

Eyes Right

Spring 2016

The quarterly publication of



Veteran of the Year Nominations Now Open

Every year, the Veterans Service Commission of Summit County (VSC) recognizes a specific veteran in the community who has continued to serve others after being discharged from military service. These individuals volunteer time, money and effort without seeking praise for their acts of goodwill.

While these veterans may not expect recognition for their efforts, the VSC believes they should be acknowledged as strong role models within their communities. The Veteran of the Year Dinner was created to do just that.

The Veteran of the Year Dinner is held every October to recognize the veteran who was selected that year based on his or her positive impact on the community. The dinner brings together community leaders and past winners. Jeff Wason is one such person, having won the 2015 Veteran of the Year award.

Wason gives back to disabled veterans and their families. He is also actively involved in Summit County's Stand Down for Homeless and Displaced Veterans, a program that provides everything from sleeping bags to medical and mental health care to veterans in need.

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Identity Theft Prevention

VSC and VA offer resources to protect veterans

Some people are known for their booming laughs, while others are known as quiet wallflower types. Maybe a certain hairstyle or signature pair of shoes sets you apart from others. Whatever it may be, everyone has something distinctive that makes him or her an individual. But, beyond these unique characteristics, there are also specific numbers, dates and other types of information that help verify an identity.

In an age when personal records are stored electronically and digital transactions are commonplace, identity theft has become a major cause for concern and a topic of discussion. But, what qualifies as personally identifiable information? Any information that can verify a person's identity like Social Security numbers, names, addresses, phone numbers or credit card and bank account numbers can be defined as personally identifiable information. Biometric data, such as fingerprints, also falls into this category.

When someone else gets a hold of this information, whether it's a Social Security number, bank account number or birthdate, that person can wreak havoc on personal and financial wellbeing. At the very least,

it can result in spending countless hours and a good deal of money to resolve. In more severe cases, it can take months or even years for an identity to be completely recovered. During that time, it can also mean denials for loans, credit cards, rental applications or jobs.

Identity theft can be imperceptible; however, the consequences are anything but. Below are some of the red flags that could indicate identity theft.

- Unexplained credit card charges
- Notifications of newly opened accounts
- Lack of normal bills or other mail
- Denied credit

The ramifications go well beyond financial wellbeing, too. Once a person's identity is stolen, they can lose their medical benefits, experience emotional distress and even encounter legal problems if the perpetrator commits a crime and gives the police the information from the stolen identity.

The Veterans Service Commission of Summit County (VSC) held its first-ever identity theft seminar this spring. Representatives from AARP, Summit County Adult Protective Services, Summit County Consumer

Affairs and other organizations identified the risks of identity theft, what information to safeguard and how veterans should be protecting themselves. Experts also emphasized how important it is for individuals not only to check their credit score, but also to monitor it for any signs of strange or unauthorized activity. A second seminar will be held July 14 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The VA is also providing veterans with tools to protect themselves against identity theft. In 2014, the VA launched a campaign called More Than a Number to educate veterans on identity theft and how to protect themselves from having their personal information compromised. An entire section of the VA website is dedicated to these efforts and contains tips to protect personal information and identify unusual activity linked to identity theft.

Along with suggestions for everyday personal information protection, the VA site includes specific recommendations for traveling and online shopping. There is also contact information for veterans to use if they are experiencing an identity theft incident. ★

E.Y.I.



AMVETS Memorial Day events

Monday, May 30

Fairview Cemetry

3990 Brecksville Rd.
7:45 a.m. – Assemble
9:00 a.m. – Services

West Richfield Cemetry

4219 Broadview Rd.
9:30 a.m. – Assemble at
Historical Building (Old Town Hall)
10:00 a.m. – Services

Bath Memorial Services

(Across from the schoolhouse)
11:45 a.m. – Services

Flag Day and proper flag disposal

Flag Day is Tuesday, June 14, and it commemorates the adoption of the flag in 1777. It is also a perfect opportunity to ensure that Old Glory is flying proudly. The Northeast Ohio weather can wreak havoc on flags, and as many people know, flying a damaged flag is disrespectful.

Flags that are ripped, torn or frayed along the edges should be replaced, and flags whose red stripes have faded to pink should also be properly discarded. The VSC accepts worn-out flags at its office and disposes of them according to standard flag etiquette. If it's time for you to purchase a new flag, please bring your old one to the VSC.

Submit Memorial Day events

Know of a Memorial Day event that you think other veterans may be interested in as well? Please send all pertinent event information to dburden@vscsummitoh.us to be posted on the VSC website.

Volunteers needed for Memorial Day

On the Saturday before Memorial Day, May 28, volunteers from the Summit County veterans' posts visit our county's cemeteries and honor veterans by placing a flag on each gravesite. Volunteers of all ages are welcome to help with this tradition or to volunteer in a different capacity. Please complete the volunteer form available on the VSC's website at www.VSCsummitOH.us or contact David Burden at 330-643-7636.

