



March 2016 Monthly Veterans' Newsletter

This Veterans Newsletter is compiled and provided by the Seminole County Veteran's Services Office. Its intent is to keep Seminole County Veterans informed about their rights, benefits, and news of interest. It is non-political and, except where noted, all articles are excerpted from outside sources. Local events honoring/supporting Veterans will be included as made available. You are encouraged to provide feedback and recommendations, as this is your Newsletter. Together with my small Team, I hope you find it both valuable and interesting.

Ed Burford, Seminole County Veterans Services Officer

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1. **Operation Outdoor Freedom**, Operation Outdoor Freedom is a State Sanctioned Program for Veterans. The program is led by the Florida Forest Service. It provides recreational opportunities to wounded veterans on state forest, agricultural and private lands throughout Florida. The events, lodging and meals are provided at no cost to the wounded veterans via private donations. Participating veterans must have a service connected disability of at least 30% to apply. A fishing trip is planned for April for 20 disabled Veterans around our neck of the woods. There has been low participation because the program has not been well publicized to date. Veteran can sign up for the trips online, and then they are selected at random for participation at the web site below. They are always looking for corporate sponsors as well as private landowners, and it is worth noting that if private citizens donate land for a hunting or fishing excursion, the State picks up the liability aspect. Point of Contact is Larry Salter, (352) 228-9766 email - saltshake@yahoo.com. [Read more.](#)

2. **Tavares VA Outpatient Clinic Ribbon-Cutting March 11, 2016**, Media Alert, Orlando VAMC, ORLANDO, Fla. – The Orlando VA Medical Center hosted a ribbon-cutting celebration marking the formal opening of its new Tavares Outpatient Clinic on Friday, March 11. The event was open to the public. The address is 1390 East Burleigh Blvd., Tavares, FL 32778. The new clinic offers extended clinical space and increased parking for Veterans, and is approximately 12 miles east of its former Leesburg location.

3. **Frontline Families**, *Ed sends* -The Frontline Families program provides opportunities to serve on projects that ultimately help fulfill the needs of local veterans young and old. They want your ideas! Help each other reintegrate into the community and find fulfillment by being a part of a cause that will ultimately bring us together and make the transition from military to civilian life one to look forward to! If you are a Veteran or are related to one, they want to empower you to tackle the most pressing challenges that our service members and their families face on a day to day basis. They have several upcoming projects that will include adults with disabilities, children’s education, the environment and more. For more information, contact Brittany at Brittany@HandsOnOrlando or call 407-740-8652. For more information check out their web page on FB called Frontline Families of Central Florida or our website at www.HandsOnOrlando.com/Veterans.

4. **CFNL Lone Sailor Race Saturday, April 2nd**, *Ed Sends*, Please join the 7th Annual Wounded Warrior Lone Sailor 5K/10K benefiting the Camaraderie Foundation of Saturday April 2nd at Blue Jacket Park at 7:30 a.m. Immediately following the race at 9:30 a.m. will be the dedication ceremony for the Lone Sailor navy Memorial. This event is honoring our wounded Veterans and Orlando's rich military heritage. **DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE** - Enter Group Code **CAM2016** for a 20% Discount, Military ID's receive a 25% Discount, Groups of 10 or more receive \$5 off per runner. For more information and registration, [go here](#).

5. The Orlando VA presents **Veteran Appreciation and Welcome Home**, Saturday April 30, 2016 from 10 am to 3 pm, at the Lake Baldwin Outpatient Clinic. It's a Veteran Job Fair, It's reconnection to the VA, and it's a family event.

6. **RTC Orlando, Call to Reunion!** Ed sends, Navy Shipmates who are former Recruits, Company Commanders and Staff of RTC Orlando. October 12 – 16, 2016, Orlando FL. Begins on Wednesday and ends with Central Florida Navy Birth Ball at the Rosen Shingle Creek. For more information call (407) 630-8940 or [click here](#).

