



THE ALABAMA VETERAN

FALL 2022 ISSUE



ADVA

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ADVA

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving
America's Finest"*

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

In 2019, when I became commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, I kept hearing about a guy named Bob Horton who used to work at ADVA. Over time, I had the opportunity to meet him, and during our first conversation I realized everything I had heard about him — his talents, his teamwork, his partnerships — were all true. One of my early goals as commissioner was to further develop outreach within the ADVA, which was accomplished my first year through the creation of the Office of Outreach and Engagement. We went through the full competitive selection procedures, but with Bob previously serving as the public information officer of ADVA, he was the perfect fit to become the assistant commissioner of outreach and engagement.

I reminisce on that story because in mid-September we celebrated Bob's retirement from ADVA and state government. It's hard to put into words all that he has accomplished during his second tour with the department. When he came back to ADVA, he was tasked with establishing an entirely new office. Once only a thought,

the Office of Outreach and Engagement is now a vital and permanent part of our operations. Frankly, I don't know how we could have done it without Bob. When you think of everything that's happened in the last three years within ADVA — new offices opening, the COVID pandemic, new projects — it was Bob who played a significant role in those missions. Currently, one of our biggest continuous projects is Alabama's Challenge. It has been under Bob's leadership since its inception.

I'm sincerely grateful we had Bob the last three years. His legacy within ADVA is lasting and impactful, and we're going to have an incredibly difficult time filling his shoes.

When we officially said farewell and celebrated Bob's service on September 15, he was presented the Distinguished Service Medal and a state government retirement plaque. Please join me in congratulating Mr. Bob Horton on a successful career and a happy retirement from government service!



ADVA

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Jeff Newton

DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

Beverly Gebhardt

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CONGRATULATIONS!

ADVA is proud to announce that Public Information Manager Brandon Miller was recently named one of Prattville's Top 20 Under 40 by the Prattville Area Chamber of Commerce. The awards are an initiative to recognize, honor, attract, retain and engage the young professionals in their community. Mr. Miller was recognized for his many accomplishments. These included his work in the news industry where he worked as a writer, editor, and producer as well as his continued service to this community through education as a published author of case studies with a focus on ethics in journalism. He serves the Prattville community by actively supporting community events and through efforts in his church. Mr. Miller has been with the agency for just over a year but has already significantly raised the profile of the agency and demonstrated his ability to engage the public.



Several ADVA employees were recently recognized for milestone anniversaries. In September, District I Manager Lynda Jenkins (top left) celebrated 15 years as a state employee. District II Administrative Support Assistant LaWanna Peters (top right) celebrated 25 years with the ADVA and Appeals & Review Division Manager Mark Sullivan (bottom left) and Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program Manager Kayla Kyle (bottom right) received 20-year service pins from Commissioner Kent Davis.



SUICIDE PREVENTION

OPERATION WE REMEMBER

ADVA LAUNCHES NEW SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN



ADVA partnered with the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) and colleges and universities around the state in September for a newly established Veterans suicide prevention awareness campaign. Operation We Remember serves as a visual reminder that suicide knows no boundaries. Participating colleges and universities displayed 152 American flags on their respective campuses during the month of September, which serves as National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. This act is intended to honor and remember the 152 Veterans in Alabama who lost their lives to suicide in 2020.

Operation We Remember was formally announced during a news conference on September 9 at Riverwalk Stadium in Montgomery. A display remained at the stadium as the Montgomery Biscuits completed the regular season, and another was added across the street from the Alabama State Capitol.

Participating student Veterans organizations included the University of Alabama, Auburn University, Troy University, Jacksonville State University, University of North Alabama, University of Montevallo, and Shelton State Community College.



Auburn University



University of Montevallo



Troy University



Jacksonville State



University of Alabama

GOVERNOR IVEY SIGNS SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH PROCLAMATION

Governor Kay Ivey welcomed members from ADVA and the Alabama Department of Mental Health on September 1 as she signed a proclamation proclaiming September as Suicide Prevention Month. The proclamation is intended to promote public awareness of suicide prevention, and to encourage a collaborative discussion on mental health and well-being in the workplace as well as reaching meaningful solutions to this national public health challenge.

You can learn more about suicide prevention resources in Alabama at www.vetsforhope.com.



STATEWIDE TOUR OF VETERANS WELL-BEING TOWN HALLS AND RESOURCE FAIRS STOPS IN HUNTSVILLE AND TUSCALOOSA

The Partners of Alabama's Challenge continued its statewide tour of hosting Veterans well-being town halls and resource fairs in Alabama's metropolitan areas. The Veterans suicide prevention initiative most recently held events in Tuscaloosa (pictured below on the left) in August and Huntsville (pictured below on the right) in September.

Each event featured a town hall that highlighted service providers from the federal, state, and community levels. The resource fairs included those providers as well as many others for service members, Veterans, and their families.

The Partners of Alabama's Challenge are planning future events in Montgomery and Birmingham.



