

E-VETS



The Monthly Online Newsletter Serving Texas Veterans

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TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

www.tvc.state.tx.us
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Dallas County Veterans Court gives second chance

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On June 6, the 67th anniversary of "D-Day," Timothy Carmack graduated from the Dallas County Veterans Court (DCVC) Program.

Carmack, a Navy Desert Storm/Desert Shield Veteran, found a difficult transition after the military and ended up homeless and in trouble with the law. Upon reviewing Carmack's case, DCVC Judge Mike Snipes accepted him into the DCVC Program for six months of rehabilitation and counseling services. After Carmack successfully completed the program, Judge Snipes dismissed his case.

The DCVC provides a second chance to servicemembers with a criminal record. Judge Snipes, a retired U.S. Army Colonel and Veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), understands the struggles of Veterans coming back and how sometimes they can take the wrong path and find themselves convicted of a crime.

"As a Veteran, it means a lot to me to be judge of this court because I have seen firsthand the terrible sacrifices that these young men and women make," said Judge Snipes. "There are no rear lines or safe havens in Iraq or Afghanistan, and you never know who the enemy is or what weapons they may employ."

The DCVC began in May 2010, and three Veterans have successfully graduated from the program. The DCVC manages Veteran cases and gives the option of replacing jail time and a criminal record with treatment and therapy and the possibility of having their case dismissed upon completion of the program.

On Sept. 1, 2010, the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance awarded the DCVC \$40,000 to assist the program. The funds help the court

continue to operate.

Recently, the DCVC was awarded another \$40,000 grant that will extend their funds starting on Sept. 1, 2011.

"I have a full time probation officer and clinical assessment specialist that would not get paid without grant funding," said Judge Snipes. "They are essential members of my staff, and I am grateful to the Texas Veterans Commission for helping me have them."

During the transition back into civilian life, Veterans can have unique problems that range from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury to drug and alcohol abuse.

Every Veteran who commits a crime will not automatically qualify for the Veterans Court program. Veterans who have been honorably discharged from their branch of service and accused of a misdemeanor or felony offenses that would likely receive probation can be accepted.

Once in the program, the Veteran participants must attend a weekly court session to inform Judge Snipes of their progress toward a stable life. Each participant is also assigned a Veteran who serves as a mentor through the entire process.

"Some Veterans deserve a second chance because they develop mental issues from combat service that lead to behavior that causes crime," said Judge Snipes. "They would not have these mental issues if they had not accepted the call to defend their



Mike Snipes, a U.S. Army Veteran, serves his tour of duty in Iraq before becoming the judge of the Dallas Veterans Court. Photo provided by Judge Mike Snipes.

country in the first place."

Judge Snipes has reviewed cases of Veterans who have served from Vietnam to OIF/OEF conflicts.

The program's success extends beyond completing rehabilitation.

"The court has impacted Veterans by giving them job opportunities, stabilizing and treating their mental and/or addictive issues and helping them find meaningful employment," said Judge Snipes.

The Texas Veterans Commission also provides claims representation and counseling, education, and employment assistance to the Veterans in the program.

For more information about other programs funded through the Fund for Veterans' Assistance please visit: <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/awards>.

Groundbreaking Ceremony at new VA clinic

By Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On June 17, 2011, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hosted a groundbreaking ceremony at the site of the new VA Outpatient Clinic in Austin, Texas. The new location is at the intersection of Montopolis Drive and Metlink Road near State Highways 183 and 71 in South Austin. The clinic is projected to open in spring of 2013.

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett, and Thomas C. Smith, director of the Central Texas Veterans Health Care System, spoke during the ceremony of the importance of providing for the nation's Veterans through the VA healthcare system.

The current VA Outpatient Clinic on Montopolis serves more than 22,960 Veterans per year, and that number is projected to grow to 30,000 per year by 2025. The new two-story Outpatient Clinic will be the largest free-standing clinic of its type in the nation with 184,000 square feet. The current clinic provides primary care, urgent care, and more than 20 areas of specialty of care. An additional 16,000 square-feet of leased space at the Southgate building on I-35 provides mental health, health care for homeless Veterans, and home-based primary care services. All operations at the current clinic and Southgate Building will be moved to the new clinic so

that Veterans will have the convenience of obtaining their outpatient medical care at one location.

