



**TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION**

www.tvc.state.tx.us  
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## Vietnam Memorial Wall showcased during American Heroes Celebration

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On April 15 and 16 at Camp Mabry, the annual American Heroes Celebration provided attendees an up close and personal look at military milestones and equipment throughout U.S. history. It also recognized the heroes who served our country and state.

Texas Veterans Commission counselors and other Veteran-friendly organizations were on hand at the event to distribute information, answer questions and raise awareness of the benefits Veterans have earned.

The weekend included events such as World War II and Civil War re-enactments along with two days of music provided by the Texas Army National Guard 36th Infantry Division band.

On exhibit were a variety of military aircraft ranging from a Boeing CH-47, which played a primary role during the Vietnam War, to a UH-60 Black Hawk, currently in use in Iraq and Afghanistan.

History camps were set up to replicate the often treacherous living conditions endured during some of the most important battles in history.

The highlight of the weekend was a replica of the Vietnam Memorial Wall, provided by the American Veterans Traveling Tribute (AVTT). The national monument located in Washington D.C. is a place where Veterans or friends and families of Veterans visit to pay their respects to those who died in the Vietnam War. It is also viewed as a place of healing for those affected by a war that took the lives of more than 50,000 Americans.

The AVTT, a Veteran owned project, travels around the country allowing people to pay respect and share in the experience of honoring the men and women who made the ultimate

sacrifice. The traveling Vietnam Wall is 80 percent the size of the original and stretches over 380 foot long from end to end and contains all 58,523 names of the killed or missing in action.

The AVTT also provides the "Gold Dog Tag" display, a one of kind tribute honoring members of the armed forces who have fallen either in hostile military actions between the end of Vietnam and the 9/11 attack or have given their life in the Global War on Terror. Each dog tag permanently

records the casualty information (full name, branch of service, rank, date and location of casualty) for that American hero. Also on hand were displays of statistics and facts for every war/conflict involving America's armed forces including a timeline. If you are interested in finding out more information about the American Veterans Traveling Tribute please visit: <http://www.avtt.org/>.



Photo by Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

A Veteran and his family take a moment to honor the names on the replica of the Vietnam Wall Memorial during the American Heroes Celebration at Camp Mabry.

## Community organizations form safety net for Veterans in need

By Lisa Waddell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Some Veterans say being in the military is simpler than returning to life at home.

"In the Army, everything was taken care of for you," says Iraq Veteran Bonnie Fletcher. "It was overwhelming coming back into civilian life knowing you did not have a safety net anymore."

Recognizing that every Veteran has unique needs that may not be met, community organizations, non-profits and local agencies are increasingly developing specific programs for Veterans and their families.

A diverse variety of community-based resources can become the safety net Veterans need. The growing number of resources spans a broad array of services that include career assistance, transportation to medical appointments, the counseling of families attempting to reconnect after a deployment, or therapy dogs and equine-assisted therapy

programs such as Horses for Heroes to help Veterans heal from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

"Community organizations play a critical role in helping Veterans on a local level," says Thomas Palladino, Executive Director of the Texas Veterans Commission. "We want to make certain Veterans know of these resources so they can take advantage of them."

In response, the Texas Veterans Commission added a Community and Emergency Resources section on their website, [www.TexasVeteransCommission.org](http://www.TexasVeteransCommission.org). Over 65 organizations around the state are listed in the directory, with more being added daily.

### Toughing it out

"Toughing it out is not recommended as a way to fit back into civilian life after combat," says Jim Driscoll, Vietnam Veteran and founder of Vets4Vets

([www.vets4vets.us](http://www.vets4vets.us)).

After serving in Vietnam, Driscoll learned first-hand that combat Veterans can become isolated in a community where well-meaning people don't understand what the Veteran has experienced.

This led him to start a peer support organization that provides free weekend workshops to help Iraq and Afghanistan-era vets heal from the negative effects of service and war.

"Our vision is that anytime a veteran needs to talk there will be someone who really understands," he adds.

Vets4Vets is one of the many community and emergency resources included in the Texas Veterans Commission resource directory.

### Accepting Help

An increasing number of Veterans are seeing the advantages

of seeking assistance. Emergency resources can make a big difference when Veterans and their families find themselves in challenging situations.

"Our situation was becoming very difficult to manage due to limited resources and [the community organization's] generous gifts have helped us stay ahead of the financial burden," says a Veteran who received a grant from a community organization.

