

# TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION JOURNAL

SPRING / SUMMER 2012



## Providing Support For Military Children

*One of the Texas Veterans Commission  
Fund for Veterans' Assistance grants is a  
program that assists children of Veterans,  
active duty service members and military  
families at Fort Hood.*

# ON THE PULSE

U.S. Army Spec. Janet Harrivel, a medic with the 228th Combat Support Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, measures the blood pressure of a Dominican woman during a Medical Readiness Training Exercise (MEDRETE) in Esperanza, Dominican Republic, June 4, 2011. The MEDRETE is part of Beyond the Horizon, which is a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed, U.S. Southern Command-sponsored joint and combined field training humanitarian exercise in which troops specializing in engineering, construction and health care provide much-needed services to communities in need while receiving valuable deployment training and building important relationships with partner nations. (U.S. Army photo by Kaye Richey/Released)



TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

# JOURNAL

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Cover photo by Michael Dewees: Students race down the field in potato sacks as part of the Communities In Schools 5th Annual Track & Field Event. Over 600 children and their parents spent the day celebrating accomplishments and bonding as a family.



On behalf of the 92,000 Veterans, dependents and surviving spouses served by organizations funded by the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA), I would like to thank the people of Texas for your generous support.

The Fund for Veterans' Assistance receives over 90 percent of its revenue directly from the people of Texas through the purchase of Veterans Cash lottery scratch-off tickets, donations on vehicle registration forms, direct online donations and payroll contributions during the State Employee Charitable Campaign.

Through the Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) program, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) awards reimbursement grants in two categories: FVA General Assistance and Housing4TexasHeroes. Both categories offer funding to non-profit and local government organizations to provide direct services to Texas Veterans and their families.

The General Assistance grants address a broad range of needs that include, but are not limited to, the following: limited financial assistance; counseling for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury; housing assistance; employment, training, education, and job placement assistance; legal services; transportation services; family and child services; and information and referral to other services.

In June 2012, the Commission established the following priorities:

- Outstanding grant applications;
- One of three service categories: financial assistance, counseling, or homeless/housing services;
- Widespread distribution of grants across the state; and
- Variety in geographic areas to ensure there is no over-saturation or duplication of services in areas of the state.

The Housing4TexasHeroes program was established in 2011, and through it, TVC awards grants to organizations that provide Veterans with permanent and temporary housing. Organizations receiving grants for temporary housing may provide: transitional housing to homeless Veterans; short-term rental assistance to low income Veterans; or assistance to families of Veterans who are undergoing long-term treatment at a medical facility in Texas. Organizations receiving grants for permanent housing may provide disabled Veterans with a physical disability or severe injury: new home construction; home renovation; or home modification.

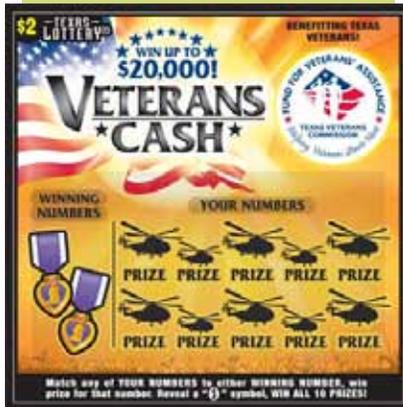
At the end of Fiscal Year 2010, there were 17 active grants totaling \$3.6 million. By January 2012, the TVC had awarded 83 grants totaling more than \$21.5 million. This represents a nearly 500% increase in the number of grants over 18 months. To date, the Commission has provided over \$23.5 million in grants to 94 local government and non-profit organizations to help serve over 92,000 veterans and their family members.

Since awarding the first grant in 2009, demand for FVA funds from local governments, Veterans Service Organizations and non-profit organizations has increased dramatically. At the same time, revenue available to make grant awards has increased only slightly. The best way to take care of Veterans in Texas is by supporting the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. Look for the Veterans Cash scratch-off ticket in your local retailer, public donations applied on vehicle registration forms or donate directly to the Fund online at [www.tvc.texas.gov](http://www.tvc.texas.gov).

Thank you for all you do to support Texas Veterans.

