



VBA TODAY

V E T E R A N S B E N E F I T S A D M I N I S T R A T I O N

FROM THE USB



I am pleased to announce the release of VBA's own newsletter "VBA Today". It is my hope and expectation that you will find this publication both informative and useful.

There are many new and exciting things going on within VBA that are allowing us to provide better service to those that have served this great nation. This newsletter will be just one of many ways we try to keep you fully informed about new benefits as they become available or new initiatives that improve our business. Let us know what you think.

Mike Walcoff
Acting Under Secretary for Benefits

NEW BUSINESS LINE OPENS

The Benefits Assistance Service (BAS) recently opened for business, and its business is outreach. The new office is a melding of components of the Office of Policy & Program Management, C&P Service's outreach and direct services programs, VBA's web operations, and a relative newcomer, social media. The Director of BAS, Mr. Robert Reynolds, himself a service connected disabled Veteran, has been successful in integrating the three components of the new organization by focusing his team on a common goal – outstanding service to all BAS customers, whether they are Veterans, servicemembers, family members, VSOs, RO staff, or other stakeholders. "Our ultimate goal will be to deliver consistent, clear, and concise messaging to our clients, regardless of the method of delivery they choose" stated Reynolds. For him, this is personal, indicating his introduction to VA was from a hospital room while recovering from career ending injuries.

BAS is divided into three main components: Client Ser-

vices and Outreach, Web Communications, and Quality and Training.

The Client Services and Outreach staff, has been divided into Veteran and Military outreach staffs and include a number of seasoned program analysts with the addition of some new staff members. Programs familiar to the field, such as homeless veteran, women veteran and minority veteran, among others, will be supplemented by outreach to a few lesser known programs, like the [Alaska Territorial Guard](#). The larger staff will allow for better services to Veterans and servicemembers by increasing outreach in all areas.

The Web and Social Media staff will be working hard to create new avenues for outreach activities by targeting computer savvy Veterans, servicemembers and other stakeholders. The web staff is responsible for maintaining and updating all of VBA's web pages, and their first assignment is updating the look and content of VBA's Internet site, making it more inviting and intuitive to use. Although they

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do not generate the majority of the content found on the sites, they are responsible for ensuring the information is correct and up-to-date, no small feat in any large organization.

New ground is being broken by the social media staff. Currently on Facebook and Twitter, the staff engages directly with the Veteran community via Facebook, providing information on VA Benefits, and on occasion assisting Veterans directly in solving benefits issues. The Twitter account is used primarily for real-time updates on outreach events.

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NEW BUSINESS LINE OPENS

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Tweets are also used to call attention to Facebook posts marking commemorative occasions and special events. Production is beginning on a number of video programs slated to be uploaded to VBA's You-Tube account. The videos will provide information on benefits, as well as informational presentations on subjects such as logging on to your e-

Benefits account. And finally, Flickr will soon be added to VBA's social media presence, allowing both the BAS and field offices to highlight outreach events, special occasions and other commemorations.

The final component of BAS is direct services, more popularly known as the National Call Center (NCC). Because the NCC staff and employees interact with Veterans on a

daily basis, they are integral to VBA's outreach efforts. BAS Quality and Training staff play an integral role in ensuring call agents provide accurate information to callers. During the initial staff training, the Quality and Training staff emphasized the importance of informing the call centers of outreach initiatives, changes in policy and other pertinent information so employees can provide

callers with accurate and timely information.

BAS occupies a unique position in VBA. Because all outreach services are located together, coordination between outreach initiatives, advertising of events and providing a single message on benefits is well within reach.

*"To care for him
who has borne
the battle and for
his widow and his
orphan..."*

*Abraham Lincoln
March 4, 1865*



EDUCATION SERVICE HITS THE TARMAC AND THE ROAD



Air Force Thunderbirds high above West Virginia.

The month of September was exciting and busy for members of VBA's Education Service.

Over Labor Day weekend, they traveled to Martinsburg, West Virginia to provide education information to a crowd of over 40,000 in attendance for the U.S. Air Force Thunderbird's air show. Ann Richardson and Randy Lazaro fielded numerous questions related to the Post 9-11 GI Bill, particularly those about "Transferability". The crowd was awed and amazed at the Thunderbirds' air demonstration and also impressed with

the Post 9/11 GI Bill NASCAR sponsored by VBA to focus on the Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit.

Upon packing their bags in West Virginia, it was off to Richmond, VA the following weekend to the Air Guard 400.

The weekend event began on Thursday, September 9th, with a kickoff ceremony at 810 Vermont Avenue, with acting Under Secretary for Benefits, Mike Walcoff, addressing a gathering of students, employees and the media. The 71 car was unveiled, with Landon Cassill behind the wheel. Landon also addressed the crowd, lending his support to the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and told the crowd of onlookers how the GI Bill had assisted some of his own family members in furthering their education.

The three-day event provided ample opportunity to reach out to Veterans,

servicemembers, and other stakeholders. Staff from the Benefits Assistance Service provided information on VA Benefits, and signed up Veterans for e-Benefits accounts. Although the 71 car came in 33rd at the race, the weekend proved successful in promoting Veteran benefits and honoring those who served.