"The gifts will help maintain our home and keep us current with our medical expenses. Because of your help our road won't be as severe and we will get back to taking care of business. God bless Americans like you."

To find community and emergency resources in your local area go to [www.TexasVeterans-Commission.org](http://www.TexasVeterans-Commission.org).

## Legislation would ensure GI Bill changes do not land Texas Vets in debt

By Lisa Waddell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides tuition benefits to Veterans not to exceed the maximum in-state tuition and fees at a public college or university. As a result of how tuition charges are structured, Texas has the highest tuition allowance in the nation which enables many Veterans to attend private Texas colleges and universities, in addition to public institutions. However, recent changes to the GI Bill program eliminated that option.

Effective Oct. 1, 2011, students attending private schools on the Post-9/11 GI Bill will have their tuition and fee reimburse-

ment capped at the lesser of net out-of-pocket cost or \$17,500 per academic year. The change could cost some student Veterans thousands of dollars.

"We are concerned that students currently attending private colleges will not be able to complete their degree programs, or will incur excessive debt to do so," says Connie Jacksits, Director of Veterans Education at the Texas Veterans Commission. "Students entered these programs with the assurance that their tuition would be completely covered."

### Lawmakers Respond

Veterans groups have urged lawmakers to pass a quick fix to grandfather those students in at current tuition rates, making sure they can complete their college classes. In April, Congressional lawmakers responded by introducing legislation to do just that.

Sponsored by House Veterans Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller, R-Fla., and Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., the legislation will ensure students currently attending college under the new Post-9/11 GI Bill will have their full tuition covered, even if the cost exceeds the \$17,500 cap.

In a statement, Schumer said the move will "ensure that our Veterans receive the full benefits they were promised and rightly deserve."

No hearings have been scheduled on the bill. If the legislation is not passed, the Post-9/11 GI Bill tuition rates will go into effect for the Fall 2011 semester.

To contact your congressional representative and senator, please visit <http://www.house.gov/representatives/> and [http://senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm).

# Veterans Crisis Line has assisted 379,000

By Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

With many Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan after serving multiple combat tours, suicide prevention and mental health resources are critical. According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), there is an average of 950 suicide attempts each month by Veterans receiving VA care.

VA Secretary Eric Shinseki stated that “Of more than 30,000 suicides in this country each year, fully 20 percent of them are acts by Veterans which means on average 18 Veterans commit suicide each day.”

These troubling statistics have put pressure on organizations to ensure there are as many resources as possible available to Veterans in distress. Combat Veterans can be reticent to ask for assistance, thinking they can handle the stress and pressures on their own. They often perceive asking for help as a sign of weakness. Taking the first step and asking for support can be difficult but can also leave the Veteran with a feeling of relief.

The VA and other organiza-

tions are encouraging Veterans dealing with thoughts of suicide or mental health issues to contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Any Veteran or family and friends of a Veteran can contact the Crisis Line 24 hours a day, seven days a week to speak with a professional counselor.

The VA counselors are trained to assist with a broad range of issues faced by Veterans that can lead to suicide. They will also provide a response to general inquiries and make referrals to local VA Medical Center suicide prevention personnel. The Veterans Crisis Center has been in existence for 7 years and callers need not be enrolled in the VA system to use the free, confidential crisis hotline.

To date more than 379,000 people have called the hotline, resulting in more than 13,000 rescues of actively suicidal Veterans. A large number of the phone calls received stem from Veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. Not every call

results in a suicide prevention call but many are from Veterans dealing with a broad range of stressors. Unemployment, homelessness, financial crises, issues in school, or feeling isolated are among the stressors that can lead to a Veteran feeling “trapped” and nowhere to turn.

The following signs are key indicators of a person that could be thinking about committing suicide:

- Talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Trying to get pills, guns, or other ways to harm oneself
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting in a reckless or risky way



- Feeling trapped, like there is no way out
- Saying or feeling there's no reason for living.

If you or someone you know is in crisis and/or thinking of suicide, pick up the phone and call **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** for immediate assistance.

# Cities increase efforts to assist Veterans

By Lisa Waddell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Texas Veterans Commission is working with the City of Austin and the Central Texas Red Cross to help women Veterans receive assistance in times of need. The City of Austin initiative, Operation Outreach, was announced by Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell at a press conference on March 30.

“We must make it easier for our women Veterans to reintegrate into civilian society and access the support services that are available to them,” said Mayor Leffingwell. “With Operation Outreach we intend to build a new group of volunteers within the Central Texas Red Cross, in conjunction with all Veteran

support groups in Central Texas, which will proactively and on an ongoing basis, reach out to women Veterans in Austin.”

