

Eyes Right

Fall 2014

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Support for Homeless Veterans

With Veterans Day just around the corner, we're reminded of our nation's service members and their sacrifices. Yet, some veterans are living without proper housing as the winter weather approaches. Ending veteran homelessness in the United States is a priority for many organizations and non-profits that assist the veteran community – and with good reason.

As recently as 2013, more than 1,000 veterans in Ohio were reported as being homeless or unsheltered, an increase of nine percent since 2012. At a federal level, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a program titled Support Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), which provides grants to organizations that assist veterans in finding proper housing.

While the SSVF's primary goal is assisting veterans in obtaining permanent housing, funds can also be used in other areas, particularly for family members. Those eligible can receive outreach and case management from the SSVF grantees, as well as VA benefits that could include services for health care, daily living, financial planning, legal needs, child care, transportation and more.

This summer, the program was awarded \$300 million, which will be used to help an estimated 115,000 homeless and at-risk veterans and their families. Those available funds increased again in late September when another \$207 million was added, providing aid to an additional 70,000 veterans throughout the nation.

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Not Your Typical Boot Camp

VSC workshop helps veterans launch careers

The Veterans Service Commission of Summit County (VSC) has its own boot camp program designed specifically for veterans. Instead of the image boot camp might naturally conjure in the minds of most service men and women, this one isn't about increasing endurance, improving running speed or upping a push-up count. The VSC's Job Boot Camp is a professional workshop created to prepare veterans to change career fields or find meaningful employment.

In the past, the program has been a three-day event. For this upcoming Job Boot Camp, David Burden, project manager for the VSC, is condensing it to a single Saturday to allow veterans who are already employed to attend more easily. The free, one-day boot camp will be Saturday, Nov. 8 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. This November's event will include resume analysis, interview skills assessment, a power brunch training session and more.

As an extra bonus, the Job Boot Camps are usually scheduled around local career fairs, giving veterans the opportunity to put their newly polished resumes and interviewing skills to the test with employers from the area. For some veterans, those career fairs are a great way to get

their foot in the door with a company. The next job fair will be Nov. 12 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at The University of Akron, Quaker Square, 135 South Broadway St., Akron, OH 44308. The event is sponsored by The University of Akron, Ohio Means Jobs, the *Akron Beacon Journal*, Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services and VSC and is open to veterans only for the first hour, giving them the first opportunity to interact with potential employers.

Maria Wood attended Job Boot Camp in the spring of 2013 and gained some valuable insight into what employers were seeking in new hires. She updated her resume, refined her interviewing skills and joined the employment social network LinkedIn as a result of the workshop. It also focused on the practical aspects of job searching, including developing a professional appearance and proper etiquette in the workplace. In fact, it is structured much like a full workday to help attendees get in the right mindset as they begin their job search.

"You got constructive feedback on what you could improve on and what you did well. I remembered what to look for when speaking with potential employers and what they'll

be looking for as well," said Wood.

The following week after the Job Boot Camp, Maria attended the VSC's Veteran Job and Career Fair and experienced great success. Other veterans like Maria who successfully completed the Job Boot Camp were invited to the job fair an hour prior to the start time. They were encouraged to help set up for the event and received some valuable one-on-one facetime with the local employers who attended. Maria received an invitation to interview and gained employment as a valet with Summa Health System as a result of the event.

Summa was a change in pace for her after 25 years with the United States Air Force and her job at Walgreens. Though she had never worked in a hospital, Maria said the customer service skills she cultivated at the Job Boot Camp were a great asset to her. In fact, those skills also translated to her work at Walgreens.

"When you walk away, you have such a positive attitude about the skills you already have as a veteran."

The Job Boot Camp is free to all honorably discharged veterans in Summit County. To learn more or register, please contact the VSC at 330-643-2830 or online www.VSCsummitOH.us. ★

E.Y.I.

