



THE ALABAMA VETERAN

SUMMER 2023 ISSUE



ADVA

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ADVA

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving
America's Finest"*

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

If you've served in the military, you know the importance of resilience, but can you still confidently say you're truly living a resilient lifestyle?

In May, as we participated in Mental Health Awareness Month—and Military Appreciation Month—an undertone of discussing resilience became more prominent within the ADVA. As you may know, resilience is a response. It's the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. It's the ability of an object or a person to spring back into shape. It's the ability to move forward with confidence. Resilience helps you “bounce back” from difficult situations—and become stronger in doing so.

Unfortunately, adversity doesn't discriminate and life includes experiencing varying levels of hardship. This can mean a loss of identity—like after a divorce, being laid off from a job, or returning from deployment. There can be traumatic experiences, which could be physical, emotional, or sexual, that may cause challenges. Loss of cognitive abilities, financial setbacks, career disappointments, and so on can also all lead to difficulties.

Living in a sports-crazed state like Alabama, it's easy to fall back on sports metaphors. One of the best explanations of resilience came in the 2006 film *Rocky Balboa* when Rocky is confronted by his son, Rocky Balboa Jr., about fighting in an exhibition against a young heavyweight champion. During the heated exchange, Rocky is blamed by his son for life's frustrations and challenges. Rocky's reply is heartfelt, honest, and the perfect description of resilience and why it's important:

“Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody, is going to hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard you hit, it's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward; how much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done. Now if you know what you're worth, go out and get what you're worth. But you've got to be willing to take the hits and not point fingers saying you aren't where you want to be because of him or her or anybody. Cowards do that, and that ain't you. You're better than that!”

Well said, Rock! We should all strive for more and establishing and maintaining resilience is a great way to make sure when we get knocked down that we get back up.

There are numerous traits that resilient people share. They know their boundaries and understand that there is a separation between who they are at their core and the cause of their temporary suffering. They keep good company, surrounding themselves with other resilient people. They cultivate self-awareness, which allows them to get in touch with their needs. Resilient people practice acceptance and understand that they don't have all the answers.

Being resilient isn't always easy, but with the right mentality and applying the unique skills and traits that fit you, you can overcome any challenge, tragedy, or traumatic experience. No crisis is insurmountable despite how it feels in the moment. Making connections, taking care of yourself, and maintaining a hopeful outlook can make all the difference. Remember that life happens. How you respond is up to you.

ADVA

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ADVA CREATES NEW POSITION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE & TRAINING

Commissioner Kent Davis has appointed Lynda Jenkins to serve as the department's director of quality assurance and training. This new position focuses on enhancing consistency of veteran support department wide.

Jenkins will be responsible for assessing, planning, and coordinating training sessions for the department and will be required to effectuate policy, planning, and guidance and monitor implementation of changes in state or federal VA programs. She will consult with the executive staff regarding all training needs of ADVA, particularly veterans service officers and appeals and review officers, and on all relevant training issues, preparation, and plans of action when additional guidance is needed.



"It has been a pleasure to learn and grow in this department. I want to thank the ADVA leadership for recognizing my commitment and appointing me to this new position," Jenkins said. "I look forward to continuing to work together."

Jenkins joined the ADVA in 2007 after retiring as a Sgt. 1st Class in the U.S. Army. She has worked her way up the ranks with the department, first serving as an assistant veterans service officer for Mobile County before being promoted to the county's veterans service officer in 2008. In 2013, she was promoted to District III manager. Jenkins assumed her new role at headquarters on May 1.

Hello and welcome to the first installment of Quality Corner! If you are unaware, we are transitioning and expanding the Training Office to the newly formed Quality Assurance and Training office.

In addition to providing initial training to new staff members and follow up support, we will be visiting ADVA offices across the state. We have an outstanding team of employees; however, our function is to ensure consistency among our offices. Our goal is to strengthen the notion of getting the same high-quality services and practices regardless of which office a client visits. This will include identifying areas of concern and providing training as needed, as well as best practices that can be shared statewide, and determining what type/level of professional development is needed for all employees.

Additionally, we will continue working with VA offices, our district managers, and our appeals division at the Montgomery Regional Office to ensure all regulation updates, manual changes, and form updates are pushed out immediately.

As we move forward, our job is to help all of our team to be the best they can be. Now and always, we welcome suggestions and ideas for improving our quality!

-Lynda Jenkins, Director of Quality Assurance & Training 3

TRAINING CONFERENCE

2023 ADVA TRAINING CONFERENCE



ADVA held a department-wide training conference at Lake Guntersville State Park in April to collectively discuss and collaborate on how to best continue serving Alabama's 400,000 veterans. During the two-day conference, headquarters staff provided updates on the state veterans home program, G.I. dependent scholarship program, outreach and engagement, and veteran- and military-related state legislation. Employees also received updates from the VA Regional Office and Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, as well as briefings from the Milwaukee VA Pension Management Center, VA Fiduciary Program, a demonstration from VetPro, and an update on the PACT Act. One of the many highlights of training was a message from guest speaker U.S. Army (Ret.) Capt. Mike Rose, a Vietnam veteran and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient.



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

The 2023 ADVA Training Conference would not have been possible without our many sponsors. We want to thank the following groups for their support:

Mr. Tom Schwarz
Blue Star Salute Foundation
Still Serving Veterans
AARP—Alabama
American Legion, Post 911

MG (Ret.) David Burford
ISS UXO and Consulting
Krulak Marine Alliance of Alabama
Marshall County Tourism
HYCO Alabama

Smith and Gaston Funeral Service
Victory Addition Recovery Center
VFW, Post 668
Humana



2022 ADVA EMPLOYEE AWARDS



COMMISSIONER'S EXCELLENCE AWARD — MICHELLE SANDERS

Ms. Sanders has shown a high degree of proficiency toward performing her duties as an assistant veteran service officer. She maintained a self-starting approach to meet job expectations and endeavored to anticipate required and implied tasks to be accomplished. During 2022, Ms. Sanders assisted over 884 veterans in the office and communicated with over 394 veterans at 12 veteran outreach events throughout the year. In addition to being an AVSO, Ms. Sanders is the youngest and first female board member of the Madison County Military Heritage Commission Hall of Heroes.