Utilizing the directory of community resources developed by the Texas Veterans Commission, the Operation Outreach team will create a sub-directory with a focus on resources catering to women.

Armed with this women’s resource directory, volunteers will contact women Veterans each month to provide support and identify areas where these female Veterans may require services.

“Women Veterans can face challenges their male counterparts do not,” said Duncan Mc-

Ghee, Public Information Officer at the Texas Veterans Commission. “Projects like Operation Outreach help ensure that women Veterans have the support and information so vital to their well being.”

With the number of Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan increasing and an aging Vietnam Veteran population, cities are searching for innovative ways to meet the needs of those who sacrificed on behalf of their country.

To assist in this endeavor, the Texas Veterans Commission has identified cities from across the state that provide quality Veteran focused resources. The cities

have declared their willingness to share their experience and information with those cities interested in emulating these programs.

Assessing the local government services and programs addressing Veterans’ needs is the first goal of the initiative. Initial meetings with city officials around the state have helped identify government agencies with established Veterans’ services and those needing support in developing Veterans’ programs. Documenting successful programs and identifying best practices will be the next phase of the project.

## Spring Training Conference a success

By Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

April 12 through April 14, the Texas Veterans Commission and the Veteran County Service Officers Association of Texas (VC-SOAT) hosted a Spring Training Conference at the Doubletree Hotel in Austin, Texas.

“Training is one of the most important functions the Texas Veterans Commission performs,” said Thomas Palladino, Executive Director for the Texas Veterans Commission. “By training the Veteran County Service Officers, we are helping Texas Veterans get the benefits they deserve.”

The Spring Training Conference has traditionally been hosted by the Texas Veterans Commission to train new Texas Veterans Commission Claims Counselors and Veteran County Service Officers (VCSOs). Due to budget cuts, the Texas Veterans Commission was forced to consider canceling the training. However, the VC-SOAT came up with a plan to hold the training in Austin with the Texas Veterans Commission providing the instructors. Despite some having to travel at their own expense, the turnout was overwhelming with more than 125 attendees.

“VC-SOAT quickly began working with the Texas Veterans Commission to seek an avenue

to provide a Spring Training Conference,” said Tim Vasquez, President of the VC-SOAT. “None of this would have been possible without the partnership between Texas Veterans Commission and VC-SOAT. Training is and continues to be a priority for both and all efforts to continue training in the next budget year are being pursued.”

The Spring Training Conference offered three types of training for Claims Counselors and VCSOs: Initial, Certification, and Accreditation.

New hires must first attend Initial Training and receive a Certificate of Training from the Texas Veterans Commission upon completion of the course. Maintaining this certification requires the officer to complete continuing training at subsequent training conferences.

Sixteen new VCSO’ and two new Texas Veterans Commission Claims Counselors were certified, and 57 VCSOs were recertified during the conference. Additionally, the conference provided training and testing for 45 VCSO’s who are accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to work Texas Veterans Commission cases.

Accreditation is available to VCSOs who: are paid employees

of the county and working for it not less than 1,000 hours annually; have successfully completed a course of training and an examination approved by the VA district counsel within the state; and will receive annual training to assure continued qualification as a representative in the claims process.

Texas Veterans Commission employees and VCSOs were not the only people to participate in the Conference. The VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network,

or VISN 17, had six employees participate in Initial Training. VISN 17 serves a population of slightly over one million Veterans residing in 134 counties stretching from the Oklahoma border to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.



Photo by Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Counselors and County Service Officers listen to their first morning training session, Fully Developed Claims, presented by Victor Polanco, Texas Veterans Commission Office Supervisor at the Austin VA clinic, during the Spring Training Conference in Austin.

## Texas Military Forces learn about Veteran benefits

By Lisa Waddell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On March 25, over 900 military Guard members and Reservists descended upon Corpus Christi for this year’s Texas Military Forces Joint Annual Conference.

The Texas Military Forces, which consists of the Texas Army National Guard, Texas Air National Guard, and Texas State Guard, hold a joint conference each year to conduct professional development and provide infor-

mation on issues and opportunities that exist in support of the command and its mission.

The Texas Veterans Commission was on hand to let the Guard members know they may be eligible for certain Veterans benefits they have served at least 181 days of active duty federal service excluding training (Title 10). Education benefits generated the most interest.

