

# IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



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## November / December – 2009

### Director's Message

Greetings to all and I wish you a happy and safe holiday season. Another year is coming to a close; winter weather is upon us and for all of you who wished for a white Christmas... your wish has been granted.

The last several months have been difficult with budget decisions and changes that had to be made. Our goal will continue to be providing as many services as we can, with the resources and staff we have. Our budget reductions include IDVA staff taking 5 or 7 furlough days before July 1, 2010 and a staff reduction at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery of the director position. Due to this, I will be dividing my time between the cemetery and the office at Camp Dodge. All state departments have had to make some difficult decisions and cuts due to the reduced operating funds, but as always, our efforts will focus on the veteran.

A "Wreaths Across America" event was held at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery on December 12<sup>th</sup> and we hope to continue this tradition next year and to increase the number of wreaths.

We continue to stress the importance of outreach services to ensure all veterans and dependents receive the federal and state VA benefits they may be entitled to. The benefits to which they are entitled are earned by your service to our country. But some of these benefits can expire. To ensure everyone is able to take advantage of these earned benefits, please encourage all of your fellow veterans to speak with a service officer and to spread the word about what is available.

As we honor this latest generation of American veterans, we recognize also that they are only the most current generation of men and women who were willing to step up when called and who served with commitment and honor.

We are blessed as a state and nation to have this caliber of service members. As long as they continue to serve, our nation will be preserved and the freedoms we cherish defended.

Thanks and appreciation goes out to all who have worn the uniform! I wish you many blessings on your holiday season.

Sincerely,  
Patrick J. Palmersheim, Executive Director  
Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs

### Happy Holidays

During this time of celebration and family, please take time from your holiday schedule to remember the men and women who are serving and have served our nation. Veterans have made this county great and have given us the gift of gathering in peace and worshipping without fear of persecution.



May this season of joy and giving find you truly blessed. The staff at the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs wishes you the best as you travel and enjoy the holidays! ~

## Wreaths Across America

On Saturday, December 12, 2009, cemeteries across the nation participated in "Wreaths Across America". This event places a fresh balsam wreath and bow on the graves of veterans interred at cemeteries across the nation.



*Wreaths placed on two of the graves at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery.*

The Iowa Veterans Cemetery participated in this event for the first time this year. Staff placed 7 wreaths on the graves of members of the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Merchant Marines, Missing in Action, and Navy. Since there is not a member of the Merchant Marines interred at the cemetery, this wreath was laid at the foot of the eagle in front of the columbarium walls. The "Missing in Action" wreath was placed on the grave of one of the "In Memory of" markers. ~



*Wreath placed at the eagle standing guard of the columbaria plaza in memory of members of the Merchant Marines.*

## Cemetery Update

Winter has arrived at the Cemetery with a vengeance. The early December blizzard kept staff busy plowing, salting, and sanding. The frost is now nearly a foot thick and graves must be thawed with propane heat to allow the excavator to cut through the frozen earth. Regular winter maintenance is a must to keep the machinery working during the cold months. But at least there is no grass to mow!

Inside, the staff continues to process applications and handle the day-to-day operations. Volunteers are incredibly helpful in assisting families and providing guided tours. Staff has begun to develop an email database so that we can instantly inform families with loved ones buried at the cemetery of special events being held at the facility. These include Veteran's Day and Memorial Day events, Wreaths Across America, and dedication of monuments.



*Snow covered view of the Fallen Heroes Monument following 15 inches of snow and blizzard conditions.*

Through November 30, 2009, cemetery staff has processed 3,484 applications and interred 408 individuals. This represents 22 states with 171 Army, 32 Marine Corps, 92 Navy, 50 Air Force, one Coast Guard, and 62 dependents interred.

As always, it is a great honor to serve the veterans of this nation and to provide them with a fitting and honorable place of rest. ~

## Women Warriors

Women Veterans have been in the news lately, and not for the reasons one may think. *The New York Times* recently reported that "as of June 2008, 19,084 female veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan had received diagnoses of mental disorders from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, including 8,454 women with a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress – and this number does not include troops still enlisted, or those who have never used the VA system."