7. **Seminole County Homeless Veteran Stand Down 2016** *Ed sends*. We had our 2016 Homeless Veteran Stand Down on March 12, 2016. A huge Thank You to all the Volunteers and to the Service Providers, you made this successful. Held at the Florida Health Department in Seminole County, everyone agrees it was a great event. While the full demographics are not yet available, the initial numbers were down from last year; however it appeared that there was an increase of the chronically homeless. I truly believe Seminole County may have the most Veteran supportive public figures in Florida. Opening Ceremonies, MC'd by the Seminole County Supervisor of Elections Mike Ertel, included comments from Seminole County Commissioner Bob Dallari, Seminole County Chief Judge John Gulluzzo and Seminole County Veterans Court own Judge John Woodard III, Supervising Public Defender Jeff Dowdy, City of Sanford's Andrew Thomas, Florida Health Department's Donna Walsh, Director of the Orlando VA Medical Center Tim Liezert, Pastor Stu Walters and coordinators Sean Gibbs and Ed Burford. Again thank you all. Please know you made a difference.

8. **DoD Budget Hints at More Future Force Initiatives, Military.com**, Week of February 15, 2016, The U.S. Defense Department's proposed fiscal 2017 budget details the various new initiatives designed to make the military more attractive to potential recruits — from expanded maternity leave to a corporate fellows program — and hints at more efforts to come. The \$583 billion spending plan — the largest of any federal agency — references the 20 personnel reforms the Pentagon has unveiled since Defense Secretary Ashton Carter first announced the so-called "Force of the Future" program in November. [Read more](#).

- 9. Four Changes Eyed for 'Blended' Retirement Plan** Military.com, Week of February 22, 2016, As many as 1.8 million active duty and reserve component members, roughly 75 percent of the Total Force, will be invited in 2018 to switch to the new "blended" military retirement plan that Congress approved last year. To prepare for that "open season" year, to strengthen force retention and to bolster retirement savings, Defense officials are asking Congress to make four significant changes to the new retirement plan. [Read more.](#)
- 10. Mica Succeeds in Transferring VA Nursing Facility to State of Florida**, Orlando VA News Release, March 9, 2016, Orlando - After passing his bill at a record-setting pace, Congressman John L. Mica (FL-07) held a ceremony transferring the vacant 120-bed nursing center at the Lake Baldwin VA medical complex from the federal government to the State of Florida. The transfer from the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) will expedite the process of re-opening those nursing care beds for Central Florida's veterans. "After years of waiting, the veterans in Central Florida are one step closer to receiving the care they need as the state will be expediting the opening of this facility," Rep. Mica said. "In less than a month, both houses of Congress and the President enacted this bill because they understood any delay in reopening this facility will affect those men and women who served our country." In 2014, Congressman Mica received direct assurance from VA Secretary Bob McDonald that the Lake Baldwin VA Clinic would remain operational after the opening of the new Orlando VA Center at Lake Nona. The Lake Baldwin Nursing Center, opened in 1999 as part of the VA complex, has been serving as a staging area for the new VA Center since nursing patients were moved to Lake Nona last year. "Expanding our network of award-winning state veterans' nursing homes to include the Lake Baldwin facility is an important step in serving our Central Florida veterans," said Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs Executive Director Mike Prendergast. "This has been a joint initiative from the beginning, and we are very appreciative of the leadership of Congressman Mica and Orlando VA Medical Center Director Tim Liezert in creating this opportunity to provide additional skilled-nursing care to our state's veterans."
- 11. VA Budget Proposed** Military.com, Week of February 15, 2016, In his FY 2017 budget, President Obama is proposing \$182.3 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The FY 2017 budget includes \$78.7 billion in discretionary funding, largely for health care and \$103.6 billion for mandatory benefit programs such as disability compensation and pensions. The \$78.7 billion for discretionary spending is \$3.6 billion (4.9 percent) above the 2016 enacted level. The President's Budget also provides for continued implementation of the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Transformation Plan to systematically improve the quality and efficiency of claims processing. The Budget also requests \$1.6 billion for programs to prevent or reduce Veteran homelessness. [Read more.](#)

