

E-VETS



The Monthly Online Newsletter Serving Texas Veterans

Volume 10 | Issue 8 | August 2011



TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

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Texas Veterans Commission promotes Veteran-preferred job opportunities

By Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

In 2009, the Texas Veterans Commission noticed that Veterans were struggling to get hired with an unemployment rate at 8.1 percent.

Kevin Smith was hired in November 2009 as the Veterans Business Outreach Coordinator, a new position tasked with matching qualified Veteran applicants with jobs.

"I didn't want to just get jobs for Veterans; I wanted to get high-paying jobs with major employers for Veterans," said Smith. "I wanted these Veterans to have a future at the companies that wanted to hire them."

Some employers are now seeking out these promising candidates directly through Smith because he has promoted Veterans so well to major corporations across the state.

Until recently, Smith was the Texas Veterans Commission only Veterans Business Representative, but due to Smith's success, the Texas Veterans Commission has hired three new Veterans Business Outreach Coordinators to

work with Smith and under his guidance.

The coordinators will each be working in a specific area of Texas to get Veterans hired in that region. Smith has been promoted to Lead Veterans Business Outreach Coordinator and will oversee the Dallas/Fort Worth area. The other coordinators will concentrate on the Houston area, the San Antonio/South Texas area, and the Austin/Fort Hood area.

When Smith was hired, there were no precedents set for how to accomplish the goal of the new initiative. Smith started by reaching out to employers through social media such as LinkedIn to inform hiring managers about the Texas Veterans Commission as a source for high performing candidates—Veterans.

The Business Outreach Coordinators work in conjunction with the 173 Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Representatives (VERs)

who provide job-readiness resources to Veterans. Smith has trained the VERs on how to find the resumes needed for the positions that employers send to the coordinators.

Once resumes are screened by the VERs and sent on, the coordinators will do a second screening before sending them on to the hiring managers. With the second screening, the coordinators are ensuring that every resume sent on adheres to all the requirements of the hiring managers. Building trust through screening candidates also helps form lasting relationships with the companies.

These jobs are posted in Work in Texas, but Smith also highlights Veteran preferred jobs on the Texas Veterans Commission website.

For more information on Veteran preferred job opportunities please go to <http://texas-veterans.com/job-postings>.

Specialty Outpatient Clinic to open in Corpus Christi

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On July 22, the Texas Veterans Commission was on hand at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Specialty Outpatient Clinic in Corpus Christi.

Texas Veterans Commission Vice Chair Al Cantu joined more than 100 Veterans, medical providers and representatives from around the state at the site of the 33,000-square-foot clinic that

will open next year.

The Specialty Outpatient Clinic will be a convenient location for the South Texas Veterans who normally travel to San Antonio or Houston for specialty medical, dental, surgical and mental health care.

The clinic will include new services such as mental health, cardiology, pulmonary, dermatology, endocrinology, urology,

ophthalmology, dental, podiatry, physical therapy, prosthetics, and orthopedics.

The old outpatient clinic will continue to run until the new clinic opens.

Once the new clinic is in operation the present 26,000-square-foot outpatient clinic will be renovated and will expand the pharmacy, laboratory, X-ray and physician care services.

Claims Processing Assistance Teams reduce backlog

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Since 2009, the Claims Processing Assistance Teams (CPATs) have brought 17,325 cases to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) for final decision or award action.

Claims backlogs had delayed decisions on Veterans' disability compensation and pension claims, causing physical and economic hardship for Veterans and their families. On July 15, all funding for the CPATs was officially exhausted.

"Gov. [Rick] Perry's quick and decisive action ensured these 17,325 cases would receive the attention they merit," said Tom

Palladino, executive director for the Texas Veterans Commission. "We thank Gov. Perry for expanding our capacity to help these deserving Veterans."

In the first quarter of 2009, the backlog of claims in the VA had increased by 100,000 nationwide.

In June of 2009, the total claims at the Houston VA Regional Office, including non-disability compensations and pensions, added up to almost 24,000, with 24 percent pending over six months; the percentage pending was higher than the national average, according to the Houston Chronicle. Houston

also had 11,389 claims on appeal, more than anywhere else in the country.