AROUND THE STATE

SEVERAL STOLEN SERVICE SEALS RETURNED TO STATE VETERANS CEMETERY

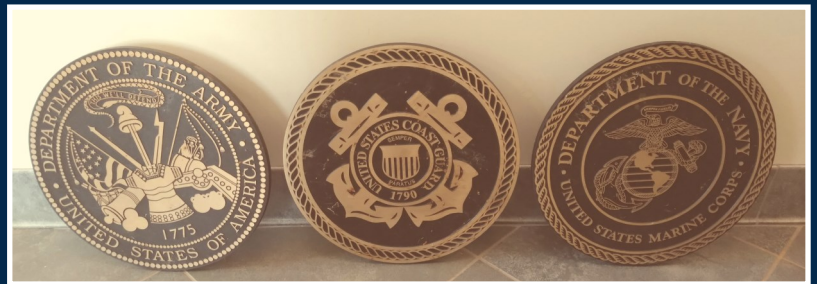
Several U.S. military service seals stolen from the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort in early August have been returned.

Seals for the U.S. Army, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps were delivered by the Alabama Highway Department on Sept. 16 after they were found alongside Alabama Highway 225.

Each seal is in good condition. The U.S. Navy seal has not been located.

"First, we want to thank the community for its support since learning of the theft a month and a half ago," Commissioner Kent Davis said. "It remains incredibly frustrating trying to comprehend that someone would steal from a Veterans cemetery, but we know this disrespectful act does not represent the wonderful residents of Baldwin County and the Gulf Coast."

ADVA reported the theft on Aug. 7 when it was discovered that four of the five service seals displayed on the cemetery's memorial wall below the American flag across from the committal shelter were missing. In the process of the seals being stolen, there was damage done to the memorial wall and other property.



ADVA ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER SOUNDS TAPS AT GETTYSBURG

ADVA Assistant Commissioner of Operations Jeff Newton traveled to Gettysburg, Penn., in August to participate in One Hundred Nights of Taps. The program takes place from Memorial Day through Labor Day and features the notes of Taps filling the air every evening as the 24-note call is sounded in Gettysburg National Cemetery.

"I'm extremely honored to have been given the opportunity to play Taps and represent ADVA at the Gettysburg National Cemetery," he said.

Assistant Commissioner Newton started his bugling career with the Boy Scouts, which led him to play trumpet in his High School band. After entering the service in 1980, he became a member of the Base Honor Guard team as Bugler and performed for 33 years. He returned to live-bugler status soon after being hired with the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, sounding Taps for his agency and various other Veterans Service Organizations."

ADVA PARTNERS WITH NATIONAL VETERANS LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

On Sept. 16, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) announced a new landmark partnership with the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) to establish unrivaled free access to legal representation for Alabama veterans and their families in appeals before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC).

NVLSP is a national nonprofit organization that works to ensure the government delivers to America's 18 million veterans and active-duty personnel the benefits to which they are entitled because of disabilities resulting from their military service to our country.

As a matter of background, when disability claims are denied by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans have the right to appeal to the CAVC. Through this partnership, NVLSP will provide free legal representation in support of appeal cases. This process begins when the NVLSP reviews a case in which a Veteran's administrative appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA), the highest authority within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is denied and determines there are grounds for a judicial appeal to the CAVC. When this occurs, NVLSP offers to represent the veteran or the veteran's family at no cost. This strategic partnership between the ADVA and the NVLSP marks the first time this free legal service is available to Veterans in Alabama.

In addition to NVLSP's assistance to Veterans with claims appeals, NVLSP will also assist Alabama Veterans with discharge upgrades, which will help Veterans access benefits they may be wrongfully denied due to a less than honorable discharge.

To learn more about NVLSP, visit www.nvlsp.org.



VETERAN AT BILL NICHOLS STATE VETERANS HOME CELEBRATES 103rd BIRTHDAY



In September, the Veterans and staff at Bill Nichols State Veterans Home celebrated the 103rd birthday of Willie Bennett. Mr. Bennett served in the United States Army from 1942-1943. We are honored to have him here with us.

Happy birthday, Mr. Bennett!

'TUT' FANN STATE VETERANS HOME RESIDENTS ATTEND KOREAN WAR LUNCHEON

We want to thank the Legacy 4 Korean War Veterans Foundation for hosting several Veterans from Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home at the Korean War Luncheon in late September!



A LOOK BACK ...

NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY



A ceremony to commemorate National POW/MIA Recognition Day was held at the Alabama State Capitol to honor and remember the brave men and women who endured hardships as Prisoners of War and those still Missing in Action and to give special recognition to their families who bore the cost of war.

COMMAND SGT. MAJ. BENNIE G. ADKINS STATE VETERANS HOME



Progress continues daily at the future site of the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home in Enterprise since construction began in July.

Rabren General Contractors was selected by ADVA to build the state-of-the-art skilled-care nursing facility. It will be approximately 182,000 square feet and house 174 residents and is expected to open in 2024.

"We look forward each time we visit Enterprise to see the progress being made on the Adkins home," said Commissioner Kent Davis. "Excitement in the Wiregrass community has continued since the groundbreaking in June and we look forward to serving those Veterans for a long time with this facility."

THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGACY RUN



ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis was in Mobile in late August for the start of The American Legion Legacy Run. The five-day, 1,150-mile, cross-country motorcycle ride raises awareness and funds for the American Legion Legacy Scholarship, which supports the children of fallen military personnel and the children of disabled Veterans who served in the post 9/11 era.

