



The above mural honoring our Veterans through the era's is on display in our hallway and was created by local artist Galen McCarthy

VICTOR SIERRA OSCAR COMMO CHECK!

Vol 2 Number 2

"America's Veterans embody the ideals upon which America was founded."

February 2019

This publication is for all Veterans, their families and their communities, compiled solely by the Jackson County Veterans Service Officer. The information provided herein is to keep you informed of upcoming events, newsworthy items and historical data of interest.

Proud member of



MN and National Associations of Veteran Service Officers



"In the aftermath, we are because they were." R.J. Heller,

OFFICE INFORMATION

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Friday Closed

(Available for after hour appointments case-by-case)

www.co.jackson.mn.us/veterans
You can find us on FaceBook too

FAKE NEWS?!?!?

"Just because something isn't a lie does not mean that it isn't deceptive. A liar knows that he is a liar, but one who speaks mere portions of truth in order to deceive is a craftsman of destruction," a quote, or might I say a truism, by Criss Jami

The power of the media! It is truly something to behold... We are bombarded by snippets of information each day through television, radio, e-mail, social media and just friends sitting around the coffee table. Each one of these professes it to be the truth, at least the truth as they admit or understand to it.

Think about these few following quotes made throughout our millennia:

- **"All I know is just what I read in the papers, and that's an alibi for my ignorance."** — Will Rogers
- **"The media is the right arm of anarchy."** — Dan Brown, Angels & Demons
- **"The average TV commercial of sixty seconds has one hundred and twenty half-second clips in it, or one-third of a second. We bombard people with sensation. That substitutes for thinking."** — Ray Bradbury,
- **"It's in our biology to trust what we see with our eyes. This makes living in a carefully edited, overproduced and photoshopped world very dangerous."** — Brené Brown

Fake News... One might say that it's the greatest threat to democracy, free debate and our Western order. It's a medium that can be used successfully to change, direct or modify popular opinion, mostly due to our innate ability to just trust the news and do nothing to question it's validity.

We see a video clip and we form an opinion fueled by the narrative of the newsie who is providing the commentary. Would it have the same effect if you were able to see the entire clip, what was in the beginning and how it actually ended? Same is true to a quoted comment, what if you were provided the entire comment rather than just a portion of it?

They lead us... They drive us... They maneuver us to where they want us and the "IT" begins... Unrest, arguments, angst, suspicion, apprehension and confusion. How are we, as citizens, supposed to know what's true and what's not so we can form our own opinion?

Simple, just research it as best you can and discuss it with others who may already have or will then research it. Be in the know, don't take for granted... **Don't be shy, call the "BS" card when you see it.**

Ronald Reagan said, **"Trust, but verify."** How simple is that... Truth is something that can scare any politician. I say, **"Listen, use your common sense, consider the end state and don't spread it if you are not sure."**

FEBRUARY SPECIAL DAYS

February is:

NATIONAL BLACK HISTORY MONTH

NATIONAL HEART MONTH

NATIONAL CHILDREN DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

2 – HOLES 4 HEROES – Veterans Fishing Tourney

3 – FOUR CHAPLAINS DAY

3 – **Super Bowl Sunday! LIII (That's, um, 53)**

3 – Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper died in a plane crash in 1959

8 – Birthday of the Boy Scouts

14 – Valentine's Day **YOU HAD BETTER NOT FORGET!!**

17 – Random Acts of Kindness Day

19 – PRESIDENT'S DAY

19 – COAST GUARD RESERVE BIRTHDAY

24 – Watch the Oscars!



February is also host to Creative Romance Month; An Affair to Remember Month; National Weddings Month – Do you see a pattern here?

FUTURE PLANNING – VIETNAM VETS DAY

March isn't really that far away when you think about it. March 29th is "Vietnam Veteran's Day". Does anybody out there have any ideas for an event for this day in the area?

The Vietnam War was an unpopular war with the public. Unpopular or not the Veterans who served are proud of their service and, in most cases, their mission over there.

We have many of those veterans in our communities, many who are still suffering from unseen wounds. Many of those have not sought help yet because of the manner in which they were treated by both the public and the system. The stigma associated with the times.

Educating the public about the War, the politics, the public outcry and the actual military action, is one more step in the healing process. Thanking these men and women for their service is tantamount to this healing.

In my office, as does every other CVSO in Minnesota, I have a ten (10) DVD series entitled "The Vietnam War" accompanied by a rather large textbook chronicling the war. The series was aired on PBS.

The DVD's are split into two volumes. Volume One includes the years 1958-1967 and Volume Two includes the years 1968 and forward.

One thought was to provide this to a local or regional American Legion or VFW to offer it to their membership and the public and their local high school or college.

They could present it as a series over several nights providing a chance to educate the public, draw Veterans to gather and talk and supplement the profits of their club offering food and beverages.

For more information you can go on-line to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vietnam_War_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vietnam_War_(TV_series)). This is a synopsis of the film.

As a side note you can participate in the Vietnam War Roundtable discussions. To check out the schedule go to www.mnvietnam.org/roundtable/

This new series at Concordia University, St. Paul is an opportunity for Veterans (and those interested in the war and its legacy) to gather on a monthly basis to honor, remember and understand this tumultuous time.

Any other ideas would be great! Think outside the box and come up with something that is meant to honor the Veteran and involve the community. Go ahead, give me a call with your suggestions, let's get it done!

A Minneapolis Tribune op ed about the return of Jayme Closs to Barron, WI. "...The way the community came together...and its exultation... is a reminder that despite this era's deep divisions, what unites us is profoundly stronger than the less important issues that sometimes divide us..."

DAILY ASSISTANCE & EQUIPMENT

As a person ages he or she often needs assistance with daily routines. This assistance may come in the form of personal assistance with daily needs or merely just equipment to provide a better stance or mobility.

In any case this assistance comes with a cost and that cost is not cheap! However, there are programs available to help offset this financial burden that a Veteran may qualify for.

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE

This may be as little as someone popping in a couple times a week to say hello. Maybe some light housekeeping or meal preparation. Or it may be as involved as daily visits to administer meds, transfer to and from bed and personal hygiene help.



It's always ideal if the family is available to provide this care to their loved ones but that is not always possible due to a variety of personal circumstances.

Programs for this type of care are available but generally has to come with a medical doctor referral or recommendation. In rural areas these programs may be limited due to area demographics. Many guidelines are also involved and you have to find the right "fit".



For our Veterans we generally try to use the VA first for any type of assistance. Otherwise we try to use the County Department of Human Services (Health Nurse).

We also have a list of private sector programs for which we can refer.

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT



Mobility equals freedom. We strive to ensure that everyone is able to perform day to day activities with little impediment. This allows people to remain self-sufficient limiting dependency on others to do what they are accustomed to doing themselves.

Most medical equipment needed for our Veterans may be provided by the VA, however, there are some specialized items which may have to be outsourced. This is where it can get expensive so your personal health insurance, Medicare or Medicare supplement can help. There may or may not be a co-pay depending on your coverage.

Another resource available to us is the **“DAV Donor Connect Program”**. This program is a repository list of donated medical equipment available to Veterans, in most cases, **FREE** of charge.

This is donated equipment statewide from those who no longer are in need of it and includes everything from shower chairs to motorized wheel chairs, walkers to scooters, and more! Just ask your local County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO) what your need is and he or she can research the list and where the item may be picked up at.

If you, or you know of, a family with equipment they no longer are in need of please let them know to call their local CVSO. I'm sure we can put it to good use as it continues to be service to a Veteran in need.

NOTE: All VA assistance is governed by a patient's ability to pay or it is based on the level or qualifying service connected disability the Veteran has.

DRUGS & USED NEEDLES!

Like many, I'm sure you have some medications, both over the counter and prescription, that're just laying around collecting dust. When I was a kid mom used to flush them down the toilet. Well, I guess now that has been detrimental to be harmful to our ecosystem. You may also have syringes or other medical “Sharps” identified items you want to discard.

MEDICATIONS



How do you get rid of them now? **DON'T** use the old flusher, the porcelain throne, the commode... Take them to your local law enforcement and they have a depository where you can drop them.

Preparing them for disposal is a pretty simple process. Just take 'em in and drop 'em in the slot... You do not need to remove labels if you don't want to but it makes no difference. (If

you do choose to leave the label on the bottle my recommendation is to take a black marker and go over any personal identifiable information). It all gets incinerated, no, not incarcerated, that's for something wholly different but at the same location.

“SHARPS” or BIO HAZARD WASTE



Do you use needles for your meds?

Are you diabetic, do you have auto injectors? Do you use any other type of “sharps”? If so please **DO NOT DISPOSE** of them in your day to day trash.

Disposing of them, in the trash may leave them susceptible to being picked up and re-used by illicit drug users or they may be found in public areas if the trash is not properly dealt with. If found in public areas, they could be picked up by children or people may step on them causing injury and possibly spreading disease.

There are approved “Sharps” containers you may purchase or re-purpose. You can purchase them at most pharmacies or medical equipment sales stores. You may also re-purpose a laundry detergent container, or something of the same sort, marking it “SHARPS”.

CAUTION! All Sharps containers must be kept out of reach of children, vulnerable adults and pets.

SHARPS DISPOSAL



If your Sharps container is full or you no longer need it you can drop it off with your County Public Health office. However, the containers must be sealed, especially the ones made from re-purposed detergent bottles. Please is duct taped to be sure they are sealed.

For more information concerning disposal of meds, Sharps or any medical waste this please contact your local law enforcement or county public health.

FEDVIP DENTAL AND VSP INSURANCE CARDS



If you are a military retiree and opted to get your dental and VSP eye coverage through the new FEDVIP program here is some information on your cards.

I received my cards yesterday (finally) in the mail. I was getting a bit concerned because I have a couple of appointments coming up. I had called the numbers for FEDVIP and Delta Dental to no avail to speak to a human. **They do make humans yet don't they?**

All is good now. If you haven't received your yet give it a little more time (and patience) before you call. I'd say at least until the end of the month. There may be some issues with the government shutdown so that's another layer of patience you need to consider.

"If you believe it will work out, you'll see opportunities. If you believe it won't, you will see obstacles."
– Wayne Dyer

HOME BASED PRIMARY CARE PROGRAM

The mission of HBCP is to improve and promote health of the Veterans through home-based primary care. This is made possible to enrolled Veterans through service delivery that is coordinated, integrated and efficient in functioning to establish a continuum of care after discharge from the medical center to home.

The frequency of visits to the Veteran's home will be determined by medical need and the Veteran's condition. Visit frequency may range from every week to once a month.

Program Eligibility: Any Veteran who...

- Is eligible for VA outpatient care
- Lives within one hour driving distance from the Spirit Lake VA CBOC
- Has identified care needs that can be met by the program
- Has a safe home environment

HBPC Home Visits Services include the following but there are certain limitations you will need to discuss with your care provider regarding the program parameters.

- Medical
- Nursing
- Pharmacist
- Dietitian
- Social Worker
- Occupational Therapist

There may be a \$15 co-pay fee per visit.

For more info. please contact Susan Willette, CNP at the Spirit Lake CBOC-HBPC at 712.336.6425

If the team is unavailable you may call 24/7 to the VA Nurse Advice Line at 866.687.7382

HOLES 4 HEROES – 3Feb19



"Fishing for Life" will be hosting the Holes for Heroes multi-species Ice Fishing Festival on Medicine Lake Saturday, Feb. 2 from 1 to 4 p.m.

Holes for Heroes is a prize-filled fishing tournament honoring the Armed Forces who have served our country, and their families who have sacrificed along with them. There will be great prizes, food, and fun activities for kids, not to mention great fishing! You do not have to be in the military to participate, the tournament is open to all.



Entry is free for all Veterans and their immediate family. Non-Veteran tickets will be \$10 ahead of time, and \$15 at the door.

For more information and registration go on-line to www.fishingforlife.org/.

"Word to the Nation: Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard."

-- President John F. Kennedy

VA ANNOUNCES ACCESS STANDARDS FOR HEALTH CARE

WASHINGTON – Today the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced its proposed **access standards for community care** and **urgent care** provisions that will take effect in June and guide when Veterans can seek care to meet their needs under the MISSION Act – be it with VA or with community providers.

Under the MISSION Act, signed by President Trump in June 2018, there are six different eligibility criteria for community care:

- Services unavailable
- Residence in a State without a full-service VA medical facility
- 40-mile legacy/grandfathered from the Choice program
- Access standards
- Best medical interest
- Needing care from a VA medical service line that VA determines is not providing care that complies with VA's standards for quality

ACCESS STANDARDS

VA is proposing new access standards, effective when the final regulations publish (expected in June 2019), to ensure Veterans have greater choice in receiving care.

Eligibility criteria and final standards as follows were based on VA's analysis of all of the best practices both in government and in the private sector and tailored to the needs of our Veteran patients:

- Access standards will be based on **average drive time** and **appointment wait times**.
- For primary care, mental health, and non-institutional extended care services, VA is proposing a **30-minute average drive time standard**.
- For specialty care, VA is proposing a **60-minute average drive time standard**.
- VA is proposing appointment wait-time standards of **20 days for primary care, mental health care, and non-institutional extended care services, and 28 days for specialty care from the date of request with certain exceptions**.

Eligible Veterans who cannot access care within those standards would be able to choose between eligible community providers and care at a VA medical facility.

URGENT CARE

Eligible Veterans will have access to urgent (walk-in) care that gives them the choice to receive certain services when and where they need it. To access this new benefit, Veterans will select a provider in VA's

community care network and may be charged a copayment.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said, “Our medical services must meet our Veterans’ needs and reinforce the trust that forms the basis for every interaction with VA. Our new access standards are a vital part of this effort.”

“Most Americans can already choose the health care providers that they trust, and President Trump promised that Veterans would be able to do the same. With VA’s new access standards, the future of the VA health care system will lie in the hands of Veterans – exactly where it should be.”

Secretary Wilkie’s full statement is available on-line at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5186

VA encourages the public to comment on the proposed access standards and urgent care benefit during the public comment period once these proposed regulations (RIN 2900-AQ46 and RIN 2900-AQ47, respectively) publish in the Federal Register; we look forward to receiving this feedback.

VA TO IMPLEMENT APPEALS HOT OFF THE PRESS MODERNIZATION

VA to implement appeals modernization in February Act will simplify process for how Veterans make appeals

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs (VA) announced that the Federal Register will publish on Jan. 18 regulations accompanying the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (AMA), which will help Veterans experience a more transparent claims decision-review process.

After publication of the regulations, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie will certify the department’s readiness to implement appeals modernization, which will transform a complex appeals process into one that is simple, timely and provides greater choice to Veterans who disagree with a VA decision.

Implementation will occur 30 days after the Secretary certifies, as required by law. Accordingly, the AMA will become effective Feb 19.

“VA has been preparing for full implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act over the past 18 months,” Wilkie said. “Our staff has worked diligently, particularly in the last few weeks, to ensure the new, streamlined process is available to Veterans in February.”

The AMA was signed into law Aug. 23, 2017. Under the act, Veterans will now have three options for claims and appeals: **(1)** supplemental claim; **(2)** higher-level review; or **(3)** direct appeals to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. All decision reviews submitted after February 2019 will fall under the new system.

Once the Appeals Modernization Act is fully implemented, VA’s goal is to complete supplemental claims and higher-level reviews averaging 125 days. Decisions appealed to the Board under its direct docket will average 365 days. Under the legacy process, appeal resolutions averaged three to seven years.

For more information about VA appeals modernization, visit <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp> and <https://www.bva.va.gov/>.

Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP)

Many of you have heard rumblings about a new program that is being implemented by the VA to streamline VA Appeals that is going to be implemented in February. Below is a VA fact sheet explaining the program.

The following bullet points should provide you a better understanding of the program.

What is RAMP?

- Launched in November 2017, the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) provides Veterans the opportunity to use the new review process in the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017. The Act, otherwise known as the Appeals Modernization Act, was signed into law on Aug. 23, 2017.
- RAMP aims to provide eligible Veterans with resolution to their appealed claims as early as possible.
- RAMP will run through February 2019. At that point, The Appeals Modernization Act will be fully implemented.
- VA will process RAMP elections as long as necessary to resolve legacy appeals.

How does RAMP work with VA’s Appeals Modernization Plan?

- The Appeals Modernization Act established a new review process for VA claims. This process is fast, transparent, and fair. It allows for improved benefits and services to you and your family.
- Through RAMP, you can receive a review of your claim decision much faster. You will have the option to use the “Higher-Level Review” or “Supplemental Claim” lane outlined in the new law.

Which Review Lane is Right for You?

Supplemental Claim Lane

- Select this option if you have additional evidence to present. The evidence should be new and relevant to your claim. We aim to complete these claims in an average of 125 days.
- We will help you gather evidence to support your claim.

- We will review any new and relevant evidence since your claim decision.
- If you still disagree with your decision, you can submit another supplemental claim with new evidence, or you can request review in the Higher-level Review Lane. An election for further review must be made within one year of the date of your decision.
- We aim to complete these claims in an average of 125 days.

Higher-Level Review Lane

- Select this option if you have no additional evidence, but believe there was an error in your initial decision. We aim to complete these claims in an average of 125 days.
- A higher-level review consists of an entirely new review of your claim, by a more senior claims adjudicator.
- The reviewer will only consider evidence that VA has at the time you opt-in. You will not be able to add new evidence during this process. Your representative will also not be able to add new evidence.
- We cannot assist you in developing additional evidence. If the reviewer discovers an error in the prior decision, your claim will return to initial decision makers to correct the error.
- You can request a one-time phone call with the reviewer to identify specific errors in your case. Your representative can also request this call. However, this call may cause some delay in processing.
- If you still disagree with your decision, and have additional evidence that you would like to submit, you can use the Supplemental Claim Lane after you receive a decision in the Higher-level Review Lane. An election for further review must be made within one year of the date of your decision. However, you will not have immediate access to the Higher-level Review after receiving a decision in this lane.

Who is eligible for RAMP?

As of April 2018, any Veteran with a pending disability compensation appeal in the stages listed below can opt into RAMP. Complete the opt-in form online on the "Appeals Modernization" webpage on-line at www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp or you may turn in a paper form.

You are eligible if you have a pending disability compensation appeal in one of the following legacy appeal stages:

- Notice of Disagreement (NOD)
- Form 9, Appeal to Board of Veterans' Appeals
- Certified to the Board, but not yet activated for a Board decision
- Remand from the board to VBA

Advantages of RAMP

- Early participation in the new review process
- Potentially faster decisions and earlier resolutions

- Multiple review options
- Supplemental Claim Lane
- Higher-level Review Lane
- Appeal to the Board after October 2018
- The same potential effective date for benefits, regardless of review option
- The option to ask for a quick look at a VA decision by a more senior claims reviewer
- A new requirement for clear and convincing evidence to change any findings favorable to Veterans in a VA decision

For the VA Fact Sheet for the RAMP program, go to: www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/appeals/RAMP_factsheet.pdf

For a short YouTube video explaining RAMP, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1gpMf6QyPE

If you have questions about RAMP, talk with your VSO about whether RAMP is right for you.



VA, Health and Human Services Announce Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will convene for the inaugural Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF) on Feb. 6, in Washington, D.C.

Through data analysis and their current suicide prevention initiatives, 10 states were formally invited to participate in the Governor's Challenge, of which seven accepted, to include, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, New Hampshire, Texas and Virginia.

State leaders will meet to develop a plan to implement the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, which provides a framework for identifying priorities, organizing efforts and contributing to a national focus on Veteran suicide prevention.

The collaboration between the agencies is an example of VA Secretary Wilkie's aim to partner with organizations who share the same goal of preventing suicide among the nation's Veteran population.

"Preventing Veteran suicide is our number one clinical priority," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This is a national problem that demands a nationwide response — the Mayor's Challenge and the Governor's Challenge provide a roadmap to develop that national focus of effort."

In March 2018, VA and SAMHSA initiated the Mayor's Challenge with a local community-level focus. The Governor's Challenge takes this effort to the state level, incorporating existing community strategic plans within respective states and supporting the initiative with state-level influence and resources.

Earlier this week, Secretary Wilkie mentioned the importance of the Mayor's challenge and Governor's challenge as part of an Op-Ed outlining VA's progress on suicide prevention for Veterans, which is the department's top clinical priority.

VA and HHS will leverage technical expertise from both agencies to ensure the work is codified, evaluated for effectiveness and shared with municipalities to optimize the collective efforts of all partners invested in preventing suicide across the SMVF demographic group.

For more information on VA's suicide prevention campaign visit www.veteranscrisisline.net/bethere. For information on SAMHSA's suicide prevention go to www.samhsa.gov/suicide-prevention/samhsas-efforts.

Veterans in crisis or having thoughts of suicide — and those who know a Veteran in crisis — can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year. **Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to 838255.**

Reporters covering Veteran mental health can visit ReportingOnSuicide.org for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense.”

— Winston Churchill

VA Partners with CaringBridge Platform connects service members, Veterans and their caregivers with loved ones during a health journey



WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has partnered with CaringBridge, a global nonprofit social network, to aid in Veterans' connection and communication with their support communities.

CaringBridge provides free, secure, personal websites — as a dedicated platform — to assist family and friends in communicating with loved ones during any type of health journey.

“Partnerships with organizations such as CaringBridge that can offer impactful support and connection form an integral part of our public health approach to ensure we

reach all Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Collaborations like these can help particularly in preventing Veteran suicide, which remains VA's top clinical priorities.”

Through this partnership, CaringBridge highlights a tailored destination page that focuses directly on the needs of service members, Veterans and their families. Each customized website supports healing and connection in various ways, keeping families and friends informed and linked using interactive journals and providing access to resources on the site.

In addition to coordinating supportive tasks, CaringBridge has collaborated with VA medical centers and staff to offer training to help facilitate online outreach and support for Veterans and their families. The organization's customer care staff also have been trained on VA resources and how to make referrals to the Veterans Crisis Line.

For more information on how veterans and their loved ones can use CaringBridge throughout their health journeys, visit www.caringbridge.org/military-service/.

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call the Veteran & Military Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. **Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, or you can send a text message to 838255 or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.** Learn about ways to support veterans in your community by visiting www.veteranscrisisline.net/BeThereSupport.aspx.

Reporters covering Veteran mental health issues can visit www.reportingonsuicide.org for information and important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

“Only our individual faith in freedom can keep us free.”

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

LEGISLATIVE NOTES



On the Tuesday after the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, the House Veterans and Military Affairs committee heard agency overviews from MDVA and the department of Military Affairs. No bills were heard. The committee is scheduled to meet again on Tuesday, Jan. 29. As of this writing, the agenda includes presentations pertaining to **fighting Veterans homelessness** from the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MAC-V) and MDVA.

The Senate Judiciary and Public Safety committee heard SF 58 on Wednesday after it was approved by the Veterans and Military Affairs committee on Jan. 17. The bill, authored by Sen. John Jasinski, would ease some difficulties in administering the disabled Veteran's **Homestead Market Exclusion** between county

Veterans service officers and county assessors. It was approved and re-referred to the Committee on Taxes.

On Thursday, the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs committee heard two bills relating to the **Homestead Market Exclusion for disabled Veterans**. The first bill, SF 114, is authored by Sen. Michael Goggin. This bill would change the application date for the exclusion from July 1 to Dec. 15 and it would allow a surviving spouse to continue receiving the valuation exclusion if they decide to move to a property of equal or lesser value. The second bill, SF 113, is authored by Sen. Andrew Lang. This bill eliminates the eight-year limit of the exclusion for surviving spouses. Both bills were approved by the committee and re-referred to the Senate tax committee. The committee also heard a presentation about the budget for MDVA and department of Military Affairs as well as a presentation from the Domestic Abuse Project about their Change Step program.

Permalink: <http://mn.gov/mdva/news/legislative-updates/index.jsp?id=1066-369653>

Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Congressmen Joe Wilson (SC-02) and John Yarmuth (KY-03) introduced H.R. 553, the **Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act**, to eliminate an offset placed on surviving spouses of service members who pass away during active duty or spouses of retirees who die of a service-connected cause.

“Members of our military risk their lives for our freedoms every day. It is unconscionable to think there is a ‘Widow’s Tax’ on the surviving family members of our courageous men and women. We owe it to them to secure stable benefits in the event of their retirement or death,” Wilson said. “For too long, the Survivors Benefit Plan (SBP) reduction by the amount of paid Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) has been an unfair penalty that cuts earned benefits to military survivors. This issue creates a substantial burden for the surviving families, and we must act now.”

“The brave men and women who put their lives on the line in defense of our nation deserve to know that their loved ones will be taken care of should tragedy strike. I’m proud to join Congressman Joe Wilson in introducing legislation to end the so-called Widow’s Tax and ensure that the survivors of military servicemembers who give their lives for our country get the benefits they have more than earned. This legislation corrects a terrible wrong and makes clear that we support members of our military not just when we need them, but when their families need us,” said Yarmuth.

New Tax Military Laws



Below is an article I was sent from “Military.com” discussing changes in tax laws which may, or may not, affect you as a

Veteran.

Military.com - Some of the changes in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act have special implications for the military community. They include: (1) the standard deduction is increasing to \$24,000 for those who are married and filing jointly; (2) your itemized deductions are no longer limited if your adjusted gross income is over a certain amount; (3) the maximum credit increases to \$2,000 per qualifying child; (4) a new credit of up to \$500 is available for each of your dependents; and (5) Reserve service members can deduct unreimbursed travel expenses to attend drill duty only if it takes place more than 100 miles away from home. For more information, contact your base tax center or see the following “Military.com” article. www.military.com/daily-news/2019/01/25/tax-code-changes-could-mean-bigger-returns-service-members-families.html

If you are reading this on-line don't forget that you can hover your mouse cursor over the Website URL above and simultaneously click “Crrl” and “Enter” to be sent directly to the website...

However, always defer to your tax preparer for the most up to date information!

VET'S DAY ON THE HILL – 20Mar19

Being that it's only February right now I know it sounds like a ways off but actually, in the scheme of things, you could say it's just 'round the old corner!

Why is it important to attend? It gives you, the Veteran, a chance to meet and greet the legislators and express any concerns you might have pertaining to Veterans issues and/or benefits. I guess you could say that they'd hear it from the proverbial horse's mouth.

That carries much more weight than the same people saying it for you every year. If they never get to see you they will never know you and the sincerity and passion in your eyes.

Plan now to make the trek to the capitol on March 20th. Call your local CVSO and let them know. Invite others to attend too. The more the merrier! You may also have your family and friends with you as advocates, make a day of it!

Just give me a call at **507.847.4774** or by e-mail to jeff.gay@co.jackson.mn.us.

NOTE TO ORGANIZATIONS! There are funds available to help defray transportation costs for bus service if you wish to pursue it. Get this information out to your membership and promote it!

LOW VISION? VISION LOSS?



Low vision is the term used to describe significant visual impairment that can't be corrected fully with glasses, contact lenses, medication or eye surgery.

No, low vision has nothing to do with “hindsight”, that’s something wholly different although it can be 20/20 in retrospect!

It includes:

- Loss of best-corrected visual acuity (BCVA) to worse than 20/70 in the better eye.
- Significant visual field loss. Tunnel vision (lack of vision in the periphery) and blind spots are examples of visual field loss.
- Legal blindness. In the United States, legal blindness typically is defined as visual acuity of 20/200 or worse (in the better eye, with the best possible vision correction in place) or a field of view (visual field) that is constricted to 20 degrees or less.

Disability statistics from the 2014 American Community Survey show that 2.3 percent of individuals ages 16 and over have a visual disability or low vision.

CAUSES OF LOW VISION

Eye diseases are a common cause of low vision. For example:

- Hazy, blurry vision can result from cataracts.
- Blurred or partially obscured central vision is typical of macular degeneration.
- Diabetic retinopathy causes blind spots, blurriness and visual distortions.
- Poor peripheral vision is a hallmark of glaucoma.
- Retinitis pigmentosa reduces peripheral vision and the ability to see in the dark.
- Light sensitivity and loss of contrast are other symptoms of these and other diseases.
- Heredity and eye injuries can result in low vision.

This is an issue among Veterans and the VA can help! There is a Low Vision clinic in the Sioux Falls, SD VA Medical Clinic. You can contact them by phone at **605.333.6891** or go on-line to their website at: www.sioxfalls.va.gov/services/low_vision_clinic.asp.

The clinic provides:

- Comprehensive eye examinations
- Daily living skills training
- Hands-on training with adaptive equipment
 - CCTV (Reading machine)
 - Magnifiers
 - Talking watches
 - And more!

The VST (Visual Impairment Services Team) provides:

- Assistance with eligibility and enrollment into the VA health care system
- Case management
- Peer support caregiver support groups

WHAT IS THE COST FOR THIS SERVICE?

There is no cost for the adaptive equipment or training for anyone enrolled in the VA program. If you’re not enrolled a

FREE

great place to start is with your county Veteran Service Officer (CVSO).

You can also ask your civilian doctor to make a referral to the VA Low Vision Clinic.

AM I ELIGIBLE FOR THE VA?

Essentially, if you have served in the military uniform of our government you are a Veteran. However, some restrictions may apply, see your local CVSO.

All honorably discharged Veterans with diagnosed low vision of 20/70 or less; or functional vision loss and vision rehabilitation goals are eligible for low vision services. See your local Veteran Service Officer or call **877.222.VETS** (8387); or you may go directly on-line to www.sioxfalls.va.gov/services/low_vision_clinic.asp.

Don’t forget that you can use your on-line video teleconferencing to talk with your provider without having to leave the comfort of your home.

“MAKE THE CONNECTION”

My Story, My Connection: True Partnership

“I lost who I was. My entire life was being active-duty in the Marine Corps — and now I’m not.” Daniel **MAKE THE CONNECTION**

In total, Daniel and Sara served nearly 30 years in the military and have stuck together through moves across the country, problems with alcohol, parenthood, and transitioning to civilian life.

For more on this and the video please go on-line to the link below. I know the link is long but it is hypertext so if you are reading this letter on-line simply press and hold the “Ctrl” key as you are hovering above the link and press “Enter” simultaneously.

https://maketheconnection.net/whats-new/true-partnership?utm_source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=january_monthly_1.17&utm_term=button_text_page&utm_content=whatsnew_vits_all_null

For more of “HEAR STORIES OF RECOVERY” go on-line to <https://maketheconnection.net/>. **If you feel that you would like some help to master any demons you are fighting see your CVSO.**

“In matters of healing the body or the mind, vacation is a true genius!” — Mehmet Murat Ildan

DO YOU HAVE CABIN FEVER?



Thinking about looking at booking a Disney vacation? Before you go, check out the Disney discounts you can get as well



as a few things to keep in mind. *(The first thing to keep in mind is to have your military ID. You’ll need a valid ID to redeem all of these deals.)*

Some of the discounts include:

- **“Hopper Tickets”**. Through Disney’s Armed Forces Salute program, military personnel can get discounted tickets to Disney theme parks. These deals are good for all military members, including active duty, National Guard, Reserve, retired military and spouses.

- **You may also stay at Disney resorts and hotels!**



The Disney Armed Forces Salute program also applies to Disney Resort hotels, where military members can get select rooms at 30-40% off the normal rates. This includes a variety of deluxe resorts, moderate resorts, and value resorts at **Walt Disney World** located in Florida and **Disneyland Resort hotels** in California include Disney’s Paradise Pier Hotel, Disneyland Hotel, and Disney’s Grand Californian Hotel and Spa.

- **Shades of Green** is an Armed Forces Recreation Center (AFRC) in Orlando, Florida. It’s a military-owned resort located within Walt Disney World that offers affordable military room rates and discounted tickets for all Disney World venues.
- **Extra Magic Hours** allows you early admission to select attractions, stores, entertainment and restaurants during each day of your hotel stay. That’s one extra hour of fun before the park opens to the general public, which is a great way to enjoy a slower pace and shorter lines.
- **Do you like the high seas? Disney Cruise Line** offers discounted cruise rates on select sailings for military personnel and families. Discounts are typically announced 30-60 days out.

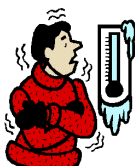


Keep in mind! The discounts are always changing, so visit their website frequently to look for updates.

Whether you’re an active duty service member, a member of the Guard or Reserve, a military family member or a veteran, stay on top of all the military discounts you’re eligible for, from travel accommodations to auto and entertainment deals. Sign up for a free Military.com membership to get full access to all discounts at <https://www.military.com/discounts>.

Are you chilled to the bone?

Beat winter in Minnesota by getting lei’d right off the plane!!



Try a Hawaiian getaway!

If you are a Veteran, military retiree, active duty, Guard/Reserve, military family member and more you can visit the “Hale Koa” resort hotel!



Another “best kept secret” that’s a gem awaiting discovery.

The Hale Koa Hotel is an oceanfront retreat for military members and families on the storied, sunny shores of Waikiki Beach. You’ll find a whole new meaning for rest and relaxation here among the sand, surf and swaying palms. Plus, their shows, sights and shopping bring Hawaiian culture, activities and entertainment within easy reach.



HALE KOA
HOTEL

The property is owned by the Military and offers all of the amenities you would expect from any major hotel or resort in Hawaii! The one thing you won’t expect is the price!!!! For more information about this seaside getaway go on-line to www.halekoa.com. To check your eligibility and accommodations you can go on-line to:

www.halekoa.com/accommodations/eligibility.

ARE THERE OTHER MILITARY RESORTS?

As a side note, there are places like this scattered around the US. The Army owns several such as the Hale Koa (HI) and Shades of Green Resort (FL) in the US and in Europe is Edelweiss Lodge and Resort located in Germany and the Dragon Hill Lodge in Seoul, Korea.

You can go on-line to www.dodlodging.net/ and explore other options. I personally use Air Force Lodging on as many trips as I can. It’s reasonable, very nice accommodations and how much more secure can you be than on a military base...

All branches have lodging available on-post and you can use their facilities, PX/BX, Commissary, gym, etc. while you’re there. **No, the Army bases do not just issue you a tent, a map, a Lensatic Compass and a grid coordinate..**

The caveat to this is that you must have at least one in your party who is in the military with current ID or who is a Military Retiree with current ID or Military Dependent with current Dependent’s ID.

Anyway, if you are traveling happy trails & be safe! Plan your trip and all contingencies. **HAVE FUN!**

PROOF OF MILITARY SERVICE

There are many discounts and specials available for Veteran’s, however you must show proof of your Veteran status.

Those still serving (Active/Guard/Reserve) have their current ID cards (CAC) and their family members have their dependent ID cards. Military Retirees and their dependents have their retired ID Cards.

Active Duty; National Guard; Reserve Component	Common Access Card (CAC)
--	-----------------------------

Military Retiree; Retiree Family Member	ID Card (DD form 2) or DD form 1173 / 1173-1
100% Service Connected	DD form 2765; DD form 1173
Military Veteran	Picture ID (State Driver's License; VA Medical Card) and/or DD form 214 (Discharge)

What about the rest of us? What do we show as proof of Veteran status?

Most businesses or events will accept not only the above as proof of status but they generally also accept your VA ID Card, Service Organization membership card (VFW, American Legion, VVA, MOPH, etc.) but may also want to see your State picture ID as well.

If you do not use the VA for your medical and you are not involved in the membership of a service organization you may carry a copy of your Discharge (DD form 214). Of course, with this you WILL need another form of picture ID.

If you're looking for a list of places who offer discounts you can do a couple things you can go on-line and search, there are several concise lists out there but often times may be outdated or not all inclusive.

In that case, well, JUST ASK! All they can do is say no but more often than not they will say **"well of course we do, thank you for your service!"**

"Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier."
- Colin Powell

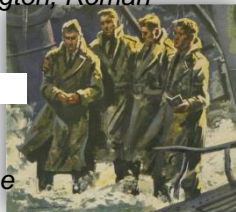
THE FOUR CHAPLAINS

It was the evening of Feb. 2, 1943, and the U.S.A.T. Dorchester was crowded to capacity, carrying 902



service men,
merchant
seamen and
civilian
workers...

Through the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness. Those chaplains were Lt. George L. Fox, Methodist; Lt. Alexander D. Goode, Jewish; Lt. John P. Washington, Roman Catholic; and Lt. Clark V. Poling, Dutch Reformed.



Quickly and quietly, the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. There they tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded and guide the disoriented toward safety.

"Witnesses of that terrible night remember hearing the four men offer prayers for the dying and

encouragement for those who would live," says Wyatt R. Fox, son of Reverend Fox.

The above is an excerpt from the Four Chaplains website. While researching this I found many more snippets of history concerning these men and their heroism and the many programs that have been established in their name.

www.fourchaplains.org/the-saga-of-the-four-chaplains

Four Chaplains Scholarship Program

Something you probably didn't know is that the Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation has sponsored the National Student Scholarship Competition for students in grades 5th – 12th for more than 15 years. Each competition is designed to challenge young people to understand and practice the values of inclusion, cooperation, and unity that were shown by the Four Chaplains. Participating provides a forum for youth to express their views on the benefits of working together in a diverse world.

Winners are selected by the Scholarship Committee of the Board of Directors. For more information on the scholarship program go on-line to: www.fourchaplains.org/youth-scholarship-programs

A couple of YouTube films for your information. The first is a documentary about the Four Chaplains and the other is a WWII training film about the Chaplain Corps w/Ronald Reagan.

THE FOUR CHAPLAINS: Sacrifice at Sea.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ewJp8HhYzA

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY U.S. ARMY CHAPLAIN CORPS WWII Film w/ RONALD REAGAN

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWkqQUtZYyM

"IN OTHER NEWS..."

In past issues I've discussed other various avenues to get the news,, Whether you are looking for news about

IN OTHER NEWS



VA issue and benefits, keeping pace with your military service as we go forward or diverse information concerning family, education, pay, health and more. There are also

the military service organization official sites which offer news more closely related to Veterans and their individual organization.

However, there are some out there, just like any other "news sites", that are purely propaganda although appearing legitimate. These are generally furthering other agendas which are not that of our government or military. Take care to look for this every time you log on and if you think that one is particularly misleading you

are urged to report it. The same can be said for Social Media.

Some of the sites that are reliable, to name a very few, are:

- *Military.com*
- *Military Times (et.al.)*
- *VA.gov*
- *MN Dept of Vet Affair*
- *Military Press*
- *Legion Magazine*
- *VFW Magazine*
- *Benefits.VA.gov/gibill*
- *TRICARE.com*
- *Stripes.com*
- *Defense News: "Early Bird Brief"*
- *CIA President's Brief*
- *Official US Military Branch Websites*
- *And many more...*

These, and more, can easily be found through a search with your favorite Internet search engine.

Another source is getting this news document monthly, the Jackson VSO Commo Check! The Commo Check offers snippets of information based on official press releases or other official mail I receive on a daily basis. I then research it and print what I believe to be the best information for our Veterans to provide news and to spark interest for them to call with questions.

You can get this newsletter on-line or via e-mail, if you wish. On-line is www.co.jackson.mn.us/Veterans or you can contact me with your e-mail address and I'll add it to the list. It may also be located at our Jackson VSO Facebook page. Just log-on daily and see what's new!

All back issues are archived at the website so you can look at back issues for additional information.

There are copies in my office for you to peruse as well.

STAY INFORMED

It's to your benefit to stay informed and that would be via news sites, magazines or calling your CVSO.

Help your CVSO help you!
Call if you read something and want more info!
Review your records in th VSO office often!
Call with changes of address or status!

A SALUTE TO ALL WHO GAVE US

OUR FREEDOM!

Anytime Fitness - Hero Discount Program

\$0 Enrollment Fee
 10% off normal monthly rate
 1 Free Personal Training Session

Heroes include:
 Military (Active, Retired, Veterans, & Reservists)



508 2NS ST
 JACKSON, MN
 507-849-7348

Get to a healthier place. JACKSONMN@ANYTIMEFITNESS.COM

URGENT INFORMATION

Please place these numbers close by in case you would ever need to call one. We hope that the need never arises but we also understand that it's a real possibility. Better to be prepared and to know where to call for help when help is needed...

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-8255

NATIONAL PROBLEM GAMBLING HELPLINE

1-800-522-4700



Veterans Crisis Line
 1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1
OR TEXT TO "838255"



Veterans Linkage Line™
 minnesotaveteran.org | **1-888-LinkVet**
 (546-5838)

REMEMBER THIS:

"The nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten."
 – Calvin Coolidge

***HOW COPY? OVER...
 GOOD COPY! OUT!***

DON'T FORGET – LIKE US ON FACEBOOK!
www.facebook.com/JacksonCountyMNVeteranServices
 or visit online at www.co.jackson.mn.us/veterans

See ya next month!



The sole responsibility for content is Jeffrey Gay, Jackson Veteran's Service Officer.

JACKSON COUNTY VETERAN SERVICES

Let's Stay Connected...