said Culley. "Just this holiday season, we've received over \$25,000 in gift cards."

The average age of Veterans Haven residents is 58 years old, with all military services and components – and generations – represented. From Gen Z to octogenarian, New Jersey's down-on-their-luck veterans have found their way at New Jersey's Veterans Havens.

If you wish to help, both facilities have their own wish lists. For Veteran's Haven North visit: <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/services/vetshavennorth/documents/VHN-Wish-List.pdf>

And for Veteran's Haven South, go to: <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/services/vetshavensouth/documents/VHS-Wish-List.pdf>

NJ Vets get \$6,000 tax break

By Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

It's the 2022 tax year and if you are a New Jersey veteran, you are eligible for a \$6,000 exemption on your state income tax return.

This exemption applies only to military veterans who were honorably discharged or honorable released from active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States on or any time before the last day of the tax year.

Veterans' spouses (or civil union partners) are also eligible for an exemption if he/she is a veteran who was honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances and are filing a joint return. This exemption is in addition to any other exemption's veterans are entitled to claim and is available on both the resident and nonresident returns. Veterans cannot claim this exemption for a domestic partner or for dependents filing separately.

In order to certify, visit <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/taxation/military/vetexemption-documentation.shtml> for a list of documents, such as DD-214 or



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/taxation/military/vetexemption.shtml>. The page header includes the New Jersey State seal and the text 'Division of Taxation'. A navigation menu contains 'Taxation', 'Filing Services', 'I am a(n)', 'I am Looking For', 'Tax Types', 'About Us', and 'Contact Us'. A breadcrumb trail reads: 'Home / All Taxes / Individuals / Military Personnel & Veterans / Military and Veteran Tax Credits and Exemptions / Income Tax Exemption for Veterans'. The main heading is 'Income Tax Exemption for Veterans'. The body text states: 'You are eligible for a \$6,000 exemption (\$3,000 for Tax Years 2017 and 2018) on your New Jersey Income Tax return if you are a military veteran who was honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances from active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States on or any time before the last day of the tax year. Your spouse (or civil union partner) is also eligible for an exemption if they are a veteran who was honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances and you are filing a joint return. This exemption is in addition to any other exemptions you are entitled to claim and is available on both the resident and nonresident returns. You cannot claim this exemption for a domestic partner or for your dependents. **Note:** This exemption can only be claimed by qualifying veterans. It does not pass through to a surviving spouse.'

an NGB Form 22 for New Jersey National Guard members. Then download and fill out a Veteran Income Tax Exemption Submission Form. Once you have all your documents, you can submit them by uploading them to: <https://www.njportal.com/DOR/TCM/#/>. Be sure to enter the notice code VET and select PO Box 440.

Veterans can also mail their supporting documentation and Veteran Exemption

Submission Form to: The New Jersey Division of Taxation, Veteran Exemption, PO Box 440, Trenton, NJ 08646-0440; or veterans can fax their DD-214 and Veteran Exemption Submission Form to (609) 633-8427.

For more information, visit: <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/taxation/military/vetexemption.shtml>.

DON'T FORGET YOUR PROPERTY TAX DEDUCTION

By Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Public Affairs Office

If you are an honorably discharged veteran with active duty military service, you may qualify for an annual \$250 Property Tax Deduction.

Reservists and National Guard personnel must be called to active duty service to qualify. Active duty for training is ineligible.

You may also qualify if you are a surviving spouse/civil union/domestic partner of an honorably discharged veteran with active duty military service.

All requirements must be met as of Oct. 1 of the pretax year – the year prior to the calendar tax year for which the deduction is claimed.

To qualify you must be a legal resident of New Jersey; own the property and have active duty service in the United States Armed Forces with an honorable discharge.

If you are a surviving spouse/civil union/domestic partner, you must: be a legal resident of New Jersey; own the property; confirm the military service

person died on active duty; demonstrate the deceased veteran had active duty service in the United States Armed Forces with an honorable discharge; document that the deceased veteran or military service person was a resident of New Jersey at the time of death, and not remarried or formed a new registered civil union/domestic partnership.

To apply, you will need the following documentation: death certificate; property deed; probated will; marriage/civil union/domestic partner certificate; military records (visit <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/taxation/military/vetexemption-documentation.shtml> for a list of documents); New Jersey driver's license, and a New Jersey voter's registration.

