Support America’s veterans, families on Giving Tuesday

By: The American Legion

For more than a century, America Legion members have extended their service to improving their communities, states and nation. While America has defeated enemies, foreign and domestic, since the Legion’s founding in 1919, it has rarely encountered such a devastating and widespread attack as the current COVID-19 crisis.

American Legion posts and members are dutifully fulfilling their commitments, serving their communities with food, masks and kindness.

Now, American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford encourages members to extend that support to the national Day of Giving, May 5. Donations will help America’s veterans, servicemembers and their families.

The Day of Giving — hashtag #GivingTuesdayNow on social media — is a global day of giving and unity, as a response to COVID-19. It’s designed to drive an influx of generosity and hope for communities and nonprofits across the globe.

“At a time when we are all experiencing uncertainty, generosity can bring us together,” Oxford said. “It gives everyone the power to make a positive change in the lives of others and is a fundamental value anyone can act on. Giving Tuesday will be a day for everyone around the world to stand together and give back in all ways, no matter who or where we are.”

America’s veterans and their families are among the hardest hit by the deadly coronavirus. In response, The American Legion is providing critical support for veterans and military members with families in need.

For example, Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) grants provide immediate debt-free cash to current active duty or American Legion members with dependent children, to help meet the cost of shelter, food, utilities and health expenses. The need for these grants is expected to grow at an unprecedented rate as the coronavirus crisis deepens.

Support of The American Legion Veteran & Children Foundation helps build reserves for TFA grants that will help families in the months ahead.

Oxford also points out that American Legion members don’t need to wait until May 5 to help. Donations for Giving Tuesday are being accepted and now and will go toward supporting our nation’s veterans and their families.

Photo and graphics courtesy of The American Legion
Note from the Editor: You might find reference to the National American Legion Convention or the Department Convention or some other events, because when the author of the article wrote it they did not know that there would be a cancellations of these and many more events due to the current social distancing requirements caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It should now be known by all, that all American Legion events controlled at the national, department for 2020 have been cancelled and rescheduled for 2021 where possible.
In honor of those no longer among us

By: James W. "Bill" Oxford, National Commander

The coronavirus pandemic has reminded everyone how fragile life can be. Unexpected and potentially deadly circumstances lurk around corners. For most Americans, the outbreak brought to light what it means to face unforeseen danger, take action, and protect others. Those who have served in the U.S. military are defined by such a cadence.

Among veterans, Memorial Day is a time to honor the men and women who did not return home from service; the unexpected but always-possible circumstances of armed conflict were their fate. It is also a time to consider those who did come home only to discover later that some potentially fatal consequence of wartime service followed them into civilian life. Memorial Day is also for them, the men and women who were exposed to atomic radiation, Agent Orange, burn-pit smoke, and other toxic substances encountered during their time in uniform.

Likewise, it is a time to remember veterans who have succumbed to the invisible wounds of war and taken their own lives or put themselves in dangerous situations caused by post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or other service-connected conditions.

Just as it was a founding principle of The American Legion over a century ago, our efforts to get at-risk veterans the care they need today are a sacred tribute to those no longer among us.

In March, when asked by Congress what The American Legion planned to do about such issues as reducing the veteran suicide rate and getting long-denied Blue Water Navy veterans into contact with VA for health care and disability benefits, I kept coming back to a pretty effective answer many of our posts know well: Buddy Checks.

When American Legion posts assemble teams, collect names, make phone calls, or knock on doors to check on the welfare of veterans, they quickly learn of those potentially fatal circumstances that lurk around corners no one saw coming. We can advocate for national issues in Washington, D.C., but real assistance for veterans in need, or at risk, comes at the community level, face to face, veteran to veteran.

Fourteen out of the 20 veterans a day who take their own lives are not enrolled in VA health care. For some, that system is inconveniently distant. A surprisingly large percentage of veterans, according to a 2019 American Legion survey, lack awareness of VA mental-health services. We must work with VA to connect such dots in our communities. Buddy Checks can be a life-saving approach, especially if they are conducted throughout the year. Download the resource kit at legion.org/membership/buddycheck to get started.

May is our special time to honor the fallen and remember those with whom we served. They may have been shot down in Korea. Perhaps a form of cancer claimed them due to poisoned air they were forced to breathe while serving in Vietnam. Way too many will have wearied from years of wrestling demons and be among the 20 per day.

Wherever we can, however we can, in honor of those no longer here, let’s rededicate ourselves to finding local veterans who need assistance from us or from VA, and follow that time-honored cadence that defines us.
Dear American Legion Family,

In this time of uncertainty, it is with a heavy heart that we announce the 2020 Department of Colorado Convention has been CANCELLED.

In accordance with Article IX, Section 4 MEETINGS, an email was sent to the voting members of the Department Executive Committee (DEC) on April 15, 2020, to vote on Resolution 1, to cancel the Department of Colorado 2020 Convention to be held at the Hotel Elegante in Colorado Springs, CO, June 25-28, 2020. The Resolution passed by an overwhelming majority vote. This Resolution also included following our National organization’s lead and recommendation to leave all elected and appointed department officers in place for the coming year and recommends the districts do the same. This includes all committee chairmen and committee members. The Finance Committee discussed all travel for Department Staff and Officers, and it was recommended that the Commander and Adjutant work together to establish the travel guidelines for the future. The Training and Education Conference has been cancelled until it is determined that it is safe to resume activities. The 2021 convention will be at the Hotel Elegante in Colorado Springs with Ovie Vernon Post 2 Pueblo, Colorado serving as host.

All our Colorado Posts need to continue the mission of this great organization. You are a vital part of our organization and service to our Veterans in our communities starts with you. We must keep the communication going with our members as we go forward into the future. When we all work together as a TEAM, we can accomplish anything. Thank you for all that you do and continue to do for our Veterans in Colorado.

Are you out walking in your community or neighborhood? Let us not forget to recognize our friends and neighbors that are flying the American Flag every day and I encourage you to take down their name and address and get them a certificate of recognition and Thanks.

Are you planning a big event in your community for after the COVID-19 is over?

The Colorado Veterans Assistance Fund and The Colorado Veterans Kids Fund are available for our members if they need assistance, please get our members the immediate assistance that they need, and we can get your reimbursed. This fund as always needs donations to ensure that we can provide the assistance at the time of need if your Post or District has and donations please get them mailed into Department Headquarters as soon as possible. As our SAL Detachment Commander Nick Arceo says “You can Make a Difference”

Please know that we are working hard to continue the great work that The American Legion does on a daily basis, Veterans Assistance and Rehabilitation, Children & Youth, Americanism and National Security are our main mission and we will never leave our mission, during this pandemic please conduct your “BUDDY CHECKS” they are the most important at this time, Veterans are struggling and they need to hear from you. Reach out by phone, email, or social media, let them know that you care about them and that they are important.

Colorado American Legion family please keep up the great work and activities that you are doing during this difficult time and share your stories and successes with everyone. We want to know what you are doing. You are truly the ones that are making a difference in Re-Igniting Patriotism as we build the Foundation for The Future!

We regret any inconveniences this may cause our members, but your safety and good health is our number one priority. Again, thank you for understanding the health and safety of our members must always be foremost in decisions we make.
Hello! I hope everyone is safe and I pray that we continue to have very minimal losses to post everlasting during this pandemic time. Many posts are finding new ways to engage our membership and working hard to make sure veterans within our communities are being contacted and offered any assistance that can be rendered by us. I can honestly say I am proud to be associated to the largest veteran organization in our great nation and being able to serve with all the members within it. Every day we hear of many people and organizations that are contributing to help one another out in extraordinary ways not normal or even traditionally seen in this country. I ask each and every one that takes the minute to read this please thank our first responders, hospital staffs, and military for their personal sacrifice and patriotism to stay strong and continuing to fight this unseen enemy.

