

Eyes Right

Summer 2015

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Honoring Laura Williams Dunlop

This past spring, the Veterans Service Commission (VSC) of Summit County lost another longtime friend with the passing of Laura Dunlop on May 14 at the age of 84. Dunlop was a previous VSC Commissioner and the VSC's 2011 Veteran of the Year. She continued to volunteer at the VSC throughout the past years, helping to organize events including the annual Stand Down in the fall for displaced and homeless veterans and a resource fair designed for women veterans, which was held for the first time last May.

"Laura was one of a kind and will be greatly missed," said David Burden, project manager at the VSC. "She was a soldier when women in the military were still something of an anomaly. That just shows the type of strength and tenacity that was inherent in her and that she brought to every endeavor."

Dunlop was a Korean War veteran who joined the military soon after graduating high school in the late 1940s. She served more than three years and earned the rank of corporal during her service. For a time, Dunlop served in Japan, which is where she met her husband, William, who was also serving in Japan. As she settled into civilian life following her discharge in 1953, Dunlop remained focused on serving others.

A true leader with a pioneering spirit, Dunlop was the first female Summit County Veterans Service Commissioner.

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Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team players during the June game at Firestone Stadium.

Wounded Warriors Experience Akron

Softball team inspires community, raises funds

Akron welcomed a group of 27 rather remarkable visitors in June, all of whom were in town for a charity event. But this wasn't the typical gala with a silent auction, formal attire or gourmet food. It had a more casual bent with baseball hats, t-shirts and hot dogs. This charity event was an American pastime played by real American heroes.

The Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team (WWAST) came to Rubber City on June 20 for a softball game at Firestone Stadium, competing against the Akron firefighters. Each of the WWAST players has an amputation of some kind, but that doesn't stop any of them from giving his or her all during every game. The motto of WWAST is "life without limbs is limitless," and these softball players reveal the truth of that statement each time they hit the field.

The event was made possible through a non-profit called Project Summit, the brainchild of local Vietnam veteran Michael Livingston.

Since first having seen the players from WWAST during a trip to Arizona, Livingston knew the team could be a great inspiration to those in Akron. He devoted months to making this hope into a reality. And it paid off. The game exceeded the \$35,000 fundraising goal Livingston had set for the event.

"It was really rewarding to see the Wounded Warriors play in Akron," said Livingston. "I wanted the people in our community, especially those with amputations themselves, to see how amazing these men and women are. It was a great weekend for everyone involved."

The players weren't confined to the ballpark for their entire stay. They also got to explore the city and engage in some decidedly Akron entertainment before taking the field Saturday evening. The group took a tour of Lockheed Martin Airdock and a quick trip down the hill at Derby Downs in a few Soapbox Derby cars. More importantly, some players paid a visit to Akron Children's Hospital, where they met with children

who had undergone amputations to encourage and inspire them.

Larry Moore, Executive Director of the Veterans Service Commission (VSC) of Summit County, worked in tandem with Livingston and coordinated a good part of the weekend's activities. He accompanied the team for the tour at Lockheed Martin and the fun on the Soapbox Derby hill.

"It was an honor getting to know these young men and women," said Moore. "Despite facing the difficult reality of an amputation, they've found a way to continue doing what they love. Beyond that, they've found a way to continue serving others. Their courage and perseverance should serve as an inspiration to all."

The WWAST also hosts a softball camp for children with amputations, and Livingston is hopeful that the group might be able to bring that camp to the Akron area in 2016. He's also endeavoring to coordinate a return game for the team in 2017. ★

F.Y.I.

Save the date-fall boot camp and job fair

The VSC will host its bi-annual Boot Camp for veterans looking for employment or a change in career on Nov. 7 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. This one-day workshop will take place at the VSC headquarters (1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron) and will cover tips on resume building, interviewing skills and advice from local professionals. All participants must register by calling 330-643-7636 or visiting www.VSCsummitOH.us.

The following week, the VSC invites all the area veterans to attend a job fair at Quaker Square on Nov. 12 hosted by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

School clothes available

Summit County veterans who demonstrate a financial need are eligible for school clothing vouchers of as much as \$350, which may be applied toward the purchase of both non-uniform and uniform school clothing for their children or wards. This can include coats, boots, hats and gloves. Vouchers for book bags and supplies are also available. Applications are being accepted until Sept. 30, 2015. Stop in at the VSC at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more details, visit www.vscsummitoh.us or call 330-643-2830.

Free budget and money management classes

Summit County Consumer Affairs offers free classes every first and second Thursday of the month. These classes provide guidance for money management, budgeting and financial planning and are held from 4-6 p.m. at the VSC headquarters. Advanced registration is required to attend these classes. Please call 330-643-2879 to reserve a spot.

Summit County Stand Down

Summit County Stand Down, Sept. 15, will connect homeless and displaced veterans with needed medical and social services. The event will be held at Firestone VFW Post 3383, 690 W. Waterloo Rd. in Akron from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Available 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.

They must bring identification (i.e. dog tags, military discharge, VA I.D. card, etc.) to be granted access inside. For more information, contact VSC at 330-643-2830.

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She was also Stand Down Program Director, American Legion Chaplain, Past Commander of American Legion Post 19 and much more. In 2003, she was inducted into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame for her service not only in the Korean War but also in the community with local veterans.

“Laura had a real spirit for service,” said Larry Moore, Executive Director of the VSC. “She always looked for ways she could be helping local veterans more, and when she found a need, she was the one to organize the effort to meet it.” ★

Director's Corner

Veterans Choice Program

Veterans in need of care should not have to wait a long period of time before receiving it, and they should not have to travel well out of their way for appointments. The Veterans Choice Program is a new temporary program meant to alleviate that stress for some veterans by allowing eligible veterans to receive health care from providers who are outside the VA health care system.



To be considered eligible, you must have been enrolled in the VA health care system prior to Aug. 24, 2014 or be a recently discharged combat veteran. If you have been waiting more than 30 days for VA medical care, or if you live more than a 40-mile driving distance from a VA medical facility, you may be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program. If you meet the eligibility requirements, you'll be provided with a Choice Card.

Using this program does not impact any of your current VA benefits, including health care. To get started, you should pick a health care provider, gather some information and call the VA in order to set up an appointment. The VA will work with you to ensure you're approved for care, and they will schedule an appointment with a local care provider of your choice.

First, check your eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program. Then, visit www.va.gov/opa/apps/locator to find a VA-approved Choice Care Provider in your area. Have information about current health insurance on hand, and call 1-866-606-8198 to verify eligibility and make an appointment. The VA will request the following information when scheduling the appointment:

- Zip code
- Address
- Eligibility
- Needs covered by VA
- Preferred community provider

Not all providers are included in the program. If you select a provider that isn't available, the VA will suggest other potential providers in the community.

To request a Choice Card, schedule an appointment or learn more information about the Veterans Choice Program, contact 1-866-606-8198. Only medical needs approved by a VA physician are covered in this program. As always, we are here to help Summit County veterans.

If you think you may need a Choice Card, please stop by our office to meet with a service officer or contact us at 330-643-2830.

In Appreciation,

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.

Problems Remain for Veterans Seeking VA Help

Initial goal of clearing backlog no longer in reach

The VA's struggle to provide timely care for veterans has been a hot button news issue in recent years. Unfortunately, the reality is that a problem remains. Despite promises and efforts to clear the backlog of claims and appeals by the end of 2015, workers are still behind schedule.

Even with solid progress, VA employees are not on pace to fully eliminate the backlog by year's end, which was the department's long-term goal. In 2014, VA workers completed more than one million claims. Still, the volume of work and the number of incoming claims makes the goal of eliminating the backlog seemingly unattainable.

The soaring demand for care from veterans has exceeded initial expectations and grown more than ten percent in the last year

alone. While in most instances, the average wait time for care is a couple of days, the number of patients waiting a month or longer has doubled in the last 12 months.

To further matters, the number of appeals – resubmitted claims veterans believe were initially mishandled – has risen nearly 20 percent to an all-time high of approximately 300,000. When veterans' claims are denied, they are then forced to deal with a multi-step process that bounces their case between regional and national offices, sometimes for years.

The backlog of claims developed in 2009 with a growing number of claims made by veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It continued to grow as a result of the expanded eligibility for Vietnam veterans with diabetes and PTSD.

As early as 2013, the backlog peaked with more than 600,000 claims.

Many veterans are living in poverty-level conditions, struggling with homelessness, and health problems. These delays, both in appeals and claims, have serious consequences. Veterans, their families and friends are encouraged to contact their congressional state representatives to voice their concerns.

Our country's veterans should be celebrated for their commitment to freedom and the protection of our values, yet all too often we hear of their struggles and misfortunes. Despite the growing efforts to improve the VA's processing of claims and appeals, the system leaves much to be desired. At home in the U.S., our veterans have already fought to protect our country.



