

THE STORY COUNTY VETERAN



Story County Commission of Veterans Affairs (SCCVA) – Story County, Iowa

SPRING 2020

Greetings Story County Veterans!

Thank you for your service to our country and welcome to the spring 2020 edition of the Story County Veteran. I hope this newsletter finds you in great health and that you find the information in this newsletter very helpful for you and your family.

I am writing this newsletter in April as I am celebrating my 21st year as your County Veterans Affairs Director. However, with COVID-19 on our minds, our thoughts and prayers go out to the people who have been affected and the doctors and nurses who are on the front-line taking care of us—we salute you!! Be safe and take care of your family.

Due to COVID-19, the VA Commission voted to not do a BBQ for Veterans in June. If and when we can have a BBQ, I will post it on our website and send out emails to those on our email list. Our annual Supermarket is planned for November 13, 2020 at the Plex. As of now we are still planning on having that event.

As I write this, I am not sure if our normal Memorial Day programs will continue this year as planned, so please check with your local American Legions. For those of you who would like to join the American Legion, the national American Legion has opened up the eligibility dates to include WWII–present. If you want to become a member, each post in Story County has a membership chair, so just contact that person or you can call me and I can help with this. This is not to leave out the other Veterans organization in Story County—Ames has a Veterans of Foreign Wars post and Story County has a Vietnam Veterans of America Council. If you are interested in becoming a member with either organization, just contact them or our office and we can help.

I have always said it doesn't matter which service organization you choose as long as you choose one or more and

be active. All of our Veterans service organizations are in need of members. I believe you will get a lot out of becoming an active member, attending the meetings, participating in activities, serving on committees, and/or running for an elected office—you can choose what you are interested in doing.

Below are some cautions I would like to share with Veterans...

Be very careful when donating.

During the last few months I have been noticing there have been some non-profits traveling around and setting up outside some retail stores asking for donations or selling. The city of Ames has a code that says they must have a permit if they do not have an office here in town. Of the pass-through non-profits that I have talked to, I was told only 10%–20% of the donations actually go to whatever cause they say they are collecting for.

Be alert to phone scams.

I was notified of a phone scam that took place recently in Story County. A Veteran in Story County received a call from a caller identifying as working for a donation center. They were seeking donations for a so-called “Veterans Relief Fund.” The number that showed up on the Veteran’s caller ID was 1-207-191-21119, which is too long for an actual phone number, but that is what was on the caller ID. The caller was asking for a \$75 donation and said that if the Veteran didn’t donate to them, they would just charge his credit card. Words were exchanged and finally the caller just hung up saying the Veteran’s credit card would be charged \$75. The caller did know the Veteran’s first name and his phone number, but the caller did not know the Veteran’s credit card number and the Veteran did not give that information, so his credit card was not charged. I think sometimes these scammers may have some information about the person they are trying to steal from, making you think

they know all about you, but please do not give them any personal information. **If you get any calls like this, just hang up and report it to the Iowa Office of the Attorney General (1-888-777-4590). Or better yet don't even pick up if it's an unknown number to you.**

If you are looking for a place to donate funds for Veterans, please call me at 515-956-2626 and we can help you find a legitimate place for donations; or you can check with your local American Legion, VFW, or Vietnam Veterans of America for guidance with that.

Do your giving where you are living so you will be knowing where it's going!

Don't pay to file a claim with Veterans Affairs—you don't need an attorney to do this.

There are attorneys surfacing from time to time in Story County in small communities who say they are wanting to help Veterans and surviving spouses with a pension and will file all the paperwork for them and get them this wonderful VA benefit. They will do this after they move all of the Veteran’s assets out of the Veteran’s name, and they charge the Veteran a one-time fee of \$4,500 for consultation.

This may not be illegal for them to do business like this, but I believe it's very unethical. You do not have to pay anyone to file a VA claim for you. Story County Veterans Affairs will do that for free; for Story County residents there is no charge for filing a claim, just call for an appointment at 515-956-2626 or 515-956-2625. Veterans or surviving spouses should not have to pay anyone to get the benefits they have earned and deserve.

Enjoy the newsletter!

Brett D. McLain, Director
Story County Veterans Affairs

Story County Veterans Affairs Staff

The Story County Veterans Affairs Director and staff have compassionate understanding of the problems which confront Veterans, widows, widowers, and dependents.

