

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.

VA REACHES TENTATIVE AGREEMENT FOR NEW ORLANDO HOSPITAL SITE (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – Central Florida veterans are a step closer to having a new 134-bed hospital and outpatient clinic on Lake Nona Boulevard in Orlando across from the new University of Central Florida College of Medicine, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced. Preliminary negotiations have been completed to purchase the site for a full-service VA medical center the Department expects to be operational in 2012. VA estimates 400,000 veterans reside in the service area of the new facility. More than 90,000 veterans from the region are enrolled in the VA health care system. Currently, enrolled veterans receive health care through six different outpatient clinics in the region.

Terms of the agreement for the 65-acre tract were not disclosed, pending formal execution of the agreement by VA and the developers, Tavistock/Lake Nona. A final agreement is expected to be signed soon. VA hopes to complete its design specifications for the new medical center early next year as site preparation begins, with a construction award made in 2009. Approved plans call for construction of modern facilities to provide acute care, complex specialty care and advanced diagnostic services through a hospital, an outpatient clinic, a 118-bed nursing home, and a 60-bed domiciliary. The site will also contain a veterans benefits office that will help veterans to obtain compensation, pensions or other financial benefits earned by military service.

VA ANNOUNCES \$4.7 MILLION TO HELP CAREGIVERS

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced it will provide nearly \$4.7 million for "caregiver assistance pilot programs" to expand and improve health care education and provide needed training and resources for caregivers who assist disabled and aging veterans in their homes.

Included in the VA pilot programs are the VA medical center in **Gainesville, FL**, where caregivers will take part in a Transition Assistance Program to provide skills training,

education and supportive problem solving using videophone technology; and the **Tampa** VA Medical Center and the **Miami** VA Healthcare System who are working on a collaborative project. In the Tampa area, the current program will be expanded to provide 24-hour in-home respite care to temporarily relieve caregivers up to 14 days a year. In Miami, the program will coordinate comprehensive community-based care services, including respite, home companions, adult day care and use of emergency response system.

HOW TO CHECK OUT ORGANIZATIONS SOLICITING FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Florida law requires charitable organizations, professional solicitors and fund raising consultants to register annually with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and provide documentation about their finances before soliciting contributions in the state. To assist in making an informed decision, the Department has created the "*Gift Givers' Guide*" at <http://app1.800helpfla.com/giftgiversguide/>. The "*Gift Givers' Guide*" tells how each charity spends its money.

Here are a few quick tips about giving to charities: Be wary of groups or individuals who solicit by telephone, mail and door-to-door. Other groups to be wary of are ones who solicit on street corners.

Be cautious of charities with similar sounding names. Some phony charities use names that sound or look like those of respected, legitimate organizations.

Don't give out personal information, such as Social Security Numbers or credit card and bank account numbers.

Don't give cash. For security and tax record purposes, it is best to pay by check.

Check the status of a registered organization by calling the Department's Consumer Hotline at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352), or by visiting the *Gift Givers' Guide* search page at <http://app1.800helpfla.com/giftgiversguide/>.

IT'S TAX TIME Here are the basics on VA benefits and Federal income taxes:

All VA benefits are exempt from taxation and should not be reported to IRS. Title 38 United States Code Section 5301: " Nonassignability and exempt status of benefits (a)(1) Payments of benefits due or to become due under any law administered by the Secretary shall not be assignable except to the extent specifically authorized by law, and such payments made to, or on account of, a beneficiary shall be exempt from taxation..." This includes payments made under the VA Work Study program.

VA does not issue W-2 or 1099 forms.

Secondary interest on VA benefits may be taxable. For example, if a VA beneficiary deposits his or her compensation check in an interest-bearing account, the interest is not tax exempt.

VA benefits are subject to collection for tax liens, i.e. in cases where the beneficiary owes the IRS.

Military Retired Pay: Veterans in receipt of military retired pay who are awarded VA compensation benefits retroactively may claim an exclusion from their income in the amount of VA compensation they would have received had they not been in receipt of military retired pay. Affected veterans should claim the exclusion by submitting the award letter showing the amount and effective date of compensation they would have received but for the receipt of military retired pay. IRS instructions tell affected veterans to submit a "VA Form 20-8993." VA Form 20-8993 is the award letter. If the veteran doesn't have it, VA can provide a letter in lieu of it.

VA Form 21-0172 Certification of Permanent and Total Disability for Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Purposes: Claimants of the IRS Disability Income Exclusion are required to submit a certificate attesting to permanent and total disability. Under an agreement with the IRS, IRS will accept a VA certification on VA Form 21-0172, Certification of Permanent and Total Disability, based solely on an *existing* rating of permanent and total disability in place of the required private physician's statement.

Veterans may request the VA Form 21-0172 by telephone or letter to the VA Regional Office. The request should provide sufficient information to identify the veteran's record, the year for which certification is needed, and the address to which the VA Form 21-0172 is to be sent.

IMPORTANT DATES IN JANUARY

January 7 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 02-1-2008 payments

January 18 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 02-01-2008 payments

January 21 Federal Holiday - Martin Luther King Birthday

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**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **www.warms.vba.va.gov**

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

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org**

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**