It appears that as women shift into active ground combat, psychologically they are "emerging as equals" with their male counterparts. A recent Department of Defense mental health study has indicated that "mental health issues rose in roughly the same proportion for members of each sex." However, research has also shown that women soldiers are more likely to suffer alone. They do better in therapy because they are "more comfortable talking through their emotions," but it typically takes years for them to seek help. Dr. Carri-Ann Gibson, a therapist who runs the Trauma Recovery Program at the *James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital* in Tampa, Florida said: "The hardest part for women is that they often feel ashamed and guilty because they're not supposed to punch a wall; they're not supposed to get aggressive with their spouse. For men, rage and aggression are more accepted, while women are typically expected to snap back into domestic routines without any trouble."

There are other distinctive psychological issues. When military divorce data is broken down by gender, a troubling pattern emerges. "Marriages of female troops are failing at almost three times the rate of male service members." Women veterans have significantly lower income than male veterans, and twenty-three percent of female veterans in the VA's homelessness programs have children under 18 years old. Since the VA cannot provide direct care to children or spouses of veterans, child care costs lead many female veterans to become homeless. Many are also on the streets as a result of PTSD and the depression it may trigger, leading to job loss and a rapid descent towards homelessness.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs has worked to make the public more aware of women's roles. Last year the VA began a system-wide attempt to make primary care for female veterans available at every VA medical facility nationwide. For some women this has been a godsend. Others, however, state that the VA and other organizations have not fully adapted to women's new roles in the military. Many say they are "still treated like wives, not warriors."

The VA recognizes that there are distinct health care needs for women veterans. But currently, it appears the VA is under-prepared to meet gender-specific care. Only 14 percent of VA facilities offer specialized, comprehensive women's health clinics, and approximately 40 percent offer only gender-specific exams.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) has issued a rallying cry that "bold steps must be taken to improve health care for female troops and veterans - taking their unique health care needs into account."

In an open letter to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, Joseph Violante, National Legislative Director for the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), said: "The VA must become better prepared to meet women's unique health care needs and provide quality comprehensive care to all in need, while removing the barriers that discourage women from seeking their medical care in a VA system that is still predominately male-oriented. We encourage your support for legislation that would address these and other gaps in care for women veterans, including those who have experienced military sexual trauma."

Our jobs as federal, state, and county employees, outreach coordinators, benefit specialists, counselors - all those professionals whose service is linked to veterans, must be vigilant to the specific and unique needs of women veterans. "Generations of women have served honorably in all this country's major conflicts. These women have earned the right to expect the same high quality health care services and benefits as their male counterparts." (Dave Gorman, Executive Director, DAV) - *Sources - The New York Times, 11-1-09, IAVA Issue Report, October 2009, The Huffington Post, 1-14-09* ~

## Veterans Day 2009

As always, November 11<sup>th</sup> was a very busy day for veterans across the state. In the Des Moines area, several events were well attended, starting with the Iowa Veterans Cemetery. Col. Steve Wieneke of the Iowa Army National Guard gave the keynote address at the 8 am service. Members of the Central Campus Red Bull Battalion, Jr. ROTC, provided the honor guard.



*Col. Steve Wieneke gave a very motivating speech to about fifty audience members.*

The cemetery was decorated in red, white, and blue to honor our veterans. Every grave had a miniature American flag placed near the stone and the "Avenue of Flags" was raised. Additionally, 110 flags surrounded the inner ring road.



*Flags placed at each grave to commemorate Veterans Day.*

This was the first annual Veterans Day ceremony at the IVC. Memorial Day and Veterans Day will always be observed at 8 am on those days.

An event was also held on the Iowa Capitol grounds between the Korean and Vietnam War Memorials at 10 am. Stan Gustafson, a retired Lt. Col. with the Marine Corp gave the keynote address and support for the event was provided by the Marine Corp League, Larry Hehring Detachment. Wreaths were laid at each of the Korean and Vietnam Memorials. A makeshift memorial for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans was erected between the two monuments.



*A memorial wreath was laid at the makeshift memorial for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Wreaths were also placed at the Korean and Vietnam Veterans Memorials.*

The traditional time for Veterans Day events is 11 am on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month. The Des Moines event was held at Veterans Auditorium and Congressman Leonard Boswell was present to make comments. Brig. Gen. Mark Corson, Commanding General of the 103 Expeditionary Sustainment Command at Fort Des Moines gave an inspiring speech that highlighted the quality of today's soldiers and touched on the importance of employers utilizing citizen soldiers as an asset to their business.