Many of our annual events both at National and Department levels have been canceled thru the summer months to include both Colorado Education and Leadership training and the Convention. These two events are normally some of our best education opportunities so therefore we will be working even harder on ways to help you acquire any training. Currently we will keep working on our Membership Plan and Membership Awards the same as we have with few changes. The Commander and I have limited our membership round-up visits as well as many of our other travels have been restricted. We will be back on the road as soon as conditions permit. Please feel free to contact us and set up any virtual visits or just discuss how the events effect our Department. Even in the days to come we intend to find new ways of staying touch with every post in Colorado.

Membership retention is often a product of education encompassing all aspects of post operations. Often this includes how we welcome and accept those new members to how we train and prepare them to assume various post duties. We have all heard that “people pay dues to be volunteers” well they also want to feel like they belong as well. There is a wide variety of things to learn in The American Legion, but lets start at post level and go from there. My focus is mainly on Membership and retention items and of course anything that will help that. We now have District Training in a box (https://www.legion.org/training) on-line and I encourage everyone to look at the training programs they have to offer. Some good and relevant ones are Mylegion.org, a power point presentation that will help you understand and be able to use the basic functions of Mylegion.org. and for those posts wishing to explore the possibility of processing their post membership dues directly (online transmittal process) they have a power point course on that as well. I believe each post and district can possibly utilize these on GOTO meeting or even Zoom.

Considering the requirement for social distancing will likely become the new normal, we all could benefit working towards helping our less computer literate members become more computer friendly and understand the benefits of its use. Today’s society depends on Smart phones and computers to communicate. I encourage you to reach out and offer to teach others how to use the many meeting platforms as well as the many video chat applications available. We can help many of our elderly members learn how to bridge that gap of not being able to visit with family, friends and colleagues.

Please obtain a listing of all your members expired and present from Mylegion.org and make those Buddy Checks. It is a simple phone call checking on them and please take a minute to have a short conversation. Don’t limit your Buddy checks to just post membership either. Call any veteran that you know and check on them and their families as well. These calls can be critical while under stay at home orders and can make a big difference in a life.

On a closing note, I personally want to thank every member of The American Legion here in Colorado for your patience during this pandemic and all that you do in order to make us the largest and the best veteran organization in the state of Colorado. All your past, current and continued efforts will help Colorado rise up and become a great state again for all to enjoy. I look forward to getting out once we are free to travel again and hearing and learning about how your post sustained. I can imagine we will all gain a better insight on how our posts can better serve our communities in the future.

We have re-ignited patriotism. Let’s proudly display it everyday in everything we do.
COVID-19 pandemic effects the Colorado General Assembly

By: Gary Force, Department Jr. Vice Commander

The American Legion Legislative Commission continues to work on national veteran’s legislation that is listed in The American Legion Legislative Agenda. Refer to the Agenda issues by going to www.legion.org and selecting ‘Legislative’ under the ‘Programs’ tab. From there select the Legislative Agenda.


With the COVID-19 pandemic taking hold of the country there has been no additional actions taken on the federal bills I am tracking so the status as follows is unchanged. The Pay our Coast Guard Act (H.R. 367 & S. 21) continues to wait Congressional floor action. Veterans Burn Pit Act (S. 2950) has been assigned to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. The Deborah Sampson Act on women veterans’ health care (H.R. 3224) has passed the House and has been sent to the Senate and assigned to the Senate Veterans Affairs committee. Veteran’s mental bill (S. 785) has been reported out of the Senate Veterans Affairs committee and is waiting for Senate floor action. The Protect the GI Bill Act (H. R. 4625) passed the House and has been sent to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

If you would like to be added to The American Legion Nation Legislative Committee Call to Action email, sign up at www.legion.org. To track the progress of any Congressional bill along with Colorado co-sponsors, go to www.congress.gov and enter the Bill number. Bill description, status, co-sponsors and other information is available.

Also, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Colorado General Assembly 2020 session has been suspended probably into mid-May. Before the suspension the following bills were passed and sent to the Governor for signature: HB20-1051 ‘Identification of Veteran Remains for proper Military Burial’, HB20-1275 – In-state Tuition at Community College for Military Families, SB20-069 ‘Disabled Veterans Free State Park Access’ With the session suspended there will be no action on the following bills until the Assembly reconvenes: HB20-1190 – Disabled Veteran Registration Fees and ownership Tax has been referred to Appropriations. HB-1220 – Veterans community Living Center Services Assessment has been referred to Appropriations. HB20-1222 – Veterans Hiring Preference is scheduled for action by the House State, Veterans, & Military Affairs Committee. SB20-122 – Mobile Veterans Support Unit Grant Program has been referred to Appropriations. SB20-178 – Women Veterans Disability License Plate has passed Senate and is assigned to the House Finance committee. To find the current status of a bill go to https://leg.colorado.gov/bills and enter the bill number in the Search by Bill box.

During the Colorado Legislative session other bills effecting veterans may be introduced and the UVC legislative committee will review these bills and determine if they will support, monitor or oppose that bill. The goals can be found at the UVC web site www.UVCOC.org. Select State Legislation then 2020 Bills To Watch.

A trip to remember

Two years back, Sharon and I joined an American Legion sponsored trip entitled "Two Wars," through the WWII museum.

We went to the Charlevaux Ravine (Argone Forest) where Benjamin J Hofstetter died, 100 years previous. He is the namesake of our post here in Hayden and Benjamin was a personal boyhood friend of my Grandpa, who was also a member of this Post.

We laid a wreath at four different Cemeteries, I was acting Chaplin for the tour group of about 40, and Sharon represented the Auxiliary and was the one who placed the wreath. Here we are at Normandy.

Sincerely,
Ron Nereson
April and May normally begin a flurry of activity for the American Legion. In Colorado all of our 14 districts are planning for their annual conventions. This is an important time where our members gather to discuss ways to improve conventions provide the opportunity for members to meet face to face to discuss the way forward. Out of these productive conventions come resolutions designed to solve problems and improve our 4 pillars programs.

The department leadership and staff begin preparations for the annual department convention. Preparations are made with the host hotel for room and food accommodations for the attendees. In April, the tentative agenda is published and distributed to our leadership in the state. Letters are sent to our special guests from the many organizations that support veteran services in the state. Those guests include representatives from our state-run nursing homes, representatives from the VA medical center, the VA regional office, the state veteran’s employment centers and usually someone from our national organization representing our national commander. All of this planning takes time and lots and lots of brainstorming sessions to be able to provide the best convention experience for everyone.

The host post also begins meetings to discuss all the details necessary for them to welcome our delegates from all over the state. They begin selling ads for the program book. They explore ideas to make the convention fun for the delegates and profitable for their post. They need to gather the materials for silent auctions, prepare raffle tickets and assign duties and times for their members to work the convention. Again, lots and lots of time to make their efforts successful.

All that changed with the appearance of a coronavirus, now labeled as COVID-19. The most used word to describe this worldwide pandemic is, unprecedented. For all practical purposes, the world has been shut down in fear of millions of deaths from this insidious disease. We will let the pundits on TV and radio and newspapers discuss the origins of this disease and how it came to being. What we do know is that it is deadly. Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus. This describes many of our elderly Korean and Vietnam veteran members.

It is with this in mind that our national organization, and your department leadership took the unprecedented action to cancel our annual conventions. All the planning had to cease, financial implications were considered, but most importantly the health and welfare of our members was the primary force in making this important decision. We will miss the comradeship and the chance to swap ideas for improving our organization by missing the conventions. Conventions are a fun time; we all look forward to the excitement that they bring. But it is not to be this year.

Let me close by offering a quote for our own Alternate National Executive Committeeman, and Chairman of the National Membership and Post Activities Committee, Jay Bowen, in a recent message to our 14,000 American Legion Posts.

“Like all things, this is temporary, but let’s not sit back and wait for the world to open back up. Let’s find ways to not only endure but thrive in this environment. Americans are world leaders in innovation, and military Veterans lead the way as Americans in finding ways to succeed. Let’s not give up!” Well said, Jay.

See you all at next year’s conventions. Take care and stay safe.
Has God Been Good to You!!!!!!!