On Nov. 12, 2009, Gov. Rick Perry, an U.S. Air Force Veteran, announced he was taking action to help address the claims backlog in Texas with the CPAT project. Gov. Perry initiated the project by transferring funds to the Texas Veterans Commission on Nov. 17, 2009, with the purpose of reducing the statewide VA claims backlog of more than 39,000 pending claims.

The CPATs began streamlining the evidence gathering process, normally the most time-con-

suming stage in the VA claims process. The Texas Veterans Commission counselors directly contacted Veterans and health care providers to expedite the gathering of evidence.

"Our strong partnership with the VA and our successful track record of working on special initiatives with them was crucial in helping these Veterans and their families," said Palladino. "Expediting these claims meant Texas Veterans received the much needed benefits in a timely manner."

Law restores funds to Veteran students using GI Bill

By Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On Aug. 3, President Barack Obama signed into law House Resolution 1383, the Restoring GI Bill Fairness Act of 2011, which will protect Veteran students accepted or enrolled in private schools and using the Post-9/11 GI Bill when the Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010 was signed into law.

During the period beginning on

Aug. 1, 2011, and ending on July 31, 2014, Texas Veteran students will be able to receive payment for tuition up to \$1,539 per credit hour and fees up to \$12,130 per term.

"This is great news for Texas Veterans," said Connie Jacksits, director of the Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Education Program. "The GI Bill promises to provide education to those

individuals who have honorably served our country, and this law will ensure that Veteran students who enrolled in private colleges before January will not be left behind."

The Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act capped nationwide tuition and fees at \$17,500 and could have left some students paying thousands of dollars out-of-pocket to

remain in school.

Students in seven states — Arizona, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas — will qualify.

To learn more about the Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Education Program and find approved programs, please visit <http://texas-veterans.com/education/overview>

Texas Veterans Commission visits Boeing

By Rick Svatora, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

At the invitation of Boeing Company, the Texas Veterans Commission commissioners and staff participated in a special tour of the Boeing Aerospace Support Center located at the former Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio on July 14. The tour included a review of Boeing's aircraft maintenance, production and painting facilities, as well as a look at the new Boeing 787 Dreamliner commercial aircraft.

The Boeing Support Systems facility first opened at the former airbase, now known as the Port of San Antonio, in August 1998 with the arrival of the first aircraft, a C-17 Globemaster III. Today, Boeing performs maintenance, modifications and upgrades on a variety of military aircraft at the site, according to the company.

According to Boeing statistics, 629 veterans are employed at the San Antonio site. Approximately one-in-four of all Boeing employees at the Port of San Antonio are Veterans. Nearly 24,000 Veterans work for Boeing across the United States.



Photo courtesy of Boeing Company

Right to left: Boeing Representative Jeffrey Dodson, Boeing, Texas Veterans Commission Executive Director Thomas Palladino, Texas Veterans Commission Secretary James Scott, Texas Veterans Commission Chair T.P. O'Mahoney, and Texas Veterans Commission Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Manager Rick Svatora.

Family Employment Assistance Counselor Program assisting military spouses

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Veterans are not the only group struggling with unemployment; military spouses are also struggling to find work in the economic recession.

A Department of Defense (DoD) survey in September 2008 identified that 84 percent of all military spouses have at least some college education, 25 percent hold a bachelor's degree, and 10 percent hold advanced degrees. Seventy-seven percent of military spouses surveyed report they want or need to work. The overall wage gap between civilian and military wives is 42 percent. Among households that moved the year prior to the survey, a common situation in the military, the wage gap rises to over 47 percent.

The Texas Veterans Commission raised the issue with the Texas Legislature in 2009. Backed with funding provided by the legislature, the Texas Veterans Commission launched the Family Employment Assistance Counselor (FEAC) program.

FEAC is designed to support and assist caretakers and family members of Wounded Warriors and Veterans, in addition to spouses of active duty military personnel. FEAC personnel provide the same type of service to the spouse or family member that is given to Veterans.

Currently, FEAC personnel are located in San Antonio (BAMC), Killeen (Fort Hood) and El Paso (Fort Bliss). Using tools like <http://texas-veterans.com/employment/overview>, www.workintexas.com, and other web- and print-based sources, they find possible job openings, job fairs and re-employment information. FEAC personnel also contact employers directly to encourage and assist them in hiring of Veteran or active duty spouses and family members.

