VETERANS
CONNECTIONS
News from the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs ★ Volume 2, Issue 3 ★ May 2022

★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

Thank you for picking up this month's IDVA *Veterans Connections*. We are in one of the busiest months of the year, starting with joint Veteran Service Officer (VSO) training and culminating with Memorial Day. For the first time in years, IDVA and County Veteran Commission VSOs will gather from across the state in an intensive three-day program that will equip our team with the knowledge and resources to support Illinois' veterans to obtain their earned benefits. With well over a half million veterans in Illinois--and countless family members, these VSOs represent the "tip of the spear" of our efforts, bringing many years of experience and continuously training and advising on new guidelines and legislation in process, benefits, and programs.

We are also looking ahead to Memorial Day. While it is often looked upon as the day that kicks off the summer season--spending time with family and friends, we know that the reality is so much different. To those who have borne the ultimate cost of war, we know it is a solemn day to remember those who passed away while serving in our military and especially those who died in combat—giving of themselves for the cause of freedom, the cause for America. I have directed the executive leadership team to ensure that IDVA is well represented at events throughout Illinois and look forward to serving as the keynote speaker at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood. I'm reminded of a quote by Jennifer Granholm, one that is so appropriate for what we do in Illinois: "Ceremonies are important. But our gratitude has to be more than once-a-year Memorial Day ceremonies. We honor the dead best by treating the living well."

Please continue to stay engaged in the fight. Illinois' veterans have earned and frankly, deserve our absolute best effort, not just on Memorial Day, but every day. Every U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman pledges the following, "I dedicate my heart, mind and strength to the work before me." It's a call to action, a rededication of our efforts. Let's keep the momentum going!

This newsletter showcases many programs, events, and resources available to veterans throughout the state. We hope you find this information valuable and are always eager to hear from you. Please reach out to us at IDVA.MEDIA@illinois.gov or 217-782-6641.

Thank you for staying connected with IDVA.

Sincerely,
Terry Prince, IDVA Director

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.

US Marine's Dog Tag Returned to Family 54 Years After Serving in Vietnam

Corporal David Gary Redenius and his recovered dog tag.

Fifty-four years after United States Marine Corporal David Gary Redenius made the ultimate sacrifice for his nation, his dog tag was returned to his family after being found in Vietnam by Canadian educator and tourist Christian Dumont. Corporal Redenuis' sisters Carolyn Redenius and Beverly Warning were presented the dog tags at a ceremony held at the Veterans' Home at Quincy on April 13th. Prior to the ceremony, Mr. Dumont and Corporal Redenius' sisters spoke on a conference call where Mr. Dumont shared how he found the dog tag and its significance.

While visiting Hill 689 in Vietnam, Mr. Dumont joined a young Vietnamese man who was scanning the ground with a metal detector. They came across several items, including unexploded mortar shells and M16 casings. Under freshly turned dirt, Mr. Dumont saw Corporal Redenius' tag. As he describes, "I understood what it was and the moment became very special, very solemn. The place was no longer just a historical site, but a place of meditation. I realized that right where I was standing something tragic had happened. History was no longer a book I read, but I was living history through a soldier's final minutes."

Mr. Dumont went on a quest to return the dog tag to the family of Corporal Redenius, and while he hit many roadblocks, he finally connected with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs and Curtis Davis, recently retired VSO, continued the research and located Corporal Redenius' sister in Quincy.

Miss Redenius and Mrs. Warning were insistent on sharing this story with the community to honor and remember the men and women who served in Vietnam and were not respectfully welcomed home.

"Mr. Dumont's gesture of returning a part of Corporal Redenius home to his family is an amazing display of determination and recognition of its meaning to his family," said IDVA Director Terry Prince. "We honor Corporal Redenius' service and sacrifice today and are grateful to his family for allowing us to share this special moment with others so that we can properly recognize our Vietnam Veterans."

U.S. Marine Danielle Luevano, IDVA Property Manager and veteran, presents Carolyn Redenius Corporal David Gary Redenius' dog tag.

Licensing and Certification Exam Prep Courses now eligible for GI Bill® Approval

Under recent federal law, The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs – State Approving Agency – may approve preparatory courses for licensing and certification exams for the GI Bill. This greatly expands the scope of educational opportunities for veterans.

If your organization is interested in offering exam prep courses, review the criteria below to see if you qualify.