As mentioned in my last article, I am going to be your American Legion National Chaplain for the 2020-2021 year, and this will be done in August at the National Convention. I am very excited about it and I hope that all of you share my excitement also. This being the case, if any of you know someone who wants to be the next Department Chaplain, please have him/her attend the Department Convention in June of this year. The elections take place on Saturday after lunch. After the person is elected, I would more than happy to talk with him/her about the position as I have been doing it. Each Chaplain does a lot of things their own way except that there are a few things that are traditional with our Department.

I would like to talk about Faith this month. I know that I have discussed this in the past, but the way I personally feel now, I think it is a good thing to talk about. Many times, we say we have faith, but faith in WHAT? God wants us to have faith in HIM and only HIM. We should all be grateful that we have a LOVEING God. Because HE loves us so much, HE sent his only Son to earth and live like we do and experience all the pain and suffering that we go through. And HE did. Our Lord died for the forgiveness of our sins and HE forgives us all for what we have done. Because God loves us so much, HE wants us to pass this love on to others. When we pass on HIS love to others, we are doing what HE wants us to do. There are many times when we fail to recognize that HE still loves us even when we sin, but we should not take things for granted and commit sins all the time and expect HIM to always forgive us.

To keep the faith in HIM we must always keep HIM in front of us all the time. I know that this is a very hard thing to do for I myself had doubts many times and thought that I have lost faith in HIM. But HE always comes through and many times it is stated in the Bible, HE can take something bad and turn it around and make something good come out of it. Keep this in mind as we go through this corona virus. Have faith that all things will come out OK in the end. Maybe God wanted us to stop what we were doing, and this is HIS way of having us stop and help each other out. I can assure you that at the end HE will make something good come out of this. We all must have faith in HIM and allow HIM to do what HE wants us to do for HIM. Our country was heading in the wrong direction and maybe this is HIS way of saying STOP! Let’s take a good look at what we are doing not only to our country but also and foremost to ourselves. I am not being political; I am just stating the facts as they were. Many of us forgot about what happened at 911. This is God’s way of saying STOP and look at what we have been missing all these years. The country was greatly untied and somehow, we got separated and many were going their own way. Now with this virus we are again untied, and all are helping each other again, as God wants us to.

I pray our country will stay untied and not fall apart again. YES, we all have differences, but we can all live together if we really want to. Keep the faith in God and your fellow men, and we can all live in peace together again as God wants us to. GOD BLESS YOU ALL!!!!!

My last three words to all of you are: GO TO CHURCH!!!!!!
Look around you, History is everywhere
By: Deb Davis, Department Historian

Local history contains a wealth of details and stories that help reveal how societal changes impacted the lives of our communities. Wars transformed society in many ways such as making heroes and filling cemeteries. By investigating local history, you can find documents such as accounts of those men and women, what people thought of them, and how they changed the lives of the community.

Local history can fill you with the knowledge that history is all around you. You don’t need to visit Europe or the far East to see reflections of the past wars because your own community contains many sites and records with a rich history. Beyond the monuments and plaques on walls, people – veterans provide a great deal of history.

HELP OUT WITH BUDDY CHECKS!

We all have stories to tell, stories we have lived from the inside out. We give our experiences an order. We organize the memories of our lives into stories. Oral history listens to these stories. Oral history is the systematic collection of living people’s testimony about their own experiences. Historians have finally recognized that the everyday memories of everyday people, not just the rich and famous, have historical importance. If we do not collect and preserve those memories, those stories, then one day they will disappear forever.

Oral histories are not difficult. Many people become concerned about “doing it right,” yet they also recognize that a voice on tape is better than nothing at all. So, they try just a simple interview, just talking to someone for an hour. Ten years later such people are thankful that they made the effort. Once a project is under way, you need to assess and ensure the accuracy of the data gathered. At the very least, we must be aware of the limitations of oral history in order not to mislead ourselves into believing that oral history automatically yields accurate renditions of past events.

Because oral history depends upon living people as sources, we have limits; we can go back one lifetime. Because oral history uses spoken, not written sources, the allowable evidence expands. Even in the absence of written documentation, veterans have been able to record their own histories and the histories of those they consider important using oral history. History is no longer limited to the powerful, famous, and rich, and literate. Now history can give us a much more inclusive, and, one hopes, accurate picture of the past.

American Legion launches COVID-19 impact survey

The American Legion, APR 16, 2020

The American Legion has launched a COVID-19 impact survey to track trends in response to the pandemic. The survey will track the impact on veterans and their families throughout the pandemic’s duration. Participants can elect to be connected with a representative from The American Legion for assistance with VA benefits, employment, emotional wellness and personal contact for support.

As this is an evolving situation, this survey will be conducted biweekly for updated responses. The first survey will be available until April 29.

To take the COVID-19 impact survey, visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BJ5283R.

For the latest VA updates on coronavirus and common-sense tips on preventing the spread of disease, visit www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus.

Greetings!

I hope everyone is staying healthy. These are uncertain times, nevertheless we still have very important items that need your attention!

At the top of the list is making sure our Veterans are being taken care of. Make sure you are participating in TAL “Buddy Check” make a list of Veterans and SAL members to call and check on. A phone call can really make a difference, offer to go to the store for someone that is not able to get out. I know I can count on you to continue “making a difference” in the lives of Veterans and our members.

This month there are some important dates to keep in mind.

Sunday the 10th is Mother’s Day. May 13th is 100% membership target day; we really have some work to do on membership!

The 22nd is National Poppy Day, it would be nice to get out and help the Auxiliary on this day.

Monday the 25th is Memorial Day. Normally we would have several events to assist our sponsoring Posts on this day, this year I’m not so sure we will be able to participate in these events. Please continue to adhere to local health guidelines in your areas, we will get through this, better days are just around the corner.

Continue to process membership, let’s not let this get out of sight in these troubled times. It’s a great time to make phone calls RE membership.

Let me remind you that your Detachment Leadership is here for you, what can we do? Reach out to us with questions and concerns, we can and will do our best to assist you.

Lastly, I want to thank each of you for all your hard work on behalf of The Detachment of Colorado. Let’s lock arms and push forward.

In closing, allow me to quote the last line from our Preamble “to adopt in letter and spirit all of the great principles for which The American Legion stands; and to assist in carrying on for God and Country”

Take care of yourselves and your loved ones. God Bless.

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Auxiliary Children and Youth Message during these trying times!

By: Debra Jackson, Department Auxiliary C&Y Chairman

Wanting to share the warmest wishes with everyone during this troubling time.

Yes, they want us to stay home and be safe, but I urge you all to contact your fellow members to make sure they are not in need of anything. If you can, please try to make sure someone can get them what they need.

On the same thought, I would ask that you think of the children who are now home and unable to see their friends and teachers. These children are more in need of daily activities and communication than before. If there is something you can do for them, please find a way to do so.

Staying inside or in your own back yard can be trying and as I can only imagine the families are trying to find all kinds of interactive things to do.

Most of all, those children that have a parent overseas have more time to focus on missing them even more. We need to make sure they are ok. If you can send a card or email to the children that would be great.

Meals are being provided through schools and other businesses in the areas. Please make sure no child goes hungry.

Make calls and reach out on the internet. Make yourself available for whatever support you can.

Do this safely and keep in mind, we are all in this together.

I thank you for following the Governors protocols during this time. Respectfully,
Fly Your Flags

By: PDC Carol Kennedy

Why should the American Flags be flown at every house and business during this time? They will fly to show our commitment, love, hope and solidarity.

Since we as a nation and Colorado as our home, have been in quarantine for weeks, we NEED to show that our commitment, love, hope, and solidarity are for a brighter future. Many people have died in this country and around the world during this dark and frightening time. May they rest in peace. Most of us have suffered from depression, other illnesses, as well as fear while making our way through restrictions of food and essential items, giving up our church worshiping and socializations and different fears we do not talk about. At times we have doubted our own hopes of recovery and then the resurgence of this illness in our own community and our nation.

