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VR&E VETSUCCESS -- PROVIDING VETERANS WITH MEANINGFUL CAREERS

With the unemployment rate for Veterans at 13.3 percent, finding a career can be a job in itself. But Veterans and transitioning Servicemembers looking for meaningful careers can receive assistance through VA.

Veterans who are eligible for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment VetSuccess program have access to a wealth of job search resources through their veterans rehabilitation counselors (VRC) and employment coordinators (EC).

Veterans receive a monthly subsistence allowance while enrolled in VetSuccess, which helps pay rent and monthly living expenses. Veterans eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, but enrolled in VetSuccess, receive the same subsistence allowance as they would if receiving the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Veterans who do not qualify for the Post 9/11 GI Bill also receive a monthly stipend, but at the rates established for the VR&E program.

The VetSuccess program's mission is to assist eligible Veterans find and maintain meaningful careers that complement their disabilities through job search/placement assistance and retraining as needed. To qualify for services through VetSuccess, Veterans should have a service-connected disability rated at 20 percent or more with an employment handicap, or a service-connected disability rated at 10 percent with a serious employment handicap. In addition, the Veteran's discharge or release from service must be under other than dishonorable conditions.

Upon enrollment into VetSuccess, the Veteran completes a series of skills and aptitude assessments to determine the career path he or she is best suited for based on existing skills, disability and the current/projected job market. The Veteran and his or her VRC will work together to develop a plan to find the Veteran a meaningful career. The plan may

“ The VetSuccess program's mission is to assist eligible Veterans find and maintain meaningful careers that complement their disabilities through job search/placement assistance and retraining as needed. ”

require the Veteran to attend school for retraining, or he or she may already possess marketable skills and therefore, immediately search for a new career. In either case, the VetSuccess counselor will support the Veteran until he or she finds a new career and is declared successfully rehabilitated.

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VETSUCCESS ONLINE

VetSuccess.gov is a comprehensive employment resource for all Veterans that provides access to more than 8 million jobs, job seeking skills training, networking opportunities, state-specific resources, news, and resources to apply for other VA resources. Some of the features available on the Vet Success portal include tips on developing your resume, samples of most frequently asked interview questions, a military skills translator, job bank database, career fair information, links to other online job banks and tools to successfully manage your job search.

If you are unsure of what career you would like to pursue, the VetSuccess "Additional Resources" tab provides a link to the Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*. The Handbook offers a comprehensive overview of current occupations, to include average wage, required skills/training, working conditions, job duties, and most important, current and future demand. You can also find industry profiles and information on obtaining military transcripts. VetSuccess is a complete, one-stop shop for the job seeker.



To help Veterans prepare for new careers, ECs help them develop resumes and interview skills, navigate local job placement services, and educate them on how and when to disclose their disability to employers.

Working closely with other government agencies and local businesses, ECs match Veterans' skills and training with employers seeking qualified applicants using one of several career placement tools. The **Non-Paid Work Experience (NPWE)** program places Veterans in positions at government agencies (federal, state and local government) at no cost to the agency. The Veteran still receives the subsistence allowance from VA for the duration of the assignment, but also gains experience in the career field he or she has chosen, while at the same time making valuable job connections that in many cases lead to an offer of employment.

Although NPWE is restricted to government entities, private-sector employers can find qualified Veteran employees through the **On the Job Training (OJT)** and **Special Employer Incentive (SEI)** programs. The OJT program helps both Veterans and employers by offsetting the costs associated with job training. Employers benefit from the program because they can hire Veterans at a trainee wage and VA will pay for any workplace accommodations needed. Veterans benefit by having any required uniforms, tools and supplies paid for by VA. The SEI program assists

both Veterans and employers by minimizing the costs associated with training, as well as any costs associated with additional supplies and equipment required for accommodating Veterans in their new position. Some employers are even eligible for reimbursement up to 50 percent of a Veteran's salary while he or she is in the program.

