

E-VETS



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Fund for Veterans' Assistance grant provides Hope for Heroes

By Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Through a grant funded by the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance, the Hope for Heroes program at the Samaritan Center in Austin began serving Veterans in September 2010. The program, with services that include counseling and alternative therapy, has assisted 193 Veterans. That number is expected to grow as Veterans discover the benefits and services of the program.

Nancy Blaich, executive director for the Samaritan Center, which houses Hope for Heroes, sought funding to successfully provide confidential counseling at no charge for servicemembers and their families.

Hope for Heroes' goals include improving access to mental health care for Veterans and their family members and to improve the health and family functioning of Veterans and their families in 20 Central Texas counties. Two programs are funded through the Fund for Veterans' Assistance grant to accomplish their goal: Veterans Behavioral Health Planning Partnership and Family and Integrating Counseling Program.

The Veterans Behavioral Planning Partnership consists of community stakeholders to establish a partnership and coordinate a process to engage Veterans in mental health supports and services. Stakeholders are providers of behavioral health services and supports to Veterans and their families such as primary care physicians, law enforcement, homeless service programs, faith based organizations and others. Veterans and family members of all ages, including Veterans' children, spouse and parents will be able to use the health services.

The Family and Integrating Counseling Program supports all members of the family and



Photo by Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Thomas Palladino, executive director of the Texas Veterans Commission, takes a tour with Nancy Blaich, executive director of the Samaritan Center, and Sean Hanna, director of Hope for Heroes, of the Samaritan Center facilities that houses the Hope for Heroes program.

includes services to servicemembers, Veterans, and their families for all stages of deployment and returning to civilian life. Hope for Heroes counselors can help with specific concerns during deployment, with family communication upon return, and with children having a difficult time with parents or siblings who are deployed.

Their services are not limited to traditional counseling; they also use alternative methods such as biofeedback, acupuncture, massage therapy, herbal therapy and Tai Chi.

Biofeedback is used to help to control one's own muscle tension, heart rate, nervous system arousal, and breathing patterns. Biofeedback can be used to treat the stress problems such as anxiety, headaches, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), insomnia, and Traumatic Brain Injury

(TBI).

Sensors are placed on the skin's surface which record the activity of the muscle, nervous system, and heart rate and transmit that information to a computer in the form of a graph or image. The Veteran becomes aware of how his or her body responds to his or her own thoughts and environment and learns to train his or her body to respond in more positive and healthy ways.

For more information about Hope for Heroes, please visit <http://www.samaritan-center.org/>.

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

Fund for Veterans' Assistance adds online donation capability

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

At a press conference in the Texas State Capitol on May 18, the Texas Veterans Commission announced the launch of an online donation tool for the Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

The Texas Veterans Commission worked with Texas.gov, the official website of the state of Texas, to launch this donation tool on May 16. Individuals and organizations are able to make a secure, tax-deductible contribution online by going to the Texas Veterans Commission

website and clicking on the Fund for Veterans' Assistance logo (pictured) or by going to <https://txapps.texas.gov/tolapp/fva/home.do>.

"When we passed the legislation creating the Fund for Veterans' Assistance, we intended it to be a way for us to say thank you to the Veterans of this great state for the sacrifices made by them and their families to protect our way of life," said Texas Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, chair of the Texas Senate Veteran Affairs and Military Installations Committee. "The launch of the online donation capability now provides all Texans the opportunity to express their gratitude through a safe and secure tax-deductible donation online."

In addition to the online tool, donations may also be made by mail, through vehicle registration renewals and through the State Employee Charitable Campaign.

During the press conference, the Texas Lottery Commission announced the new John Wayne-themed \$2 scratch-off lottery ticket for the Veterans Cash lot-

tery game. Since its introduction on Nov. 11, 2009, sales of Veterans Cash scratch-off tickets have provided over \$14.5 million to the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

"I encourage all the citizens of Texas to buy the John Wayne Lottery tickets and help support the Veterans community," said Rep. Joseph Pickett, chair of the Texas House Defense and Veterans' Affairs Committee. "They have given so much to our state and it is crucial that we show our appreciation and give back."

Also speaking during the press conference were T.P. O'Mahoney, chair, Texas Veterans Commission, Thomas Palladino, executive director, Texas Veterans Commission, Rep. Ralph Sheffield, vice chair, House Defense and Veterans' Affairs Committee, Rep. Joe Farias, Gary Grief, executive director, Texas Lottery Commission, and John Miterko, legislative liaison, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations.