As we begin our journey out of quarantine, let your flags fly all over Colorado and this great nation. Let them show our love and concern for our families, friends, and all people around the world, who have suffered as we have and worse. Remembering all of those who lost their lives in the War on Covid 19. Flying flags will show all we will once again be united.

Look at those beautiful red and white stripes and the white stars in that Field (Union) of blue. Long may “Old Glory” wave, as she has after the wars of 1776, 1812, 1864, 1919, 1945, 1952, 1961, 1991 and Global War on Terror, wars among ourselves, our neighbors, other states as well as other countries for this has certainly been a War of Terror. We will not forget the War on Covid 19.

WE can and will survive by Re-igniting our Patriotism, fly your flags, and show the world our commitment, love, hope and solidarity. When you see those beautiful colors waving in the fresh breeze, may they also remind you of our country’s motto: and know “In God We Trust” has helped to get us through.

Main street Westcliffe, Colorado! Photo courtesy of Carol Kennedy & Post 170.

Flags were put up by two of our veterans, that are proud members of The American Legion Post 170 and they wish to remain anonymous.

Thank You, God Bless you and God Bless America.
ReHire Colorado combines wage-paid work, job skills training, and supportive services to help individuals facing barriers to employment succeed in the workforce.

www.colorado.gov/CDHS/ReHire
Who is eligible? Participants must be:

- Lawfully present and eligible to work in the United States;
- Colorado residents;
- At least eighteen years of age;
- Not incarcerated or otherwise unavailable for work;
- Family income below 150% the federal poverty level, as adjusted for family size;
- Unemployed, or employed for no more than twenty hours per week, for at least four consecutive weeks; and
- Demonstration of active job search through the public workforce system.
VA deploys Mobile Vet Center units to increase outreach during COVID-19 outbreak

VA began deploying Mobile Vet Center units the week of March 16 to expand direct counseling, outreach and care coordination to Veterans in communities affected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first of the mobile units was dispatched to various cities to include boroughs in New York City, a second unit was sent to San Francisco, followed by mobile centers going to New Orleans and Los Angeles.

VA’s Mobile Vet Centers can also refer active duty service members, Veterans and their families to VA care or other care facilities in the community. They serve as an extension of VA’s 300 brick-and-mortar Vet Centers across the country that provide a range of services, including individual, group, marriage and family counseling.

These mobile units help VA reach those who may not otherwise seek VA services for counseling and mental health support. Vet Center staff can assist those who may be facing extreme isolation during this period of “social distancing”—a practice that is needed to reduce the COVID-19 infection rate—but one that may likewise increase the vulnerability of some Veterans.

“While all Americans are being instructed to limit their contact with others, our duty to protect the nation’s Veterans has not ended,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Our Vet Center staff will help ensure we keep in contact with those Veterans who need our care and attention and help reduce the anxiety some may be experiencing during this unique national emergency.”

VA Mobile Vet Centers are available to help affected communities now and in the upcoming weeks. Vet Center employees, who volunteer for these missions, deploy in the wake of emergency response situations such as hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, shootings and other events. When engaging the public, VA employee volunteers are provided the necessary protections to keep them and those they help safe.

“In times like this it’s important to stand shoulder to shoulder with our local communities, support their local needs and ensure they are not alone in navigating this crisis,” said Brooklyn Vet Center Director Gabe Botero, who volunteered for five days in New York City.

Veterans, active duty service members and their families are encouraged to find their nearest Vet Center and call to get connected to counseling services or reach out to the 24/7 Vet Center Call Center at 1-877-927-8387. Many Vet Centers are currently utilizing telehealth services through VA Video Connect and can also speak to individuals via phone to reduce any barriers to seeking necessary help.

VA extends financial benefits and claims relief to Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced, April 3, a number of actions to provide Veterans with financial, benefits and claims help amid VA’s COVID-19 response. “As all Americans come together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, we want Veterans to be focused on their health and safety,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “That’s why we’re taking action to give those with pending debts, claims and appeals greater flexibility during these challenging times.”

The financial relief actions include the following until further notice:

- Suspending all actions on Veteran debts under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department.
- Suspending collection action or extending repayment terms on preexisting VA debts, as the Veteran prefers.

For benefit debts, Veterans can contact the VA Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648 to make arrangements. For health care debts, Veterans can contact the Health Resource Center at 1-888-827-4817 to make arrangements.

The benefits and claims relief actions include giving Veterans the option to submit their paperwork late for the following actions:

- perfecting claims
- challenging adverse decisions
- submitting Notices of Disagreement
- submitting Substantive Appeals
- responding to Supplemental Statements of the Case

Veterans requesting claim extensions can simply submit them with any late-filed paperwork and Veterans do not have to proactively request an extension in advance. For added convenience, VA will also accept typed/digital signatures instead of wet signatures on its forms. Those with questions can call 1-800-827-1000.

For Veterans who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and need immediate action on their appeals, as opposed to a filing extension, the Board of Veterans’ Appeals will Advance their appeal on Docket (AOD). Click here to find out how to file for AOD and what documentation is required.
CARES Act helping VA boost protections for Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun implementing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act or CARES Act, signed into law March 27, to protect America’s Veterans.

The CARES Act is best known as the law providing $2.2 trillion in economic relief to Americans and has language critical to ensuring the safety of Veterans.

“President Trump signed this legislation into law with a sharp eye on ensuring the safety of our nation’s Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Since the President signed the CARES Act, VA has been moving quickly to implement the President’s intent to hire new staff, take care of homeless Veterans, use our cutting-edge telehealth technology to keep appointments, help state-run Veterans homes.”

The bill contains important funding increases in support of VA’s nationwide response to the challenge.

This includes $17.2 billion for the Veterans Health Administration, where money is already being used, to hire new staff and make sure existing personnel have the resources they need to deal with the evolving needs of the pandemic.

The funding has also been used to add beds, provide overtime pay and purchase needed supplies such as ventilators, pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment.

Other CARES Act benefits to Veterans includes:

Homelessness
- Increasing the amount to support the additional costs of aiding Veterans in today’s more difficult economic circumstances. Before the CARES Act, VA provided up to $48.50 per day for each Veteran that grantees assist.
- Expecting loan servicers to comply with all home loan related provisions of the CARES Act, giving borrowers the right to loan forbearance upon request and protecting against foreclosures, evictions and adverse credit reporting. During the COVID-19 emergency, servicers must also comply with all other federal, state and local requirements implemented to address the servicing of home loans.

Telehealth
- Allowing VA to enter into short-term agreements with telecommunications companies to deliver free or subsidized support for mental health services through a telehealth connection or VA’s Video Connect service.
- Working to ensure Veterans participating in the HUD-VA Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH) have access to telehealth equipment.

State Veterans Homes
- Waiving a requirement that VA state homes maintain a 90% occupancy rate in order to receive federal benefits for times when the Veteran is not in the home. The change recognizes the importance of social distancing, especially among the older Veteran population.
- Permitting State Veterans Homes to admit more spouses of Veterans and Gold Star parents.

Additionally, the CARES Act law allocates $150 million for emergency State Veterans Home construction and $2.15 billion for information technology.
We realize you may be dealing with difficulties during the COVID-19 crisis. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) may be able to help.

WHAT WE’RE DOING

If you have...

New VA debt,
We will temporarily stop debt payment collections.
You don’t have to act.

Existing VA debt,
You can request a temporary collection suspension or an extended repayment plan. Call 1-800-827-0648.

After the national emergency ends, we will resume debt collection activities.

OTHER VA DEBT-RELATED EFFORTS

• VA will not refer delinquent debts to credit reporting agencies during the crisis.
• VA Home Loan applications will continue for Veterans with unresolved debt payment issues.

For help or to confirm whether this information applies to your VA benefit debt, contact the Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648.

WHAT ELSE WE’RE DOING

When possible, we’re moving in-person services to virtual platforms. We’re also granting extension requests for late-filed forms, when the extension request is based on COVID-19. For assistance with benefit-related claim support, please contact 1-800-827-1000 or visit benefits.va.gov.