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But, his work isn't limited to veterans. He is involved with a fundraiser that sends kids to Camp Corral, and he donates Thanksgiving dinners to families in need. He's currently working with some partners on a project to get homeless veterans with children off the street.

"Being a disabled vet, I wanted to give back and help those in the community who are in need," Wason explained.

If you know of a veteran who is deserving of this award, please visit the VSC's website at www.VSCsummitOH.us to complete a nomination form on his or her behalf. Once the form is complete, it can be dropped off or mailed to the VSC headquarters at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron. Nominations are always accepted. The winner will be announced in the fall of 2016. To learn more, contact the VSC at 330-643-2830. ★

Director's Corner

VA's Polytrauma System of Care Provides Insight into TBI

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Polytrauma System of Care (PSC) recently reached a new milestone: The PSC has performed one million Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) screenings. This new benchmark is a significant achievement because it further helps veterans live successful lives following their military service.



TBI is regarded as one of the most common injuries from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. TBI symptoms include severe headaches, memory loss, reduced executive functioning and ringing in the ears. Symptoms range from being manageable to seriously debilitating, limiting a veteran's ability to work or even manage daily life.

The one million mark in TBI screenings reflects the VA's success in building an integrated polytrauma care program for wounded and injured service-members and veterans. The VA's dedicated polytrauma care teams recognize the importance of taking care of the whole person through the coordination of physical, mental and rehabilitative care for veterans suffering severe injuries from the war.

The PSC provides comprehensive and coordinated rehabilitative care to veterans with life-changing injuries, including TBI, limb loss, blindness, hearing loss and others. The PSC also assists with re-entry into the community. Fully coordinated with the Department of Defense, the PSC ensures seamless health care transition for those who served on active duty as they transition to their post-military lives.

VA employees created the PSC to address the need for a comprehensive multi-disciplinary system of care to help veterans suffering from two or more physically disabling injuries or psychological impairments. Past patients sustained injuries affecting multiple body parts that resulted in physical, cognitive, psychological and functional disabilities.

Now, with one million TBI screenings logged, the PSC encourages all veterans, even those who weren't obviously wounded, to have a TBI screening. Subtle symptoms can indicate larger medical issues that can be revealed through a TBI scan at a VA health care facility. Screening veterans for TBI and helping them deal with their condition is one of the central programs of PSC and a key to helping veterans live fulfilling lives. For more information, including PSC screening locations, visit www.polytrauma.va.gov.

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.

VA Adds New Members to Minority Advisory Committee

Of the 21.8 million veterans in the United States, 4.7 million are minority veterans who utilize various VA benefits, including compensation, health care, rehabilitation, outreach and others. A special advisory committee was created in 1994 to provide recommendations on behalf of minority veterans, who comprise approximately 21 percent of the total veteran population.

Recently, four new members were added to this committee: Melissa Castillo, Benno Cleveland, Ginger Miller and Xiomara Sosa. They joined the current eight committee members with the goal of improving how minority veterans interact with the VA through the following efforts:

- Performing community outreach
- Advising Congress on VA benefits
- Meeting with VA officials to assess efforts to provide benefits
- Providing an annual report to Congress summarizing the delivery of benefits and services

Castillo, a navy veteran, has been involved with many veteran's organizations in Texas and is an accredited service officer. Cleveland is a Vietnam army veteran, who received a Purple Heart. The Alaska Federation of Natives recognized him as the Veteran of the Year in 2014, and he founded and serves as the current president of the Alaska Native Veterans Association.

Miller, also a navy veteran, was previously a disabled, homeless veteran. However, she has since founded and become CEO of two nonprofits for veterans and their families. She has served on various veteran's organizations and is a current member of Disabled American Veterans.

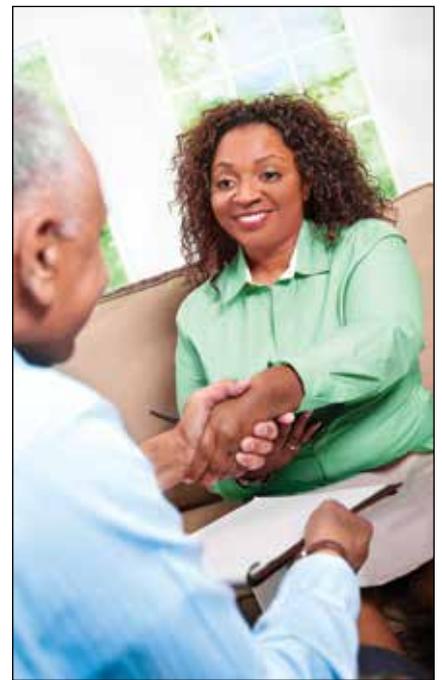
Sosa is an army veteran and the founder and principal of XAS Consulting, LLC. Her business focuses on mental health care and holistic wellness. She's been active in many veteran initiatives and organizations

and is currently a member of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc.

The VA also has a Center for Minority Veterans (CMV) dedicated to ensuring all veterans receive equal service regardless of race, origin, religion or gender. It is also charged with raising awareness among the minority veteran populations about VA benefits and encouraging participation in them.

The CMV also has outreach programs specific to minority veteran business owners and potential business owners. This initiative aids veterans in learning about business start-ups, financing and government contracting, acquiring knowledge of marketing and business legal structures, and building relationships and contacts through networking.

These efforts encourage veterans to utilize the available services and benefits. Like other campaigns, the goal is to help veterans live successful



lives after transitioning from military service. For assistance with VA benefits and services, please contact the VSC at 330-643-2830. ★



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

Local Groups Help Make the Holidays Bright!

During the 2015 holiday season, the veterans in our Summit County community received many gifts from our neighbors. From toy donations to free admission to see *The Nutcracker*, the generosity of area organizations made the season a bit brighter for many veterans and their families.

From late November to early December, the Ballet Theatre of Ohio brought *The Nutcracker* to life on stage at the Akron Civic Theatre. A beloved holiday play, seeing it is a tradition for many families, and by donating tickets to the VSC, the organization provided veterans with a free opportunity to enjoy the play with a loved one.

The Polish American Club and American Legion Post 449 and 452 donated hundreds of dollars worth of toys to the VSC. Veterans who were receiving financial assistance through the VSC



around the holidays and had young children were welcome to select a gift from those donated. As veterans are not permitted to use their financial aid to purchase presents, this toy drive ensures that their children have at least one holiday gift to open and enjoy.

For Terri Austin Steele, a member of the Polish American Club, veterans have always been a priority. Her father was a war veteran and POW, and she sees

giving back to those who have served as both an honor and a responsibility. Steele and her mother have been helping local veterans and their families for a decade – first through gift card donations and now through the toy drive and Thanksgiving meals.

"You have to take care of the people who put their lives on the line, so we don't have to. We've got to show them we care and appreciate them," explained Steele.

"The important thing is to remember these folks."

That spirit of giving and thankfulness helped fill the tables at the VSC with new toys that kids of all ages would enjoy. From Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to My Little Pony, the toy drive had a lot of great items just waiting to be wrapped in festive paper. Most importantly, nearly 150 children were able to receive a gift for the holidays as a result of that generosity. "We want the holidays to be a time of celebration for all veterans in our community," said David Burden, VSC project manager. "It's this kind of consideration and generosity from other organizations that helps make that possible."

To learn more about how you can partner with the VSC to help area veterans, please contact David Burden at 330-643-7636 or dburden@vscsummitoh.us. ★

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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Renew Today!

Fill out the annual renewal form below and return to the VSC to continue receiving this newsletter, or submit your renewal online at www.VSCsummitOH.us. ★

Name: _____
Phone: _____ Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Age: _____ Gender: Male Female
Do you use the VSC's website? Yes No
Do you follow the VSC on social media? Yes No

Your Health

ReWalk Allows Paraplegic Veterans to Walk Again

Captain Derek Herrera is not the first marine to be awarded the Bronze Star for bravery. He is also not the first marine to receive the reward standing on his own feet. He is, however, the first paraplegic marine to actually walk during the award ceremony.

Despite being severely wounded on the battlefield, Captain Herrera walked up to the presenting officers during the ceremony to receive his Bronze Star. Captain Herrera was paralyzed by a sniper's bullet during combat operations in Afghanistan. But after hours of grueling physical therapy and the advanced technology of ReWalk Robotics, he turned tragedy into triumph. As the first person in the U.S. to acquire a ReWalk exoskeleton, Herrera wears the light robotic suit that creates motion in his knees and hips, giving him the ability to walk on his own.

With the support of crutches, the exoskeleton is secured to the legs and waist of the individual and uses a motion sensor to detect movement in the torso. The suit then responds to the direction the individual leans.

The exoskeleton moves forward when a forward lean is detected, it sits when a backward lean is detected and it turns when the wearer twists side-to-side.

ReWalk is one of the first inventions of its kind. The FDA-approved exoskeleton gives paralyzed veterans a chance to walk again and regain a sense of normalcy and independence. Even before FDA approval, the VA was working with ReWalk to test the system at various VA medical centers.

Recently, the VA developed a policy that gives qualifying veterans access to the ReWalk exoskeleton and training at one of 24 VA Health Administration Centers. After successfully completing the training program, each veteran will be considered for a ReWalk exoskeleton for use in the home and community.

With the success and changes ReWalk has made in the lives of paraplegics like Captain Herrera, the potential is endless and the opportunity to put paralyzed veterans back on their feet is more of a reality than ever before. ★

