VETERANS
CONNECTIONS
News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 2, Issue 2 ★ April 2022

★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

Last month, we presented our budget before the House and Senate Committees, which was a time to not only look ahead to our future initiatives, but to reflect on what we have accomplished over the past year, since I joined IDVA. I was proud to share with the committees how hard Team IDVA has worked on our shared mission outlined in my six-point plan to elevate our services to veterans. Our senior leadership is restructured, the IDVA culture and communication is reenergized, infection control in our homes is strengthened, key roles have been filled by experienced professionals, and technology is amplified. We have built a foundation and our team is poised to continue improving our service to the veterans of Illinois.

In this edition, you will learn more about construction at the Veterans' Home at Quincy, an interview with the skilled dietician in the Veteran's Home at Anna, more about our VSOs, education opportunities, our women's program, and upcoming events and programs. I hope you enjoy learning more about IDVA.

Thank you for taking the time to connect with IDVA.

Terry Prince, IDVA Director

Happy 100th Birthday Norman Hickam

Norman is a resident of the Veterans' Home at Anna and had a special celebration with the presentation of a letter from President Joe Biden commemorating his birthday in November. Norman is the seventh child of nine children and is from Jonesboro, Illinois. He was with the Army Infantry stationed in Hawaii as a Staff Sergeant. His Army Infantry Unit was set to take over the islands, when it came to his Unit Commander's attention that Norman could read, type, and write shorthand. His Commander sent him to Fort Benning Georgia as a Second Lieutenant. When Norman returned home from the service, he carried on the family farm and owned his own timber business where he worked in the winter. Thank you for your service. Happy Birthday, Norman.

Our mission at the IDVA is very simple. To serve those who have served. In doing so, we serve not only the men and women who have worn the uniform, but also their families. It is our privilege to be able to help our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to our nation. Our goal is to empower our veterans and their families to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We know there are many veterans within our great state who do not require any assistance – but we still want to encourage you to "Stand Up and Be Counted!" by registering with your local VSO. In doing so, you're helping IDVA to do a better job of planning for services, seeking federal funding and understanding the needs of our veteran communities statewide. Click here to register.

We Thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and we at the IDVA look forward to offering our services to You.

Vietnam Veterans Day Ceremony

National Vietnam War Veterans Day, designated every March 29th, is a day to honor all the men and women who served and sacrificed. On this day, thousands of organizations from across the nation join to honor and thank over six million Vietnam War veterans and nine million family members for their service and sacrifice. They do this through various ceremonies and vigils where every Vietnam veteran, surviving spouse or family member is properly welcomed home and receives a lapel pin as a small token of the Nation's gratitude.

Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs hosted a pinning ceremony in Lincoln, Illinois. The program is a partnership with IDVA and several veteran organizations in Logan and surrounding counties.

Vietnam Veterans receive their pins honoring their service.

Virtual Desert Storm Remembrance Program

On Tuesday, February 28th, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs streamed the 31st Desert Storm Remembrance Program. Take a moment and view the link below.
https://multimedia.illinois.gov/dva/DVA-Desert-Storm-31st-Remembrance-Ceremony-2022.html

Gold Star Families

Gold star families – **spouses, children, parents, siblings, or others who's loved one died in service to our nation** – are a vital part of our country's military community and history.

On Tuesday, April 5th, 2022, we come together to recognize the sacrifices made by military spouses. Their unique service is many times overlooked, and this is an opportunity to elevate awareness of their sacrifices and their grief.

The Gold Star community stands together in support of one another. Below is a listing of the many resources and networks available to those who have loved ones who died in the line of duty.

Gold Star Survivor Resources

- Navy Long Term Assistance Program (901) 874-0083
- Army Family Programs Directorate (210) 466-1173
- Air Force Airman and Family Care Division (703) 697-2392
- Coast Guard Casualty Matters Office (703) 872-6647
- Marine Corps Gold Star & Surviving Family Member Representatives (703) 784-9580
- Tragedy Assistance Program For Survivors (TAPS) Hotline 800-959-TAPS (8277)
- Department of Defense Casualty and Mortuary Affairs & Military Funeral Honors (571) 372-5319
- The Sugar Bear Foundation (760) 622-9008

March 2022: Women Veteran Recognition Month in Illinois

As Women's History Month was celebrated throughout the nation, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker proclaimed March 2022 as Women Veterans Recognition Month. We were thrilled to recognize and celebrate Illinois Women Veterans throughout the state. The Strategic Program Management Office with the Veterans Benefits Administration found women veterans often feel overlooked as a veteran. It is important that we come together as a community and uplift our women veterans. We can start by building a community and sharing our stories. In doing so, we increased awareness on women veterans and the unique experiences and challenges that many of us have faced and continue to face. We all have a story worth sharing.