- 12. VA 'Presumption' Reg Could Help Up to 15,000 Lejeune Vets** Military Update, January, 29, 2016 The Department of Veterans Affairs expects up to 15,000 seriously ill veterans who served at Camp Lejeune, N.C., before 1988, when base drinking water was contaminated, to be helped by a faster-track compensation process proposed last month. But the promised acceleration in VA disability awards can't begin until the proposed regulation becomes final, which could take at least another year to complete, VA officials said in a phone interview Tuesday. In this case, time is money. Every month that passes before a final regulation takes effect is a month of compensation lost to ailing veterans of an older generation, most of them Marines. *Ed sends – please note that there is not a time for for this to be considered a presumptive condition.* [Read more.](#)
- 13. VA Updates Crisis Lines** Military.com, Week of March 07, 2016, Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson has announced improvements to enhance and accelerate progress at the Veterans Crisis Line. The Veterans Crisis Line will form a stronger bond with VA's Suicide Prevention Office and Mental Health Services. The Veterans Crisis Line will also be under the direction of VA's Member Services, which has many efforts underway to restructure portions of VA that have direct contact with Veterans. Veterans in crisis may contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. They can also text 838255 or chat with trained professionals online at the Veterans Crisis Line website. [Read more.](#)
- 14. VA Sunshine Healthcare Network**, March 13, 2016, The Spring 2016 issue of *Veterans Health Matters*, VISN 8's quarterly wellness magazine for Veterans, is now online in English and Spanish. The print version of the magazine will soon be available to Veterans in all hospitals and clinics in the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network. To read more about VISN 8 and to review the Spring 2016 *Veterans Health Matters*, [go here.](#)
- 15. Million Veterans Blood Sample Program** Military.com, Week of February 15, 2016, *Ed sends, I have just signed up for this, it is easy to do.* The goal of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Million Veterans Program is to collect blood samples of at least a million veterans, and use it to research illnesses. The veterans' blood samples could hold the key to understanding causes and discovering treatments and cures for myriad illnesses. The VA is looking at some 750,000 genetic markers that medical researchers believe could be linked to illnesses that plague veterans, ranging from cancers to heart disease, kidney disease to post-traumatic stress disorder. Veterans may volunteer for the project at a number of VA sites across the country. For more information, [Read more.](#)
- 16. List of 111 VA facilities flagged for wait-time investigation**, USA Today, February 24, 2016 WASHINGTON — Officials with the Department of Veterans Affairs asked the agency's inspector general in June 2014 to investigate 111 medical facilities where an audit, conducted after the wait-time scandal at the Phoenix VA, found potential scheduling manipulation. [Read more.](#)

- 17. VA Will Cover Hepatitis C**, MOAA, February 26, 2016 A new VA ruling - effective immediately - extends coverage of Hepatitis C treatment to all veterans, regardless of stage of liver disease. Last year, the VA faced a \$2.6 billion budget deficit, largely due to the costs of newly developed Hepatitis C treatments. Medication and treatments developed within the last three years can actually cure the disease, have no side effects, and save tens of billions of dollars in late-life intervention from medical complications. The VA ruling comes at a time when an estimated 200,000 veterans suffer from Hepatitis C. [Read more.](#)
- 18. VA Takes Steps to Reduce Vet Suicides** Military.com, Week of March 14, 2016, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced new steps it is taking to reduce veteran suicide. They include: (1) providing additional resources to manage and strengthen current programs and initiatives; (2) providing veterans with same-day evaluations and access by the end of calendar year 2016; (3) using measures of veteran-reported symptoms to tailor mental health treatments to individual needs; (4) using data on suicide attempts and overdoses for surveillance to guide strategies to prevent suicide; (5) increasing the availability of naloxone rescue kits; and (6) establishing three regional tele-mental health hubs. [Read more.](#)
- 19. Budget Proposal Includes Retiree Tricare Fee Hikes** Military.com, Week of February 15, 2016, The new Defense Department budget proposal for 2017 sent today to Congress drastically increases the cost of healthcare for military retirees under 65 and reorganizes the current Tricare system, but otherwise includes few other major military family program reforms. [Read more.](#)
- 20. New TRICARE Fees Could Be Coming to You**, MOAA, February 19, 2016, Last week's legislative update opined the proposed FY17 DoD budget was light on specifics to improve value for beneficiaries - [but heavy on across the board TRICARE fee increases](#). We also promised you more details on how these complicated budget proposals would affect various categories of beneficiaries. We'll start with TFL, which covers uniformed services beneficiaries age 65 and above, and certain other severely disabled retirees who are eligible for Medicare. [Read more.](#)
- 21. TRICARE Pharmacy Changes** Military.com, Week of February 15, 2016, Several changes to the TRICARE pharmacy benefit took effect on Feb. 1. Copays for drugs filled at retail pharmacies and TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery increased slightly. Also, TRICARE Over-the-Counter (OTC) drug coverage became a full and permanent part of the TRICARE benefit, requiring that beneficiaries pay the usual generic copays. If you get your drugs from a military pharmacy, or use Home Delivery to get a generic drug, you will still pay \$0. [Read more.](#)