Sincerely,

Thomas Palladino  
Executive Director  
Texas Veterans Commission



LICENSE NO.	XX1234
PLT TRUCK PLT	
REGIS. EXP. MON YR	AUG 2012
VEH/REG CL	TRK<=1/TRUCK-LESS/EQL. 1 TON
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VEHICLE IDENT. NO.	NNNNXXXXNNN1234
FUEL TYPE	GAS
EMPTY WT./CARRYING CAP.	4700/1000
GROSS WEIGHT/TONNAGE	5700/0.50
REGISTRATION FEE	\$ 52.75
LOCAL FEE	10.00
TOTAL-FEE	\$ 62.75
IF MAILED	63.75
Donate to Support TX Veterans	\$ _____
Donate \$5 (or more) to State Parks	\$ _____
Grand Total Due in Fees & Donations	\$ _____



The Texas Veterans Commission is the State agency serving the needs of our Veterans and their families. Its purpose is to serve Texas Veterans, their dependents or survivors in all matters pertaining to Veterans' benefits and rights. The Texas Veterans Commission administers four programs: (1) Claims Representation & Counseling, (2) Veterans Employment Services, (3) Veterans Education, and (4) Fund for Veterans' Assistance. Through these programs, TVC helps obtain state and federal Veterans' benefits, such as compensation, pension, death benefits, employment assistance, educational assistance, hospitalization and outpatient care, as well as numerous other benefits and privileges.

Drawing by a student at Clarke Elementary where Harold Caldwell is the Site Director for Communities in Schools of Greater Central Texas. The drawing is part of a scrapbook project for military families at Fort Hood.



# PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR MILITARY CHILDREN

A parent recently came into Kim Wilkes' office at Smith Middle School at Fort Hood – in tears. The parent explained to Wilkes that her family had recently moved to Fort Hood and that her husband had just left for his first deployment. Her children were having a difficult time adjusting to being away from their family and friends, as well as dealing with their father's deployment.

"She said she was tired, frustrated, and felt totally lost," said Wilkes. "She asked me if I had ever been in the military. I replied that I had been a military spouse for 26 years and my son was in the Army as well. Her response was, 'so you have been there and done that! You understand what I am going through.'"

## **SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS**

Wilkes is a site director for Communities In Schools of Greater Central Texas (CIS) at Smith Middle School. CIS is a nonprofit organization that monitors the academics, behavior, and attendance of at-risk students in Bell, Coryell, Milam and Williamson counties, and has been providing services to the children of Veterans, active duty service members, and

military families since their inception in 1992.

"Although troop deployments to Iraq have come to a conclusion, thousands of Fort Hood soldiers are still making year long deployments to Afghanistan and stress levels within Army families remain high," said Mary Erwin Barr, Executive Director at CIS.

CIS was awarded a Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) grant that began July 1, 2011, to support eight site directors on seven elementary, middle and high school campuses on or adjacent to Fort Hood to provide social and academic support to students from military families. Schools with site directors include Shoemaker High School, Audie Murphy Middle School, Smith Middle School, Clarke Elementary, Clear Creek Elementary, Duncan Elementary, and Montague Village Elementary.

## **NEVER ALONE**

CIS site directors and staff provide supportive guidance and counseling, tutoring, homework clubs, enrichment activities, career fairs and college trips. A CIS participant at Clarke Elementary wrote about



Harold Caldwell, CIS site director at Clarke Elementary.

“He helps us with our problems when our dad is gone and talks to us when we feel upset or if we feel we need to talk to someone,” said the Clarke Elementary student.

“Many spouses of Veterans who remain at home are overwhelmed,” said Barr. “All of a sudden, they must become a ‘single’ parent for a year at a time. Tasks and responsibilities the departing parent handled now have to be prioritized or dropped altogether.”

Barr explained that a child who has been struggling at school but getting by with help from both parents suddenly loses that attention when a parent is deployed. Children with behavior or mood problems that could be managed by two consistent parents may now have one exhausted and preoccupied parent.

“When this scenario is coupled with fears and anxieties of having a loved one placed in harm’s way, life for military children can seem overwhelming at best and performance at school can suffer. This is where CIS has and will continue to help,” said Barr.

#### PERSONAL TOUCH

Students may be referred to CIS through a variety of sources including teachers, counselors, school administrators, parents, or by the students themselves. Parental permission is needed for the student to participate and once

that is obtained, the site director conducts an extensive needs assessment for the child to determine needs and areas of concern.

Based on this assessment, a comprehensive case management plan is developed to address the identified needs and services are tailored to assist the child in overcoming obstacles to succeeding in school. Throughout the year, the student’s grades, behavior and attendance are monitored and entered into a statewide database to track and record progress.

#### PROVEN SUCCESS

Since July 2011, CIS has served over 900 students who come from military homes. Of the military children CIS has served so far in the 2011-12 school year, 81 percent are experiencing a family crisis or conflict, 88 percent have been referred to CIS due to academic deficiencies, 70 percent were referred because of behavior issues, and almost 61 percent are considered low-income or are eligible for free and/or reduced lunches.

CIS expects that 85 percent of those military children served by the program will show improvement in academics, behavior and/or attendance, 95 percent of those students will stay in school, 90 percent will be promoted to the next grade level, and 85 percent of eligible seniors will graduate.

Parental involvement, including home visits, parenting activities and classes, is also part of

the program, as well as providing referrals for local and on-base services and assistance for basic needs such as food, clothing and supplies for those families struggling economically.

