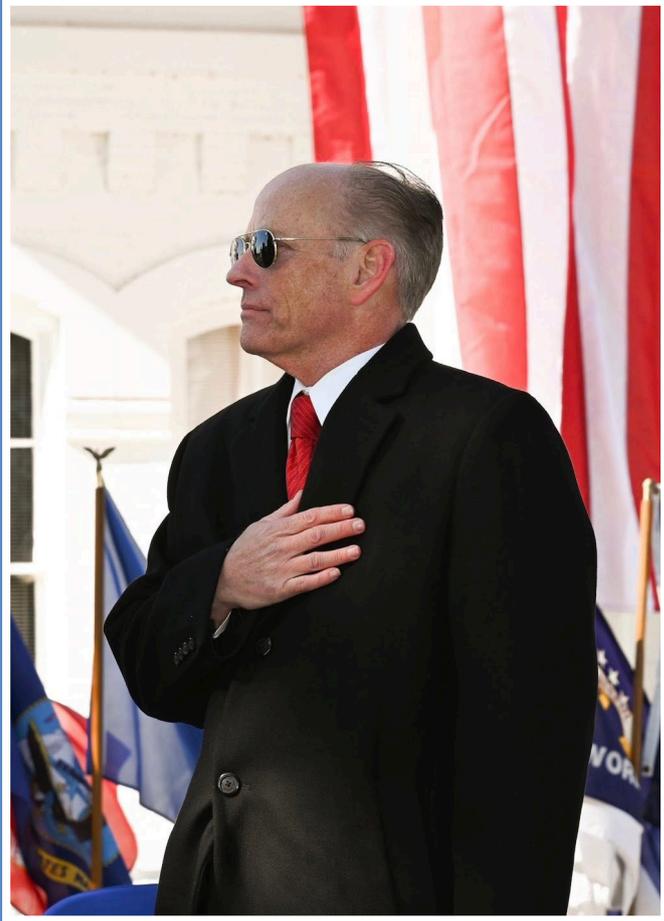


NOVEMBER

Newsletter

A Reflection on Veterans Day



We often say that every day is Veterans Day at the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, but November 11 is truly a powerful reminder of the courage, sacrifice, and quiet strength of the men and women who stood ready to defend our nation. It is a day when Alabama pauses to say, with one voice, thank you – for your service, your resilience, and the freedoms you’ve protected for generations.

In Alabama, our commitment to veterans cannot – and will not – be confined to a single day. That belief is woven into the identity of our state and the daily work of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. Our mission is more than a responsibility; it is a calling. We exist to serve those who served, and we approach that mission with urgency, purpose, and profound respect for what our veterans have given. Whether it’s

ensuring a veteran receives the benefits they earned, providing compassionate care in our state veterans homes, guiding a family through moments of uncertainty, or reaching out to prevent veteran suicide, our work is driven by a simple truth: Alabama’s veterans deserve nothing less than our very best—every single day.

Veterans are the backbone of our communities. Their leadership strengthens our workforce, their character shapes our neighborhoods, and their continued service—long after the uniform is retired—makes Alabama a better place to live. And because they never stopped serving, neither will we.

On Veterans Day, and on all the days that follow, Alabama stands proudly beside its veterans. Our mission is steadfast. Our gratitude is sincere. And our commitment is unwavering.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Jeff Newton".

Commissioner, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs

IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

We are committed to connecting Alabama Veterans with VSOs, ADVA staff, and Commissioner Newton to ensure they receive the benefits they have rightfully earned.



District 1 - NACC Resource Fair in Rainsville

Jackson County VSO Kevin Holcomb had a public display and provided assistance at the Northeast Alabama Community College Resource Fair on October 16 in Rainsville.



District 2 - Tunnel to Towers Groundbreaking Ceremony

In Birmingham, Commissioner Newton was a part of the groundbreaking of a new Veterans Village – a community that will provide housing and support for homeless veterans working to rebuild their lives.



District 3 - Alabama Veterans Affairs Association Conference

Commissioner Newton, Director Kayla Kyle and Rachel Griffith attended the AVAA Conference in October. Director Kyle gave a presentation about the AL GI Dependent Scholarship Program.



District 4 - Expansion of the Tallapoosa County Office Space

The Tallapoosa County VSO Office in the Courthouse has expanded for VSO David Davis and VSO Joy Lowery to have their own office spaces to best serve the community!

Veterans Day in Alabama



Veterans Week Proclamation

Governor Ivey proclaimed November 5-11 as Veterans Week. She encouraged all Alabamians to express their gratitude to those who served during this time as well as to participate in local celebrations and reaffirm our collective promise to serve those who have served.

Veterans Appreciation Month Proclamation

Governor Ivey also declared November as Veterans Appreciation Month - continuing Alabama's commitment in honoring the dedicated men and women who have served our nation.

Veterans Day Began in Alabama: The Father of Veterans Day, WWII Veteran Raymond Weeks

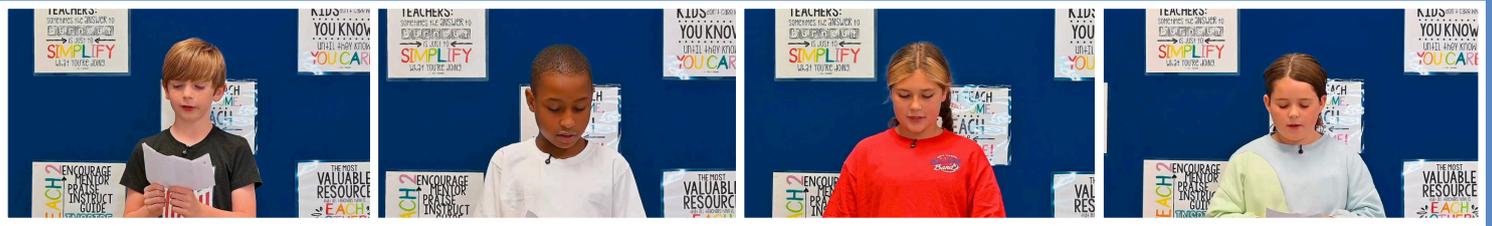
In 1947, Birmingham WWII Veteran Raymond Weeks organized a parade and celebration on November 11 (then called Armistice Day) to honor all U.S. veterans, not just those from World War I. He later lobbied national leaders, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower, to change Armistice Day into a broader event called "Veterans Day" to honor veterans of all wars. As a result, in 1954, legislation was officially passed, renaming the holiday to Veterans Day. That first celebration in Birmingham is widely regarded as the origin of the modern Veterans Day.



He changed a holiday

President Reagan shakes hands with Raymond Weeks of Birmingham, Ala., yesterday after presenting him with the Presidential Citizens Medal at the White House. Weeks, a past state American Legion commander, was instrumental in having the celebration of Armistice Day, Nov. 11, commemorating the end of World War I, changed to Veterans Day, a holiday honoring American veterans of all wars. He first changed the name in Birmingham in 1947 and seven years later Congress made the change nationwide.

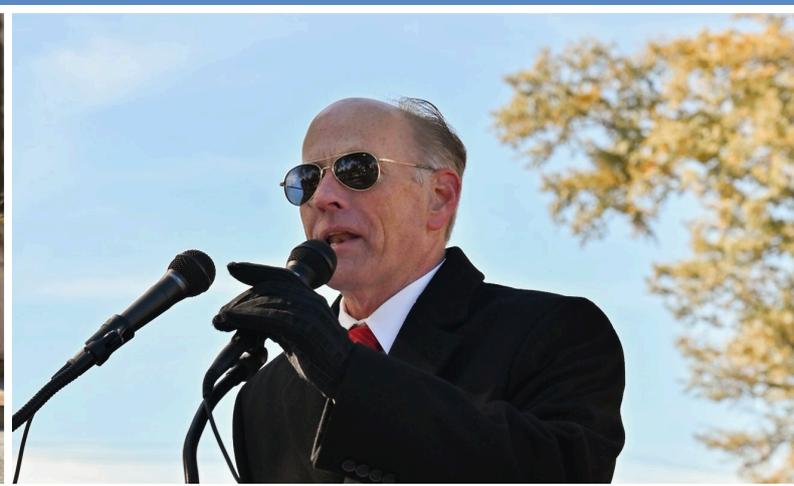
This photo is from lifeleadersinstitute.org