Another job development tool ECs have in their arsenal is **Schedule A Hiring Authority**. This program is not exclusive to VetSuccess, nor is it exclusive to Veterans. However, in their role as job developers, ECs can assist with gathering all of the required documentation required by Schedule A and advocate on the Veteran's behalf with potential employers.

Finally, there is the **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)**, a federal tax incentive for private sector businesses that hire Veterans. The focus of this program is to assist targeted employees to move from economic dependency to self-sufficiency. Like Schedule A, this program is not exclusive to Veterans, however those who meet the program criteria have another potential avenue to employment at their disposal. ECs can educate both potential employers and Veterans on program incentives and requirements.

Employment coordinators and rehabilitation counselors in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment VetSuccess program have a number of tools available to help Veterans find meaningful careers in this tough economy. ★★☆☆



NEW PARALYMPIC WEBSITE ENCOURAGES ADAPTIVE SPORTS

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) recently launched the new Paralympic website which highlights sports programs offered through the VA Paralympic Program Office. Its mission is to “motivate, encourage and sustain participation and competition in adaptive sports among disabled Veterans and members of the Armed Forces through partnerships with VA clinical personnel, as well as national and community based adaptive sports programs.”

Adaptive sports are by no means new. After WWII, young, disabled Veterans began playing wheelchair basketball in VA hospitals across the United States. Interest grew, leading to adaptations for other sports, such as track and field, bowling and archery. In 1980, VA established the Recreational Therapy Service and the first Wheelchair Games were held at the Richmond, Virginia VA Medical Center soon after.

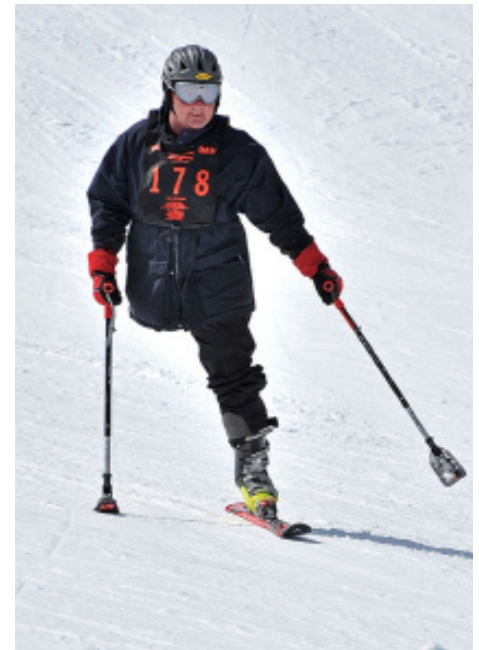
The popularity of the Wheelchair

Games continues to grow; the 2010 games drew 583 participants. VA expanded its adaptive sports program and now sponsors the Winter Sports Clinic, Summer Sports Clinic, Golden Age Games and the National Veterans TEE Tournament in addition to the Wheelchair Games.

The program website features a “Groups” page dedicated to Veterans and provides examples of sports that are easily adaptable for certain disabilities. Also, Veterans can read athlete profiles of Veterans who are actively engaged in adaptive sports.

The website also features a separate section devoted to families and caregivers and provides information on how to assist Veterans who are beginning an adaptive sports program.

VA’s Paralympic Program also provides grants to community based adaptive sports programs, as well as monthly assistance allowance to Veterans training in their respective



A Veteran participates in the Winter Sports Clinic, which is also sponsored by VA.

sports as allowed by federal law. For further information on adaptive sports programs, visit <http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports/>. ★★☆☆

NEW ONLINE LIST OF SHIPS ASSOCIATED WITH AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE

Veterans who served aboard U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships operating on the waters of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, may be eligible to receive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation for 14 medical conditions associated with presumptive exposure to Agent Orange.

An updated list of U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships confirmed to have operated on Vietnam’s inland waterways, docked on shore, or had crewmembers sent ashore, has been posted at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/> to assist Vietnam Veterans in determining potential eligibility for compensation benefits.

