

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/>.

ADVISORY FROM THE NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU An organization called **Veterans Affairs Services (VAS)** is providing benefit and general information on VA and gathering personal information on veterans. This organization is not affiliated with VA in any way. Websites with the name "VA services" immediately after the "www" are not part of the Department of Veterans Affairs; the real VA website ends in ".gov."

Persons approached or called should not offer them any information concerning themselves or data on other veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not randomly call veterans, nor does it ask veterans for information which it does not already have. Persons who have not dealt with VA previously and in person, and who receive a call from someone saying they are with VA or something similar, should hang up the phone. People should not respond to emails which suggest that they are from VA. VA never conducts official business nor asks for personal information by email.

VAS may be gaining access to military personnel through their close resemblance to the VA name and seal. NGB Legal Counsel has requested that the NGB Provost Marshal Office coordinate with DoD to inform military installations, particularly mobilization sites, of this group and their lack of affiliation or endorsement by VA to provide any services.

SOCIAL SECURITY SPECIAL EXTRA EARNINGS FOR MILITARY SERVICE

(<http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm#2002>) Since 1957, persons who had military service earnings for active duty (including active duty for training) paid Social Security taxes on those earnings. Since 1988, inactive duty service in the Armed Forces reserves (such as weekend drills) has also been covered by Social Security.

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for military service from 1957 through 2001 can be credited to the records for Social Security purposes. These extra earnings credits may help to qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of the Social Security benefit. For

service from 1957 through 1977, \$300 in additional earnings is credited for each calendar quarter in which active duty basic pay was received. For service from 1978 through 2001, for every \$300 in active duty basic pay, an additional \$100 in earnings is credited up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year.

Special extra earnings credits are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training. Special extra earnings credits are not granted for inactive duty training.

For active military service which occurred from 1957 through 1967, Social Security will add the extra credits to the record when application is made for Social Security benefits. A copy of the U.S. military service paper(s) (e.g., DD-214 - Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty) is needed for military service *before 1968*. From 1968 through 2001, there is no need to do anything to receive these extra credits. The credits were automatically added to the record. After 2001, there are no special extra earnings credits for military service.

Persons who enlisted after September 7, 1980, and didn't complete at least 24 months of active duty or the full tour may not be able to receive the additional earnings. They should check with Social Security for details.

REMINDER - SIGN UP FOR E-BENEFITS NOW!

eBenefits allows servicemembers and veterans to check the status of compensation and pension claims; view payment history of received VA benefits; obtain or submit an application for the home loan certificate of eligibility; access MyHealthVet directly from eBenefits; and access and retrieve copies of official military personnel records to include DD-214s active/reserve orders. Future releases to eBenefits will include the capability to view status of current benefits; change addresses; and change direct deposit accounts.

A Level 1 account allows access to information self-entered into eBenefits (such as Favorite Links, or categories of benefits). A home loan certificate of eligibility can be obtained. It's a lower form of access than Level 2, but can

require less work to obtain. A Level 2 account gives access to personal information (pending claim information, VA payment history, etc.) contained in VA's and DoD's computer systems.

For more information and to apply, go to www.eBenefits.va.gov.

NEW VA SUPPORT LINE PROVIDES IMPORTANT ASSISTANCE TO CAREGIVERS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is increasing its support to caregivers with a new, toll-free telephone line for the caregivers of veterans of all eras. The National Caregiver Support Line -- 1-855-260-3274 -- will serve as the primary resource and referral center to assist caregivers, veterans and others seeking caregiver information. The support line will provide information regarding new caregiver benefits, referrals to local caregiver support coordinators as well as emotional support to those concerned with their ability to provide care to loved ones who are veterans.

The National Caregiver Support Line is open Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 11 PM, Eastern time; and Saturday, 10:30 AM to 6 PM, Eastern time. Licensed VA social workers and health technicians will staff the support line. The line unofficially started February 1, and in its first week logged nearly 600 calls, including 134 referrals to local VA caregiver support coordinators and 233 calls from caregivers themselves.

Local caregiver support coordinators are available to assist veterans and their caregivers to understand and apply for VA's many caregiver benefits. VA also features a Web page, www.caregiver.va.gov, with general information on other caregiver support programs available through VA and the community.

Access to the National Caregiver Support Line was identified as a significant need in a November 2010 study on caregivers of veterans published by the National Alliance for Caregiving.

For an opportunity to get to know a few of today's remarkable caregivers of veterans, go to <http://www.youtube.com/user/veteranshealthadmin#p/u/0/XRmAwZHYRFE>.

JUPITER VET CENTER OPEN at 6650 W Indiantown Road, Suite 120, Jupiter FL 33458, telephone 561-422-1220, fax 561-746-1458. Opening ceremonies were held on February 22, 2011. The center, which will be operated by eight full-time employees of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, will offer individual and group outpatient services for combat veterans and their families. The areas of counseling include bereavement, education, substance abuse, sexual trauma, employment, brain injury and depression.

For more information on VA Vet Centers, go to <http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/>

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

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) -
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 1-800-733-8387

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) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

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

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

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

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

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