Christa Noland, deputy director of Green Doors, and Dennis



Miller, a formerly homeless Navy Veteran who completed the Green Doors program, also attended the event. Green Doors operates a homeless program for Veterans in Austin.

For more information about organizations receiving grant awards from the Texas Veterans Commission's Fund for Veterans' Assistance, visit: <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/awards>.



Texas servicemembers honored on Memorial Day

Photos by Rick Svatora, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin



On May 28, 2011, at the Texas State Capitol, Gov. Rick Perry and Texas Legislature honored Texas Servicemembers who fought and died in the Global War on Terror. Joe Straus, the Speaker of the House, led the ceremony in which 96 names of Texans killed in Iraq and Afghanistan were read to recognize their ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

Texas Veterans Commission Chairman T.P. O'Mahoney

(left) is pictured in the Chamber of the Texas House of Representatives.

Also in attendance were Sen. Steve Ogden and Commissioner Richard A. McLeon IV, Commissioner's son, Richard A. McLeon V, and Commissioner James H. Scott (right) pictured in front of the North Steps of the Texas Capitol.



Smart phone applications assist Veterans



By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

A new smart phone application launched by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) in April 2011 is designed to help servicemembers and Veterans manage their adjustment challenges with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The application, PTSD Coach, has been downloaded by over 5,000 users in over 25 countries.

The app lets users track their PTSD symptoms and take personal assessments. It also teaches helpful strategies and exercises to manage PTSD from the palm of the user's hand.

Tools include relaxation skills, positive self-talk, anger management, and other common self-help strategies. Also, the tool can be used anonymously.

The application is free and is

not only designed for Veterans who may experience PTSD, but also for friends, family or professionals who seek more information about this issue.

"This new tool is about helping Veterans and servicemembers when and where they need it," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki. "We are encouraged so many have already downloaded this resource and hope many more will utilize this convenient tool to access VA services."

While the assessments and checklists in the app are valid measures, the app is intended for combined use with professional care. The application specifically states that it will not diagnose PTSD or offer treatment, only a trained professional can do that. It does have useful information

about PTSD and tools for managing the stresses that come with life after trauma.

Within the first two hours of the app's official launch, a Veteran contacted the Veterans Crisis Line because the app instructed the Veteran to call. The Veteran was immediately set up with an appointment at their local VA medical center.

PTSD Coach can be downloaded for free from the iTunes App Store, on iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad. It will also be available for Android phones soon.

For more information, including instructions on how to download the PTSD Coach app go to: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/PTSDCoach.asp>

The DoD also announced an app for health care professionals, the Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

(TBI) Pocket Guide. The app provides a quick reference that includes clinical practice guidelines for assessing and treating service members and Veterans who have sustained a mild traumatic brain injury, commonly referred to as a concussion.

The mobile application is free and available for download on Android smart phones at <https://market.android.com/details?id=org.t2health.mtbi>.

The Texas Veterans Commission is also addressing these issues through the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. Eight organizations have been granted a total of \$2,886,790 from the fund for programs that address PTSD and TBI. For more information go to: <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/awards>.

Korean Veterans Day recognized by Texas Senate

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On April 29, 2011, the Texas Senate passed Senate Resolution 865, by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, recognizing the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces who served during the Korean War. The event paid tribute to these Veterans on the occasion of Korean Veterans Day, which is celebrated on April 29.

The Korean War was one of the earliest conflicts in the proxy battle between the United States and Soviet Union most often referred to as the Cold War.

"Over 1.8 million Americans served in the Korean War and 289,000 of those were Texans," said Sen. Van de Putte. "1,800 Texans made the ultimate sacrifice and were either killed in action or to this day are missing in action."

Sen. Brian Birdwell also took a moment to address the Korean Veterans in attendance. Sen.

Birdwell served on the Department of the Army staff in the Pentagon during the 9/11 attacks and received the Purple Heart for injuries sustained during that attack.

"One of the storied Veterans of the Korean War is Capt. Lewis Lee Millett Sr. who passed away just a little over two years ago now," said Sen. Birdwell. "Capt. Millett led the last American bayonet charge during the Korean War in one of the many hills, many mountains, these men conducted difficult operations on that led to his receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor. It is a great reminder of a generation that is slowly departing us and to say thank you because the Korean War is not forgotten in the heart of Texans."