Letters to Local Heroes - A Veterans Day Tribute

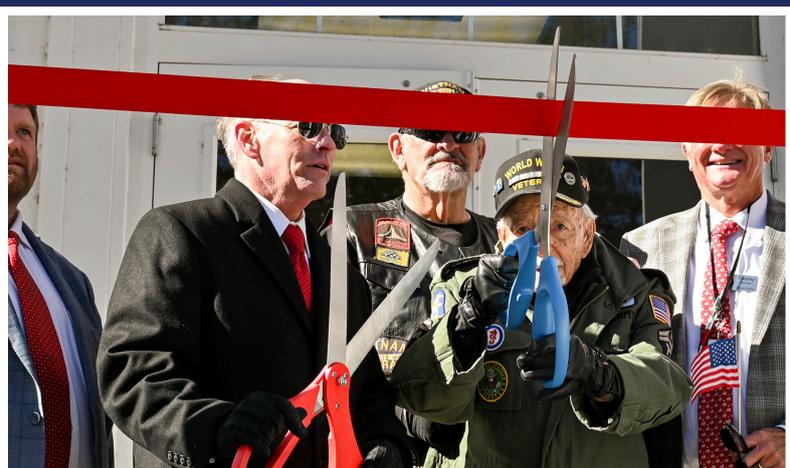
In honor of Veterans Day, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs partnered with Autauga County Schools (ACS) to create a heartfelt video tribute titled "Letters to Local Heroes." This video tribute is a collection of students reading letters they wrote to local veterans. The ADVA appreciates the efforts of ACS leadership and students for their support and expressions of gratitude for our Alabama heroes.

To view the video, visit www.youtube.com/@alvetaffairs



Colbert County Veterans Day Ceremony & Veteran Service Office Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Commissioner Newton served as the Grand Marshal for the Colbert County Veterans Day Parade and the keynote speaker for the post-parade ceremony. The ADVA also opened a new Veterans Service Office in Tuscumbia with a ribbon-cutting to celebrate expanded access to benefits for Colbert County veterans and their families. The new office supports ADVA's mission to ensure Alabama's 400,000 veterans receive the benefits they deserve.



Veterans Day at Our State Veterans Homes

Each of our homes had their own Veterans Day Programs as well - bringing our residents, their families, and the surrounding communities together to honor those who served.



Our Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home had visits from Congressman Dale Strong and the local Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. Chapter to celebrate Veterans Day.



Our Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home had a packed house for their celebration on Veterans Day.



Several of our veteran residents from the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home rode in style for the Montgomery Veterans Day Parade! The celebration at the Bill Nichols Home was attended by many, including City Council Members Bobby Tapley, Mike Lucas, and Bill Young as well as Alexander City Mayor Mike Densmore.

Veterans Day at Our State Veterans Homes



Veteran and VSO District III Manager Rhonda Jackson photographed with William F. Green SVH Director Charlie Allen

Some of the girls from Girl Scouts Troop 3130 at our William F. Green State Veterans Home Veterans Day Celebration

Our William F. Green State Veterans Home Veterans Day Celebration was also widely attended by the community. Girl Scouts Troop 3130, Rob Hickman with Congressman Barry Moore's office, State Rep. Rhett Marques of Dist 91, State Rep. Donna Givens of Dist 64, State Rep. Jennifer Fidler of Dist 94, Baldwin County Commissioner Jeb Ball of Dist 1, Baldwin County Commissioner Skip Gruber of Dist 4, and the Bay Minette Mayor Josh Brown were all in attendance on Veterans Day alongside our wonderful staff, veteran residents, and their families.



In addition to the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home Veterans Day Celebration that took place at Enterprise Health and Rehabilitation, Veteran residents were also invited to attend two local school celebrations earlier in the week. The Veteran residents who visited the schools sincerely enjoyed watching the children express their appreciation for veterans!



We are thankful for ADVA Cemetery Director Joe Buschell and all the work he is doing for veterans and their families in his community.

Ahead of Veterans Day during the week of November 5, Director Buschell welcomed students from St. Paul's Episcopal School to the cemetery to place flags at each headstone. Director Buschell and a local Boy Scout Troop also made a float and participated in the Mobile Veterans Day Parade.



North Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery Progress!

Director Buschell has also been busy in the efforts securing land for the second State Veterans Memorial Cemetery up in North Alabama alongside Commissioner Newton and other ADVA team members. We hope to have a more formal update soon.

At the end of October, Joe Buschell also met with the Westminster Retirement Group Veterans Community to give a presentation on the State Veterans Memorial Cemetery and the free burial benefits the ADVA provides to Alabama's 400,000 veterans.



We are proud to share the 2025 Recipients of the Lt. Col. Robert M. Horton Jr. Memorial Service Award and the Meritorious Service to Veterans Award

On November 5, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) recognized Major General (Ret.) Paulette Risher and Tammy Doerer for their exceptional dedication and lasting contributions to Alabama's veterans, service members, and their families.



The Lt. Col. Robert M. Horton Jr. Memorial Service Award annually honors an Alabama-based individual or civilian organization that has made a lasting impact on service members, veterans and their families over a period of many years. General Risher has dedicated her life to service — first through nearly 34 years of active and reserve duty in the U.S. Army, and later through her work supporting veterans across Alabama. After retiring from the military in 2006, she joined the defense industry before serving as President/CEO of Still Serving Veterans (SSV), a Huntsville-based nonprofit helping veterans and their families with employment, benefits and crisis support.

Today, General Risher works through her sole-practitioner consulting practice, Learning for the Journey, LLC, which she established in 2009. She is truly committed to helping individuals, groups, organizations, and businesses create human thriving and professional impact. One of General Risher's most notable initiative is Alabama's Challenge to Prevent Veteran Suicide, which she co-chairs with ADVA Deputy Commissioner Sandra Lucas. What began as a legislative taskforce has grown into a nationally recognized model now advising other states. General Risher's leadership, compassion and commitment reflect the true spirit of the Lt. Col. Robert M. Horton Jr. Memorial Service Award.



The Meritorious Service to Veterans Award, is given annually to recognize an Alabama-based civilian or civilian-based organization for meritorious volunteer service, initiation of a valuable project, or contributions to Alabama veterans. This year's recipient, Ms. Doerer, accepted the award saying she shares the award on behalf of the City of Enterprise who allows her the opportunity to serve.

A military spouse whose husband served 30 years in the U.S. Army and continues as an Army civilian, Ms. Doerer's commitment to supporting the military community is deeply personal. Through her role as Director of Tourism with the City of Enterprise, she partners with local Veteran Service Organizations, Fort Rucker, volunteers, and businesses to connect service members and veterans with essential resources while fostering strong bonds between the military and the broader community. Ms. Doerer has been an incredible partner to the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs — from opening the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home last year to hosting the ADVA Training Conference earlier this year.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Director Hiliary Hardwick, Col. Robert L. Howard Veterans Home

The Col. Robert L. Howard Veterans Home won the 2025 Chamber Award for Large Business at the Pell City Chamber of Commerce Banquet. We are proud of Director Hiliary Hardwick, HMR Administrator Matt Goolsby, and the HMR staff at the home for receiving this award.



ADVA Partner Highlight *Emory Healthcare*

Read "Permission to Heal: An Army Colonel's Journey to Recovery," an article from the Emory Veterans Healthcare Program about Alabama Army National Guard Colonel (Ret.) Sean Fisher's journey with Emory. <https://www.emoryhealthcare.org/stories/veterans-health/permission-to-heal-army-colonels-journey-to-recovery>



Pre-Register Today at the State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort

Pre-registration is free and allows a veteran and their spouse to establish, in advance, their eligibility for burial at the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort.

Eligibility for interment in the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort follows National Cemetery Administration eligibility requirements. National Guard and Reserve service members, as well as veteran spouses and dependent children who meet certain criteria, may be eligible.

VISIT [VA.ALABAMA.GOV/VETERANS-MEMORIAL-CEMETERY](https://va.alabama.gov/veterans-memorial-cemetery) TODAY



Holiday Closures for ADVA Offices

State offices will be closed on November 27 and November 28, December 25 and December 26, and January 1 for the holidays.