They should not have to fight to live a quality life within it.

The experts at the VSC can help with VA claims. Contact 330-643-2830 for more information or to schedule an appointment. ★



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

Veterans Serve Community as Business Owners

When two disabled veterans were released from active duty, the next steps in their career path were uncertain. Don Meyer and Geno Conley were in a position that is all too common among veterans: the struggle to transition successfully to civilian life. Rather than letting this adversity dishearten them, the pair saw it as a challenge to overcome. The result of their efforts was Band of Brothers Restoration. This Medina-based company opened in 2013 and offers renovation, restoration and installation services for homes.

Less than two years later, the company is already flourishing, with a service base that encompasses Ashland, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Medina, Lorain, Portage, Richland, Stark, Summit and Wayne Counties. This past May, the company

received the 2015 Emerging Business Award from the Greater Akron Chamber's Small Business Council.

"It's inspiring to see a company created and managed by veterans," said Larry Moore, Executive Director of the Veterans Service Commission of Summit County. "But, what makes it even better is the owners' passion to serve their fellow veterans through employment or other efforts to extend a helping hand."

Band of Brothers seeks to employ veterans whenever possible in an effort to help lessen the burden that co-owners Meyer and Conley initially experienced. Conley, CEO of Band of Brothers Restoration, estimates that about 95 percent of the staff is comprised of veterans. The others who work

for the company have a connection to the military through a family member.

But, the duo's efforts extend beyond offering employment. When Conley and Meyer heard about a fellow veteran who needed a work truck, they rallied to his cause. The company purchased a reliable vehicle for him, allowing him to continue working and providing for his family.

The company also has recently started a charity called "Homes for Heroes." This large-scale effort not only houses disabled veterans and their families, but also creates a veteran community nestled in the Ohio countryside where those with PTSD can relax away from the noise of the city.

"They [veterans] have done their time. It's almost like we



Don Meyer (left), COO, and Geno Conley (right), CEO, of Band of Brothers Restoration.

need to keep that community – that brotherhood – together, and help one another," said Conley in regard to the charity effort.

Veterans who are seeking a position with Band of Brothers Restoration or simply want to chat with a fellow veteran who can relate to them, can contact employment@band-of-bros.com. Learn more about the company by visiting the website at www.band-of-bros.com. ★

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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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Elder Care Seminar

Caregivers, nursing home and assisted living professionals are invited to join the VSC and other organizations Wednesday, Sept. 9, to learn about benefits elderly veterans may be eligible to receive during a complimentary seminar. The event will be from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the VSC located at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron. Please call Ernest Mizzell at 330-643-2891 or Sharon Ameser at 330-643-2842 to reserve your spot. ★

Your Health

Funding Cuts May Affect Research and Health Care

Losing a limb and learning to live with a prosthetic is a reality for many veterans returning from military service in Afghanistan and Iraq. Even those who served decades ago may find themselves dealing with an amputation as a result of diabetes or other medical conditions. Since 2000, the VA has seen a 70 percent increase in the number of veterans needing prosthetics, sensory aids and similar services.

In its 2016 budget, the VA has allocated \$622 million for the research and development of pioneering medical technology from the overall budget of \$168.8 billion. When it comes to prosthetics research, the VA explores a variety of ways to help individuals regain the highest level of functioning by developing new materials and designs for prostheses. Likewise, the VA aims to provide better service for veterans currently using prosthetics by studying different components and understanding how satisfied veterans are with their current prostheses.

However, a proposed cut to the overall funding for the VA could impact how health care is provided to veterans, while reducing the depth and scale of medical research efforts. This past spring, the House Appropriations

Subcommittee recommended a \$1.4 billion cut to the president's overall budget for veterans. The initial budget supported research and development in engineering and technology that would improve prosthetic systems that replace lost

limbs and active paralyzed nerves and muscles. With the proposed cuts, many services and research opportunities are in question.

In addition to creating delays in prosthetic research, the \$1.4 billion in funding cuts will also limit the VA's ability to provide quality health care to many veterans. The estimated cut from the VA's health care program will reduce access to care for approximately 70,000 veterans. The more than one billion dollar shortfall will also limit reform and outreach programs, further hindering the VA's efforts.

While the House and Senate will continue to work on the VA budget plan in the near future, the initial outlook is grim. The early plan did include significant funding for mental health care, the homeless veterans program and modernized electronic health records. These needed services and many others could be affected by a budget cut, and that means that veterans may lose out on receiving the resources they need. ★