Ohio Veterans Bonus available through December

Ohio Iraq veterans are eligible to apply for an Ohio Veterans Bonus by completing the online bonus application. Some of the qualifying conditions include being on active duty anywhere in the world for purposes other than training beginning Oct. 7, 2001 or serving in Iraq between Mar. 19, 2003 and Dec. 31, 2011.

All online bonus applications must be submitted by Dec. 31, 2014 and hard copy applications sent to the Ohio Veterans Bonus program must be postmarked on or before Dec. 31, 2014. For more information on whether you qualify for a bonus, please visit www.veteransbonus.ohio.gov or visit the experts at the VSC.

VSC offers emergency financial aid to veterans

When veterans are faced with difficult financial times due to loss of employment, family emergencies, home repairs, medical crisis or financial hardship, the VSC may be able assist by providing financial aid. The 90-day program helps with primary living expenses when a veteran is not able to achieve financial stability during that timespan.

Two of the requirements are that eligible individuals must have served in a branch of the U.S. military on active duty other than training purposes and received

an honorable discharge, or an honorable separation, or be the spouse or widow of an honorably discharged or separated veteran. Those eligible also need to be able to prove they are a resident of Summit County for a minimum of three months. A benefits coordinator will then be assigned to assist with the application process. For more information, visit www.VSCsummitOH.us and go to the Services tab.

Veterans Day discounts

The Summit County VSC will be closed Nov. 11, 2014 in observance of Veterans Day. There are several opportunities for veterans to use free services, discounts and special offers on Veterans Day. Some of the restaurants offering items include:

- Applebee's
- Bob Evans
- Boston Market
- Chili's
- Denny's
- Einstein Bagel
- Friendly's
- Golden Corral
- Krispy Kreme
- Little Caesars
- Longhorn
- Max & Erma's
- Menchie's
- Olive Garden
- Outback Steakhouse
- Red Lobster
- Red Robin
- Sheetz
- Shoney's
- Spaghetti Warehouse
- Starbucks
- Texas Roadhouse
- TGI Fridays

If you hear of any Veterans Day discounts, please contact David Burden at dburden@VSCsummitOH.us.

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Unfortunately, the number of homeless veterans is on the rise in Summit County. According to a report by the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, 97 veterans were considered homeless or at-risk in 2013. The Veterans Service Commission of Summit County (VSC) and other area agencies for veterans are working to help end veteran homelessness

through events like Stand Down, which provided services and products to 400 local veterans in need this year.

Other VA benefits may be available for veterans and their families who are struggling. For more information, visit us or contact the VSC at 330-643-2830 and online www.VSCsummitOH.us. ★

Director's Corner

Finding the right care for veterans

Determining appropriate care for older veterans is important, and with so many different options, it can be a challenge. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) contracts with nursing homes to care for veterans. The Community Nursing Home program is a residential option, where veterans receive care from a skilled nursing staff available 24/7. This program is available in many communities, allowing veterans to stay near their families and homes.



All Community Nursing Homes offer around-the-clock care that could include wound care and IV medication. They also provide occupational therapy, physical therapy and access to social work services. A few Community Nursing Homes may provide expanded services, including short-term rehab services, hospice and palliative care, and specialized dementia care.

Some veterans may be eligible for care at a Community Nursing Home depending upon clinical need and setting availability. The VA may pay for a veteran's care in one of these facilities if he or she meets certain criteria that includes service connected status, level of disability and income. For example, the VA covers the cost of care at VA contracted nursing homes for veterans with a 70 percent service-connected disability rating. Veterans who don't meet those requirements must pay for nursing home care through their own means. If they cannot afford it, Medicare benefits or Medicaid assistance may be able to help cover the cost.

Getting assistance could be as simple as a quick phone call. Sometimes, it's best to talk about all of the options you have in order to make the right decision, and we have the support and information you need at the VSC.

Our primary focus is helping veterans and their loved ones. We work to help those who care for veterans. Caregivers deserve support and may be eligible for assistance. The VA has a support system in place for caregivers through the Caregiver Support Line. Through this service, those caring for veterans can talk to licensed professionals about available VA assistance, services and benefits and local support services at VA medical centers. Call the VA's Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274 or the VSC at 330-643-2830.