Did You Know...2-1-1

Dialing 2-1-1 connects you to a trained operator 24/7 that has access to a comprehensive database with a multitude of services in your community.

You can text for help too. Text your zip code or 211KNOW to 898-211 and message one of our live 2-1-1 specialists for help.

They also have a website! You can visit 211connectalabama.org to search their database of community resources to find ones suitable for your needs.



United Ways of Alabama

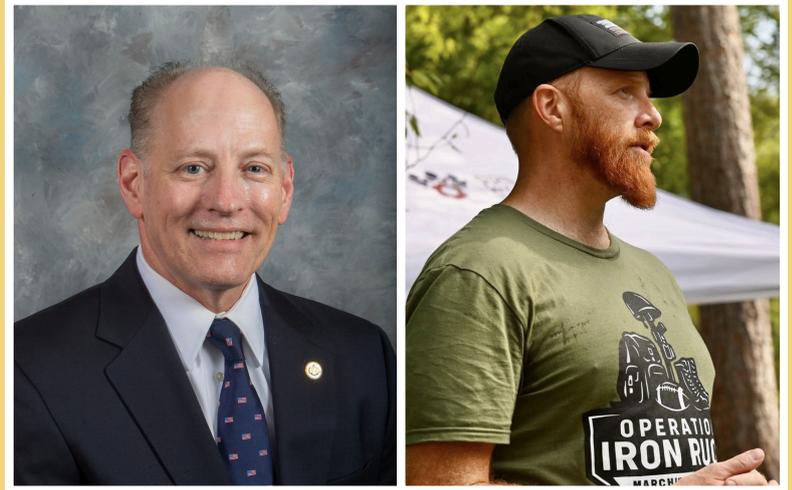
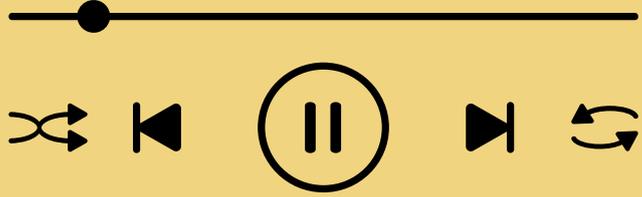
Welcome to the Team – Permanently!

Preston Settle, Veterans Service Officer for Lauderdale County, has demonstrated dedication, professionalism, and a strong commitment to his role and to our organization's values. We are proud to have him as a permanent member of the team and look forward to his continued growth and contributions.



Photographed from left to right: District Manager Tim Edgil, VSO Preston Settle, and VSO Peggy Williams.

FIG brewing
connections.
COFFEE WITH THE COMMISSIONER



Coffee with the Commissioner Episode 3, With Operation Iron Ruck Coordinator Drew Lufkin

Join us on YouTube (youtube.com/@alvetaffairs) for the third episode! Commissioner Newton and Operation Iron Ruck Coordinator Drew Lufkin discussed Drew's story, Operation Iron Ruck, and Veterans Day. This is an episode you won't want to miss. If you also haven't heard them already - go ahead and give Episode 1 and Episode 2 a listen!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit our Events Calendar at va.alabama.gov/events for more info.

November 21 Veteran Suicide Prevention Training

JOIN the Central Alabama Veterans Collaborative, S.A.F.E.R. Together Alabama and Birmingham VA Health Care System in the fight to reduce suicide at the Lawson State CC, Bessemer Campus. This event is free of cost and comes with lunch - CEUs are also available!

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED, please scan the QR code or visit transtechtraining.wufoo.com/forms/z8r811h0tszckx/

Veteran Suicide Prevention Training

November 21, 2025
10a.m. – 2p.m.



Registration

Training Presentations include:

- VA S.A.V.E.
- TBI Overlap and Education
- Post Traumatic Growth
- S.A.F.E.R. Together with Panel Discussion

FREE to ALL

Working Lunch Will Be Provided
CEUs Available for Social Workers

Lawson State Community College
1100 9th Ave, SW,
Bessemer, AL 35022
Building H - Ethel H. Hall
Alabama Center



Looking to find
more events?

Visit our Event Calendar at va.alabama.gov/events
We update the calendar regularly and also share
upcoming events on our social media accounts.

