

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

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



May 2012

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/>.

BEWARE – SCAM EMAILS - THAT APPEAR TO BE SENT BY DEFENSE FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING SERVICE (DFAS) EMPLOYEES

(<http://www.dfas.mil/dfas.html>) There are emails being sent to individuals, including military members, military retirees, and civilian employees, which appear to be sent by a DFAS employee. Although the email appears to come from a DFAS employee and displays a dot mil address it is actually from a non-government email account. This is an example of what's called "spoofing."

The emails indicate that individuals who are receiving disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) may be able to obtain additional funds from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). These emails are not issued by DFAS and will likely result in a financial loss if you comply with the suggestions in the email followed. Bottom line – do not send personal information or copies of tax returns and 1099s to the individual listed in the email.

The email indicates that individuals receiving VA disability compensation can receive additional funds from the IRS. The email states that such funds can be obtained by sending copies of the VA award letter, income tax returns, 1099-Rs, RAS statements, and a copy of the DD 214, to a so-called retired Colonel at an address in Florida. Persons who received the email should not follow the suggestions in the email because they will be providing a significant amount of their personal information to a complete stranger, which could result in a financial loss.

THE VOW TO HIRE HEROES ACT OF 2011, provides seamless transition for service members, expands education and training opportunities for veterans, and tax credits for employers who hire service-connected Veterans.

On April 17, 2012, the VOW website www.benefits.va.gov/VOW was launched, which provides individuals with a wealth of information on the VOW to Hire Heroes Act including details about VRAP, tax credits for employers, vocational rehabilitation services, transition

assistance program, and DOL resources. For the VRAP program, qualified Veterans will be able to apply for the program directly from the site starting on and after May 15, 2012.

VETERANS MAY QUALIFY FOR ADDITIONAL EDUCATION BENEFITS

The Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) offers 12 months of retraining assistance to veterans who are: unemployed; at least 35 but no more than 60 years old; have an other than dishonorable discharge; not eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g., the Post 9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment); not in receipt of VA compensation due to Individual Unemployability (IU); not enrolled in a federal or state job training program; and enrolled in a VA approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school.

The program is limited to 45,000 participants from July 1, 2012 through September 30, 2012, and to 54,000 participants from October 1, 2012, through March 31, 2014. Participants may receive up to 12 months of assistance at the full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill–Active Duty program (currently \$1,473 per month). The program must lead to an Associate Degree, Non-College Degree, or a Certification, and train the veteran for a high demand occupation.

Visit www.gibill.va.gov/VRAP to learn more and read frequently asked questions about VRAP. **More details about VRAP, including information on how to apply, will be published at www.gibill.va.gov as they become available.**

MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONIES

Barrancas National Cemetery (Naval Air Station, 80 Hovey Road, Pensacola). On Saturday, May 26, the Boy Scouts will place American flags on the gravesites. The Memorial Day ceremony is on Monday, May 28, at 9:00 AM (Central Time) in the Main Post Chapel. For information call 850-453-4108.

Bay Pines National Cemetery Memorial Day Ceremony 10:00 AM. To mark the occasion, all 31,733 graves will be marked with U.S. flags to honor those who gave their lives while serving in the military. The event will include musical performances, a firing salute, and taps performance. Guest speakers for the event include Congressman C.W. Bill Young; new Bay Pines VA Medical Center Director Suzanne M. Klinker; and Bay Pines National Cemetery representative Maurice Roan.

Shuttles will provide transportation for guests from parking lots to the National Cemetery. The venue is handicapped accessible. For further information, please contact the cemetery office at 727-398-9426.

Florida National Cemetery (6502 SW 102nd Avenue Bushnell) Memorial Day Ceremony 11:00 AM. Major General Jeffrey E. Phillips, Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1 will be the Keynote Speaker. Steve Jerve of WFLA TV News Channel 8 (Tampa) will be the Master of Ceremonies. Guests are invited to arrive early and enjoy the patriotic and inspirational musical prelude which will begin shortly before the ceremony. Organizations with colors are invited to participate in the massing of colors at the beginning of the program and should plan to arrive by 9:30 AM.

The Florida National Cemetery Visitor's Center will be open to the public on Memorial Day from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM. For more information call 352-793-7740.

Jacksonville National Cemetery (4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL) The ceremony begins on Memorial Day, May 28, at 2:00 PM. For more information call the cemetery at 904-766-5222.

Sarasota National Cemetery (9810 State Highway 72, Sarasota FL) The ceremony will be on Sunday, May 27, at 1:30 PM. The guest speaker will be Florida Governor Rick Scott. For information call the cemetery at 941-922-7200.

South Florida National Cemetery (6501 S. State Road 7 Lake Worth) The Memorial Day ceremony begins at 10:00 AM Monday, May 28. Parking will be open from 8:15 AM, and a shuttle will run from 8:30 AM. For more information call 561-649-6489.

St Augustine National Cemetery (104 Marine St, St. Augustine) The service begins at 9:00 AM on Monday, May 28. The event begins with opening remarks, welcome and introduction of guests followed by massing of the colors. The massing of the colors is unique in that the color guards participating are not only from military and veterans organizations but civic organizations as well. Music is presented by a bagpipe and drum unit. The guest speaker will be Lt. Col (Retired) Richard Vargus. Following the keynote address a roll call of veterans lost since Veterans Day will be announced. The roll call is in order of branch of service. For more information call the Florida National Guard Public Affairs office at 904-823-0166.

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.equator.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