

THE ALABAMA VETERAN

Kay Ivey
Governor

Fall 2018

W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner



DATES TO REMEMBER

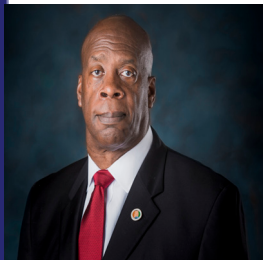
- * Columbus Day
October 8, 2018
- * Halloween
October 31, 2018
- * Veterans Day
November 11, 2018
- * Thanksgiving
November 22, 2018
- * Christmas
December 25, 2018

INSIDE THIS EDITION

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| One -Stop Shopping | 2 |
| Meet Your VSO | 3 |
| NASWVC Conference | 4 |
| A Time to Say 'Thanks' | 4 |
| State Combined Campaign | 5 |
| Annual Award Presentations | 6 |
| Tut Fann Day | 7 |
| VA Releases Suicide Data | 8 |



Commissioner's Corner



The job of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) is quantified in the words of Abraham Lincoln: "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan."

The ADVA is rock solid in determination and gaining momentum as we move forward. We will continue to fulfill this nation's and state's commitment

to veterans. Our objective is to honor our veterans' sacrifices and to dignify the cause they served, by serving them.

For over six decades the ADVA has rendered services to those who served with a high standard of compassion and commitment. ADVA's veterans advocates are committed to providing excellent care and benefits to our nation's veterans. We anticipate that many more veterans will require our services in the future. ADVA will be there to serve them and their families.

In keeping with our mission to assist veterans, we released the ADVA "Strategic Plan 2021" in July. This plan sets the stage for the progress we intend to make in serving veterans over the next several years and serves as the foundation for the future. The plan's basic framework focuses on six priorities: field offices, state veteran homes, state cemetery, dependent scholarship, veteran outreach and claims/appeals. These objectives are outcome-oriented and reflect our commitment to provide timely, top quality service to Alabama veterans and their families.

We have a very special ceremony coming up next month. Sixty-five years ago, the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed. Over 36,000 Americans were killed and more than 100,000 were wounded during the conflict. The Republic of Korea government has not forgotten the service and sacrifices made by the brave men and women who answered the call to duty. On November 16th at 1 p.m. at the Troy University Montgomery Davis Theatre, Consul General Yound-jun Kim and Consul Hyeongchul Kang will personally award the Ambassador for Peace Medal to Alabama veterans who served in Korea. Everyone is welcome to attend the ceremony to help honor these Korean War heroes.

In closing, Veterans Day is right around the corner; however at ADVA every day is Veterans Day. I've always been impressed with a number of events being held all across the State of Alabama as well as our nation. The events conducted to commemorate Veterans Day is nothing short of impressive. Let us not forget December 7, 1941, the day that will live in infamy. Keep up the great work and do a good deed for a veteran today!

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One-Stop Shopping for Veterans Benefits



Kayla Kyle explains the requirements for the Alabama GI Dependent Scholarship program to a veteran.

Bernie Collett, a claims reviewer, provides information about filing a claim to a veteran.



Alabama veterans recently “shopped” for benefits and services at the “Supermarket of Veterans Benefits,” held August 24th in Dothan.

Vets and their dependents took the opportunity to sit down face to face with state and federal officials to ask questions about their eligibility for veterans benefits. The free event provided information about many veterans benefits and directed veterans to community agencies that can assist. A variety of vendors from the community set up tables and displays, and the Salvation Army provided free food and drinks for all attendees.

Theodore Merriett, an Army veteran, came to the supermarket to find out about any assistance he qualifies for. “I’m here just trying to get some information so that I’ll know that my family will be taken care of.”

“Instead of getting food you’re getting knowledge,” Navy Veteran Marvin Alexander said. “Not only individually but I can tell all our comrades and everybody else what they’re missing.”

The event was well attended and the weather was great,” Lynda Jenkins, District III manager, said. “We received a lot of feedback from the veteran population as well as the vendors. Everyone wants us to plan another Supermarket for that area in the near future.”

Meet Your VSO

Jerry Lucas and Rachel Hauser, the Dale County veterans service office (VSO) staff, love helping veterans.

Both the VSO (Lucas) and the assistant VSO (Hauser) served in the Army as military police officers. Lucas said that his military duties really help him with his current position. "My military job made me inquisitive and able to communicate. During the interview process, I can get the who, what, when and where. I can ask the hard questions," Lucas said. "Also, I can relate to some of the problems veterans have, like PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) because I am a combat veteran."

The office is exposed to a very diverse population because of the proximity to Fort Rucker. "We have active duty transitioning and a large population of retirees," Hauser said. "Transitioning out can be a scary and stressful thing, especially with those who may be suffering from combat related illness or injuries. Who better to have your back, than someone who knows what you are going through?"