Please take a moment to follow our Illinois Women Veterans page at https://www.facebook.com/IllinoisWomenVeterans/ to celebrate the stories of fellow Illinois women veterans and learn more about women veteran specific resources and happenings available to you.

STATE OF ILLINOIS

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Proclamation

WHEREAS, women have a long and often unrecognized history of serving in the Armed Forces; and,

WHEREAS, throughout our history, women have been among the patriots who have defended our land and liberty from every enemy; and,

WHEREAS, women have served in occupations from pilot to nurse, in both peacetime and war; we owe all of them a special debt of gratitude for their part in advancing the promise of freedom; and,

WHEREAS, women have demonstrated great skill, sacrifice, and commitment to defending the principles upon which our nation was founded; and,

WHEREAS, there are approximately two million living women veterans in the United States and its territories with an estimated 50,000 women veterans who call the state of Illinois home; and,

WHEREAS, the state of Illinois is proud to honor women veterans throughout the month of March, to recognize the courage, honor, and dignity with which women have served and continue to serve in defense of our nation;

THEREFORE, I, JB Pritzker, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim March 2022, as **Women Veterans Recognition Month** in Illinois, and encourage all residents to honor those women veterans who have courageously served their country.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Illinois to be affixed.

Done at the Capitol in the City of Springfield, this TWENTY-TWO day of FEBRUARY, in the Year of Our Lord, two thousand and TWENTY-TWO, and of the State of Illinois, two hundred and FOURTH.

SECRETARY OF STATE

GOVERNOR

Women's History Month: WomenIn Webinar Featuring Women in Government

WORK FOR ILLINOIS

work.illinois.gov

Keandra Rodriguez – Dietary Cook: Caring, T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson-Administrator: Troubleshooter, Melissa Beckford – Northern Division Supervisor - Outgoing, Julia Moreno – Activity Director – Empathetic, Suzanne Isenberg-Chhabra, Social Services Director - Strength-Based, Donnis Overton – VSO - Persistent

As part of Women's History month, Central Management Services (CMS) presented a webinar, WomenIn, which featured women who serve in government in the fields of public safety, science, IT, and healthcare. The Chicago Home's Administrator T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson and members of her team were interviewed for their contributions in health care. Also interviewed were Suzanne Isenberg-Chhabra, Social Services, Julia Moreno – Activities, Kendrea Rodriguez – Dietary, and Jennifer Malon – Director of Nursing. Melissa Beckford, Regional Supervisor and Donnis Overton VSO, were also interviewed for their work with veterans. In the interviews, they each shared their passion for their work, love of working with veterans, and what it means to be a woman working for IDVA. The webinar aired on Thursday, March 31, 2022. To view Kendrea's interview: https://youtu.be/ouPVXoE21lw

Education Looks Different for Everyone

State of Illinois Education Benefits for Dependents
The State of Illinois offers two state veterans' dependent education benefit programs, the Educational Opportunity Grant and the MIA-POW Scholarship. The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs works with families to determine eligibility and application. Please read on to learn more about these opportunities which could support your educational goals.

The first program is the **Educational Opportunity Grant**, which pays a $250 grant per year for certain dependent children between the ages of 10-18 to cover expenses associated with school attendance.

Specifically, the grant is for dependent children of a veteran who died on active duty, a veteran whose death was ruled service connected, a veteran who is 100% totally and permanently disabled, or a veteran 100% disabled for at least two years.

The child must be enrolled at an Illinois educational institution, such as an elementary school, middle or junior high school, high school, or vocational training school. Applicants must apply annually during the academic year to receive the Grant. More information may be found at https://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/services%20benefits/education/Pages/Educational-Opportunities-for-Children.aspx.

The second program is the MIA-POW Scholarship for post-secondary education program, which covers tuition and specified fees for certain dependent children to attend an Illinois public university or community college.

An applicant for the **MIA-POW Scholarship** must be the spouse, widow, natural child, stepchild or adopted child of the veteran to qualify. The veteran must have been an Illinois resident at the time of entering active military service, an Illinois resident within six months after entering active military service, or a resident of Illinois for at least 15 consecutive years after leaving active duty as of the date of application. Furthermore, the veteran must meet one of the following criteria in order to qualify – (1) Veteran must have been an MIA (Missing In Action) (2) Veteran must have been a POW (Prisoner of War) (3) Veteran must be rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (USDVA) as being 100% permanent and totally disabled by service connected causes (4) Veteran must be rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (USDVA) as being 100% permanent and totally disabled by service connected causes due to unemployability (5) Veteran's death must be rated service connected by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (USDVA).

More information may be found at https://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/services%20benefits/education/Pages/MIAPOW-Scholarship.aspx.

The application process for the MIA-POW Scholarship is online at https://studentportal.isac.org/student.

Quincy Home Project

If you've ever visited the Veterans' Home at Quincy, you are immediately enthralled by its expansive 210 acres perched along the Mississippi River. Built 135 years ago as the Soldiers and Sailor Home, it is steeped in history and stories. Private Joe Fifer is the symbol of the home, and his image watches over the veteran residents and thousands of employees who have cared for its veteran residents. Its 37 buildings were built between 1886 and 2002, and while they have served the home well, many needed major repair and upgrades.

The task at hand was to marry the Quincy Home's mission to care for residents with state-of-the-art facilities with the charm of the home's setting and history. A partnership between IDVA and other state and federal agencies went to the drawing board and developed a phased development and implementation plan to achieve a long-term vision for the home. The plan includes improvements and connection to existing campus infrastructure. The buildings must also meet at the minimum LEED Silver certification, a commitment to the state's commitment to environmental responsibility. Additionally, the team is coordinating with the Illinois Historic Preservation Division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to maintain the integrity of the home's historic significance.

"The energy around the campus is evident as construction crews are working diligently to build our new buildings that will serve our veterans for years to come," said Troy Culbertson, Home Administrator.

Today, construction is well underway as crews are at work regardless of the climate, and the home has made sure that the resident veterans' lives are not disrupted, and that families and friends are able to visit campus. The Quincy Home's project is set for completion in 2024. Time will fly, and we cannot wait to celebrate the renovated Veterans' Home at Quincy.

