



THE ALABAMA VETERAN

SPRING 2023 ISSUE



ADVA

NEWSLETTER

**NEWSLETTER
HIGHLIGHTS**

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ADVA

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving
America's Finest"*

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

I have the greatest job in the world. For the last four years, it has been an honor to serve Alabama's veterans as commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. And while we accomplished great tasks during my first term, I am thrilled and thankful to the State Board of Veterans Affairs for a second term, which began in February.

While we are moving full sails forward, I have taken some time to reflect on the last four years. My focus has centered around building external relationships and partnerships, improving business and personnel efficiency within the department, and taking the lead on enhancing veterans well-being issues in Alabama.

During my first term, we established the Office of Outreach and Engagement, which expanded the department's community engagement and public outreach. We also spearheaded the effort to create Alabama's Challenge, which addresses the state's high veteran suicide rate. In 2022, we held six veterans well-being town halls and will continue to do so this year.

However, the last four years also came with challenges. The most significant challenge was combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, especially within our state veterans homes. With the lives of our nation's heroes at risk, we made innovative decisions and implemented strategies to ensure their safety. All four state veterans homes' HVAC units had needlepoint bi-polar ionization systems installed, which can destroy 99% of airborne pathogens. Additional portable UV lighting systems were also purchased to sanitize surfaces in the homes, and in 2020 the homes were among the first facilities in the entire state to begin vaccinations and monoclonal antibody treatments for COVID patients. Each state veterans home then took the required steps to establish the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program, which allowed facilities to receive, store, and administer vaccinations directly to residents and staff members without relying on outside sources.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we still put an emphasis on growing partnerships in communities. During my first term, we opened 12 new veterans service offices, expanding our total to 63 offices statewide.

With my second term already underway, we are already knee deep in several major infrastructure projects. We are currently expanding the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort and held a groundbreaking in February. We are also finalizing a new web-based application system for the Alabama GI Dependent Scholarship program, which will roll out soon. This will serve approximately 16,000 students in the state and will replace an outdated, decades-old paper application process. The department is also thrilled with the continued progress of the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home, which is being built in Enterprise and expected to open in 2024.

I cannot emphasize how much I look forward to continuing to serve the heroes who call the great state of Alabama home. I am blessed to work with an exceptional staff of over 1,000 state employees and contract employees in 71 of our facilities around Alabama—and a growing list of external partners—who work diligently to assist those veterans.

CONGRATULATIONS!

ADVA

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The department honored and said farewell to Montgomery County Veterans Service Officer Charles McCray in February. To celebrate his career, Commissioner Kent Davis presented McCray with a 10-year service pin and retirement plaque.

“Charles is a very compassionate service officer,” said District III Manager Lynda Jenkins. “He is the type that will look under every rock before he says ‘no,’ meaning that Charles will research thoroughly before giving you an answer. That’s what makes him a good service officer and advocate for our veterans. The District III team will miss him and we wish him and his family the very best.”



The department celebrated two additional honors during the first quarter. Caretaker Ben Carey received a 5-year service pin in February from Commissioner Kent Davis, Assistant Commissioner of Operations Jeff Newton, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Matthew T. Quinn, who was visiting the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort.

Floyd E. 'Tut' Fann State Veterans Home Director Charlotte Robinson was honored during January’s State Board of Veterans Affairs meeting, receiving her 20-year service pin from Commissioner Davis and State Veterans Home Executive Director Kim Justice.



GROUNDBREAKING

BREAKING GROUND ON PHASE II OF STATE VETERANS CEMETERY

ADVA and the Baldwin County community celebrated the Phase II expansion of the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort on Feb. 11 during a groundbreaking ceremony.

The expansion is funded by a \$5 million grant through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. This is the first of nine planned cemetery expansions that will serve Alabama veterans for a total of 100 years.

“We were thrilled to celebrate this superb moment for Alabama’s veterans,” ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis said. “We always say our department serves this great state’s veterans from the moment they take off their uniform for the final time through eternity. This project is another example of Alabama’s dedication to veterans and we look forward to continuing that promise.”

The expansion will add 2,762 pre-placed vault sites (casket sites), 960 columbarium niches (above-ground urn sites), and a memorial wall that will include 100 sites, as well as updates to roadways, storm drainage, irrigation, and other expansion infrastructure. Expansion completion will be in early 2024.