Erin Velasquez, CIS site director at Montague Village Elementary School, spouse of a 20-year active duty Army soldier and a current Army Reservist herself, finds that her experience in accessing services helps her to better serve other families.

“Very often I am able to direct families to the exact resources they need as I have used them myself,” said Velasquez. “Being able to understand and personally relate to the experiences of both a military spouse and a soldier greatly facilitates the relationships I build with my students and their parents.”

#### VETERANS HELPING VETERANS

Each of the CIS site directors are either Veterans or military spouses themselves. Jesus Garcia, one of the site directors at Shoemaker High School, is a retired Sergeant Major.

“Being a Veteran of a foreign war, we discuss the hardship families go through and connect them with the agencies at Fort Hood, if need be,” said Garcia. “They ask a lot of questions about the war situation and I try to answer their questions as best I can. Being retired from the Army now for 14 years I thought I could put the military behind me, but I guess when you retire, you really never do.”



Left and Far Left: Jesus Garcia, Site Director for Communities in Schools (CIS), works with two students participating in the CIS program at Shoemaker High School at Fort Hood. Garcia provides individual case management for each student in the program such as monitoring grades, behavior and attendance.

Above: These three young ladies participate in the Communities In Schools 5th Annual Track & Field Event. Over 600 children and their parents spent the day celebrating accomplishments, making new friends and bonding as a family. For parents who could not be present, CIS takes photos and makes videos which are sent around the world.

# HONORING SENIOR VETERANS THROUGH SERVICE

Story and Photos provided by Aly Ruiz, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the fastest growing population of Veterans is composed of seniors who served during Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. As these Veterans age, their social, medical, and physiological needs become more complicated. While we want to focus on the influx of warriors returning home from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we also need to remember the needs of our elderly Veterans who have served our nation in battles of the past.

Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels was awarded a grant for \$120,981 from the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) to feed and maintain a healthy quality of life for 100 elderly Veterans and surviving spouses in the Houston area. The goal of Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels is to enhance the lives of seniors so they may continue living with dignity, independence, and receive basic socialization while their needs are met.

"When it was announced that FBS would be receiving grant funding from TVC, our Veterans and their spouses sat up and noticed, and this gave them such pride to know that other Veterans were supporting them," said Manuela Arroyo, Fort Bend Meals on Wheels Chief Executive Officer. "The pride this created within our elderly made such an impact and raised their spirits. Also, when case managers go speak to elderly regarding our services and note funds are coming from the TVC, it provides validation of our programs, and an assurance their loved one or neighbor will be cared for. Also, having funds from the TVC assists our organization in receiving funds from other sources, since the TVC is so well respected."

Seniors are provided meals seven days a week, 365 days a year. Participants receiving delivered meals are also checked on daily by de-

livery volunteers to ensure their well-being. If a need is identified by a delivery volunteer, it is reported to a case manager, who coordinates with local partners to fulfill the need. Providing meals to these elderly clients allows the clients to stretch their pensions and social security benefits farther while continuing to live independently. Seniors also receive valuable socialization including workshops and education classes, as well as holiday meals for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"Memorial Day is such a special time for Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels' Veterans and their survivors as we pause to remember all who died for America's freedom," said Arroyo. "So many of our widows of Veterans appreciate the acknowledgement of the service their husbands and sons gave for this country and our freedom. The Veterans also appreciate our honoring their friends and loved ones who have passed away, but served our country in the Armed Forces."

Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels is an organization that understands the challenges that are faced when helping elderly Veterans.

"After the FVA grant, we had less challenges with Veterans accepting our services and meals because when we said the meals are being provided through the FVA, then they accepted them more readily, as if this was acceptable to them, as if they had earned the right to have our services and meals and they did not look at it so much as charity. We cannot thank the FVA enough."

Through the funding provided by the FVA, Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels is able to honor our senior Veterans and work daily to keep their needs a top priority.

For more information on the Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels, please visit their website: [www.fortbendseniors.org](http://www.fortbendseniors.org). 



A volunteer with Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels brings meals to elderly Veterans and surviving spouses in the Houston area. The goal of Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels is to enhance the lives of seniors so that they can continue living with dignity, independence, and receive basic socialization while their needs are met.

## VA certifies Veterans' families to be caregivers

By Leta Scott,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Houston

Families play an important role in helping Veterans through a crisis. As a result of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has implemented a program that allows families to care for Veterans they are related to.

Under the Act, families of Veterans who served in combat on and after Sept. 11, 2001, can be certified as an official caregiver of his or her Veteran family member who sustained a serious injury as a result of traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma, or other mental disorder.