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD — BRANDON MILLER

Mr. Miller provided distinguished service to the department through his unrelentless desire to promote awareness of the vital veterans services offered by our department. Specifically, his outstanding work in coordinating and promoting the Alabama's Challenge for Preventing Suicide program at numerous town hall events throughout the state served to create an impactful, long-term outcome as we continue fighting a stigma with mental illness in Alabama. He represented ADVA in an outstanding manner through numerous media events and maximized department exposure to Alabama veterans through various social media outlets.



VETERANS ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR — GENE MOORE

Mr. Moore's duty performance throughout 2022 has been noted by supervisors, peers, and co-workers as being nothing but outstanding. As the veteran service officer for Escambia and Monroe counties, he consistently demonstrated a sincere and dedicated concern for the welfare of the veterans and their families. Mr. Moore pursued the best outcome for all situations and truly exemplified the core values and image of our department.



SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR — ALEXIS MCKEE

Mrs. McKee epitomized the title of support professional and is an extremely positive reflection for the ADVA. She provided outstanding service to the employees of District 3, the district manager, as well as the veterans and their dependents visiting the Mobile County office. She was very involved with the community, such as managing the annual community Christmas drive, the State Combined Campaign, and the 8th annual Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System "person-centered care walk-a-thon."

AROUND THE STATE

ALABAMA'S CHALLENGE BEGINS 2023 TOWN HALL CAMPAIGN

The Partners of Alabama's Challenge joined the City of Anniston for its first veterans well-being town hall and resource fair of 2023. The two-part event took place on April 26 and welcomed more than 125 veterans and community members to the Anniston City Meeting Center to learn more about federal, state, and local resources.

The town hall featured information about the 988 crisis line, VA programs and healthcare, gun safety, QPR training and more. In partnership with the Alabama Department of Labor and Anniston Career Center, the resource and job fair highlighted more than 50 vendors focused on veteran-related programs, mental health resources, or employment opportunities.

Alabama's Challenge events are scheduled for Enterprise on June 9 and Auburn on August 23.

You can learn more about Alabama's Challenge and veterans well-being programs by visiting vetsforhope.com.

Anniston Mayor Jack Draper (left) and City Manager Steven Folks



ADVA LAUNCHES NEW WELL-BEING CAMPAIGN

ADVA launched a new well-being campaign in May called "Service Never Stops" to recognize that despite the bravery and heroism provided when serving this great nation the mission continues in serving each other in the community even when not in uniform.

Physical and mental illness, along with substance abuse, continue to be a war many veterans face after their military service. Connectedness, communication, and seeking assistance are steps everyone can take to increase the well-being of Alabama's 400,000 veterans.

The campaign launched with a t-shirt giveaway in partnership with the Montgomery Biscuits on its Military Appreciation Night, presented by Alabama Power. ADVA also organized a resource fair at the game that featured 10 local veteran-friendly resources.



WORKING TOGETHER, SERVING ONE ANOTHER

ADVA has signed two Memorandums of Understanding this year, officially partnering with the Emory Healthcare Veterans Program and the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation.

Emory Healthcare (EHVP) provides a new, revolutionary resource to post-9/11 veterans and service members, treating conditions such as PTSD, TBI, military sexual trauma, anxiety, and depression related to military service. Treatment is free and confidential for eligible post-9/11 veterans and service members living anywhere in the United States, regardless of discharge status, deployment history, or length of service. The traditional outpatient treatment or the two-week Intensive Outpatient Program is offered in person at Emory or via telehealth. Learn more by visiting emoryhealthcare.org/veterans.

The goal of the Reeve Foundation Military and Veterans Program is to foster and perpetuate a long-standing culture of collaboration among service organizations providing resources to Veterans, their families, and allies across the United States. Working with ADVA will elevate the voices and needs of its community to achieve greater representation, independence, and quality of life for service members, veterans and family members in Alabama and adjacent areas. Learn more about the Reeve Foundation Military and Veterans Program by visiting christopherreeve.org.

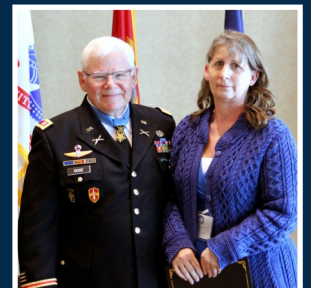


CONGRATULATIONS!

Commissioner Kent Davis and U.S. Army (Ret.) Capt. Mike Rose acknowledged numerous ADVA employees for their loyal and dedicated service to the department with service pins for milestone anniversaries and other recognitions. We want to thank each of these exceptional individuals for their commitment, devotion, and dependability in serving Alabama's 400,000 veterans.



Virginia Barnett—35 years



Cindy Carter—Certificate of Appreciation



Chris Orr—5 years



Rhonda Jackson—10 years



Joe Buschell—15 years



Rogers Wilson—15 years

'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 five major veterans services: State Veterans Homes, Veterans Service Offices, the Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program, the State Veterans Cemetery, and well-being programs such as Vets For Hope.

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 G. 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. ADVA is currently completing the first of nine planned expansions, which will add 2,762 pre-placed vaults, 960 columbarium niches, and a memorial wall that includes 100 sites.

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 (Press 1).

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

