



THE ALABAMA VETERAN

WINTER 2022 ISSUE



ADVA

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ADVA

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving
America's Finest"*

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

There's a certain drive, determination and passion that comes with leadership. It requires more than going through the motions or meeting status quo, which is why leading isn't for everyone. It is also why it's typically easy to spot a leader when you see one.

Operation Iron Ruck is a great example of leadership. The annual four-day, 151-mile ruck march by members of the Auburn Student Veterans Association and University of Alabama Crimson League ran from Nov. 23-26 this year, and included student veterans sacrificing half of the week — including Thanksgiving — to march from stadium to stadium ahead of the Iron Bowl. It is done to raise awareness for veteran suicide prevention, which hit closer to home this year after both schools lost a student veteran to suicide in the last year.

I was honored to speak at the step-off ceremony on Nov. 23, and as I scanned the crowd, the leadership of these men and women truly hit home. For most of us, Thanksgiving break was an opportunity to go home, relax, and eventually begin preparing for finals. Not for

this group. These are students who have already sacrificed for our great country, now they are willing to sacrifice their week off from classes to promote a cause larger than any of us.

Operation Iron Ruck and veteran suicide prevention in our state as a whole are steadily gaining traction and becoming more frequently discussed. Support is continuing to grow in amazing ways, which was evident that morning outside Jordan-Hare Stadium. Auburn University First Lady, Tracy Roberts, an Air Force veteran, was in attendance to march alongside the students. Then, completely unexpected, Auburn then-interim head football coach Carnell Williams arrived, wanting to show his support for Operation Iron Ruck. Simply amazing.

Again, it takes special qualities and traits to be a leader. It's become a bit of a tradition for my wife, daughter, son, and I to walk a leg of Operation Iron Ruck, and it's an honor to join these student veterans. I find solace in knowing that as we continue to promote veteran suicide prevention, we have a group of driven, determined, passionate advocates by our side.



ADVA

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ADVA APPOINTS NEW ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Kent Davis has appointed Sandra Lucas to serve as the department's new Assistant Commissioner of Outreach and Engagement.

Lucas will be responsible for all actions relating to outreach and engagement activities. Key responsibilities include supervising and managing all public affairs matters, veterans well-being program initiatives, and federal, state, and local intergovernmental relations. She is also tasked with collaborating with other federal, state, and local agencies as it relates to veterans awareness and support initiatives.

"Being a veteran myself, there is no greater honor than serving those who have served," Lucas said. "I look forward to joining the wonderful team at the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs and continuing to make Alabama one of the most military and veteran friendly states in the country."



Lucas comes to the department after an extensive, diverse career within the U.S. military, public and private administrations, and non-profit organizations. Spending the last 16 years serving in the Alabama Army National Guard, Lucas was deployed three times, including with Joint Task Force Guantanamo and the Central Command Public Affairs Office, and most recently served as the deputy chief of public affairs with the Alabama National Guard. Previously, she has worked in the Office of the Governor as the director of constituent services and military advisory and deputy chief of staff. Among other professional roles, she was also appointed by Governor Bob Riley to serve as external affairs officer for the Alabama Emergency Management Agency.

"We are thrilled to have Sandra join the ADVA team," said Commissioner Kent Davis. "Sandra has a wealth of public affairs and governmental experience and knowledge that will be valuable additions to our department and the implementation of our mission across the great state of Alabama."

Lucas is a graduate of the Defense Information School. She is community emergency response team certified, holds a level III certification in acquisition management, and has completed courses related to federal emergency management. Lucas also has additional experience as a paralegal within the Judge Advocate General's Corps.

ALABAMA'S CHALLENGE WRAPS UP 2022 TOWN HALLS

The Partners of Alabama's Challenge completed its statewide tour of events by hosting a town hall in the River Region in November and at Riverchase Galleria in Hoover in early December.

"I cannot say enough about our many partners and the collective goals we were able to accomplish this year," said Alabama's Challenge Co-Chair Kent Davis. "This year provided an adequate foundation for the continued work the veterans community can expect for many years to come. Alabama's Challenge remains as committed as ever to lowering the veteran suicide rate and we look forward to visiting more communities and continuing this important conversation in 2023."

Alabama's Challenge visited Dothan in February for its first town hall, which was followed by a resource and job fair the following month. The initiative followed with town halls and resource fairs in Mobile, Tuscaloosa, and Huntsville during the summer months. The final two locations, the River Region and Hoover, held town halls. Each of the final two stops included warm welcomes from the communities and featured Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed and Hoover Mayor Frank Brocato. The River Region and Hoover events both hosted around 100 attendees.



