



March 2014



Veteran Newsletter



Women have served with distinction since the early days of America's military. Most of that time has been in support roles, but women have become increasingly involved in combat and now the Department of Defense has lowered the barriers to serve in direct-combat jobs.

Over 14 percent of the military is currently comprised of women, and Ohio is home to more than 60,000 women veterans.

Five women veterans, all of who served after 9/11, took part in a panel discussion sponsored by ODVS, where they spoke of their experiences and their views on women in combat.

Read all about it in the story on pages 3, 4.

Welcome to the Ohio Department of Veterans Services e-newsletter! The newsletter is a key source of information about issues of interest to our community of veterans in Ohio.

We thank you for your service to our country. Because you're a veteran, you've earned a number of benefits that you may not be aware of. Most of these benefits originate at the federal level with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Based on the time you served, you may be eligible for compensation for injuries, health care, educational assistance, home loans or many other benefits. There are also a number of state benefits available to Ohio veterans, to include the Ohio Veterans Bonus as well as direct financial assistance from the county to veterans in need.

The place to find out what you've earned and to apply is your county veterans service office. You can locate yours in the interactive map on our department home page, www.ohiovet.gov, or by calling 1-877-OHIO-VET (1-877-644-6838).

We will continue to provide you this newsletter each month. We hope it's of value to you and your family.

Mid-Biennium Review Helps Veterans with Education and Jobs....

Governor John R. Kasich introduced a series of proposals to the Ohio General Assembly on March 11 known as the Mid-Biennium Review (MBR), building on successes already achieved in state government fiscal, employment and related policies to keep state government moving forward and bring additional jobs to Ohio. The MBR has a number of important points to benefit veterans.

The veterans' components of the MBR center on higher education and jobs.

Veteran Newsletter

Monthly Update



- The Governor proposed a standardized system of awarding veterans college credit for military training and experience at all Ohio state-supported public colleges and universities. The Military Transfer Assurance Guide will provide a baseline of standards and tools for granting this credit. The proposal also states that no school could charge a veteran for evaluation, transcription and application of credit for their military training and experience. Other proposed measures include standardizing best practices for student veteran service offices on public campuses statewide, and providing veterans with priority registration at state-supported institutes of higher learning.



- Because of the intensive training and experience in a variety of skills that veterans possess from their military service, Governor Kasich proposed a number of changes to streamline the process of obtaining professional licenses in Ohio – licenses that lead directly to jobs. The proposal would allow veterans to use the G.I. Bill to pay for their licensure or certification testing. It would also provide for a common web site where veterans can obtain information about how their military experience can directly lead to professional licensing and certifications so they can put their skills to work. These proposals build on the Governor's Executive Order of last June, as a result of which Ohio's boards and commissions are identifying ways to quickly grant veterans professional licenses based on their training and experience.

The MBR is currently being considered by both the House of Representatives and Senate of the Ohio General Assembly. Other proposals are aimed at lowering the state's income tax in all brackets, expanding Ohio's Earned Income Tax Credit, preventing high school dropouts and strengthening career education, and caring for Ohioans suffering from mental illness and substance abuse.

The MBR was divided into 14 bills by subject matter to assist in the review and hearings by the legislature. The veteran and military portions of the MBR have become House Bill 488.



Veteran Newsletter

Monthly Update



Women Veterans of Today Share Their Experiences....

The Ohio Department of Veterans Services celebrated Women's History Month by hosting a panel discussion of post-9/11 era women veterans in the Grant Hearing Room the of Ohio Statehouse on March 19.

Five distinguished women, representing each branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, served on the panel:

- Petty Officer Denise Davidson is originally from east Texas, but has served on active duty in the Coast Guard since 2009. Her first permanent duty assignment was to the Coast Guard Station in Destin, Florida. There she qualified as both a boat crewmember and a boarding team member, and participated in numerous search and rescue and law enforcement operations. She later served in New Orleans and trained as a Marine Science Technician in Yorktown, Virginia. Currently, she is assigned to the Marine Safety Detachment in Cincinnati. Her unit's responsibilities include search and rescue, homeland security, port safety, security, law enforcement, vessel inspection, waterways management and environmental protection.
- Jennifer Lowry of Thornville is a Sergeant First Class in the Ohio Army National Guard (OHARNG), currently serving her 21st year in the Guard. She joined at 17 years old into an Air Defense Artillery (ADA) unit as a radio operator. Once the Air Defense MOS(s) opened up to women, SFC Lowry jumped aboard and became the first women to attain the 14J in the OHARNG. She deployed 12 months to Kuwait in 2006 and served as Camp Buehring Base Operations NCOIC. After 14 years, she left the ADA community and transferred to Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ) and currently works full time as the Coordinator for the State Partnership Program, a joint security cooperation program linking US States with partner countries. She is an Equal Opportunity Leader, Unit Victim Advocate, and Casualty Assistance/Notification Officer for Joint Forces HQ Headquarters Detachment.
- Veronica Anne Minnefield of Columbus is an "Army Brat" who retired from the Navy in 2011 after a total of 27 years of service both as an enlisted sailor in grades E-1 to E-7 and as an officer, from Chief Warrant Officer Two to Chief Warrant Officer Four. She is trained in a variety of fields, including telecommunications, administration, security and law enforcement. She has served at several stateside locations as well as overseas on Bahrain, England, France, Germany, Japan, Korea and Scotland. From 2008-2009, she served as the Equal Opportunity Officer, Training Officer and Security Manager for Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group Forward INDIA in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. She retired as Chief Warrant Officer 4 in 2011. She holds two bachelor's degrees from Ball State University, a master's degree from Anderson University, and is currently pursuing a doctorate from the University of Phoenix. Today she serves as Assistant District Director of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs in the Columbus District Office.



Monthly Update



Veteran Newsletter

- Monica Nicholson of Columbus is an active duty Sergeant in the Marine Corps who enlisted in 2007 and served in Japan, California and Washington, D.C. She also served a six-month tour in Afghanistan in 2012. During her deployment, she was a member of the Female Engagement team. She was also a team leader who was responsible for counterinsurgency operations as her unit moved from one forward operating base (FOB) to another in support of different infantry units. Currently, she is attending The Ohio State University in pursuit of a bachelor's degree and a commission as a Marine Corps Officer.
- Sheila L. Pryor of Mansfield is a Master Sergeant who currently serves as the full-time Information Resource Manager of the 179th Airlift Operations Flight, Ohio Air National Guard. She has been a member of the Ohio Air National Guard since 1990, working in the administrative field. Prior to her assignment to the 179th, she worked as a civilian fitness instructor and in newspaper advertising. She is also pursuing a bachelor's degree at North Central State College. She deployed with the 179th to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, in 2010.

The panel covered a number of areas, including each panelist's reasons for joining the military, tense experiences they had, advice for women joining the military, and their views on women in direct combat jobs.

Interesting and moving highlights filled the discussion. Petty Officer Davidson emotionally recalled pulling remains from plane crashes at sea and the thanks from family members when their loved ones' remains were returned. A strong faith helped both her and her squadron mates throughout their deployment, Master Sgt. Pryor said. The constant tension of what could happen on patrols outside the wire were a fact of life during SGT Nicholson's deployment. Ms. Minnefield created a light moment when she spoke of her unit's mission of clearing returning personnel through customs and the things they would try to bring home from Iraq. The pride in SFC Lowry's voice was evident when she recalled her training in Air Defense Artillery, as the first woman in the Ohio Army National Guard to hold that job.

All the panelists supported women holding jobs that would put them in direct combat – but only if the women could meet those jobs' current physical standards. They said young women going into the military today must want to be there, realize the opportunities available and work hard to show they belong, and realize that protections and support for them are in place within the services.

Photos of the event are available at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ohioveteransservices/sets/72157642590983353>

Videos are available at:

<http://www.ohiochannel.org/MediaLibrary/Media.aspx?fileId=143231>



Veteran Newsletter

Monthly Update



Ohio Veterans Bonus Now in Final Year for Iraq War Veterans...

If you served in Iraq and have not yet applied for the Ohio Veterans Bonus, this is for you – **the deadline for applications for veterans of the Iraq War is December 31, 2014.**

The Ohio Veterans Bonus is available to veterans who served anywhere in the world during the time of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Service must have been for more than 90 days active duty, not for training. Eligible veterans must have been Ohio residents at the time of their entry into the service, and must be Ohio residents currently.

As noted above, December 31, 2014 is the deadline to apply for those who served in the country of Iraq. The Bonus remains open for veterans who served in the country of Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world since Oct. 7, 2001.

The bonus pays \$100 a month to veterans who served in the countries of Afghanistan or Iraq, up to a maximum of \$1,000. For veterans who served anywhere else in the world during the eligible periods, the payment is \$50 a month up to a \$500 maximum. The maximum individual award for all eligible periods of service is \$1,500.

Veterans medically discharged due to injuries sustained in combat can receive \$1,000, plus up to \$500 for months of service elsewhere. Family members of those killed in action or who died from disease as a result of their in-theater service can receive a bonus of \$5,000 plus whatever the service member was eligible for, up to a total of \$6,500.

Specific eligibility periods and deadlines are below:

- Iraq: eligible period is from March 19, 2003 to December 31, 2011 (**deadline to apply is December 31, 2014**); and
- Afghanistan or elsewhere: eligible period is, from October 7, 2001 through a date to be determined by the President.





Veteran Newsletter



Anyone needing more information or who want to apply can call toll-free to 1-877-OHIO VET (1-877-644-6838) option 2, or see:

https://veteransbonus.ohio.gov/odvs_web/

Veterans can also apply for the Bonus at their local Veterans Service Office in their home county. To find the location of your county office, see the Ohio map and select the appropriate county at:

<http://dvs.ohio.gov/>

Your County Veterans Service Office can also help you determine what other federal and state benefits you're eligible for and help you apply for them.



Mobile App Helps Veterans Find Resources...

Everywhere you look today, it seems that a lot of people spend a significant amount of time looking at their phones. It stands to reason that connecting veterans to benefit information through something they could view on their phones is the logical next step of outreach.

This next step became a reality last November with the launch of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services mobile app, designed for Androids, iPhones and similar devices that use those operating systems.

For the first time ever in Ohio, a veteran can look at app on their smartphone and read a brief summary of the major benefits available to them. The app also displays the contact and directional information to find every county veterans service office in the state, where veterans can apply for their benefits. If a veteran needs to find a VA facility, the same contact and directional information is there. The app also contains links to job and job training information, educational benefits, and other benefits such as temporary financial assistance.

The future is here....the Ohio Department of Veterans Services mobile app. Find the links to download it at:

<http://dvs.ohio.gov/HOME/Welcome>



Monthly Update



Veteran Newsletter

Jobs for Veterans Update...

As we do each month, we want to make sure everyone knows that veterans in Ohio can take advantage of many national and local companies who want to hire them. Below is the latest information on job-seeking strategies for veterans. Please read and share.

Ohio Employment Workshop Info:

Two organizations are offering assistance to veterans entering the job market.

- Battelle Corporation, a nationally-known company involved in a number of scientific projects, is hosting a resume and interview preparation workshop aimed at veterans on Wednesday, March 26, from 5:30 to 8 at their headquarters at 505 King Avenue in Columbus. Battelle plans to hold such a fair quarterly. For more information and to register for the March 26 event, see: <http://battelle.org/media/events/2014/03/04/jobs-for-veterans-workshop>
- The Miami Valley Human Resources Association is offering a one-day veteran employment workshop on Friday, April 4 from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Clark State Community College Beaver Creek Campus, 3775 Pentagon Boulevard in Beaver Creek, zip 45431. This event offers veterans training in assessing strengths and weaknesses in job skills, communicating and conducting an effective job search, interviewing, and identifying veteran support organizations. Some potential employers will also be present. For more information and to register, see: <http://www.mvhra.org/quickLinks/VeteransEmployment.cfm>

Companies Looking to Hire Veterans:

Many well-known national companies with Ohio operations are in the market to hire veterans in many different areas of their businesses. These companies include AEP, AT&T, Chase Bank, GE, General Motors, Home Depot, Huntington Bank, Scotts Miracle Gro, Starbucks, Walmart, Verizon, and Xerox. Information on current jobs is available on the individual company web sites; go to www.google.com to search by company name and then click on their "employment" or "careers" links.





Monthly Update



Veteran Newsletter

The Ohio insurance industry has 17,000 new jobs to fill in many different areas. These jobs are available in insurance companies all around the state. For more information, see:

<http://insurancecareers.org/veterans>

Several state agencies are also currently seeking veterans. Open state jobs can be viewed and applied for at: <http://careers.ohio.gov/>

Many large state employers, such as the Cleveland Clinic and local and regional hospitals, are also in the market for qualified veterans.

For the most current information on jobs in a local area:

- the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services offices in each county, as well as regional Job Centers, can help; see "Finding Jobs In-Person" in this section.
- the Ohio Department of Veterans Services' Facebook and Twitter pages will also post frequent announcements of multiple job openings across the state, so be sure to check them out.

Schools and Companies Offering Job Training:

Job training that could lead to employment in the emerging shale industry and in manufacturing is available throughout Ohio. For example, Stark State College and Eastern Gateway Community College offer training targeted to shale jobs. Cincinnati State College offers training aimed at industrial jobs. Siemens Corporation offers training geared to engineering manufacturing jobs. Find out more at the schools' and company's web sites; conduct your search using www.google.com. Veteran-specific information on higher education is available through the Ohio Board of Regents at:

<https://www.ohiohighered.org/veterans>





Monthly Update



Veteran Newsletter

Finding Jobs Online:

Veterans can also look for jobs online. “Ohio Means Jobs” is the state’s primary job web site, listing the vast majority of both private sector and public jobs which are open in Ohio. The site is at <https://ohiomeansjobs.com/omj/>, or simply type in “Ohiomeansjobs.com.” The available jobs are posted in the “Job Seekers” area.