First Set of Criteria

The organization -

1. is already approved or meets the requirements to be approved as either an accredited or nonaccredited educational institution.
2. has received official recognition and/or accreditation, if applicable, from the licensing or certification authority offering the exam that the prep course is designed for.
3. agrees to provide verification when requested by a VA beneficiary. This must include the name of course as well as start and end dates.
4. must identify the tuition and any mandatory fees associated with the prep course.

Mandatory fees are defined in the provider's catalog or supplement and listed on the billing statement or invoice. The fee must be the same and mandatory for all students, and it may not be waived.

Second Set of Criteria

The organization -

1. has provided training to at least 100 students.
2. has demonstrated that 75% of students who complete the course pass the certification test within two years of completing the program.
3. agrees to provide verification when requested by the VA beneficiary. This must include the name of the course as well as the start and end dates.
4. identifies the tuition and any mandatory fees associated with the prep course.

Mandatory fees are defined in the provider's catalog or supplement and listed on the billing statement or invoice. The fee must be the same and mandatory for all students, and it may not be waived.

An organization may offer prep courses in-person, online or in a hybrid format. The State Approving Agency only approves mandatory fees and any variation of the prep course, including variations in cost, length, etc. There is no cap on tuition and fees for approved prep courses. The Illinois State Approving Agency will ensure that charges are similar and consistent with other similar prep courses. Veterans may request reimbursement as many times as they need for a prep course.

If your organization is interested in approval of an exam prep course, please contact Dan Wellman at IDVA.GIBILL@illinois.gov or 217-782-7838.

® GI Bill® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More information about education benefits offered by VA is available at the official U.S. government Web site at https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill.

Director Terry Prince joined United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dennis McDonough at a round table with student veterans from universities in the Chicago area to talk about their challenges, concerns and solutions for maximizing their educational experience. The round table was hosted at Loyola University Chicago's downtown campus.

Women Veterans

Come learn more about services and resources for women veterans

Save the Date! National Lewis University and the University of Chicago are hosting a Women Veterans Stand Down Event on Saturday, June 11th, 2022 in honor of Women Veterans Appreciation Day. This hybrid event will be taking place throughout the state at various host site locations and will address topics of interests such as:

- Education
- Employment
- Housing
- Legal Services
- Medical and Mental Health

The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs will be hosting this event at the Elks Lodge #158 in Springfield. Please keep an eye on our social media pages for more information!

Field Services

Annual VSO Training Conference

We have a great program in store for our VSO training conference coming up May 16-19 in Springfield. Led by Ken Bonner, our new Training Coordinator, and joined by the Illinois Veterans Assistance Commission, the three-day conference will address many areas of interest for professional veteran's benefits advocates. This year, we will convene at the Northfield Inn, Suites & Conference Center, 3280 Northfield Drive. If you have additional questions, please reach out to Ken Bonner, Kenneth.Bonner@illinois.gov.

Comings and Goings

IDVA welcomes U.S. Army veteran Charles Barry to the Field Services team as a VSO at the McClean County office located in Bloomington. Charles' service included participation in Operation Noble Eagle and Operation Enduring Freedom. He retired from full-time service in the Illinois Army National Guard in September 2021 and stayed on as a civilian part-time staff until joining IDVA.

Two of IDVA's exceptional VSOs Gavin Armour and Donnis Overton have accepted employment with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs at the Chicago VA Regional Office. Their service to our agency has been outstanding, and we wish them well as they continue to serve the veteran community in Illinois at the federal level.

Illinois Joining Forces Annual Summit brought advocates for veterans to share their ideas and solutions for serving veterans across Illinois. IDVA is grateful for this partnership. Director Terry Prince addressed the collaborative efforts of veteran advocates and Women Veterans Coordinator Kourtney Hopkins co-moderated the women veterans break out.

Veterans' Homes

Veterans' Home at Manteno Welcomes New Team Member

Carolyn Domont, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, has joined the Veterans' Home at Manteno as its new Social Services Director. Over the course of her career, she has worked with all age groups from infant to geriatric populations. She came to IDVA after 20-years as a social worker at Riverside Medical Center. She also has experience in Acute Inpatient Rehabilitation and Acute Care Hospital setting. During her graduate studies, she worked at the Veterans Hospital in Oklahoma City which ignited her interest in working with veterans as a social worker.