The new clinic will provide services including cardiology, dental dermatology, endocrinology, x-ray imaging, laboratory, ophthalmology, pharmacy and physical therapy. The new clinic will also include specialty services such as chemotherapy, mammography, ear-nose-throat and other specialties which currently require a trip to the Temple VA Medical Center or a referral to an outside physician.

In anticipation of the increased volume and in recognition of the valuable service provided, the Texas Veterans Commission has been allotted additional office space at the new facility to accommodate four counselors and an administrative assistant.

Photo by Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Sen. John Cornyn, Thomas Smith, director of the Central Texas Veterans Health Care System, and Rep. Lloyd Doggett break ground at the new VA Outpatient clinic in Austin.



Texas Veterans Commission asks Veterans to revisit Physical Evaluation Board Process

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

From Independence Day, July 4, 2011, through Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2011, the Texas Veterans Commission is working to raise awareness of the Department of Defense (DoD) Physical Disability Board of Review (PDBR).

The Physical Disability Board of Review, or PDBR, was created by Congress in response to allegations of systematic "low balling" by the service branches of the Armed Forces in the assignment of ratings to servicemembers discharged as medically unfit for continued military service between Sept. 11, 2001, and Dec. 31, 2009. The PDBR

reviews the disability ratings of wounded warriors and provides another avenue of administrative recourse for wounded Veterans.

The PDBR uses medical information provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the military department. Once a review is complete, the PDBR forwards a recommendation to the secretary of the respective branch of the Armed Forces. It is up to the individual service branch to make the final determination on whether to change the original disability determination.

"Ensuring our wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers and former servicemembers receive

fair and equitable recommendations pertaining to the assignment of disability ratings in the Physical Evaluation Board process is the absolute least we should do," said Jim Richman, Texas Veterans Commission Director of Claims Representation and Counseling.

Any servicemember may have their case reviewed by the PDBR if they were discharged between Sept. 11, 2001, and Dec. 31, 2009, with a combined disability rating of 20 percent or less and were not found to be eligible for retirement.

More than half the cases reviewed by the PDBR have

resulted in the applicant being eligible for a disability retirement according to information provided by the Military Health System.

What does this mean for the Veterans and their families who choose to have their cases reviewed and are successful? Benefits of such an award include all military retired rights and privileges for the Veteran and their family.

To learn more about Physical Disability Board of Review requirements or individual eligibility, call toll free 800-252-VETS (8387) and ask to speak a PDBR specialist.

Army Veteran graduates high school after being drafted over 60 years ago

By Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On June 3, Mauro Padilla, Jr. realized a life-long dream when he walked across the stage at Del Rio High School and received his high school diploma after missing his first chance when he was drafted into the U.S. Army over 60 years ago.

Padilla, 81, also received a plaque, an American flag and a Texas Veterans Commission coin for his service and to congratulate him on his overdue accomplishment during a reception before the graduation ceremony.

During the ceremony, Padilla received a standing ovation from the class of 2011 at Del Rio High School.

With assistance from Texas

Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Representatives Janice Casillas and Ernie Torres, Padilla's daughter, Linda Fernandez, contacted the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and persuaded TEA to honor her father with his high school diploma because his duty and then familial obligations had taken precedence over his education.

In 1950, Padilla was drafted in the Army during the Korean War. He was assigned as a transport driver and delivered supplies to the troops at the front lines. In 1953, he was honorably discharged following an accident transporting a truckload of generators which left him

seriously injured.

Needing to support his family, Padilla did not return to school after being discharged. He became a carpenter and a cabinetmaker. He instilled in his children and grandchildren the importance of education, and Fernandez wanted to honor him with the diploma which had eluded him.

"The plaques, coin and flag were so much more than I expected," said Fernandez in a letter to Casillas. "I see [my dad] glowing with pride."

Fernandez also shared her father's next goal in life: a college diploma.



Photo provided by Janice Casillas, Texas Veterans Commission, Del Rio

Janice Casillas, Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Representative, joins Mauro Padilla Jr. before his graduation ceremony.

Legislature recognizes value of Texas Veterans Commission

By Rick Svatora, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The 82nd Texas Legislature passed a budget with only a slight, two percent decrease in funding to the Texas Veterans Commission. On June 17, 2011, Gov. Rick Perry signed the budget into law and it takes effect Sept. 1, 2011.

