

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

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

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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 [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

## VA CLARIFIES POLICY ON FLAG-FOLDING

**RECITATIONS** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON -- To ensure burial services at the 125 national cemeteries operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reflect the wishes of veterans and their families, VA officials have clarified the Department's policy about recitations made while the U.S. flag is folded at the gravesite of a veteran.

Traditional gravesite military funeral honors include the silent folding and presentation of an American flag, a 21-gun rifle salute, and the playing of "Taps."

The clarification includes the following: volunteer honor guards are authorized to read the so-called "13-fold" flag recitation or any comparable script; survivors of the deceased need to provide the material and request it be read by the volunteer honor guards; and volunteer honor guards will accept requests for recitations that reflect any or no religious traditions, on an equal basis.

**2008 COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT:** The Social Security Administration announced the Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) effective 12-01-2007 will be 2.3%. VA compensation and pension rates will be increased by the same amount, effective 12-01-2007. The increase will show up in the 12-31-2007 payments for December 2007.

## VA NAMES NEW NATIONAL CEMETERY NEAR

**SARASOTA** (VA News Release October 19, 2007) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has named the future national cemetery to be constructed near Sarasota as the "Sarasota VA National Cemetery." Located on a 295-acre site in Sarasota County along State Route 72, the new cemetery will become operational in late 2008. It will provide burials to nearly 400,000 veterans and their families who live in southwestern Florida. VA plans to begin construction in the summer of 2008 in a 15-acre section where burials are expected to begin in late 2008. The cemetery staff will work initially from a temporary office, committal service shelter and equipment facility until construction is completed.

VA has selected Sandra M. Beckley as the first director of the new cemetery. Ms. Beckley began her VA career in 1972. Before assuming her new duties, she was the director at national cemeteries in Atlanta, GA; Pensacola, FL; Mobile, AL; and Florence, SC. She also served at the Danville, IL, National Cemetery. Ms. Beckley begins her new duties in temporary office space in Sarasota.

The cemetery's 60-acre initial construction area will contain 18,200 casket gravesites, a 7,000-unit columbarium, 500 sites for in-ground cremated remains and a scattering garden. When completed, the new cemetery will also include an administration and public information complex with an electronic gravesite locator and public restrooms, a maintenance facility, entrance and flag assembly areas and a memorial walkway, plus two committal shelters that will use energy-saving solar panels. Other infrastructure elements include roadways, landscaping, utilities and irrigation.

Information about the Sarasota VA National Cemetery is available by calling the VA Memorial Service Network in Atlanta at (404) 929-5899.

**"HIRE VETS FIRST" JOB FAIRS** The U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) runs a Web campaign called "HireVetsFirst" (<http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov/>) that aims to raise employer awareness about the value of hiring veterans. As part of the project, the department announced a major expansion of its job fairs for veterans, with more than 100 fairs in all 50 states running through the week of Veterans Day.

In Florida Job Fairs will be held on the following dates:

November 3, 2007, from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Comfort Inn and Conference Center, 8700 Navarre Parkway, Navarre, point of contact Bill Neal 850-595-5200 Ext 103.

November 8, 2007, from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM, at Military Stars, Wyndham Riverwalk, 1515 Prudential Drive, Jacksonville, point of contact Todd Hecht 941-684-0133.

November 14, 2007, from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM at Recruit Military/MOAA, Raymond James Stadium, Tampa, point of contact Larry Slagel 513-683-5020.

For information on Department of Labor programs for hiring veterans see <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/hiring/veterans.htm>.

#### **VA ANNOUNCES 46 GRANTS FOR HOMELESS PROGRAMS**

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – As the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its homeless program, VA has awarded 46 grants worth over \$16 million to public and private non-profit groups to assist homeless veterans. This latest round of grants creates 950 beds for homeless veterans, bringing to more than 12,000 the number of VA-funded community-based beds provided by public and community non-profit and faith-based organizations in 34 states and the District of Columbia.

VA has the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country. It is the only federal agency providing substantial one-on-one contact with the homeless. In many cities and rural areas, VA social workers and other clinicians conduct extensive outreach programs, clinical assessments, medical treatment, alcohol and drug abuse counseling and employment assistance.

More information about VA's homeless programs is available on the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/homeless>.

Grants in Florida went to: Steps to Recovery, Inc. in New Port Richey (\$143,975); Volunteers of America of Florida in Pensacola (\$736,848) and Punta Gorda (\$666,848); and The House of Hope in St. Petersburg (\$1,575,470).

#### **VA NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TAKES AIM AT RESISTANT STAPH INFECTIONS**

(VA News Release) VA has tough new screening requirements now in place in all of its hospitals. In addition to emphasizing its commitment to hospital hygiene and flagging affected patients for special precautions, VA facilities monitor all incoming patients on key units with nasal swabs and cultures for methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). The VA initiative focuses on "culture change" among its health care workers to improve awareness of the threat and to make infection prevention a routine component of care during each patient encounter every day.

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN NOVEMBER**

**November 1** payments for October due

**November 5** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-30-2007 payments

**November 12** Federal holiday - Veterans Day (observed)

**November 13** last day to change of cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-30 2007 payments

**November 22** Federal holiday - Thanksgiving

**November 30** payments for November due

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**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**

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

**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**

**Foreign Medical Program Office** (medical treatment abroad) - PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

#### **National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 **561-649-6489**

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

**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](http://www.va.gov)**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **[www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)**

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): **[www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)**

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **[www.floridavets.org](http://www.floridavets.org)**

St. Pete Regional Office: **[www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)**