For all those who care for a veteran, we thank you for your support.

In Appreciation,

Executive Director



VSC Services for Vets

We assist veterans in need with their basic living needs. These services are available to eligible veterans, their dependents and widows. Services are subject to change.

Financial Assistance

- Mortgage payments / Homeowner's insurance
- Rent
- Utilities
- Roofs
- Furnace (replacement and repair)
- Stove and Refrigerators
- Food
- Children's clothing
- Adult work clothing
- Car payments, repairs and insurance (limited)

Medical / Dental

- (including dentures, glasses and hearing aids)
- Regularly scheduled transportation to VA medical facilities and Ohio Veterans Home
- Grave markers and flags

Veterans Affairs Assistance

- Assistance applying for Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits

- Preparation of VA forms and paperwork
- Supportive documentation of claims and pertinent data
- Proper submission of claims to the VA
- Service connected compensation
- Non-service pension
- Widows pension
- Burial benefits
- Headstones

If you are a veteran in financial need or need help with your VA claim, please visit us at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd., Akron or call 330-643-2830.

Programs Help Veterans Transition Back Home

The Transition Goals, Plan, Success Program helps veterans get acclimated

Veterans often come back home looking for ways to adapt to civilian life and help their family adjust. In the past year, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DoD) have worked to create a program titled "Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success)" to assist veterans as they return home from active duty. The program was created to provide complete services to transition to work, life and home after the military and is even designed to help a soldier's family better understand better how to use VA benefits.

The program focuses on the benefits and services veterans have earned after serving. The program is a requirement for all service members, demobilizing after 180 days or more of active service, including National Guard and National Reserve members. Some of the benefits of the Transition GPS program are pre-separation

counseling prior to exiting the military and enhanced VA benefits briefings. Each veteran, and family members if desired, will go through two separate briefings.

VA Benefits I Briefing provides information on education, health care, compensation, life insurance and home loans, as well as vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits information and counseling.

VA Benefits II Briefing explains the services and programs related to VA health care and helps veterans understand the VA disability compensation process.

Education and employment programs are available to help launch veterans' careers, and there are employment workshops to assist that process. Employment specialists are available to help with job searching and proper resume writing by translating what experiences veterans

gained during active duty. The specialists also help guide veterans on successful interviewing skills. These sessions help veterans go through the decision-making process of researching careers, applying to training programs and exploring funding options to create a customized plan.

There are a set of common and specific standards, based on service member's determined goals, that must be achieved to demonstrate the service member is prepared to pursue these goals. The full list of Career Readiness Standards (CRS) all transitioning service members must achieve can be found at: www.dodtap.mil/career_readiness_standards.html.



There is also an option for virtual curriculum to help support long-term career planning. To create a free Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) account, visit www.dodtap.mil/virtual_curriculum.html.

The Summit County VSC can also help. Call 330-643-2830 to set up a time to talk and meet in person about transition back to civilian life. ★

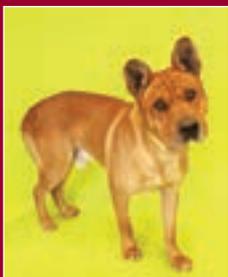


Tip of the **H.A.T.** *Helping America's Troops*

Pets for Our Vets Program

Pay It Forward For Pets, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that manages six programs to benefit rescued animals and the public. One of those programs is No Buddy Left Behind. Funded by a grant, No Buddy Left Behind helps service men and women reconnect with animals they've befriended while serving abroad by bringing those animals to the U.S.

As a subprogram of No Buddy Left Behind, the organization introduced Pets for Our Vets. Initially, this effort matched orphaned dogs and cats from Summit County Animal Control that were five years and older with veterans who were at least 55 years old. The animals are all from



Summit County, but the veterans adopting them need not be. Pay It Forward For Pets covers the \$76 adoption fee and the \$18 license fee. The organization also interviews would-be veteran owners to ensure that they can care for the animals properly.