Due to the leadership of budget writers Sen. Steve Ogden and Rep. Jim Pitts, the Texas Veterans Commission's budget for three of its core program areas – Claims, Education, and Employment – was restored to adjusted Fiscal Years 2010-2011 levels. Under House Bill 1 as introduced, the Texas Veterans Commission faced a 20 percent cut to those programs. The restoration in General Revenue funding amounts to over \$2.5 million for the agency.

The Texas Veterans Commis-

sion's success this session was due to the support of a number of legislators committed to the agency's service to Veterans.

Rep. Ralph Sheffield, Vice Chair of the House Defense and Veterans' Affairs Committee, passed an amendment on the House floor to restore the Claims budget.

Rep. John Otto, chair of the House Appropriations subcommittee that wrote the budget for the Texas Veterans Commission, was the first to increase funding by providing \$800,000 to the Claims budget. He also funded the Texas Veterans Commission's request for a Women Veterans Coordinator. The funding provided for the coordinator in the final budget will allow Texas to assist women Veterans to attain equitable access to services.

The Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance will also start administering the Veterans Housing Assistance Program, beginning Sept. 1, 2011. Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Military Installations Committee, led the effort and worked with Sen. Tommy Williams to transfer the funding from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs to the Texas Veterans Commission. The program will provide at least \$585,000 in grants per year to modify homes of injured service members, provide temporary housing for caretakers of severely injured servicemembers, and provide rental assistance to Veterans and their families.

In addition, legislators worked tirelessly to enhance and protect

the Fund for Veterans' Assistance:

- Senate Bill 1635, by Sen. Wendy Davis and Rep. Joe Farias, creates an option on vehicle registration renewal forms to enable individuals to donate directly to Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

- Senate Bill 1739, by Sen. Davis and Rep. Joe Pickett, chair of the House Defense and Veterans' Affairs Committee, will prohibit the use of the Fund for any purpose other than grants to meet the needs of Veterans or for the administration of the Fund.

Gov. Perry signed both bills into law on June 17, 2011.

Transition Assistance Program prepares Veterans for civilian life

By Rachel Howell and Stan Kurtz, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was established to meet the needs of separating servicemembers transitioning into civilian life by offering job-search assistance and related services. Texas has 11 TAP sites throughout the state, and in the past year, Texas conducted 318 TAP workshops with 14,212 participants.

Texas TAP facilitators are all Veterans, and most are Texas Veterans Commission employees. Their military experience coupled with their vast knowledge of Veterans' benefits and programs is an invaluable resource and greatly contributes to a smooth transition to civilian life.

"I attended the TAP course at Randolph AFB," said a retired U.S. Air Force Major. "I just wanted to say what a great deal this is for departing/transition-

ing military members. I picked up many important nuggets this week, and the TAP manual will be an important reference tool for folks throughout their job search process. I also wanted to say what a fantastic job the facilitator did."

The TAP seminars provide servicemembers, Veterans and their spouses with information on labor markets, job search techniques, interviewing skills, resume preparation, Veterans' benefits, and employment and training services.

The Texas Veterans Commission facilitators are an essential resource to make TAP informative and memorable. Facilitators get creative in finding ways to teach the information to the participants. Mock-up interviews are conducted, and some sites have dress for success demonstra-

tions and employer question and answer panels.

The employer panels consist of local area employers providing a unique insight on what employers are looking for when interviewing and hiring employees. The employers volunteer their time in an effort to better prepare these soon-to-be job seeking veterans. Some of these well-known employers include GEXPRO, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, CVS, and Caterpillar.

"I thought the courses were awesome, and the facilitator was personable and professional; his attitude was infectious," said an E-7 NCO. "The facilitator was very knowledgeable and helpful. I loved the employer panels, and the guest speakers were great."

TAP helps servicemembers and their spouses make the initial transition from military service to

the civilian workplace with less difficulty and at less overall cost to the government. An independent national evaluation of the program estimated that servicemembers who had participated in TAP, on average, found their first post-military job three weeks sooner than those who did not participate in TAP.

For Veterans and spouses who may have missed TAP, do not live near a TAP site, or would like additional information, Turbo Tap offers endless resources to help Veterans successfully transition from boots to suits. Please visit <http://www.turbotap.org/register.tpp>

For more information about TAP and the Texas Veterans Commission, please visit <http://texas-veterans.com/employment/transition-assistance-program>.