“Many attendees didn’t know

the Hazlewood Act entitles them to 150 hours of free tuition at state sponsored schools if they enlisted in Texas and were activated over 180 days,” said Debbie Bush, Veterans Education Counselor with the Texas Veterans Commission. “Learning they could transfer any unused credits to their children opened up options they didn’t know they had.”

Other Texas Veterans Commis-

sion members attending the event included Vice Chair Al Cantu and Claims Counselor Perry King.

## Thirteen Medal of Honor recipients recognized

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

One of the best kept secrets in the country is the Medal of Honor Host City Program in Gainesville, Texas (population 16,517). The city invites all living recipients of the Medal of Honor to participate in three days of activities that include speaking engagements at local schools, including North Central Texas College, a tree planting, barbecue, banquet and parade.

The Medal of Honor Host City Program was launched in 2001 and at the time there were slightly fewer than 100 living Medal of Honor recipients. Today only 85 remain. Since the beginning of the Program, 20 recipients, more than 20 percent of all living recipients, have participated in the event. This year, 13 recipients took part in the three day event.

While giving a brief speech during the Medal of Honor Banquet, recipient James Taylor spoke of his rationale for participating in the Medal of Honor Host City Program.

“It’s important for youth today to know they represent the future

of America,” said Taylor. “For their children to live free there will be a need for sacrifice. I fear that as a nation we’ve forgotten the importance of teaching our youth the values of duty, honor, country, patriotism, selflessness and self sacrifice.”

Said Ray Fletcher, Medal of Honor Host City Program President; “It’s amazing to watch these high school age kids sit in the bleachers for two hours at a stretch and you can literally hear a pin drop.”

Only 854 Medals of Honor have been awarded since Dec. 7, 1941, the outset of America’s entrance into World War II. More than half that number received the award posthumously. From Pearl Harbor to the Global War on Terrorism only 329 soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen survived their moment of heroism to wear the Medal.

For more information on the Medal of Honor Host City Program visit: <http://www.themedalofhonorhostcityprogram.com/index.html>.



Photo by Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

U.S Army Specialist, Robert Patterson, a Medal of Honor recipient, rides in a M151 during Medal of Honor Day Parade in Gainesville, Texas.

## Fishing camp brings wounded warriors to Texas

By Duncan McGhee, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On Saturday, May 21, Port O’Connor, Texas will play host to more than 200 warriors wounded in the Global War on Terror. The event, Warrior’s Weekend, is an annual fishing event which includes a combination of other recreational events for the wounded warriors.

Along with their families and care givers, warriors from Ft. Hood, Ft. Sam Houston’s Brooke Army Medical Center, Walter Reed Hospital, and Ft. Bragg will be treated to a day of fishing, fun, and relaxation.

“I personally have been forever changed by Warrior’s Weekend”, said Sgt. 1st Class

Ronnie Guillion.

After completing tours in Bosnia and Desert Storm, Gullion was diagnosed with a combat-related illness that led to liver disease.

The festivities include a grand welcome rally in the morning, a dinner in the evening, music and addresses from military dignitaries as well as the heroes themselves. It is a family-friendly event and all are encouraged to show their support. For more information call 361-572-0001 or visit: [http://web.mac.com/warriorweekend/Warriors\\_Weekend/Home.html](http://web.mac.com/warriorweekend/Warriors_Weekend/Home.html).



## San Antonio Veterans get help facing substance abuse

By Lisa Waddell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On April 26, the Texas Veterans Commission awarded the San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (SACADA) over \$171,000 for their Veteran's Intervention and Prevention Services program.

Abigail Moore, Executive Director for SACADA, says "the grant money will go a long way to help veterans recover from the emotional wounds they often bring back from war."

"Most of the time, substance abuse and mental illness go together. If you don't address both, the individual can't recover," said Moore. "And prevention is a lot more cost-effective than treatment."

The Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance provides grants to community organizations that offer services addressing Veterans' unmet needs. With 25 percent of the over 167,000 Veterans in Bexar County suffering from

substance abuse, the Texas Veterans Commission chose SACADA as an established and effective organization with a focus on improving the lives of Veterans and their families.

"Substance abuse can lead to unemployment, homelessness, domestic violence and suicide," said Bill Wilson, Director of the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. "By providing this grant, the Texas Veterans Commission can help to stabilize and strengthen Veteran families and the community."

The Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance has provided over nine million dollars in grants to 40 organizations across Texas. The Fund is supported by tax-deductible donations from organizations and individuals, and by proceeds from the sale of \$2 Veterans Cash lottery scratch-off tickets.

