

# 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).

## **HOLIDAY CARDS FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND**

**VETERANS** (from [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)) Want to share some joy by letting hospitalized veterans and military service members know you are thinking of them during this holiday season? Sending greeting cards, "care packages" and Internet messages of thanks and appreciation for their service are some of the ways to do that. A number of corporations and non-profit organizations are pitching in to help brighten the holidays for as many service members and hospitalized veterans as possible.

**Holiday Mail for Heroes** (American Red Cross and Pitney-Bowes) From now through December 10, you can send holiday cards with a message of thanks and cheer to a special post office box. The cards will be delivered to military bases and hospitals, veterans hospitals, and other locations during the holidays. <http://www.redcross.org/email/saf/>

**Let's Say Thanks** (Xerox) "Let's Say Thanks" is a national program designed to deliver cards to servicemen and women overseas with messages of support from home. <http://www.letssaythanks.com/Home1280.html>

**America Supports You** is a Department of Defense program that was launched in 2004 in an effort to recognize citizen support for our military men and women and communicate that support to the members of our Armed Forces at home and abroad. The America Supports You Program lends support to our men and women in uniform. You can show support in many ways, including sending letters and e-mails, care packages and on-line messages of support. <http://www.americasupportsyou.mil/>

**Army and Air Force Exchange Services (AAFES)** The AAFES Community Center has a number of ways to demonstrate your support for military members, including prepaid calling cards and gift certificates. <http://www.aafes.com/>

**TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT INCREASES FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that eligible veterans will see an increase in the mileage reimbursement

they receive for travel to VA facilities for medical care. The mileage reimbursement will be raised from the 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile for all eligible veterans.

Congress, which mandates such increases, recently provided funding to VA to increase the reimbursement rate, which goes into effect on November 17, 2008. Service connected veterans, veterans receiving VA pensions, and veterans with low incomes are eligible for the reimbursement.

While increasing the payment, the current deductible amounts applied to certain mileage reimbursements will remain frozen at \$7.77 for a one way trip, \$15.54 for a round trip, and capped at a maximum of \$46.62 per calendar month. On January 9, 2009, these deductibles will decrease to \$3 for a one way trip, \$6 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$18 per calendar month. Deductibles can be waived if they cause a financial hardship to the veteran.

## **VA EXPANDS PROTECTIONS FOR VETERANS WITH MISSING PAPERWORK** (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced special procedures for processing claims from veterans, family members, and survivors whose applications for financial benefits from VA may have been mishandled by VA personnel. These special procedures come after an audit by VA's Inspector General found documents waiting to be shredded at some of VA's regional offices that, if disposed of, could have affected the financial benefits awarded to veterans and survivors.

VA worked with the six largest veterans service organizations in developing these special new procedures. The procedures will assist veterans and survivors in establishing that an application or another document was previously submitted to VA, but was not properly acted upon by VA and was not retained in the veteran's records.

The special procedures cover missing documents submitted by a veteran or other applicant for VA benefits

during the 18-month period between April 14, 2007 and October 14, 2008. VA will process any missing applications or evidence resubmitted under these special procedures as if the document had been originally submitted on the date identified by the claimant. Veterans and other applicants have one year, or until November 17, 2009, to file previously submitted documents under these special procedures.

Veterans not covered by these special rules who believe relevant material is missing from their files can submit additional documentation at any time. An award of benefits earlier than April 14, 2007, may be established if there is credible corroborating evidence supporting an earlier date of document submission.

When this problem of mishandled documents was uncovered on October 14, 2008, VA immediately ceased all shredding activities while it established tighter controls over all claims documents and conducted special training for all employees who process veterans' applications. All regional office shredding equipment and operations are now under the strict control of the facility records management officer. Every employee has been given a separate receptacle for papers appropriate for shredding. These receptacles are subject to review by supervisors and other officials. Before any claims document can be shredded now, it must now be reviewed by two people and the facility records management officer.

Veterans and others who are concerned about missing documents and want more information on the special processing procedures may call 1-800-827-1000 for assistance or go to the website at [http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/specialprocedures\\_qa.asp](http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/specialprocedures_qa.asp). They may also send an e-mail inquiry through [IRIS@va.gov](mailto:IRIS@va.gov) or visit their local VA regional office.

VA representatives will review VA's record systems to verify receipt of applications and supporting evidence and will assist anyone desiring to file a claim under the special processing procedures for missing documents.

**NEW LAW AUTHORIZES VETERANS' SALUTES DURING THE PLAYING OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON -- Veterans and active-duty military not in uniform can now render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the national anthem, thanks to recent changes in federal law. The new provision improves upon a little known change in federal law last year that authorized veterans to render the military-style hand salute during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag, but it did not address salutes during the national anthem. Last year's provision also applied to members of the armed forces while not in uniform. The most recent change, authorizing hand-salutes during the national anthem by veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel, was included in the Defense Authorization Act of 2009, which President Bush signed on October 14.

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

**December 1** payments for November due  
**December 25** Federal holiday – Christmas  
**December 31** payments for November due

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

##### **SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

**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

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

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

**VA Health Revenue Service** (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

**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

##### **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  
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846  
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

**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)

**St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:**

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

**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)

**"Florida Vets First:"** [www.FloridaVetsFirst.com](http://www.FloridaVetsFirst.com)

**Library of Congress (information on pending legislation)** [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)