

# IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



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## Winter 2010

### Director's Message

Dear Friends:

On Wednesday evening, March 3, our website - [www.iowava.org](http://www.iowava.org) - was compromised, along with Homeland Security. An initial investigation has been conducted, and initial logs do not indicate any breach of data. Currently, the webserver has been disconnected from the network and turned over to the state's Information Security Officer for further in-

The Midwinter Conference of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs was held during the week of February 21<sup>st</sup>.

Meetings were held with Secretary Shinseki to discuss numerous VA issues - including the backlog of claims. It was agreed that merely adding more staff



vestigation. We hope to have our website back on line and operational in the near future.

The 83<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly is drawing to a close. There are numerous legislative bills still moving through the chambers, and it will be several more weeks before we know what legislation has passed this session. We are thankful for all the support the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs has received from both houses and from both sides of the aisle. We must continue to forge strong and positive legislative partnerships - at both the state and federal levels - working in a nonpartisan manner to ensure that the needs of Iowa's veterans are met.

at the regional offices was not the answer, but rather the submission of well-developed claims would assist in reducing the backlog.

Other VA briefings included an update from the National Cemetery Administration regarding the changes in population requirements for a national cemetery. With these changes, it appears that Omaha, Nebraska will be in line for a national cemetery in the near future.

State Directors also received briefings from the White House and the National Governors Association.

## Iowa Veterans Cemetery Update

The Iowa Veterans Cemetery reports that through February 2010 they have:

Applications on file:	3,707
Interments thru February:	453
Dependents interred:	68
"In Memory of" stones:	17
States represented:	22

Keith Blum, Cemetery Superintendent, reports that this year an estimated 175 additional gallons of fuel were used than last year at this date; propane use was nearly the same as last year. The cemetery grounds staff had literally TONS of snow to remove this winter! Nevertheless, they were better prepared this winter having drilled holes for cremation sites before the frost arrived.



*Pensive wintry scene at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery*

## Checklist for Requesting Service Records

IDVA's Records Specialist, Bob Betz, has suggested that to make the research and queries process more streamlined, the following checklist will help. Here is the information he asks to have at hand before making a phone call to his desk:



1. Last, First, Middle Name - (Exact spelling)
2. Date of birth (Day, Month, Year)
3. Place of birth if known (City, County, State)
4. Social Security number and/or Service number
5. Iowa veteran (Yes or No)
6. Approximate service period
7. Service Component/Branch
8. Where information is to be sent

## Vietnam Bonus and Trust Fund Update

IDVA staffer Missy Miller is now overseeing the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund in addition to administering the Vietnam Bonus, County Grant Program, and War Orphan Tuition Assistance Program. She reports the following:

Current numbers for the Iowa Vietnam Bonus are as follows:

Approved:	1,289
Awarded:	\$231,745.50
Denied:	750
Deferred:	10
Deferred amount:	\$862.50

Figures for the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund are:

Awarded:	318
Deferred:	8
Denied:	176

Seventeen applicants have applied for the Trust Fund this calendar year. There is now \$21,868.50 in available funds.

## Midwinter Homeless Veteran Stand Down

The 2010 Winter Veterans Stand Down was held on Saturday, February 27, 2010. Approximately 300 homeless veterans were seen at the Polk County Senior Center in Des Moines. The function was hosted by Goodwill Industries.

Participating veterans were furnished with breakfast, lunch, and a sack lunch to take with them. The program included a host of providers, including dental and medical services, Social Security and IRS assistance, and Drake Law School legal advisors - led by Judge Celeste Bremer.

Both Iowa Workforce Development and the Vet Center provided counseling assistance. The VA Regional office, the VA Medical Center, the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, and representatives from the American Legion offered benefits and service information. New and used clothing and hair cuts were also donated.

## 2010 ISFAC

IDVA Director Patrick Palmersheim and Outreach Coordinator Jill Joseph attended the first 2010 Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee (ISFAC) meeting in February at the JFHQ. ISFAC is a voluntary military cooperative partnership organized to provide multi-service networking for training and assistance to ensure Total Force Family Readiness. Their purpose is to provide assistance to families regardless of service component. The goal of the ISFAC is to strengthen existing family assistance delivery systems in the event of mobilization, deployment, or natural disaster through the interaction of committee members.

ISFAC provides a forum for various Federal, State, and local agencies, care and service providers, and other organizations to network and identify opportunities, and to eliminate duplication of effort. Division of Services include: Working for Families; Working with Communities; Working with Military Units; and Working with Employers.

For more information or to get involved with the ISFAC, contact:

Sondra VanDerPol, Family Assistance Center Coordinator  
JFHQ  
800.294.6607 ext 4758  
515.727.3103  
[sondra.lee.vanderpol@us.army.mil](mailto:sondra.lee.vanderpol@us.army.mil)



## Are you a WAC? Do you know a WAC?

The Fort Des Moines Museum is looking for women who trained as a part of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) during World War II, or anyone who has a direct connection to someone who served as a WAC at Fort Des Moines. Through a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Fort Des Moines Museum, in an effort to preserve this history, will interview WAC women who trained at Des Moines. We are looking for those who collected memorabilia, uniforms, photographs, and other items that interpret the WAC story. With these items, we will create an exhibit based on the history of the WAC experience. *Time is of the essence, so please call the museum promptly with this information.*



### The Back Story...

During the Second World War, Fort Des Moines hosted the formation of the first Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), later renamed the Women's Army Corps (WAC), training 72,000 troops and commissioning the first female officers for noncombat duty between 1942-1945. Among the 436 initial WAAC officers were 39 black women who graduated as 3<sup>rd</sup> Officers (2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants) on 29 August 1942 and served in England and France in 1945. Fort Des Moines produced 118 black female officers and 3,656 enlisted women by war's end, representing 4% of all WAC troops. The success of the WACs freed 250,000 male soldiers for combat duty in Europe and the South Pacific.

Contact: Michael Kates, Curator  
Fort Des Moines Museum & Education Center  
515.282.8060  
[katesedu@qwestoffice.net](mailto:katesedu@qwestoffice.net)  
[www.fortdesmoines.org](http://www.fortdesmoines.org)



## Spotlight on Iowa Veteran Partners: The Des Moines Vet Center

The Des Moines Vet Center provides readjustment counseling services to eligible veterans and their families in a caring manner. Services include counseling and psychotherapy for individuals, couples, and families. If you have been to the Vet Center, you probably noticed that it's a place of action. Vet Center staff is trained to counsel the impact of psychological trauma on the veteran and readjustment issues faced by veterans returning from war.

The Des Moines Vet Center provides individual and group readjustment counseling free of charge, and pays extreme attention to confidentiality and privacy of veterans and family members. The Center has a variety of counseling/support services to meet a variety of needs. Some of the groups offered are: OIF/OEF educational groups, OIF/OEF combat related issues, PTSD support groups for all war eras, Grief and Loss groups, Anger Management, Relaxation/Wellness, and Recreational Therapy.

The Des Moines staff includes: Katina Mach, Team Leader; John DeVold, Counselor; Steven Leonard, Counselor; Brian Wrightsman, GWOt Outreach; Joseph Biver, GWOt Outreach; and Christine Francis, Office Manager.

Currently, March 8<sup>th</sup> marks the beginning of a 6-week Anger Management Group and a 6-week Wellness Group. Please call for dates and times.

Please feel free to contact the Vet Center @ 515.284.4929 or "walk on in" at 2600 Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway. You can also find them on the web: [www.va.gov/rcs](http://www.va.gov/rcs). There are also vet centers in Cedar Rapids, Moline, and Sioux City. Offices do provide outreach to other locations, so feel free to contact your nearest Vet Center. There is no cost for Vet Center readjustment counseling.

## NAMI Veterans Council

The latest issue of *NAMI's* Greater Des Moines newsletter contains some pertinent and thought-provoking articles regarding: *New Approaches to Veterans Involved in the Criminal Justice System*; *Military Misconduct May be a Sign of PTSD*; and *Vets with PTSD Could See Better Benefits*.

To access these articles, visit:

[www.nami.org/MSTemplate.cfm?Site=NAMI\\_Greater\\_Des\\_Moines](http://www.nami.org/MSTemplate.cfm?Site=NAMI_Greater_Des_Moines)  
and click on "newsletters."

## Good-bye & Good Luck!

Many of our IDVA colleagues probably know by now that Kent Hartwig, IDVA's Legislative Liaison and Public Affairs Officer, has left our office and taken a new position. Kent brought a fresh face, a contagious vitality, and an understanding of veterans issues that belied his age. We want to once again wish him a very reluctant good-bye and a heartfelt "good luck" with his new job.



## News Briefs

### Gulf War Illness

The Associated Press has reported that the Department of Veterans Affairs will re-examine the disability claims of what could be thousands of Gulf War veterans suffering from ailments they blame on their war service. This will be the first step toward compensating them.

VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said the decision is part of a “fresh, bold look” his department is taking to help veterans who suffer from “Gulf War illness.” Gulf War veterans have long felt that the government has done little to help them.

The VA said it also plans to improve training for clinic staff who work with Gulf War veterans to make sure they do not tell the vets that their symptoms are imaginary. These changes may reflect a significant shift in how the VA may ultimately care for the 700,000 veterans who served in the Gulf War.

### FedsHireVets.gov

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has announced the launch of [FedsHireVets.gov](http://www.fedshirevets.gov), a “critical component” of President Obama’s Veterans Employment Initiative. This website will help ensure that “veterans, transitioning military service members, their families, HR professionals, and hiring managers receive accurate and consistent information regarding veterans employment in the Executive Branch.”

John Berry, Director of OPM, explained that, “[FedsHireVets.gov](http://www.fedshirevets.gov) will be a one-stop gateway to Veterans employment resources throughout the government. Our goal is to honor veterans service by helping them find good federal jobs when they lay the uniform down.” For more information, visit their website: <http://www.fedshirevets.gov>

### Female WWII Pilots: The Original Fly Girls

On March 3, 2010, more than 1,000 women who flew military planes during World War II will be honored with the Congressional Gold Medal. They were known as WASP, Women Air Force Service Pilots, and at the time of their service, they were civilians. They waited three decades to be granted military status. And history nearly forgot them.

### Service-Connected Illness Update I

The Department of Veterans Affairs is amending its adjudication regulations to establish a presumption of service connection for osteoporosis for former POWs who were detained or interned for at least 30 days and whose osteoporosis is at least 10 percent disabling. This presumption is based, in part, on the likely nutritional deprivation experienced during longer periods of captivity.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.thefederalregister.com/d.p/2009-08-28-E9-20790>

### Service-Connected Illness Update II

Relying on an independent study by the Institute of Medicine, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki has decided to establish a service-connection for Vietnam veterans with three specific illnesses presumed to have been caused by Agent Orange.

The illnesses affected by the recent decision are B cell leukemias (such as hairy-cell leukemia), Parkinson’s disease, and ischemic heart disease.

In practical terms, veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have a “presumed” illness, don’t have to prove an association between their illnesses and their military service.

The Secretary’s decision brings to 15 the number of presumed illnesses recognized as being caused by exposure to herbicides during the Vietnam War.

### National Resource Directory

The federal departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor, and Defense have unveiled an improved website for wounded warriors. The National Resource Directory is a comprehensive, free, online tool for wounded, ill, and injured service members, veterans, and their families.

The updated website has been enhanced to provide a single point of access to a wealth of information from more than 10,000 sites.

Visit the site at:

[www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov](http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov)





## Iowa Veterans Task Force – Mental Health

Many of Iowa's veterans are faced with the challenges of mental health issues such as depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as substance abuse issues including alcoholism and drug abuse. Left untreated, these issues can become severely worse, creating problems within a veteran's family or community - or worse - putting a veteran's life at risk. As a state, we must do all that is possible to ensure our veterans have access to adequate mental health and substance abuse services. The Iowa Veterans Task Force is working hard to address these challenges.

In 2007 the Iowa General Assembly passed House File 909 calling for a study to identify the needs of Iowa's veterans. The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs contracted with State Public Policy Group (SPPG), an Iowa-based nonpartisan policy consulting firm to engage stakeholders to complete the study and make recommendations to improve benefits and services to veterans. The Iowa Veterans Benefit Study Report was completed in September 2008 and identified eighteen recommendations to improve benefits and services to Iowa veterans. The full report and recommendations can be found at [www.iowava.org](http://www.iowava.org) or by calling the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs at 515-242-5331. The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs and the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs have utilized many of these recommendations in developing legislative agendas and identifying priorities for the Department and Commission to address.

One key recommendation from the Iowa Veterans Benefit Study Report was to convene a broad stakeholder advisory group to address additional veterans benefits issues, gaps in services and unmet needs. In response to this recommendation, the Iowa Veterans Task Force has been convened to address the mental health and substance abuse needs of Iowa veterans. The Iowa Veterans Task Force is comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders who make up Iowa's veterans mental health service system. The Task Force is currently working to develop a list of veterans mental health and substance abuse priorities that will be addressed through a series of recommendations and implementation strategies. Task Force meeting facilitation, staffing, and support is being provided by SPPG.



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