In December of 2010, President Barack Obama commissioned a presidential study on the military and their families, "Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's

Commitment." The report focused on the following four areas: psychological health and wellbeing of military families; excellence in education and development for military children; career and educational opportunities for military spouses; and availability and quality of child care for the armed forces.

During a ceremony at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington on June 29, the DoD announced the launch of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership. The partnership encompasses more than 70 employers who have committed to opening their doors to spouse employment including Dell, Inc. in Round Rock, Texas.

Each employer promises to:

- Increase employment opportunities for military spouses, while maintaining employment for relocating spouses;
- Provide career promotion

opportunities for military spouses who are excelling at their jobs;

- Ensure pay equity for military spouses commensurate with their level of training, work experience, accomplishments and credentials; and
- Spread the word about spousal support throughout the military and corporate America.

For more information on the Texas Veterans Commission FEAC program visit <http://texas-veterans.com/> or call 1-800-252-VETS.

To learn more about the federal Military Spouse Employment Partnership Web program, visit <http://www.ourmilitary.mil>.

Cell Phones for Soldiers donates calling cards

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Helping soldiers stay in touch with their families is just as easy as donating an old cellphone.

Cell Phones for Soldiers collects used cell phones, recycles them for cash and uses the money to buy prepaid phone cards for the soldiers deployed overseas.

In 2004, Brittany and Robbie Berquist, from Norwell, Mass., saw a story on their local news about a soldier having to pay for an \$8,000 phone bill that he accrued while deployed. They felt the soldier should not have to pay for the phone bill and decided to take action. The brother and sister duo came up with \$21 of

their own money and organized raffles and car washes to pay off the soldier's bill.

When they saw the positive outcome from one soldier's issue after their efforts, they decided to help other soldiers that might run into the same problem, and Cell Phones for Soldiers began.

Over \$2 million has been raised in donations and over 500,000 phone cards have been distributed to soldiers overseas.

Each donated cell phone generates 60 minutes of phone card call time.

Since October 2009, the Texas Veterans Commission has helped with the efforts by setting up a

cell phone drop off location at its Austin Headquarters, located at the Stephen F. Austin building, Suite 800. To date 1,058 cell phones have been donated, which has generated over 63,000 minutes for soldiers.

AT&T has also supported their efforts by donating half a million dollars in phone cards and has established drop off locations at each of its more than 2,000 company-owned stores across the U.S.

Cell Phones for Soldiers accepts all make, model, and condition of cell phones, chargers, batteries, accessories, Blackberry PDA's, and pagers.

If you would like to donate a cell phone or have any questions, please visit www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com or <http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com/locateDropoff.asp> to find your nearest drop off location.



Over \$3 Million in Grants Available from the Texas Veterans Commission

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Texas Veterans Commission announced the availability of more than \$3 million in grants to be awarded from the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

Grant funds will be awarded to qualified charitable organizations, Veterans Service Organizations and local government agencies to address issues affecting Veterans and their families. Services funded to date include transportation to medical facilities, counseling for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), housing assistance for homeless Veterans, short-term emergency financial needs, Veteran courts, legal assistance and career train-

ing.

"These grants play a critical role in meeting the diverse needs of these Veterans and their families," says Thomas Palladino, Executive Director of the Texas Veterans Commission.

"I invite all eligible organizations and entities to consider how their specific programs can be lever-



aged to assist Veterans and encourage them to apply for a grant."

Veterans Cash has been the primary source of funds for the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance since its introduction in November 2009. The current game features the iconic image of John Wayne. Individuals can

also support Veterans by making an online donation to the Fund for Veterans' Assistance through <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us> or when registering a vehicle. Donations to the TVC Fund for Veterans' Assistance are tax deductible under the provisions of Section 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Information outlining the grant objectives, selection criteria and instructions application can be found at <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/fund-for-veterans-assistance>. All grant applications must be received by the Texas Veterans Commission no later than 5:00 PM Central Time on August 26, 2011.

Find the Texas Veterans Commission on the web



State Bar and Texas Court Reporters Association initiate Veterans History Project

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Texas Veterans Commission is assisting the State Bar of Texas and the Texas Court Reporters Association (TCRA) in their search to find Veterans who want to share and document their military experiences for the Veterans History Project (VHP).