"The social workers at Manteno are a critical piece in caring for all the needs of our residents," said Home Administrator Tanya Smith. "Carolyn brings years of experience and deeply-rooted compassion for veterans, which will amplify our services."

Carolyn summarizes her commitment to social work with a quote from Kim Leaner, LCSW, " I became a Social Worker to touch individual's lives by listening to them without judgment, celebrating their strengths, supporting them in their struggles and advocating on their behalf".

Carolyn earned her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology/ Sociology and Counseling from Southwest Baptist University and her Master's Degree from the University of Oklahoma. She lives in Bourbonnais with her husband, two children, and their dog Enzo.

"I am so excited to be here at the Manteno Veterans' Home as the Director of Social Work," said Carolyn. "I am a big advocate for the profession of Social Work and so proud that there is already a group of dedicated and professional social workers at the Manteno Veterans' Home."

Partner Highlight

Springfield Elks Lodge #158

The Springfield Elks Lodge #158 has been a longtime partner with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs. Located at 409 East Lake Shore Drive, Springfield, Illinois, the Elks Lodge graciously donates their space for veteran events. Established in 1903, the Elks mission is to serve the people and communities through benevolent programs, demonstrating that Elks Care and Elks Share, and to pledge, "So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them." Managed by Exalted Ruler Sandra Begué, and with the leadership of Past Exalted Ruler & Retired Chief Warrant Officer Bobby Edwards who is currently serving as the Commander of the Illinois VFW, and the Illinois Veterans Memorial Board President and Elks member John Carrigan, the Elks Lodge #158 has been the host site of ceremonies such as Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, Anniversary of the World War II Allied invasion at Normandy, now known as D-Day, Veterans Day, Flag Day, and is a host site for the upcoming Women Veterans Stand Down event on June 11, 2022. The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs thanks Elks Lodge #158 for the continued dedication to the veteran community!

To learn more about Elks Lodge #158, please visit http://www.elks158.com/.

Interview with Jim Keeton, *Rehabilitation Director for HealthPRO-Heritage for the Veterans' Home at LaSalle*

Jim Keeton, Rehabilitation Director for HealthPRO-Heritage and assigned to manage rehabilitation services at the Veterans' Home at LaSalle, is deeply connected to serving veterans. His father is a U.S. Vietnam War Army veteran who has a service-connected disability.

"I take care of veterans how I would like my father to be cared for," said Jim in talking about his work at the LaSalle Home.

The LaSalle, Chicago, and Manteno Veterans' Homes contract with HealthPRO-Heritage to deliver on-site rehabilitation services including physical, speech, and occupational therapies. The LaSalle team includes CNAs, physical, occupational, and speech therapists. Each has either an associates, master's, or doctorate in their field.

"Jim Keeton and his HealthPRO team serve our veterans with enthusiasm and encouragement," said LaSalle Home Administrator Brandi Melton. "I have seen resident's daily lives enhanced in small and big ways through therapy delivered by these compassionate and skilled professionals."

Jim describes his team as "phenomenal," and work toward one goal - gaining independence for the veteran for as long as possible. The Physical Therapists focus on building strength and mobility. Occupational Therapists focus on self-feeding, grooming, bed mobility, and wheelchair functioning. Speech Therapy addresses concerns including voice disorders, word retrieval, and swallowing disorders. Jim's team celebrates all the successes of their veterans and values that even the smallest improvement enhances the quality of each day and, in many cases, is life changing.

The LaSalle rehabilitation setting is inviting and well-equipped, and the ratio of therapist to veteran provides important one-on-one attention. The therapists also work with the home to plan everyday activities that support their therapies. At an ice cream social, a veteran can stand while scooping ice cream or on a gardening day, the veteran can plant flowers. These are simple, but important tasks for developing skills and confidence.

Jim attributes the veteran's motivation and commitment to understanding that work and discipline produce results. His team also creates a welcoming, social environment with, activities, and relationship building. The "Star of the Month," program encourages veterans to work hard. They have built a community so that the veterans enjoy coming to therapy. The team and the veterans are working together to improve the quality of life for the veteran.

Director Terry Prince had the honor of presenting U.S. Army veteran Dan Valsques with his service dog Rex as part of the K9s for Veterans Dedication ceremony. K9s for Veterans helps veterans manage PTSD by pairing them with a trained service dog. Their bond is lifesaving!

Don't forget to keep in touch with the veterans in your life. A simple call is a gesture that brighten their most difficult days.