VBA Staff Allison and Ann (kneeling) Jennifer, Barrett, and Jim in Richmond, VA for the Air Guard 400 with the Post 9-11 GI Bill race car

WALK-IN CLAIMS ARE HERE

Something special is happening at both the Wichita and Milwaukee Regional Offices in the area of claims processing. A special pilot program that provides claims decisions in one day. Veterans who opt into this program must attend an hour long claims clinic where they are provided information about the compensation and pension claims process, what benefits are available as well as what evidence is needed to support their claim.

After completing the clinic, Veterans may then schedule an appointment to complete their claim, at which time all evidence is reviewed with them, and the claim is submitted. If no further evidence is required, the claim is decided that same day.

Doug Chapman, Public Affairs Officer at the Wichita Regional Office recounts one instance when a homeless Veteran was brought to the regional office by his social worker to apply for VA pension. Because he had all of the required documentation with him, his claim was faxed to the Milwaukee Pension Management Center and processed the same day.

Mr. Chapman also notes that VSOs have been very supportive of the program. After experiencing success with this new process, they are encouraging more and more of their clients to utilize it. While this program champions the cause of faster decisions for the Veteran, an equally important aspect is the claimant

becoming an active participant in the processing of their claim. Including the Veteran in the claims process, in this manner, generates a positive experience and ultimately a partnership between VBA and the Veterans that are served. The concept of this advocacy program is the brainchild of Wichita Regional Office Director Antoine Walker. Additional information about the program can be obtained by calling 1-800-827-1000.

PORTLAND REGIONAL OFFICE ACQUIRES NEW DIGS

The Portland Regional Office will move into its new location at 100 SW Main Street in Portland over the Columbus Day Weekend. The doors will remain open at the current location on Friday, October 8th to provide walk-in service to area Veterans, however VSO offices will be closed. Services will be up and running at the new location on Tuesday, October 12, 2010; benefits counselors will be on the second floor.

The new offices are only one block away from the current regional office location.

We're Moving



Important Toll Free Numbers:

VA Benefits 1-800-827-1000
 Education 1-888-442-4551
 Health Care 1-877-222-8387
 Insurance 1-800-669-8477
 Insurance (SGLI/VGLI only)
 1-800-419-1473
 VA Pension 1-877-294-6380

You Can Find Us online at:

<http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/>

OR Connect With Us On:



[Facebook](#)



[Twitter](#)



[YouTube](#)



[Flickr](#)

SELF SERVICE HAS ARRIVED



Caring for Veterans is a sacred mission, and one that VBA takes seriously. In this fast-paced world of the information age the meaning of care has expanded to include providing Veterans with real-time updates on claim status, as well as the benefits they are entitled to. Thanks to the launch of eBenefits 2.3 this past April real time updates are a reality.

The concept of eBenefits is to provide Veterans, servicemembers, dependents, caregivers and other interested stakeholders a one-stop shop for VA and DoD benefits. The site serves as a portal to all VA Internet sites, as well as other agency websites with information of interest to Veterans and their families. It boasts a number of innovative features made possible through inter-agency agreements, like the ability to obtain documents such as DD214s and active/reserve orders through a link with DoD. But, the potential of turning Veterans into partners in the claims process is its most valuable attribute.

There are two levels of access; a **Basic Account** allows

the Veteran or servicemember to take advantage of the calculators available to determine eligibility for health and insurance benefits, as well as some Social Security benefits, obtain a Certificate of Eligibility for VA Home Loans, and access other general benefit information. A **Premium Account** allows Veterans to view information specific to their claim. An In-Person-Proofing (IPP) process is required of most Veterans to obtain access to the system.

Military retirees and servicemembers can obtain Premium access by registering with their Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) MyPay user name and password, or by using their Common Access Card.

Veterans who obtain access to eBenefits have the ability to track the progress of their claims, from initiation to completion. Users can view the type of claim filed, the date of claim, Power of Attorney if one is designated, the regional office with jurisdiction over the claim, including those temporarily transferred to another office for processing.

Tracked items is the most valuable feature for keeping abreast of claim progress. This section lists all of the evidence requested to support the claim, when the evidence was requested, from

whom, and when it was received. A simple eBenefits inquiry by the Veteran allows him or her to see each request made. If a response is not received in a timely manner VA will follow up on the request, but now the Veteran also has the information needed to conduct his or her own follow up if he or she chooses to do so. Information on benefits payments is also available. Veterans can view the payment date, amount, type of benefit paid and the method of payment, i.e., direct deposit or mailed. Payments returned to VA, with the return date, can be viewed as well.

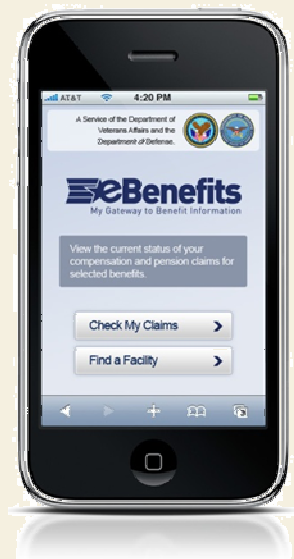
Servicemembers can use eBenefits to update employer information (Guard/Reserve), transfer their Post 9-11 GI Bill benefits to eligible family members, and review their SGLI elections.