STATE VETERANS HOMES RECEIVE NUMEROUS AWARDS FOR SERVICE

Staffs at the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home and Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home were recently celebrated after each home received a deficiency-free survey on recent inspections from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. These surveys, which are completed annually, produced zero findings at the Bill Nichols home and the Col. Robert L. Howard home domiciliary, which is a true testament to the work of each staff.

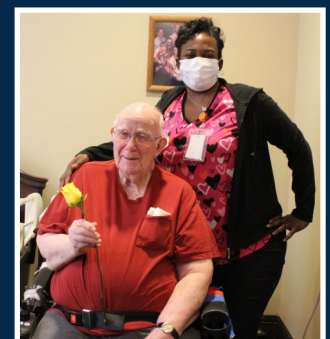
“Federal VA inspections are conducted at a minimum of once a year,” said Kim Justice, Executive Director of the State Veterans Homes Program. “It is an extensive review process that measures compliance with hundreds of criteria through interviews, chart reviews, observations and inspections. Having a VA inspection with no findings is a rarity and the staff of Bill Nichols State Veterans Home and Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home are to be commended on this achievement.”

All four state veterans homes were recently celebrated for receiving numerous accolades from Pinnacle Quality Insight for customer service. Every year, Pinnacle Quality Insight awards clients who have excelled at providing a superior customer experience for their residents. Receiving a Customer Experience Award is no small feat. Out of the 2,700 care providers Pinnacle has and the 150,000 customer interviews it conducts each year, only those that are the 85th percentile or higher receive this award.

Awards for the state veterans homes included overall customer experience, overall satisfaction, response to problems, safety and security, dining service, cleanliness, quality of food, dignity and respect, and communication from facility.



The staff at Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home celebrated a milestone in mid-March! Mr. Jim Pendergrass was the 1,000th veteran admitted to the state-of-the-art facility.



On Valentine's Day, AARP's Wish of a Lifetime's Cupid Crew donated 270 roses to veterans at the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home.



Veterans at the William F. Green State Veterans Home had fun celebrating St. Patrick's Day!

AROUND THE STATE

PARTNERS IN ACTION

On February 22, Veterans Well-Being Program Manager Sissy Louise Moore (front center) joined the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services and Southeast Alabama Works (Workforce Development Region 6) in Troy for its third quarterly Veteran and Military Resource Meet-Up. The mission of the group is to develop collaborative partnerships and share resources with a common purpose of improving conditions and outcomes for service members, veterans, and their families.



Attendees were able to network and learn about new initiatives going on in their region. One initiative is the new grant COLSA Corporation awarded in response to the Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 to prevent veteran suicide. Bruce Douglas, program manager for COLSA, spoke about the various services that will be provided to veterans through their new outreach program. The meeting also included updates from ADVA and ADRS, who shared new information regarding traumatic brain injuries services in an effort to help Alabamians with TBI.



Assistant Commissioner of Outreach and Engagement Sandra Lucas represented Alabama veterans at the Eastern Region Community Veterans Engagement Board (CVEB) Inaugural Convening in February. The CVEB model enables veterans, service members, military families, veteran advocates, community service providers, and stakeholders to have a collective voice in identifying their community goals and work to resolve gaps in service at the local level to improve service delivery for veterans, military families, caregivers, and survivors.



Alabama's Challenge took a step forward with a visit in February from Ben Barrowman (back right) and Emily Russell (back left) with SAMHSA's SMVF TA Center. The meeting allowed Alabama's Challenge to collaborate on what has been completed since 2020 and how it will move forward in 2023 and beyond.

Commissioner Kent Davis, Assistant Commissioner of Outreach and Engagement Sandra Lucas and Veterans Well-Being Program Manager Sissy Louis Moore joined the South Alabama Veterans Council in February to tour the U.S. Coast Guard Aviation Training Center (ATC) in Mobile. The ATC Mobile evaluation center is responsible for ensuring that Coast Guard aviation forces are prepared to complete all mission requirements successfully.



WORKING TOGETHER

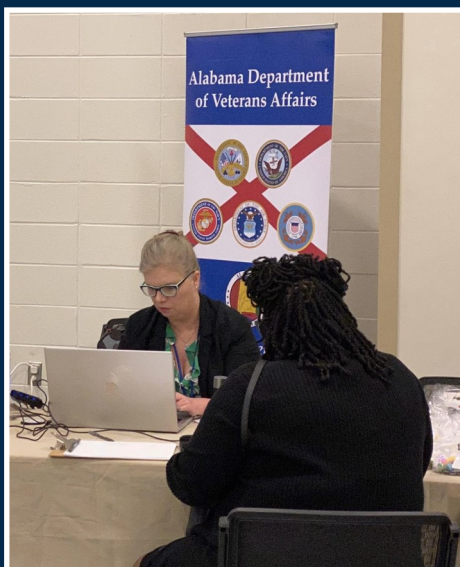
Veterans service officers around the state participated in 30 resource workshops at Alabama's community colleges in January and February. The events were established by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) with the goal of engaging military active-duty, guardsmen, reservists, veterans and their dependents on the local services and programs available to them through Alabama's community colleges.

