

EyesRight

Summer 2014

The quarterly publication of



VSC event connects veterans with benefits

As veterans age, they and their dependents may require more or different care than they have in the past. Unfortunately, many scams exist that exploit older veterans. The Veterans Service Commission (VSC) is aiming to help veterans and their loved ones recognize the difference between real benefits and fraudulent ones. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has benefits available to assist eligible veterans, and one of the VSC's primary goals is connecting veterans with those benefits.

On Wednesday, Sept. 10, the VSC will be hosting a free seminar for veterans and their dependents, as well as professionals from assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Area agencies will be on-site at the VSC headquarters located at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. to discuss topics that relate to this population.

The Better Business Bureau will be speaking to attendees about how to recognize and avoid elder financial/asset scam groups. The Ohio Department of Veterans Services and Ohio Sandusky Veterans Home will cover nursing home care that is specifically offered to Ohio veterans. Speakers from the Area Agency on Aging will also be present, discussing in-home care support services; while representatives from Medicaid will cover the

See Benefits, page 2



Getting veterans back in the game

Wounded Warriors Amputee Softball Team

More than 52,000 American servicemen and women have been physically injured due to recent military conflicts as of July 1, 2014. In addition to those with physical wounds, it is estimated that 400,000 service members are living with psychological wounds as well.

Michael Livingston, a Vietnam Air Force veteran and Akron resident, is working relentlessly to remind fellow citizens of the sacrifices made to preserve the freedom we enjoy as U.S. citizens.

"Freedom is not free," Livingston said behind teary eyes. "The families pay that cost, too. I want to pay them back."

So how does Livingston hope to thank veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much? With an all-American sporting event of course.

In 2011, Livingston attended his first Wounded Warriors Amputee Softball Team (WWAST) game in Arizona. He met family members of some of the young players who shared their stories of sons who had come back from war with serious injuries and crushed spirits. Livingston even remembered one father saying that his 20-year-old son was "falling between the cracks" until they found this softball team. Bringing the team to Akron for a game has been on his bucket list ever since.

The WWAST is made up of athletically talented veterans who sustained severe injuries during their

service, resulting in amputation. These veterans have primarily served in either Afghanistan or Iraq. Through extensive rehabilitation, they have become competitive athletes again, playing against able-bodied teams throughout the nation.

Livingston's spirits were lifted as he watched the team on the softball field. Though all of the players had faced such tragedy, they played with smiles across their faces. The teamwork and dedication of these wounded warriors moved him.

"We're looking for heroes," Livingston said. "[These players] don't consider themselves heroes, but they are."

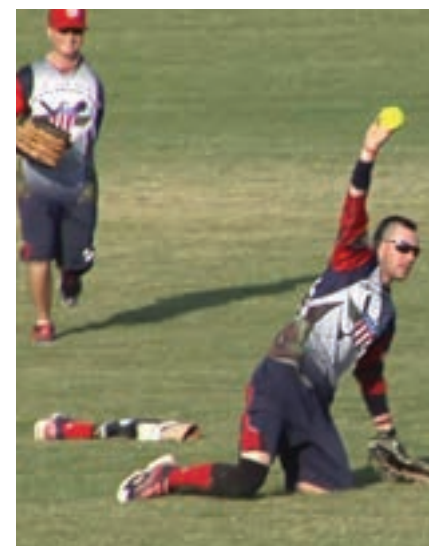
As the WWAST motto proclaims and as these players have proven, "Life without limbs is limitless." At many of their games, a child with an amputation is invited to serve as the bat boy or girl. The team also hosts a summer softball camp for children with amputations or missing limbs. In its inaugural year, WWAST players coached and mentored 20 children. The organization hopes to continue the camp, which changes locations each year, as an annual event.

When Livingston attempted to bring the team to Akron in 2011, he was informed they were booked in advance for the next year and a half. Livingston is excited to announce that the WWAST will officially be playing at the Canal Park Stadium in Akron with a date still to be determined in June of 2015.