Future enhancements to the site are already in the planning stages, and once implemented, Veterans will be able to change their address and direct deposit information by simply logging into their eBenefits account. Developing more user-friendly applications for use by the Veteran community is the goal of the eBenefits program. Providing Veterans with up-to-date claim information is one of the many ways VBA is proactively engaging with its clients.



Veteran Frank Bryceland obtains a Premium eBenefits account from Allison Calabro as Richard Ivy looks on.

We know your time is valuable, so now you can visit eBenefits while on the go at <http://m.ebenefits.va.gov>



GAINING NEEDED EXPERIENCE IN NEVADA



Billy Riley is now the Regional Training Coordinator for the Bureau of Reclamation.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program's ultimate goal is employment for job ready clients and improving independence or the quality of life for our veterans. With the limited availability of employment in today's job market, especially in the State of Nevada, this is a prospect that comes with many challenges. For the Reno Regional Office, the Non-Paid Work Experience program (NPWE) is becoming a very effective tool providing disabled veterans a unique opportunity to secure employment in public agencies.

As federal agencies scramble to develop systems to meet President Obama's recent executive order to employ more veterans in the federal government, the NPWE serves as an effective means to recruit, assess, and place outstanding talent. The distinguishing feature of this program is its ability to provide the agency an opportunity to "try before they buy" as the veteran works in voluntary status prior to placement. The veteran obtains critical experience and skills during the duration of the program as they are normally required to perform in the same capacity that they would in a permanent position. Federal agencies can then utilize special hiring authorities to place these qualified candidates non-competitively into federal positions. The result is a win-win for the veteran and the employer.

Three such Nevada Veterans that have benefited from this program are Billy Riley, Annette Negron, and Cecilia Sexton. For Riley, the program has led to employment with the Bureau of Reclamation as a Training Coordinator. "Participating in The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Non Paid Work Experience (NPWE) program was one of the best opportunities I have been afforded. It allowed me to obtain hands on work experience, networking opportunities and valuable exposure that led to my Federal appointment with the Bureau of Reclamation. The program is a valuable tool for Veterans to showcase our abilities to prospective employers, while receiving a monthly subsistence allowance. I am very thankful for the programs and support provided by The Department of Veterans Affairs."

Mr. Riley has received rave reviews by his agency management staff. As an agency, the Department of Reclamation has become an advocate for the NPWE.

Annette Negron faced challenges that many veterans who complete education programs face when she completed her Degree in Social Work from The University of Nevada, Reno — a lack of work experience. This challenge was overcome by utilization of the NPWE program. Although the State of Nevada could not obtain a position to place her, the six months of NPWE with the State and her internship gave her the required experience necessary to qualify for a position with the Department of Veteran Affairs. "I am extremely grateful to have participated in the VA Work Experience Program at the Division of Welfare and

Supportive Services in Carson City, NV. The program allowed me the opportunity to steadily gain and improve on the limited Social Work skills I had acquired through my education and internship. This experience and the valuable skills I acquired set the foundation that led to me being hired at the Reno VA Medical Center as a Social Work Associate in the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program".

The NPWE program does more than provide a means of income, while meeting staffing demands of public agencies. It gives new hope to veterans by completing the process of rehabilitation for many disabled veterans in receipt of VA services. Take Cecilia Sexton's account into consideration. "I was having a difficult time finding employment suitable to my disability. I met with Tyra Brewer, Veterans Readjustment Counselor and Anthony Roeback, Employment Coordinator, who reviewed my

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Annette Negron is now giving back to her fellow Veterans as a Social Work in the HCHV Program working at the Reno VA Medical Center.



GAINING EXPERIENCE IN NEVADA (CONT.)

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resume and other information and immediately retrieved a NPWE opportunity with the Taxpayer Advocate Service at the Internal Revenue Service. Anthony prepared me for the interview, met with my future supervisor and worked out an agreement that would benefit all involved. He was always there when I had questions or concerns. I started the program in February, 2008, and after only three months of mentoring by the Taxpayer Advocate Service manager an Intake Advocate position opened up and I was hired on the spot.

The opportunity I was given is one that I had been looking for since I left the military. Receiving assistance from the staff at the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program has changed my life forever."

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment strives to improve the lives of our Nation's heroes, by providing them opportunities that they may not have been afforded. NPWE has proven invaluable to the program, employers, and our veterans.



Cecilia Sexton works with the Internal Service as a Taxpayer Advocate.

Coming Next Month!

November 2nd - Election Day

November 11th-Veterans Day

November 25th -Thanksgiving



Be sure to get your eBenefits account today!

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

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VBA Today is an official publication of the Veterans Benefits Administration. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent that of the Veterans Benefits Administration

CONGRATULATIONS TO VBA'S LOAN GUARANTY SERVICE ON THEIR 19TH MILLION GUARANTEED HOME LOAN!

