February 5, 2018

VETERANS
MONTHLY INFORMATION PACKAGE

FLAGLER COUNTY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 25, 2018

New Online Tool Will Provide Veterans With Customized Instructions for Discharge Upgrade Process

WASHINGTON — The Department of Defense (DOD), through a joint initiative with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), has launched a new web-based tool that will provide customized guidance to Veterans who desire to upgrade or change the conditions of their military discharge.

By answering a few short questions, Veterans will receive information on the specific armed services board to contact, the form/s to fill out, special guidance applicable to their case, where to send their application and helpful tips for appealing their discharge.

“This new tool and partnership with DOD is one of many VA initiatives offered to Veterans who believe they may have been unfairly discharged or received an unfair discharge characterization,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “Veterans who believe their discharge was unjust, erroneous or warrants an upgrade are encouraged to use the tool and then apply for review.”

DOD officials also praised the new innovative tool.

“We are thrilled to have partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs in developing this wonderful and easily accessible tool,” said Mr. Robert Wilkie, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. “We support our Veterans, whether they served recently or long ago, and we are excited to introduce a tool that will individualize the guidance for those who desire an upgrade or change in their military discharge.”

The military has estimated that tens of thousands of Veterans with less than honorable discharges are especially likely to have unjust discharges deserving of upgrades. These are Veterans who were discharged due to incidents relating to post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or sexual orientation. Fragmented and confusing information has historically deterred Veterans from obtaining crucial information and — in many cases — necessary benefits.

The discharge upgrade tool is available at https://www.vets.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2018

VA Announces Aggressive New Approach for Low-Performing Medical Centers

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced steps that it is taking as part of an aggressive new approach to produce rapid improvements at VA’s low-performing medical facilities nationwide.

VA defines its low-performing facilities as those medical centers that receive the lowest score in its SAIL star rating system, or a one-star rating out of five. VA currently has 15 such one-star facilities:

Hampton (Virginia); Harlingen (Texas); Roseburg (Oregon); Washington (DC); Big Spring (Texas); Denver (Colorado); Dublin (Georgia); El Paso (Texas); Jackson, (Mississippi); Loma Linda (California); Memphis (Tennessee); Murfreesboro (Tennessee); Nashville (Tennessee); Phoenix (Arizona); and Walla Walla (Washington).

The steps VA is taking to produce rapid improvements at its low-performing facilities include:

1. **Central, national accountable leadership** – VA has designated Dr. Peter Almenoff, Director of VA’s Office of Reporting, Analytics, Performance, Improvement and Deployment (RAPID) Healthcare Improvement Center, to oversee improvement at each of the centers. Dr. Almenoff reports directly to Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Executive in Charge of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

2. **Comprehensive analysis and identification of improvement targets** – VA is employing a new initiative, known as Strategic Action Transformation (STAT), that uses a rigorous and formal approach based on clinical performance indicators to identify vulnerabilities in each low-performing facility and set specific targets for improvement.

3. **Provision of national resources for improvement** – VA’s RAPID team of experts will use sophisticated statistical tools to track the progress of improvement against these targets, and, where warranted, will dispatch a team of expert improvement coaches quickly to the medical centers to assist them in meeting the goals.

4. **Accountability for results** – VA’s Central Office will review each of the facilities quarterly, and if the facilities fail to make rapid substantial progress in their improvement plan, VA leadership will take prompt action, including changing the leadership of the medical center.

“President Trump has made it clear that our Veterans deserve only the best when it comes to their healthcare, and that’s why we are focusing on improving our lowest performing facilities nationwide,” said VA Secretary David Shulkin. “We will employ tight timelines for facilities to demonstrate improvement, and if low performance persists, we will make swift changes -- including replacing facility leaders -- until we achieve the rapid improvements that Veterans and taxpayers expect from VA.”