Sens. Juan Hinojosa, Troy Fraser, Dan Patrick, Jose Rodriguez, Jeff Wentworth, Mario Gallegos,

Eddie Lucio, Carlos Uresti, and Wendy Davis also addressed the Veterans on the floor and in the gallery before Sen. Van de Putte moved to adopt the resolution.

Sen. Van de Putte recited a poem, written by Korean War

Veteran Francis M. Macy entitled, "Korea." After reading the poem the resolution was adopted unanimously.



Photo by Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On Korean Veterans Day, April 29, 2011, Sen. Leticia Van de Putte stands with Korean War Veterans (not in order): Bob Bighouse, Buddy Blair, Don Napp, Rod Ramsey, Johnney Lee, Stoney Stone and Wayne Telling.

Millions in stop loss pay still unclaimed

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates 145,000 servicemembers were put on stop loss, extending the servicemembers time beyond the end of their enlistment contracts. These servicemembers were not able to discharge from their branch of service and may have ended up in Iraq or Afghanistan. The military services initiated the stop loss in order to maintain the level of forces needed to support Iraq and Afghanistan.

In order to compensate for the extension, the 2009 War Supplemental Appropriations Act established Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay (RSLSP), which provides \$500 for each month or partial month served in stop loss status. Servicemembers, Veterans, and beneficiaries of servicemembers whose service was involuntarily extended under stop loss between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009, are eligible for RSLSP.

Effective December 2009, if a servicemember voluntarily

reenlisted or extended their service or received a bonus for such reenlistment or extension, the servicemember will be ineligible for RSLSP.

To receive this benefit, those who served under stop loss must submit a claim by Oct. 21, 2011. The deadline has been extended multiple times because only 77,000 of 145,000 servicemembers claims have been paid so far. The average claim paid is \$3,700.

Efforts to contact Veterans, through the use of direct mail, engaging military and Veterans organizations, social media networks and media outlets, will continue throughout the period of eligibility.

Submitting a claim

To initiate a claim visit: http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Retroactive_Stop_Loss_Pay_RSLSP.asp and choose your service specific website. Submitting the claim should take about 30 minutes depending how many supporting documents are needed. Veterans will be asked to provide personal

identifying information and other relevant information to determine eligibility. Veterans will need to provide the proper documents according to service component(s) during the stop loss period.

Veterans will have the option to email, fax or mail in their documents. Veterans should have the documents available before proceeding with the claim registration process. There is an opportunity to upload any additional supporting documents.

Needed Documents

The following documents are examples of authorized documents but, depending on specific status and service, they may not apply to all servicemembers.

- DD 214 (8-09), Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty and/or DD 215 (8-09), Correction to DD 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty.

- Personnel record or enlistment or reenlistment document recording original expiration of

service date.

- Approved retirement/transfer to the Fleet Reserve memorandum or orders establishing retirement prior to actual date of retirement as stipulated in DD 214 or DD 215.

- Approved resignation memorandum or transition orders establishing a separation date prior to actual date of separation as stipulated on DD 214 or DD 215.

- Signed documentation or affidavit from knowledgeable officials from the individual's chain of command acknowledging separation/deployment, etc.

- Revocation of retirement or separation orders.

Once a claim is submitted, it will take up to 90 days for processing and payment. Veterans put on stop-loss between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009, should please visit: http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Retroactive_Stop_Loss_Pay_RSLSP.asp and initiate a claim before the deadline.

Disability compensation payments going paperless

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The U.S. Department of Treasury and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are encouraging Veterans to elect electronic payment for recurring disability compensation.

Treasury officials announced that as of March 2013 all paper checks for federal benefits will be phased out. This includes VA payments to Veterans and family members, as well as Social Security checks, and Supplemental Security Income.

All Veterans who started receiving compensation from the VA as of May 2011 will be automatically enrolled in the elec-

tronic pay system and will not receive paper checks. Veterans who are already receiving paper checks in the mail will have until March 2013 to enroll in the new system.

"Receiving VA benefits electronically will increase the security, convenience and reliability of these vital payments," said VA Secretary Eric Shinseki.

Veterans receiving benefit payments by check or those who have just become eligible to begin receiving benefit payments have two choices for electronic payments:

Option 1: Receive payments

by direct deposit through a designated financial institution of the Veterans' choice. Direct deposit is a safe and reliable way to receive benefit payments because the money is sent directly to the Veterans' bank account. If the Veteran wishes to receive direct deposit, he or she needs to designate a financial institution (e.g., local bank) and then call the VA with the direct deposit account information at 1-800-827-1000 or visit www.GoDirect.org to enroll.