You will also need to fill out a Property Tax Deduction Claim by Veteran or Surviving Spouse/Civil Union or Domestic Partner of Veteran or Serviceperson form, which can be downloaded at https://www.nj.gov/treasury/taxation/pdf/other_forms/lpt/vss.pdf.

Once you filled out the form, submit it and your documentation to your local tax assessor.

If you have questions, call your local assessor or tax collector, or call the Division of Taxation at (609) 292-7974.

If you need help documenting your veteran status, call the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (609) 530-6823, or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (800) 827-1000.

For more information, visit: <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/taxation/lpt/lpt-veterans.shtml>.



Veterans honored at ceremonies

New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs photos by Mark C. Olsen



Photo left: Women veterans pose for a group photo after the New Jersey State Medals Ceremony at the American Legion, Department of New Jersey Convention at Wildwoods Convention Center in Wildwood, New Jersey, June 7, 2023. Photo right: U.S. Army Brig.



Gen. Lisa J. Hou, D.O., right, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, presents World War II veteran U.S. Army Cpl. William F. Vadola the New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal at the Joint Military and Family Assistance Center, Bordentown, New Jersey, Aug. 3, 2023.



Photo left: Veterans and family members salute during the national anthem at the New Jersey State Medals Ceremony at the Woodbridge Center Mall in Woodbridge Township, New Jersey, Aug. 17, 2023. Photo right: New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal and New Jersey Global



War on Terrorism Medal recipient Operation's Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom veteran Army Sgt. First Class Pablo E. Chavez, third from left, has his photo taken during the New Jersey State Medals Ceremony at the Ocean County Mall in Toms River, New Jersey, May 25, 2023.



Photo left: New Jersey state medal recipients pose for photos after the New Jersey State Medals Ceremony at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City in Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 19, 2023. Photo right: Retired U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 Luisa Sanchez, right, presents



the New Jersey Meritorious Service Medal to Navy Stewardmate 3rd Class Jameel T. Sadiq for honorable service in the U.S. Navy during the combined New Jersey State Medal and Camden County medal ceremony at the Cherry Hill Mall in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, April 13, 2023.

NEW JERSEY'S NEWEST MILITARY AWARD

From the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Division of Veterans Services



Medal design by Mark C. Olsen, New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

More than 32,000 New Jersey veterans participated in the United States' War on Terror; there were 163 reported casualties.

In an effort to recognize New Jersey servicemembers who have contributed to America's War on Terror, a bi-partisan bill to create a New Jersey Global War on Terrorism Medal was signed into law Jan. 4, 2021. The law – P.L. 2020, c. 147 – created a state medal that the Governor can award to servicemembers or veterans who served for at least 30 consecutive days or 60 non-consecutive days in one of eight military operations related to the United States' War on Terror.

The Global War on Terrorism encompasses numerous operations starting with operation Enduring Freedom, Sept. 11, 2001 – Dec. 28, 2014; and includes operations' Noble Eagle, Sept. 11, 2001 – present; Iraqi Freedom, 2003 – 2010; New Dawn, 2010 – 2011; Nomad Shadow, 2007 – present; Inherent Resolve – the war against ISIS in Iraq, Libya, and Syria from 2014 – present; Freedom's Sentinel/Enduring Sentinel from 2015 – present, and Odyssey Lightning – the Battle of Sirte, Libya in 2016.

So far, 776 medals have been awarded to New Jersey servicemembers and veterans.

Are you eligible?

If so, click on this link for more information and to apply: <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/services/awards/index.shtml>

DYK...

The State of New Jersey also has the following medals: The New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal; New Jersey Meritorious Service Medal; New Jersey Korean Service Medal; New Jersey Vietnam Service Medal; New Jersey POW-MIA Service Medal and the New Jersey Desert Storm Medal.

For more information, visit <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/services/awards/index.shtml>; call (609) 530-6970, or email VBB@dmava.nj.gov.



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Public Service Building
200 Federal Street, Suite 146
Camden, NJ 08103
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678 Montgomery Street
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Catholic Family & Community Services
(Thursday and Friday)
48 Wyker Road
Franklin, NJ 07416
(609) 922-2400

WARREN/HUNTERDON VSO

Veterans Haven North
200 Sanatorium Road
Glen Gardner, NJ 08826
(908) 537-0831 / 0832
Fax: (908) 537-0833



For information on your Veteran entitlements, call toll-free 1-888-865-8387, or online at: <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/>