Tickets to Semi-Pro baseball game donated to Veterans

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On Monday, June 27, 2011, the Round Rock Express hosted a Military Appreciation Night at Dell Diamond in Round Rock, Texas. More than 2,500 seated tickets and hundreds more of the grass seats were provided to active duty, Veterans and their families free of charge. Military personnel spanning multiple eras attended the event and took part in the festivities.

The evening included a Veteran skydive entrance by double amputee and former Golden Knight, Dana Bowman, who remained in the stands throughout the game to sign autographs. Vietnam Prisoner of War Ken Wallingford took the mound to start the game by throwing out the first pitch. The Round Rock Express players wore "desert camo" jerseys, and fans were able to take home the jersey of their favorite player in a silent auction.

Veterans also had an opportunity to learn about the many benefits and services available to them by visiting the Dell Diamond United Heritage Center during the game. Numerous organizations staffed tables in the Center to answer questions and provide information to Veterans and family members.

Veterans polled after the game said they had a great time and expressed their gratitude to the sponsors who made the event a success.

"The only thing that would have made it better," exclaimed one Veteran, "would have been a Round Rock Express win!"



Photo by Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Joseph Butler, Round Rock Express player, wears the "desert camo" jersey for Military Appreciation Night.

Texas Veterans Commission provides community and emergency resources

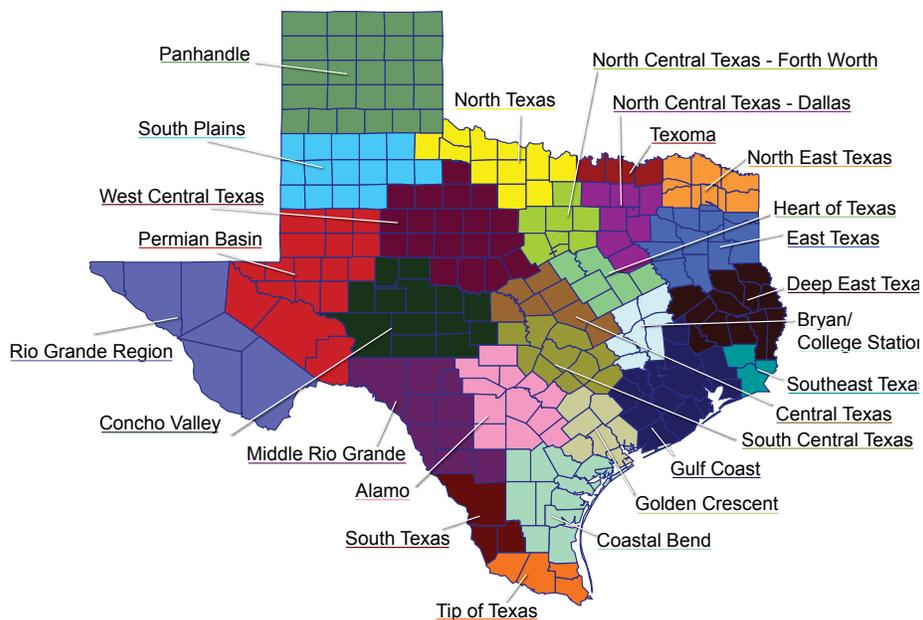
By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Texas Veterans Commission staff provides excellent service so that each Veteran is well aware of the benefits they deserve. They are also linked in with the community and emergency resources across the state of Texas.

The state's 254 counties are divided into 25 regions. Each region has designated resources for Veterans.

To find the community and emergency resources in your area, visit <http://texas-veterans.com/claims/veteran-resource-guide>.

Find your region or county in your specified region to locate the community and emergency resources for that area. Click on the Veteran specific resource directory for a listing and description of the services provided.



Veteran news around the web

New research shows how PTSD effects the body

<http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/health&id=81958431>

Texas Tech named Veteran friendly school for second year

<http://www.myfoxlubbock.com/news/local/story/Texas-Tech-veteran-West-Texas/E-FhwshqcEGBD8L4MmT9jQ.csp>

First county Veterans workshop proves success

http://www.mysoutex.com/view/full_story/14468912/article-First-county-veterans-workshop-proves-success?instance=news_special_cover_age_right_column

36 Houston Veterans compete in 25th National Veterans Golden Age Games

http://www.yourhoustonnews.com/river_oaks/living/article_4f9d3e2e-ec18-51a2-9fd4-1cd9b427d2d6.html

VA and Easter Seals open first round of caregiver training

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2118>

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>