“Posting of the ships list is an important recognition of the sacrifices U.S. Navy and Coast Guard Veterans made for this Nation,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “It provides an easier path for Veterans who served in Vietnam to get the benefits and services they are entitled to under the law.”

VA presumes herbicide exposure for any Veteran with duty or visitation in the country of Vietnam or on its inland waterways during the Vietnam era. Information about the 14 recognized illnesses under VA’s “presumption” rule for Agent Orange is also located on the webpage.

In practical terms, Veterans with qualifying Vietnam service who develop a disease associated with Agent Orange exposure need not prove a medical link between their illnesses and their military service. This presumption simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits.

For questions about Agent Orange and the on-line list of ships, Veterans may call VA’s Special Issues Helpline at 1-800-749-8387 and press 3.

When a claim is filed by a Veteran, surviving spouse or child, VA will determine whether the Veteran qualifies for the presumption of exposure based on official records of the ship’s operations. Ships will be regularly added to the list based on information confirmed in these official records.

Even if a Veteran is not filing a claim, a Veteran may conduct his or her own research and submit scanned documentary evidence such as deck logs, ship histories, and cruise book entries via email to 211_AOSHIPS.VBACO@va.gov.

Service on board ships anchored in an open water harbor, such as Da Nang Harbor, or on ships on other open waters around Vietnam during the war, is not considered sufficient for the presumption of Agent Orange exposure.





COMPENSATION AND PENSION, BENEFITS IN BRIEF

VA compensation and pension benefits are just two of the benefit programs the Department of Veterans Affairs provide to Veterans.

VA compensation is a monetary benefit paid to a Veteran who is shown to have incurred or aggravated an injury or illness as a result of military service. These injuries and illnesses [service-connected] are assigned a disability rating. If the condition(s) worsens, the Veteran may be eligible for an increased disability rating and can file a claim for an increased rating by submitting VA Form 21-526b, Veteran's Supplemental Claim for Compensation. Veterans are entitled to receive free medical treatment for service-connected disabilities at Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC).

Pension is a benefit paid to wartime Veterans who have limited or no income, and who are age 65 or older or permanently and totally disabled. The requirements for pension eligibility include a discharge under conditions other than dishonorable; a minimum of 90 days of active service with at least one day during a time of war (service in a combat theater is not required); and a countable family income below a yearly limit set by Congress. The minimum service requirement for Veterans with wartime service who served after September 7, 1980 is 24 months or a full period of active duty, in most cases.

Wartime Veterans and their dependents may be eligible for VA pension if their countable income does not exceed the annual limits set by Congress. If found eligible, VA

will pay the difference between the annual income limit and the Veteran's household income. For example, if the annual limit for a Veteran with a dependent spouse is \$15,000 and the household's countable annual income is \$10,200, the difference is \$4,800. The pension benefit would be a total \$4,800 paid in 12 monthly payments of \$400.

When applying for VA pension, it is important that the Veteran report all household income, including any income received by members of the Veteran's household. There are some exclusions regarding what is counted as income.

Veterans receiving of a VA pension benefits may also be eligible for Aid and Attendance (A&A) or Housebound benefits. A Veteran may be eligible for A&A when:

- The Veteran is unable to perform personal daily living functions, and requires another person to assist him or her with everyday activities such as dressing, feeding, bathing, sanitary needs, adjusting prosthetic devices or protecting the Veteran from everyday hazards.
- The Veteran is bedridden
- The Veteran is in a nursing home due to mental or physical incapacity
- The Veteran is blind, or so nearly blind that corrected visual acuity is 5/200 or less in both eyes, or concentric contraction of the visual field is 5 degrees or less.

To be eligible for the Housebound benefit the Veteran must:

- Have a single, permanent disability evaluated at 100

percent, and another disability evaluated at 60 percent or more disabling.

