

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Camp Dodge, Bldg. A6A, 7105 NW 70th Avenue, Johnston, IA 50131
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July / August – 2009

Director's Message

Dear Friends -

As the end of summer draws near, IDVA continues to be busy with numerous veteran programs and events.

This past Tuesday, August 11th, I had the privilege and honor to accompany 350 World War II veterans from Iowa to Washington D.C. to visit their memorial. The trip included many other sites as well - notably the changing of the guard at Arlington National Cemetery. As I guided one of our veterans in a wheelchair around the memorial, I began wondering how many World War II veterans have visited the memorial since it was dedicated on May 29, 2004? I also wondered how many have passed away since then and never got to see the memorial?



WWII Veterans get to know each other at the pre-flight breakfast provided by HyVee.

As we reach out to thank them, we must also remember those who served in Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Middle Europe, Persian Gulf, Somalia, and all the conflicts around the globe. 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.



Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

We are blessed as a state and a 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.

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

Military Retiree Day

August 20, 2009 will mark the first *Joint Military Services Retiree Appreciation Day*. This event will be held at Prairie Meadows Race Track and Casino at A.J.'s Restaurant. Registration starts at 7:30 am and the program will begin at 8:30. Presentations will be made on issues affecting military retirees such as VA health care, TRICARE, dental, Social Security, long term care, ID cards, service connected disability compensation, and a federal legislative update. The event should conclude by 5:15 PM.

Space is limited to the first 100 individuals and there is a \$12 cost per person which includes breakfast and lunch. If you are interested in attending, contact Russ Eggers at 515-277-6113. ~

Cemetery – A Year of Service

The Iowa Veterans cemetery celebrated its first year of operation on July 7, 2009. After fighting weather during construction, the facility continued to struggle with Mother Nature this spring. Continuous rain caused multiple areas of erosion. This has since been controlled through the use of matting and erosion socks. Now grass has finally taken hold in these areas and the socks are being removed.

During the first 12 months of operation (through July 2009), there have been 316 interments (this includes memory markers). Forty-three of these interments have been the dependents of veterans. Nineteen different states are represented in burials. Through the same period, 3006 applications preapproved; the staff processes approximately 44 applications each week. Visitors regularly tour the site, averaging 25+ visitor briefings each week.



With the many interments in the past year, the site is beginning to look like a cemetery.

Although the facility is currently shorthanded, the outside staff mow and trim the grass weekly, perform burials, maintain equipment, and set headstones. On special occasions, the "Avenue of Flags" is raised and over 100 flags are placed along the center ring road of the cemetery. Since the rain has subsided, watering the new trees that have been planted is now a priority. Generally, grass is mowed on Thursdays and Fridays so weekend visitors can view the facility at its best. ~



Watering trees on the freshly mowed grounds.

Veteran Volunteer Recognition

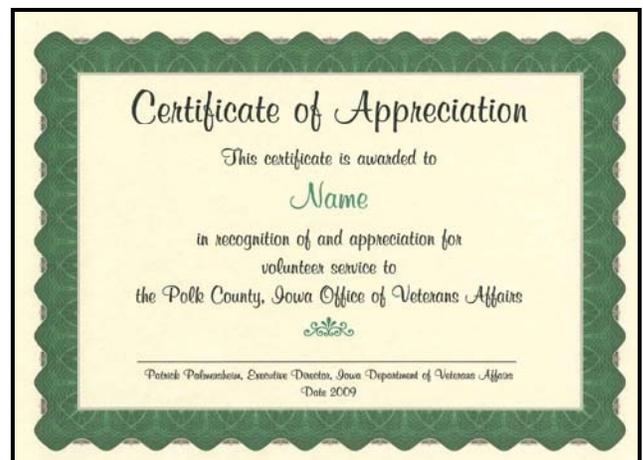
IDVA is continuing to receive nominations for veteran volunteer recognition. There is no deadline for this program that recognizes the excellent volunteer efforts Iowa citizens provide to veterans. If you know of an individual who has gone above and beyond for Iowa veterans, please nominate them for this recognition. Send a letter to IDVA outlining the volunteer's efforts - including their mailing address and IDVA will send them a certificate honoring them. Nominations should be made for volunteer efforts, not for performing the duties of an individual's employment. ~

Nomination letters can be sent to:

jill.joseph@iowa.gov

-or-

Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs
c/o Jill Joseph, Volunteer Nomination
7105 NW 70th Ave, Camp Dodge Bldg A6A
Johnston, IA 50131 - 1824



Another Kind of Valor

The Iowa première showing of the series, *Another Kind of Valor*, was presented on Saturday, July 25th, at the Iowa National Guard Joint Forces Headquarters. The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs partnered with NAMI (National Alliance of Mental Illness) for this day-long event – a day focused on training professionals to address the mental health needs of veterans. It was a unique kind of training day as there were no “teachers” or seminar “gurus,” but instead a learning forum based on an interactive learning process that encouraged spirited discussion and examination of the experiences of our veterans and the therapies available to address those needs. The attendees themselves, a group composed of psychologists, VA outreach professionals, county VA directors, law enforcement crisis negotiators, veterans, social workers, service officers, and many others, addressed issues such as: How will PTSD affect our community? What are successful strategies you have used to treat PTSD? Does current screening for suicide seem adequate?



Kevin Smith, Division Manager for Orange County, California, Health Care Agency's Adult Mental Health Services was a co-presenter & moderator for the event.

Dan Weisburd, Executive Producer and Director of the nine-episode/six-hour series, and Kevin Smith, a Division Manager for Orange County's Adult Mental Health Services, skillfully guided the attendees through the video-based learning system.

They challenged the group to consider these goals: To bring community services into closer touch with other veteran's services; to assist veterans and their families with emotional as well as physical wounds as they return from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan; to become better organized to meet the urgent needs of our 1.5 million returning veterans whose unmet crises too often bring on predictable and preventable tragedies.



Discussions continued on the docudramas during lunch.

A “Town Hall” meeting concluded the day with a panel-led review of the issues and needs facing our returning veterans and families, and a discussion of what we as a community are willing to do to help them. The panel included Congressman Leonard Boswell, Nancy Edwards, Dau-shen Ju, the Omvigs, and Diana Prizgintas. ~



Town hall panel (l-r) Randy and Ellen Omgvig; Dr. Manshadi; Congressman Boswell, Diana Prizgintas, Nancy Edwards, Dau-shen Ju, Ph.D.

Gender Balance on County Veteran Commissions

During the 2009 Legislative Session, House File 243 was signed into law that effects county commissions of veterans affairs. This legislation creates a gender balance provision in Iowa Code for all appointed bodies at the local level.

This bill goes into effect on January 1, 2012. Appointees whose term expires prior to that date can be reappointed regardless of gender. Following that date, the Board of Supervisors will be required to appoint individuals so that no gender shall hold more than half the membership plus one for an odd numbered board.

There is a good faith effort clause that allows for the appointment outside of the gender balance if there is a three month effort at filling the position with the appropriate gender. The Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) is developing a standardized application for boards and commissions to be used to fill these positions. There will be guidance to Boards of Supervisors from ISAC and the Supervisors Association in a process for filling these positions and in meeting the good faith effort when unable to identify qualified candidates. ~

IDVA Staff Spotlight



Bob Steben - Executive Officer

Bob administers the nursing home reporting system, homeless veteran outreach, provides direct assistance to veterans in accessing their federal benefits, and is a featured speaker at many IDVA outreach efforts.

Bob Steben has been an Executive Officer 1 for IDVA for the last five years. Prior to that, he spent 36 years as a National Service Officer with AMVETS.

In his capacity at IDVA, he serves as an advisor to veterans and other individuals assisting veterans when filing federal claims. He also serves as the liaison between all the nursing homes and assisted living facilities in this state when they report to the state the veteran status of their residents.

Bob has been married 46 years to his wife, Dee. He has four children, eleven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He resides on an acreage in Ackworth, IA and enjoys flowers, gardening, fishing and hunting.

~

Freedom Rock

The newest veteran scratch off game from the Iowa Lottery was announced in July. This ticket features the artistic work of Ray "Bubba" Sorenson II. Bubba annually paints a 56 ton boulder outside of Greenfield, IA for Memorial Day, as a way to honor veterans.



Bubba Sorenson in front of the Freedom Rock Lottery ticket that bears his art work.

The Iowa Lottery is using this year's Freedom Rock as the theme for a \$2 scratch game that has a maximum prize of \$7,777. All profits from the lottery tickets go to benefit the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund. Since the beginning of the games in July of 2008, the lottery has raised nearly \$2.8 million. ~

IDVA Conference Room

After several months of preparation, the department's conference room and file cabinets have switched places. The move was done to provide a more convenient location for the meeting space, with an entrance at the front of the building. Behind the conference room is a large storage area that will hold many of the items that used to clutter the conference room and cabinet area. Eventually, the cubicle partition walls will be replaced with a stud wall covered in drywall. The paneling will also be updated. This has been funded by a grant from the American Legion. ~



IDVA's conference room in its new location.



The clutter free file room!

Fire Suppression Discharge

In order to make the back room switch, prisoners from Iowa's correctional facilities were brought in to move the heavy files. Unfortunately, while moving the cabinets, the automatic release button for the Halon fire suppression system was hit and broke. This caused the system to discharge throughout the office. This waterless system forces compressed air into the building which reduces the oxygen in the room to suppress the fire.



Damage surrounding the Halon discharge nozzle.

The air release caused quite a mess and took the office staff by surprise. Fiberglass insulation and ceiling tiles littered the hallways and staff spent the rest of the day vacuuming every inch of the office floors, ceiling, and walls. The department has applied for emergency funds with the state to refill the Halon system, which is quite expensive. ~



Bob Steben's desk is usually messy, but after the air release, it was only slightly disturbed!

HyVee / Honor Flight

Over the last several months, individuals from Des Moines and Council Bluffs have been working hard to gather donations to start an Honor Flight hub out of Des Moines.

In June, HyVee announced that they were pleased to donate \$250,000 to sponsor a large flight of World War II veterans to see their memorial in Washington DC.



Store Manager Wes Snook of HyVee presents Jeff Ballenger of Central Iowa Honor Flight with a check for \$250,000.

With the donation from HyVee in hand, planning commenced. The funds provided would allow for a single 747 jet that would accommodate 350 veterans and 50 guardians.

The flight took place on August 11th, with the plane beginning to board at 5:30 am. The group was greeted personally by Governor Culver as they climbed the steps to the plane. The plane arrived at Dulles at 10:30 am eastern time and the veterans were then bussed to the WWII Memorial.



Boarding for the early morning flight.

The mall was a sea of gold shirts as Iowans took over the memorial. Next the group visited the Korean and Vietnam Memorials, followed by a trip to Iwo Jima and Arlington Cemetery. The day ended with the plane ride home, where they were greeted by hundreds of loved ones back in Des Moines.



Veterans from the Hawkeye state in gold at their memorial.

A huge thank you to HyVee who never hesitated to donate the funds to make this trip a reality for 350 men and women! ~

Food Bank Award

Congratulations to Missy Miller who was honored for her participation in the Food Bank of Iowa's 2009 campaign. Missy was very determined to provide more food from Camp Dodge to the food bank than ever before. ~



Missy Miller is presented her certificate by Patrick Palmersheim, Executive Director of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.

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