Service Officers Brett McLain and Erin Rewerts are accredited with the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) under the Department of Veterans Affairs. However, we don't work for the Department of Veterans Affairs; we work for Story County, Iowa and are advocates for Veterans. We can assist you in developing your claim and or file for benefits. Once the claim is fully developed, we can then assist you in selecting a service organization to represent you. In Iowa we partner with the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign

Wars. These service organizations are not your local posts. Instead, they are located at the Federal Building in Des Moines, and their purpose is to represent Veterans on their claims for free.

Our support staff are one of the first people you will talk to on the phone or meet when you come to our office. Since Brett and Erin are not always available to see Veterans without an appointment, support staff assist Veterans by scheduling appointments with either Service Officer. When Veterans come to the office for appointments, support staff will verify and/or update their contact information so that we can continue to provide Veterans in Story County with up-to-date, helpful information about benefits and services.



Support Staff: Melanie Worley, Wendy Schmitz, Jennifer Kerns

Also, we have five VA Commissioners in Story County: Pat Peakin, Monty Woodward, Amy Rosenberg, Luke Vance, and Nic Briseno. The Commissioners don't work in the office but are out in the community working for the betterment of Story County Veterans.

The Story County VA office is located at the Human Services Center at 126 South Kellogg Avenue, Suite 001, in Ames.

Where is the Iowa Veterans Home and What Do They Do?

The Iowa Veterans Home (IVH) is located in Marshalltown. The Iowa Veterans Home provides a continuum of care to Iowa's Veterans and their spouses in an environment focusing on individualized services to enhance their quality of life. IVH is one of the largest state Veteran's homes in the nation and provides services to over 550 Iowa Veterans at a time. Learn more about our state facility, how to apply for residency, how to volunteer, and more.

On January 28, 2020, WHO TV Channel 13 did a segment on the Iowa Veterans Home's five-star rating. It's the dedication of the staff and the support of the donors and volunteers that makes IVH such a wonderful home for its residents and their families.

For the second year, the Iowa Veterans Home has received some national recognition for quality of care. US News and World Report has rated this nursing home a five on a scale of five.

"Twenty-nine nursing homes in Iowa

received the five-star rating out of 439 nursing homes throughout the great state," said Tim Oujiri, Iowa Veterans Home Commandant. "I am very proud of the staff that deserves the credit for that outstanding rating."

The staff at IVH strive every day to maintain that rating and to ensure all their residents are safe, well cared for, and their rights are protected. The Iowa Veterans Home is a state home owned by the taxpayers of Iowa. It's not a retirement home community, it's a nursing home rated at the highest level.

The Iowa Veterans Home has over 800 employees and serves 500 Veterans. Last year they served over 493,000 meals, and the laundry cleaned 1.5 million pounds of laundry. Pie day is on Fridays at the Iowa Veterans Home; during the last year they served over 27,000 pieces of pie.

The Iowa Veterans Home is operating at 97-98% capacity, with a waiting list of Veterans to get in.

Location of the Iowa Veterans Home:
1301 Summit Street
Marshalltown, IA 50158-5485

Admission to the Iowa Veterans Home
Please contact Story County Veterans Affairs for an application and assistance with completing the application if you are interested in admission to the Iowa Veterans Home.
Story County Veterans Affairs: 515-956-2626 or 515-956-2625

WE HAVE GIFT CARDS

Veterans and surviving spouses of Veterans who live in Story County—

If you are in between jobs, not sure how to buy food or gas for the car, please call Story County VA and give us the opportunity to assist you during your time of need.

We would like to help you any way we can. Please call first, 515-956-2626 or 515-956-2625.

Sergeant Gary D. French Receives Quilt of Valor

In September 1965, Gary D. French decided to quit high school and enlist in the U.S. Army at age 17. His mom had to sign the permission form. He went to Basic Training at Ft. Leonard Wood, MO, and attended AIT at Ft. Dix, NJ. He received training, became a Recovery & Evacuation specialist, and went to Germany where he ran his wrecker up and down the autobahn. After a year there, he put in his request to go to Vietnam.

After a quick trip home to see his family, he headed to SE Asia. Gary wanted to go into combat, but he was needed in his MOS (military occupational specialty) and continued operating a wrecker. He eventually trained others to do that, and he picked up manuals and began repairing broken-down bulldozers, receiving a second MOS. He was there working on the jungle-clearing equipment, which was covered with Agent Orange. His base was one of many hit during the Tet Offensive. He lost friends and equipment to the North Vietnamese. He

was a 21-year-old sergeant when he got out in 1968.

When Gary returned home, his family did not recognize him until they saw the name tag. During his time in the jungle with North Koreans, he had contracted malaria. Between that and other factors, he was down to about 125 pounds. Gary met Joyce at work in January 1969. A year later, they were married. In 1972 they agreed he should go back into the Army. This forced him to get his GED. Since his inactive reserve time had expired, he had to go back through Basic Training again, again at Ft. Leonard Wood. He attended Artillery training at Ft. Sill, OK. In January of 1973, the two headed for Ft. Bragg, NC, where he was stationed until he was discharged in 1975. He worked his way up to sergeant again. However, he didn't stay in Artillery very long. They found out about his mechanical and organizational skills, and he was transferred into Engineering Equipment Maintenance.



Colo Quilting Group presenting a Quilt of Valor to Gary French on December 1, 2019. Left to right: Karen Cody, Lucy Schaper, Dorothy Cerka, Gary French

Medals earned:

National Defense Service Medal
Vietnam Campaign Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with palm
Sharpshooter Badge
Hand Grenade Badge
Expert Badge M-16
Good Conduct Medal

VA Mobile Medical Unit

The Story County VA Office will be hosting the Mobile Medical Unit on October 9, 2020 at Story County Veterans Affairs, 126 South Kellogg Avenue in Ames. The vehicle will be parked at the northeast corner of our parking lot.

Mission:

The VA of Central Iowa Health Care System is dedicated to providing the best health care to Veterans living in our rural areas in Iowa.

Services are provided at the main facility in Des Moines and outpatient clinics in Mason City, Marshalltown, Fort Dodge, and Knoxville. This provides the base for expanding services of the Mobile Medical Unit throughout this service area. Veterans have the right to consent to treatment via telehealth. Declining telehealth does not affect a Veteran's eligibility for other care.

The Mobile Unit is also part of the VA of Central Iowa Health Care System's outreach program and is available to provide support during outreach.

What to Expect

On-site telehealth technicians and nurses provide "hands on" care while you are connected via secure video network to VA providers at the Central Iowa Health Care System or at the outpatient clinics in Mason City, Knoxville, Marshalltown, Carroll, and Fort Dodge.

How to Access the Mobile Medical Unit

The Mobile Medical Unit is available by appointment only. To make an appointment, call 515-699-5999 X 23805. Bring to your appointment your VA ID Card, list of medications or medication bottles, documentation from recent non-VA hospitalization/procedures. We ask you keep your scheduled appointment or cancel it in advance if

need be. No-shows only prevent other Veterans from receiving care.

How to Cancel an Appointment

Please call 515-699-5999 x 23805

Urgent Care

Call 911 or go to the local hospital and call 1-888-795-0773 within 72 hours for authorization. Non-urgent care will be provided through this Mobile Telehealth Clinic.

Services Provided by the Mobile Medical Unit:

Primary Care
Mental Health
Occupational Therapy
Physical Therapy
Dermatology
Acupuncture
Social Work
Patient Advocacy
Labs
Vaccines

Be Aware of Internet Scams

The internet is a powerful tool for Veterans. It allows them to keep up with friends, access their hard-earned benefits, and shop for the things they need. Unfortunately, former service members are more likely than civilians to be targeted by online scammers while doing these things. Veterans are twice as likely to lose money to fraud because of identity theft, phishing, impostor scams, and investment, loan, or donation deceptions.

Many of these scammers target Veterans to alter or access their government-provided aid, swindling them out of the money or benefits they have earned. This is a widespread issue. Nearly 80% of Veterans say they have been targeted by scams due to their service, according to an AARP survey. These scams are diverse and range from phishing attempts to solicitations for fraudulent Veteran-focused charities.