Eligibility guidelines for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, require that Veterans must be enrolled for VA health services. Program objectives include:

1. Allowing Veterans to remain at home in the community.
2. Addressing specific needs of family caregivers with a menu of programs and services.
3. Promoting Veteran and caregiver health and well-being.
4. Providing a single location to obtain any needed information.
5. Providing training and information on common conditions.
6. Reducing isolation through professional and peer support.
7. Providing respite care options to caregivers.
8. Sensitize health care providers to the caregivers' role.



It is important to note that eligibility is based on the Veteran's functional limitations, and not diagnosis. Having served on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and sustaining a serious injury — including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma or other mental disorder — incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, is an eligibility requirement for this program.

Veterans also must need personal care services resulting from an inability to perform one or more activities of daily living and/or need supervision or protection based on symptoms or residuals of neurological impairment or injury as part of the eligibility requirements.

The Veteran's need for assistance is determined by having a member of the Veteran's Primary Care team complete an assessment which also determines the level of stipend the caregiver receives. Upon completion of the assessment, the Caregiver Support Coordinator (CSC) will arrange for training for the caregiver, via web, in person, or with a workbook and DVD. The CSC is a licensed professional who will match the caregiver with services for which the Veteran is eligible, and provides them with valuable information about resources that can

help them stay smart, strong and organized as they care for the Veteran they love.

On-going support will be provided to Veterans and caregivers that include:

1. Well-being checks every 90 days.
2. Supportive and instructive home visits.
3. Evaluation of Veteran and caregiver's physical and emotional state.
4. Recommendations for additional training, support, equipment, etc.

The caregiver also receives services alongside the Veteran:

1. Stipend
2. Health Insurance (CHAMPVA)
3. Travel and lodging
4. Mental Health Services

Any additional training, support, and equipment can be coordinated with the Veteran's primary team and the facility CSC.

Caregivers of active duty servicemembers may apply for the stipend program as well, with the appropriate supporting documentation for an incurred or aggravated injury. When a military member has a medical condition, including mental health conditions, which renders them unfit to perform their required duties, they may be separated (or retired) from the military for medical reasons.

The National Caregiver Support Line is open Monday through Friday 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM and Saturday 10:30 AM to 6:00 PM ET. They can be contacted at 1-855-260-3274 or online at [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov).

For help applying for this benefit, please contact a local Texas Veterans Commission office, [http://www.tvc.texas.gov/documents/2012\\_TVC\\_Directory.pdf](http://www.tvc.texas.gov/documents/2012_TVC_Directory.pdf).

## VA expands medical forms program to support faster claims processing

By Bonnie Fletcher,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Any Veteran who has ever applied for disability benefits knows that it can be a long and difficult process. In response, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the release of 68 new forms that will help speed up the processing of Veterans' disability compensation and pension claims.

The new forms, called disability benefits questionnaires (DBQs), guide physicians reports of medical findings, ensuring VA has the exact medical information needed to make a prompt decision.

This will allow VA employees to process more disability claims quickly, since DBQs capture important medical information needed

to accurately evaluate Veterans' claims. DBQs are just one of many changes the VA is implementing to address the backlog of claims.

"The Texas Veterans Commission fully supports this step forward and have always been in favor of making it easier for Veterans to provide private treatment information suitable for rating purposes, and this certainly satisfies that criteria," said Jim Richman, Director of Claims Counseling and Representation at the Texas Veterans Commission. "The DBQs are 'individually case specific' and are easy to use as a source of information."

When deciding a disability claim for compensation or pension benefits, VA provides Veterans with free medical examinations for the purpose of gathering the necessary medical evidence.

Veterans who choose to have their private physicians complete the medical examination can now give their physicians the same form a VA provider would use. It is important that physicians provide complete responses to all questions on the DBQs. VA cannot pay for a private physician to complete DBQs or for any costs associated with examination or testing.

DBQs can be found at <http://benefits.va.gov/disabilityexams>.

If you are a Veteran that needs to file a disability compensation or pension claim, please contact your nearest Texas Veterans Commission Claims Counseling and Representation office at <http://www.tvc.texas.gov/Claims.aspx>.

Veterans may also file a claim online through the eBenefits web portal at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>.

# TVC program helps Veterans go to school

By Marlene Hall,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Dallas

As involvement in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are winding down, approximately 610,000 additional men and women could be seeking to use their U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) GI Bill education benefits. This will not only affect the schools they will attend but it will also have a great impact on most, if not all, of the Veterans programs offered at the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC).

Effective Aug. 1, 2009, the Post-9/11 GI Bill provided some degree of education benefits for all Veterans that served active duty after Sept. 10, 2001. According to the VA, the number of Veterans receiving educational benefits soared 16-fold to 555,329 within three years of enactment of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. This growth greatly expanded the need for educational counseling and assistance for Veterans planning to take advantage of those educational benefits. Through amendments to the original Post-9/11 GI Bill, signed by President Obama in December 2010, Veterans and eligible dependents can now use this benefit not only for in-residence college degrees, but for online schools and vocational training programs as well.