VHP was created in 2000 as a part of the American Folklife Center at the U.S Library of Congress.

The mission is to collect, preserve, and make accessible the personal accounts of American wartime Veterans so that future generations may hear directly from Veterans and better under-

stand the realities of war.

At the State Bar annual meeting in June, the TCRA and the State Bar launched the initiative, which had a positive response led to several lawyer-Veterans recording their stories on site and other Veterans to set up dates to be interviewed at a later time.

Court reporters who are members of the TCRA are volunteering their time to record and conduct the interviews. They will provide the Veterans' oral histories in written transcript form to the U.S. Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

The Veteran may also submit

memoirs, collections of original photographs, letters, diaries, and other historical documents they deem necessary.

The interview and any documents or pictures, will be housed in the U.S. Library of Congress in a preserved environment within the permanent collections. The stories and collateral materials will be available to scholars, students, and anyone else visiting the U.S. Library of Congress.

This project not only honors the nation's heroes, but also allows them to create a lasting legacy of their wartime experiences and how those experiences

affected their lives and America itself.

There is a six month processing period for each interview donated.

The State Bar and TCRA are looking for Veterans from all conflicts and eras. The current goal is to record 1,000 oral histories interviews in one year.

If you are a Veteran that would like to be interviewed or know of one, contact Stephanie Moses at 214-653-7178, Stephanie_moses@sbcglobal.net, or Judy Marchman at the State Bar at 512-427-1520, jmarchman@texasbar.com.

Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission seeks out WWII liberators

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Texas Veterans Commission is assisting the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission (THGC) in their efforts to find World War II liberators of the Nazi concentration camps who would be willing to be interviewed for an oral histories project.

The purpose of the oral histories project is to instill in individuals a sense of responsibility to uphold human value, especially in the face of genocidal travesty, while also recognizing the acts as well as the people throughout these atrocities who participated

in the preservation of human sanctity.

The THGC is in the process of gathering the names of Veterans through networking efforts such as social media, personal contacts, and press releases that would be willing to participate. THGC is also working with Holocaust institutions in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and El Paso.

Baylor University will conduct the first interviews. Once the interviews are conducted they will be placed in the Holocaust institutions libraries and on the THGC website for the public to

view.

Suzanne Ransleben, chair of the THGC resource committee and head of the project, feels having the oral histories of the World War II liberators will provide a unique and perspective of the Holocaust and be vital for educational purposes.

“Oral histories are so powerful for students,” said Ransleben. “There is no more powerful means for teaching than firsthand experiences.”

Due to the urgency relating to the age of the World War II Veterans, the project is urgently

working to get the oral histories recorded.

The mission of the THGC is to ensure that resources are available to students, educators, and the general public regarding the Holocaust and other genocides.

Following this oral histories project the THGC will expand to include other genocides.

If you are a World War II liberator or know of one willing to participate in the THGC oral histories project, please contact Martin Fein at martin@fein.com or Suzanne Ransleben at rsransleben@acid.org.

Governor signs important Veterans' bills into law

By Rick Svatora, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Gov. Rick Perry signed a number of bills into law this session with a significant impact on Texas Veterans.

Legislation that will assist employers who hire Veterans, will assess the need to increase the property tax exemption amounts for Veterans with a disability rating of less than 100 percent, provide burned Veterans discounts on their utility bills, and create a “Veteran” designation on drivers licenses were all signed by the governor at the end of the 82nd legislative session:

Senate Bill 439 “Employer Chargeback Exemption” (Sen. Leticia Van de Putte and Rep. Kenneth Sheets)

SB 439 exempts businesses from paying unemployment insurance costs for temporary employees who are filling in for service members who have been deployed.

Senate Bill 540 “Comptroller Homestead Study” (Sen. Van de Putte and Rep. Naomi Gonzalez)

Texas Veterans with a disabili-

ty rating of 10-90 percent are eligible for a progressive property tax exemption off the assessed value of their homes. However, the amount of the exemptions hasn’t increased for ten years. SB 540 requires the Comptroller to study the fiscal impact on state and local governments that would have been created in the past 10 years if adjustments to the maximum amount of property tax exemptions to which disabled Veterans (and surviving spouses and minors) are entitled were made.

