



DATE: October 1, 2025

TO: Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs

FROM: Darlene McMartin, Chair, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs

SUBJECT: Quarterly Commission Meeting

The Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs quarterly meeting was held on Wednesday, October 1, 2025, at the Iowa Veterans Home, Whitehill Auditorium, 1301 Summit Street, Marshalltown, Iowa 50158

AGENDA

- Call to Order
- Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence
- Welcome and Introduction of Guests
- Roll Call
 - **COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:** Darlene McMartin, Joella Perry, Elizabeth Ledvina, Becky Dirks Haugsted, Dennis Jones, Reginald Richardson, Gregory Paulline, Todd Jacobus, Scott Miller, Robert Suesakul, Dave Grimm
 - **COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:** George Mosby
- **VA Regional Office-Heidi Rhodes**
 - Nationally processed 3 million claims in FY 25 vs. 2,440,684 in FY24.
 - Reached 2 million claims processed on June 13, over a month faster than FY24
 - The DSM Regional Office processed 34,570 claims in FY25, exceeding FY24's total (23,859) by more than 10,000 claims.
 - Through August, over \$1 billion in compensation provided in FY25 to Iowa Veterans
 - Continue to focus daily on oldest claims. On 10/1/24 the backlog was at 237,518 and on 10/1/25 the backlog was reduced to 132,814
 - Outreach-Initiated a monthly newsletter via GovDelivery for the RO to increase
 - Increasing communications with Veterans on upcoming events, CBOC visits, news and helpful information.
 - Recent events included: The Iowa State Fair, National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic and the Annual Latino Fest.
 - VR&E
 - Local VR&E team continues to exceed targets for getting Veterans prepared to re-enter the workforce through the job training and education programs.
 - New streamlined Readiness and Employment System (RES) deployed to improve application intake, automating eligibility determination and award creation, and introduces intelligent document handling.
 - Local leadership changes
 - Tracie Pinkston took a new role in DC
 - Shawn Bohn covering as acting Director
 - Impacts of Shutdown
 - Claims are still being processed
 - No outreach events
 - No public facing activities
 - Call Center is not impacted
- **VA Medical Center-Iowa City Update (Heath Streck)**
 - Government shut down does not affect VA Hospital, CRC, CBOC. Public facing events shut down
 - Recognized for the third year in a row as a 5-star rated facility by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
 - Events:
 - National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic-September 7-12

- Veteran Participation-214 total Veterans (53 first time attendees, 35 states represented, 70 VA Health Care Centers represented, Ohio was the top attendee with 29 participants)
 - Demographics- Korean War Vets (4), Vietnam Vets (45), Gulf War Vets (27), Iraqi Freedom War Vets (31), Enduring Freedom Vets (14), Volunteers (457)
- Future Participation: Veterans with qualifying disabilities are encouraged to apply for next year at www.veteransgolfclinic.org/participate.
- POW/MIA Recognition Day-September 19, 2025
- Participated in the 2025 Five Seasons Stand Down in Cedar Rapids
- Participated in the Bridging the Gap Quad Cities Stand Down
 - Dedicated to assisting homeless veterans in the Quad City and Cedar Rapids areas to bring them in contact with agencies and organizations that can provide them support.
- Upcoming events:
 - October 10, 2025-Observance of the Navy's 250th birthday
 - November 6, 2025-Stakeholder Meeting
 - November 7, 2025-Observance of the Marine's 250th birthday
 - November 10, 2025-Observance of Veteran's Day
- Facility Updates
 - 2025 Flu Clinics (flu clinic list attached)
 - Starting October 1 Flu Shots will be available at the Iowa City VA Medical Center and Community Based Outpatient Clinics with a variety of walk in clinics
 - Effective October 1, 2025 the Donated Meal Voucher program was discontinued
 - Construction Projects
 - Ambulance Garage additions proceeding with construction, expected to be open for use by November 2025.
 - New IR/Cath labs are scheduled to be completed later this summer, opening by Fall 2026
 - Building 50 added 2 new floors for new Specialty Clinics and Women's Clinic is ongoing with expected completion in early fall 2026.
 - Burlington CBOC expansion expected completion in July 2026
- ICVAHSC Center for Development and Civic Engagement Needs List
 - Gift cards-gas, food, etc.
 - TracPhones and phone cards
 - Dedicated fund 4457-Homeless Outreach monetary donations
 - Winter Coats (Sizes S-3XL)
 - Winter Boots (Sizes 7-13)
 - Winter Gloves
 - Stocking Hats
 - Hand Warmers
 - Non-perishable food items
 - Popcorn machine supplies (Kernels, Oils and Bags)
 - Snacks and Beverage for the "Kindness Cart"
 - Full size toiletry items (shampoo, conditioner, body wash, mouthwash, etc.)
 - Monetary donation towards the Veterans Coffee Service
- ICVAHCS Suicide Prevention Initiatives
 - Iowa City VA Suicide Prevention Team was a proud participant in nearly 30 additional events throughout catchment area.
 - Provided education on 988 and the Veterans Crisis Line
 - Ten awareness walks
 - Ten resource fairs
 - Three VA S.A.V.E. trainings
 - Three stand downs
 - Two kick off events for new community coalitions-one of which is the new harm reduction vending machines in three Johnson County locations

- Coming Up
 - Saturday, October 4th, the Bremer County Suicide Prevention Coalition and members of the Readlyn, Iowa community are showing the film, "Country", which debuted in September 1984. The film was shot on location in Readlyn and Dunkerton and follows the trials and tribulations of a farm family during the farm crisis of the 1980s.
 - The Suicide Prevention Team will be presenting "Counseling on Access to Lethal Means" training in the Quad Cities on October 22nd.
- ICVAHCS Homeless and Under-served Veterans Support
 - CRRC Needs
 - Cedar Rapids and Davenport-Canned and boxed foods
- VA Medical Center-Central Iowa Update (Director Curnes Unavailable)
- Presentations:
 - Dr. Doug Steenblock, M-IMS Workgroup, Neurocognitive Disorder Policy
 - As Iowa's population ages, the prevalence of dementia and other neurocognitive disorders is likely to rise substantially. Some of the patients will have highly problematic and even violent behaviors that exceed the capacity of most nursing homes. This may require transfer to a hospital for a higher of care on a psychiatric unit. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly difficult for the patients to gain access to inpatient psychiatric care.
 - There have been reported cases of patients who stabilized on psychiatric units but then were stuck in the hospital for several months(even though they no longer need that level of care) because nursing homes were reluctant to accept dementia patients who are difficult to manage. When the outflow from hospital psychiatric unit is reduced, it then in turn reduces the inflow of new admissions, thereby limiting the number of inpatient psychiatric beds available and in turn, causing lengthy stays in emergency rooms.it is not uncommon for a dementia patient to be stuck in an emergency room for several days because of the shortage of inpatient psychiatric beds and the reluctance of hospitals to accept agitated dementia patients.
 - Dr. Steenblock chaired a workgroup through the Iowa Medical Society to address this issue. This workgroup recommended add-on payments for long-term care facilities that care for patients with complex neurocognitive disorders and the allocation of funds to train PR actioners to better manage this population. If nursing homes are better equipped to manage these behaviors, then it is hoped that this will reduce the numbers of patients being referred to hospitals and also allow the hospitals to find placement sooner, thereby opening more beds for new admissions
- Jenna Davis-Survivor Outreach Services
 - April Day of Healing
 - 16 survivors of suicide loss attended the event in West Des Moines
 - Programming focused on smaller group of survivors
 - August 2025-Survivor Reunion-created to make connection and peer support amongst survivors
 - <https://www.facebook.com/SurvivorOutreachServicesIowa/>
- Heather Harney-Iowa Balance of State Veterans Homeless Committee
 - Hiawatha
 - Support services for Veteran Families
 - 300 Grantees across the country
 - 2010 74K homeless Veterans around the country; down to 32-33K since 2024
 - 96 counties are grouped together by HUD as one community, Polk, Woodbury and Pottawattamie county are separate communities
 - Decreased homeless numbers by 20% in 5 years in communities outside of Polk, Polk is at 22%
 - Polk county VA providers meet once a month and talk about barriers, trends and updates
 - VA has three main goals in 2025 for Veteran homelessness
 - Tracking to permanent housing from the street
 - Unsheltered engagement (Surge events)
 - Track Veterans who return to homelessness
- Andy Bales-Children and Family Urban Movement
 - Shared his story of working in homeless communities and "Skid Row"
- Dan Gannon-Recognition Presentation to Karl Lettow
 - Appreciation for the Support for the Iowa Vietnam Veteran Recognition Day each year

- Karl Lettow has supported these events since 2019
 - Veterans Day on the Hill
 - National Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day
 - Iowa Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day
 - Memorial Events
 - Iowa State Fair
 - Iowa Legislative Initiatives
 - "In recognition of your hard work and dedicated service in support of Iowa Veterans, caregivers and survivors, with special recognition of your efforts in support of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration activities and events across the State of Iowa."



- **Introduction of Service Organization Key Leaders and Organizational Overview**
 - **Becky Dirks Haugsted-Veterans of Foreign Wars**
 - Commander for the State of Iowa since July 2025
 - National Commander, Carol Whitmore, is the first Iowan and the first woman to take this title
 - 126th Anniversary of the VFW
 - Members must be combat Veterans
 - Serve and advocate for all Veterans
 - National Home is located in Eaton Rapids, Michigan <https://vfnationalhome.org/>
 - **Greg Paulline-Vietnam Veterans of America**
 - State Council President for last 8 years
 - National Membership is currently over 93000 with 1500 women
 - Eligibility August 5, 1964 through May 7, 1975
 - Iowa has 7 Chapters with 1249 members
 - Veterans Benefits program at the Federal Building in Des Moines and the VA hospital in Iowa City. Between the two programs they have 6 VSOs. 5 Served in Vietnam. 24 VSOs across the State who are dually accredited with VVA
 - VVA is a one generation organization, meaning it will eventually come to an end. At the National Convention, a resolution was presented that to end the national organization March 1, 2028. That resolution was defeated.
 - **Scott Miller and Jim O'Brien-Paralyzed Veterans of America**
 - Shared personal experience of how he became involved in PVA and how it directed his life in a positive manner
 - Eligibility-paralyzed or a spinal cord injury or disorder, to include ALS and MS, Spinal Stenosis
 - 126 members in Iowa
 - Support all Veterans
 - Work with United Spinal with bowling events to get people connected

- Annual Midwest PVA Fishing Event in Ely, MN <https://www.iowapva.org/about-5-2#:~:text=Midwest%20PVA%20Annual%20Fishing%20EvenT.%20This%20is,On%20the%20Lake%20Resort%20in%20Ely%2C%20MN>
 - National Veteran Wheelchair Games <https://wheelchairgames.org/>
 - Scott serves as one of 33 National Directors for PVA
 - Incoming President Jim O'Brien
- **Darlene McMartin-Public Member at Large**
 - Supports individuals who do not have a specific territory or organization
 - Work with other organizations to share information and gather information
 - Veterans homelessness and suicide are top priorities
 - Works legislation to improve quality of life of Iowa Veterans
- **State Commander Kevin Reece and Mary Van Horn-AMVETS**
 - Working to fill the vacancy on the Commission
 - Introduction of Kevin Reece who became the State Commander in June 2025
 - AMVETS has 5032 members, large Auxiliary
 - Large involvement in community activities
- **Iowa Association of County Veteran Services-Patty Hamann**
 - Past Single Subject Training Events
 - 7/23/25 87 attendees Subject: Appeals, provided by Des Moines Regional Office
 - 8/27/25 91 attendees Subject: Aggravation of Secondary Conditions, provided by Amy Kretkowski
 - 9/24/25 83 attendees Subject: Veterans Readiness and Employment (VRE); provided by the Des Moines RO
 - New CVSO Training Event
 - 7/10/25 25 attendees Subject: Veteran interview process, provided by Dan Green (IACVS Education Committee)
 - Commissioner training event
 - 9/16/25 85 attendees Subject: Discussed impact of federal /county dollars-GDX report/RO monthly report; Training requirements; Dues, Donation Funds; Office hours of availability; Budgets; Commission appointments/attendance/monthly meetings, provided by IACVS Leadership
 - IACVS 2026 Training Plan
 - Should be completed by mid-November and distributed. This is due to the upcoming Association Election and a new 2nd Vice President taking over the Education process. The Des Moines Regional Office and Amy Kretkowski are all on board to provide training in 2026.
 - IACVS has two people selected to the NACVSO Education Team. Jenni Olson and Jim Jones
 - Upcoming Training
 - 10/29/25 Total Disability based on individual unemployability-Amy Kretkowski
 - 11/19/25-Dependency/Indemnity Compensation/Survivor Benefits/Pension-Regional Office
 - 12/17/25- CHAMPVA-Regional Office
 - 11/20/2025 New CVSO training-Pension Claim Basics
 - Veteran Comparison
 - Fiscal Year 2010
 - Veteran Population- 234,552 Comp and Pen \$378,656,000
 - Fiscal Year 2015
 - Veteran Population-227,991 Comp and Pen \$581,555,000
 - Fiscal Year 2020
 - Veteran Population-199,339 Comp and Pen \$766,007,000
 - Fiscal Year 2024
 - Veteran Population-177,098 Comp and Pen \$1,067,508,868
 - August 2025 Iowa VA Compensation (attach)
- **Karl Lettow, IDVA PIO**
 - Iowa State Fair Request
 - State Fair has reached out proposing an idea of creating a display in honor of Iowa Veterans and service branches
 - Asking for all to start thinking of ideas or themes
 - Will address at next Commission meeting and ask State Fair representative to attend.
- **Gavin Sandvig- Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits and Cemetery Update**

- Cemetery Updates
 - Flagpole renovation is completed, adding the Space Force at the Committal Shelter
 - Hotsy Cleaning Systems, a local DSM area company, volunteered to pressure wash multiple areas at the Cemetery to include all front entrance signs, Committal Shelter, Iowa's Fallen Memorial walk, all the section markers, and 300 headstones in Section 8A
 - Events
 - Host for the C Co 3-22 INF national reunion, October 3, 2025
 - Final Salute, October 4, 2025, laying to rest 13 unclaimed Veterans and 1 spouse
 - Veterans Day Service November 11, 8 00 am-Speaker is BG Stephen Osborn
 - Wreaths Across America December 13th at 11 00 am
 - As of August 30, 2025, there are 8,784 Veterans and Spouses interred at IVC
- Benefits Update
 - Events
 - October 13th Commissioners and Board of Supervisors Training
 - October 21-23 County Veterans Service Officer Fall Training at Stoney Creek Lodge
 - November 4, 2025 Virtual Quarterly Training Meeting conducted by IDVA focused on collaborating on training in support of the CVSOs
 - November 6, 2025 Trust Fund Meeting
 - November 8, 2025 Story County Outreach Event
 - November 8, 2025 Spirit of Iowa Liberty Bell will be at the UNI football game
 - November 8, 2025 Quad Cities Success Fair
- **Mike Olson-Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs-Legislative Update**
 - Meeting scheduled for November 14th at 2 pm where the ICVA will discuss their legislative priorities
 - Administrative Rules Update Executive Order 10, mandates all departments review and edit existing rules to eliminate redundancy and language that is duplicative of statutory language and other criteria
 - IDVA has 17 chapters to be reviewed by September 2026 Eleven have already been reviewed and scheduled for public hearing
 - Proposing to rescind three Chapters
 - Chapter 9, War Orphans Educational Assistance Fund Funds were transferred to the Trust Fund
 - Chapter 13-Vietnam Conflict Veterans Bonus (this Chapter was repealed)
 - Chapter 16-Vietnam Conflict Veterans Bonus Fund, transferred to the Veterans Trust Fund (this Chapter was then repealed)
 - HF 706- Iowa Public Information Board which requires additional training required for any newly elected or appointed public official who is a member of a governmental body. This applies to any county supervisors, county commissioners of Veterans Affairs, and Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs members. Anyone appointed after July 1st of this year, would be subject to this requirement. However, anyone can take the training
- **Todd Jacobus- Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Update**
 - **IDVA and IVH Not Impacted by Government Shut-Down** A Federal government shut-down went into effect at 12 01 am today. The shut-down does not impact the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs' delivery of core services at the Iowa Veterans Home, the Iowa Veterans Cemetery, and the Iowa Veterans Records and Benefits Office on Camp Dodge. However, Veterans can expect disruptions of some Federal services during the shutdown
 - **IDVA Schools for CVSOs** The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) provides semi-annual in-person training for County Veteran Service Officers, and annual training for County Commissioners, and Boards of Supervisors. All training is provided at no cost to participants. We are fine tuning our training plan for this month, and I commit to you that this will be meaningful training done in a professional manner. Here are the dates from 2025-2030. Gavin Sandvig has distributed the itinerary for both training events later this month
 - 2025 CVSO Training October 21-23, Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 13
 - 2026 CVSO Training April 14-16 & October 13-15, Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 12
 - 2027 CVSO Training April 13-15 & October 12-14, Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 11

- 2028: CVSO Training April 11-13 & October 10-12; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 9
 - 2029: CVSO Training April 10-12 & October 9-11; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 8
 - 2030: CVSO Training April 9-11 & October 15-17; Commissioner/Supervisor Training October 14
- **Veterans Day.** The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs will conduct Veterans Day activities next month.
 - Iowa Veterans Cemetery **8:00 am.** Both Governor Reynolds and Major General Steve Osborn, The Adjutant General of Iowa, will speak at the Committal Shelter. Wade Sheeler, Grand Master of Masons in Iowa, will lay a wreath at the Flagpole there at 7:30 am.
 - Iowa Veterans Home **10:30 am.** Brigadier General Mark Kappelman, the Deputy Adjutant General of Iowa, will speak in the Malloy Leisure Resource Center. Wade Sheeler, Grand Master of Masons in Iowa, will host a coffee at 1:30 pm in the Dack Leisure Resource Center with residents who are Masons.
- **Wreaths Across America.** 2025 will be the first year since the opening of the Iowa Veterans Cemetery in 2007 that Patrick Palmersheim has not been involved in coordinating the Wreaths Across America Program there, as he passed away on January 12. Pat's daughter, Michelle Knaack, and Pat's grandson, Anthony Mathias, both of Reinbeck, Iowa, are leading the effort, and are doing quite well in raising funds in order to ensure that each grave at IVC has a wreath. The Wreaths Across America organization will be memorializing Pat and his commitment to the WAA mission for 17 years 2007-2024) in a video that we look forward to seeing.
- **Women Memorial “Strive for 500” Campaign.** The goal of the Military Women’s Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, is to capture the stories of as many female Veterans as possible. CW5 Phyllis Wilson, U.S. Army Retired, presented me with a certificate during a conference recently because 65 Veterans have shared their stories in 2025 compared with only 64 stories in 2024. We can surely do better. We want every female Veteran in Iowa to capture their story and perspective by inputting their name and service information into the registry for future generations. To do so they need to go to this website, create an account and provide details of their career. https://myaccount.womensmemorial.org/nc_createaccount. Get the word out there to share this request / call to action. There is also a YouTube video available at <https://www.youtube.com/@WomensMemorial>.
- **IDVA Monthly Newsletter.** It is important to keep our stakeholders informed of developments, initiatives, events, programs, and opportunities that impact the Veterans community. Toward that end – the IDVA Director of Communication, Karl Lettow, publishes a newsletter on the 15th of each month. There is information in this newsletter that is beneficial to Commissioners, federal and county partners, Veteran Service Organizations, Veterans, and family members. How do you subscribe?
 - Go to the IDVA website: <https://dva.iowa.gov/>
 - Find the Newsletter Sign-Up section (footer of the homepage).
 - Enter your email address and click Subscribe/Submit.
 - Confirm your subscription via the email you'll receive.
 - Note: the state uses GovDelivery for all external releases, so you may need to check your spam, promotions, updates or other folders depending how you have your inbox set up.
- **Maintaining Veterans Graves.** I received a letter dated July 4, 2025 from Ms. Carol Ross of Unionville, Missouri, regarding the disrepair of the headstones of five Civil War Veterans from Appanoose County at the White Cemetery, 16098 584th Street, Cincinnati, Iowa 52549 [Coordinates 40.63330, -92.96330]. She provided photos of five headstones, including H. Oliver, Co I 3rd Ia. Cav. (Civil War) & Wife, Sarah Elizabeth Goldberry PERRY; Pvt. Francis A. Calvert, Co I 36th Iowa Inf (Civil War); Corporal Joseph Fulcher, Co I 36th Iowa Inf, (Civil War) (2 Headstones) (Civil War); Moses Jonathan Root, Co I 3rd Iowa Cav. (2 Headstones) (Civil War); and, John Mavel Bond II, Co D 23rd Iowa Inf (Civil War). I have communicated with Appanoose County Board of Supervisors and Veteran Service Officer, and Veteran Service Organizations. We need to be clearer in terms of who is responsible for what regarding Veterans' headstones and the cemeteries where Veterans are interred.
- **Significant Events and Commemorations:**
 - **Marine Corps 250th Birthday Celebration.** On Monday, November 10, 2025 at 11:00 am the Department of Iowa Commandant Ryan Lincoln, and the Marine Corps League

Department of Iowa, invites the public to attend the United States Marine Corps 250th Birthday Celebration at a ceremony taking place in the Rotunda of the State Capitol. This event is being coordinated by both the Iowa Marine Corps League and the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation.

- **The Final Salute.** On Saturday, **October 4, 2025**, "The Final Salute", a 501c(3) non-profit, will provide funeral and interment services for 13 Veterans and one spouse. There will be a visitation from 9:30-11:00 am and then a memorial service at 11:00 am at Lutheran Church of Hope (305 NE Dartmoor Dr., Waukee, Iowa 50263). Immediately following the service there will be a procession led by the Patriot Guard Riders to an interment ceremony at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery, 34024 Veterans Memorial Drive, Van Meter, Iowa 50003. Those being interred this year are Cecil Jones (Army, WWI, 1892-1963), Harry Carmichael (Army, WWI, 1885-1972), Patrick Pickar (Army, WWII, 1916-2004), Shie Foudree (Army, WWII, 1921-2010), David Rybin (Army, Vietnam, 1946-2022), Bobby Adams (Navy, Korea, 1939-2022), Steven Schultz (Navy, Vietnam, 1948-2023), Lori Herndon (Navy, Peacetime, 1955-2024), Kenneth Peterson (Navy, Peacetime, 1957-2024), John Watkins Jr. (Air Force, Peacetime, 1929-2000), Joan Watkins (Spouse of John Watkins), Larry Nye (Air Force, 1938-2025), Steven Bock (Air Force, Vietnam, 1956-2025), Lawrence Coen (Air Force, Korea, 1953-2025).
- **Vietnam Veterans Reunion at IVC.** On Friday, **October 3, 2025, at 10:00 am**, Veterans of a Company of Soldiers who served together in Vietnam will conduct their bi-annual reunion at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery in Van Meter. These Soldiers served with Company C 3rd Battalion 22nd Infantry 4th Infantry Division. The very first Soldier killed in action with this company was George Fogarty of Elma, Iowa. George graduated from high school in 1964 and was killed in Vietnam on November 12, 1966. His unit is coming to Iowa to honor George. George's brother, Robert Fogarty, served in the USMC from 1953-1956, and his family has attended this reunion since 2007. This event was at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 2021, and in San Antonio, Texas, in 2023. We anticipate around 150 participants. They are staying at the Embassy Suites in Des Moines. Our first meeting to discuss this reunion in Iowa was coordinated by Pat Palmersheim on March 14, 2024, as Pat is from the same hometown as the Fogarty family. There are no services scheduled for Friday, there will be tents and chairs set up between the Administration Building and the Flagpole, and we anticipate at least two large tour buses transporting participants to the event. The Patriot Guard will be escorting them. Following the memorial service there will be a lunch at American Legion Post 403 in Van Meter.
- **POW MIA Recognition Day.** On Friday, September 19, 2025, Iowa State University Air Force ROTC Detachment 250 conducted its 30th Annual POW MIA Recognition Day program. This event commenced during a ceremony on the West Terrace of the State Capitol during which I read a proclamation from Governor Reynolds. In addition, former American Legion Department of Iowa Commander Brian Ring and Kosovo Chief of the Consular Mission in Iowa Drilon Zogaj addressed the Cadets. Following this ceremony, the Cadets conducted a memorial relay run from the State Capitol to Iowa State University Memorial Union where another commemoration ceremony took place. Grateful to LtCol John Cacic and Cadet Joseph Albert for coordinating this event and allowing us to be part of that. Next year's event will be on Friday, September 18, 2025 at 8:00 am on the West Terrace of the State Capitol. What an outstanding tradition.



- **Saluting Branches at IVH.** On Wednesday, **September 17, 2025**, a non-profit organization of arborists including 30 volunteers reported to the Iowa Veterans Home in Marshalltown for its 3rd consecutive annual day of service. This organization's mission is to "honor American service men and women by organizing volunteer tree and landscape care for property dedicated to our Veterans". These volunteers brought their own equipment – chain saws, stump grinders, trucks with lifts, etc., and continued to clean up downed trees, damaged trees, and grind out stumps that have been left around this 158-acre campus following the July 19, 2018, E4 tornado, and the August 10, 2020 derecho. In 2024, Saluting Branches removed 32 trees, pruned 20 trees, and mulched throughout campus. In 2025 Saluting Branches removed 9 trees, pruned 7 trees, and removed 32 stumps. Our point of contact for Saluting Branches is George Toubekis, who works for Vermeer.



- **Kosovo General Officer at IVH.** On Monday, **September 15, 2025**, we were fortunate to host Major General Irfete Spahiu, Inspector General of the Kosovo Security Force, Mr. Drilon Zogaj, Kosovo Chief of the Consular Mission in Iowa, Brigadier General Mark Kappelman, Deputy Adjutant General of the Iowa National Guard, U.S. Army Colonel Dena Bryant, NATO Advisory Team Senior Advisor in Kosovo, at the Iowa Veterans Home. 30 residents and many staff listened to MG Spahiu speak about struggles in Kosovo in 1980s and 1990s, her experiences as a Soldier fighting in the Kosovo Liberation Army, and her continued career in the Kosovo Protection Corps, and now as a General Officer in the Kosovo Security Forces. Her presentation was followed by great dialogue and questions from our residents. You can view the event on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/kHzNzt5q2Mc?feature=shared>. Please know that she was very impressed with the 715+ staff and 600+ volunteers we have here at IVH supporting 395 Veterans and spouses – and commented how incredible it is that the U.S. invests so much in those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.



- **ISU Army ROTC Game Ball Run at IVH.** On Friday, September 6, 2025, at 11:00 am the Iowa State University Army ROTC "Cyclone Battalion" came to the Iowa Veterans Home as part of the annual Game Ball Run, where Cadets from The University of Iowa carried the Game Ball for the Hawkeye – Cyclones Football Game from Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City to Jack Trice Stadium in Ames. This tradition began in 1986, and it was great

to see the Cadets run through campus and into the courtyard, share time with residents and staff, and then continue on their journey. Thanks to ISU Army ROTC Professor of Military Science Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Yaffe, ISU Army ROTC Staff, and Cadets for making this an annual event. We appreciate you.



- **Iowa State Fair Events & Veterans Parade.** Monday, August 11, 2025, was Veterans Day at the Iowa State Fair. Thanks to all of you who had a role in making the Iowa State Fair Veterans Day and Parade such a great success. For the last 13 years, our fallen Vietnam Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of all services, and their families, have been honored and recognized during ceremonies, tributes, and commemorative speeches as part of an initiative approved by Congress on May 28, 2012. This formal commemoration will conclude on Veterans Day 2025. Establishing "Vietnam Veterans" as the Grand Marshall of the Iowa State Parade was an extraordinary tribute at the largest annual gathering of Iowans. After the parade concluded, Governor Reynolds shared with me her appreciation for all of the hard work that was done to make this year's event so special. She specifically mentioned her appreciation for our recognition of Vietnam Veterans, and that she was so grateful to celebrate these heroes during this parade. I share these comments with all of you – as it was many of you who planned, resourced, coordinated, synchronized, and executed this event in such a seamless, professional manner. You provided Iowans the opportunity to honor and respect our Vietnam Veterans. Thank you!
- Major General Edward Chrystal, who serves as the Director of the U.S. Vietnam War Commemoration, shared with me that he was thoroughly impressed with enthusiastic support of Iowa leaders on and around the podium, the outstanding participation of Veteran Service Organizations and community support organizations, and of course our Vietnam Veterans. He shared with me that the Iowa State Fair Veterans Parade is quite unique – he's never experienced anything like this.
- I had a 30-minute conversation with Dan Gannon, USMC Vietnam Veteran, former ICVA Commissioner, and strong Veteran advocate. Dan shared with me that he has been involved in organizing the Iowa State Fair Veterans Parade for 15 years and that the 2025 parade was the best. Dan shared with me that he and Master Sergeant Harold Tackett, U.S. Army | Iowa ARNG Retired, appreciated the support and communication leading up to and during the event. These two men have carried a heavy load for more than a decade supporting this event. I believe that Harold has been involved in parade lineup and reviewing stand set-up dating back to 2007. We are grateful for their support and dedication.
- Special thanks to Jackie Schmillen, the Iowa National Guard, and Karl Lettow for your work over the last three months preparing for this event, and for addressing all of the questions and last-minute issues. We had 83 entries – only two entries were absent on the day of the parade, and there were an additional two entries that had not registered, but which were accommodated. Karl estimates more than 1,700 Veterans and stakeholders participated in the parade. We have not had these many entries since before the COVID Pandemic.
- The next Veterans Parade at the Iowa State Fair is on **August 17, 2026** – "America 250!".
- **Carol Whitmore Commander VFW.** On Wednesday, August 13, 2025 at 9:10 am EST / 8:10 am CST former Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Carol Whitmore was elected as the Commander in Chief of the United States Veterans of Foreign Wars during the organization's

126th Convention in Columbus, Ohio. She was installed during the closing session later that day. What an incredible accomplishment! Carol is a Traer, Iowa native, and lives in Des Moines. She and I belong to the same VFW Post - - - Beaverville Post 9127 in Des Moines. **Carol is the first Iowan and the first woman to serve as VFW's National Commander in Chief!** She represented the VFW on the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs from 2018-2023. She is a United States Army Veteran, served from 1977-2013, including a deployment to Iraq. During her career she was recognized with the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, and the Combat Action Badge. We were fortunate to have her serve as our keynote speaker at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery during Memorial Day services earlier this year.

- **The Wall That Heals** On Tuesday, August 5, 2025, Colonel Kristian Dugger, U S Army | Iowa ARNG Retired, was responsible for bringing "The Wall That Heals" to the Iowa Veterans Home courtyard. "The Wall That Heals", a three fifths replica size of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, provides a mobile experience of the memorial to those who may not be able to visit the original. The replica honors more than 58,000 service members whose names are inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the millions of Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen who served and sacrificed in Vietnam, and serves as a place for reflection, remembrance, and healing – for survivors, Veterans, their families, and our community. This effort to marshal the procession at the Iowa Veterans Home provided an opportunity for the 213 Vietnam Veterans residing here to experience this part of "The Wall", and that opportunity was very well received. As part of this event, Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Rosheim and his crew flew a Utility Helicopter (UH-60) Black Hawk from Boone to Marshalltown and landed on Valor Field. Awesome for our residents and staff to get an up-close view of this aircraft. Also, I'm grateful to our staff for providing residents an opportunity to visit The Wall in Nevada on Wednesday thru Sunday, August 6-10.
- **Governor Branstad at IVH.** On Wednesday, July 23, 2025, former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad visited the Iowa Veterans Home for the first time since he left Iowa to serve as the U S Ambassador to China in 2017. I asked Governor Branstad to come to Marshalltown, and he enthusiastically accepted my invitation. He made thoughtful comments about his time growing up on a farm near Forest City, his time at The University of Iowa, then as a U S Army Soldier / Military Policeman at Fort Bragg, NC, from 1969-71, then his time at Law School and then Private Practice in Lake Mills, as a State Representative, then as Lieutenant Governor, Governor, President of Des Moines University, another tour as Governor, and U S Ambassador to China. He has great memories of the Iowa Veterans Home, and had close relationships with many Commandants – the one he remembered immediately was Jack Dack (Commandant from 1969-2002). Our residents asked excellent questions, he provided thoughtful answers for more than an hour. It was a privilege to host this Iowa Treasure at the Iowa Veterans Home!

IOWA VETERANS HOME

- As of September 30, 2025, we have 392 residents at the Iowa Veterans Home. There have been 72 new admissions since January 1, 2025. Our most recent admission was on September 18, 2025, and that resident is **#19,605** since the facility opened on December 1, 1887. On October 1, 2025, we have **392** residents, including Veterans from the following wars and conflicts, branches of service, and ages:
 - Era / Conflict World War II **2** | Korean War **23** | Vietnam War **208** | Gulf War **20** | Peacetime **86**
 - Resident Gender Male **371** | Female **21**
 - Service Army **147** | Navy **111** | Air Force **76** | Marine Corps **29** | Coast Guard **0** | Space Force **0** | WAC **2**
 - Ages 51-60 **15** | 61-70 **69** | 71-80 **179** | 81-90 **86** | 91-101 **45**
- **Response to Outbreaks** Thanks to all of you who have invested additional time and efforts in responding to the recent outbreak of Legionella / Legionnaires and COVID during the month of September. At our highest point we had 29 residents and 15 Staff test positive for COVID, and we had three residents test positive for Legionnaires / Legionella disease. I am proud of our entire team at the Iowa Veterans Home for your professional and timely response to this outbreak. We had a leadership huddle, consulted with the State Medical Director and Iowa HHS, and then Kelley Oetker and Kim Bratland notified staff and families thru Care-feed in a very timely manner. We've been clear, concise, and transparent as we have worked thru this outbreak to ensure that our staff and residents are protected as much as possible. Thanks to all of you who have put forth extra effort, invested more time, and who have been most significantly impacted by this outbreak. If anyone has thoughts on how we could have addressed this crisis more efficiently then we want to hear from you.

- **Emergency Response Drill at IVH.** The Active Emergency Response Drill on Tuesday, September 30, from 9:30-11:00 am provided us a great opportunity to think about "what if". The standard operating procedures to this scenario are outlined in the IVH Emergency Operations Program & Plan Manual on Page 28 (Active Attack / Active Shooter). Thanks to Tim Klenk and Russ Pape for getting this organized with the Marshalltown Police Department and to Officers Captain Kiel Stevenson, Lieutenant Chad Hillers, Sergeant Wyatt Shelangoski, and Sergeant Dan Bowermaster for their expertise and coordination for us. We hope to be readier to respond to a crisis situation.



- **2025 Daisy Award Recipient – Bonnie Linsenmeyer.** Congratulations to **Bonnie Linsenmeyer, Nurse Clinician on Malloy 4th Floor South Wing**, on being recognized as the **2025 Daisy Award** recipient at the Iowa Veterans Home. Bonnie was nominated for the DAISY award 5 times throughout the year! Only 24 (6%) of the 117 licensed nursing staff and 276 certified nursing assistants at the Iowa Veterans Home were recognized as Daisy Award nominees. Bonnie Linsenmeyer was recognized as the #1 of those nominees – a great personal and professional accomplishment! Her work, service, and leadership are a shining example and has a direct and very positive impact on the quality of life of our residents.



- **IVH In Need of RNs, LPNs, CNAs/RTWs.** We continue to have vacancies on the Iowa Veterans Home clinical team. Approximately 25% of our licensed staff positions continue to be vacant.
 - Nurse Supervisors | Authorized: 25 | Assigned: 24 | 96%
 - Nurse Clinicians Authorized: 13 | Assigned: 11 | 84.62%
 - Registered Nurses (RNs) Authorized 22 Assigned 17 | 77%
 - Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) Authorized: 52 | Assigned 35 | 67.31%
 - Certified Medication Aide (CMA) Authorized: 84 | Assigned 61 | 72.62%
 - Resident Treatment Workers (RTWs/CNAs) Authorized 192, Assigned 143 | 74.48%
 - Resident Assistant (RAs) Authorized: 36 | Assigned: 31 | 86.11%
 - Temporary RTWs/CNAs: Authorized 0 | Assigned 40
 - Temporary RNs & LPNs: Authorized 0 | Assigned 9
 - Find current jobs at: <https://dva.iowa.gov/iowa-veterans-home/work-iowa-veterans-home> and then click on "Check our CURRENT OPENINGS to see where YOU fit" tab.
- **2025 Employee Engagement Survey.** The Iowa Department of Management fielded the annual Employee Engagement Survey in July 2025; the survey concluded on July 25, 2025, and the results were distributed to Agency Leadership Teams immediately. Organizations never remain at

the status quo – we either improve or decline, and our leadership team is committed to improving overall performance, service to Veterans and their families, responsiveness, and overall job satisfaction by our staff I am sharing with the Commissioners a brief synopsis of our survey results

- “Dimensions Summary”. These are areas that need the most improvement according to our survey in rank order precedence
 - My job allows for good work-life balance (-17)
 - I feel safe and respected when sharing my ideas or opinions (-12) I want to understand how to make our staff feel safe and respected when sharing opinions
 - There is good communication within my team (-11) I want to understand better how we can better communicate throughout the Department – from my level as the Commandant, within our Bureaus, and even within our small teams
 - My team has created an environment where everyone feels included (-11)
 - I trust my leaders to make the right decisions (-10)
 - There is good teamwork and cooperation within my department (-9)
 - Leadership keeps people informed about what is happening (-9)
- Literally hundreds of comments were shared regarding “what needs to improve” Here is a summary in rough rank order precedence
 - We need more nurses
 - Staffing
 - “They let the same people call in day after day ”
 - Excessive absenteeism is bad for morale
 - Better pay was listed by many on the survey
 - 14-hour employees who can’t make it to work need to go back to 8-hour shift
 - Hold leaders accountable for their actions and the actions of their staff
 - Would like to hear more from leaders throughout the facility
 - Many comments about favoritism – leaders letting certain staff get away with things while disciplining others
 - RTWs are over-worked
 - Need better communication from throughout the organization – senior leaders, leaders, within teams
 - Need Vocera Communication Devices to work as advertised
 - Request that nurses treat non-nurses with respect
- A common frustration among our IDVA team has to do with a “lack of communication” The following five comments were submitted by ONE staff member here at the Iowa Veterans Home in the survey I captured that word for word here
 - I think our current efforts to communicate (town halls, newsletters, recorded messages) are well-intentioned but don’t address the root cause of what staff mean when they say they want “more communication”
 - What seems to be missing is clear, ongoing explanation of why we do what we do – – the goals, objectives, requirements, and reasoning behind policies and tasks. For example, staff ask things like, “why do I have to do this audit?” or “Why am I disciplined when I don’t have enough benefit time to cover an absence?” or they perceive that “leadership just wants to make my job harder.”
- There’s a gap in explaining the whole process the what, how, and why Many don’t realize our work rules, audits and procedures are shaped by state and federal regulations, agency-level goals, and broader plans that limit our autonomy in decision-making Without this context, policies feel arbitrary Another important issue is that when staff voiced frustration to ask, why, it’s often dismissed as complaining That can shut down communication Instead, we should validate those concerns and treat them as opportunities to explain, engage, and build understanding If people feel heard and respected – even when we can’t change the requirement itself – they are more likely to feel like valued members of the team
- I recommend that our communication strategy focus more on context, transparency, and validation Instead of only sharing what is being done, let’s consistently explain why, listen openly to concerns, and acknowledge their validity This would help build, trust, reduce frustration, and clarify our shared purpose
- **In conclusion regarding the survey – I am disappointed in the results. The message from our team is that we need to do more, to do better, to work harder to meet your expectations. While I am disappointed, I am also motivated, and commit**

to you that we will do exactly that – do more, do better, and work harder. Looking forward to the 2026 survey!

- **Thank You to Commissioners.** Lastly, I want to call out this group – our Commissioners of Veterans Affairs. Each of you were nominated by your Veteran Service Organization, appointed by the Governor, and confirmed by the Senate to fulfill obligations outlined in Iowa Code Chapter 35 while representing your organizations. The management of the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund alone is an incredibly heavy lift for you with emergency requests for support being validated, reviewed, voted on, and then delivered in a timely manner. Your efforts and work do not go unrecognized or unappreciated by any of us. We are grateful for your leadership and service.
- **Approval of minutes from the ICVA quarterly meeting on July 9, 2025**
 - Motion to approve: Joella Perry; 2nd: Scott Miller-Passed Unanimously
- **Approval of minutes from the Trust Fund Meeting on July 9, 2025**
 - Motion to approve: Dave Grimm; 2nd: Robert Suesakul-Passed Unanimously
- **Approval of minutes from the Trust Fund meeting on August 14th, 2025**
 - Motion to approve: Becky Dirks Haugsted; 2nd: Scott Miller-Passed Unanimously
- **Approval of minutes from the Trust Fund meeting on September 4, 2025**
 - Motion to approve: Joella Perry; 2nd: Dave Grimm-Passed Unanimously
- **Old business**
 - None
- **New business**
 - None
- **Public Comment:**
 - Veterans Day on the Hill will be on January 21, 2026
 - John Derner, Supporting HF 1000
 - Passed House of Representatives last year
 - House File 1000 (HF 1000) is an [Iowa state bill](#) that would establish a veterans service organization grant program and make appropriations for it. The bill aims to provide funding to Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to expand the number of employees who directly assist veterans with VA benefit claims.
 - Nathan Wilson announced IVH's Food Service and Human Resources Bureau Chief Melissa Sienknecht and her teams were awarded the National Disability Employment Awareness Month Award
- **The next Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs meetings will be held:**
 - January 7, 2026 at 10:00 am, Camp Dodge
 - April 1, 2026 at 10:00 am, Iowa Veterans Home
 - **July 1, 2026 at 10:00 am, Camp Dodge**
 - **October 7, 2026 at 10:00 am , Iowa Veterans Home**
- **Motion to Adjourn** by Joella Perry, 2nd by Scott Miller. Meeting adjourned at 1:07 pm.