SACADA has an established

53-year history of providing substance abuse prevention and intervention services. To get more information about the SACADA and their services for Veterans visit [www.sacada.org](http://www.sacada.org) or

call (210) 225-4741.

To learn about other Fund for Veterans' Assistance grantees or how to apply for a grant go to <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/fund-for-veterans-assistance>.



Photo by Lisa Waddell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Bill Wilson, the Director of The Fund for Veterans' Assistance presents San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (SACADA) with a check for over \$171,000.

## Veteran news around the web

**They're not guys: New gear to fit female soldiers**

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=13433425&page=3>

**Retroactive Stop Loss Pay extended to Oct. 21**

[http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Retroactive\\_Stop\\_Loss\\_Pay\\_RSLSP.asp](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Retroactive_Stop_Loss_Pay_RSLSP.asp)

**Vietnam veteran walking 2,300 miles to thank comrades in arms**

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20110427/NEWS01/104270322/Vietnam-veteran-walking-2-300-miles-thank-comrades-arms>

**Widow of Texas WWII Veteran gets medals 66 years later**

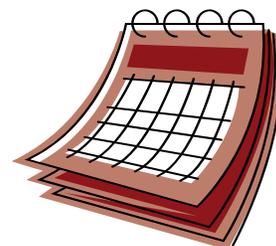
<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/tx/7541151.html>

## 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>



## *Memorial Day Message from Texas Veterans Commission Executive Director*

Memorial Day, which falls on the last Monday of May, commemorates the men and women who died while serving in the American military. It is a day for Americans to offer tribute and honor to the heroes who laid down their lives to preserve freedom.

Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day because it was a time set aside to honor the nation's Civil War dead by decorating their graves.

Officially proclaimed Decoration Day on May 5, 1868, by General John Logan, Memorial Day was first observed on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery.

In 1882, the name Decoration Day was changed to Memorial Day to honor those killed during the Civil War. It was not until after World War I, however, that the day was expanded to honor those who have died in all American wars.

In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated on the last Monday in May.

As President Ronald Reagan stated on Memorial Day, 1983, "we honor those brave Americans who died in the service of their country. I think an ancient scholar put it well when he wrote: 'Let us now praise famous men . . . All these were honored in their generation, and were the glory of their times. Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore.' As a tribute to their sacrifice, let us renew our resolve to remain strong enough to deter aggression, wise enough to preserve and protect our freedom, and thoughtful enough to promote lasting peace throughout the world."

President Reagan also spoke of the meaning of Memorial Day during the ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia on May 26, 1986.

"Today is the day we put aside to remember fallen heroes and to pray that no heroes will ever have to die for us again," President Reagan said. "It's a day of thanks for the valor of others, a day to remember the splendor of America and those of her children who rest in this cemetery and others. It's a day to be with the family and remember."

On this Memorial Day, as you enjoy the day with family and friends, I ask that you take a moment and reflect upon the true meaning of this holiday. In December 2000 Congress passed the National Moment of Remembrance resolution requesting all Americans stop what they are doing at precisely 3 P.M. on Memorial Day and observe a moment of silence. I ask each of you to join me this Memorial Day by observing this moment of silence and reflect upon the fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters who gave all for the freedoms we hold so dearly.

Thank you,  
*Thomas Palladino*  
Executive Director, Texas Veterans Commission





STATE OF TEXAS  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

*A Message from the Governor in honor of:*

## **Memorial Day**

**May 30, 2011**

*Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends."*

*Throughout our nation's history, the freedoms we enjoy have been won and protected by a brave few who understand that greatest and most selfless love. The men and women of our armed forces risk the ultimate sacrifice to protect fellow Americans and citizens of the world from tyranny and oppression. Every time they put on the uniform, these heroes renew their commitment to pay any price, to bear any burden, so that we might be free.*

*Many have given all for the cause. On this day of remembrance, our hearts are torn with sorrow for heroes lost, and filled with pride for the way they lived their lives. To these brave individuals, we owe the most profound respect and gratitude. To their loved ones, too, we owe our deepest thanks.*

*We pause today to reflect on these men and women of selfless devotion, and we are all reminded that the freedom we enjoy — and all too often take for granted — comes at a tremendous price. May all Texans be forever grateful.*

*First Lady Anita Perry joins me in paying tribute to these men and women of the highest honor.*



*Sincerely,*  
**Rick Perry**  
Rick Perry  
Governor