- 22. Surgeons General: Reform Tricare, Not Military Hospitals** Military.com, Feb 24, 2016, Military health care reform must strike a balance between maintaining military readiness and fixing an "antiquated" Tricare system that needs upgrading, lawmakers said at a subcommittee hearing Tuesday on Capitol Hill. "On not a happy note, I think Tricare as it's designed is really antiquated -- I wouldn't give it a 'B,' " said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, who chairs the Senate Armed Services subcommittee on personnel. "I'm really going to be hard on you guys to come up with reforms, not just premium increases. We're going to look hard at Tricare and turn it upside down and make it more transparent and make it more accountable." [Read more.](#)
- 23. TRICARE Gets a Grade** MOAA, February 26, 2016, This has been a busy week for the Military Health System (MHS) on Capitol Hill. It isn't a secret Congress is intently focused on reforming the MHS, including the TRICARE program, and held several hearings this week on that topic. MOAA and The Military Coalition submitted written testimony for these hearings, stressing the need for system improvements, and not just fee increases for beneficiaries. [Read more.](#)
- 24. TRICARE: Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record** Military.com, Week of March 14, 2016, The Military Health System's (MHS) Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Health Information Exchange (HIE) Initiative enables shared access to your health care information. The information exchanged is already part of your TRICARE benefit. If you do not want your information accessed by your doctors in VLER HIE, you can opt out. Once you opt out, the MHS will not be able to share your information, even in case of an emergency. To opt out, [Read more.](#)
- 25. Decades Later, Agent Orange Catches Up with Vietnam Veterans,** Military.com via Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Feb 28, 2016, Snow fell outside the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 696 as its members held their monthly meeting Feb. 9. Although attendance was down, most of those present were Vietnam veterans receiving some percentage of disability benefits from their exposure to Agent Orange -- a herbicide sprayed by the United States military during the Vietnam War from 1961 to 1971. [Read more.](#)
- 26. Sesame Street Launches Website** Military.com, Week of February 15, 2016, The Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street, recently launched a website devoted to helping families cope with the changes associated with transitioning into civilian life. Sesame Workshop contains resources that military parents can use to help their families communicate through the transition process. The Department of Defense (DoD) has worked with the Sesame Workshop in the past to use Sesame Street's familiar characters to help preschool-aged military children understand aspects of military life such as the deployment of a parent or moving to a new home. [Read more.](#)

- 27. 6 Tax Tips for Maximizing Charitable Giving** The American Legion via USAA, February 18, 2016, You need proof of your charitable gifts – and a little planning – to claim them as deductions on your tax returns, according to Bob Meighan, vice president of customer advocacy for online tax preparer TurboTax®. Here's how to make the most of your generosity: [Read more.](#)
- 28. Rooney, Deutch Ally Against Veterans Fraud,** Sunshine State News, March 7, 2016, Two members of the Florida congressional delegation teamed up last week to introduce a bill to safeguard veterans against fraud. U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, R-Fla., and U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch, D-Fla., brought out the “Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act”. The bill proposes increasing penalties on conmen targeting veterans by charging illegal fees for help in appealing a claim with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. If the bill becomes law, violators would face fines and prison sentences up to five years. “Everyone knows that the claims process at the VA is too slow,” Rooney said as he introduced the proposal. “Anyone who deliberately seeks out our most vulnerable veterans purporting to speed up this process with their VA claims and illegally charging them exorbitant fees for their ‘services’ deserves to face a harsh penalty. This bill will help prevent America’s heroes from being targeted by fraudulent financial schemes by giving law enforcement the tools they need to punish these low-life criminals.” “Financial fraud is an increasingly sophisticated enterprise, and the unfortunate reality is that our veterans are a target,” said Deutch. [Read more.](#)
- 29. Women's History Month** Military.com, Week of March 09, 2015, March is Women' History Month, which honors the hard work and contributions made by women in the past and present. Today, in the U.S. Military, there are not many jobs women cannot volunteer for. For more information about Women's History Month and the role of women in the U.S. military, visit the Library of Congress' Women's History Month website - [Read more.](#)
- 30. Exclusive Offers from AAFES** Military.com, Week of March 14, 2016, The Exchange brings exclusive offers directly to shoppers' inboxes every week when they sign up for the Exchange Buddy List. Shoppers who sign up will be among the first to find out about exclusive savings, promotions, events and special offers at their local Exchange. The Buddy List delivers emails about worldwide and local promotions to approximately 134,000 authorized Exchange shoppers. Customers interested in receiving these messages can sign up at their local Exchange. For more discounts for military service members, families and veterans, visit - [Read more.](#)
- 31. From Combat to the Private Sector: 4 Resume Tips,** Military.com, February 17, 2016, After leaving the military, many servicemen and women must find their first private-industry job or consider using their combat experience to advance their previous careers. One of the most difficult challenges in making this transition is translating military experience into marketable private-industry skills on your resume. [Read more.](#)

