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January 3, 2024



Ready To Serve ★ Proud To Have Served

Commissioner's Corner



Message from the Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Affairs

2023 Year in Review

As we begin a new year, I am pleased to report that in 2023 the New Jersey Department of Veterans Affairs expanded state-delivered Veterans programs and services while also improving the quality of care that we provide the Veterans, Veterans Spouses, and Gold Star families who call our facilities home.

Veterans Healthcare Services

In 2023, ensuring the health and welfare of the residents of the Veterans Memorial Homes at Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland remained a priority for The Adjutant General and our entire DMAVA team.

This year, both the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), acting as agents of the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), completed annual recertification surveys of Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland. I am profoundly grateful to the teams in each home

for their hard work and attention to detail to ensure the success of these surveys. Their commitment was borne out in the results of these visits and the improvements in clinical areas and infection control that were documented during each one.

In an effort to improve communication not only with residents and loved ones, but also the DMAVA team members who form the backbone of our daily operations, in 2023 department leadership deliberately created opportunities to solicit ideas and feedback. For residents and families, that took the form of regular virtual and in-person town halls to answer questions, share information, provide updates, and address concerns.

From a DMAVA team perspective, Brig. Gen. Hou conducted “Coffee with the Commissioner” sessions at each facility. I met with our partners in organized labor to better understand the challenges their members face. I also visited all three homes to talk with folks during and after each shift. Our goal is to foster a culture of mutual respect and transparency and I am grateful to those who attended these sessions.

Significantly, we also implemented an electronic medical records system (EMR) that simplifies tasks for providers and caregivers and results in better quality of care for our residents. The new EMR complements the digital learning management system we introduced earlier this year.

Veterans Services

In 2023, the Division of Veterans Services answered Governor Philip D. Murphy’s call to expand its footprint of State of New Jersey Veterans Service Offices from 14 to one in every county. We cut the ribbon on offices in Passaic County and Camden County and by the end of this fiscal year, Garden State heroes will have 21 points of entry to access the federal and state benefits that they and their families have earned.

In 2023, DMAVA’s 19 Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) conducted over 48,000 direct contacts with individuals, filed over 7,600 VA claims, and secured over \$100 million in federal benefits for Garden State Veterans and their survivors.

Our team continues to tackle veteran suicide head on. In this area, our work will never be done and there will always be room to improve. Under the umbrella of the [Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families](#), DMAVA partnered with the New Jersey Hospital Association and the Mental Health Association of New Jersey to provide statewide Mental Health First Aid training. These day-long events increase suicide awareness and provide participants with the tools they need to recognize the common signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use challenges, how to interact with a person in crisis, and how to get them the help they need.

This year, DMAVA's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) counseling program (free to Veterans and families) assisted 3,832 individuals over 8,945 sessions and our [Vet2Vet peer support line](#) (1-866-838-7654) supported more than 7,700 calls.

The Brigadier General William C. Doyle Memorial Cemetery continued to be the busiest state Veterans cemetery in the United States. Over the course of the year, our team facilitated the interment of over 2,500 deceased individuals. Team members made much needed repairs to the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial and we executed a \$5.5 million VA grant to improve infrastructure and expand cemetery capacity.

Veterans Haven North and South continued to set the example on how to provide Veterans transitional housing. Our teams at both facilities are force multipliers whose passion for their mission is reflected in successful resident outcomes.

This year, DMAVA's State Approving Agency achieved an overall satisfactory rating and ensured that public and private institutions met the required standards to provide job training and education to eligible individuals. In addition, our Veterans Benefits Bureau hosted over 150 outreach events and conducted 19 state medals ceremonies.

Our Shared Commitment

Taken together, these achievements reflect our shared commitment to delivering important services and programs to New Jersey heroes. As a state, we are moving decisively to enhance the services that we provide to Garden State Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

We could not do this without the support of the Governor, The Adjutant General, our partners in the Legislature and Veterans Service Organizations, and readers like you. I offer my personal thanks and appreciation.

As always, thank you for staying connected to DMAVA!

We invite you to share ideas, events and feedback. Please email our team at outreach@dmava.nj.gov.