“Help the Vets” is one example of a fraudulent charity targeting Veterans. It claimed to fund medical care and mental health services for Veterans. An

investigation found that “Help the Vets” spent 95% of donations on administrative costs and compensation for its founder. Just 5% of proceeds were actually used to benefit Veterans.

Scammers and identity thieves also target financially stressed Veterans with promising investment opportunities. Recently, a man defrauded about 2,600 people—many of whom are pension-holding Veterans—in a Ponzi scheme. The investor told these pension holders to make monthly payments and disguised them as cash flows.

Identity thieves have developed both low-tech and high-tech ways to steal Veterans’ data, like shoulder surfing and skimming. Shoulder surfing requires that someone physically look over your shoulder to steal your password, PIN, or credit card number. Skimming utilizes a device that fits onto regular credit card machines, allowing scammers to steal your credit card information.

How to protect your information

Veterans can take simple actions to better protect their information:

- ★ Use unique passwords for your online accounts. Re-using passwords increases the risk of cyber theft.
- ★ Use multi-factor authentication (MFA). This combines more than one authenticator type based on information users know and information users receive. It also adds another level of security when Veterans log in to access and manage VA services and benefits.

VA works hard to prevent Veteran identity theft. VA delivers cybersecurity awareness training for all VA employees. It ended the use of Social Security numbers in its business processes. Lastly, VA gives free credit monitoring to Veterans and beneficiaries whose data was compromised by a VA breach. Veterans or beneficiaries of identity theft not caused by a VA breach can contact the toll-free Identity Theft Help Line at 1-855-578-5492 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday.

Fraud Avoidance for Veterans

Over the past four years, there has been a 4X increase in fraudulent activity against Veterans, their survivors, and dependents. VA is actively working to prevent these incidents, but the best line of defense against these criminals is empowering Veterans to be informed.

- ★ If you receive correspondence from VA concerning a claim and you don’t remember filing a claim, contact VA directly at 1-800-827-1000.
- ★ VA will never charge you for processing a claim or request a processing fee prior to releasing benefits payments.
- ★ VA will never ask for your email or your social security number, address, and or your bank information over the phone. VA only addresses personal information by US mail.
- ★ VA may check in with you by your phone, email, or text message. If

you are unsure about any call, email, or text, confirm details with VA directly at 1-800-827-1000.

- ★ Veterans Affairs does not threaten claimants/Veterans with jail or lawsuits.
- ★ Be cautious of telephone numbers on your caller ID. Scammers can change the phone number (spoofing) to make a call appear to come from a different person or place.
- ★ When in doubt, hang up and call Veterans Affairs at 1-800-827-1000 or your Power of Attorney representative (DAV, VFW, American Legion, etc.)
- ★ If you receive an email or a letter from Veterans Affairs notifying you that your direct deposit information was updated, or that your E-Benefits account information was updated, and you don’t remember doing that, immediately contact Veterans Affairs at 1-800-827-1000.

BRUSHY CREEK AREA HONOR FLIGHT

Thanks to the Story County Freedom Fun Run organization and the Senior Variety Show, we have funds to send WWII, Korea, and Vietnam Veterans to Washington DC in 2020 to visit their memorials. If you are a Veteran who served during any of the following time periods on active duty and have never gone on an Honor or Freedom Flight, you should highly consider going.

- Eligible dates of service:
 WWII Era: December 7, 1941 – December 31, 1946
 Between WWII and Korea: January 1, 1947 – June 24, 1950
 Korea Era: June 25, 1950 – January 31, 1955
 Between Korea and Vietnam: February 1, 1955 – February 27, 1961
 Vietnam Era: February 28, 1961 – May 7, 1975

It is unsure if any more flights will be offered in this area after the spring of 2021, so if you want to go on a flight, please call or email Story County VA to request an application. You will need a copy of your DD-214 that we can send in with your application, and then you will be all set for 2020 or 2021 to take a trip of a lifetime.

VA Home Loan Funding Fee Refunds

Starting September 30, 2019, the VA was expected to start processing the funding fee refunds for about 53,200 disabled Veterans. A July 2019 article in Military.com stated that the VA had approved over \$100 million in refunds as a result of a VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report released in June 2019 saying that funding fees were erroneously charged to disabled Veterans receiving VA-backed home loans.