With some of the donations toward next year's event in Akron, it is Livingston's goal to sponsor two children with amputations to attend the WWAST Kids Camp and make the softball game an annual event. It would require about \$5,000 to send two children and their families to the camp. That donation would cover food, travel and lodging.

"Play Ball in One Five" is the name of this event. Sponsors are needed to help raise funds that would bring WWAST to Summit County. Those interested in donating to the cause can contact Mike Livingston at projsummit2015@yahoo.com or 330-807-7207 for more information.

"We [veterans] come back broken and despaired," Livingston said. "... It's about time we take this and have a feel good moment." ★



F.Y.I.

Student Adopt-a-Flag Day

This Veteran's Day, students from homeschools, charter schools and smaller schools have the opportunity to eat lunch with a veteran at the VSC offices. Lunch will be provided during this free program from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Please register at www.VSCsummitOH.us to attend.

Veteran I.D. card pick-up

Veterans can pick-up their new county Veteran I.D. cards at 175 S. Main St. on the 4th floor. Veterans are asked to bring their DD-214 papers and two forms of accepted I.D.

Now accepting Veteran of the Year nominations

In it's 25th year, the annual Veteran of the Year award is presented to a veteran who actively continues to serve his or her community after discharge from military service. Fellow veterans may nominate any Summit County veteran for the award by completing the nomination form, which is available on the VSC's website at www.VSCsummitOH.us. Nominations are due Oct. 7. The selected veteran will be honored at the annual dinner, held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 23 at the VSC headquarters (1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron). There will be a cash bar from 6 to 6:30 p.m.

Summit County Stand Down 2014 event

Homeless and displaced veterans will have the opportunity to receive medical and social services at the Summit County Stand Down event Tuesday, Sept. 9 from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Firestone VFW Post 3383 located at 690 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron.

Services will include access to VA health care, mental health and substance abuse counseling; foot, eye and dental exams; employment and social services; comfort items; community legal aid; clothing donated by veteran and community organizations; lunch; haircuts; and camaraderie with fellow veterans.

Veterans can ride Metro bus #18 to and from the event, and must bring identification (i.e. dog tags, military discharge, VA I.D. card, etc.) to be granted access inside. For more information, call Laura Dunlop at 330-762-7328.

Veteran Oktoberfest picnic

Join fellow Summit County veterans this fall at the VSC headquarters for a free picnic in honor of veterans and their service on Saturday, Oct. 18 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The VSC will provide picnic fare including hotdogs, hamburgers and refreshments for attendees. No alcohol permitted.

Benefits from page 1

requirements for nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

During the event, the VSC will also provide an overview of available services that can be helpful to the older veteran population. Services at the VSC are free of charge to eligible veterans and include assistance with filing for VA benefits, VA compensation, transportation to Louis Stokes

VA Medical Center in Cleveland and more.

If you are interested in attending this event, please RSVP by Aug. 13 to Ernest Mizzell at 330-643-2891 or emizzell@vscsummitoh.us. You can also contact Karen Benfield at 330-564-8022 or kbenfield@vscsummitoh.us. ★

Director's Corner

An unexpected visit in Washington, D.C.

Serving my fellow veterans is one of my greatest honors, and one that I take very seriously. I often travel to Washington, D.C. to advocate on behalf of veterans, but on Wednesday, May 21, I had another special honor I wasn't anticipating. I was in Washington, D.C. because Ohio State Senator Sherrod Brown, who serves on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, invited me to address the Senate committee at the U.S. Capitol on veteran's issues. While I was there, a staff member from Senator Brown's office informed me that Senators Brown and Rob Portman would be greeting World War II veterans at the World War II Memorial who had arrived by Honor Flights from Ohio that afternoon.



Larry Moore with Joseph Kandrac, WWII Army veteran from Twinsburg, OH.

I was able to accompany the senators to greet these veterans and speak with them. The two flights were made up of 71 WWII veterans from Toledo and another 50 from Cleveland. Ford Motor Company was the corporate sponsor for the Cleveland Honor Flight, footing the \$16,000 bill to get veterans to the memorial built in their honor. I spoke with veterans from the Cleveland, Akron, Twinsburg and Niles areas. The average age of the veterans on the Cleveland Honor Flight was 92.