This event was followed by a free-will donation concert by local band, *The Nadas*. The concert was sponsored by Iowa Workforce Development. At the intermission of the show a bench was presented to the family of Glen McDole. The bench will be placed at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery as a permanent memorial to WWII POW and Palawan massacre survivor McDole. ~

## VA Medical Foster Home Program

The VA Central Iowa Health Care System has joined other VA Medical Centers all across the United States in providing veterans with an attractive alternative to nursing home placement.

This new and innovative medical foster home program provides disabled, frail and chronically ill veterans with the choice to live with a foster caregiver in a private home in the community. Medical foster home caregivers are special people who open their homes and hearts to our veterans. Our medical foster homes are approved by the VA Medical Center to care for only one or two veterans assuring one-on-one personal attention. Medical care is provided by the VA Medical Center and the Home Based Primary Care Team providing professional health care services in the medical foster homes. MFH caregivers are paid between \$1500 and \$3000 monthly by the veterans in their care to provide a home, meals, transportation, appropriate supervision and needed personal care. Monthly rates vary according to care needs.

Medical foster home veterans enjoy the freedom, independence and privacy of living in a family home and at less cost than institutional long-term care placement. Nationwide, the program has served over 500 veterans since its inception and currently around 200 veterans are living in private medical foster homes as members of the family.

Our central Iowa program was approved in April 2009 by the VA Central Office in Washington, DC. We have five approved medical foster homes and our first veteran moved into his MFH in May. Three additional veterans moved into medical foster homes during the summer.

Veterans choosing medical foster home care come from institutional nursing home settings, assisted living programs or private homes and apartments.

Some struggle with multiple health problems and do not have family to care for them. Chronically or terminally ill veterans can receive Hospice services in the medical foster home. Couples can live together in medical foster homes and some veterans are able to keep their beloved pets.

As we continue to expand the number of medical foster homes to serve the veterans who have served us, we look to our communities and our fellow citizens to join us as medical foster home caregivers. We also encourage veterans and their families to look at this new home and community-based option to provide excellent care.

For more information, contact:  
Jan O'Briant, Medical Foster Home Coordinator  
VA Central Iowa HealthCare System  
515-699-5715 ~

## 2010 Veterans Day at the Capitol

January is fast approaching, which means the Iowa Legislature will be convening soon. The 2010 legislative session begins on January 11, 2010. The first week of session is usually filled with speeches and procedural items. But with legislators agreeing to a condensed session, it is likely they will hit the ground running.

"Veterans Day at the Capitol" will be on January 21, 2010. All veterans are encouraged to attend and sign-in will take place from 9 - 10 am on the first floor of the Capitol Rotunda. Staff will be on hand to identify elected officials and to give information regarding veteran's priorities for 2010. At 10 am there will be a veterans program on the same floor, where elected officials who specialize in veteran's issues will provide updates.

Following that event, veterans are encouraged to seek out their elected officials and meet with them about the 2010 veterans agenda. Following these meetings, veterans can have lunch on their own and depart for home.

## County Fall School of Instruction

October 19-23, 2009 was a historic week in Iowa. Approximately 80 county employees gathered in Des Moines to become accredited service officers through the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers. This training was in response to legislation passed in 2008 and 2009 that required each county to have an employee that is nationally accredited to assist veterans in applying for federal benefits.



*It was a packed room for the accreditation training in Des Moines, IA.*

The county employees had class all day and then studied at night to make sure they passed the course. In the end, all who attended successfully passed the examination and their application for accreditation has been sent to the federal government.



*Heather Homewood, Director from Allamakee County receives her certificate of completion.*



*CEU training for currently accredited County Veteran Service Officers.*

Toward the end of the week, county directors and administrators who are already accredited attended Continuing Education Unit (CEU) training to maintain accreditation. IDVA will continue to provide this training in the future to allow CUE opportunities within the state for our newly accredited staff to maintain their accreditation. ~

## Fire Suppression System

Following the accidental air discharge in our office, IDVA finally has its system back up and functioning. Attempts to re-fill the pressurized tank in place failed due to a leak that formed at the valve. Fixing the leak did not work, so the cast iron tank was removed and taken to the company repairing the system.

This was quite an ordeal, and required several men, a cherry picker, and a motorized cart to move the incredibly heavy tank. The tank has been returned and IDVA's records are once again protected from fire. ~



*Removing the tank from IDVA.*

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