We’re working to find additional ways to serve you during this crisis. Please follow national and local guidelines to stay healthy and safe.
Inspired by your service.

As a veteran who has received an Honorable discharge, you’re eligible for membership in USAA. With advice, tools and products to aid you with insurance, banking, investments and retirement, USAA is committed to stand alongside you wherever life takes you.

Explore the benefits of USAA membership now.

☎️ 1-877-699-2654 | usaa.com/legion

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Purchase of a product other than USAA auto or property insurance, or purchase of an insurance policy offered through the USAA Insurance Agency, does not establish eligibility for or membership in USAA property and casualty insurance companies. Use of the term “member” or “membership” does not convey any eligibility rights for auto and property insurance products, or legal or ownership rights in USAA. Membership eligibility and product restrictions apply and are subject to change. To be eligible for auto and property insurance, separated military personnel must have received a discharge type of Honorable. Eligible former dependents of USAA members may purchase auto or property insurance if the member obtained USAA auto or property insurance. USAA means United Services Automobile Association and its insurance, banking, investment and other companies. Banks Member FDIC. Investments provided by USAA Investment Management Company and USAA Financial Advisors Inc., both registered broker dealers. Financial planning services and financial advice provided by USAA Financial Planning Services Insurance Agency, Inc. (known as USAA Financial Insurance Agency in California, License #0E363120), a registered investment advisor and insurance agency and its wholly owned subsidiary, USAA Financial Advisors, Inc., a registered broker dealer. The American Legion receives financial support from USAA for its sponsorship.
Military scientists and engineers develop ventilator prototype in response to COVID-19

By: Katherine Mapp, Naval Surface Warfare Center Public Affairs, PANAMA CITY, Fla, no changes have been made to this article which was taken from www.health.mil

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists and engineers at Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division (NSWC PCD) are developing low-cost, easily-assembled non FDA approved ventilators that can be rapidly prototyped and used in both hospital and field settings. If approved, these prototypes could be used to support critical care requirements around the world.

During a period of only two weeks, the Department of Defense (DoD) Hack-a-Vent Innovation Challenge sought to ignite the brilliant minds and expertise of our Nation to respond to the threats overwhelming the medical system. Teams were charged with creating innovative prototypes using exclusively commercial-off-the-shelf items and/or 3D printed parts.

The NSWC PCD teams are comprised of mechanical, electrical, and systems engineers, as well as diving and life support subject matter experts, in addition to experts from the Naval Experimental Diving Unit and end-users, including medical professionals. The prototypes were developed and tested in partnership with NSWC PCD’s Center for Innovation.

Holly Gardner, NSWC PCD innovation lead, said this challenge identifies an emergent need that can be rapidly delivered across the globe through innovation.

“This is personal to me. My brother, a former Navy flight surgeon, is an emergency medicine physician and medical center director for two hospitals in the Dallas area. He has survived war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and now he and his team are putting their lives on the line to save people affected by COVID-19,” said Gardner. “This battle is just starting and they are already running out of medical supplies.”

Dr. Andrew Schicho, NSWC PCD mechanical engineer and one of the team leaders, said he wanted to develop a solution for the call because, “aside from the tragic loss of life, the emotional toll this must take on our health care providers is almost unimaginable,” said Schicho. “Knowing that the United States does not have a ready supply of ventilators to support the estimated need, I decided right then that I wanted to help.”

Schicho and his team decided that building ventilators was how they serve the best at a time like this.

“Many people dedicated their time and were all so encouraging of the work,” said Schicho. “What really drove this home for us is that we were onto something, that what we were doing was important, and that this device could actually be used to save someone’s life.”

Despite the aggressive deadline, the employees remained committed to the task because they know producing a viable solution will serve a greater need. NSWC PCD submitted five different proposals, one of which had a working prototype that met all of the requirements.

The DoD Innovation Challenge teams will be notified after the submission deadline and the top three submissions will be selected by a panel of experts and may be offered an opportunity to produce a functioning prototype by March 30.
Veterans seeking fertility find help at VA

VA is here to guide you through the process

Thirteen percent of couples in the United States have trouble getting pregnant. Infertility is when a couple does not get pregnant after 12 months of regular intercourse. As a result, trying to have a baby can result in stress and uncertainty.

For Veterans having trouble conceiving, VA is here to help. VA understands and is here to guide you through the process.

Overview and Treatment

There are many medical conditions that can cause infertility. VA offers several different fertility treatments and services. For example:

- Infertility assessments and counseling.
- Blood testing.
- Genetic counseling.
- Imaging services, such as ultrasounds and X-rays.
- Hormonal therapies.
- Surgery.
- Reversal of tubal litigation.
- Reversal of vasectomy

Eligible Veterans with service-connected conditions that result in infertility may qualify for fertilization help. For example, treatments include in vitro fertilization (IVF) or other forms of assisted reproductive technology. Through IVF, an egg is fertilized outside of the body and then transferred to the uterus.

Getting Started

If you need help getting pregnant, schedule an evaluation with a VA provider. Then, your provider will help determine what services you need. VA will then refer you to a fertility specialist who will work with you to develop the right treatment plan.

“VA was very helpful in explaining the different treatment options available to me and supported me through every step of the process,” said one-woman Veteran. “I would definitely recommend VA’s fertility program.”

Veterans do not have to face fertility concerns alone. Instead, VA will walk you through available treatments and support you throughout the process.

To learn more about VA’s fertility services, schedule an evaluation with your local VA provider. You can also contact the Women Veterans Call Center at 1-855-829-6636.

VA Partners with Treasury Department to Deliver Economic Impact Payments to Veterans and Survivors

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today, April 17, 2020, it is working directly with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and U.S. Treasury Department to ensure delivery of ‘Economic Impact Payments’ to Veterans and survivors who receive Compensation and Pension (C&P) benefit payments from VA without additional paperwork or IRS filings.

The ‘Economic Impact Payments,’ authorized by the Treasury Department under the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, will be issued automatically to recipients of non-taxable VA benefits who did not file annual income tax returns for 2018 or 2019. VA and the IRS have been collaborating since the passage of the CARES Act to ensure Veterans receive their EIP.

“Many have expressed concern that Veterans and their beneficiaries would be overlooked during the distribution of Economic Impact Payments from the CARES Act simply because they don’t file an annual tax return,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This collaboration will ensure our Veterans receive CARES Act payments without any additional action or paperwork required.”

Economic Impact Payments will be automatic for non-tax filing VA beneficiaries. For VA beneficiaries who filed a Form 1040 for 2018 or 2019, those payments will also be automatic. No further action is needed. They can track the status of their payments on the Get My Payment tool on IRS.gov. For non-tax filing VA beneficiaries, please note their information will be loaded on this tool within the next few weeks.

For VA beneficiaries who didn’t file a tax return in 2018 or 2019 and have a dependent, there is a special step they need to take, and the sooner the better. They should visit the Non-Filer: Enter Payment Info Here tool on IRS.gov. By quickly taking steps to enter information on the IRS website about them and their

(Continued on Page 22 See IRS)
How will you pay for expenses that Medicare doesn’t cover?

With the high cost of healthcare today, Medicare Supplement insurance is becoming a necessity for more and more Americans. That’s why it’s good to know that you now have a choice of Standardized Medicare Supplement plans at affordable group rates, offered to members like you. And, all plans are underwritten by a company known for it’s prompt, personal, responsive service.

Other features include:
- The freedom of choosing your own doctors and hospitals
- Outstanding Customer Service available from courteous representatives ready to answer your questions
- Hassle-free claims processing in about 7 days
- Excellent service from a company with an A+ (Superior, 2nd out of 16 ratings) A.M. Best rating for financial stability as of 4/27/11

Make sure you can pay for the expenses that Medicare doesn’t cover and help protect your family’s retirement savings. Apply today for the peace of mind you want, at affordable Legioneer Insurance Trust member rates.

Legioneer Insurance Trust Members Medicare Supplement Reply Card

For your FREE information kit on the Medicare Supplement Insurance Plans complete and return this coupon.

Name: __________________________ DOB: _______
Spouse Name: __________________________ Spouse’s DOB: _______
Address: __________________________
City: __________________________ State: ______ ZIP: ______
Telephone: __________________________

Send to: Medicare Supplement Processing Dept.
P. O. Box 1341
Valley Forge, PA 19482-9946
ID RESOLVE

A New Program to Help Legionnaires Fight Back Against Identity Theft

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America and has affected more than 18.7 million victims, with veterans being especially vulnerable targets. Data breaches are becoming more frequent and, when an identity thief strikes, most victims are left to clean up the mess themselves, unsure of where to turn to first. We’ve heard Legionnaire’s concerns around the growing threats of identity theft and are proud to provide a new service to address this concern.

ID Resolve focuses solely on the aftermath of identity theft and resolving the issue. With call centers located in the US, Legionnaires can activate an important set of services to fix the situation and restore their name. ID Resolve’s Identity Resolution Specialists are certified in identifying and repairing any type of identity theft such as medical fraud, Social Security identity theft, and financial theft.

ID Resolve is available to Legionnaires at a special member only rate and provides resolution services for a full year. Plus, Legionnaires can take up to 30 days to review ID Resolve and decide if it’s right for them; if not, a full refund is available as long as the services have not been used.

There are two annual memberships available:

Member: $79/year
Couple: $99/year

To learn more or enroll in ID Resolve, visit www.theit.com/IDResolve

ID Theft by the numbers

Claims a new victim every 2 seconds
16+ mill. victims targeted in the U.S.
$16 billion in losses
Veterans are 50% more likely to be the victim of identity theft
There were 1,579 data breaches last year
40+ hours spent resolving an identity theft case

Services provided by Generali Global Assistance. Generali Global Assistance has been a leading provider of identity and digital protection solutions, travel insurance, and other assistance services for more than 30 years. Generali Global Assistance is part of the multinational Generali Group, which for over 185 years has created a presence in 50 countries with over 74 000 employees. Generali’s success has been built on the foundation of trust that clients have placed in their ability to provide assistance in the most difficult of circumstances.

Offered by Worldwide Identity Security, Inc.
qualifying children, they can receive the $500 per dependent child payment in addition to their $1,200 individual payment. VA recognizes that many non-tax filing beneficiaries have already begun using the IRS’ EIP payment portal to provide the necessary data to IRS to receive their EIP. There will be no interruption to payments being processed using the IRS portal, and Veterans with internet access are encouraged to continue providing information and track their EIP through the IRS portal.

For those who do not have access, or choose not to use the IRS portal, their EIP will be processed without further action on their part.

While no date for distribution has been set at this time, VA is securely sharing necessary beneficiary data with Treasury which will allow Treasury to begin issuance of Economic Impact Payments.


Millions of veterans to get letters this week on potential reimbursements for medical costs

By: Leo Shane III

The exterior of the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System in Denver is shown in 2017. (David Zalubowski/AP)

More than one million veterans will soon be receiving instructions from Veterans Affairs officials on how to check if they are eligible for thousands of dollars in medical cost reimbursements as part of a court decision last fall.

Starting today, department staffers will send letters to tens of thousands of veterans who were rejected for financial relief in recent years for bills they received for non-department emergency medical care. That move comes over VA objections concerning an ongoing lawsuit over the issue, which could add billions in new costs to the department’s budget.

Last fall, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruled that the department’s current regulation for veterans who seek non-department medical care violates existing federal law. They ordered VA officials to re-examine more than 72,000 rejected claims and update their rules, arguing the department has a responsibility to cover the costs of the unexpected medical visits.

The ruling could cost the department up to $6.5 billion in past and future reimbursement expenses.

The case centers on veterans whose unpaid emergency room expenses were denied by VA officials under existing policies. The plaintiffs’ both had part of their bills paid for by other insurance but were left with several thousand in personal costs.

VA officials argued in court that they did not need to handle the unpaid balance because the veterans were primarily covered under other insurance plans. The court ruled that violates both existing law and past legal precedent.

A VA Inspector General report last summer found $716 million in improperly processed payments in cases involving veterans who sought medical care outside the department’s health system in 2017, including about $53 million that should have been refunded under existing rules.

VA officials are considering appealing the ruling and asked that any action on the cases be postponed until higher courts weigh in on the matter.

About the Author Leo Shane III - Leo covers Congress, Veterans Affairs, and the White House for Military Times. He has covered Washington, D.C. since 2004, focusing on military personnel and veterans’ policies. His work has earned numerous honors, including a 2009 Polk award, a 2010 National Headliner Award, the IAVA Leadership in Journalism award and the VFW News Media award.

New procedures for Veterans suffering from enlarged prostate

Avoiding the sexual and other side effect

Vietnam Veteran Phil Gonzalez planned his life around his proximity to a rest room. The 69-year-old lived with the fear of not making it to the toilet in time. His sleep was restless as he got up numerous times throughout the night to use the restroom.

Gonzalez, like millions of men over 50, suffered from lower urinary tract infection symptoms (LUTS) secondary to benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). This condition is commonly referred to as an enlarged prostate.

Two new procedures at VA Salt Lake City Health Care System are giving Veterans who suffer from LUTS new hope.

Most male Veterans will need to see a urologist at some point in their life, according to Dr. William Brant, Urologist at VA Salt Lake City (pictured above). Forty million men in the United States have an enlarged prostate. In addition, more than 40% of men over 50 and 80% of men over 70 experience symptoms.
Symptoms a lot of men will recognize

Symptoms can range from irritating to obstructive to dangerous. For example, on the irritating side, men experience frequent urination and a strong urgency to urinate. They also get up multiple times at night and sometimes experience burning or pain when urinating. Veterans experiencing obstructive symptoms have trouble initiating stream, pushing to urinate and weak stream. They feel they have not completely emptied or are unable to empty their bladder. As a result, they feel the need to go back to the restroom and finish the job.

If not treated, men can experience a deterioration of overall bladder health. The bladder may just stop working. This could lead to catheter dependency, urinary incontinence, bladder stones and urinary tract infections.

Surgery and medications can have sexual side effects

Gonzalez’s symptoms were irritating, but LUTS was still affecting his quality of life. He wanted to change that.

In the past, treating LUTS would mean potentially taking medication for the rest of your life or surgery. Both have numerous side-effects and drawbacks for Veterans. Men often stop taking the medication or only take it periodically, not as recommended by their doctor.

Surgery can have complications and can include hospital stays. Both surgery and medication can have sexual side effects.

VA Salt Lake's urology staff started looking for alternatives

“What we were originally looking for was something that would give us the best chance of being able to treat all comers. That can be done in clinic and comfortably. And give good results without the side effects,” said Brant.

They found a solution in two new procedures: UroLift and Rezum.

“What’s nice about both of these is they really avoid the side effects. Particularly the sexual side effects. And they are a onetime deal,” said Brant.

Both UroLift and Rezum are in-clinic procedures. The procedures are fast and the patient is awake for the entirety. Doctors give some patients local anesthesia for minor pain and mild medication for anxiety.

What the procedures do

UroLift uses small implants to lift and hold prostate tissue out of the way of the urinary tract. It works almost immediately after procedure.

Rezum uses steam to kill prostate cells. The body naturally removes the dead cells, shrinking the prostate and opening the urinary tract. Patients start to see the effects within a few weeks, and see peak effect about six months after the procedure. The shape of a man’s prostate dictates the method a doctor will use.

Sleeping through the night

Gonzalez received the Rezum treatment. He now sleeps through the night and can sit through a church service without heading to the restroom. He no longer plans his day around locating the nearest restroom.

“When I have something to drink,” said Gonzalez, “I no longer have to hurry home or to the hospital. I think it’s great. It’s made me so happy.”

If you are Veteran suffering from an enlarged prostate, contact your VA urologist to find out if either of these two new procedures are appropriate for you.