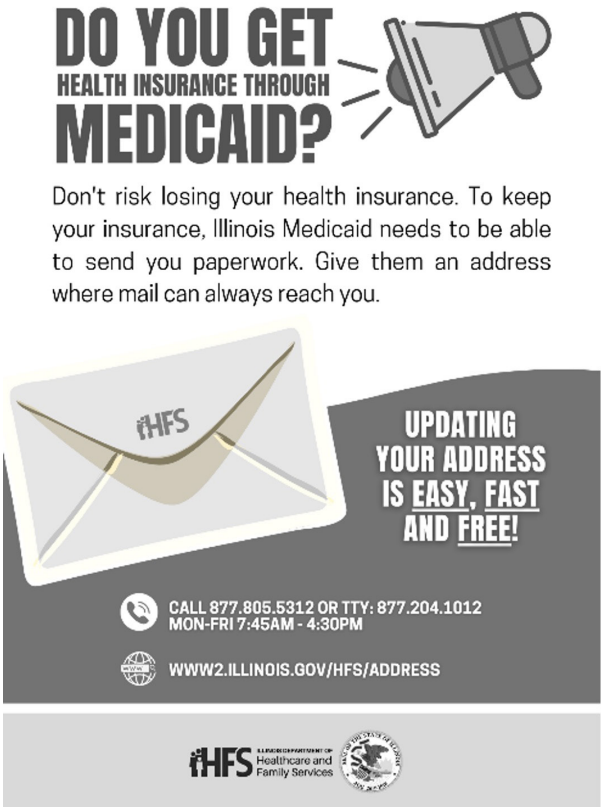
Site of Independent Living

Curtis Davis: Retiring Again

A note from Mark Patterson, Field Services Manager

On March 31st, Curtis Davis, Navy veteran, retired as the Central Region Supervisor after 17 years with IDVA. He is missioned oriented and focused on advancing the services provided to our veteran's community. He has achieved the golden rule of service, leave it better than you found it. In his case, he improved on a program that was up and running. During his time at IDVA, he has served as a Veterans Service Officer, Central Division (Region) Supervisor and since September 16, 2021, the Acting Training Coordinator. He joined in 2005 in a class of 25 VSOs, where only six will remain upon his retirement.

Your years of service have benefited our country and state. You will be missed but not forgotten. Thank you for the support and advice you have shared with me. Fair Winds and Following Seas.



Annual Training Conference 2022

It is going to be an exciting conference this year. We will be joined by members of the Illinois Veterans Assistance Commissions and will be the start of a long series of collaborative efforts we share with our county partners. Our partnership enhances the services our veteran communities have access to by working together as an advocacy team. Welcome VAC's and thank you for all you do.

The conference will be May 16-19 in Springfield. This will be the first conference with our new Training Coordinator Kenneth Bonner. Ken was our Veterans Service Officer in Will County, Joliet. He has a short-term and long-term vision for the training activities that will continue our growth as veteran advocates in our communities.

Anna Homes' Kitchen: Behind the Scenes

Melissa Campbell, Dietician at the Veterans' Home at Anna, said that her approach to eating wisely is simple, "Choose the correct foods and eat them at the correct time." Serving three meals a day and snacks to more than 50 residents requires careful meal planning and preparation. Melissa, a Certified Dietary Manager who earned her undergraduate degree in food nutrition from Southern Illinois University, plans meals on a four-week cycle. She consults a food committee and encourages her team to have fun in the kitchen by experimenting with new recipes and ideas. Melissa also monitors clean up to see what is left on plates – a sure survey of how meals are being received. She relies on a spreadsheet to track special dietary needs of residents and make substitutions as needed.

Melissa is insistent that her vendors provide high-quality, fresh ingredients to enhance the meals she prepares. Fresh vegetable and fruit are always on the menu and lunch and dinner always begin with soup. Her team of ten arrive at 5:30 AM and are skilled, reliable, and creative. They are the backbone of her operation. A full supply of small tasting spoons is at the ready, so that each dish is tasted for seasonings before it is served. The team takes pride in presenting meals with garnishes and in special dinnerware to elevate the meal experience.

"We strive to carefully present and prepare meals so that the entire meal experience is enjoyable for the veterans," said Melissa. "Mealtime is so important from being together to sharing good food."

During the COVID-19 pandemic it was particularly difficult to manage meal preparation to ensure the kitchen was its absolute safest. Paper products replaced dinnerware and strict sanitization methods were initiated. The residents suffered from not being together and isolated to their rooms or hallways for meals. Melissa's team looked for creative ways to make meals feel special. For example, they assembled individual appetizer baskets delivered to each resident. Residents have returned to the dining room and Melissa looks forward to bringing back interactive food experiences such as ice cream, taco, and chili bars.

Presenting a well-balanced, diet that is delicious and served with care is a gift our veterans deserve.

An Anna favorite:

Strawberry Shortcake with pie crust

Use parfait glass for nice presentation

PIE CRUST

Sysco's T. Marzetti 9x11 pastry dough sheets
Item # 6674345
Brush pastry sheet with butter and sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar
Bake at 350

STRAWBERRIES

1 6lb sliced frozen strawberries
4-5 lbs fresh sliced strawberries
Combine, and place in fridge so that it will become nice and juicy

WHIPPED TOPPING

Cool Whip

TO ASSEMBLE THE SHORTCAKE

1. Place crust in parfait glass starting with the crust and alternating with the berries.
2. Don't be stingy with the berries. It's better to not use all the crusts if there's a shortage of berries.
3. Add whipped cream to the top of the parfait glass and a fanned strawberry for garnish.
4. ENJOY

Mental Health Education Coalition April 2022 Program

Military Veteran Cultural Competency

This workshop is for mental health providers who serve the behavioral needs of service members, veterans, and their families. Veterans a suicide rate is 1.5 times higher than non-Veteran adults. As mental health professional we all have a role to play preventing suicide among veterans who are experiencing emotional or mental health crisis with lifesaving support. Military culture encourages self-reliance and asking for help is not the norm. Veterans do not always feel comfortable about talking about their military experience and how it affects their lives.