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

Memorial Day – A History

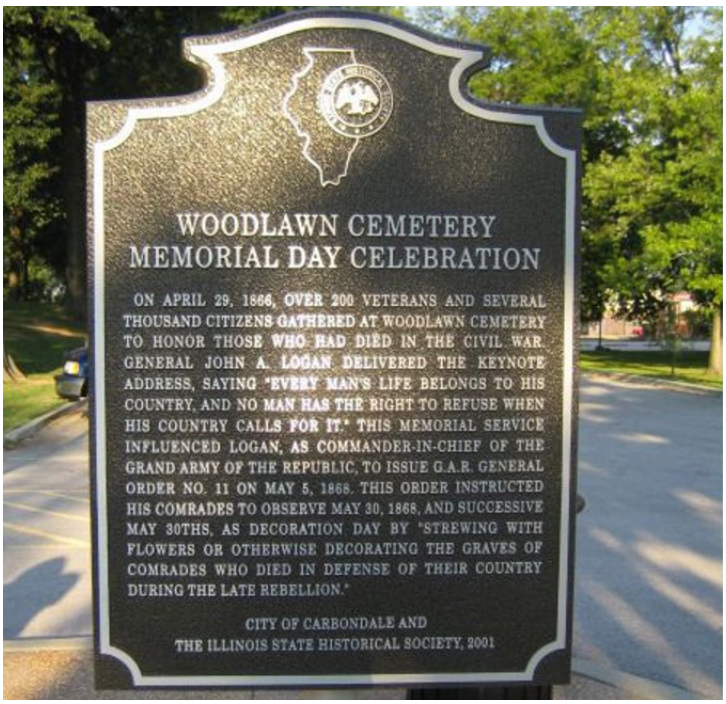
On May 5, 1868, Illinois Civil War General John "Black Jack" Logan, the second Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal veteran organization consisting of Union Civil War veterans, declared May 30 as Decoration Day, a predecessor to today's Memorial Day.

The first large observance occurred at Arlington National Cemetery that year with Illinois General Ulysses S. Grant presiding over the ceremonies. Many local observances throughout the country claim to be the first observance, including one in Carbondale, Illinois.

There in Southern Illinois, the story goes that Ambrose Crowell, Russell Winchester, and Jonathan Wiseman, inspired by a woman with two children putting flowers on graves in rural Hiller Cemetery, just outside Carbondale, decided to organize a larger memorial service observance at Woodlawn Ceremony in Carbondale on April 29, 1866. General Logan was the keynote speaker at the observance, which had over 200 participants. With this observance, Carbondale makes the claim that is hosted the first organized, community wide Memorial Day observance.

The legacy of John A. Logan still resides in Illinois and the United States to this day, as one may find an equestrian statue of him in Chicago's Grant Park and in Logan Circle in Washington, D.C. Many neighborhoods and schools are named after Logan, including Logan Square in Chicago and Logan Heights in San Diego, along with John A. Logan Elementary School and John A. Logan College, both in Carterville, Illinois. His legacy, however, is most strongly tied to his declaration creating Decoration Day, now known as Memorial Day, which pays tribute to U.S. military personnel who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces.

From 1868 to 1970, Memorial Day was observed on May 30. Memorial Day is now observed on the last Monday of May.



FALLEN PATRIOTS

To salute the sacrifice of military children who have lost a parent in the line of duty, May 13 is Children of Fallen Patriots Day. This date shows appreciation for the young people whose lives were forever changed in support of their parents' service to our country. Too often, this tremendous sacrifice is overlooked, which is why Children of Fallen Patriots Day was created to applaud their resilience and strength.

David Kim returned to the United States and founded Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation in 2002. Since then, Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation has grown in its mission and vision to extend peace of mind through college scholarships to Gold Star families in all 50 states from all branches of the military.

Monthly Highlights

Military Spouse Appreciation Day

National Military Spouse Appreciation Day is a presidentially approved holiday and is celebrated on the Friday before Mother's Day in May. This year it will be observed on Friday, May 6th, 2022.

On Military Spouse Appreciation Day, we honor the contributions and sacrifices made by military spouses. Their commitment and support help to keep our country safe. America's military spouses are the backbone of the families who support our troops during mission, deployment, reintegration, and reset. Military spouses are silent heroes who are essential to the strength of the nation, and they serve our country just like their loved ones.