Pictured below: Lauren Brafford (left), Kayla Kyle, Shenea Wallace, Angela Hunter (middle), and Chris Phillips (right).



Assistant Commissioner of Operations Jeff Newton joined VA Chief of Staff Tanya Bradsher, Birmingham VA Executive Director Dr. Oladipo Kukoyi and the community on March 16 in celebration of the Birmingham VA's 70th Anniversary!

On March 16, 1953, the Birmingham VA Health Care System (BVAHCS) opened its doors to Veterans in the historic southside district of Birmingham, Alabama. Today, the medical center is a level 1A acute tertiary medical and surgical care center with 10 community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). It employs more than 3,000 staff members that serve over 71,000 veterans in Alabama.



The department partnered with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Outreach, Transition and Economic Development office in mid-March for the 2023 Alabama Economic Development Initiative. The two-day event was held at Cramton Bowl Multiplex in Montgomery and provided resources, benefits, and employment opportunities for veterans, transitioning service members, spouses, family members and caregivers. ADVA veterans service officers were also available to assist with filing claims for benefits, as well as providing information about the PACT Act.



'PROUDLY SERVING AMERICA'S FINEST'

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) proudly serves more than 400,000 Veterans in Alabama. As a state department, the ADVA frequently partners with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, but the ADVA is a separate and distinct organization.

The ADVA's mission is to promote awareness, assist eligible veterans, their families, and survivors to receive from the state and federal government any and all benefits to which they may be entitled under existing or future laws to be enacted.

The ADVA offers four major veterans services: State Veterans Homes, Veterans Service Offices, the Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program, and the State Veterans Cemetery.

STATE VETERANS HOMES

Alabama is extending a special kind of care to veterans through a partnership with the federal government and private industry by proudly operating four state-of-the-art veterans homes located within the state. The Bill Nichols State Veterans Home in Alexander City has been "home" to thousands of veterans since its opening in November 1989. In July 1995, Alabama opened two more homes to veterans, the Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home in Huntsville and the William F. Green State Veterans Home in Bay Minette. In November 2012, the Colonel Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home opened in Pell City.

Construction is underway for the Command Sgt. Major Bennie Adkins State Veterans Home in Enterprise. It is expected to be completed in 2024. ADVA will announce when it begins accepting applications for admission and employment in 2024.

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICES

The ADVA has Veterans Service Offices in 61 of Alabama's 67 counties. These offices provide veterans with free services, including hands-on assistance in submitting applications for VA compensation and pension claims, and assisting with all other state and federal veterans benefits and services.

ALABAMA G.I. DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

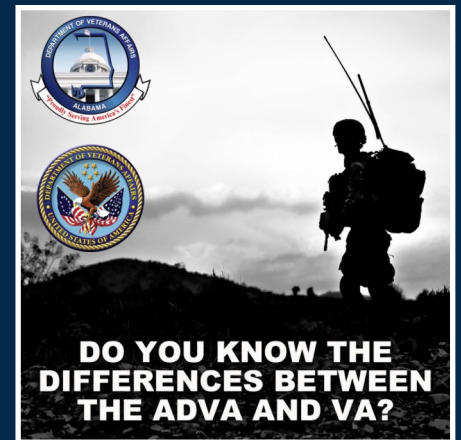
The Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program provides academic assistance for dependents of eligible disabled veterans toward tuition, textbooks, and institutional fees. The scholarship can be applied to qualifying institutions of higher learning in the state of Alabama. There are approximately 16,000 students enrolled in the program.

ALABAMA STATE VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY AT SPANISH FORT

The Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort provides burials for veterans and spouses. It is a 106-acre cemetery and expected to be active for 100 years. It features over 4,000 preplaced vaults and 700 columbarium niches for cremains.

VETS FOR HOPE

VetsForHope.com is the landing page for Alabama's Challenge for Preventing Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families. On *VetsForHope.com*, veterans and their loved ones will find a directory of service providers, location of crisis centers, information on red flags and warning signs, and more. Veterans in crisis should contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 988.



For more information, visit the ADVA website at va.alabama.gov.