From 2007 to 2012, more than 2,300 veterans have benefited from a trip with the Cleveland Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. This amazing feat is accomplished solely by volunteers, who donate more than 53,000 hours to this important cause. The 2014 Cleveland Honor Flight schedule includes the following flight dates: Aug. 20, Sept. 17, Oct. 15, Oct. 29 and Nov. 12. Any WWII veteran or potential volunteer can find information and applications at honorflightcleveland.com/. The mission of Honor Flight Cleveland is to pay tribute to U.S. veterans by providing a safe and memorable all-expense-paid trip to Washington, DC to visit the memorials honoring their service. It was a true pleasure for me to share in this experience with these American heroes.

Thank you for your service,

Larry D. Moore

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.

VA secretary to take measures to improve care

Resources and staff acquired to investigate issues

Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA), Sloan D. Gibson, recently outlined the serious problems regarding access to healthcare and the plans to improve care. In a testimony before the Senate Committee, Gibson testified that the VA will need approximately \$17.6 billion to meet current demand for the remainder of 2014 through 2017 fiscal years. The funding will be used for several items including clinical staff, space, information technology and benefits processing.

"We understand the seriousness of the problems we face. We own them. We are taking decisive action to begin to resolve them," said Gibson. "We can turn these challenges into the greatest opportunity for improvement in the history of the department."

Gibson outlined the steps that are being taken to address problems with access to VA healthcare as

well. To start, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has reached out to more than 160,000 veterans to get them off of wait lists and into clinics. Additionally, more than 543,000 referrals have been made for veterans to receive care in the private sector.

VHA facilities are also adding additional clinic hours and pressing to fill all employee vacancies causing delay. More than 1,100 in-person monthly inspections on location have been conducted to assess scheduling practices and identify obstacles to veterans receiving timely service.

"The trust that is the foundation of all we do – the trust of the veterans we serve and the trust of the American people and their elected representatives – has eroded," said Gibson. "We have to earn that trust back through deliberate and decisive action, and by creating an open and

transparent approach for dealing with our stakeholders to better serve Veterans."

VHA central office hiring has been frozen, and personnel actions will be taken in offices where misconduct or management negligence took place. As another big step in correcting the care, all VHA senior executive performance awards for the fiscal year of 2014 have been suspended.

Gibson recently visited ten VA locations to get feedback from the field and take action to get veterans off of the wait lists for care. The VA has dispatched teams, mostly in Phoenix, to provide assistance to those locations needing the most improvement. As all of these internal



Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan Gibson speaks to staff members of the Washington, D.C. VA Medical Center during a June 18 visit. (VA photo/Robert Turtill).

reviews take place, the department will begin to discharge those employees responsible for wrongdoing or negligence.

To learn more, visit the VA website at www.va.gov/health. ★



Tip of the H.A.T.

Helping America's Troops

Partnering to find jobs for veterans

After being discharged from the military, veterans begin the transition to civilian life, which often includes finding gainful employment to support themselves and their families. The Veterans Service Commission (VSC) of Summit County has several programs in place to help veterans who are looking for work. From job fairs that bring in dozens of area employers who meet with veterans to three-day workshops focusing on building specific skills, veterans have options to prepare for and maximize their job search experiences.

Many of the area employers who attend these events and programs have been doing so for several years. Tenille Kaus, Affirmative Action Coordinator for Summa Health System, has attended multiple Veteran Job and Career Fairs, where she seeks veterans who are good

candidates for employment with her organization.

"We think veterans bring a lot to our workforce in terms of leadership skills and professionalism. We also feel it's a way to give back," said Kaus. "Veterans are very qualified for our positions and make excellent employees. That's why we actively try to recruit them."

In fact, Summa Health System has opened a program at its learning skills center to veterans who participate in the VSC's Job Boot Camp free of charge that was previously only available to its own employees. More than 60 courses are available, spanning a range of topics that cultivate both soft and hard skills. Veterans can choose to take a course that is specifically geared toward Summa employment or something as general as Microsoft programs such as Outlook and Excel.