- 32. Credentialing Helps Transfer Military Skills to Civilian Jobs** Military.com, Week of February 22, 2016, Many civilian jobs have certain professional and technical standards. Credentials show prospective civilian employers that your skills are on par with your civilian peers. Employers may choose to hire only employees who have certain credentials, or to pay those employees more. Federal, state, or local law may require specific credentials to legally perform some jobs. Obtaining credentials – certifications and licenses – shows that you meet these standards. Credentials may also assist you in getting promoted within the military. Civilian credentialing can contribute to military career development, and may be accepted for self-development requirements and in performance evaluations. [Credentialing Helps Transfer Military Skills to Civilian Jobs](#).
- 33. Bogus Benefit? Frustration with USAJOBS** Military.com via The American Legion, Feb 23, 2016 , Before John Spanogle left the Army in the fall of 2014, he enrolled in a weeklong transition course at Fort Knox, Ky., and hired a professional résumé service to translate two and a half decades of leadership, training and distinguished service into civilian terms. A career officer with a top-secret security clearance and six combat tours that culminated in responsibility for U.S. Special Forces worldwide for the Pentagon. [Read more](#).
- 34. Women Veterans Virtual Career Fair** Military.com, Week of March 07, 2016, On March 9th, Verizon is teaming up with WomenVeterans.com to host a Women Veterans Virtual Career Fair, a global event that is designed by veterans for veterans. During this virtual fair, women in the active-duty military, the reserves, and veterans, can log on to [womenveterans.com](#) to connect and chat live with recruiters about jobs available in Customer Service, Retail, network engineering, and IT at Verizon. In addition to the Career Fair, Verizon recently announced that it eliminated the minimum plan requirement for active, former and retired members of the military to receive a 15% discount on monthly wireless service and automatically applied the discount to more than 100,000 accounts. To learn more about this Virtual Career Fair and the Military Discount, visit the [Verizon website](#). [Read more](#).
- 35. GI Bill Transfer Update: Questions Answered** Military.com, Week of February 15, 2016, So you heard that there are changes underway to transferring the post-9/11 GI Bill. You know what was proposed, but now you want to know: what actually happened and what does it mean? You're not the only one asking — we've received tons of questions from users wanting the inside scoop. [Read more](#).
- 36. What Happens if You Drop a GI Bill Class?** Military.com, Week of March 14, 2016, To understand what happens if you drop a class, look at it this way: Uncle Sam is paying you money to go to school and take classes; if you don't show up for classes he's going to come to you looking for that money. If you remember anything from your military service, you should remember that the government will get any money owed to them, and they will get it pretty fast. So, with this in mind, how can you drop that class you are failing and not end up owing money to the VA? [Read more](#).

37. March Birthday - Grover Cleveland (1837-1908) the 22nd and 24th U.S. president was born in Caldwell, New Jersey. He was the only president to serve two nonconsecutive terms and was also the only president to be married in the White House.

Newsletter from your local Seminole County Veterans' Services Office Staff.

For all the Veterans you know, shake their hand and thank them for their service;

If you are a Veteran, we as individuals and a Country owe you a debt of gratitude.

Thank you for your service to our Country!