

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg

VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

VA PURCHASES LAND FOR TWO NEW NATIONAL CEMETERIES IN FLORIDA (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON- The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced that it has purchased land for two new national cemeteries in Florida. VA plans to construct one of the cemeteries in central eastern Florida between the cities of Daytona and Melbourne, and the other in northwestern Florida, in the Tallahassee area. Together, the facilities will serve an estimated population of 247,000 Veterans and family members who are not currently served with an open national, state or tribal Veteran's cemetery within 75 miles of their residence.

VA completed acquisition of the central eastern Florida property on July 31. The property, formerly known as Acosta Groves, is located on U. S. Route 1 in northern Brevard County in Scottsmeer, approximately two miles from Interstate 95.

VA purchased the Tallahassee property on August 14. The 250-acre parcel is in Leon County with frontage along U.S. Highway 27 (Apalachee Parkway). The cemetery will also serve Veterans in southwestern Georgia and southeastern Alabama.

VA has opened three new national cemeteries in Florida over the past five years including Jacksonville National Cemetery (2009), Sarasota National Cemetery (2009) and South Florida National Cemetery (2007).

Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell opened in 1988 and is now the second busiest VA national cemetery in the country with 6,728 interments completed in fiscal year 2011. Of VA's 131 cemeteries across the nation, the state of Florida is home to six national cemeteries that rank among the top 32 busiest by interment workload.

Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola, established in 1868, serves Florida's western panhandle and southern Alabama. A recent expansion of the historic cemetery ensures that it will remain open with a full range of burial options for decades to come.

Bay Pines National Cemetery was established in 1933 and has been closed to first interment casketed burials since 1989. The facility still offers cremation burial sites. St. Augustine National Cemetery, established in 1881, has been closed since 1997.

Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Also eligible are military personnel who die on active duty, their spouses and eligible dependents. Other burial benefits available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker. Families of eligible decedents may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment.

Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at www.cem.va.gov, or by calling VA call centers toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at any VA national cemetery at the time of need, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117.

VA SEEKS TO EXPAND TBI BENEFITS (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON- The Department of Veterans Affairs is publishing a proposed regulation in the Federal Register that would change its rules to add five diagnosable illnesses which are secondary to service-connected Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). VA proposes to add a new subsection to its adjudication regulation by revising 38 CFR 3.310 to state that if a Veteran who has a service-connected TBI also has one of the five illnesses, then the illness will be considered service connected as secondary to the TBI.

Service connection under the proposed rule depends in part upon the severity of the TBI (mild, moderate, or severe) and the period of time between the injury and onset of the secondary illness. However, the proposed rule also

clarifies that it does not preclude a Veteran from establishing direct service connection even if those time and severity standards are not met. It also defines the terms mild, moderate, and severe, consistent with Department of Defense (DoD) guidelines. Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted over the next 60 days. A final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received.

VA's decision is based on a report by the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine (IOM), "Gulf War and Health, Volume 7: Long-Term Consequences of TBI." In its report, the IOM's Committee on Gulf War and Health concluded that "sufficient evidence of a causal relationship" - the IOM's highest evidentiary standard - existed between moderate or severe levels of TBI and diagnosed unprovoked seizures. The IOM found "sufficient evidence of an association" between moderate or severe levels of TBI and Parkinsonism; dementias (which VA understands to include presenile dementia of the Alzheimer type and post-traumatic dementia); depression (which also was associated with mild TBI); and diseases of hormone deficiency that may result from hypothalamo-pituitary changes.

Specific information about the Defense and Veteran Brain Injury Center is available at <http://www.dvbic.org/>. Information about Gulf War and VA's services and programs are available at: http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/hazardous_exposures.asp.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR VETERAN FAMILIES (SSVF) PROGRAM (VA News Release) VA announced the availability of \$300 million in grants for community organizations, estimated to serve approximately 70,000 Veterans and their family members facing homelessness. The deadline for applying to the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, a homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing program, is Feb. 1, 2013.

SSVF grants promote housing stability among homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families. The grants can have an immediate impact, helping lift Veterans out of homelessness or providing aid in emergency situations that put Veterans and their families at risk of homelessness.

Grantees provide a range of supportive services to very low-income Veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing, including case management, legal assistance, financial counseling, transportation, child care, rent, utilities and other services aimed at preventing homelessness.

A video on www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp offers guidance for community organizations interested in applying for SSVF funds. Community organizations seeking more information on the SSVF program may also contact VA at 1-877-737-0111 or at SSVF@va.gov.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans
1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838)

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022
1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications
1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) 1-800-733-8387 CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023; CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024 Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840
104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120
1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) - 711

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

VA Workload and Performance Reports;
<http://www.vba.va.gov/reports/>

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:
<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): <http://va.equator.com>

Florida Dept of Veterans' Affairs: www.FloridaVets.org

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov