

From Patrick Welch, Director



We are receiving information on a daily basis from Washington, DC; Albany, NY and from our multitude of resources all over the nation that has an effect on Western New York Veterans. This newsletter is one way we issue information, another way is the Bulletin's that are issued during the month, another is our website; www.erie.gov/veterans and we will use any other means that we have to reach out to our population of people who have served our country.

As part of our Four Pillars Program this month we are featuring one of our Not for Profit Partners; Jewish Family Services. This agency has been a strong supporter of the Veterans Services Office and we acknowledge their efforts on behalf of our veterans.

Please distribute this newsletter to your email distribution list. Anyone who would like to receive this each month can email me at patrick.welch@erie.gov or call 716.858.6363.

Remember my mantra: "If you do NOTHING, then someday when you need the VA, then NOTHING is just what you may get." ©

New Bill Introduced to End Delays in Funding for Veterans Health Care

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Phil Hare (D-IL), a member of the **House Veterans' Affairs Committee** and the author of legislation to make veterans' health care a mandatory spending item within the federal budget, today praised the introduction of a new bill that attempts to end the longstanding delay in annual health care funding for our nation's veterans.

"The current 20th century approach to the way Congress appropriates veterans health care funding is simply unacceptable," Hare said. "The men and women who risked their lives for our nation deserve to receive their benefits in a sufficient, timely, and predictable fashion."

The **Veterans Health Care Budget Reform Act**, of which Hare is an original co-sponsor, would authorize advance appropriations for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care programs one year in advance of the start of the fiscal year. In other words, VA health care would have a one year advantage over other discretionary programs.

Hare is the author of the **Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act**—a bill to make VA health care a mandatory spending item within the federal budget like Social Security or Medicare. It has 126 co-sponsors but has not seen action in the House. Hare played a major role in developing this compromise.

"I believe assured funding should be the law of the land," Hare said. "But I also want a bill that can move quickly through the process. The goal is to help our veterans—no matter what the legislative vehicle."

Disabled American Veterans Executive Director David W. Gorman praised Hare and the other sponsors of the veterans' health care funding reform bill. "Assuring a long-term, reliable funding system to provide our nation's veterans with the health care they have earned is a top priority for the veterans community and the American public," Gorman said. "We are grateful for the leadership Phil Hare has demonstrated on behalf of veterans, especially disabled veterans, since he arrived in Congress. We will be working with him, Chairman Filner

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and others to finally pass and enact veterans' health care funding reform."

Hare called advanced appropriations a good first step to ensure the sufficient, timely, and predictable

delivery of veterans health care funding. "17 out of the last 19 VA budgets have been late," Hare said. "Our veterans deserve better. With a one year advantage, Congress will no longer have any excuses."

VA Loans Remain a Strong Option for Veterans

Agency Sees Significant Increase in Loan Volume over Past Year

WASHINGTON – More servicemembers and veterans are using their Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) home loan guaranty benefit, as VA's loan program remains a strong option in today's housing market.

VA is experiencing a significant increase in home loan volume, with more than 162,000 home loan guaranties provided this year, an increase of more than 31 percent over the same period last year.

"VA attributes this increase to the favorable terms traditionally offered with VA loans and the elimination of many no-downpayment products in the conventional mortgage market," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake.

No-downpayment loans are increasingly difficult to obtain with conventional financing. Under recently enacted legislation, VA now uses a locality-based approach in determining ceilings on its no-downpayment home loans. VA no-downpayment loans are available for as much as \$729,000. Larger VA loans may be obtained with relatively small down payments.

Not only is the VA program one of the few remaining no-downpayment programs in the market today, but lenders and veterans using the program are finding that it provides a timely and user-friendly product.

Focus in recent years on improvements in information technology has helped streamline the loan process and has made the program more accessible. Veterans no longer need to obtain a VA Certificate of Eligibility prior to contacting a lender.

Lenders can access the program's web portal to use VA's online Automated Certificate of Eligibility (ACE) system and obtain the certificate for the veteran. Many times, lenders can receive the certificate within seconds.

VA lenders have the authority to process and approve veterans' loan applications. Lenders can order appraisals online, review and determine the appraised value of the property themselves, electronically submit the information VA needs to process a loan guaranty, and then receive the guaranty electronically within 24 hours.

To obtain more information about the VA Loan Guaranty Program, veterans can call VA at 1-877-827-3702. Information can also be obtained at www.homeloans.va.gov.

VA's is also revolutionizing its loan servicing activity through implementation of a new web-enabled and rules-based 'smart' system called VALERI (VA Loan Electronic Reporting Interface). Standardized servicing criteria on par or ahead of industry norms and instant access to acquisition and claim payment

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status make it easier for servicers to work and communicate with VA. It also allows servicers to help veterans who are experiencing financial difficulty avoid foreclosure.

Last year, about 135,000 veterans, servicemembers and surviving spouses received loans valued at nearly \$24 billion. More than 90 percent of VA loans were made without any down payment.

VA-guaranteed home loans are made to eligible veterans, servicemembers, and surviving spouses through private mortgage lenders throughout the United States. Since 1944, when home loan guaranties were first offered with the original GI Bill, VA has guaranteed more than 18 million home loans worth over \$965 billion.

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To obtain more information about the VA Loan Guaranty Program, veterans can call VA at 1-877-827-3702. Information can also be obtained at <http://www.homeloans.va.gov/>

VA Loan Limit Increased

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will now use a locality-based approach in raising ceilings on its no-down payment home loans from the current \$417,000 to as much as \$729,000. The VA's Specially Adapted Housing Program has also raised primary grants from \$50,000 to \$60,000 toward constructing a new home or modifying an existing home to meet adaptive needs of veterans or active-duty service members with certain service-connected disabilities. Veterans with certain service-connected disabilities resulting from severe burns can receive the adaptive housing grants. For more information, call the VA at 1-877-827-3702 or at the VA Loan Guaranty website.

<http://web50.military.com/cgi-bin/outlog.cgi?url=https%3A//secure.military.com/leads/>

From Sergio Rodriguez
Assistant Service Officer



NYS Veterans Benefits

When veterans and their families inquire about benefits, they instinctively think of the VA—yet often overlook their home state. The New York State Division of Veterans Affairs provides veterans with a share of benefits that often complements what the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has to offer. In certain circumstances, it even surpasses that of the VA.

Take, for example, the New York State Blind Annuity Program for veterans or the surviving un-remarried spouse of the blind veteran. This program provides for an annuity payment of up to \$1,128.72 per veteran. This one-of-its kind program is not available through the VA.

Another great and unique state benefit is the NY State Gold Star Parent Annuity, which provides \$500 per Gold Star parent of a deceased veteran. For the younger generation there is the New York State Veterans Tuition Award. I particularly like this program because I am currently taking advantage of it myself. I receive \$2,143.75 per semester, which is applied towards my tuition, as well as my G.I. Bill benefits. In some cases this benefit, coupled with the G.I. Bill, ensures that a veteran will go to school tuition free without concerns of indebting themselves with student loans.

There are more New York State benefits for veterans, such as Operation Recognition, which awards High School diplomas to veterans who did not receive one, as well as property tax exemptions to homeowners, but there is not enough room here to cover all.

I encourage you to visit the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs website at:

<http://www.veterans.state.ny.us/index.html> to find out more. While you're out there web surfing, visit our website at: www.erie.gov/veterans.

Semper Fidelis,

"Sergeant Serg"



Change in Taxable Status Date for the 25 Towns Located in Erie County

EXEMPTION FILING DEADLINE AND GRIEVANCE DATE CHANGE FOR TOWNS ONLY

Taxpayers Alert: [Erie County, New York](#)

Taxable status date has been changed from **May 1**, of any given year to **March 1 effective January 1, 2009**. This will move the assessment calendar up by two months.

Therefore, taxpayers filing for any REAL PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION, for example STAR, AGED EXEMPTION, VETERANS EXEMPTIONS, DISABILITY, AGRICULTURAL, BUSINESS INVESTMENT EXEMPTION; must file or renew his or her exemption on or before **March 1, 2009**.

This will also effect the date that taxpayers can challenge assessments through the Town **BOARD OF ASSESSMENT REVIEW**, the old law set grievance day as the first Tuesday in June.

Therefore for 2009 the grievance date for the 25 Towns will be the fourth Tuesday in May. For 2009 that date will be May 26, 2009.

This change does not apply to the Cities of Buffalo, Lackawanna or City of Tonawanda. They operate under a City Charter. Contact the Appropriate City Assessor for filing deadlines.

For further information please contact your local Town Assessor's Office.

Veterans Advocate of the Month

Michele L. Knezevic was instrumental in attaining free burials for indigent veterans at several local cemeteries. She helped to secure the funds that were necessary for this program to become a reality in our community. We are eternally grateful for her dedication and support of our fallen heroes.



In the past, Michele has also worked very hard to save Erie County taxpayers money by working closely with the Erie County Office of Veterans Services to ensure that each indigent veteran burial was properly examined.

Michele works for the Erie County Social Services Department as a Senior Social Welfare Examiner. Michele always strives to help indigent veterans receive the proper and respectful burial that they deserve.

Michele is a key component of Erie County's team and we are very lucky to have her.



GENERAL ELECTION
Tuesday, November 4, 2008

(Last day to register for the November 4th
General Election is
October 10, 2008)



In-person Networking and Job Boards More Important than Social Networking

Social networking sites may increase in importance as a job search tool, but they'll still lag behind online job boards and in-person networking when looking for a job, a recruitment firm has predicted.

In a recent survey of 500 working executives by Harvey Nash, nine out of ten said they had signed up to a site such as LinkedIn, while 50% had put their resume on an online job board. While the execs expected the importance of online networking to grow from 24% now to 38% in two years' time, that's still less important than developing personal contacts (81%), contacting recruiters (63%) or using job boards (51%).

Source: VetJobs Veteran Eagle
Issue 9:09, Monday, September 1, 2008
www.vetjobs.com

The Veteran Eagle is a newsletter for veterans, transitioning military, their family members and friends and supporters of VetJobs.



Mission Statement of Erie County Veterans Services

To insure that every veteran in the county is registered in the VA System and is fully aware of all the benefits that they have earned.

To make veterans an economic force in education, employment and business development.

Snipers Train to Wage War on Enemies

MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER, TWENTY NINE PALMS, CALIFORNIA

A quick flash catches the eye of the Marine as he gazes through the sights of his Winchester Model 70 .30-06 Sniper Rifle at a cluster of bushes on the opposite side of a hill. He zeroes in on the target, releases a breath and takes his shot. The round explodes from his rifle and penetrates the scope of the hidden sniper's rifle, killing the enemy instantly.

This is not the plot of a high-action film. This is the true story of a legendary former Marine Corps scout sniper named Gunnery Sgt. Carlos N. Hathcock, who holds a service record of 93 confirmed kills and more than 300 probable kills during the Vietnam War.

Sgt. Jeremiah B. Johnson, chief scout sniper of Scout Sniper Platoon, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, said he believes legendary Marine Corps snipers like Hathcock blazed a path on which all Marine Corps snipers strive to tread on.

"When you look at Marine Corps snipers, you see they're well known in history for their skills," said Johnson, a Hemet, Calif., native. "We live off those legends and hope to become those ourselves. People come into scout sniper platoons for multiple reasons – they are one of the most elite services, are held at such an incredibly high standard and hold the utmost level of responsibility."

The definition of a Marine Corps scout sniper outlines the most sacred role of a sniper: "A Marine highly skilled in field craft and marksmanship who delivers long-range, precision fire at selected targets from concealed positions in support of combat operations."

What this definition does not reveal is the level of training Marines endure before they are even eligible to step foot on the ground of one of the four scout sniper schools in the Marine Corps.

In addition to being proficient in the swim qualification, physical fitness test and firing an expert score in the known-distance rifle range, Marines pulling for a position in a scout sniper platoon need to show mental fortitude, patience and a whole lot of heart, said Johnson.

Although many weapon and technology systems today use assistance elements like GPS, Marine snipers are given only what they need to survive when tasked with a mission, he added.



MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER TWENTYNINE PALMS, Calif.-Lance Cpl. Daniel Hillin, a scout with Scout Sniper Platoon, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, and Lance Cpl. Brandon Padilla, his spotter, show how a sniper and spotter work together to select and engage a target outside the 7th Marines armory at the Combat Center Aug. 28, 2008., **Cpl. Nicole A. LaVine, 8/28/2008 5:34 AM**

"We take our Marines back to the days of bows and arrows," he said. "For instance, when they do their land nav [navigation], we give them a map, a compass and a mission. Then we start the time on our watches and say 'go.'"

Sniper training can be summed up in five categories; stalking, or moving tactically toward a target, the shooting package, observation, range estimation, and academics, added Johnson.

Those Marines who attend a scout sniper school are dubbed Hunters of Gunmen, or HOGs, while Marines being trained in scout sniper platoons prior to receiving school instruction are called Professionally Instructed Gunmen, or PIGs, said Johnson.

1st Sgt. Roger F. Griffith, Company A first sergeant, 1/7, who served four years as a scout sniper with 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, and 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, said being selected to train with a sniper platoon is in itself a tremendous accomplishment.

"The company submits a list of names of Marines who volunteer to be in a sniper platoon," explained Griffith. "As the training carries out, Marines are weeded out and narrowed down to those who really want to be there. By the end of the training,

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you have the cream of the crop.”

From that small group, individual Marines are selected to attend a sniper school to enhancing the skills they have already learned, added Griffith.

Johnson agreed, saying basic skills are taken care of long before a Marine is hand-picked to attend a sniper school at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.; Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.; Marine Corps Base Hawaii; or Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Scout snipers are also trained in medical assistance, rules of low visibility, ballistic physics, weapon systems, security, gathering intelligence, target assessment, land navigation, communication and more, added Johnson.

Traditionally, Marine Corps snipers work in two-man teams consisting of a shooter and a spotter, said Johnson. The solitary nature of being a sniper or spotter demands tireless patience and focus.

“Snipers are used to being completely self-contained,” he explained. “They can carry as much as 20 quarts of water and an 80-pound full combat

load of mission-essential gear on them for a three-day mission.”

Griffith also reiterated the importance of a sniper’s individual performance.

“Snipers have to be able to think, react and run quickly,” said Griffith. “They don’t have that backup an infantry battalion has. The easiest way for a sniper to survive is to not be compromised.”

Cpl. Ronald P. Lashley, 1/7 scout sniper, said he takes great pride in his title as a sniper.

“Scout sniper platoons are the only reconnaissance and surveillance asset organic to an infantry battalion,” said Lashley, a Great Falls, Mont., native. “I like the small team operations and knowing what we can do to the enemy psychologically. For them it’s like fighting an invisible foe. We don’t have to kill someone to take them out of the fight.”

Hathcock quoted a well-known passage written by President Theodore Roosevelt called “The Man in Arena” that expresses the challenge and valor that comes to those who are brave enough to fight. In these lines, those who have not sacrificed or bled for a cause may understand the motivation that drives courageous men like Hathcock and those who strive to become just as legendary.

<http://www.marines.mil/units/mciwest/29palms/Pages/Marinesniperstraintowagewaronenemyminds.aspx>
Official U.S. Marine Corps Web Site



Did You Know.....

.....the Disabled Veteran Non-Revenue E-ZPass Program allows free, unlimited travel for the disabled veteran anywhere on the Thruway system

Disabled Veterans that have qualified for and received a fee exempt registration (license plate) from the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles under Provisions of Section 401 (6) (c) of the New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law are entitled to one E-ZPass tag when verified by the fee exempt vehicle registration.

The tag will provide disabled veterans non-revenue travel on the Thruway system. The tag is transferable to other qualifying vehicles (2-axle,4-tire cars, vans or pickup trucks or motorcycles) in or on which the disabled veteran is a passenger.

To download an application for this program, please visit the following link to the Authority's website:

<http://www.nysthruway.gov/ezpass/veterans.html>

or call the Authority's E-ZPass Operations Office at 518-471-5848.



<http://www.militaryreport.com>

Extra Social Security Benefits

The Fleet Reserve Association reports that those with military service prior to 2001 may be entitled to an extra monetary benefit when filing for Social Security benefits. This benefit includes all military veterans with active-duty service from 1957 - 2001. Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for military service for this period can be credited to Social Security. The DD-214 can establish eligibility for up to \$1,200 per year of earnings credited at time of application. Taking your DD-214 to the Social Security Administration when applying for benefits will help ensure extra earnings for military service. For more information, visit the Social Security website at

<http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm>

More information at:

<http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/special-military-social-security-rate>

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IT TAKES THE COURAGE AND
STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR TO
ASK FOR HELP...

If you're in an emotional crisis,
call 1-800-273-TALK (Press "1" for Veterans)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org