



Fillmore County VSO Newsletter - Winter 2009

Fillmore County Service Office

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The Fillmore County Veterans Service Office is located in the Fillmore County Office Building. This building is located across from the sheriff's office in Preston. We are located in the lower level of the building. Parking is available on the east side of the building on the corner of County 17 and Farmer's Street. We are immediately inside the doors on the right.

We are open from 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. No appointment is required to be served, however if you would like to know for sure if we are available, please do give us a call.

We now have a web page on the Fillmore County web site. You can reach it off the main Fillmore County Web page under departments or you can go there directly via this link. <http://www.co.fillmore.mn.us/Veterans/Web/default.htm>.

Note: Once a quarter we be sending out a newsletter with any updated information we have received. This newsletter will be sent to all the Fillmore County Veterans Service Posts and Auxiliaries. Please contact us at vso@co.fillmore.mn.us if you would like to receive this newsletter or be removed from the mailing list. Also, if you have any notices for special events etc. please contact us and we would be happy to include them!

Greetings from your CVSO

I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and wish everyone a Happy New Year. 2008 has been sort of a training period for me. As you may know, I was hired as the assistant Fillmore County VSO about a year ago. I have been extremely busy learning the ropes of what it takes to be a VSO. Almost every day I have a question that requires some research. Recently, I received a call from a veteran inquiring about the Ruptured Duck medal. After doing my homework here is the information I found:

The original Ruptured Duck was a cloth insignia depicting an eagle inside a wreath. It was worn on uniforms above the right breast pocket by WWII servicemen and women. It was issued to service personnel who were about to leave the military with an Honorable Discharge. It also allowed them to continue to wear their uniform for up to thirty days after they were discharged since there was a clothing shortage at that time. This showed the MP's that they were in transit and not AWOL. Well, the boys thought the eagle looked more like a duck; and, because it meant they were going home, the popular saying was, "They took off like a Ruptured Duck"...hence the nickname.

I have truly enjoyed meeting with veterans from Fillmore County and hearing your stories. I encourage veterans to continue to stop in our office with any questions and I promise to do my best to get the correct answers.

Happy New Year
Rick Darling, Assistant Fillmore County VSO

Donations are still needed and greatly appreciated for the funding of the new Fillmore County Veterans Van that we use to transport Veterans to the VA Hospital in Minneapolis.

Any donations can be sent to our office.

VA Medical Center Important Phone Numbers

Fillmore County Van Transportation

MINNEAPOLIS

Toll Free Main Number

1-866-414-5058

By dialing the main number you get the following options to speed up your call.

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Medications | 2 Cancel Appointments |
| 3 Eligibility | 4 Health Concerns |

Toll Free Pharmacy Refills

1-800-661-0827

Toll Free Urgent Care

1-866-NURSE-VA (687-7382)

Telephone Care

1-612-725-2242

Appointment Confirmation

1-866-414-5058 ext 92095

Primary Care Call Center

1-866-414-5058 ext 91100

Remember, you now need to dial "9" before any extension you use.

We also have a full list of extensions to each clinic within the VA Hospital. If you need to have a direct number, please contact us and we will be happy to give you the extension you need.

OTHER FACILITIES

Rochester VA Primary Care Clinic
(507) 252-0885

Tomah VA Medical Center
(608) 372-1777

LaCrosse VA Primary Care Clinic
(608) 784-3886

Fillmore County has a van that transports any veteran to the VA Hospital in Minneapolis twice a week. Any veteran that has an appointment is more than welcome to ride this van. There is no direct fee to ride the van, however we do ask, that if you receive travel pay, you donate at least \$70 of that money to the van fund.

Our current van has been purchased with our county's gracious Post and Auxiliary donations as well as money from the county funds. It is our hope that everyone will know about this van and the service it provides.

If you have an appointment on a van day, or would like an appointment changed to ride the van, please contact our office and we will be glad to add you to our van list as well as change any appointment you may have.

January

1 - Thursday
 7 - Wednesday
 9 - Friday
 12 - Monday
 14 - Wednesday
 20 - Tuesday
 21 - Wednesday
 28 - Wednesday
 29 - Thursday

February

4 - Wednesday
 6 - Friday
 9 - Monday
 11 - Wednesday
 17 - Tuesday
 18 - Wednesday
 25 - Wednesday
 26 - Thursday

March

4 - Wednesday
 6 - Friday
 9 - Monday
 11 - Wednesday
 17 - Tuesday
 18 - Wednesday
 25 - Wednesday
 26 - Thursday



Secretary Peake Announces Travel Reimbursement Increases for Eligible Veterans

WASHINGTON, November 17, 2008 – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that eligible veterans will see an increase in the mileage reimbursement they receive for travel to VA facilities for medical care.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake announced today that he will use his authority to raise the mileage reimbursement from the 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile for all eligible veterans.

“We owe it to our veterans to give them the best care possible,” said Peake. “The increase will once again provide assistance to our veterans, especially in these difficult economic times, to help offset gasoline costs and to assist veterans with access to the VA’s world-class health system.”

Congress, which mandates such increases, recently provided funding to VA to increase the reimbursement rate, which goes into effect on November 17, 2008. Service connected veterans, veterans receiving VA pensions, and veterans with low incomes are eligible for the reimbursement.

“As I have travelled the country and spoken with many of our veterans, they have expressed the need for such an increase,” added Peake. “We are pleased to be able to provide them with the increase needed and we will continue to work with our veterans to ensure they receive the quality care they need.”

On January 9, 2009, the deductible will decrease to \$3 for a one way trip, \$6 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$16 per calendar month. Deductibles can be waived if they cause a financial hardship to the veteran.

VA Secretary Presents Top Award To Minneapolis VA Medical Center

WASHINGTON DC— Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Peake presented the Minneapolis VA Medical Center (VAMC) the Robert W. Carey Trophy Award for performance excellence in a Washington DC ceremony Oct. 31.

The annual Carey Trophy Award -- the most prestigious national quality award that VA bestows - recognizes a VA organization that implements management approaches resulting in high levels of performance and service to the nation's veterans.

"The Minneapolis VAMC is a model for health care, not just in the federal sector, but for practitioners and researchers everywhere. They are champions of excellence," said Peake.

In accepting the award, Minneapolis VAMC Director Steven Kleinglass said the purpose of the medical center's journey to excellence was to honor patients "the real heroes of our nation who we so proudly serve."

He added: "While leadership may have had the vision to pursue the Carey journey, it's really all about our staff who made this a reality. While we have always felt they are the best, this is now validation by an outside source. It's about all of our caregivers at every level of our organization. It's about our laundry workers and housekeepers. It's about our police and security staff who keep us safe each day. It's about all of the other staff who make up the workforce at the medical center."

The award is named in memory of Robert W. Carey, a publicly recognized VA quality leader and a champion for excellence in the federal government. He was the Director of the Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center from 1985 until 1990.

All VA organizations (medical centers, benefits offices and cemeteries) are eligible to complete for the award. Recognition is based on the level performance in relation to the performance excellence criteria. Each applicant is assessed by a board of examiners, consisting of individuals from the various VA Administrations, as well as from non-VA agencies. Finalists are further reviewed by a site visit team and their recommendations are reviewed by a panel of judges. Recommendations are forwarded to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for final selection.

The Minneapolis VAMC cared for more than 80,000 unique patients in the last year. Besides the medical center in Minneapolis, the Minneapolis VAMC operates outpatient clinics in Rochester, St. James/Mankato, Maplewood and Hibbing, MN, and Chippewa Falls, Hayward, Rice Lake and Superior, WI.

The VA operates 163 medical centers and more than 800 clinics nationwide.

VA Opening 31 New Outpatient Clinics

World-Class Health Care Brought Closer to More Veterans

WASHINGTON (Dec. 4, 2008) - Veterans will have easier access to world-class health care under a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) plan to open 31 new outpatient clinics in 16 states.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake today announced VA will establish new clinics in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Vermont.

"VA is committed to providing world-class health care to the men and women who have served this nation," Peake said. "These new clinics will bring VA's top-notch care closer to the veterans who have earned it."

With 153 hospitals and about 745 community-based clinics, VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country. VA's medical care budget of more than \$41 billion this year will provide health care to about 5.8 million people during nearly 600,000 hospitalizations and more than 62 million outpatient visits.

"Community-based medicine is better medicine," said Dr. Michael Kussman, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "It makes preventative care easier for patients, helps health care professionals have closer relationships with their patients and permits easier follow-ups for patients with chronic health problems."

The community-based outpatient clinics, or CBOCs, will become operational by late 2010, with some opening in 2009. Local VA officials will keep communities and their veterans informed of milestones in the creation of the new CBOCs.

VA's Proposed Sites for New Outpatient Clinics

Alabama - Monroe County (2010)

Arkansas - Faulkner County (2010), Pope County (2010)

California - Lake County (2010), Oakhurst (2010), Susanville (2010), Yuba County (2010)

Florida - Brandon (2010), Clermont (2010)

Georgia -- Blairsville (2010)

Hawaii - Leeward (Honolulu, 2010)

Illinois - Carbondale (2009), Harrisburg (2010), Sterling (2010)

Iowa -- Decorah (2010)

Maryland - Fort Meade (2010), Montgomery County (2010)

Michigan - Bad Axe (2010), Cadillac (2010), Cheboygan (2010), Grayling(2010)

Minnesota - Southern central border (2010), Southwest metro area (exact locations to be determined, 2010)

Mississippi - Pike County (2010)

Missouri - Excelsior Springs (2009), Sikeston (2009), Sedalia (2010)

North Carolina - Edenton-Elizabeth City (2010), Goldsboro (2010)

Pennsylvania - Cranberry Township (2009)

Vermont - Brattleboro (2010)

VA Urges Vets to Sign-up for Direct Deposits

WASHINGTON (December 15, 2008) -- Every month, 730,000 veterans or survivors look for their compensation, pension checks or educational assistance payments in their mailboxes. Nearly all receive them, but theft and mail delays cause problems for some veterans, which can be prevented by direct deposits.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is urging those veterans and family members now receiving paper checks to join nearly 3.1 million others whose VA payments are safely deposited electronically.

"VA is teaming up with the Treasury Department in a new campaign to protect government beneficiaries against the theft of funds and of their identities," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake.

"Veterans earned -- and rely on -- the financial support we send them every month. I urge them to help VA ensure they get those funds reliably and safely by signing up for direct deposit."

Peake cited several easy ways to sign up for direct deposit -- calling VA toll-free at (800) 333-1795 or enrolling online at www.GoDirect.org.

Veterans, and family members who receive VA payments, also can sign up by contacting a VA regional benefits office or their financial institution. Information about direct deposits will be included in VA's monthly compensation and pension envelopes throughout 2009.

The VA Secretary urged veterans to remember that direct deposits relieve worry about mail delivery being delayed by severe weather or natural disasters. The deposits also eliminate trips to banks or credit unions to deposit checks, while providing immediate access to money at the same time each month.

You can also come to the Veterans Service Office in Preston with your bank information and we will be happy to get you signed up!

Higher Education Veterans Programs

Since 2006, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Higher Education Veterans Programs has worked to assist Minnesota public colleges and universities to help their student-veterans succeed and complete degrees. The programs have developed into a healthy network producing positive results. There are currently 12 regional coordinators and 56 campus veterans resource centers. The program has served 5,288 individuals in the last year, a 67 percent increase from the previous year.

“This steady growth in service demonstrates that there is a need for services to help address the unique challenges veterans face when attending college. It is anticipated that the number of veterans and their families needing services will continue to grow,” said Don Pfeffer, Director of the Higher Education Veterans Programs.

The Higher Education Veterans Programs are funded by the Minnesota Legislature through June 2011. If the Legislature does not remove the programs’ “sunset” date, they will cease to exist. For more information about educational benefits in Minnesota, visit www.MyMilitaryEducation.org.



CHANGES TO THE STATE SOLDIERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SSAP) EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2009

DENTAL AND OPTICAL BENEFITS:

Effective January 1, 2009, the MN Department of Veterans Affairs will raise the income limits for Dental and Optical Benefits under the State Soldiers Assistance Program by 5.8% to keep in line with the US Department of Veterans Affairs recent increase. Asset limits will remain the same.

Income limits (based on VA’s Improved Disability Pension with Aid & Attendance) will be:

- \$1,645 for a single veteran or surviving spouse
- \$1,950 for a veteran or surviving spouse with one dependent
- Please see Schedule of Allowance (dated 1-1-09) for additional dependent amounts

All new applications, dated after January 1, 2009, will be considered under the new Schedule of Allowance.

If you have any questions, please contact us at the Veterans Service Office.

VA PRESUMPTIVE GULF WAR VET DISEASES UPDATE 01:

The Department of Veterans Affairs presumes that specific disabilities diagnosed in certain veterans were caused by their military service. If one of these conditions is diagnosed in Vietnam Vet, VA presumes that the circumstances of his/her service (i.e. exposure to Agent Orange) caused the condition, and disability compensation can be awarded. This includes DIC education and CHAMPVA for spouses of veterans rated 100% or surviving spouses late-veterans that died from discussed medical problems. The following disabilities may be presumed for those who served in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations during the Gulf War with condition at least 10% disabling by 12/31/11. Included are medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illnesses defined by a cluster of signs or symptoms that have existed for six months or more, such as:

- o chronic fatigue syndrome
- o fibromyalgia
- o irritable bowel syndrome
- o amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- o any diagnosed or undiagnosed illness that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines warrants a presumption of service connection

Signs or symptoms of an undiagnosed illness include: fatigue, skin symptoms, headaches, muscle pain, joint pain, neurological symptoms, respiratory symptoms, sleep disturbance, GI symptoms, cardiovascular symptoms, weight loss, and menstrual disorders. [Source: County of Humboldt Veterans Service office 12 Oct 08 ++]

FITNESS TIPS

Eat Less Later in the Day

Everyone knows, whether they want to admit it or not, reducing calories will help you to lose weight. However, just as you should reduce the calorie intake, you need to know when to eat. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day and the one meal that should not be missed. Lunch should be healthy but a less than what you ate for breakfast. As you approach dinner, eat healthy but light. Avoid after dinner snacks or eating before bed!

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

Does sleep really affect health? You bet it does. During sleep, your body is resting and recovering from all the work it has done throughout the day. Your serotonin levels are brought back in line, your muscles relax, and mind is allowed to clear itself in preparation for the next day. If you are not getting the proper amount of sleep, you will notice it in a physical way. While there is no magic number, usually between six and eight hours a night is appropriate. If you have difficulty getting to sleep, before you climb into bed, try Yoga, listening to soft, relaxing music, a glass of wine, or if you can talk someone into it, a good massage.

Laugh it Off

The medical field has proven that laughter actually works with your body toward good health. Have you ever heard the expression, Laughter is the best medicine?? The truth is, when you laugh, several positive things happen. Your muscles relax; stress hormone production is reduced; you forget about pain; your body's immune system is improved; high-blood pressure is lowered; the heart and lungs are strengthened; and overall, you feel better!

MILITARYCONNECTION.COM LAUNCHES NEW JOB BOARD WITH THOUSANDS OF NATIONWIDE JOBS

MilitaryConnection.com wants to take this opportunity commend and to thank you. We appreciate the outstanding work you perform every day helping those who serve, past and present and their families.

MilitaryConnection.com is a proud corporate member of the Defense Department's *America Supports You* program. We are a portal of all things military offering thousands of pages of resources and information free to users. One of our major areas of focus is employment and connecting candidates from the military community with excellent civilian and government jobs. We are pleased to announce that we have launched a new Job Board featuring thousands of nationwide jobs in occupational areas across the board.

Please check it out at: **<http://www.militaryconnection.com/jobs/>**. You will also find hundreds of valuable employment resources including, Directory of Employers, Virtual Job Fair, Live Job Fairs, Law Enforcement Test Dates, Interviewing Questions, Career Articles and much more. We hope that you will use these resources and encourage your clients to check out the jobs, register as job seekers and use them too. When the next tour is back home, it's on MilitaryConnection.com.

New Law Authorizes Veterans' Salutes during National Anthem

WASHINGTON (Oct. 30, 2008) -- Veterans and active-duty military not in uniform can now render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the national anthem, thanks to changes in federal law that took effect this month.

"The military salute is a unique gesture of respect that marks those who have served in our nation's armed forces," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "This provision allows the application of that honor in all events involving our nation's flag."

The new provision improves upon a little known change in federal law last year that authorized veterans to render the military-style hand salute during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag, but it did not address salutes during the national anthem. Last year's provision also applied to members of the armed forces while not in uniform.

Traditionally, members of the nation's veterans service organizations have rendered the hand-salute during the national anthem and at events involving the national flag while wearing their organization's official head-gear.

The most recent change, authorizing hand-salutes during the national anthem by veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel, was sponsored by Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, an Army veteran. It was included in the Defense Authorization Act of 2009, which President Bush signed on Oct. 14.

The earlier provision authorizing hand-salutes for veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag, was contained in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, which took effect Jan. 28, 2008.

Lutheran Social Services Debt Management Plan

The Minnesota Service C.O.R.E Program, which is administered by Lutheran Social Services (LSS), successfully launched in November and is already helping provide much needed case management services to Veterans, service member and their families across Minnesota.

We would also like to make you aware of an additional external program through LSS called the Debt Management Plan (DMP). Clients enrolled in this program make a structured payment to LSS and they then distribute the funds to creditors listed on the plan. DMP payments may be lower than the current required payment clients are facing, and many creditors reduce interest rates and stop extra fees once a client is established with a plan.

Unlike the financial counseling and planning services provided under the C.O.R.E program, this higher level of service is not free. There is a \$35 dollar charge to start the program and a monthly fee is assessed, based on the size of the DMP, up to a maximum of \$50 per month.

Please share this information with all future clients who are referred to LSS. In addition to ensuring the clients understand the fee structure, this will help heighten awareness of DMP as a resource for Veterans and their families. For more information on DMP, please visit Lutheran Social Services website at: <http://www.lssmn.org/debt/> and click on the debt and credit help section.

ST. CLOUD VA TAKING APPLICATIONS FOR 2009 PHYSICALLY DISABLED VETERANS TURKEY HUNT

St. Cloud, MN— Applications will be available beginning January 19, 2009, for the fifth annual Physically Disabled Veterans Turkey Hunt. Sponsored by the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota National Guard, Camp Ripley, this special hunt will take place April 21-23, 2009, at Camp Ripley in Little Falls.

The Physically Disabled Veterans Turkey Hunt is available to physically disabled veterans who receive outpatient treatment at a VA Medical Center, or veterans who are eligible for VA care and cannot hunt during the regular firearms season.

Limited space is available. Applications will be available beginning Monday, January 19, 2009. The deadline for applications to be returned is Friday, March 6, 2009.

**Contact: Patricia Aljets, Recreation
& Voluntary Service Manager
(320) 252-1670, ext. 6669**

Patricia.Aljets@va.gov

Upcoming Events

Fort Snelling, Jan. 8

World War II history roundtable: Andrew Nagorski will discuss the battle of Moscow and his book on the subject, "The Great Battle," at the Fort Snelling History Center, 200 Tower Ave., St. Paul at 7 p.m.. The Cost is \$5. For more information and to register call (651) 726-1171.

Stillwater, Jan. 26

Civil War Roundtable: St. Croix Valley Civil War Roundtable will meet at 6 p.m., at the Lowell Inn, 102 2nd St. N., Stillwater. Steve Osman will discuss collecting Civil War memorabilia. Cost \$ 22, includes a buffet dinner. For more information, call (715) 3860 1268.

Minneapolis, Jan. 28

Veterans with Combat Trauma in the Justice System: The Hennepin County Bar Association will present a 3.5 CLE event on "Veterans with Combat Trauma in the Justice System", from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

Our military is under enormous strain. The levels of combat trauma continue to rise. The question we face in the criminal courts is what to do with war veterans whose criminal offenses are tied to their untreated psychological injuries. Also, what are the collateral consequences of failing to re-integrate veterans into our society? Have we learned any lessons from the past? For more information, visit www.hcba.org. or call (612) 752-6600.

St. Paul, Jan. 30

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will host a forum addressing concerns about exposure to Depleted Uranium, Friday Jan. 30 at the Minnesota History Center, 3M Auditorium, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. The forum will feature a panel of experts from around the country. Please RSVP to mdvaforum@webershandwick.com For more information, please contact Anna Long at Anna.Long@state.mn.us.

Saint Paul, June 13

Minnesota Honors Vietnam Era Veterans: Join the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and the veterans community for a day of honor, respect, remembrance and celebration for all those who served during the Vietnam War era. Events will include a fly over, parade of colors, speakers, special guest, entertainment, food and more. For updates on the event, visit www.mnhonorsvietnamvets.org.