Founder and Executive Director Georjette Thomas said the community's response to this program was overwhelmingly positive, and Pay It Forward For Pets was soon able to expand Pets for Vets to encompass all ages for both veterans and companion animals. In late July, the program came to the Veterans Service Commission (VSC). Three dogs were adopted as a result, giving the orphaned animals a loving home and the veterans who adopted them a loyal friend.

"Not all vets need service dogs, but many vets can benefit from having a companion animal," said Thomas. "Pets can give our

veterans purpose; a reason to get up in the morning, to take care of themselves and to get motivated to live life."

Over the past two months, a total of seven dogs have been adopted by veterans. Only one four-legged friend, Ricky, remains from the eight animals that were with Pets for Our Vets when it started. There are plenty of animals that still need homes in addition to Ricky, and Thomas sees the program continuing to match veterans up with animals into the foreseeable future.

"There's always a gray area where you see a need and a cause you want to support, but



you don't have the resources to do it," said Thomas of her work



in animal welfare for the past 15 years. Pets for Our Vets, however, is a great example of how community support can

make a direct difference in the lives of animals and individuals. In addition to the programs mentioned above, the organization also has Seniors for Seniors. This effort matches up senior citizens with senior pets to provide both with companionship.

If you are interested in adopting a pet, please contact Pay It Forward For Pets, Inc. at 330-760-0763 or payitforwardforpets@gmail.com. There are also volunteer opportunities for those who aren't able to adopt an animal. ★

1060 E. Waterloo Rd.
Akron, Ohio 44306
p: 330-643-2830
f: 330-643-8779

www.VSCsummitOH.us



Veterans Service Commission of Summit County (VSC) provides comprehensive support services to Summit County residents who have served in any branch of the military. Veterans and their families who demonstrate need receive free financial, transportation and medical assistance as well as coordination and processing help with Veterans Administration (VA) claims and benefits. The agency was created in 1886 to aid veterans upon their return home from duty.

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Byron Morris
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Student Adopt-a-Flag Day

Students from home schools, charter schools and smaller schools will have a unique opportunity Nov. 11 to celebrate Veterans Day by eating lunch with a veteran at the VSC offices. Lunch will be provided for the students during this free program, and each student will also receive a flag to take home. Please register at www.VSCsummitOH.us to attend. ★

Your Health

Compensation for Gulf War and Iraq Veterans

Entering military service comes with a certain level of risk, but some of the side effects of service are less obvious. Illnesses related to service can appear years after discharge, and in recognition of that, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has created presumptive service connections that make some veterans eligible for benefits and compensation. Presumptive service connections simply mean that when veterans develop certain illnesses or conditions, it is presumed that these are a result of their service.

Service connections are often defined by the location and date range of a veteran's service. The VA has established a presumptive service connection for several diseases for Gulf War and Iraq veterans who served abroad in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other countries in the Middle East between 1990 and 2011. These nine infectious diseases include malaria, brucellosis, campylobacter jejuni, coxiella burnetti (known as Q Fever), mycobacterium tuberculosis, nontyphoid salmonella, shigella, visceral leishmaniasis and West Nile virus.

The presumptive service connection for Gulf War and Iraq veterans also covers unexplained illnesses believed to be associated with service in these countries during this time. Veterans may qualify for compensation if they are experiencing symptoms such as chronic fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory disorders and memory problems. This may be called "Gulf War Syndrome," although the VA prefers not to use that name as symptoms among veterans vary widely.

Veterans can take a free Gulf War Registry Health Exam to uncover any possible illnesses that could have developed as a result of their service. There is also an Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry for veterans of the Gulf War that contains a questionnaire about environmental exposure during their deployment. The questionnaire can then be printed and used to guide discussions about health concerns with medical professionals.

For questions about health care and more information about



presumptive service connections, please contact the professionals at the VSC. Veterans can call 330-643-2830 to make an appointment, or stop by the office at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. to

talk with a service officer in person. Walk-in hours are from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday or 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Wednesday. ★