River Region Town Hall



Hoover Town Hall



River Region Town Hall



Hoover Town Hall

ADVA ANNOUNCES ALABAMA'S CHALLENGE 2023 TOWN HALL & RESOURCE FAIR LOCATIONS

After hosting six successful events in 2022, the department is thrilled to announce the Partners of Alabama's Challenge will continue its statewide tour of town halls and resource fairs in 2023.

Events are being planned for the Birmingham metropolitan area, Opelika/Auburn, Huntsville, Baldwin County, the Wiregrass, and Calhoun County. More details will be available in early 2023.

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

Dothan Resource Fair



Mobile Town Hall



Huntsville Town Hall



Tuscaloosa Town Hall

ADVA OFFERS SUPPORT TO OPERATION IRON RUCK

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs welcomed student veterans from the University of Alabama and Auburn University involved in Operation Iron Ruck in early November to deliver items requested for the annual ruck march. A news conference was held on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol to present the donations and promote the event.

Operation Iron Ruck is a four-day, 151-mile ruck march from Auburn to Tuscaloosa which took place November 23-26. As they do each year, participants from the student veteran associations carried 22-pound rucksacks that contain donated items that the students will deliver to charities that assist Alabama's veteran population.

At the news conference, Casey Rogers, External Affairs Director for Governor Kay Ivey, presented Alabama's Tiffany Laurie and Auburn's Clayton Buchanan with a proclamation proclaiming November 23 as Operation Iron Ruck Day.



HOLIDAYS AT THE STATE VETERANS HOMES

The holiday season is always an exciting time at the four Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs state veterans homes. We are incredibly grateful for the many donations and visitors from communities around the state during this time of celebration. Below are examples of the generosity seen at the state veterans homes in Alexander City, Huntsville, Bay Minette, and Pell City.



Blue Star Salute Foundation



St. Paul's Episcopal School



Montgomery Sunrise Rotary Club



Marine Corps League



Loxley Elementary School



Heritage Baptist Church

SERVING OUR FALLEN HEROES

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs thanks students from St. Paul's Episcopal School for visiting the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort prior to Veterans Day to place American flags at each headstone to honor our nation's heroes.

"I want to thank the students at St. Paul's for dedicating time to not only place flags at headstones of the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort, but also to learning more about Alabama veterans and apply their time and effort to honoring those who have passed away," said Commissioner Kent Davis. "ADVA has a wonderful partnership with St. Paul's and we genuinely appreciate all that the staff and students do for veterans in our great state."



WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

The department participated in the 14th Annual Alabama State House Ceremony for Wreaths Across America in December at the Alabama State Capitol. Commissioner Kent Davis provided remarks during the ceremony and our own Assistant Commissioner of Operations Jeff Newton closed the ceremony with the sounding of Taps.

Governor Kay Ivey was the keynote speaker and Adjutant General of Alabama Maj. Gen. Sheryl Gordon also gave remarks. The Alabama Wing Civil Air Patrol provided the presentation of colors and Sandra Robertson with the Gold Star Wives of America advanced the wreath. Rob Robinson provided a special music tribute.

"Alabamians remain steadfast in their support in the nation's military and when we lay a wreath, we are signaling that we will not forget their sacrifices," Governor Ivey said.



A LOOK BACK ...



Congratulations to Commissioner Kent Davis for receiving the Dr. Jack Hawkins Leadership Award during the Youth Leadership Development Program's Lunch with Heroes!

The event also honored four Medal of Honor recipients - U.S. Army Col. (Ret.) Roger H. C. Donjon, U.S. Army SFC (Ret.) Melvin Morris, U.S. Army Capt. (Ret.) Gary M. Rose, and U.S. Army SSG Robert James Miller.

Read their stories at cmohs.org.



Join us in congratulating Ira Lee Franklin for his honorary advancement to Chief Master Sergeant! Assistant Commissioner of Operations Jeff Newton presented Mr. Franklin with a certificate from the Command Sergeant Major Bennie G. Adkins Senior Enlisted Advisory Society in late October to celebrate the advancement.

Commissioner Kent Davis made a special trip to Tallassee in early December to wish Harry Jackson, Jr. a happy 97th birthday.

The two Navy veterans shared stories for hours before Commissioner Davis presented Jackson with a certificate of appreciation and challenge coin.



A special birthday celebration was held in December at the William F. Green State Veterans Home for William Hatter, who turned 100 years old!

The U.S. Army veteran served as a clerk typist during World War II and earned several decorations and citations during his time serving our great nation. In celebration, Hatter received a certificate of appreciation and challenge coin from Commissioner Davis.

ADVA was grateful to participate in the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce Veterans Day Ceremony in early November. Along with Commissioner Kent Davis serving as the key-note speaker, the department presented a certificate of appreciation for American Red Cross volunteer and veterans advocate Dr. Martha Poole Simmons. Kelly Hodges and Darrell Woods with the Red Cross accepted the certificate on behalf of Dr. Simmons.