Two courses at Summa, one for unit secretaries and one for patient access representatives, are designed to give participants the skills they need to perform those jobs well. The courses can also improve the likelihood of being hired by the hospital system after completion.

Kaus has also attended multiple Boot Camps at the VSC, where she shares the opportunities available at Summa with veterans who are looking for employment or seeking a new career.

While Kaus can't share the exact number of veterans working for Summa, she did say that the hospital system has increased its number of veteran employees within the past few years. And, she is working to continue the growth of the veteran population.

"Ms. Kaus has been a tremendous resource for veterans in Summit County," said David



Tenille Kaus of Summa Health System

Burden, project manager for the VSC. "By attending the Job Fairs and Boot Camps, she actively engages with our local veterans who are

seeking employment. Her commitment to assisting veterans proves that companies and organizations see the value in hiring those who have served."

For more information about the VSC's Boot Camp, Veteran Job and Career Fair or other employment programs and services, please contact the VSC at 330-643-2830 or stop by the office at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron to meet with a service officer. ★

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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.

Commissioners

A.W. “Sonny” Cool
Bruce Hestley
Byron Morris
Robert Panovich
Mike Stith



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Larry D. Moore

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David Donaldson
Clarence Drake
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Mark Anderson
Karen Benfield
Gordon Dean
Marcie Howes
Jennifer Pelfrey
Carl Richardson
William Schnering
Yvonne Summers
Gail Warley

RSVP for the Veteran of the Year dinner

Join us for a special evening recognizing a local veteran who actively serves his or her community as the Veteran of the Year. The selected veteran will be honored at the annual dinner, held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 23 at the VSC headquarters (1060 E. Waterloo Rd.). A cash bar will be available from 6 to 6:30 p.m. Tickets for the event are \$16 each and can be purchased by contacting Marcie Howes at 330-564-1487. Space is limited. Please reserve your spot by Oct. 17. ★

Your Health

Telehealth brings care closer to veterans

By bringing many of the capabilities of traditional health care to individuals via technology, telehealth has become a popular alternative to frequent visits to the doctor’s office or, in some cases, nursing homes or assisted living facilities. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) now provides telehealth services to veterans. These services improve veterans’ access to health care and allow them to manage their health without the hassle of multiple appointments in various locations.

For those with diseases that require regular management, including diabetes, depression, chronic health failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), VA Home Telehealth allows veterans to interact with doctors who are miles away without having to leave their homes. Medical providers can check vitals and symptoms using telehealth devices that gather information remotely; that information can then be used to adjust medications as needed.

In addition to Home Telehealth, the VA also offers Store-and-Forward

Telehealth and Real-Time Telehealth. Through the use of photography, Store-and-Forward saves data and images, then sends that information for clinical evaluation. This is particularly helpful for areas such as radiology and dermatology. It is also used for retinal imaging for those with diabetes.

Certain forms of telehealth may require a veteran to travel to a community based outpatient clinic. The Real-Time Telehealth option gives veterans the opportunity to interact with specialists, such as cardiologists, psychiatrists, surgeons and neurologists, at more than 700 community based outpatient clinics. These facilities are often more easily accessible than the few regional medical centers available in each state. In fact, there are 26 different community based outpatient clinics throughout Ohio. Nearby locations include Akron, Ravenna, Parma, Cleveland and Mansfield.

Telehealth can address a wide range of issues and is especially relevant for veterans who live in rural areas or have illnesses or injuries



that make extensive travel difficult. Though locations where telehealth is conducted change based on the particular needs of the veteran or type of telehealth, video conferencing can be used for anything from regular checkups to pre- and post-operative assessments and rehabilitation.

Telehealth isn’t appropriate for all patients, but it can be a great way for

older veterans to remain in their homes. Learn more about VA Telehealth Services at www.telehealth.va.gov. Service officers at the Veterans Service Commission (VSC) can help connect veterans with telehealth options. Contact the VSC at 330-643-2830 or visit the office at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. ★