Speakers will share information about the needs of veterans, understand military culture, describe how to navigate the VA system, provide information on suicide prevention and treatment and how to support veteran caregivers. This workshop will provide the best available information and practices to prevent veteran suicide.

Program objectives include:

- Identify branches of the military
- The language of the military
- Review how roles and responsibilities in military affect one's identity
- Discuss Veterans and the VA
- Facts about suicide
- Identify steps of S.A.V.E.
- Resources and references
- Review receiving care with Hanna Somatic Movement and Meditation.
- Review common and alternative treatments used with veterans
- Review Examples of how others have helped veterans
- Identify Organizations that service veterans and how to join them

Advance registration is required, and spots are limited. Deadline for registration is April 6, 2022. This program will be free for all participants. This program will be VIRTUAL. The day before the program you will be sent handouts and links to join the meeting. There will be a link provided at the end of the program to fill out the evaluation. To be awarded contact hours you MUST complete the evaluation.

To register for this opportunity, please click here.

Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide

On November 9, 2020, Governor JB Pritzker with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) announced that the State of Illinois would be joining a nationwide effort known as the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF). This challenge, designed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) partnered with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), challenges states to develop and implement statewide suicide prevention best practices. The Governor's Challenge team will use a public health approach to educate community providers on the SMVF population's unique needs and challenges. Dr. Teresa Glaze, from the Illinois Department of Human Service's Division of Mental Health, leads the Governor's Challenge team which consists of several Illinois organizations throughout the state who bring their own expertise and experiences to the discussion.

The Governor's Challenge identified three strategic priorities to support their mission:

1) Assess and Screen for Suicide Risk
2) Promote Connectedness and Improved Care Transitions
3) Increase Lethal Means Safety

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs is honored to be a part of the Governor's Challenge efforts and assist in developing practical strategies across the state to support the SMVF community. Be on the lookout in the coming months for updates and information on the Illinois Governor's Challenge!

A Life-Saving Bond: K9s for Veterans

A service dog is a veteran's companion and the bond created promotes healing and the management of PTSD and other challenges related to military service. The IDVA has partnered with K9s for Veterans, a nonprofit whose mission "is to help veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder transition back to civilian life once their military service has ended with the help of trained service dogs. We are committed to educating the public about the plight of veterans with PTSD and streamlining the process for them to get service dogs, so they get the help they need... Before it's too late." K9s for Veterans exclusively trains rescue dogs and provides food and medical care for the life of the service dog.

Founded by Mike Tellerino, K9s for Veterans, trains nearly 30 dogs throughout the year and works with veterans to build the relationship and the role of the dog in the veteran's life. The dogs are presented to the veteran in special ceremonies where the veteran and his/her dog become family. The staff is talented and dedicated to training dogs and partnering them with their veteran. The intent is for the veteran to feel connected and supported.

"When Mike Tellerino refers to his program, he says, "who rescued who," said IDVA Acting Director Prince. "Bringing together rescue dogs and veterans is a special and important relationship that benefits the veteran and provides a safe place for the canine."
K9s for Veterans also founded the Forgotten Warrior Memorial beautifully situated in Channahon State Park.