Bruce Sperry is a surgical physician assistant. Jeremy M. Laird is a public affairs specialist. Both work at the Salt Lake City VA Medical Center.
Veterans - A Nation of Angels

By: Annette Johnson, Department C&Y Chair

The recent world events have reminded me of this phrase I said to my father when I was five years old. It was the first awareness I had of the word unknown. I witnessed firsthand how veterans will come to the aid of others in times of need. Last year we were confronted with a government shutdown, this year it is a pandemic. It is not often we are confronted with circumstances we have almost no knowledge of or control over. Yet, no matter what we go through, veterans are one of the most giving, resilient and irrepressible people in our Nation. How many do you know that would give their last dollar or share a comfort item with a stranger in desperate times?

While conducting Buddy Checks over the past few weeks, there have been conversations where many are experiencing overwhelming feelings of helplessness and questions of what can ‘I’ do to help? Thank you for the many conversations and sharing of thoughts of boredom, your feelings, and ideas you have come up with to show you care and are here to help our brothers and sisters in need. Some of your stories include bringing comfort baskets of basic essentials to veterans with disabilities, interestingly some have thought out side of the box and have included personal hygiene items to families knowing these also are basic necessities everyone needs.

Others are supporting shelters and food banks ensuring no veteran or child goes hungry during this time. A few fun ideas involve people donating books and games to families with kids and for neighbor kids who cannot go to the park some are planning surprise Easter egg hunts, placing Easter eggs in the front yard then texting the parents on Easter morning so the kids can still enjoy a little fun. Others are choosing to write words of encouragement, coloring pictures or drawing a picture for a child and transforming these messages into a paper airplane and delivering the message over the fence. And thank you for the numerous ways you are helping the elderly and immuno-compromised in our communities, because of you we continue to succeed.

Unique Acts of Kindness are not new to many of us. For those who remember the 60’s and 70’s we are revisiting a time we have lived already, although, without Woodstock. This was a simpler way of life, without mass electronics and for those born in the 80’s you may be feeling the growing pains of this “new normal” together we will get through this, we always do.

All of the stories have been great to hear, are inspirational and uplifting. I find myself compelled to call upon our Nation of Angels one more time.

As you know this pandemic has displaced many veterans and their families are acutely in need of assistance more than what we may think. On a National level, TFA applications are on the rise, not all qualify and not all can be fulfilled. One of the struggles we are facing is the need for social distancing and remaining indoors. This makes it difficult for many to receive assistance.

During this time, I am proud to say our Veterans Assistance Fund and Colorado Veterans Kids Fund are still here helping our veterans and their families. To answer the question of “How can ‘I’ help, if I have learned one thing in life it is that “we” have control over how we choose to help others.

Currently, our funds are low and we needed to reduce the amount of distributions to a case by case basis. The American Legion Veterans Assistance Fund and Colorado Veterans Kids Fund are a last resort for our members. Since the COVID-19 pandemic we have limited all funds to Colorado American Legion members. The old adage “this will get worse before it gets better” is true; veterans are known for overcoming adversity, adapting and understanding our country looks to veterans for hope and reassurance in times of adversity. Help us avoid turning our members away because we do not have the funding available.

This is a call for all Veterans, A Nation of Angels; will you join me by uniting and participating in an act of kindness that will effect change in the lives of others?

Please reach a little deeper and send in whatever you can to Dept. HQ earmarked for VAF or CVKF. Ask your Legion family members to match your donation of $1.00, $5.00, $10.00, $20.00 or $25.00 - no amount is too small to feed a child. Our veteran community depends on us; together we will overcome these uncertain times while continuing to make a difference in the lives of veterans and their children.

It is my hope this story will touch you in some way, and bring a pleasant though, encouragement, and a decision to choose to unite in a common cause. Please stay safe, shelter in place until we get the all clear and remember while you may not see us, we are ever watchful, we stand ever ready, we are Veterans: A Nation of Angels.
VA Research reveals circumstances that can lead to homelessness among women Veterans

By: Dr. Ann Elizabeth Montgomery

VA provides a full range of programs and services to help Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness secure stable housing and achieve independence. These resources are vital for all Veterans, especially women: Homelessness among female Veterans increased by 2% between 2018 and 2019, while homelessness among male Veterans declined by 3% during the same period.

Although women Veterans make up 10% of the Veteran population, their numbers have nearly doubled in the past decade, making them the fastest-growing segment of the Veteran population. VA research found that women Veterans are more than twice as likely to become homeless as women who did not serve in the military. Additionally, 1–2% of all women Veterans and 13–15% of women Veterans living in poverty will experience homelessness over the course of a year.

When a team of VHA researchers asked women Veterans experiencing homelessness to describe their “downward spiral” into homelessness, the experience of trauma before, during, and after military services was a common theme. Childhood adversity, substance abuse, relationship termination, military sexual trauma (MST), intimate partner violence (IPV), medical problems, a PTSD diagnosis, and unemployment were all associated with women Veterans’ experience of housing instability.

Homelessness for women Veterans may look different than it does for men. While men are more frequently on their own when homeless, women are more often accompanied by dependents. Men also are more likely to access emergency shelters or shorter-term transitional housing—programs often geared specifically for males. Women, however, tend to access VA homeless programs such as Supportive Services for Veteran Families and Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing. In addition to helping to prevent or rapidly end homelessness among Veterans and ensure long-term stable housing, these programs offer the flexibility that women need to ensure the welfare of their children and families. Women also may double-up with friends or family members, making it difficult to identify them as experiencing homelessness.

One way VA identifies Veterans who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness is to ask them questions about their housing when they present for outpatient care. Responses to these questions reveal that women Veterans both experience housing instability and access VA’s homeless programs more frequently than male Veterans.

Safe, affordable, and functionally adequate housing is an important platform from which Veterans are able to accomplish their goals, including supporting family and other relationships, attaining and maintaining employment, and addressing their healthcare needs.

Since 2009, when the White House and the Secretary of the VA announced the goal of ending Veteran homelessness, the number and types of services intended to prevent and end housing instability among Veterans have grown. This has led to a 50% reduction in the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness on any given day.

Further developments

VA continues to develop and implement innovative refinements to its homeless programs to address challenges to housing stability, such as limited or non-existent affordable housing in some communities, Veterans’ needs for longer-term housing subsidies, and the lack of social support. Further, research is ongoing to learn about the needs of women Veterans experiencing or at risk of housing instability and the best methods to address those needs.

By contacting their local VAMC or the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans, women Veterans can be immediately directed to programs and services that will provide them with the assistance and support they need to find or remain in a place they can call home.

Dr. Ann Elizabeth Montgomery is an Assistant Professor at the UAB School of Public Health in the Department of Health Behavior as well as an Investigator with VA’s National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans at the Birmingham VA Medical Center.
A toxic mess

By: Ken Olsen, APR 20, 2020

For years, Wade Woxland, Paul Lutz and Lisa McCracken used the water at Naval Air Station Willow Grove in Pennsylvania without a second thought. They didn’t worry on days they arrived at work to find the drinking fountains shut off and covered in plastic, considering it an inconvenience instead of a warning. They filled their water bottles in bathrooms, showered in the base gym, swam in the base pool and ate at the base galley. Until the people they served with started developing strange cancers and other diseases. Until it was too late.

McCracken contracted breast cancer. Lutz has multiple myeloma. Woxland died just after Christmas 2013, 18 months after he was diagnosed with five different types of cancer — including one so rare that only 50 cases had been reported in the United States. His wife, Nicole Gitt-Woxland, who also served at the base, has an autoimmune disorder. Until they were diagnosed, none of them realized that Willow Grove’s drinking water had been contaminated by toxic firefighting foam chemicals, often referred to as PFAS.

“No one ever said ‘Don’t drink the water,” Lutz says, noting that questions were not asked when the drinking fountains were shuttered because the joint Navy/ Air Force Reserve base was old. “Come to find out it’s been a Superfund site since 1995.” Lutz began making a list of his colleagues as they became sick or died. He gave up when the tally reached 119 — and that was years ago.