The following figures exemplify the impact Veterans have in the state of Texas.

- The approximate Veteran population of Texas is 1.7 million, which is the second largest in the United States.
- As of Jan. 31, 2012, Texas leads the nation in the number of service-members, 298,276, deployed since September 11,

2001.

- In Texas, the number of VA educational recipients increased from 67,015 in 2010 to 76,878 in 2011 (a 13 percent increase).

The Veterans Education Program, which functions as the State Approving Agency to approve programs and courses of study for Veterans and their families, assists Veterans and their families with both federal and state educational benefits. The program currently has one director, one manager, two assistants, and 11 education program specialists (seven in the field and four at TVC headquarters).

Veterans Education staff work hard to ensure that all Veterans pursuing training or education in Texas have sufficient opportunities. The number of Texas facilities with approved programs has more than doubled in the last five years to a total of 1,266, and during Fiscal Year 2011, 18,341 programs of education and training for Veterans were reviewed. Veterans Education staff answered 11,481 phone calls and e-mails in FY2011 and also attended Veteran Benefit Fairs, Veteran Focused Job Fairs, GI Bill and Hazlewood briefings at military installations, and new school/facility program approval

opportunities to reach out to Veterans and schools. During FY2011, 19,584 information letters and brochures were mailed to recently discharged Veterans, and 1,020 school/facility on-site visits were conducted.

“We, in Texas, are indeed fortunate to have an economic climate and the educational infrastructure to attract Veterans and their families here,” said Rufus Coburn, Director of the Veterans Education Program. “These Veterans have given their best in some extremely trying circumstances to ensure that we can continue to enjoy our comforts and privileges at home. The very least we can do is to give our very best efforts to enable those Veterans to pursue their educational goals and aspirations. Their education is an investment in our future.”



Photo provided by Marlene Hall, Texas Veterans Commission, Dallas

Terry O'Neill, TVC Program Specialist, answers questions a Veteran has about education benefits. Veterans Education staff answered 11,481 calls and emails about state and federal education benefits during FY2011.

# Annual conference brings Veteran education program officials together

By Melanie A. Moynahan,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Cypress

On March 6-9, 2012, the Texas Association of Collegiate Veteran Program Officials (TACVPO) held their annual conference in Galveston, Texas. Many school officials from universities, collegiate organizations, and other programs from various areas of Texas were present as well as Program Specialists from the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and representatives from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Workshops and breakout sessions were held during the conference to help school officials

in Texas learn about changes to the GI Bill and the Hazlewood Act Exemption, and to obtain information on proper certification procedures. Cynthia Rosas, a TVC Program Specialist, was one of the speakers at the conference.

“Being a presenter allowed me to incorporate my knowledge as a former Certifying Official and to return to my roots and support the ‘front-line workers’ who deal with our Veterans on a day-to-day basis and provide them with the tools and knowledge they need to help our returning soldiers in their transition back to civilian life,” said Rosas.

A review of all standards and recent changes to certification trends was provided for new

and tenured Certifying Officials and question and answer sessions were also held to offer all in attendance an opportunity to share and review similar problems, situations, and difficulties.

“The camaraderie and the opportunity to help Veterans by bringing together all factors of Veterans’ service is a unique and valuable thing,” said Diana Davis, Supervisory Education Compliance Survey Specialist for the VA. “We are lucky in Texas to have an organization such as TACVPO which brings us all together if only for a short time.”

# Veterans Employment Representative helps Gulf War Veteran get back to work

By Cheri Smith,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Bobby Lee Williams began working for the Texas Veterans Commission in September 2011 as a Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist and is already proving why Texas leads the country helping Veterans enter employment.

Walking through the Workforce Resource Center in McKinney Texas, he saw Greg Williams using one of the resource center's computers. Greg was becoming a regular fixture in the center, and Bobby Lee approached him to find out if he was a Veteran. Greg informed Bobby Lee that he was a Navy Veteran who served in the Persian Gulf War and had been out of a job for a year.

Bobby Lee worked with Greg on his resume, informed him of job leads, and staged mock interviews, but Greg was still not finding employment. Late one Friday afternoon, Greg swallowed his pride and told Bobby Lee that he needed financial assistance to pay his rent and utilities by Monday morning. Bobby Lee immediately thought to take care of his fellow Veteran. He called his predecessor, Dave Hoch, a former Veteran Employment Representative

(VER) for TVC. Hoch was now the Quartermaster for the VFW Lone Star Post 2150 and in charge of a program for financial aid at VFW. Hoch was able to write a check from Post 2150 for Greg's rent and utilities that day. With the immediate threat of having his utilities cut off gone, Greg was able to concentrate on finding work.