Senate Bill 1002 “Burned Vet Discount” (Sens. Van de Putte/Mario Gallegos, Dan Patrick, Eddie Rodriguez, Jeff Wentworth and Rep. Jose Menendez)

SB 1002 creates a payment assistance program for utility customers in San Antonio who are military Veterans and who have difficulty regulating their core body temperatures because of severe service-connected burns.

San Antonio is home to a high number of Veterans who have sustained severe burns received

in combat.

These burns significantly impair the Veteran’s ability to regulate his/her core body temperature, thus requiring cooler in-home temperatures. These cooler temperatures, especially during scorching Texas summers, result in high utility bills.

House Bill 1514 “VETERAN” Drivers License Designation (Rep. Jason Isaac and Sen. Brian Birdwell)

HB 1514 requires the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to include a designation of “VETERAN” on the driver’s licenses issued to certain Veterans.

The bill will allow any person who served in a branch of the U.S. military as well as members of the Texas National Guard to request to have the “VETERAN” designation on their license. The Veteran must provide proof of their service and honorable discharge to obtain the designation.

The legislation came in response to Veterans seeking an easier way to verify their

military service to businesses, organizations and events that provide benefits and discounts to Veterans.

The license designation is a convenient way to provide such proof without having to produce a copy of their form DD-214.



Photo provided by Brent Turner, Office of Sen. Leticia Van de Putte

Sen. Leticia Van de Putte addresses the attendees for a bill signing at St. Philips Community College in San Antonio.

Former Austin resident to be awarded Medal of Honor

By Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Former Austin resident, Cpl. Dakota Meyer, will be the first living Marine to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor (MOH), the nation's highest military honor, since the Vietnam War. He will join Army Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta and Army Sgt. 1st Class Leroy Petry as three living members of the military to

receive the MOH in the current Iraq/Afghanistan conflict.

Cpl. Meyer will be awarded this medal due to his actions on Sept. 8, 2010, in Ganjgal, a village in the remote area of Afghanistan in Kunar province, near the Pakistan border. After being pinned down by heavy enemy fire, Meyer entered a

"kill-zone" in order to locate four missing members of his team. Although wounded, alone and on foot, Cpl. Meyer found his three missing Marines and a Navy corpsman already dead. He carried the four men out of the area and back to safety.

"I am the furthest thing from the hero because the real ones are

those in the war and those who gave the ultimate sacrifice that day," he said at the time.

Cpl. Meyer is originally from Greensburg, Ky., and enlisted in the Marines in 2006. Recently he lived in Austin for three months before moving back to Kentucky in May.

Lone Star Veterans Organization branches out

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

With the number of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Veterans increasing each day, there has been a greater need for support organizations created specifically for these Veterans.

The Lone Star Veterans Association (LSVA) started by John Boerstler in Houston, Texas, in 2009, was created as a support system for returning OIF and OEF Veterans.

In May 2011, the LSVA established a presence in Austin. The organization has roughly 75 members and plans a variety of weekly activities such as happy hours, kickball games and food drives.

LSVA also provides trained peer mentors for those Veterans who are having trouble transitioning from military to civilian life and works closely with other organizations to develop strate-

gies and ongoing programs to assist local servicemembers, Veterans and their families.

LSVA also provides information on resource fairs, job openings, and special events such as concerts and sporting events.

"LSVA offers the opportunity to reach out to the younger Veterans," said Cinda Johnson, communications director of the Austin branch.

"Sharing benefit information,

assisting them with employment and anything else they may need while participating in activities will hopefully create bonds between our members."

LSVA membership is free and open to all Veterans and their family members.

For more information on LSVA and upcoming events, please visit <http://lonestarveterans.ning.com/>.

Veteran news around the web

Military service records (DD214) now available online

<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>

VA solar energy projects at 5 hospitals, including 2 in Texas

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2140>

Hiring Veterans make positive investment

<http://www.veteranstoday.com/2011/07/28/hiring-vets-makes-positive-investment-general-says/>

VA embarks on national homeless prevention initiative

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/07/27/2332885/va-embarks-on-national-homeless.html>

Job Fairs, Benefits Fairs and More

Please visit the Texas Veterans Commission Calendar

for all upcoming Veterans events in your area!

<http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/calendar>