Veterans who obtain VA-backed home loans must ordinarily pay a one-time funding fee that ranges from 1.25% to

3.3% of the loan amount. A Veteran, however, is exempted from paying a funding fee if he or she currently receives, is about to receive, or would be entitled to receive (if he or she did not receive retirement or active duty pay) a service-related disability compensation. Surviving spouses of Veterans who have died in service or from service-related disabilities are also exempted from paying a funding fee.

Why Vets use their VA Home Loan benefits?

The VA provides many home loan

benefits to Veterans who have served their country. Aside from a down payment exemption, VA-backed loans are attractive since there is no private mortgage insurance requirement, no penalty for loan prepayment, no credit score requirement, and interest rates that are generally lower than on conventional loans.

What do you need to do if you are owed a VA Funding Fee refund?

Contact your mortgage servicer or request a refund through the VA Regional Loan Center by calling 877-827-3702.

Wreaths Across America

This program started in 1992 with 5,000 wreaths being donated, and in 2019 2.2 million Veteran's wreaths were placed in total across the country, 254,000 of them at Arlington National Cemetery. More than two million volunteers participated at 2,158 locations nationwide, with 38,500 volunteers laying wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery. More than a third of the volunteers across the country were children.

Currently in Story County we don't have any cemeteries where we lay wreaths on graves of Veterans under this program.

Wreaths Across America (WAA) will support you in becoming a Location

Coordinator for a cemetery in your area. There is no cost to become a participating location and host a Wreaths Across America ceremony.

Wreaths Across America's mission touches the lives of thousands of schools and scout, civic, and religious groups across the country through fundraising for wreath sponsorships. These groups help us ensure that we reach our goal to place a wreath on each hero's grave. In return, they receive fundraising dollars that assist in furthering their own goals and projects.

If your American Legion or VFW post would like more information about how to get this program going in your

community, please call 207-618-5348 X 608 or you can email rbergeson@wreathsacrossamerica.org

Please note: Wreaths cost \$15 each, so your organization would have to do some fundraising. If you need to know how many Veteran's graves are in a particular cemetery in Story County, please send Brett McLain an email to research that: bmclain@storycountyiowa.gov

If you want to participate in a free Wreaths Across America event, contact WAA at 877-385-9504 or info@wreathsacrossamerica.org

Aid and Attendance and Housebound Benefits

VA Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits provide monthly payments added to the amount of a monthly VA pension for qualified Veterans and/or surviving spouses. If you need help with daily activities, or you're housebound, find out if you qualify.

Am I eligible for VA Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits as a Veteran or surviving spouse?

VA Aid and Attendance eligibility

If you get a VA pension and you meet at least one of the requirements listed below, you may be eligible for this benefit.

At least one of these must be true:

- ★ You need another person to help you perform daily activities, like bathing, feeding, and dressing, or
- ★ You have to stay in bed—or spend a large portion of the day in bed—because of illness, or
- ★ You are a patient in a nursing home due to the loss of mental or physical abilities related to a disability, or
- ★ Your eyesight is limited (even with glasses or contact lenses you have only 5/200 or less in both eyes; or concentric contraction of the visual field to 5 degrees or less)

Housebound benefits eligibility

If you get a VA pension and you spend most of your time in your home because of a permanent disability (a disability that doesn't go away), you may be eligible for this benefit.

Note: You can't receive Aid and Attendance benefits and Housebound benefits at the same time.

If you have any questions about these benefits and/or would like to apply, please give Story County Veterans Affairs a call at 515-956-2626 for Brett or 515-956-2625 for Erin.



Ceremonial Bugle Available for Military Funerals

Story County Veterans Affairs has a ceremonial “player bugle” available for checkout. This beautiful ceremonial bugle will play “Taps” on its own, making this touching tribute available even when a skilled bugle player is not.

Additionally, the playing mechanism in the bugle can be removed, making it a traditional (and playable) bugle.

Use of this ceremonial bugle is free to Veterans in Story County. It is available to check out for 72 hours.

This extended checkout period is designed so that it can be checked out the day before a funeral and not returned until the day after. This gives the bugle “players” a chance to familiarize themselves with the bugle.

To reserve this bugle, please give us a call at 515-956-2626 or 515-956-2625.



Story County Veterans Affairs
126 South Kellogg Avenue, Suite 001
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