The two serve about 700 veterans and family members a month—in person or by phone, letters or email. "My favorite part of working as a VSO is assisting my fellow comrades and their family members receive every benefit that they are entitled to because of their service to our county," Lucas said. "I think I'm just as excited as they are when



Rachel Hauser assists veterans with filing a claim.

they come into the office with their VA award letter."

Hauser said that her favorite part of working as a VSO is serving fellow veterans and sharing experiences. "I love the bond that can be formed. Knowing that our agency played a role in the veteran getting the help they need is very rewarding. I love getting that call or visit from a veterans, sharing their excitement and gratitude."

Both think using a veterans service officer for claims is beneficial because they are knowledgeable of state and federal laws and regulations in relation to the claim process. "We are veterans ourselves so we can relate to their situation and help them through the process as an advocate, working with them on their behalf to assist them through the whole claim process."

Lucas stated that seeing someone's life change for the better because of the counsel and assistance with their claims he and Hauser provide is very rewarding. "I remember when I first started as an AVSO way back in February 2007 and I assisted a homeless veteran apply for the VA pension benefit. After he was awarded he came into the office and stated that he and his spouse were back together and they were doing well," he said. "That was the first time I saw that what we are doing has life changing effects on the lives of the veterans and family members in our communities. How awesome is that? And we get to do it every day."



Jerry Lucas answers questions from veterans.

NASWVC Conference Focuses on Women Veterans

By Zanthia Matthews
Jefferson County Assistant Veterans Service Officer

On June 24, 2018, the National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators (NASWVC) sponsored its 19th Annual Conference at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Alexandria, Virginia.

The mission of the NASWVC is to advocate for women veterans through partnerships, training, and the exchange of information, identify barriers to successful transition of women veterans and military women to the civilian community, and recommend solutions through legislative, programmatic and outreach activities.

The conference focused on supporting a network for state women veteran coordinators, heighten wellness, strengthen relationships, and connections for women veterans. During the conference, attendees learned the latest information from presenters, shared best practices, opinions, thoughts and suggestions for consideration regarding the latest state of women veterans.

Speakers delivered a wide range of topics focused specifically on women veterans. Among the topics were the change of the Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare model, women veterans health care, building trust with women veterans, understanding the women veteran patient experience and sexual harassment of women veterans by male veterans at VA medical centers. Kayla M. Williams, director, and Anna Crenshaw, deputy

director, Center for Women Veterans, shared profound information from the latest research and studies which revealed astonishing positive and negative outcomes for women veterans. For example, we learned that the suicide rate for women veterans is much higher than male veterans, as well as women and minority veterans are the fastest growing diversity population at VA.

There wasn't much information available nor shared regarding incarcerated women veterans. When asked how the outcome of the research and studies impacts incarcerated women veterans, the speakers responded that "it was quite difficult to obtain access to incarcerated women veterans to participate in the study." The speakers did acknowledge the gap with their research and a discussion followed expressing the importance of all women veterans.

The boundless opportunity to network, brainstorm and share best practices was priceless. Upon many discussions with other women veteran coordinators, I saw and learned that they were quite passionate about their careers. Most importantly, I was able to create a profound relationship with all of the women veteran coordinators. However, a stronger connection was made with the Women Veteran Coordinators of VA Southeast Networkk (VISN) 7 (i.e., Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina) and I look forward to working closely with them on campaigns that focus and speak to the Women Veterans of VISN 7.

Veterans Day—An Opportunity to Say 'Thanks'

Veterans Day gives Americans the opportunity to celebrate the bravery and sacrifice of all U.S. veterans.

World War I officially ended on June 28, 1919, with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. However, the actual fighting between the Allies and Germany had ended seven months earlier with the armistice, which went into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918.

Armistice Day officially became a holiday in the United States in 1926. In legislation that was passed in 1938, November 11 was "dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be hereafter celebrated and known as 'Armistice Day.'" This new holiday originally honored World War I veterans.

In 1954, after having been through both World War II and the Korean War, the 83rd U.S. Congress amended the Act of 1938 by striking out the word "Armistice" and inserting the word "Veterans." With the approval of this legislation on June 1, 1954, November 11 became a day to honor American veterans of all wars.

Much has changed in the 99 years since Armistice Day was first observed.

Now we honor not only servicemen, but servicewomen. Our wars are not fought with cannons, but with drones. The war to end all wars didn't end war at all. Soldiers have fought and died all over the globe.

But despite its different names, the purpose of Veterans Day has remained the same—to say thanks to all American veterans.

State Combined Campaign Kicks Off

Make it a rule...never to lie down at night without being able to say, 'I have made one human being at least a little wiser, a little happier or a little better this day.'