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January 26, 2018

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1. TRICARE Pharmacy Copays Increasing: TRICARE pharmacy copay costs will increase on Feb. 1, 2018, as required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018. The increases will impact almost all beneficiaries, including individuals on TRICARE For Life. Exceptions include active-duty service members (ADSM), who can still fill their prescriptions at any pharmacy at no cost, dependent survivors of ADSM, and medically-retired service members and their dependents, who will continue to be charged 2017 rates. Both retail network and home delivery costs are impacted for generic, brand name and non-formulary drugs. The most significant increase will be in the home delivery generic formulary drug costs, which will increase from $0 to $7 per 90-day supply of a medication. Beneficiaries can still fill their prescriptions at a military treatment facility for a $0 copay. Read details on the pharmacy costs.

2. DOD-VA Release Discharge Upgrade Tool: On Thursday, the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the launch of a web-based tool to assist veterans looking to upgrade or change their military discharge. This tool is the latest in a series of steps taken by DOD to improve the discharge review process. Previous steps have included such measures as the 2011 issuance of guidance related to individuals discharged under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, a 2016 internal review of policies and procedures, and the August 2017 guidance clarifying consideration of cases involving mental health conditions, such as PTSD and those associated with TBI, sexual assault and sexual harassment. The new tool will provide customized guidance to veterans who believe their discharge was unjust, erroneous, or warrants an upgrade and wish to seek a review. After answering a few questions, veterans will be provided specific information on which board to apply to, which forms to complete, where to send the application, guidance helpful to their case and tips for appealing their discharge. Read more information.
3. **TRICARE Establishes Philippine Provider Network:** A TRICARE preferred-provider network is now available to eligible beneficiaries living or traveling in the Philippines. The network replaces the Philippine Demonstration project, which was initiated in 2013. The project was designed as a way to offer high-quality health care to eligible TRICARE Overseas Program (TOP) Standard beneficiaries living in certain areas in the Philippines. The Standard plan ended Dec. 31, 2017, and individuals using the network will now pay the same copays, deductibles and catastrophic caps as those enrolled in the new TRICARE Select plan. Beneficiaries are required to see a certified provider and are encouraged to use a preferred provider, which reduces out-of-pocket costs. Choosing an uncertified or non-preferred provider may result in processing delays or denial of claims. Refer to the [TOP website](#) for a network provider list, claims details and contact information for beneficiary assistance, or the [TRICARE website](#) for updated cost information.

4. **VFW Talks Toxic Exposures on CBS Radio:** This morning, VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Ken Wiseman joined CBS radio for their daily “Connecting Vets” show. Discussing issues related to toxic exposures, host and Army veteran Jake Hughes asked about how this issue affects veterans and the history of the VFW’s efforts to get needed legislation passed. Wiseman, who is also an accredited VFW Service Officer, talked about ways toxic exposures impact veterans, how this affects veterans when they file their VA claims and the urgency for Congress to pass legislation. [Listen to the episode](#).

5. **Home Loan Refinance Protections:** The Senate recently introduced S. 2304, a bipartisan bill designed to stem the number of bad refinance opportunities to which veterans can fall victim. The VA home loan program is an excellent benefit that has been used by millions of veterans over the years. While most of the refinance opportunities are offered in good faith, there are some bad actors who look to prey upon VA home loan users and offer beneficiaries loans which have front-end benefits, but increase the long-term costs. The bill would limit home loans from being refinanced unless they meet the net tangible benefit test in which offers must benefit the VA user, not the institution. The bill would also make permanent a requirement for VA home loan beneficiaries to wait six months before being eligible to refinance their loans. The six months seasoning period was established by VA and Ginnie Mae to control the rapid increase in interest rates for homeowners which is caused by frequent refinancing of VA home loans. The VFW is encouraged that Senators Tillis and Warren have taken up this issue and we are glad to see that protection of veterans is always a priority in Congress. [Read the bill text](#).

6. **MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identification of five American servicemen who had been missing in action from WWII and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:
   -- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Warren H. Crim** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Crim was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Crim](#).
   -- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class Lowell E. Valley** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941.
Valley was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read about Valley.

-- Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. John H. Canty was a member of the 555th Bombardment Squadron, 386th Bombardment Group, IX Bomber Command based at Easton Lodge-Essex, England. On June 22, 1944, Canty’s B-26 Marauder was on a nighttime bombing mission against targets near Caen, France, when his plane was shot down between the villages of Baron-sur-Odon and Gavrus, France. Canty and the seven other crewmembers were killed in the incident. Because the location of the crash was in German-held territory, U.S. forces were unable to make a detailed search for the crew at the time of their loss. Interment services are pending. Read about Canty.

-- Army Sgt. 1st Class Pete W. Simon was a member of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In September 1950, his unit participated in a defense of the Pusan Perimeter, a large defensive line west and north of Pusan, South Korea. Simon was reported to have been killed in action on Sept. 5, 1950, but his remains could not be located following the battle. Interment services are pending. Read about Simon.

-- Army Pfc. Lamar E. Newman was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In November 1950, his unit took part in a defensive operation in the vicinity of the village of Kujang, North Korea. The division suffered heavy losses, with many soldiers going missing or being killed or captured. Newman went missing on Nov. 27, 1950, near the village of Kujang as a result of heavy fighting. Interment services are pending. Read about Newman.


As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to vfwac@vfw.org.
On November 9, 2017, Representative Charlie Crist (FL) and Representative Jeff Denham (CA) introduced H.R. 4345, the Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2017.

The bill would create coordination between the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Attorney General to provide grants and technical assistance to the State circuit court systems that have adopted Veterans Treatment Court Programs or have filed a notice of intent to establish a Veterans Treatment Court Program with the Secretary.

There are currently over 200 Veterans Treatment Courts in the United States. These courts seek to treat veterans suffering from a substance abuse and/or mental health disorder, while helping ensure public safety. They combine rigorous treatment and personal accountability, with the goal of breaking the cycle of drug use and criminal behavior. Veterans Treatment Courts require regular court appearances, as well as mandatory attendance at treatment sessions, and frequent and random testing for drug and alcohol use. Veterans respond favorably to this structured environment, given their past experiences in the Armed Forces.

Veterans Treatment Courts keep veterans out of jail and prison and connect them with the benefits and treatment they have earned, all while saving tax dollars for our country. Nationwide, these courts have produced a statistically significant reduction of recidivism rates in veterans.

H.R. 4345 would create a single office in the Department of Justice to coordinate the provision of grants, training, and technical assistance to help State, local, and Tribal governments develop and maintain Veterans Treatment Courts.

In accordance with DAV Resolution No. 105, calling for the continued growth of Veterans Treatment Courts for justice-involved veterans, DAV supports this bill. Please use the prepared electronic letter or draft your own to urge your Representative to cosponsor H.R. 4345.

We appreciate your support for DAV and your grassroots efforts through DAV CAN. Your advocacy makes DAV a highly influential and effective organization in Washington, DC. Your voice makes a difference and we would not be as effective without you.

Click the link below to log in and send your message: https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/6kD3dPyCvTVyGGwQ35CRfA
‘Welcome home’: After 1 year Veterans Court honors first graduate

BY JARED KEEVER

jared.keever@staugustine.com, St Augustine Record

Nearly a year after its official start, the St. Johns County Veterans Treatment Court saw its first commencement on Thursday afternoon, as one veteran was recognized for completing the program designed to help those who have served their country but are having a hard time with the transition home.

The afternoon session in Circuit Court Judge Howard McGillin’s courtroom started much like the Jan. 19, 2017, ceremonial first session did — with McGillin leading attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

After a few words about court that he said, focuses on “treatment and accountability,” McGillin introduced Volusia County Court Judge Bryan A. Feigenbaum, who oversees a veterans court in the southern part of the 7th Judicial Circuit, and St. Johns County Veterans Council chair Bill Dudley, who helped McGillin piece together the political support to start the treatment court here. Both spoke a little about the court’s goals and how it was put together.

Modeled after the drug court program already in place in the county and other veterans courts around the country, Veterans Treatment Court is meant to help vets who find themselves on the wrong side of the law as they struggle with the often unseen scars of war and coming back to civilian life

Those meeting initial requirements must admit to the crime they are accused of committing and then are required to complete the 12- to 18-month program, which often includes community service time and drug treatment.