Option 2: Receive payments through Direct Express Debit MasterCard Program. The ben-

efit payment will be deposited directly to the Debit MasterCard. There are no fees to sign-up for or to activate the card, receive deposits, make purchases, get cash, or check the card's balance at an ATM. Additionally, there are no fees for declined transactions and overdrafts.

Switching to the electronic payment system eliminates the risk of lost or stolen checks and provides immediate access to money on payday.

For more information about electronic payment system visit www.GoDirect.org or call 1-800-827-1000.

Texas Veterans Commission grants \$250,000 to Women Veterans Organization

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On May 20, 2011, in its ongoing efforts to help women Veterans returning home from service, the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance presented a \$250,000 check to Grace After Fire.

The grant will help fund the women Veterans organization's mission to aid women suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and those having a difficult time readjusting to civilian life.

Texas Veterans Commission Executive Director, Tom Paladino, and the Director of the Fund for Veterans' Assistance, Bill Wilson, presented Grace After Fire's Executive Director, Kim Olson, Director of Operations, Lil Serafine, and Outreach Coordinator, Erica Richardson, a

recently discharged Army Medic, with the check at Texas Veterans Commission headquarters in Austin. (Pictured right)

"About 10 percent of the U.S. Forces currently serving in Afghanistan and Iraq are women," said Wilson.

The population of female Veterans in Texas is expected to reach 163,249 by the end of 2013, and organizations like Grace After Fire will be needed by these women Veterans.

"We are honored by the Texas Veterans Commission's commissioners and the citizens of Texas who made this generous donation possible and for their support of women Veterans in our community," said Olson.



Photo by Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Major League Baseball tickets donated to Veterans

By Ray Wilburn, Texas Veterans Commission, Employment Representative



Photo provided by Lonestar Veterans Association, Houston

Jeff Chatman, Jason Lacognator, Michael Daren, David Bryant, Curtis Newcomer, Todd Andrade and Kris Van Vasquez, members of the Lonestar Veterans Association, and Ray Wilburn, Texas Veterans Commission, employment representative attend the Houston Astros baseball game.

On May 25, 2011, Veterans in Houston, attended a Major League Baseball game between the Houston Astros and the Los Angeles Dodgers, thanks to the generosity of the Stanley Corporation.

Texas Veterans Commission received the tickets from the Stanley Corporation and partnered with the Lone Star Veterans Association (LSVA) in Houston to distribute the tickets.

The LSVA is a Veteran service organization whose mission is to connect Post-9/11 Veterans (Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom) throughout Texas by providing an accessible support system for those making the transition from military to civilian life.

For those able to attend the midday game, they witnessed a 2-1 Astros win over the Dodgers at Minute Maid Park in Houston, Texas. For several of the Veterans, this was their first professional baseball game.

\$5.4 Million in grants awarded from the Texas Veterans Commission's Fund for Veterans' Assistance

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On, May 18, the Texas Veterans Commission awarded 21 organizations over \$5.4 million in grants from the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

"Prior to Wednesday, the Commission provided over \$9 million in Fund for Veterans' Assistance grants to 39 local government and non-profit organizations to help 38,956 Veterans and their family members," said Bill Wilson, director of the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. "The 21

new grantees are projected to serve an additional 52,488 Veterans, dependents and surviving spouses between July 1, 2011, and June 30, 2012."

The grants are awarded to help all Texas Veterans facing difficulties, including recently separated Veterans and their families as they adjust to civilian life. Services funded include transportation to medical facilities, counseling for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), housing assistance for homeless Veterans,

short-term emergency financial needs, Veterans courts, legal assistance and career training.

"There are 1.8 million Veterans residing in Texas," said Thomas Palladino, executive director of the Texas Veterans Commission. "For many of the men and women who served their country with honor, the transition to life as a civilian is met with unanticipated obstacles. The organizations receiving these grants offer programs that focus on helping Veterans overcome these

obstacles."

For more information about the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance, visit <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/TVCFundforVeteransAssistance.html>.

The next grant solicitation period will open Fall 2011. To apply for a grant, go to: <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/current-grant-process-and-form> and download the grant application form.

Bill introduced in Congress to help Veterans transfer successfully from military service

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), chairwoman of the U.S. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced the Hiring Heroes Act (H.R. 1941) in May 2011. This bill is aimed at helping separating service members find jobs.