~ Charles Kingsley

This year marks the 25th Anniversary of the State Combined Campaign (SCC). The campaign kicked off on August 29th and continues through November

In 1993, 6,500 state employees donated \$311,778. Since then Alabama's state employees have contributed more than \$16 million to charitable organizations across Alabama. These donations have brought help and hope to countless Alabamians as well as made life better for those overseas.

The SCC is the only authorized workplace campaign for state employees. It is the only way state employees can support charitable organizations through the ease of payroll deduction. The great thing about the campaign is that you choose where your dollars go and how they will help! You can designate your gift to any of the more than 400 charities listed at <http://www.statecombinedcampaign.org/charities/>.

This year's theme is "love your State by giving back." To celebrate the 25th year, state coordinators are asking those who have never given, or given a small gift, to consider a minimum gift of \$25 or \$25 per month (an

annual gift of \$300). A \$25 gift, both annually and monthly, makes a difference:

- \$25—135 meals to one of your neighbors in need through the Montgomery Area Food Bank and its partner food banks;
- \$25—will provide vaccinations for two puppies through Montgomery Humane Society;
- \$25—will provide \$2,000 worth of medicine to people in need through MAP International;
- \$300—will provide shelter to a homeless teen through Thirteenth Place;
- \$300—could help provide patients and caregivers with six nights of free lodging at the Joe Lee Griffin Hope Lodge (American Cancer Society) when they have to travel to Birmingham for cancer treatment;
- \$300—funds medicine and supplies to treat 1,380 disaster patients through Blessings International;
- \$300—funds a pair of shoes or an article of clothing for 12 different boys and girls through Boys and Girls Ranches of Alabama; and
- \$300—provides 60 hot meals for 12 weeks delivered to the doorsteps of a homebound senior.

Each and every contribution impacts a life and makes a difference for those we help.



Brenda Eberly, the Montgomery County Assistant Veterans Service Officer, talks to a veteran at the Homeless Stand Down on September 7th.



Mr. William Wyatt, of the Blue Star Salute Foundation, donated \$500 to each veterans home during the Veterans Home committee meeting in June. (Left to right): Hiliary Hardwick, Kathleen Voll, Charlotte Eason, Kathryn Fuller, Kim Justice, Commissioner Clyde Marsh and Mr. Wyatt (in front).

Annual Award Presentations



Covington County VSO Brian Foshee was selected as one of the VSOs of the Year for 2017. The Covington County Commission presented him with a proclamation honoring his hard work. Pictured left to right: Joe Barton, Commissioner District 2, Kenneth Northey, Commissioner District 1, Brian Foshee, Chairman Greg White, Tony Holmes, Commissioner, District 3 and Kyle Adams, Commissioner, District 4.



Lynda Jenkins, District III manager, receives the Commissioner's Excellence Award for outstanding leadership and innovative veterans outreach initiatives from the commissioner while board member Deborah Walker applauds.



Hiliary Hardwick, the director of the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home, receives a plaque from the commissioner for being selected as the veterans home super star of the year award.



Angela Hunter, the Jefferson County VSO, receives one of the VSO of the Year Awards from Commissioner Clyde Marsh.



Amari Gunn, the administrative support assistant (ASA) at the Tuscaloosa County VSO, receives the ASA of the Year Award from the commissioner.

Fun at Tut Fann Day



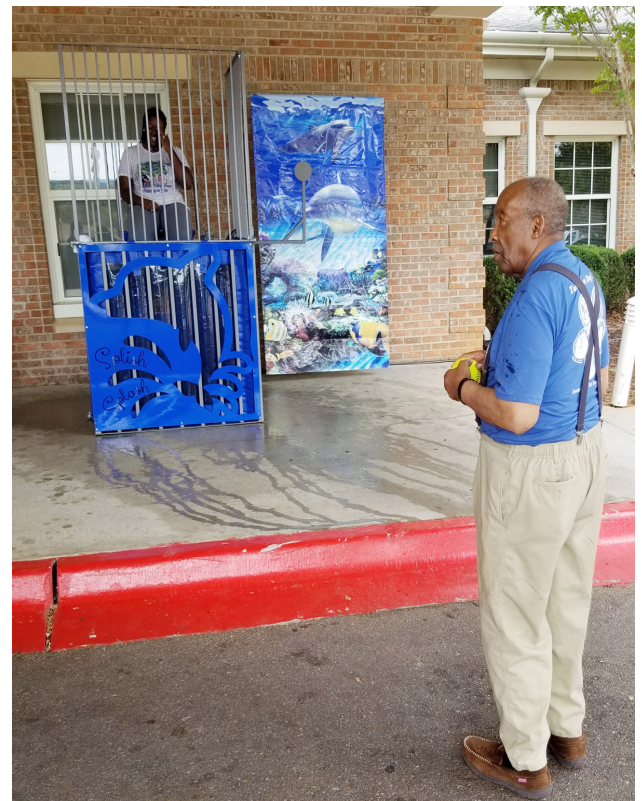
Veteran Robert Walker and his son, Jimmy pose in front one of the motorcycles.



The Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter 2201 donated \$500 on Tut Fann Day as well as volunteered for the event.



Veteran Mose Nettle and Activity Director Rae Barthel with members of the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association who brought their motorcycles for Tut Fann Day 2018.



Veteran Mose Nettles throws the ball at the dunk tank with staff member Tosheba Burton in the tank.

VA Releases National Suicide Data Report

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released findings from its most recent analysis of veteran suicide data for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This report yields several important insights such as suicide rates increased for both veterans and non-veterans, underscoring the fact that suicide is a national public health concern that affects people everywhere; the average number of veterans who died by suicide each day remained unchanged at 20; and the suicide rate increased faster among veterans who had not recently used Veterans Health Administration health care than among those who had. The report, known as “VA National Suicide Data Report 2005–2015,” is available at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/Suicide-Prevention-Data.asp.

The analysis is part of the VA’s ongoing examination of more than 55 million civilian and veteran death records that is being used to evaluate and improve the VA’s Suicide Prevention Program. Data from this report were obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s National Death Index and then linked to both VA and Department of Defense (DOD) data. The VA is committed to publishing the most accurate suicide data possible. The CDC has 2016 data, but the VA works with both CDC and DOD to analyze millions of records and data sources to produce an analysis of suicide deaths for all known veterans. This collaboration adds a layer of complexity to the analysis process, thus making 2015 the most current year for which the VA is able to publish complete veteran suicide data. The VA is working with the CDC and DOD to innovate and refine the data analysis and plans to publish 2016 veteran suicide data in fall 2018.

The report includes suicide rates from 2005 to 2015 for both veteran and non-veteran populations segmented by age, race, and gender, and analyzes veteran rates based on service branch and era, suicide method, and suicide risk factors. This data informs the ongoing work of the VA and its partners to prevent suicide and expand the network of support for veterans. “Suicide remains a top

clinical priority,” said Acting VA Secretary Mr. Peter O’Rourke. “One life lost to suicide is one too many. Suicide is a serious public health concern in the veteran population and across all communities nationwide. These data offer important insights to help VA to build effective networks of support, communication, and care that reach veterans where they live and thrive.”

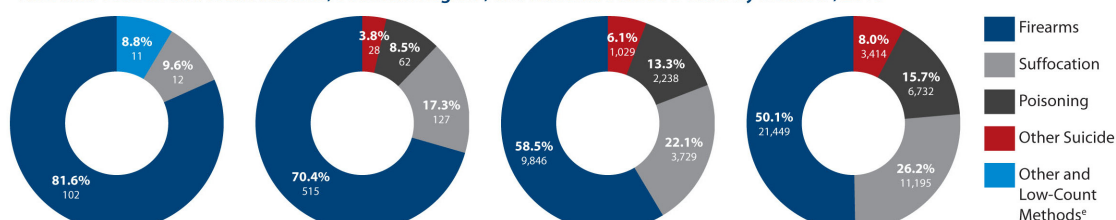
Suicide is a complex issue and is influenced by a multitude of intersecting factors that can increase or decrease suicide risk. The VA Suicide Prevention Program’s public health approach addresses the risk factors associated with suicidal behavior—such as a prior suicide attempt, stressful life events, or the availability of lethal means—while promoting the protective factors that can offset risk — such as positive coping skills, feeling connected to other people, and access to mental health care. Data forms an integral part of the VA’s public health strategy and enables the VA to tailor research-backed suicide-prevention initiatives to reach diverse groups across the veteran population.

In the years since this data was captured, the VA has undertaken substantial suicide-prevention efforts, including expansion of the Veterans Crisis Line, creation of new cross-sector partnerships, implementation of the Joint Action Plan for Supporting Veterans During Their Transition From Uniformed Service to Civilian Life, launch of SAVE online suicide prevention training, and development of the forthcoming National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide. Learn more about VA’s suicide-prevention resources and programs at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention.

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a veteran in crisis, should call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year at (800) 273-8255 and press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or send a text message to 838255. Reporters covering this issue are strongly encouraged to visit www.ReportingOnSuicide.org for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

After accounting for differences in age, the Veteran suicide rate in Alabama was significantly higher than the national suicide rate .

Alabama Veteran and Total Alabama, Southern Region , and National Suicide Deaths by Method , 2015



Alabama Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2015

| Sex | Veteran Suicides |
|--------|------------------|
| Total | 125 |
| Male | 110–120 |
| Female | <10 |

Because some of Alabama’s Veteran populations are relatively small, suicide deaths are presented in ranges rather than precise counts to protect confidentiality.