

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

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



August 2011

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/>.

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY MANDATORY USE OF ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSFER (EFT) SYSTEM OR DIRECT EXPRESS® DEBIT MASTERCARD® PROGRAM

U.S. Treasury regulation (31 CFR Part 208) requires that on or after May 1, 2011, all recipients applying for or receiving benefits from a Federal agency by paper check, must be informed by the agency that they are required to receive their payments electronically. Their choices are either via electronic funds transfer (EFT) or via Direct Express®, which is a debit MasterCard® issued by Comerica Bank.

If the claimant does not provide VA with their banking information to allow their federal benefits to be sent directly to their bank, they will receive their VA benefits in the form of a paper check for an interim period. The claimant will need to contact the Treasury Department within three months from the date of their first check payment to discuss how to receive future payments at 1-800-333-1795.

If the claimants choose to continue to receive paper checks, they will need to request a waiver from the Treasury Department by calling 1-888-224-2950.

If the claimants choose to have their federal benefits electronically transferred to their designated financial institution (e.g. bank), they should call VA at 1-800-827-1000 with their banking information.

If the claimants choose to have their federal benefits issued through Direct Express®, they should call 1-800-333-1795.

VA NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS CONFERENCE AND EXPO

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The upcoming National Veterans Small Business Conference and Expo, Aug.15-18 in New Orleans is taking shape. Hosted by VA for the first time, it will be the largest nationwide conference of its kind focused on helping veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses succeed in winning federal contracts and expanding their businesses.

The conference will offer valuable insight to assist both new and seasoned veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses to succeed. More than 100 sessions will address a range of topics, including branding, marketing, management, financing and business opportunities within the federal government as well as how to secure loans through the Small Business Administration (SBA) and its new Express & Pilot Programs, which offer streamlined and expedited loan procedures for certain borrowers such as veterans.

Participants will also have an exceptional opportunity to network via the VetGovPartner platform that will enable them to view extensive business profiles of all participants at the conference as well as to identify business opportunities associated with the more than 200 government procurement decision makers in attendance.

The conference will also offer on-site assistance to veterans and veteran business owners on how to become eligible for VA's Vets First Contracting Program.

For those veterans or veterans-owned businesses new to the process, the conference will provide a learning session that explains current requirements to become verified accompanied by lessons learned and tips to help applicants navigate the process. In addition, VA staff will be on-site to assist firms to initiate verification applications, and to provide updates on status of applications in process.

The conference learning sessions will be targeted at a variety of businesses--from new business owners to well-established Veteran-owned businesses looking to expand opportunities or increase market share.

Additionally, the state directors of VA from 10 states will attend to share their 'best practices' on Veterans-owned business development with conference attendees.

The National Veterans Small Business Conference and Expo is open to both government and non-government personnel. For more information and to register for the conference, go to www.nationalveteransconference.com.

VA CALLS WOMEN VETERANS (VA News Release)
WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has embarked on a major initiative to reach out to women veterans in order to solicit their input on ways to enhance the health care services VA provides to women veterans. Representatives at VA's Health Resource Center (HRC) are placing calls to women veterans nationwide, asking them to share their experiences with VA and suggest potential enhancements that will further VA's mission to provide the best care anywhere.

The HRC, which started placing calls on June 1, is contacting women veterans who have enrolled, but have not begun using VA services. The HRC representatives making the calls are also informing women veterans about the services VA offers and quickly connecting them with appropriate departments if they are interested in trying VA health care. Veterans who have complaints about VA are connected to a patient advocate who helps resolve issues.

The Women Veterans Health Care program has made significant changes in the last few years to enhance the health care offered to eligible women Veterans. This progress includes: adopting key policies to improve access and enhance services for women veterans; implementing comprehensive primary care for women veterans; conducting research on the effects of military service on women's lives; improving communication and outreach to women veterans; and providing mental health, homelessness and other services designed to meet the unique needs of women Veterans

For more information about VA programs and services for women veterans, please visit: www.va.gov/womenvet and www.publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth.

VA LAUNCHES NEW PREVENTION INITIATIVE TO SERVE 22,000 VETERAN FAMILIES AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – VA announced the award of nearly \$60 million in homeless prevention grants that will serve approximately 22,000 homeless and at-risk veteran families as part of the new Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. This initial \$60 million award will serve veteran families at 85 non-profit community agencies in 40 states and the District of Columbia under VA's new homeless prevention initiative.

Under the SSVF program, VA awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that can provide a range of supportive services to eligible very low-income veteran families. Supportive services include outreach, case management, assistance in obtaining VA benefits, and assistance in obtaining and coordinating other public benefits.

More information about VA's homeless programs is available online at <http://www.va.gov/homeless>. A list of award recipients and details about the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program are available online at <http://www1.va.gov/homeless/ssvf.asp>.

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