“Imagine the hundreds of thousands of people on the base who were exposed,” Gitt-Woxland adds. “I don’t think we’ve seen the implications of what was done there — or the cover-up.”

Willow Grove is one of hundreds of current and former U.S. military bases where servicemembers and families were potentially exposed to PFAS-laced drinking water. Not to mention residents of nearby communities whose drinking water was also polluted by firefighting foam chemicals. But the work to assess the contamination, much less clean it up, has barely begun.

‘Forever chemicals’ - PFAS are a class of fluorinated chemicals used in aqueous film-forming firefighting foams invented with the help of the Navy and widely adopted by the U.S. military beginning in the 1970s, says Remington Nevin, a preventive and occupational medicine physician who served with the 82nd Airborne in Afghanistan. PFAS were also used in products ranging from non-stick cookware to stain-resistant carpet and specialty clothing.

Because these fluorinated compounds don’t break down in soil or water, they are often called “forever chemicals.” They are linked to a variety of cancers, autoimmune disorders, birth defects and other health issues. An environmental specialist at 3M, which manufactured the toxicants, called them “the most insidious pollutant since PCB” in his March 1999 resignation letter, according to the Detroit Free Press.

“The toxicity of this class of substances is undeniable, and their persistence and accumulation within the body should be cause for significant concern,” says Nevin, who studied the health risks during his occupational medicine fellowship training at the International Association of Fire Fighters. Long-term consumption of drinking water contaminated with high levels of the toxicants “poses an unacceptable risk to human health,” he adds.

Yet there are no federal regulations limiting PFAS pollution, says Genna Reed, lead science and policy analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists. “That’s one reason we don’t have any idea of the number of sites that are contaminated.”

In 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency set a PFAS advisory limit of 70 ppt, far higher than many scientists believe is safe for human health. Some states are moving to set stricter limits. And the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry has recommended PFAS limits as low as 7 to 11 ppt.

The scope of PFAS pollution is staggering. It’s turned up in Strawberry Lake in Michigan, where residents have been warned not to eat fish or touch the foam that’s built up from PFAS contamination. It has tainted the baptismal pool and drinking water at a Pentecostal church in Sacramento, Calif. PFAS problems have prompted the military to drill monitoring wells near places such as Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Washington state, and pay to build new water-treatment plants near Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado.

Current and former military bases have some of the nation’s highest PFAS levels, according to an analysis by the Environmental Working Group (EWG). The former England Air Force Base near Alexandria, La., is thought to have the worst contamination with concentrations measuring 20.7 million ppt. At Willow Grove, where the Air Force is providing $2.8 million toward containing the contamination and filtering drinking water, PFAS levels were measured at 86,000 ppt — 7,818 times greater than the safe-exposure level, according to EWG.

In 2017, DoD estimated 401 current and former U.S. military bases were contaminated with PFAS. The total has now jumped to 651 military sites with potential firefighting foam pollution, according to a new Pentagon report released in March. It’s telling that DoD can’t provide a conclusive number, Reed says.

“That speaks to the real need for meaningful federal action — for
testing, remediation and helping people who have been exposed,” she says. “This is a legacy contaminant that has been used on military sites for decades. Military families and other affected communities have the right to know if the water they drank for decades was contaminated with PFAS and posed significant risks to their health.”

U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., a former Pentagon official, called for accountability in a 2019 letter to Defense Secretary Mark Esper. “We must address these issues as environmental security is, in fact, homeland security, and it is clear PFAS is a threat to our safety,” Slotkin wrote. “When residents of the Great Lakes state, home to the greatest concentration of fresh water in the world, cannot hand our kids a glass of water with confidence that it is safe to drink, that is a threat to our way of life.”

**Hangar full of foam** - It’s easy to see how the toxicants could have made their way into drinking water at Willow Grove, now Horsham Air Guard Station. Lutz recalls the firefighting foam system accidentally going off at least twice during the 12 years he was stationed at the base. “I’ve seen the hangar 10 feet deep in foam,” he says. “They don’t say, ‘Put on a Tyvek suit and a respirator.’ Instead, there are kids out there in dungarees with brooms and squeegees sweeping the foam into drains.”

Still, Lutz knew nothing about the groundwater contamination until an ice hockey injury sent him to the doctor. A back specialist found a tumor on his spine in 2015, a year after he retired from the Navy. VA has acknowledged that his cancer is tied to his service at Willow Grove, he says. After surgery, chemo, radiation and two stem-cell transplants, his multiple myeloma is in remission. But there is no cure.

“I was diagnosed with cancer at 44,” Lutz says. “I took a bullet for our country from our country. I could have protected myself – but if the people charged with taking care of me won’t tell me ....”

Likewise, McCracken was aware that the Navy used firefighting foam at both of her duty stations – Naval Air Station North Island in California and then Willow Grove. “I didn’t know how bad it was when it got in the drinking water,” she says. McCracken discovered she had breast cancer in 2004 and left the Navy in 2006, not wanting to burden the military with five years of monitoring for the possibility of her cancer’s reoccurrence. But she was never able to make sense of her disease. “There is not a stitch of cancer in my family,” she says. “I never smoked or drank or any of that. No drugs. No factor that led to any of this.”

McCracken started connecting the dots after former Willow Grove colleagues faced catastrophic illnesses. “Some of the healthier people I knew would get rare cancers, and then they were dead,” she says. “It was one after another after another.” She researched firefighting foam and concluded that PFAS caused her cancer. Her journey has unsettling similarities to her father’s experience as a Blue Water Vietnam War veteran who deals with the effects of Agent Orange exposure.

Although she’s now cancer-free, McCracken worries about her stepdaughter, who was stationed at Whidbey Island for four years. And she’s alarmed at the lack of awareness.

“When you’re in the military, you don’t say, ‘Let’s look at the list of Superfund sites’ when you get your next duty station,” she says. “I wanted to go to Willow Grove because I wanted to live back east again. If I had known about PFAS, I probably wouldn’t have done it.”

**Health nut** - The Woxlands became aware of Willow Grove’s toxic hazards only after Wade was diagnosed with the first cancer in 2012. An ultra-healthy bicyclist who rode 500 miles the month before doctors found a tumor in his bladder, he was optimistic about his recovery. Then specialists discovered that the disease was a rare cancer that normally attacks the stomach. Only 50 cases had been identified.

Wade underwent intensive chemotherapy and bladder surgery, to no avail. The couple went to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston hoping to find more treatment options. Instead, they learned that Wade had four additional types of untreated cancer and nine to 18 months to live. The more he thought about it, the more Wade was certain his condition was connected to his time at Willow Grove. The couple went home to Denver and contacted members of his squadron.

“We started hearing about all the people he was stationed with who had died of brain cancer, colon cancer, breast cancer,” Nicole says. She created a Facebook group for people who served at the base and asked people to post if they knew anyone with a cancer diagnosis.

“An astronomical number of people responded,” Nicole says. “It was crazy. And every month, it seemed two or three people passed away who served with us or were in another squadron at Willow Grove.”

Wade died Dec. 28, 2013, and Nicole handed responsibility for the Facebook group to Lutz and another veteran a few months later. “I had three kids who were mourning,” Nicole says. “There was no way I was going to be able to take care of that.” Eventually, the Facebook group became less about people who were falling ill and more of a memorial site for people who died.

The Woxlands filed a VA claim while Wade was still alive, without success. After Wade died, Nicole filed a new claim as a survivor, hiring a medical specialist and other experts to help her make the case. After three frustrating years, she prevailed and believes it’s the first time VA granted 100 percent service connection post-mortem for PFAS exposure. Nicole hopes that sets a precedent for other veterans and families who were exposed to PFAS.

Now Nicole is pushing for legislation that would automatically grant servicemembers who serve at a Superfund site a zero percent VA disability rating as they leave the military, so they can more readily access care and benefits when they are stricken with service-connected health problems.

Meanwhile, she worries what the PFAS exposure means for her children – particularly her youngest. “It’s scary,” she says, recalling the years their family lived in military housing near Willow Grove. “We used the tap water to make baby formula for him.”

Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.