During their time in the program, veterans must stay employed if they are able to
work, submit to drug testing and attend all VA appointments for treatment.

Once completed, they are eligible to have charges dismissed or their records expunged.

Feigenbaum in his remarks to those in attendance said the court is meant to help vets “who are not all the way home sometimes.”

The one welcomed fully home Thursday is an Army veteran who, as McGillin said, “joined the Army while it was already at war” in 2003 and would eventually serve 13 months in combat in Iraq.

Once home and out of the Army, he struggled with drugs and alcohol, McGillin said, racking up a few DUIs and eventually causing a wreck that injured a person.

“He started to lose hope in the future,” McGillin said. “He started missing probation appointments, was violated and told me that he was basically just getting ready to go to prison, and that is exactly where he would have gone.”

The vet was accepted into the court in February.

“And I will tell you he flew through the program,” McGillin said.

Although he had kicked most of his substance abuse problems prior to acceptance into the program, McGillin said, he has put together 340 days of sobriety since joining the program and is no longer on probation.

“You have blazed a path for others to follow,” McGillin told him.

After a few words of congratulations, a presentation of a “Welcome Home” coin and a certificate of completion, McGillin, a veteran himself, honored him with a salute.

“It is my privilege on behalf of the court, on behalf of the Veterans Council to tell you, ‘Welcome home,’” he said.
10 MARCH 2018 (SAT.)
9am to 2pm
Veterans In Need & Homeless Stand Down
VFW Post 8696
47 Old Kings Rd N, Palm Coast, FL 32137

A one-day event providing access to valuable resources for veterans.

• Free haircuts & food
• Access to VA & veterans services
• Medical services
• Employment resources
• Shelter & clothing information
• Counseling & Vocational Services

PARTNERS

For more information:
Joe Roberts (386) 323-7011
CareerSourceFV.com

Programs funded through the CareerSource Flagler Volusia are equal opportunity programs. Auxiliary aids and services available upon request to individuals with disabilities. All voice and telephone numbers in this document may be reached by persons using TTY/TDD equipment via the Florida Relay Service at 711.
SPECIAL EVENT
FOR MARCH 14, 2016

Former POW Bill Robinson, the longest held enlisted military captive during the Vietnam War – will speak in Palm Coast

March 14, 2018 in two separate sessions: 2 p.m., and 6 p.m.
- Tickets are required for entry but are FREE.

Don’t miss this rare opportunity to hear and meet a POW. DON’T MISS IT!

Come hear his story... Bill spent 2,703 days in captivity; longer than any other enlisted service member in U.S. history! He has a lot to say about his experiences...

Time will be available after Bill's talk for hand shaking, photo opportunities, and book signing. So plan on the event lasting 90-120 minutes.

HOW TO GET YOUR FREE TICKET:

Tickets are available from our local: VFW, The American Legion, DAV, AMVETS, MOAA, and MCL organizations.

Alternative 1: stop by the Flagler County Veterans Service Office, Mon-Fri • 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (closed noon to 1 p.m.) in Building 2, Suite 108, at 1769 E. Moody Blvd., Bunnell; Phone: 386-313-4014

Alternative 2: An individual reservation can be made on-line (for the 6 p.m. session only): Make the reservation at www.FlaglerVeteran.com and then pick up the actual ticket at Will Call (outside the VFW main entrance) approximately 1-hour prior to the event.

Event Location: VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars): #8696, 47 Old Kings Rd N, Palm Coast, FL 32137; Phone (386) 446-8696
2018
1st Quarterly Gathering of Veterans

Saturday
FEB 24th

1030 to 1100 coffee Social
1100 to 1300 Meeting/Free Lunch
at
Prime Osborn Convention Center
1000 Water St, Jacksonville, FL 32204

- Speakers on topics of interest to Veterans and their Families
- Speakers from newly organized Veteran Organizations
- Opportunity for Veterans and Veteran Organization to connect and share information

This is the time for Veterans to get connected and unite for the benefit of the Veterans community at large.

JOIN US!
TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER