



VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 6, Issue 8 ★ August 2026



Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) recognizes the immense challenges of transitioning from military service. The Department of Defense transition assistance program (TAP) provides outstanding information on housing, healthcare, employment, along with federal and state benefits however, much of that information is delivered over a short period of time. With so much to remember, it's easy to get overwhelmed and that is precisely what the Veteran Service Officers (VSO) of IDVA are here to do, help former service members and their families make their way through all that information.

This summer, through the heat domes, storms, and rain, IDVA VSOs have dispersed across the state to participate in community events, county and state fairs, resource fairs, and programs to inform veterans of how to obtain their earned benefits. We often hear things like, "I didn't know you existed," or "don't you run the VA hospitals?" We are eager to attend events, speak at programs, and share resources, so veterans learn about the services and how we can help them. Recently, we partnered with the Illinois Attorney General's Office to produce a comprehensive guide to these benefits. I encourage you to [take a look](#).

If you would like a VSO to participate in one of your community events, request here: [IDVA SPECIAL EVENT ATTENDANCE REQUEST](#). We are also available to promote most veteran events on our social media platforms or here in our newsletter. You may send information to our communications director: Maureen.hartigan@illinois.gov.

For those who joined us at the Illinois State Fair, in Springfield, thank you for coming out on a hot and stormy day. It's not too late for Veterans' Day at the DuQuoin State Fair, which is this Sunday, August 30th. The day fosters camaraderie, displays traditions, and demonstrates our respect and appreciation. Admission and lunch are free for veterans and their families.

Enjoy these final days of summer and thank you for staying connected to IDVA.

Sincerely,
Terry Prince, Director and U.S. Navy Veteran

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ IDVA is Hiring



IDVA Director Terry Prince and HR Recruitment Specialist Candice Rudd at the State Employment Job Fair in Bolingbrook.

IDVA is hiring across the agency including registered nurses, certified nurse's assistants, dietitians, veteran service officers, and administrative staff. We are seeking qualified, talented, and eager employees to join our team of 1,400 who are dedicated to serving veterans across Illinois. We also offer tools to position candidates to succeed. Check out the Virtual Job Fairs which provide interviewing tips and guidelines for applying for state employment. IDVA also offers onsite career workshops in Quincy each month for interested candidates to learn about seeking and applying for state employment, and one-on-one career counseling.

Virtual Job Fairs

9/1/2026 5:30-6:15 PM How to Read a Job Bulletin



9/2/2026 10:00-10:45AM IDVA Extraordinary Employees



9/4/2026 9:00-9:45 AM How to Certify Your Veterans Points



9/9/2026 5:30-6:15 PM Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward



9/10/2026 2:00-2:45 PM Interview Tips and Tricks



9/14/2026 2:00-2:45 PM How to Certify Your Veterans Points



9/16/2026 12:00-12:45 PM How to read a Job Bulletin



9/18/2026 1:00-1:45 PM IDVA Extraordinary Employees



9/22/2026 10:00-10:45 AM Interview Tips and Tricks



9/28/2026 10:00-10:45 AM Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Learn the Ropes of Working for the State of Illinois

Working for Illinois means being part of a diverse community dedicated to making a difference in people's lives every day. Join us in shaping the future of our great state, where innovation, collaboration, and opportunity thrive.

Illinois offers opportunities in nearly every field and experience. Join the Illinois Career Workshops to learn how to seek and apply for positions leading to life-changing experiences and meaningful careers

Illinois offers excellent benefits for employees and their families.

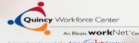
- Career counseling
- Instructions on building a state profile and reading a job bulletin
- Interview Tips

The first Thursday of each month:

**August 6th
September 3rd
October 1st
November 5th
December 3rd**

**10:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Veterans are welcome at 10:00 AM**

Illinois Department of Employment Security
107 N. 3rd Street, Quincy, Illinois



IDVA Veteran Service Officer Dax Griffith Named Southern Region Supervisor

Dax Griffith, an IDVA Veteran Service Officer since 2019, has been named the IDVA Southern Region Supervisor. While a VSO, he worked and trained in eight offices, assisting veterans and their families in accessing the benefits and services they have earned through their military service.

"His skills and influence in the veteran's advocacy space are admirable and will certainly have a positive impact on the Southern Region mission," said Field Services Manager Mark Patterson.

Dax retired from the United States Air Force after 26 years of honorable service. Beginning his military career in 1992, he served at eight duty stations around the world and completed six deployments in support of military operations. Throughout his distinguished career, Dax served as a heavy construction equipment operator, concrete and asphalt repair specialist, and technical training instructor. He concluded his military service as the superintendent of Civil Engineer Operations, providing leadership and oversight for all civil engineer career fields.

Former Senior Master Sergeant Griffith's military decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal with five oak leaf clusters, the Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters, the Army Commendation Medal, the Air Force Achievement Medal with three oak leaf clusters, and the Army Achievement Medal, reflecting his exceptional leadership, dedication, and service.

Dax holds three associate degrees and a bachelor's degree from Columbia Southern University, graduating summa cum laude. He was recognized as an Honor Graduate from Basic Military Training and earned Distinguished Graduate honors at both the Airman Leadership School and the Noncommissioned Officer Academy.

"I am passionate about serving Illinois veterans and their families and am honored to assume the role of Southern Region Supervisor," said Dax. "I am committed to supporting Veterans Service Officers and ensuring they have the tools needed to serve Illinois veterans effectively."

Quarterly Field Services Meeting

The Field Services Leadership Team met for their quarterly meeting to review the past quarter, plan for the next, and evaluate the team's performance. The three-day meeting wasn't all hard work; the team gave back to the Pawnee community by providing lunch through the Lunch in the Park program. Their efforts connected them with a community they support and serve. Following lunch, the team visited the New City Greenhouse, a local operation showcasing fresh farm grown vegetables and sustainable growing practices. They left the day restored and well-positioned for the fourth quarter of the year.

Field Services Manager Mark Patterson, Northern Region Supervisor Melissa Paris, Central Region Supervisor Kimberly Yantis, Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson III, Field Training Coordinator Kenneth Bonner, and Field Services Manager Administrative Assistant Missy Ross-Nance participated.



Central Region Supervisor and Field Services Manager Mark Patterson and Central Region Supervisor Kimberly Yantis serving lunch in the park.



Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson III picking out corn at the New City Greenhouse.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Field Services

Veterans Seeking Assistance with Claims and Benefits, visit

Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs

Veteran Service Officer Dan Ebker – McLean County

Itinerare

Heartland Community College

Veteran Center

Workforce Development Center (WDC 1005)

1500 Raab Road, Normal, IL 61761

Third Wednesday and Fourth Thursday of each month

Dan Ebker

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Daniel.ebker2@illinois.gov

217-670-4036

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Joining Forces Northern Regional Summit

The 2026 Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) Northern Regional Summit featured an in-depth discussion on moral injury, exploring its risk factors, warning signs, and impact on service members and veterans. Attendees also participated in training that highlighted the differences between moral injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), providing valuable insight into these distinct behavioral health challenges.

Additional sessions focused on opioid overdose response, including training on recognizing the signs of an opioid overdose and the proper administration of Narcan in emergency situations.

The event concluded with the IJF recognizing outstanding service through its annual awards presentation, honoring Dr. Carlos L. Redmond, as the Northern Region Veteran of the Year and Veterans Path to Hope as the Northern Region Veteran Support Organization of the Year.



*Margo Watson, Women Veterans Coordinator,
Anthony Vaughn, Assistant Director, and Tanya Reyes,
Field Service Officer (Cook-Des Plaines).*



Women Veterans Program



Candice Rudd, IDVA Central Office Recruitment Specialist (Cook County), Margo Watson, Women Veterans Coordinator; and Cynthia McKee, Veteran Service Coordinator, attended the 250th America Celebration – Honoring Our Women Veterans & Their Families at Christ Church Oak Brook.

The event featured more than 50 vendors offering a wide range of resources and services for women veterans. In addition, a benefits clinic provided on-the-spot assistance to veterans seeking to access VA disability benefits, helping attendees connect directly with the benefits and support they have earned.



25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders in 2026



Tawanda Hanible, Marine Corps

Gunnery Sergeant Tawanda "Tee" Marie Hanible, USMC (Ret.), is a retired Marine Corps leader, nonprofit founder, and bestselling author who honorably served 20 years after enlisting in 1996. A trailblazer for women in the Corps, she made history as part of the first formal female platoon to complete Marine Combat Training and deployed to Iraq in 2003 as the only female Marine in her combat unit during the initial invasion.

While on active duty, she founded Operation Heroes Connect, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to reconnecting veterans, mentoring at-risk youth, and restoring communities through impactful programs including nationally recognized summer camps led by veterans and service members. She was honored at the White House by President Barack Obama for her service and has been recognized with major awards including the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award (2025) and the VA Trailblazer of the Year Award (2021).

Hanible gained national visibility as a co-star on FOX's American Grit alongside John Cena and has appeared as a veteran advocate and political commentator on CNN, MSNBC, and Lifetime. She is the author of *The Warrior Code: 11 Principles to Unleash the Badass Inside of You* (St. Martin's Press), adopted by the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance in a VA-funded program supporting veterans' mental health. Hanible is an Appointee, Chicago Committee on Urban Opportunity, Chicago Department of Family and Support Services. She holds a Master of Science in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics from the University of Maryland, Baltimore, studied Leadership at Harvard Extension School, and earned degrees in Psychology and Liberal Arts from the University of Maryland.



25 Illinois Women Veteran Leaders in 2026



Melissa Farmer-Hill, Army

Melissa Farmer-Hill is a retired U.S. Army Combat Veteran and advocate for women Veterans. As Founder of Shero Coffee Club and author of *Army Strong Women*, she leads a purpose-driven coffee and tea initiative honoring women Veterans through storytelling and engagement. She is the creator and host of Shero Coffee Chat, a weekly livestream platform for the Veteran community, and has hosted Shero Uncorked for five years – an annual gathering fostering connection and empowerment. She also leads and supports Veterans Coffee Chats throughout the Chicagoland area, strengthening community engagement and advancing Veteran-centered collaboration.

In 2025, she served as keynote speaker for the Jesse Brown VA Women's Health Program, Women Warriors, the Park Forest Veterans Commission's "Her Story, Her Legacy" program, and Top-Flight Defense Inc.'s Empower and Enlighten event.

A lifetime member of VFW Post 311, she serves as Resource Coordinator, organizing community partners and service providers for the annual Veteran and Family Resource Fair. She also chairs the Mental Health Consumer Advocacy Council at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, advocating for Veteran-centered improvements in mental health care and access.

Named one of the 2025 Amazing Women of Rich Township, Melissa continues to empower women Veterans to lead with confidence and thrive in life after service.



Women Veterans Program

National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators Conference

Margo Watson, IDVA Women Veterans Coordinator, attended the National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators (NASWVC) Conference in Savannah, Georgia. The professional development opportunity brought together Women Veterans Coordinators, veteran advocates, and organizations from across the country to exchange knowledge, strengthen partnerships, and advance their shared commitment to serving women veterans.

The NASWVC is dedicated to advocating for women who have served in the United States Armed Forces. The organization ensures women veterans have equitable access to healthcare, benefits, programs, and services while promoting greater awareness of the unique needs, experiences, and contributions of women veterans.

Throughout the conference, discussions focused on important and emerging women veteran issues, and strategies for strengthening outreach, advocacy, and services. It also centered on identifying and sharing best practices for Women Veterans Coordinators. These sessions provided valuable opportunities to learn how other states are addressing the needs of women veterans and connecting them with essential resources and benefits.

One of the highlights of the conference was networking with fellow Women Veterans Coordinators from across the nation and establishing professional relationships that will encourage continued collaboration and the sharing of best practices.

"I returned from Savannah with new ideas, resources, professional connections, and renewed enthusiasm for advocating on behalf of women veterans," said Margo Watson, "The NASWVC Conference reinforced the importance of remaining informed, building partnerships, embracing innovative resources, and ensuring that the voices of women veterans remain at the forefront of our work."

The conference also featured several organizations dedicated to serving military veterans, highlighting innovative resources in the areas of technology, training, and medical and healthcare services. Learning about these organizations demonstrated how advancements in technology, specialized training opportunities, and evolving healthcare resources can improve the lives of veterans and support their successful transition and well-being. These connections also provided additional resources that Women Veterans Coordinators can share with the veterans and communities they serve.

Additionally, meetings and sessions were led by the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA), providing valuable insight into broader state and national veterans affairs priorities.

The NASWVC Conference strengthened our collective ability to ensure that women veterans are recognized, heard, connected, and supported and have access to the benefits, services, opportunities, and quality care they have earned through their military service.



Margo Watson, IDVA Women Veterans Coordinator, with Katia Woods, United States Army Veteran, Road Home Program Veteran Outreach Coordinator and an Illinois Women Veterans Leaders of 2026.



Veterans Day at the Springfield State Fair

Hundreds of veterans attended Veterans Day at the State Fair for this annual event that honored Illinois veterans and their families. Gold Star families gathered for a brunch and yellow rose ceremony and the main program featured a speaking program, presentation of Governor JB Pritzker's Proclamation declaring August 16th Veterans Day at the State Fair, and a special presentation by the Black Tiger Honor Guard. Springfield Mayor Misty Buscher honored Brenda Jefferson for over 50 years of volunteering with the American Legion, Combined Veterans, and the Veterans Day State Fair Committee. August 16th was named Brenda Jefferson Day in Springfield.

JROTC competed throughout the day and were judged by a diligent panel from IDVA. Three schools participated: Waukegan High School - Bull Dog Guard, Bull Dog Reign - Army JROTC, Zion Benton High School - Zee Bee - Navy JROTC, and Prosser Career Academy - Falcons - Army JROTC.

The day culminated in a Veterans Day Parade through the fairgrounds with veteran service organizations and IDVA.

JROTC Competition

Cash awards for overall performance:

- 1st Place - Waukegan High School - \$300
- 2nd Place - Zion Benton High School - \$250
- 3rd Place - Prosser Career Academy - \$200

The JROTC competed in six categories:

Armed Color Guard

- 3rd Place - Prosser Career Academy
- 2nd Place - Waukegan High School
- 1st Place - Zion Benton High School

Unarmed Regulation Platoon

- 3rd Place - Zion Benton High School
- 2nd Place Waukegan High School
- 1st Place Prosser Career Academy

Armed Regulation Platoon

- 2nd Place - Zion Benton High School
- 1st Place - Waukegan High School

Armed Regulation Squad

- 2nd Place - Zion Benton High School
- 1st Place - Waukegan High School

Unarmed Regulation Squad

- 2nd Place - Zion Benton High School
- 1st Place - Waukegan High School

Unarmed Exhibition Squad

- 2nd Place - Waukegan High School
- 1st Place - Zion Benton High School

The following cadets were identified as the Outstanding Cadet by their cadre and were recognized with a certificate and a medal provided by the AMVETS:

Prosser Career Academy
Noah De La Rosa Ja

Waukegan High School
Guillermo Rodriguez-Maldonado

Zion Benton High School
Mariah McNeal

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Veterans Day at the Springfield State Fair



Veterans' Home at LaSalle

This summer, the residents of the Veterans' Home at LaSalle enjoyed time with third and fourth grade students from the Northwest School. For two weeks, the students engaged with residents through different programs. They expressed their creative side with a Craft Corner. As part of "When I Grow Up," program, the students interviewed residents about their life experiences.



Leon Jendruczek - Army Veteran



Rose Rogalla - Marine Corps Veteran



Bruce Karder - Air Force Veteran

Veterans' Home at Quincy

Residents and staff of the Veterans' Home at Quincy viewed the Rise Above exhibit at Quincy Airport. Managed by the Commemorative Air Force, the exhibit featured a fully restored P-51C Mustang airplane, famously flown by the Tuskegee Airmen, America's first Black military pilots. The exhibit included the plane and a short documentary movie about the Tuskegee Airmen and a film out the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), civilian female aviators who flew U.S. military aircraft on the home front during World War II so that male pilots could fly combat.



American Legion Legacy Ride

The American Legion Legacy Ride of 230 motorcycles visited the Veterans' Home at Quincy where they served 300 meals from Texas Roadhouse to the residents. This year's ride began in Lincoln, NE and ended in Fort Knox, KY. It coincides with the American Legion National Convention in Louisville, KY, August 28-Sept 3.

The American Legion Ride 20th anniversary has raised over \$23 million over the last 20 years for the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation. They fund emergency temporary financial assistance grants for military families and the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund to support children who lost a parent in active military service or whose parent was disabled.





Do you have a Compliment, Recommendation, Question, or Complaint?

Illinois Veterans Accountability Unit (VAU)

Let us Know!

If you are an Illinois veteran or other Illinois resident who seeks services from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA); a resident of any Illinois Veterans' Home, a family member of a resident, a visitor of any Illinois Veterans' Home; a vendor and/or contractor of the IDVA; or staff of the IDVA, we want to hear from you.

This office welcomes feedback about the services being provided to the veterans of Illinois.
If you received exceptional service or have concerns involving any member of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, please let us know.

Email us at

IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov

or Call our Toll-Free Helpline

1-855-660-7011

More information about the VAU can be found on the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs website

<https://veterans.illinois.gov/>

The VAU maintains the confidentiality of investigations, complainants, and witnesses to the maximum extent allowable, but must disclose complaints to the Office of the Executive Inspector General (OEIG).

You can obtain more information about the OEIG or file a complaint with the OEIG directly through its website at **<https://oeig.illinois.gov/>**.

Our mission at the IDVA is very simple. To serve those who have served. In doing so, we serve not only the men and women who have worn the uniform, but also their families. It is our privilege to be able to help our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to our nation. Our goal is to empower our veterans and their families to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We know there are many veterans within our great state who do not require any assistance – but we still want to encourage you to “Stand Up and Be Counted!” by registering with your local VSO. In doing so, you’re helping IDVA to do a better job of planning for services, seeking federal funding and understanding the needs of our veteran communities statewide. [Click here to register.](#)

We thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and we at the IDVA look forward to offering our services to you.



**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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