Recent U.S. Department of Labor (DoL) statistics estimate that the unemployment rate for Veterans age 20-24 is as high as 27 percent.

"Overall, the unemployment rate for this group of Veterans has remained high and we cannot afford to leave them behind, says Sen. Murray. "As service members continue to separate from the military, the problem of Veteran unemployment will only grow larger."

If H.R. 1941 passes, it will authorize new programs improving the transition from service-member to civilian employee. This bill would be the first of its

kind to require job skills training for all servicemembers before returning home.

Currently the military has a Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in place, but it is not mandatory.

In the past year, Texas conducted 317 TAP workshops with 14,194 participants. The TAP seminars, which were conducted at 11 military installations, provided service members, and their spouses with information on:

- Labor Market
- Job Search Techniques
- Interviewing Skills
- Resume Preparation
- Veterans' Benefits
- Employment and Training Services

The experienced TAP facilitators are all veterans. Their military background coupled with their vast knowledge of

veterans' benefits and programs is a valuable resource and greatly contributes to a seamless transition to civilian life.

The Hiring Heroes Act of 2011 would make participation in the TAP mandatory for separating servicemembers and as well as modify federal hiring practices to encourage the hiring of separating servicemembers and allow servicemembers to begin the federal employment hiring process prior to separation.

In addition, the bill would provide up to an additional 24 months of vocational rehabilitation and employment services to Veterans who have exhausted both these benefits and state-provided unemployment benefits. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs would also be required to engage with each Veteran who has participated in its Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program periodically to

determine whether the Veteran is employed.

Texas is the only state to have the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) operated by the state's veterans' advocacy agency instead of the state's workforce agency. Texas currently provides a record level of direct services and meets or exceeds state performance outcomes.

For more information on the Hiring Heroes Act, please visit: <http://murray.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&Fileid=0ea542fe-c8c9-4d9a-ae4d-bc67ffa0f909>.

For more information on TAP, please visit: <http://texas-veterans.com/employment/transition-assistance-program>.

Measures to give 100% tax exemption to surviving spouses passes legislature

By Rick Svatora, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

In May 2011, the Texas Legislature unanimously passed measures that, if approved by Texas voters, would extend the 100 percent property tax exemption for totally disabled or unemployable Veterans to their surviving spouses.

Senate Joint Resolution 14, by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, and Senate Bill 516, by Sen. Dan Patrick, would allow tax appraisal districts to provide to the surviving spouse of a 100 percent disabled or unemployable Veteran the 100 percent property tax exemption that the Veteran had been receiving at their residence homestead.

The measures received signifi-

cant backing from Veterans service organizations, which made the exemption their top initiative for the 82nd Legislative Session.

Because the change requires amending the Texas Constitution, Texas voters must approve the proposal in the Nov. 8, 2011, statewide election for it to become effective.

The change would remedy a problem currently experienced by spouses when a 100 percent disabled Veteran passes away. Under current law, surviving spouses must not only deal with the grief of their loss, but also with a daunting tax bill as well. The median Texas homeowner pays \$2,275 per year in property

taxes. This tax hit, in conjunction with the loss of much of the monetary benefit the family received from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), can threaten the financial security of military families.

If approved by voters, the legislation would entitle the surviving spouse to the 100 percent property tax exemption if:

- The property was the surviving spouse's homestead when the Veteran died;
- The property remains the surviving spouse's homestead; and
- The surviving spouse has not remarried since the death of the disabled Veteran.

According to the legislation,

the spouse is not obligated to remain in the original home so long as the new home is designated a homestead and the spouse does not remarry: "If the surviving spouse subsequently qualifies a different property as a residence homestead and has not remarried, the surviving spouse would be entitled to a property tax exemption on that homestead of the same dollar amount received on the former homestead that qualified for the surviving spouse homestead exemption."

Veteran news around the web

Veterans, others gather at state cemetery for Memorial Day

<http://www.statesman.com/news/local/veterans-others-gather-at-state-cemetery-for-memorial-1508178.html>

Female Veterans facing a new battle-Higher unemployment than civilians

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/05/26/female-veterans-victims-high-unemployment/>

War Veterans show games can play important role in recovery

http://www.usatoday.com/sports/olympics/2011-05-24-warrior-games-military-veterans-recovery_N.htm

East Texas Veterans remember the battles they fought

<http://www.kltv.com/story/14748402/east-texas-veterans-remember-the-battles-they-fought>

VA processing hundreds of applications for new family caregiver benefits in first week

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2105>

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>