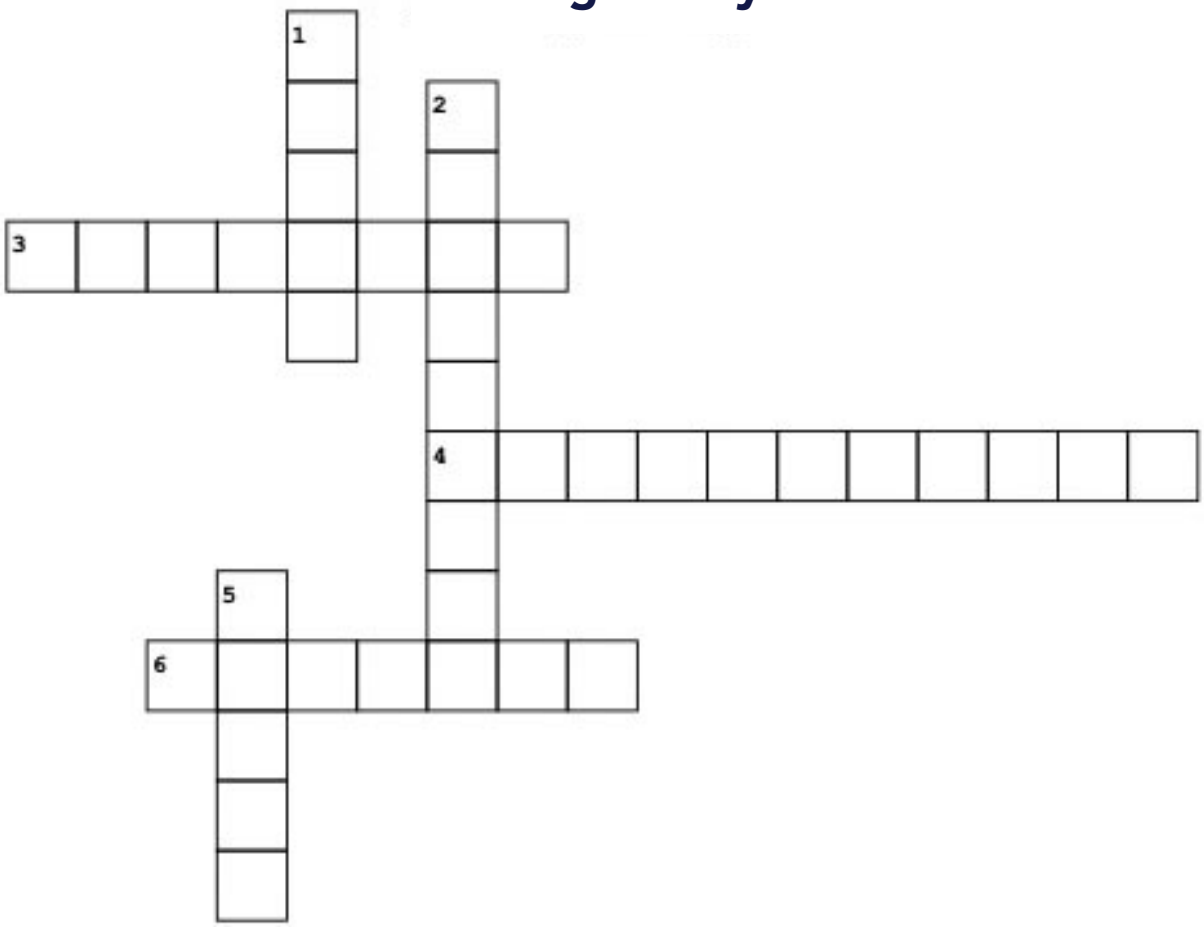
It is the only memorial in the nation that recognizes service men and women who lost the battle of PTSD. It's a beautiful tribute to heroes: https://www.k9sforveteransnfp.org/forgotten-warrior-memorial.html

Acting Director Terry Prince has been interviewed on K9s for Veterans cable program, "Veterans Helping Veterans," where he shared his vision of IDVA and the services it offers veterans across Illinois. It was a great platform to get the word out about IDVA, one of Director Prince's primary initiatives to ensure that veterans are educated about how IDVA can help a veteran obtained earned benefits and services.

For more information, visit: https://www.k9sforveteransnfp.org/index.html

Veterans Connections Crossword Puzzle

Eating Wisely



ACROSS

3. The scientific study of fruits
4. You can learn more about the MyPlate initiative through the U.S. Department of
6. Meat, seafood and poultry are a part of this food group

DOWN

1. The saying goes, "An _____ day keeps the doctor away!"
2. According to the USDA, this food group is organized into subgroups: dark green; red and orange; beans, peas and lentils; starchy
5. Avocados are considered a_____

1. Apple 2. Vegetable 3. Pomology 4. Agriculture 5. Fruit 6. Protein

Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

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