Be sure to register and post your resume on the site – and don’t forget to indicate that you *are* a veteran. The site automatically posts veterans’ resumes first for any job that matches the qualifications they’ve stated in their resume – so employers who go to the site will see veterans’ resumes before they see anyone else’s. The resume should be reviewed every month and electronically “updated” – whether any additional information is added or not – to keep it refreshed and at the head of the line for jobs.

This web site also has an area with other resources for veterans, to include translation of military to civilian skills and frequently asked questions about the process. The link is below:
<http://www.ohiomeansveteranjobs.com/infocenter>



Finding Jobs In-Person:

If you want to start a face-to-face job search, there’s in-person assistance available throughout Ohio that knows where the local jobs are. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) is in an active partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor to operate Job Centers regionally around the state. Contact information can be found online at:
<http://jfs.ohio.gov/owd/wia/wiamap.stm>

While the Job Centers are open to all residents, but are also staffed with counselors who specifically assist veterans.

Their primary clients are veterans with barriers to employment, of which long-term unemployment definitely qualifies. Counselors can also assist with skills translation and resume preparation – and they know where the jobs are locally. The Job Centers also have resources to assist disabled veterans with qualifying for, finding and keeping meaningful employment.



Monthly Update



Veteran Newsletter

For a Job Fair, or any Employment Event, Be Prepared for Interviews, and Know Your Skills:

Before you attend any job fair or visit any employer, remember these common tips:

- Have a current resume;
- Have a cover letter that's geared to the type of job being sought;
- Present a professional appearance, e.g., suit and tie, or dress/skirt or pantsuit.

To prepare an effective resume, you have to be able to translate military experience to civilian experience. The Army and the Navy have developed online "cool" web sites that help veterans translate their military skills into terms civilian employers can understand. The sites, which stand for "credentialing opportunities online," allow a veteran to select their military skill code and then see the types of jobs their training and experience translates to, as well as any certifications that are needed. There is no Air Force, Marine, or Coast Guard "cool" site. However, the Air Force does offer similar resources in its Community College of the Air Force site, at the Credentialing and Education Research Tool (CERT) page; Marine skills are similar to those found in the Army and Air Force; and Coast Guard skills are similar to those found in the Navy.

The "cool" sites are below:

<https://www.cool.army.mil/index.htm>

<https://www.cool.navy.mil/overview.htm>

<https://augateway.maxwell.af.mil/ccaf/certifications/programs/>

Help for Employers to Hire Veterans:

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is tackling the mission of helping veterans find employment by reaching out to employers. The agency has developed a Veterans Hiring Guide that provides a central location for information about tools to hire veterans and the business incentives that are available for doing so. The VA's goal is to help employers find job-seeking veterans or to assist employers with their own ongoing efforts at veteran hiring programs. The guide also includes resources for employers seeking to attract military spouses. Development of the guide was a joint effort between the VA, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Departments of Defense, Labor and Education.

The Veterans Hiring Guide is available at:

<https://www.vetsuccess.va.gov/public/employers.html>



Monthly Update



Veteran Newsletter

Veterans with ALS Have Help to Adapt Homes...

Veterans who suffer from service-connected ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, now have help available from the VA to adapt their homes through grants of up to \$67,555.

This change in policy affects current recipients of VA's specially adapted housing grants, which helps pay for the costs for building, buying or adapting a home. Under this change, veterans and service-members with service-connected ALS will be determined medically eligible for the maximum grant. The program provides grants to eligible service-connected disabled veterans and service-members to construct or modify a home to meet their unique housing needs. Grants are also available to help eligible individuals purchase adapted homes or pay down mortgages on homes that are already adapted.



For more information, see the VA news release at:
<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2530>

VRAP Program is Changing...

The VRAP program has been highly successful in providing job training to unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 and 60....but a big change is on the horizon.

If a veteran is currently enrolled in a VRAP-approved training program, the VA will pay a lump sum payment for any of that training that is conducted after March 31 and ending June 30. This is because the VA does not have statutory authority to pay any VRAP benefits after the end of March. The bottom line is that no one will receive more than the 12 months of benefits authorized by the legislation establishing VRAP.

In a recent news release, the VA said that it has begun to compute the lump sum payments to eligible veterans. The release said that, for example, if a veteran is currently enrolled with a term/enrollment completion of 10 May 2014 – that individual would receive a lump sum for the month of April + 10 days in May. If a veteran's term ends on 15 July, that individual would get a lump sum payment for



Monthly Update



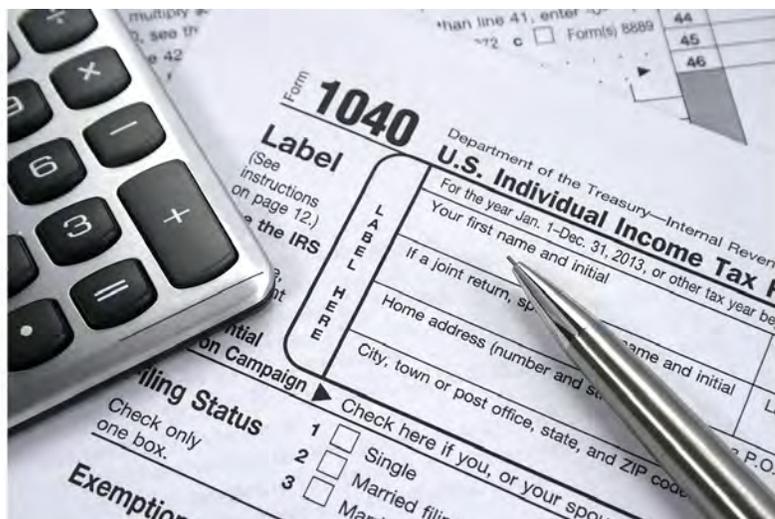
Veteran Newsletter

April + May + June – *and not the 15 days in July*. These payments will not be made for enrollment periods that begin after March 31. Again, this lump sum payment does not provide additional VRAP benefits beyond 12 months.

VRAP participants who have any changes to their training program, or any question about their benefit, should contact both their local school certifying official, and also the VA at 1-888-GI Bill-1 (1-888-442-4551). Any reduction in training or withdrawal may result in an overpayment.

VRAP was established by the *Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011* and began July 1, 2012. For further information, see: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW/education.asp>

Tax Filing Help...



Just about everybody knows that the deadline for filing taxes is April 15 – but we may not think about how we're going to do that until the deadline is almost upon us.

We initially presented the information below last month, but we wanted to repeat it in the interest of bringing maximum awareness to military tax benefits in Ohio and how to get assistance in tax filing.

Military service members and military retirees who are Ohio residents have some very important tax benefits:

- Military income for those stationed outside of Ohio for 30 days or more is not taxable by Ohio.
- Military retiree and survivor benefits income is not taxable by Ohio.
- Ohio resident federal retirees who are military veterans and have a part of their federal pension attributable to military service can exclude that part of their pension from Ohio taxes.

More information on these is available on the Ohio Department of Taxation's website at: http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_individual/individual/military_tax_provisions.aspx

The tax department website also contains detailed information on filing Ohio taxes.



Monthly Update



Veteran Newsletter

For military service members, retirees and veterans who need tax assistance, free help is available.

Ohio-resident military service members who are deployed anywhere outside Ohio can get free tax preparation help from the Ohio Society of Certified Public Accountants (CPAs). To take advantage of this service, the eligible military service member, their spouse or a family member can call the Ohio Society of CPAs toll-free at 1-888-959-1212 or e-mail cpanswers@ohio-cpa.com.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has a network of volunteers who provide free tax preparation service to the elderly, veterans and all who meet the income guidelines. The volunteers work under two primary services, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE), which is operated in coordination with the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Each program provides free tax assistance at a number of sites across Ohio.

To qualify for either program, taxpayers seeking assistance must have an income of \$52,000 or less. Qualified taxpayers can find the site nearest them, and find out what to bring for the tax preparation session, by calling:

VITA: 1-800-906-9887

TCE (for elderly taxpayers): 1-888-227-7669

To locate these free tax preparation sites by zip code, and for details on what to bring to the tax preparation session, see the information beginning at "Self-Help Tax Preparation" at:

<http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Free-Tax-Return-Preparation-for-You-by-Volunteers>

Limited assistance is also available for federal taxes through the IRS's "free file" program.

Taxpayers with income below \$58,000 can receive free tax preparation software; those with incomes above \$58,000 can receive free electronic fill-in forms. More information is at:

<http://www.irs.gov/uac/Free-File:-Do-Your-Federal-Taxes-for-Free>

It may not be everyone's favorite time of year, but taking advantage of the services available can make it less painful for many taxpayers.