After reviewing Greg's Work In Texas (WIT) profile, Bobby Lee helped Greg update his work profile so it would be more effective in matching him to jobs that fit his skill set and assisted him with getting interviews. Keeping a close eye on Greg, Bobby Lee helped him through this tough time and kept him focused on his goals.

All their effort finally paid off as Greg was placed in the Reemployment & Eligibility Assessment (REA) program at the Texas Workforce Solutions office in McKinney, working as an employment consultant, right next to Bobby Lee.

"Bobby Lee's motivation and encouragement really helped me during the difficult time of looking for employment," said Greg. "Because of him I will be able to provide the same encouragement and motivation to those Veterans I work with since I have been in their shoes,

and I can feel their pain."

Bobby Lee has been in Greg's position as well and knows how important it is to have empathetic Veterans Employment Representatives in the workforce centers.

"Everything I impart to my Veterans is a direct reflection of the great training that I have received from TVC, as well as my partner – (Local Veteran Employment Representative) Veronica Carnucci," said Bobby Lee.

As a disabled Vietnam Veteran with significant employment and educational barriers, Bobby Lee entered employment through the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Through that program, Bobby Lee met Carnucci and Hoch in April 2011, and told Carnucci he wanted her job.

Carnucci worked with Bobby Lee on his resume and WIT profile and soon was able to help him land his dream job, working with Veterans as a Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Representative.

Bobby Lee practices the Texas Veterans Commission mission every day: advocating for and providing superior service to Veterans and their families. 🇺🇸

## Texas Veterans Commission launches Texas Veteran Entrepreneur and Business Development Program

By Rachel Howell Shumaker,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) has created the "Texas Veteran Entrepreneur and Business Development Program," a Texas Veterans Commission program to promote Veteran business ownership and connect Veterans with the necessary resources for the successful launch, operation and growth of their business.

TVC appointed Duncan McGhee, an Army Veteran with a Bachelor's degree in Management and a Master's degree in Business Administration, to head the program.

"Duncan's 25 years of experience working in start-up environments and growing companies in the private sector makes him the ideal candidate for this position," said Thomas Palladino, the TVC Executive Director.

Initially, the program will focus on outreach

to notify Veterans of the wide variety of financing, franchising and business support systems available to Veterans who wish to launch or grow their business successfully.

The program will grow to provide the following services:

- Business concept assessment
- Business plan development
- Financial guidance
- Management assistance
- Marketing assistance
- Information regarding franchise opportunities
- Mentorship opportunities

"With its four programs of Claims, Veterans Employment, Veterans Education and grants through the Fund for Veterans' Assistance, TVC is uniquely positioned to inform the greatest possible number of Veterans about all the resources available to support Veteran busi-

ness ownership," says Duncan McGhee. "My goal is to connect the Veteran entrepreneur with the internal and external resources available to ensure the highest rate of success for Veteran business ownership."

TVC Veteran Entrepreneur Program will be conducting Entrepreneur Information Seminars throughout the State beginning July 2012. Please check back for dates and times as they are announced.

For more information on the program, please contact Duncan McGhee at 512-936-6677 or via email at [duncan.mcgee@tvc.state.tx.us](mailto:duncan.mcgee@tvc.state.tx.us).

To join the discussion with other Veteran business owners and entrepreneurs, please visit the Veteran Entrepreneur and Business Development Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/TVCVeteranEntrepreneurProgram>. 🇺🇸

# Fund for Veterans' Assistance Grant Opportunity opens July 2012

By Elaine Zavala,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On July 1, 11 organizations, awarded just under \$2.3 million dollars in grants, began their projects through the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

"Eleven new grantees are projected to serve an additional 23,915 Veterans, dependents and surviving spouses between July 1, 2012, and June 30, 2013," said Sarah Tillman, Grant Officer for the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. "To date, the Commission has provided over \$23.5 million in grants to 94 local government and non-profit organizations to help serve over 92,000 Veterans and their family members."

The grants are awarded to help 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 financial assistance, legal assistance and



family and child services.

"There are 1.7 million Veterans residing in Texas, and 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," says Thomas Palladino, Executive Director of the Texas Veterans Commission. "The organizations receiving these grants offer programs that focus on helping

Veterans overcome these obstacles."

The primary source of funds for the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance is the Veterans Cash \$2 scratch-off lottery ticket. Since its introduction in November 2009, sales of the lottery ticket have provided over \$19.8 million to the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

Individuals can also support the Fund for Veterans' Assistance by making an online donation through [www.tvc.texas.gov](http://www.tvc.texas.gov) or on their vehicle registration form by specifying an amount at the bottom right corner of the form. Donations to the Fund for Veterans' Assistance are tax deductible under the provisions of Section 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code.

For more information about the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance visit <http://www.tvc.texas.gov/Fund-for-Veterans-Assistance.aspx>

## Stable housing and support is offered to Veterans

By Ashley Holcomb,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Families In Crisis (FIC), a non-profit United Way agency located in Killeen, Texas, provides assistance and supportive services to Veterans and their dependents who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in the hopes of helping them achieve increased stability. Currently FIC has two grants from the Texas Veterans Commission. They were awarded a twelve month Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) General Assistance grant that started in July 2011 in the amount of \$267,549 and were awarded a second grant under the new Housing4TexasHeroes program in the amount of \$300,000 that started in January 2012.

In addition to homelessness prevention programs, FIC also provides emergency assistance, transportation services, and housing search and rental assistance for Veterans and their spouses, dependent children, dependent parents, and surviving spouses. Some of their services include case management, life skills classes, support groups, transportation to and from medical appointments, professional counseling services, and other supportive services.

As part of their rental assistance program, FIC provides assistance for up to six months and start-up costs, such as security deposits and utilities, to secure and maintain permanent housing to resolve or avoid homelessness. FIC also addresses other issues that may have contributed to and/or compounded housing situations through their case management system.

So far, FIC has served a total of 295 Veterans, dependents, and surviving spouses through their grants. Through FIC, a single male Veteran father of two teenage boys who was recently laid off due to health reasons and ongoing back and knee problems was able to avoid homelessness and was rehired by the employer who had fired him.

After losing his job, the Veteran began facing severe financial difficulties since he was denied unemployment benefits and was experiencing lengthy wait times for his much needed surgery through the civilian health system. Upon receipt of his eviction notice, he sought help and was referred to FIC. He began working with a case manager who provided rental assistance to avoid his eviction and helped him attend life skills classes to address coping skills and money management proficiency. He was linked

to a representative at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) where he was able to schedule his surgery at a VA hospital. He was also able to apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, Social Security insurance, as well as Medicaid for his children with the help of his FIC case manager. He also applied for service-connected disability through the VA and had a successful surgery, so his former employer has agreed to rehire him.

Families In Crisis has been providing services since 1978 for those in need in Bell, Coryell, and Hamilton counties, including Fort Hood.

"FVA has afforded our program the flexibility to assist additional Veteran-affiliated populations (such as surviving spouses)," said FIC Director of Operations, William Hall. "Also, these funds have enabled us to help people avoid eviction and subsequent homelessness, thereby allowing us to intervene on critical situations before they become catastrophic."

FIC will continue to utilize its strong community linkages to provide Veterans with relevant and timely referrals while continuing to provide supportive services through grants.

# Message from the Secretary of the Veterans County Service Officers Association of Texas

Wouldn't it be nice if each day was recognized as Memorial Day? Every day at our job we are reminded of the sacrifices made by those heroes and their families. It is that knowledge that gives us the true motivation to continue the fight for their recognition.

I'd like to extend a Big Texas welcome to the 21 newly-appointed Veteran County Service Officers (VCSOs) who attended the annual Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Spring Training Conference in Corpus Christi. The training will help you assist veterans and their dependents on a daily basis. Please remember we are all in this together, so don't hesitate to call a fellow VCSO or a TVC counselor to ask for help. What an awesome conference and a great Veterans Expo!

The Fall conference is scheduled for September 17-21 in Dallas, so plan your budgets accordingly. This conference will also include a Veterans Expo as well as guest speakers from the VA and other subject matter experts. Gary Ivy, TVC, is still soliciting input for subjects to be covered in the upcoming training conferences.



Speaking of conferences, the 2012 National Association for Veteran County Service Officers (NAVCSO) convention was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The training was amazing and the knowledge available from other VCSOs from other states is endless. The 2013 convention is scheduled for June 1-8, 2013, in Reno, Nevada. Check out the NAVCSO website for more information.

With all of us working together, learning together, and sharing together we can all rest assured that President Theodore Roosevelt's 1903 speech to veterans will remain a reality: "A man who is good enough to shed his blood for his country is good enough to be given a square deal afterwards."

Sincerely,  
Laura Spain, Veterans County Service Officer,  
Wise County  
Secretary, VCSOAT

## VLB now offering \$417,000 for home purchases, \$100,000 for land

Jim Suydam  
Texas Veterans Land Board

Texas Veterans can now take advantage of the VLB's low-interest rate loans to borrow as much as \$417,000 to buy a home and \$100,000 to buy land.

The Texas Veterans Land Board voted unanimously to increase the home and land loan limits in the latest expansion of benefits under the leadership of Chairman Jerry Patterson.

"Texas Veterans have more than earned this increased VLB benefit," Patterson said. "Increasing these loan limits gives Texas Veterans additional purchasing power to buy the home of their dreams or a find a little piece of Texas to call their own."

Since taking office in 2003, Patterson has raised the amount Texas Veterans may borrow for a home from \$150,000 up to \$417,000.

Buying land through the VLB has gotten easier, too. Under Patterson's direction, the VLB has reduced the minimum acreage that could be bought with a VLB land loan from five acres to one acre, making it easier for Veterans to buy lots closer to urban areas. A Texas Veteran can simultaneously have a VLB land loan, a VLB home loan and a VLB home improvement loan.

The Texas Veterans Land Board was created in 1946 to help Veterans returning from World War II buy land for agricultural purposes. The program has changed over the years as land prices rose sharply and VLB land loan amounts have increased from the original \$7,500.

"No other state can match what the VLB offers: low-cost home, land and home improvement loans; skilled nursing facilities and cemeteries - all exclusively for Texas Veterans or their spouses," Patterson said. "And all of our programs are self-funding, which is



good news for Texas taxpayers."

For more information on Texas Veterans Land Board home, land and home improvement loans, Texas State Veterans Homes, or Texas State Veterans Cemeteries, call 1-800-252-VETS (1-800-252-8387), or visit the Veterans Land Board Web site at [www.texasVeterans.com](http://www.texasVeterans.com). 

# New appointments to the Texas Veterans Commission announced

By Cheri Smith,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Governor Rick Perry recently appointed Eliseo "Al" Cantu, Jr., as the new Chairman for the Texas Veterans Commission. He also appointed a new Commissioner, J.K. "Jake" Ellzey, and reappointed Richard A. McLeon, IV. Their terms expire December 2017.

"Chairman Cantu has contributed significantly on Veterans' issues at both national and state levels," says Thomas Palladino, Executive Director of the Texas Veterans Commission. "His experience and his military background provide a solid foundation for this agency to continue its mission, serving the Veterans of Texas."

Chairman Cantu retired from the U.S. Army in 1978 at the rank of Major. He has served as Post and District Commander for the Department of Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the United States and was elected State Commander for the VFW Department of Texas in June 2007.

Chairman Cantu worked as an Internal Auditor with Nueces County, then in the finance field with Driscoll Children's Hospital, finally retiring after 21 years of service on the Executive Committee. Chairman Cantu and his wife live in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Commissioner Ellzey is an independent contractor who recently retired as a Commander after 20 years in the U.S. Navy. He is a combat-decorated pilot who served in multiple theaters including Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi

Freedom.

Commissioner Ellzey has flown over 4,000 hours in F-14s, F/A-18s and H-60s, and has over 900 carrier arrested landings. He commanded a F/A-18 Super Hornet squadron and was the Air Boss on the carrier USS Ronald Reagan. Additionally, he was a Joint Tactical Air Controller (JTAC) supporting Navy SEALs in Iraq. "Commissioner Ellzey's most recent military experience makes him a valuable asset, providing our agency with fresh insight on the challenges facing this generation's Veterans," said Mr. Palladino. "We look forward to hearing his perspective on the issues faced by the men and women that completed service during his 20 year tenure."

For his exemplary service, Commander Ellzey received two Bronze Stars, two Meritorious Service Medals, an Individual Air Medal with Combat "V", seven Strike/Flight Air Medals (one with combat "V"), the Combat Action Ribbon, and the Battle "E".

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science from the United States Naval Academy, and is pursuing his Executive Master of Business Administration at the Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University.



Chairman Al Cantu



Commissioner Jake Ellzey



Secretary Richard McLeon

Commissioner Ellzey grew up in Perryton, and he and his family live in Midlothian, Texas.

Commissioner McLeon is a native of Grapevine, Texas, and is the general manager of Rusk County Electric Cooperative, as well as board member for the East Texas Electric Cooperative and the Tex-La Electric Cooperative. He has experience in non-profit management, administration, and finance. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A&M University and a Master of Business Administration from Sul Ross State University.

A Veteran of Operation Desert Storm, Commissioner McLeon enlisted in 1983 and served in the U.S. Army and Army Reserves receiving an Honorable Discharge in 1996. Commissioner McLeon is an ordained minister in the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas. He lives in Victoria, Texas, with his wife and their two sons.

For more information about the Texas Veterans Commission visit [www.tvc.texas.gov](http://www.tvc.texas.gov).

## Texas Veterans Commission hosts successful Conference

By Rachel Howell Shumaker,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

May 1 through May 3, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) hosted the annual Spring Training Conference at the Omni Bayfront Hotel in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Almost 250 attendees were trained during the three-day conference, which offered three types of training for TVC Claims Counselors and Veterans County Service Officers (VCSOs): Initial, Certification, and Accreditation.

New TVC Claims Counselors and VCSOs 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.

Twenty-one new VCSOs and eight new TVC Claims Counselors were certified through Initial Training, and 95 VCSOs were recertified during the conference. Additionally, the conference provided training and testing for 48 VCSOs and 46 TVC Claims Counselors who

are now accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to represent Veterans with disability claims and appeals cases.

Accreditation is available to VCSOs who: are paid employees of the county and working for the county 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.



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