

MAY

Newsletter



Welcome!

Thank you for taking the time to read this month's edition of our ADVA newsletter. We appreciate your continued interest in the work we're doing to support Alabama's veterans and their families. Each month brings new opportunities to strengthen our services, share important updates, and highlight the efforts taking place across the state. Thank you for staying connected with us and for your commitment to Alabama's veteran community.

Jeff Newton
Commissioner, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs

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ALABAMA VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY RECEIVES OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD



The Alabama Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort received national recognition from the VA's National Cemetery Administration with the Operational Excellence Award, honoring the cemetery's outstanding commitment to service, appearance, operations, and memorial care. The award reflects the dedication of Cemetery Director Joe Buschell and his staff in ensuring Alabama's veterans and their families are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect.

Since opening in 2012, the cemetery has provided honorable final resting places for more than 4,700 veterans and eligible dependents while preserving the legacy and sacrifice of Alabama's military community. ADVA also continues expanding its mission of service with plans underway for a second state veterans cemetery near Huntsville.

CHRIS PHILLIPS NAMED DISTRICT I MANAGER

Commissioner Jeff Newton is proud to announce Chris Phillips as the new District 1 Manager for the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. Since joining ADVA in 2021 as the Veterans Service Officer for Fayette, Pickens and Lamar counties, Phillips has been recognized for his dedication to serving veterans and was recently named the 2025 Veterans Advocate of the Year. He has also played an important role in supporting veteran outreach efforts and helping keep American Legion Judge Bell Post 127 active within the community.

Before joining ADVA, Phillips retired from the U.S. Navy in 2019 as a Petty Officer First Class following a distinguished career in aviation. He served aboard the USS Porter, USS Kennedy, USS Enterprise and USS Bataan, as well as with the Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, from 2010-2013. His continued commitment to Alabama's veterans reflects ADVA's mission of serving those who served.



PARTNERSHIP SPOTLIGHT WBRC 6 NEWS

The ADVA is proud to partner with WBRC 6 News in Birmingham as the latest supporter of the “You Are Bigger Than This Moment” campaign. This statewide veteran suicide prevention initiative focuses on reminding veterans and their families that hope, strength, and support are always within reach. Through strong community partnerships, the campaign continues to expand its message of encouragement and awareness across Alabama.

Launched in partnership with America 250 Alabama and American Village, the initiative includes yard signs placed at ADVA facilities statewide and a growing number of partner facilities. It promotes the Veterans Crisis Line, a free and confidential resource available 24/7 by calling 988 and pressing 1. Together, these efforts aim to ensure veterans know they are never alone and always bigger than the challenges they may face.



SIGNS IN ACTION

“You Are Bigger Than This Moment” signs are continuing to appear across Alabama as communities, organizations, and veteran supporters join together to promote hope and suicide prevention for veterans and their families. Signs have been displayed in locations including Coffee County, the Fort Rucker Aviation Museum, numerous VFW posts, the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spanish Fort, and other community spaces throughout the state.

The continued growth of the campaign reflects the power of communities coming together to support Alabama’s veterans. Each sign serves as a visible reminder that veterans are valued, supported, and stronger than the challenges they may face.





STRIKE OUT STIGMA

The ADVA joined the Montgomery Biscuits and the Alabama Department of Mental Health in early May to support the “Strike Out Stigma” campaign, bringing awareness to the importance of mental health and suicide prevention across Alabama. Events like these highlight the power of community, connection, and conversation in breaking the stigma surrounding mental health.

Representing Alabama’s more than 400,000 veterans, ADVA remains committed to supporting veterans and their families through outreach, advocacy, and partnerships that encourage hope and remind individuals that seeking help is a sign of strength. Nothing brings people together quite like baseball and a cause that matters.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Photo from ADVA 80th Anniversary Celebration

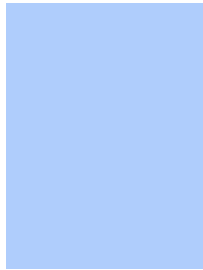
Pike County Veterans Affairs Officer Randy Ross was recently named one of the “40 People to Know in Pike County” in Progress 2026, a publication of The Messenger. A Navy veteran and dedicated advocate for Alabama’s veterans, Ross (second from right) has served with ADVA since 1998, spending more than 25 years helping veterans and their families access the benefits and support they have earned through military service. His recognition reflects the lasting impact he has made throughout Pike County through his service, outreach efforts, and continued commitment to honoring and supporting Alabama’s veterans.