Vincent Solomeno III
Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Affairs
Administrator of Veterans Affairs



Featured Event



**Multiple Dates and Locations
Free Eight-Hour Training Sessions**

Mental Health First Aid Training

Learn How to Support Veterans

Intended for community organizations that interact with Service Members, Veterans, and their families at the local level, but is open for all interested participants.

[Learn More and Register](#)

Events



DMAVA Calendar

DMAVA is sponsoring or will participate in the events below. A DMAVA Veterans Service Officer will be present at many of these events. Please check details to confirm.

- January 5 | Lawrenceville
[Blood Drive](#)
- January 20 | Battleship New Jersey
[Camden County Veterans Outreach Retreat](#)
- January 20 | Elmwood Park
[1st Annual Fitness and Suicide Prevention Day](#)

- January 21 | Bordentown
[Reserve & National Guard Transition Benefits Workshop](#)

Community Calendar

We add new events to our calendar on a daily basis so please bookmark and check back often.

[View Full Calendar](#)

In Memoriam



Rest In Peace

As we reflect on the many events of 2023, it is with profound sadness that the New Jersey National Guard mourns the passing of U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Latoya Sabrina Sotomayor and U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Theodore Condo.

Our condolences are with their families, friends and all those who served alongside SFC Sotomayor and SSgt Condo.

NJ National Guard



Recruiting and Retention Battalion

New Jersey Army National Guard recruiters assigned to Able Company, [Recruiting and Retention Battalion](#), New Jersey Army National Guard, gave back to their local communities by participating in a food drive on December 21, 2023.

In a resolute demonstration of their commitment to community service, 40 soldiers attended the event to ensure that the food drive was successful on all fronts.

[Read Full Story](#)

Join Our Team

- 100% Free College Tuition
- Bonuses up to \$20,000
- Student Loan Repayment



DMAVA Veterans Services



Good News, Granted!

DMAVA was awarded \$300,000 from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Geriatrics & Extended Care through the State Home Nurse Hire & Retention Grant Program.

The [Veterans Memorial Homes](#) at Vineland, Menlo Park and Paramus are each receiving \$100,000 for nursing staff incentive programs, including tuition reimbursement for Certified Nursing Assistant Certification, monthly bonuses for overtime and reducing call-outs, and a staff appreciation fund.

This grant will help DMAVA retain and recruit talented care providers for the Veterans, Veteran Spouses, and Gold Star family members of our three homes.



NJ Service Medals

The State of New Jersey awards medals to honorably discharged Veterans of the state who served in various conflicts and combat theaters.

State medals include the Distinguished Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Korean Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, POW/MIA Medal, Desert Storm Medal, and the Global War on Terrorism Medal.

[Learn More](#)

**THE DMAVA READJUSTMENT
COUNSELING PROGRAM PROVIDES
VETERANS WITH:
INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING
GROUP COUNSELING
FAMILY COUNSELING**

**SCAN THE CODE AND CALL YOUR
LOCAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER,
OR CALL:
(888) 865-8387,
OR EMAIL:
VBB@DMAVA.NJ.GOV**



**SUPPORT
IS PEER TO PEER**

Call Us 24/7
7 days a week
(866) 838-7654

The graphic features a dark blue banner at the top with the text "SUPPORT IS PEER TO PEER" in white, distressed font. Below the banner is a white background with a purple speech bubble icon on the left. To the right of the speech bubble is a stylized illustration of a man with a beard and a headset, representing a customer service representative. Below the illustration is the "NJ VETZVET" logo, which includes the letters "NJ" in blue and "VETZVET" in red with a stylized American flag motif.

NJ Veterans' Benefits Hotline
888-865-8387
vbb@dmava.nj.gov

Veterans Outreach Schedule

Veterans Service Offices

DMAVA Departments



NJ Youth ChalleNGe Academy

The New Jersey Youth ChalleNGe Academy graduation ceremony for Class 56 was held at the National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville, NJ on December 15, 2023.

The [New Jersey Youth ChalleNGe Academy](#) is an alternative education program designed to reclaim the lives of at-risk 16 to 18 year old youths and produce graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults.

The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program was established by Congress in 1993. New Jersey's first ChalleNGe class began in September 1994.

[View Images](#)

NEW JERSEY
YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY
DREAM. BELIEVE. ACHIEVE.

 **YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY**

Now accepting applications for Class 57 - January 2024.

APPLY NOW!

TUITION FREE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
 (800) 997-5587 / (732) 974-6516
 rpm@dmava.nj.gov
 njyca.org/admissions

The graphic features a dark blue background with white and gold text. On the right, a circular inset shows a photograph of four individuals in high-visibility yellow jackets standing in front of a classical building with columns. A gold starburst graphic contains the text 'TUITION FREE'.



Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

DEIB Newsletter

State Partners



NJ State Agencies

- [Vote For Valor](#)
 - [Career Services for Veterans](#)
 - [Tax Resources for Military/Veterans](#)
 - [Educator Certification for Military Spouses and Veterans](#)
 - [Civil Service Preference for Veterans](#)
 - [NJ National Guard Hunting / Fishing Licenses](#)
 - [NJ Special Hawker and Peddlers License](#)
 - [Veterans Designation for Drivers License](#)
 - [Military CDL Skills Waiver Program](#)
 - [Disabled Veteran / Purple Heart Recipient Placards](#)
 - [Disabled Veteran Hunting and Fishing Licenses](#)
 - [Veteran and Disabled Veteran-Owned Business](#)
 - [Division of Consumer Affairs Military Outreach & Support](#)
 - [Professional & Occupational Licenses for Veterans and Spouses](#)
 - [Military and Overseas Voting](#)
 - [Troops to Teachers](#)
-



Federal Partners



All WWII Veterans are now eligible for no-cost VA health care and nursing home services

November 10, 2023

WASHINGTON - Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that all World War II Veterans are now eligible for no-cost VA health care, medical services, and nursing home care.

All WWII Veterans who served between Dec. 7, 1941, and Dec. 31, 1946, are eligible under this expansion, regardless of their length of service or financial status. These Veterans will not have to pay copays, enrollment fees or monthly premiums.

VA is reaching out by phone and mail to encourage WWII Veterans who are not currently enrolled in VA care to apply today. Veterans who enroll may also keep their private providers, Medicare, and most other insurance to meet their health care needs.

[Read Full News Release](#)

VA now offers online ordering for CPAP supplies

December 4, 2023

Veterans who rely on CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machines to manage sleep-related breathing disorders, including sleep apnea, now have a new [streamlined online ordering system for CPAP supplies](#).

VA has added the CPAP supply ordering feature as part of the online tool that's already in place, same as how veterans [order hearing aid supplies](#) on VA.gov. The addition improves how veterans order, manage and efficiently receive health care supplies. It's a notable improvement to the previous CPAP supply ordering process, which was by phone call or traditional mail order forms sent to VA's Denver Logistics Center (DLC).

[Read Full News Release](#)

VA has screened 5 million Veterans for toxic exposures

December 12, 2023

WASHINGTON - Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has screened 5 million Veterans for toxic exposures — a critical step to detecting, understanding, and treating potentially life-threatening health conditions. Of the 5 million Veterans who have received the screening, 2.1 million (43%) reported at least one potential exposure.

[Read Full News Release](#)

National Parks Pass

A lifetime pass for Gold Star Families & Veterans is being offered to demonstrate the country's immense gratitude and respect for those who have served and defended our country.

[Learn More at VA News](#)

VALife Insurance

Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife) provides guaranteed acceptance whole life coverage of up to \$40,000 to Veterans with service-connected disabilities. Lesser amounts are available in increments of \$10,000. Under this plan, the elected coverage takes effect two years after enrollment as long as premiums are paid during the two-year period.

All Veterans age 80 or under with a VA disability rating of 0 to 100% are eligible for the VALife program and have no time limit to apply.

[Learn More](#)

Featured Links

- [Accessing Records from the National Archives or NPRC](#)
- [PACT Act Performance Dashboard](#)
- [How to Check Your PACT Act Claim Status](#)
- [Download VA Benefit Letters](#)
- [Podcasts on Veterans' Issues](#)
- [VA Health and Benefits Mobile App](#)
- [Women Veterans Call Center](#)
- [Veterans Legacy Memorial](#)
- [Million Veteran Program](#)

#VetResources

Subscribe to #VetResources to receive a weekly newsletter from the VA for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

Subscribe

Community Spotlight



Handmade Quilts

With the chilly weather ahead, handmade quilts gifted from J. Fletcher Creamer & Son, Inc. and Operation Kindness NJ will surely keep the residents at the [New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Paramus](#) warm!

[View Images](#)



American Legion

Thank you to the American Legion Auxiliary Department of New Jersey for providing Christmas Dinner at [Veterans Haven South](#) and for continuing to support our Veterans!

Image courtesy [The American Legion Department of New Jersey](#).



Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps

The JROTC program offers high school students a platform to embody the values upheld by service members throughout the Department of Defense.

At Passaic High School, the JROTC program stands as a testament to the future generation of leaders poised to shape our success.



Family Child Care Program is back, and growing!

The Department of the Air Force is reviving a special Family Child Care program (FCC).

Military families, or other families in our communities, can open their homes as a small business to military families in need of childcare. This includes drill weekends for Guard and Reserve members seeking childcare!

Oversight and restrictions apply, please contact Alicia Stasiulis at cia.stasiulis.1@us.af.mil and (609) 562-2192 for details.

Never Forget



In Honor of all those from New Jersey who gave their lives in the fight against terrorism during Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. In humble gratitude, we remember their sacrifice.

January 11, 2008
 Operation Iraqi Freedom
LCpl Curtis A. Christensen Jr.
 U.S. Marine Corps
 Collingswood, New Jersey

January 14, 2010
 Operation Enduring Freedom
SGT Christopher R. Hrbek
 U.S. Marine Corps
 Westwood, New Jersey

January 12, 2011
 Operation Enduring Freedom
SPC Benjamin Moore
 U.S. Army
 Robbinsville, New Jersey

January 16, 2005
 Operation Iraqi Freedom
SPC Alain L. Kamolvathin
 U.S. Army
 Blairstown, New Jersey

"But on the battlefield their feet stood fast, and in an instant at the height of their fortune, they passed away from the scene, not of their fear, but of their glory."
 ~ Pericles

NJ Fallen Heroes Memorial

History



102nd Cavalry Officers at Fort Jackson in 1941.

January 5, 1861

John McGowan of Elizabeth, a former Revenue Marine (Coast Guard) officer who established lifesaving stations along the New Jersey coast, sailed the unarmed ship *Star of the West* into Charleston Harbor on a mission to resupply Fort Sumter. When his vessel was hit by two rounds from a shore battery, McGowan withdrew. Some count these as the actual first shots of the Civil War.

January 6, 1777

General William Howe ordered Elizabethtown abandoned by British troops due to constant harassment by the New Jersey militia as the forage war heated up.

January 6, 1941

The 102nd Cavalry of the New Jersey National Guard was called to active duty and assigned to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for training. The 102nd went on to participate in the Normandy Invasion, landing on D-Day plus two under the command of iconic New Jersey soldier Colonel Donald McGowan, and had the honor of being the first United States unit to enter Paris in August 1944.

January 12, 1777

January 15, 1961

Twenty-eight men, US Air Force and civilian personnel, were killed after the collapse of Texas Tower #4, a massive radar installation in the Atlantic Ocean seventy-five miles off the New Jersey coast, in a winter storm. The tower, one of three similar structures named for their resemblance to Gulf of Mexico oil rigs, was designed to provide early warning of a Soviet air attack so that Nike Hercules anti-aircraft missiles could respond. Dubbed "Old Shaky" by the men who worked aboard it because of its tendency to shift in the ever-moving ocean, the structure was built on three pilings in 185 feet of water. Following the disaster the remaining towers were decommissioned.

January 15, 1865

At the Second Battle of Fort Fisher, North Carolina, nineteen-year-old US Marine Corps Corporal Andrew J. Tomlin of the Goshen section of Middle Township, Cape May County, inspired his men to hold the line against a Confederate attack and rescued a fellow Marine who was wounded and under heavy fire. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic conduct.

January 15, 1942

The British oil tanker *Coimbra* was sunk by a German submarine 100 miles east of Sandy Hook and

Continental Army General Hugh Mercer died of the bayonet wounds he had received at the battle of Princeton. Mercer County was subsequently named in his honor.

twenty-eight miles south of Long Island, signaling the arrival of World War II to New Jersey waters. The tanker was sailing unescorted, with its lights on, and was hit at 1:40 AM. Of the forty-six man crew, ten survived.

In The News



New NJ law aims to employ veterans, address nursing shortage

Priscilla Liguori | December 28, 2023

PHILLIPSBURG, N.J. - Employing veterans and addressing the critical nursing shortage are the two main goals of a new law in New Jersey. It goes into effect in the new year.

Come the new year, it'll be easier for veterans with medical training to become LPNs.

[Read Full Story](#)

Retiree Spotlight



COL(R) Walter Nall

On December 27, 2023, COL(R) Walter Nall conducted an inspiring oral history interview at the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey in Sea Girt.

The museum is the home of the Center for U.S. War Veterans' Oral Histories. It is the Center's mission to collect and preserve the memories of Veterans and Gold Star family members through recorded oral history interviews.

At a future date, COL Nall's interview will be posted alongside over 400 other interviews currently available for viewing online in the museum's [oral history archives](#).

The museum will also submit the interview to the [Veterans History Project](#) at the Library of Congress.

Volunteer Spotlight



Rachel Yuan

Rachel Yuan is a sophomore at Ridge High School in Basking Ridge, NJ and volunteers at the [Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park](#).

Under the mentorship of Carol Fowler, Assistant Curator at the National Guard Militia Museum of New Jersey, Rachel has become a contributor to the [Veterans History Project](#) at the Library of Congress.

To date, Rachel has recorded oral histories for two veterans - a veteran of the Korean War who resides at the Home, and a veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. She has plans to record more in the future.

Inspiring work, Rachel!

Did You Know?



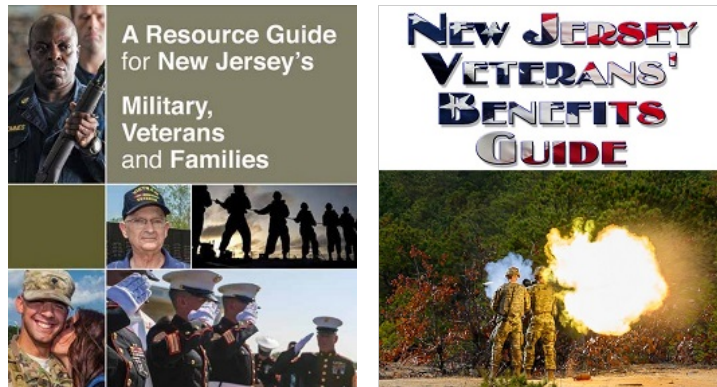
Use of Facilities

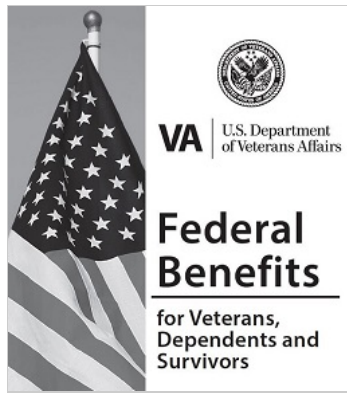
Through an active community relations program, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs strives to be a good neighbor and community partner.

As a result, many of the facilities maintained by DMAVA are available for public use. Potential users can inquire about availability and obtain a no obligation cost estimate.

[Learn More](#)

Resources





DMAVA Careers



We Are Hiring!

At the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs we take our work in support of Veterans, Servicemembers and their families very seriously. Whether supporting our Veterans with nursing care, transitional housing, or assisting them in navigating access to their Veteran benefits, the Department provides valuable services and can offer rewarding career opportunities to members of the public.

We also have opportunities in facilities management and program management. In addition, we have job openings for members of our military to serve in AGR and Federal Technician roles.

Subscribe to our [Jobs Bulletin](#) to stay updated on job openings.

Vacancies

Stay Connected



We hope you enjoy receiving our newsletter and find it both educational and engaging. If you have questions about our department, our programs or your benefits, please visit our website at nj.gov/military to get contact information.

Contact DMAVA

Please email us at outreach@dmava.nj.gov with feedback and comments regarding the newsletter. If you would like to contribute with an item of interest to our subscribers, please email us your proposal.

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