

JULY

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 the Alabama's veteran community.

Commissioner, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs

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COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF ALABAMA CONVENTION JOINT SESSION 2026

Commissioner Jeff Newton recently addressed attendees at the joint session of the Alabama American Legion convention where he provided an update on ADVA initiatives and highlighted the department's continued efforts to serve Alabama's veterans.

During the session, Commissioner Newton also presented the 2026 Veterans Service Officer of the Year Award to Angela Hunter of Jefferson County and the Veterans Service Provider of the Year Award to Mobile County Administrative Support Assistant Heather Jordan (top right).



On July 4, 2026, our nation marks a historic milestone—the Semiquincentennial of the United States, celebrating 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration, together with the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights, is preserved in the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., where they stand as enduring symbols of our nation's founding principles.

Throughout our history, the United States has embraced two national mottos: "E Pluribus Unum"—"Out of many, one"—and "In God We Trust." Both reflect the ideals that have united generations of Americans through times of triumph and adversity.

Alabama, admitted to the Union on December 14, 1819, proudly bears the state motto "Audemus jura nostra defendere"—"We Dare Defend Our Rights." Like our nation's founding documents, these words are more than a slogan. They are a declaration of conviction, courage, and sacrifice. In 1776, the representatives of thirteen colonies pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor because they believed that liberty was worth any cost.

Their enduring words continue to define who we are:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Generations of Americans have studied and memorized these words. More importantly, generations have defended them. For 250 years, brave men and women have answered the call to preserve the freedoms they proclaim, ensuring that our nation remains free, independent, and strong.

This Independence Day, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs proudly honors the service members defending our freedoms around the globe, the veterans who have faithfully served before them, and the families whose sacrifices make that service possible. Their commitment ensures that the Stars and Stripes continue to fly over the land of the free and the home of the brave.

As fireworks illuminate the night sky this Fourth of July, pause for a moment to reflect on the extraordinary price of liberty. Remember the generations who secured our independence, those who preserved it, and those who continue to defend it today. May we never take for granted the blessings of freedom or the responsibility entrusted to every American to preserve it for generations yet to come.

Jeffrey L. Newton
Brig Gen USAF/ANG (Retired)
Commissioner,
Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs



COMMISSIONER'S 4TH OF JULY MESSAGE

SBVA MEETING



STATE BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS QUARTERLY MEETING

The State Board of Veterans Affairs (SBVA) met on July 9 at ADVA headquarters in Montgomery for its quarterly meeting to review the progress of programs and initiatives supporting Alabama's veterans and their families. Board members received updates from the Veterans Benefits and Services, Veterans Homes, Cemetery, and Legislative committees, covering ADVA's day-to-day operations and the department's FY28 budget planning. The meeting also included reports from Commissioner Jeff Newton and presentations from veteran service organizations.

Among the highlights, board members learned that Veteran Service Offices assisted more than 19,000 veterans statewide during the quarter while continuing to process disability, pension, and survivor benefit claims. SBVA members also discussed future investments in veteran services, including outreach initiatives, expansion of the state cemetery system, and continued improvements to Alabama's veterans' homes.



NOTABLE UPDATES

ADKINS HOME UPDATE



Renovation of the Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home in Enterprise continues making excellent progress and remains on schedule to reopen this fall. Permanent electrical service and air conditioning have been restored, and required inspections are underway. The facility is expected to be substantially complete in August, with residents anticipated to return once a certificate of occupancy is issued sometime in September. During the SBVA meeting, Executive Director Kim Justice noted occupancy remains high across all four facilities, staffing levels continue to improve, and new chaplain services are being introduced to further enhance the quality of life for residents.

CEMETERY UPDATE



Cemetery Director Joe Buschell briefed SBVA members on a successful public town hall in June that introduced plans for the new North Alabama State Veterans Cemetery. The meeting provided community members an opportunity to view conceptual drawings, ask questions about the project, and learn about the construction timeline. More than 200 veterans and family members have already pre-registered for future interment, as ADVA prepares to break ground in October 2026. During the SBVA meeting, members also discussed future enhancements to the Spanish Fort Veterans Cemetery and took steps toward establishing a third state veterans cemetery to serve Alabama's Wiregrass region.

THE CEMETERY REPORT



CEMETERY TOWN HALL

On June 18, community members from across North Alabama gathered at Madison County High School for a town hall to learn more about the future Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery – North Alabama. The event provided Commissioner Jeff Newton, Cemetery Director Joe Buschell, ADVA leadership, and project partners the opportunity to present the cemetery's master plan, share updated design renderings, outline the construction timeline, and discuss the services, amenities, eligibility requirements, and long-term burial capacity the cemetery will provide directly to attendees.



Among those in attendance were Medal of Honor recipients Lt. Col. James Sprayberry, U.S. Army (Ret.) and Captain Mike Rose, U.S. Army (Ret.). Capt. Rose gave a short speech which underscored the significance of creating a resting place for the veterans of North Alabama.

The town hall marked an important milestone as ADVA continues working to bring a state veterans memorial cemetery to North Alabama, ensuring veterans and their eligible family members have access to a dignified final resting place closer to home.



HAPPENING AROUND ALABAMA

20TH ANNUAL VIETNAM VETERANS LUNCHEON

Huntsville, Alabama



The Legacy 4 Korean War Veterans Foundation recently hosted its 20th Annual Luncheon at The Summit at Redstone Arsenal, honoring 32 Korean War veterans—many of whom also served during World War II and Vietnam. Veterans, military leaders, community members, and supporters gathered to recognize their courage, sacrifice, and enduring legacy, while Lt. Gen. Gavin A. Lawrence, Deputy Commanding General of U.S. Army Materiel Command and Redstone Arsenal Senior Commander, delivered the keynote address, emphasizing the lasting impact of their service and the importance of preserving their stories for future generations.

VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK UNDERWAY

Hokes Bluff, Alabama



Representatives from the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, Troy University, and the Veterans Memorial Park Association recently toured the future Veterans Memorial Park in Hokes Bluff, a Supporting Alabama's Veterans Grant recipient that will offer fishing, rustic camping, walking trails, and outdoor wellness opportunities for veterans and their families. The project is one of several funded through the grant program, a partnership between the State Board of Veterans Affairs and ADVA that supports initiatives promoting the mental health and well-being of Alabama veterans.

VETERAN HONORED WITH COMBAT METAL

Mobile, Alabama

Nearly 30 years after retiring from the U.S. Army, Mobile veteran Col. Patrick H. Downing was awarded the Army's newly established Master Combat Infantryman Badge, recognizing his distinguished 36-year military career, including Special Forces service and two combat tours in Vietnam. Since retiring, he has continued serving Alabama's veteran community through leadership with local veterans' organizations and support for initiatives such as Honor Flight South Alabama and the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spanish Fort.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

ADRIANNE TYES-SMITH

Adrienne Tyes-Smith started her role as the Veterans Outreach Coordinator with the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs on June 1. With this position, she is dedicated to connecting veterans and their families with the resources, benefits, and support they deserve. Before joining ADVA, she worked as a United States Marine Corps contractor, supporting active-duty service members both overseas and stateside.

Coming from a strong military family background, Adrienne brings a deep personal understanding of the challenges faced by service members, veterans, and their loved ones. She holds a bachelor's degree in communications and a master's in business. She is passionate about community engagement, outreach, and ensuring that no veteran is left without guidance or connection. Adrienne is committed to strengthening partnerships, expanding access to services, and fostering meaningful support throughout Alabama's veteran community.



STILL SERVING VETERANS

Still Serving Veterans is a Huntsville-based nonprofit that provides free career transition services, VA benefits guidance, and community support to veterans, transitioning service members, members of the Guard and Reserves, and their families. Since 2006, SSV has helped thousands of veterans find meaningful employment, access earned benefits, and connect with resources that promote long-term success after military service.



S.A.F.E.R. TOGETHER ALABAMA

S.A.F.E.R. Together is an Alabama-based grassroots suicide prevention initiative dedicated to supporting military members, veterans, and first responders through voluntary, confidential, and temporary firearm and ammunition storage during times of crisis or high-risk life events. By partnering with federally licensed firearm dealers and connecting participants with peer support and community resources, the program helps create critical time and space that can save lives while promoting resilience, mental wellness, and recovery.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & MORE

TRIP TO NORMANDY

World War II veteran and Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home resident Aubrey Blackwell recently made his third trip to Normandy to commemorate the 81st Anniversary of D-Day. During his visit, Mr. Blackwell joined Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, fellow veterans, and supporters in honoring the sacrifices of the Greatest Generation.

While in Normandy, Mr. Blackwell also paid tribute to fellow World War II veteran and former Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home resident George Hamilton, recognizing his service and legacy.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

JULY 16

BESSEMER VETERANS RESOURCE FAIR AND CLAIMS CLINIC

BESSEMER RECREATION CENTER
100 14TH STREET
BESSEMER, AL
10 AM - 2 PM

JULY 18

BACK TO SCHOOL BASH 2.0

MARY G. HARDIN CENTER FOR
CULTURAL ARTS
501 BROAD STREET
GADSDEN, AL 35901
10 AM - 2 PM

AUGUST 4

WOMEN VETERANS COFFEE

100 NORTH UNION STREET, SUITE 826,
MONTGOMERY, AL
7 AM - 8 AM

AUGUST 7

STAND DOWN FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

CRAMTON BOWL MULTIPLEX
220 HALL STREET
MONTGOMERY, AL
9 AM - 3 PM

LEARN ABOUT MORE
UPCOMING EVENTS AND
OTHER VETERANS
RESOURCES BY SCANNING
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VETRESOURCES

#VetResources is a weekly newsletter for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. [Connect with Secretary Collins on X](#)



VA RESOURCES



UPCOMING VA EVENTS



JOBS FOR VETERANS