2026 ADVA TRAINING CONFERENCE U.S. SPACE AND ROCKET CENTER - HUNTSVILLE, AL

ADVA staff from across Alabama gathered in Huntsville for the annual ADVA Training Conference, bringing together team members from every division to collaborate, share ideas, and continue improving services for Alabama’s veterans and their families. Throughout the conference, staff participated in training sessions, toured veteran-focused facilities and organizations, and heard from leaders and partners dedicated to supporting the veteran community across the state.

The conference also provided an opportunity to recognize the dedication and hard work of ADVA employees while reinforcing the department’s shared mission of service. From professional development to team recognition, the event highlighted the continued commitment of ADVA staff to honoring and supporting Alabama’s veterans every day.



RECOGNIZING DEPARTMENT EXCELLENCE

2026 Training Conference Award Recipients



Commissioner's Excellence Award

PEGGY WILLIAMS

Lauderdale County Veterans Service Officer



G.O.A.T. Award

SAMANTHA WISE

CSM Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home Director



Distinguished Service Award

KEAMBRIA EVANS

Senior Accountant



Veteran Advocate of the Year

CHRIS PHILLIPS

Fayette County Veterans Service Officer



Support Professional of the Year

HEATHER JORDAN

Mobile County Administrative Support Assistant



Rookie of the Year

KIM SPRAYBERRY

Mobile County Veterans Service Officer

PROGRESS REPORT

State Board of Veterans Affairs members Bob Schmidbauer, Buddy Keen, and Lori Rasmussen joined Commissioner Jeff Newton and State Veterans Homes Program Executive Director Kim Justice in Enterprise earlier this month to tour the Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home and spend time visiting with veteran residents currently staying at Enterprise Health and Rehabilitation Center.



The visit provided an opportunity to see the continued restoration progress firsthand while also connecting with the veterans who have served our country with honor and dedication. "The Homes Committee of Alabama State Board of Veterans Affairs is pleased with the progress being made at the Bennie G. Adkins home," Schmidbauer said. "We look forward to returning our veterans to their home. Also we appreciate the partnership with the Enterprise Health and Rehabilitation Center."



DAV DONATES TO SVHs

The DAV Department of Alabama donated \$4,000 to each of the five Alabama State Veterans Homes. These donations help fund outings, activities, and opportunities for residents to connect with their communities and enjoy meaningful experiences.



The continued support from organizations like DAV reflects a deep commitment to honoring the men and women who served our nation. The residents of Alabama's State Veterans Homes represent generations of sacrifice, service, and dedication that helped pave the way for those who follow behind them.

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH AND MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH!

CINCO DE MAYO

Residents and staff at Alabamas State Veterans Homes came together to celebrate Cinco de Mayo with festive decorations, themed activities, music, and food, creating a fun and memorable experience for everyone involved. Events like these provide opportunities for fellowship, laughter, and meaningful social engagement for veteran residents.

The Alabama State Veterans Homes Program provides qualifying veterans with compassionate, high-quality long-term care through skilled nursing care, rehabilitation services, and daily support. To learn more, visit va.alabama.gov.



WAR DAMN EAGLE!

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs proudly congratulates Deputy Commissioner Lucas on graduating from Auburn University with her Executive MBA. This accomplishment reflects her dedication to professional growth, leadership, and continued commitment to serving Alabama’s veterans and their families with excellence.

Balancing the demands of leadership while pursuing an advanced degree demonstrates the hard work, determination, and perseverance that Deputy Commissioner Lucas brings to ADVA every day. Her achievement represents not only a personal milestone, but also an investment in the future leadership and success of the department.

VETERANS ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACADEMY

The UAB Veterans Entrepreneurship Academy continues to provide veterans with valuable tools, education, and resources designed to strengthen entrepreneurial skills and support business success. Built “For Veterans, By Veterans,” the program empowers participants through world-class entrepreneurship education focused on leadership, innovation, and professional growth.

Supported through partnerships with organizations across Alabama, the academy reflects a continued commitment to investing in veterans beyond military service by creating opportunities for career development, business ownership, and long-term success within their communities.