

# IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWSLETTER



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## Spring/Early Summer 2015

### Greetings to the Iowa veterans community,

We're pleased to provide this issue of our newsletter to you. You can see that it's been a busy and exciting year. There are many events occurring across our state to recognize and honor our veterans and those serving in our military. I'm taking this opportunity to highlight some of the events the Department has conducted as well as make you aware of others that are scheduled this year.

During this year we will celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of America's Civil War, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. Many America men and women answered their nation's call to serve and protect our rights and freedoms. Iowans have always enthusiastically responded when the call went out to do their part. The events that we do are a very small payment back for all that they have done for future generations in America and around the world.

We celebrated Iowa's Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day at the monument on the capitol grounds on 7 May. We were overwhelmed with the number who attended on a day when thunderstorms were all around us. They fortunately went around us for the most part and we only dealt with a few sprinkles.

This year's Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day was a very special event, especially for one southeast Iowa family. The weather was questionable early that morning. The radar and skies threatened heavy rains in the Des Moines area at the starting time for the ceremony. We made a decision to move forward and execute the plan. We had a few sprinkles but they didn't dampen the spirits of those who attended. The shiny black granite

of the Iowa Vietnam Veterans Memorial glistened with the lower portion covered by a crescent bunting. Governor Branstad officiated the ceremony just as he had in 1984 when the monument was originally dedicated. Colonel Harold Johnson, of Fairfield, was the guest speaker. He is a Vietnam veteran and flew high-level security mission. He was shot-down and was imprisoned at the Hanoi Hilton for over four years. He provided an amazing talk about being an American. Many Vietnam veterans – veterans of all conflicts and wars, and friends of veterans attended.

The monument was inscribed in 1984 with the names of 851 Iowans who gave their lives for their county while serving in Vietnam. Several years later additional names were added. One name was omitted. I don't know why. It just was. Through the diligent efforts of Dan and Mary Gannon and David Thornburg this has been corrected. Douglas Eugene Peterson, a rifleman in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, was seriously injured in a firefight in 1969. He was evacuated through military medical channels and for the next six years, he received continual medical care and many surgeries to repair the extensive damages. Douglas died in 1975 in Fairfield, Iowa, his hometown.

During this year's Recognition Day ceremony, Douglas's sisters removed the crescent bunting that had covered his name. Douglas' mother and father and extended family attended the ceremony. The addition of Douglas' name to the Iowa monument provides closure for the family and hopefully to our monument.

Memorial Day services at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery and at the Community Choice Credit Union

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Convention Center/Veterans Memorial followed quickly. Senator Joni Ernst and Congressman David Young spoke at the cemetery to the largest crowd that had gathered there under threatening skies for our annual ceremony to honor our veterans who have served our country and have passed. Congressman Young spoke at Veterans Memorial, again to a very large audience. The audience was composed of veterans of all eras, families of those who have passed and many buried at the cemetery. There were visitors from the community and across the state. There were young families with no family military experience. The cemetery looked outstanding and is certainly a fitting final resting place for our veterans.

More events are in the planning. The Spirit of '45 is a national effort to recognize and honor our World War II veterans. Congress declared a national Spirit of '45 Day several years ago and Iowa has participated with visits and proclamations. This year, the Iowa Veterans Ceremony will be the Iowa location for the celebration of an international Spirit of '45. On Sunday, 16 August 2015, Spirit of '45 ceremonies will be conducted at Arlington National Cemetery, all national cemeteries, the national cemeteries operated by the American Battlefield Monument Commission and the US Park Service, and many state cemeteries around the world.

The Iowa ceremony will begin at 1:00 p.m. at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery. Governor Terry E. Branstad is the guest speaker. Capt. Jerry Yellin, of Fairfield, Iowa and a World War II fighter pilot, will provide remarks. Many special touches have been added to make Iowa's ceremony a very special remembrance and recognition of all of our World War II veterans and their families and our community. We hope you will be able to join us.

The next morning on Monday, 17 August 2015, we will conduct our annual Iowa State Fair Veterans Day parade. The parade time is 11:00 a.m. Governor Branstad, the Commander-in-Chief of the Iowa National Guard, will officiate the parade. He will be joined by other dignitaries on the reviewing stand that is located

in front of the fair's administration building. The Iowa State Fair Veterans Day parade is a long-standing fair tradition. The parade route is lined several deep as the parade makes its way down the Grand Concourse and its route around the fairground. The on-lookers are as varied as the parade entries. Veterans, veterans service and support groups, friends of veterans and good patriotic Americans. Many are Iowans; many come from across the country and around the world. The applications have been mailed and are also available on our IDVA website. We hope to see you in the parade or applauding our veterans from the curb.

We are also updating the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs website. Our endeavor is to make information concerning veterans issues, programs, and benefits more readily accessible. The design is completed. We are working with IT for content connections at this time. We plan to put it up live soon.

Time passes quickly. I came to this position two year's ago. Those two years have come and gone fast. As we complete one event we look forward to the planning and conduct of another. I appreciate all of the efforts of those in our IDVA office, at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery and Iowa Veterans Home, in the county veterans offices, and our stakeholders at US Veterans Affairs Regional Office, at the US Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, at the Vet's Center, and the governor's office, the Iowa Legislature, and the other state departments and agencies and many, many others for all they do on a regular basis to help all of us do our mission of caring for our veterans and their families. We'll all look forward to another good year.

I wish you a good day and thank you for all you are doing for our veterans. Please remember that our nation's veterans provided this wonderful land to us and made it possible for us to do what we do. May God bless them all.

Colonel Robert C. King (Ret)  
Executive Director



Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day 2015



Photos by Robert Nandell

**Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day 2015 Con't.**



*The family of Doug Peterson*

*Photos by Robert Nandell*

## Memorial Day 2015



7:00 am Van interviews Bob King from the Iowa Gold Star Museum



8:00 am - Memorial Day, Iowa Veterans Cemetery Service

*It is a time to remember our family and veterans that no longer walk among us. — Julie Glueck, sister of Doug Peterson, Vietnam Veteran.*



Col. Robert King (Ret.) speaks at the ceremony held at the WWII monument on the Iowa capitol grounds.

# Iowa Veterans Cemetery

## Memorial Day 2015



Gettysburg Address Plaque donated by "The Governor's Own 49th Iowa V.V.I."

Van Meter Mayor Allan Adams, U.S. Congressman David Young, U.S. Senator Joni Ernst

Photos by Robert Nandell

## Iowa Veterans Cemetery Con't.

Thank you to Wells Fargo Volunteers!



*In April, Wells Fargo put mulch around 50 trees. Thank you for all your volunteer work!!*

Congratulations to the Van Meter American Legion Post 403, the Knights of Columbus (WDM), Jason Shepherd (owner Bob's Septic & Portable Restrooms), and Gloria Doyle (bugler) - all of whom received Governor's Volunteer Recognition Awards at the 32<sup>nd</sup> annual ceremony held on June 8, 2015.

**We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.**  
—Winston Churchill



*Remember this white stuff? – IVC February 2015...Hellooo Spring! [Photo by cemetery staff member Mindy McGregor]*

The Iowa Veterans Cemetery reports that through June 25, 2015, there are:  
Applications on file (still living): 7,653    Interments: 2,505  
Veterans interred: 2,015    Dependents interred: 490

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Iowa Veterans Cemetery Facts:  
Caskets: 744    Cremations: 1,694    In Memory of markers: 67

## Iowa Veterans Cemetery Con't.

### Spirit of '45 International Tribute – Honoring the Legacy of the Men and Women of America's Greatest Generation on the Anniversary of their Greatest Day

In 2010, Congress unanimously voted in favor of a national "Spirit of '45 Day" to preserve and honor the legacy of the men and women of the World War II generation so that their example of national unity, shared sacrifice, can do attitude, and service to their community and country continues to inspire future generations of Americans.

Spirit of '45 Day is now being observed in hundreds of communities throughout America on the second Sunday in every August, with events and activities in public parks, community centers, funeral homes and memorials, senior living communities, and during Major League Baseball games. Events for the nationwide commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II have been taking place throughout the country during the year. A 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Greatest Generation's Greatest Day will kick off on Friday, August 14 with a public "Kiss-in" in Times Square, followed by a weekend of flyovers by WWII vintage aircraft, 40s style swing dances, concerts, and other events. The weekend will conclude on Sunday, August 16, with an around-the-world tribute in the form of "the longest continuous wreath laying ceremony in history" – that will begin in the American national cemetery in the Philippines, continue westward across Europe and the continental United States, and end at the National Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii at the grave of the late Senator Dan Inouye.

On Sunday, 16 August 2015, the Iowa Veterans Cemetery will participate in the Spirit of '45 international tribute. The international tribute program includes all national cemeteries, state cemeteries, and those managed by the American Battlefield Monument commission and the Park Service. Iowa's Governor Terry Branstad will be the keynote speaker for the Iowa Veterans Cemetery event and Jerry Yellin, national spokesman for Spirit of '45 Day and WWII P51 pilot, will also participate in the ceremony.

For additional information, go to [http://www.spiritof45.org/national\\_spirit\\_of\\_45\\_day1.aspx](http://www.spiritof45.org/national_spirit_of_45_day1.aspx).

**Mark your calendars! Attend the Spirit of '45 international tribute and be part of an event that will commemorate and honor our greatest generation World War II veterans.**



### Iowa Gold Star Military Museum News

In April 2015, the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony dedicating its new Vietnam War exhibit. The interactive exhibit includes a UH-1H "Huey" helicopter display with live footage and voices from pilots and soldiers just before takeoff, a M274 "Mule" 1/2-ton utility truck, "My Story Recollections" of Iowa Vietnam veterans experiences, and other artifacts.

A scrollable list of Iowans who were killed in the Vietnam War is now available, as are television monitors featuring stories from the Vietnam War. (The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs still has a few books available that are a companion to the interactive list: "Iowa Vietnam Veterans Memorial/Directory of Names.")

A full-scale diorama and mural – painted by local artist John Neal, depicts the tunnel system that laced the hills of Vietnam.

The museum continues to collect, preserve, and exhibit materials that illustrate the story of Iowa's military past from statehood to the present.



## Iowa Veterans News

### The 2015 Iowa Legislature

**Read this before you agree to pay for help in obtaining veterans benefits:**

If you are thinking about paying someone for help in obtaining veterans benefits, please carefully read the following DISCLOSURE:

Veterans benefits services are offered at no cost by federally chartered veteran service organizations and by county commission of veteran affairs offices.

Have you checked into the free help available to you? YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_

If you answered NO, the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs urges you to consider contacting these free resources, before you pay for services.

If you need help locating a veteran service organization or county office, or have questions about obtaining veterans benefits, contact:

Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs  
7105 N.W. 70th Avenue  
Camp Dodge, Bldg. 3465  
Johnston, Iowa 50131-1824  
800-838-4692 or 515-252-4698  
[www.va.iowa.gov](http://www.va.iowa.gov)

Because free help is available, anyone wishing to charge you for services related to obtaining veterans benefits must obtain your signature on this form. Do not sign this form or sign any agreement to pay for services if you wish to contact free help first.

Remember:

- You are not required to pay for assistance in obtaining veterans benefits.
- You are not required to sign this form in order to obtain your veterans benefits.

By my signature below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand this document.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Reference: House File 414, signed into law by Governor Terry E. Branstad, 24 April 2015.  
This form will be posted on the IDVA website and distributed to many state agencies.*

**ATTENTION! Amendment to House File 616 signed into law by Governor Terry Brandstad 18 June 2015**

An amendment to House File 616 pertaining to the DISABLED VETERAN HOMESTEAD PROPERTY TAX CREDIT APPLICATION has been approved by the Iowa State Senate and the Iowa House of Representatives. This amendment provides "EXCEPTION TO APPLICATION TO FILING DEADLINE" for submitting applications for the tax credit. It provides retroactivity for filing of applications to 1 January 2014. The filing deadline is coming quickly. The applications must be received in the county assessor's office no later than the close of business on Tuesday, 30 June 2015, to be eligible for the tax credit. This Disabled Veteran Homestead Property Tax Credit is available to 100% service-connected disabled veterans, family members receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), and Individual Unemployable disabled veterans certified and paid by the US Department of Veterans Affairs at the 100% level.

## Iowa Veterans News

### The 2015 Iowa Legislature Con't.

#### Veterans' Lottery Money

The Iowa Lottery has previously been required to conduct a series of games to generate revenue for a state trust fund to benefit military veterans. The legislation amends the law to simply provide \$2.5 million annually in lottery revenue to help veterans.

*Reference Senate File 323*

### Tax Reminder: No Age Restriction for Military Retirement Benefits Exclusion

The Iowa Department of Revenue reminds qualified taxpayers and tax professionals that military retirement benefits are excluded from Iowa Income Tax regardless of a taxpayer's age. Unlike the general pension exemption of \$6,000/\$12,000, there is no age restriction on the exclusion for military retirement benefits.

Iowa Code sections 422.7(31A) and (31B) provide an exclusion from Iowa Individual Income Tax for military retirement benefits retroactive to tax years beginning on or after January 1, 2014. The retirement pay is only deductible to the extent that it is included in the taxpayer's federal adjusted gross income. The exclusion

also applies to military survivor benefits received under U.S.C. 1448. It is available for both residents and nonresidents of Iowa. More tax information for veterans and those serving in the military and their spouses is available on the Department of Revenue's website at: <https://tax.iowa.gov/military-tax-information>.

Iowa Income tax is due April 30. Visit their website for details on how to eFile your 2014 taxes, file an extension, or file an amended return. <https://tax.iowa.gov>

The mission of the Iowa Department of Revenue is to serve Iowans and support state government by collecting all taxes required by law, but no more.



## County News

### from Lucas County

*submitted by Richard Jones*



A special ceremony was held in Chariton, Iowa to introduce the Lucas County Veterans Memorial Park. The park will eventually contain a freedom rock painted by Ray "Bubba" Sorensen II, who painted the freedom rock north of Greenfield, Iowa.

The ceremony was on April 9 – the date which marked the end of the Civil War. The ceremony also honored the over 700 Lucas County men that enlisted in the Civil War and the 131 Lucas County veterans who did not return. The memorial park will be dedicated to all veterans and citizens of Lucas County.

Earl Comstock, speaking for American Legion Post #102 indicated the park project should be completed within the next three or four years. For more information about the project, contact Comstock at 641.774.4406.

## County News Con't.

### from Washington County

*submitted by Sue Rich*

There is no way of knowing how a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star belonging to World War II veteran Leo Embree wound up in a storage unit in Tama County, but now thanks to a watchful eye and some research, the medals have been returned to Embree's family.

On Monday morning, Max Embree, Leo Embree's nephew, accepted the medals in Washington County Veterans Affairs Office Administrator Sue Rich's office. Leo Embree died Nov. 14, 2005 at the age of 91. After retrieving the medals from Tama County, they were given to Leo Embree's nephews Max, Don and Phil Embree.

"Luckily the person who found them was kind enough to take them to the local service office there instead of pitching them or selling them," Rich said. "We are just happy they are back where they should be."

Rich said Tama County Veterans Affairs Administrator Tiffany Richard had a man bring the awards into the office. The man had stated they were found in a box in a storage unit. Richard posted photos of the medals on Facebook and did some research to find that Embree was the recipient. When Rich saw the post, she recognized the name and located Embree's obituary online. It also listed the names of his nephews as survivors.

After contacting Max by phone, Rich picked up the medals in Tama County. She said she was going there on Saturday, May 16, to attend a graduation party. She gave Max the medals on Monday. "When Sue called me, I couldn't believe it was happening," Max Embree said. "We knew that he had earned the Purple Heart. We weren't aware of the Bronze Star. I thought someone else in the family had those medals. I never believed they would show up in Tama. I don't know how they got there. It's a mystery." Max Embree said the medals would be displayed. He will talk with his two brothers and they plan to figure out the best way to display them.

Larry and Cheyenne Cuddeback featured Leo Embree in the recent book "The Three of Hearts." The feature about Embree in the book was provided by retired Major General Robert Sentman.

According to the book, Embree was with the 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. He was in the same regiment depicted in "Band of Brothers" — a book and later a miniseries chronicling a parachute company's exploits during World War II — but not in the same company. He jumped in Normandy, Market Garden and fought at Bastogne.

He was a platoon sergeant in a line company before becoming a mess sergeant. He was awarded the Bronze Star for action in Bastogne in December 1944. He was also wounded during the fighting. He was wounded a second time in Belgium in February 1945. He was discharged on Sept. 14, 1945. After the war, Embree worked as a carpenter at the physical plant at the University of Iowa for 31 years.

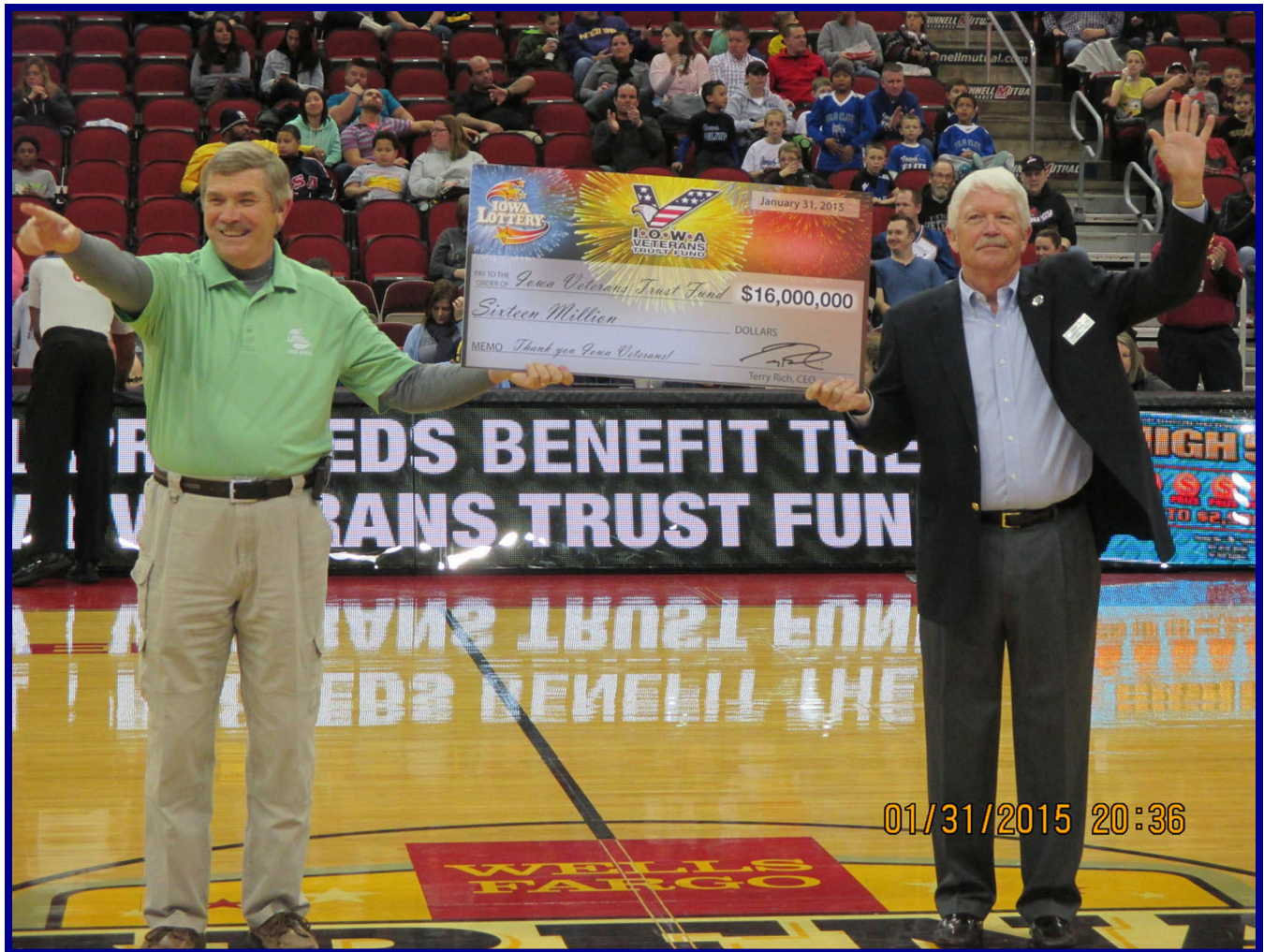
The Purple Heart is awarded for people killed or wounded while serving. The Bronze Star is awarded for heroic or meritorious service in a combat zone and is the military's fourth highest decoration for valor. [published in the online *Journal Village Soup* by David Hotle]



*Washington County Veterans Affairs Administrator Sue Rich, left, presents Leo Embree's medals to Max Embree, one of Leo Embree's living relatives. Also present are commissioners Darren Denler, rear, left, Jeff Johnston, and Terry Philips.*

## Commission of Veterans Affairs News

### Iowa Lottery



Mary Neubauer, Vice President, External Relations, Iowa Lottery, asked Dan Gannon (Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs) to represent the Commission at the “Veterans Proceeds Presentation” at the Iowa Energy “Hoops for Troops” January event at the Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines, Iowa.

At Center Court is Steve Bogle, Vice President, Security presenting to Dan a ceremonial check for \$16,000,000 from the Iowa Lottery to the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund. [Photo by Roger Elliott, President, VVA Chapter 490.]

### New Commission Members

On March 2, 2015 Governor Branstad announced department directors, boards and commissions appointments. New Commission of Veterans Affairs members are Steven Hyde (Military Order of the Purple Heart), Ron Langel (Vietnam Veterans of America), Gary Wattnem (Reserve Officers Association), and Kate Myers (Public Member at Large) reappointment join Richard Goebel (Veterans of Foreign Wars), Monica Blakley (Iowa Air National Guard), Elizabeth Ledvina (American Legion), Mickey Williams (American Veterans), and Dan Gannon (Disabled American Veterans - replacing Jon Wille) to the Commission. Welcome!

## Local News and Updates

### Answers for Veterans about Medicare Part B & Part D

The Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) and the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs are offering a new factsheet titled *Medicare and VA Healthcare* to help answer questions regarding the need to enroll in Medicare Part B and Part D.

There is much misunderstanding and misinformation about Veterans enrollment in Medicare Part B and Part D," SHIIP Director Kris Gross said. "Our new factsheet, developed in partnership with the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs,



provides clear information and answers to many questions."

"We're always looking for ways to ensure veterans clearly understand the options available to them. This information concerning their health care is extremely important," Executive Director of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Colonel Robert King said. "Iowa's SHIIP program is an outstanding program and provides excellent informational materials as well as one-to-one SHIIP counselor assistance - and all at no cost to the veteran."

Veterans can review the Medicare and VA Healthcare factsheet online at [http://www.therightcalliowa.gov/Resources/0079 Medicare and VA.pdf](http://www.therightcalliowa.gov/Resources/0079_Medicare_and_VA.pdf) or call a SHIIP representative at 800-351-4664 to have a paper copy sent by postal mail.

The factsheet answers questions for veterans including:

- ⇒ Do I need to enroll in Medicare Part B?
- ⇒ Should I consider purchasing a Medicare supplement policy?
- ⇒ How do Medicare Advantage plans coordinate with VA benefits?
- ⇒ Do I need to enroll in the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit?
- ⇒ If I enroll in Part B and D can I get help with these costs?

SHIIP representatives are available free of charge to help answer questions for Iowans about Medicare supplement insurance. To meet with a trained SHIIP insurance counselor please call 800-351-4664 or visit SHIIP's website at [www.therightcalliowa.gov](http://www.therightcalliowa.gov). SHIIP counselors do not sell insurance or promote specific insurance companies, policies or agents.

#### About the Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP)


The Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) was created in 1990 by the Iowa Insurance Division. SHIIP advocates, informs, educates and assists consumers on Medicare and related health insurance issues so they can make informed decisions and access resources to address their needs. SHIIP services are free, objective and confidential. Iowans can contact SHIIP by calling 800-351-4664 or online at <http://www.therightcalliowa.gov>.

#### About the Iowa Insurance Division

The Iowa Insurance Division (IID) has general control, supervision and direction over all insurance and securities business transacted in the state, and enforces Iowa's laws and regulations. The IID investigates consumer complaints and prosecutes companies, agents and brokers engaging in unfair trade practices. Consumers with insurance or securities-related questions or complaints may contact the IID toll free at 877-955-1212 or online at [www.iid.iowa.gov](http://www.iid.iowa.gov).



**Local News and Updates Con't.**  
**Post Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month**

  
**State of Iowa**  
**Executive Department**

IN THE NAME AND BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF IOWA

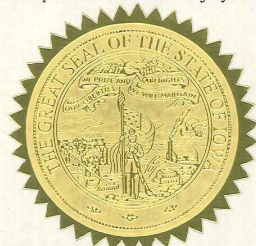
**PROCLAMATION**

- WHEREAS,** the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces proudly serve the United States and risk their lives to protect our freedom and they deserve our caring and attention to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being; and
- WHEREAS,** more than 2,500,000 United States' service members have deployed as part of overseas contingency operations since the events of September 11, 2001; many of our veterans return home with new challenges to fight and struggle with in their own silence; and
- WHEREAS,** hundreds of thousands of our service members have been clinically diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – a condition affecting an estimated 7.7 million Americans; and
- WHEREAS,** post-traumatic stress injury occurs after a person has experienced a trauma; and can result from the stress of combat, as well as rape, sexual assault, battery, torture, confinement, child abuse, car accidents, train wrecks, plane crashes, bombings, or natural disaster and is characterized by numerous symptoms; including flashbacks, avoidance, hyper vigilance, nightmares, re-experiencing, anxiety, cognitive deficits, irritability, insomnia, fatigue, and thoughts of suicide; and
- WHEREAS,** while post-traumatic stress has historically been viewed as a mental illness caused by a pre-existing flaw in the individual's brain or character; it has been learned that post-traumatic stress is a very common injury to the brain that is treatable and repairable; and
- WHEREAS,** efforts should continue to make the condition less stigmatizing and more honorable in order to increase the number of those affected to voluntarily seek help and assistance; and
- WHEREAS,** the Department of Defense, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and the National Institute of Mental Health have made significant advances in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSI and the symptoms of PTSI; all citizens suffering from post-traumatic stress injury deserve recognition, and those who have received these wounds while serving to defend our freedom deserve our respect and special honor:

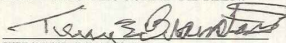
**NOW, THEREFORE, I,** Terry E. Branstad, Governor of the State of Iowa, do hereby proclaim the month of June, 2015 as

**POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS INJURY AWARENESS MONTH**

and encourage continued efforts to educate our service members, veterans, and families, as well as victims of abuse, crime and natural disaster, and the general public about the causes, symptoms, and treatment of post-traumatic stress injury.



IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I HAVE HERETO SUBSCRIBED MY NAME AND CAUSED THE GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF IOWA TO BE AFFIXED. DONE AT DES MOINES THIS 3rd DAY OF JUNE IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD TWO THOUSAND FIFTEEN.

  
TERRY E. BRANSTAD  
GOVERNOR OF IOWA

ATTEST:  
  
PAUL D. PATE  
SECRETARY OF STATE

## Other Notable News

### President Obama Awards the Medal of Honor

At a ceremony on June 2, 2015, President Barack Obama awarded the Medal of Honor to Army Sergeant William Shemin and to Army Private Henry Johnson for conspicuous gallantry during World War I.

Sergeant William Shemin received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions while serving as a member of Company G, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, American Expeditionary Forces. Sergeant Shemin distinguished himself during combat operations in the vicinity of the Vesle River, Bazoches, France, on August 7-9, 1918.

Sergeant Shemin entered the Army on October 2, 1917. He was assigned as a rifleman to Company G, 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, which moved from Syracuse, New York to Camp Greene, North Carolina, joining the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The Division arrived in France in May, 1918. While serving as a rifleman from August 7-9, 1918, Sergeant Shemin left the cover of his platoon's trench and crossed open space, repeatedly exposing himself to heavy machine gun and rifle fire to rescue the wounded. After officers and senior non-commissioned officers had become casualties, Shemin took command of the platoon and displayed great initiative under fire, until he was wounded, August 9.

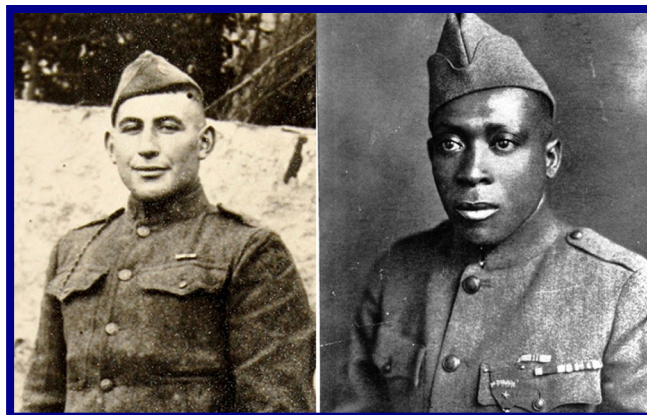
Ms. Elsie Shemin-Roth of Webster Grove, Missouri, joined the President at the White House to accept the Medal of Honor on her father's behalf.

Private Henry Johnson received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions while serving as a member of Company C, 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 93<sup>rd</sup> Division, American Expeditionary Forces. Then Private Johnson distinguished himself during combat operations in the vicinity of the Tourbe and Aisne Rivers, northwest of Saint Menehoul, France, on May 15, 1918.

Private Johnson entered the Army on June 5, 1917. He was assigned to Company C, 15<sup>th</sup> New York (Colored) Infantry Regiment, an all-black National Guard unit that would later become the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The Regiment was ordered into battle in 1918, and Private Johnson and his unit were brigaded with a French Army colonial unit in front-line combat. While on night sentry duty on May 15, 1918, Private Johnson and a fellow soldier received a surprise attack by a German raiding party consisting of at least 12 soldiers. While under intense enemy fire and despite receiving significant wounds, Johnson mounted a brave retaliation resulting in several enemy casualties. When his fellow soldier was badly wounded, Private Johnson prevented him from being taken prisoner by German forces. Private Johnson exposed himself to grave danger by advancing from his position to engage an enemy soldier in hand-to-hand combat. Displaying great courage, Private Johnson held back the enemy force until they retreated.

Command Sergeant Major Louis Wilson, New York National Guard, joined the President at the White House to accept the Medal of Honor on Private Johnson's behalf.

The Medal of Honor is awarded to members of the Armed Forces who distinguish themselves conspicuously by gallantry above and beyond the call of duty while:



*Sargeant William Shemin*

*Private Henry Johnson*

engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

## Federal News and Updates

### VA Expands Choice Program Eligibility - Effective Immediately



In order to expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will determine eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program based on the distance between a Veteran's place of residence and the nearest VA medical facility using driving distance rather than straight-line distance. This change has been published in the Federal Register and is effective immediately.

"VA is pleased to announce the distance calculation change from straight-line to driving distance for the Veterans Choice Program," said Secretary Robert McDonald. "This update to the program will allow more Veterans to access care when and where they want it. We look forward to continued dialogue with Veterans and our partners to help us ensure continued improvements for Veterans' to access care."

The change from straight-line to driving distance roughly doubles the number of eligible Veterans. Letters are being sent to the newly eligible Veterans to let them know they are now eligible for the Veterans Choice Program under this expansion. If a Veteran does not remember receiving a Veterans Choice Card or has other questions about the Choice Program, they can call (866) 606-8198.

Effective immediately, VA is also changing the mileage calculation for beneficiary travel. The change will ensure consistency in VA's mileage calculations across the two programs. The beneficiary travel calculation will now be made using the fastest route instead of the shortest route.

For more details about the department's progress and related information, see [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/factsheets\\_and\\_details.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/factsheets_and_details.asp).

### VA Extends Program for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the award of 20 contracts for the Assisted Living Pilot Program for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (AL-TBI). Originally slated to end in 2014, the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 ("VACAA") extended this program through October 2017.

"We are pleased to extend this valuable program and provide specialized assisted living services to eligible Veterans with traumatic brain injury that will enhance their rehabilitation, quality of life and community integration," said Dr. Carolyn Clancy, VA's Interim Under Secretary for Health.

Under the AL-TBI program, Veterans meeting the eligibility criteria are placed in private sector TBI residential care facilities specializing in neurobehavioral rehabilitation. The program offers team-based care and assistance in areas such as speech, memory and mobility. Approximately 202 Veterans participated in the AL-TBI Pilot Program in 47 facilities located in 22 states. Currently, 101 Veterans participate in the pilot as VA continues to accept new eligible patients into the program.

For more information about the TBI program, visit [www.polytrauma.va.gov](http://www.polytrauma.va.gov). For information about VA's work to implement the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, see <http://www.va.gov/opa/choice-act/documents/FactSheets/Progress-Report-March-2015-Fact-Sheet.pdf>



## Federal News and Updates Con't.

### Overcoming Rural Veterans' Health Care Challenges

Between fiscal years 2006-2014, the number of enrolled Veterans who live in rural communities increased by seven percent. Thirty-five percent (3.2 million) [1] of the Veterans who are enrolled in and obtain services from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) enjoy residing in rural America.

Following active careers or debilitating injury, many Veterans opt for a rural community for a variety of reasons—cost of living, proximity to family, open space or independence.

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) recently unveiled a new video, “Caring for Rural Veterans,” about VA’s programs that improve and increase Veterans’ access to care in rural communities. The three-minute video tells the story of a Community Based Outpatient Clinic in the small town of Cumberland, Maryland, where VA innovations in telehealth technology allow veterans to meet with specialists who are hours away. Take a look at <http://youtube/yyljKAa-kv0>.

Rural Veterans and their caregivers face unique barriers to care, such as lack of public transportation, lack of broadband coverage, distance to VA health care facilities and a shortage of care providers.

As VA’s lead proponent for rural Veterans’ health and well-being, ORH plays a unique role in VA’s transformation to provide Veterans personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care. ORH works to remove barriers to care through a variety of local efforts, including projects that focus on telehealth, transportation and mental health.

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[1] Veterans Health Administration, Support Service Center

The mission of ORH is to improve the health and well-being of rural Veterans by increasing access to care and services. Learn more at [www.ruralhealth.va.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov).

### VA Eliminates Net Worth as Health Care Eligibility Factor

The Department of Veterans Affairs is updating the way it determines eligibility for VA health care, a change that will result in more Veterans having access to the health care benefits they’ve earned and deserve.

Effective 2015, VA eliminated the use of net worth as a determining factor for both health care programs and copayment responsibilities. This change makes VA health care benefits more accessible to lower-income Veterans and brings VA policies in line with Secretary Robert A. McDonald’s MyVA initiative which reorients VA around Veterans’ needs.

Instead of combining the sum of Veterans’ income with their assets to determine eligibility for medical care and copayment obligations, VA will now only consider a Veteran’s gross household income and deductible expenses from the previous year. Elimination of the consideration of net worth for VA health care enrollment means that certain lower-income, non-service-connected Veterans will have less out-of-pocket costs. Over a 5-year period, it is estimated that 190,000 Veterans will become eligible for reduced costs of their health care services.

In March 2014, VA eliminated the annual requirement for updated financial information. VA now uses information from the Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration to automatically match individual Veterans’ income information which reduces the burden on Veterans to keep their healthcare eligibility up to date. That change better aligned VA’s health care financial assessment program with other federal health care organizations. Veterans may submit updated income information at [www.1010ez.med.va.gov](http://www.1010ez.med.va.gov) or by visiting their nearby VA health care facility. For more information, visit [www.va.gov/healthbenefits](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits) or call VA toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

## Federal News and Updates Con't.

### Clay Hunt Act Complements the VA's Ongoing Commitment to Veterans' Mental Health

by Bob McDonald, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs

The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act complements VA's ongoing, multi-faceted efforts to improve mental health care for our nation's veterans, and I'm pleased that both houses of Congress came together to pass the SAV Act.

The health and well-being of the courageous men and women who have served in uniform is VA's highest priority. And we're working hard to provide timely access to the highest-quality recovery-oriented mental health care that anticipates and responds to veterans' needs and supports their reintegration back into their communities.

We know that a growing number of veterans are seeking mental health care, and VA has deployed significant resources and increases in staff toward mental health services. VA provides a continuum of forward-looking outpatient, residential, and inpatient mental health services across the country.

We have many entry points for care: through our medical centers, more than 800 community-based outpatient clinics, 300 Vet Centers that provide readjustment counseling, the Veterans Crisis Line, VA staff on college and university campuses, and other outreach efforts. VA offers expanded access to mental health services with longer clinic hours, telemental health capability to deliver services, and standards that mandate rapid access to mental health services.

While we know that the suicide rate is lower for those veterans who use VA health care, losing just one veteran to suicide is one too many. So, VA will continue to develop and improve mental health and suicide prevention services so that veterans who reach out for help receive that help when and where they need it.

Last August, President Obama announced 19 executive actions to improve access to mental health services for service members, veterans, and their families - building on progress made since the President's 2012 Executive Order and myriad steps VA has taken over the past six years to improve mental health services.

For example, following the 2012 Executive Order, VA increased its mental health staffing, expanded the capacity of the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net)), enhanced its partnerships with community mental health providers, and increased suicide prevention awareness efforts.

In addition, under the President's 19 executive actions announced last August, we are working to improve service members' transition from DoD to VA, both to ensure that service members receiving mental health care are connected to mental health professionals as they transition to VA and that their mental health medications follow them from DoD to VA. We are also working to improve care coordination between VA and DoD and strengthen community resources for those with mental health issues. The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act will help us to build on this critical work to provide the care and services veterans have earned.

Sgt. Clay Hunt's death was a tragedy. Together with the President, Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, and both profit and non-profit community partners, we will continue working to make monumental, historic strides to improve mental health care for those who have borne the battle.



## Federal News and Updates Con't.

### Choice First Program Fact Sheet



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration

### Choice First Program Stakeholder Fact Sheet

- VA implemented the **Choice First** initiative that revises the current non-VA Care Coordination (NVCC) processes to use the Veterans' Choice Program (VCP) option sooner when local VA facilities are not able to provide health care services to the Veteran. It will be implemented 6/10/15.

#### Major Improvements under the **Choice First** initiative:

1. **The use of a medical consult in lieu of the Veteran Choice Progress Note**
2. **Non VA Care staff make the initial Veteran contact instead of the third party contractor**
3. **When services are not available within VA, the Veteran is now considered Choice eligible (the Veteran must still meet other basic eligibility factors, such as enrollment by Aug. 1, 2014).**

#### How will Choice benefit the Veteran?

Most important, it provides the Veterans another resource for care when unavailable within the VA.

#### What are the key components of the Choice First initiative?

- If the VA facility does not offer the required service, the VA provider will create a traditional Non-VA Care Consult. The 30 day and 40 mile Choice eligibility also remain in effect.
- NVCC staff will receive the consult and review the Veteran's Choice eligibility. Once eligibility has been established the NVCC staff will contact the Veteran and inquire if the Veteran wants to exercise their Choice Benefit and be referred to the community;
  - If the Veteran decides to use Choice, NVCC staff will provide the Third Party Administrator the necessary documentation to facilitate an appointment in the community with a Choice provider
  - if the Veteran declines to use their Choice benefit, they will be placed on an EWL at a VA Facility that offers the care
- VA Copayments will be handled as with traditional NVCC and any payment from the Veteran's Other Health Insurance (OHI) will be applied to offset VA copayments etc. Other out of pocket expenses may exist depending on the Veteran's OHI obligations.

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