- Have a single, permanent disability evaluated at 100 percent, and due to the disability her or she is confined to his or her immediate premises, or

Veterans who file claims for A&A or Housebound benefits may ask their treatment provider to complete VA Form 21-2680, Examination for Housebound Status or Permanent Need For Regular Aid and Attendance and may also submit copies of medical evidence relevant to the claim. The report should provide a diagnosis with a description of whether the condition limits the Veteran from performing functions of daily living or confines the Veteran to the home or immediate premises. The report should also discuss where the Veteran goes, what he or she is able to do in a typical day and if the Veteran needs supervision. Veterans claiming dependents may be asked to submit VA Form 21-2680, which they can now do through their premium level eBenefits account.

To file a claim for VA compensation or pension, Veterans or their survivors should submit VA Form 21-526, Application for Compensation or Pension to any VA Regional Office or apply on-line at www.ebenefits.va.gov. VA forms are available at www.va.gov/forms.

Veterans and dependents may choose to appoint a service organization to assist them with their claim. There are many service organizations with trained personnel that can help fill out VA forms and provide information about VA benefits.



FEMA WEBSITE OFFERS WAYS TO PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

It was 1:50 p.m., I sat at my desk furiously typing my feature article for the September newsletter. I was dangerously behind and afraid I wouldn't meet my deadline and then it hit. It started as a low rumbling sound and grew steadily louder. My desk began to shake. My computer screen flickered and went black. I looked up and saw a confused look on my office mate's face.

"What's that," he asked.

"It's an earthquake," I answered. My calm demeanor belied the panic I could feel rising within me.

The next thing I knew I had my purse and cell phone and was heading out the door, my office mate several paces ahead of me. I made my way down five flights of stairs and emerged into the bright sunlight. There I was met with a sea of people all flowing in one direction, towards the park.

Scenes similar to this one undoubtedly played out across

Washington, D.C. the afternoon of Aug. 23. Everyone vaguely aware they needed to find a safe place, but uncertain what to do next. We were all suffering from the "almost prepared for an emergency" syndrome, a sometimes fatal condition that plagues most of us.

Fortunately the cure is simple, it's called planning, and there are lots of resources to help you through it. The best place to start is online at www.ready.gov. The website is hosted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and it will help you develop your own emergency preparedness plan. The site offers safety information on every type of natural disaster, with tips on what to do before, during and after the event. You can create your own customized emergency preparedness plan by using the online tool. The tool walks you through all of the important information you need to include in your emergency plan. The FEMA



website also feature:

Supply lists

- Brochures specific to people with disabilities, older Americans and pets
- Links to community and state emergency preparedness agencies
- Instructional Videos
- Kid-friendly informational materials.

Having an emergency plan in place and making sure everyone in your family understands it will ensure when faced with an emergency situation your reactions are the right ones. ★★☆☆

OVER \$2.2 BILLION IN RETROACTIVE BENEFITS PAID TO VETERANS

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that more than \$2.2 billion in retroactive benefits has already been paid to approximately 89,000 Vietnam Veterans and their survivors who filed claims related to one of three new Agent Orange presumptive conditions.

On August 31, 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) amended its regulations to add ischemic heart disease, hairy cell leukemia and other chronic B-cell leukemias, and Parkinson's disease to the list of diseases presumed to be related to exposure to Agent Orange.

"As the President said to at the American Legion National Convention, VA is committed to ensuring Veterans and their families receive the care and benefits they have earned," Secretary Shinseki said. "I encourage all potentially eligible Veterans to apply as soon as possible to preserve the most favorable effective date for payments."

For new claims, VA may authorize up to one year of

retroactive benefits if a Veteran can show he or she has experienced one of those conditions since the date of the regulatory change.

VA has reviewed, and continues to review, thousands of previously filed claims that may qualify for retroactive benefits under a long-standing court order of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in *Nehmer vs. U.S. Veterans Administration*.

"VA encourages survivors of Veterans whose death may be due to one of the three diseases to file a claim for dependency and indemnity compensation," added Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey.

Potentially eligible Veterans include those who were exposed based on duty or visitation in Vietnam or on its inland waterways between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975; exposed along the demilitarized zone in Korea between April 1, 1968, and August 31, 1971; or exposed due to herbicide tests and storage at military bases within and outside of the United States. ★★☆☆