Ideas to Make Military Spouses Day Special

Here are a few ways that you can show your appreciation to your military spouse.

- Give your military spouse a day off
- Do something he or she hates doing
- Give a token of appreciation e.g., care package, gift card, flowers or anything they love
- Say "Thank You" but be creative in expressing thanks
- Have a day of pampering together
- Make dinner or surprise your spouse with breakfast
- Watch a movie or show you'd rather not watch but that they love
- Create a coupon book for them
- Give your military spouse a list of reasons why you appreciate them
- For deployed troops, send a video message or ecard showing your appreciation

Month of the Military Caregiver

Military caregivers are the pillars of support amongst the military and veteran community. Often under recognized for their role among the military and veteran community, the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs not only recognizes but appreciates the dedication and sacrifice of military caregivers. In honor of the Month of the Military Caregiver, please check out some of the provided resources in this month's Resources Corner. Taking care of our caregivers is of the upmost importance. IDVA stands with our caregiver community and is available to assist in navigating services and benefits.

Resource Corner

Building Better Caregivers
(brought to you by VA Caregiver Support)

USDVA Caregiver Support Program

USDVA: Find your Caregiver Support Coordinator

Illinois Department on Aging- Illinois Family Caregiver Support Program

USDVA: The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers

Military OneSource- Caregiver Resources

Monthly Highlights

Tiny Homes for Veterans

Positioned in the middle of the state, in a small town called Lincoln, IL (Logan County), you will find the passion for veterans being shown and felt everywhere. Joe Schaler, Marine Corps veteran and Commander of Military Order of the Purple Heart, envisioned providing homes and supportive services to veterans. Joe is the chairman of the Central Illinois Veterans Commission (CIVC) which has supported his vision to build homes for veterans. In 2021, the first Tiny Home was built as the community came together to lend a helping hand. The second Tiny Home is in progress and will be completed this year. The Tiny Homes provide not just a house to a veteran, but a home – a dream come true.

Many resources are available through CIVC to veterans, for more information please visit www.civeteran.org or email contact@civeteran.org or jschaler@yahoo.com

Manteno Memorial Wall Expands

Since 1987, 4,094 veterans have called the Veterans' Home at Manteno their home. Beginning with the first resident Robert Bootz, the home has been a retreat for veterans from across Illinois. To honor each resident, a Memorial Wall etched with the name of each resident was erected in 2009. In 2021, with all residents honored, the original structure was complete leading to an expansion project projected to be completed this month. The project is funded by the Member Benefit Fund which is supported by families, organizations, and the community. The Memorial Wall, along the accessible path to Lake Lyle, is enjoyed by residents and visitors. A dedication ceremony will be scheduled at a later date.

Ships Ahoy

Prince Home resident David Schwickrath is proud to share his hand-carved wooden pirate ship. He carved it from a 4"x4"x8" block of pine, commonly known as posts or deck legs. This was a timely project that required a great deal of patience. Every knot was made and glued. The ladders (ropes) were pieced together, and each joint was glued with a toothpick end. The sails were made from cloth. Also pictured: Wali Lewis, Prince Home program supervisor.

Veterans Connections Wordsearch

Caregivers

Q	W	A	R	Q	H	L	J	N	F	P	Y	G	J	H	E	E	R
F	G	Q	E	C	X	E	U	B	H	A	J	B	X	F	U	D	Y
A	L	N	S	X	I	Y	R	E	P	U	R	P	L	E	U	P	Z
M	U	Y	O	K	P	F	H	O	D	S	C	Q	U	U	N	J	H
I	A	Z	U	I	H	B	I	R	G	E	V	F	G	Z	B	G	I
L	D	T	R	F	P	C	L	Y	W	O	M	K	T	B	H	I	N
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J	T	L	E	F	O	X	W	F	G	O	T	O	A	B	L	Y	K
U	K	L	S	N	X	C	I	U	S	A	V	H	Y	A	N	X	A
Z	G	W	N	G	S	T	E	V	S	U	P	P	O	R	T	R	I
C	A	R	E	G	I	V	E	R	D	J	F	J	W	N	H	O	T
V	E	T	E	R	A	N	S	A	F	F	A	I	R	S	S	S	T

Find the following words in the puzzle.
Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

CAREGIVER
FAMILY
HERO
PURPLE UP
RESOURCES
SACRIFICE
SUPPORT
VETERANS AFFAIRS

Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

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