

**Vol.3, No.1  
January 2024**

# **2023 Year in Review**

## **Serving Those Who Served**

**The Official Newsletter of the Kentucky Department of  
Veterans Affairs**



## **Year in Review**

### **Commissioner Corner**

**KDVA 2023 - Check out pictures from some of our milestones and events from the course of 2023.**

### **Upcoming Events**

- "A Veteran's Forum" VA Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Event
- "She is a Veteran" Women Veterans March Event
- "Here Is Better" DAV Event Flier

### **VA News**

- VA announces hundreds of millions in grant funding to help homeless Veterans after new data shows an uptick in homelessness

### **Pact Act News**

**I Support Veterans License Plates**

**Much, much more...**

---

## **Commissioner's Corner**

Greetings teammates,

Happy New Year! 2023 seems to have flown by. This is our "Year in Review" newsletter and highlights some of the events and milestones KDVA played a role in or accomplished for veterans. That's what it's about: veterans of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.



Turning to what we have to look forward to for veterans in 2024. We have a VA Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP) event called "A Veterans' Forum" in February and a Women Veterans Celebration called "She is a Veteran" in March. We'll have more to announce soon!

Hope everyone had an enjoyable holiday and let's hit the ground running for 2024. Hooah!!!

Very respectfully,

***Commissioner Whitney P. Allen, Jr.***  
*Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs*

**KDVA 2023**

**Military Honors Ceremony**  
**January**



The American Legion Post 8 honored veterans with certificates of appreciation and Commissioner Whitney Allen, KDVA, presented challenge coins to them, in Lexington, KY, Jan. 24, 2023. In the pictures above the two gentlemen with manilla envelopes are both World War II Veterans.

## Signing of House Bill 2 February



Governor Andy Beshear signed House Bill 2 into law, this Bill provides much-needed support to complete the Bowling Green Veterans Center. Governor Beshear spoke at length about HB-2 which provides the remaining \$16,630,000 in fiscal year 2022-2023 from the Budget Reserve Trust Fund being added to the previously appropriated budget

items for the construction of the \$53 million Veterans Center in Bowling Green. The center is expected to be completed in 2024. (February 15th, 2023)

---

## **KDVA Receives Pillar Award**

### **March**

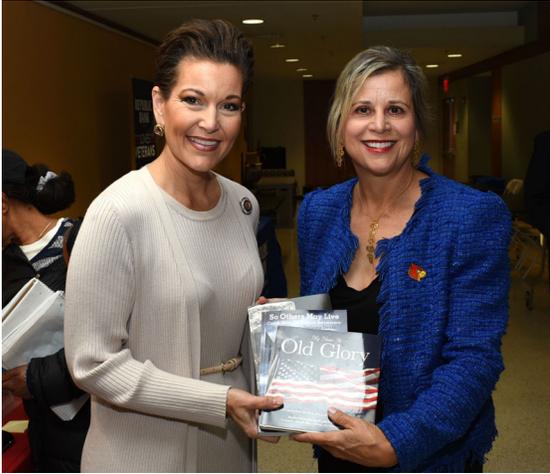
The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs has won its third Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award in a row, this time for Customer Experience with VA Benefits and Services. KDVA won for The Homeless Veterans Trust Fund in 2021 and Kentucky Veterans' Songwriting Project in 2022. (Feb. 23, 2023)



---

## **Women Veterans Celebration**

## March



Martha Kotite spoke during our Women Veterans Event at the University of Louisville, KY, March 22, 2023. Kotite is a retired U.S. Coast Guard Captain and spoke about her experiences of being a woman in units entirely and mostly comprised of men. She also told some of the stories she's written about on other women veterans.

---

## Signing of House Bill 29

### April

On April 7, 2023, Governor Andy Beshear signed House Bill 29 into effect at the Frankfort Capital Building, KY. HB-29 removes the state residency requirement for our five state veteran cemeteries which allows more veterans access to interments when the time comes. With the removal of the state residency requirement, veterans in neighboring states like Ohio and Tennessee can have the option of having their interment here in our Commonwealth.



---

## Memorial Day at Kentucky Veterans Cemeteries May





*(Pics are from all KDVA's Cemeteries)*

## Commissioner's Memorial Day Message

"Memorial Day weekend is a time when so many Americans across the nation gather with families, grill out, socialize, and relax. This is important but I want you all to keep the families and friends of our honorable military men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving our Nation in your hearts and prayers. This is the purpose behind Memorial Day...to honor those who died for the freedoms we have in our great country. The sacrifices of our men and women can never be repaid but I hope we can give them the respect and honor they so rightly deserve.

To our veterans, let us not forget why we served our Nation, why we should continue serving our communities, and why we must continue carrying the torch in honoring the legacy and spirit of our fallen brothers and sisters. May God continue to bless our fallen brothers' and sisters' spirits, and the Gold Star Family members they left behind. And for him to give us the resolve and strength to ensure their legacy of service will always be honored by generations of Americans to come. I would like to personally thank all of you, our great Commonwealth veterans/veteran service organizations, and the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky family for your continued support to our veterans and their families."

Very respectfully,  
KDVA Commissioner Whitney Allen

## KDVA Women Veterans State Conference June



For the 2023 KDVA Women Veterans State Conference, we had several guest speakers and representatives from Federal and State government. Lt. Governor Jaqueline Coleman, Retired General Huntley, Heather French Henry, and more came out to give thanks to our Commonwealth's women vets and to give them up-to-date information on benefits available to them.

---

## **Veterans Experience Action Center (VEAC)**

**June**



The VEAC event gave Kentucky veterans direct communication with people in person to learn about employment opportunities and VA benefits available to them. Veterans Benefits Representatives from KDVA from across the Commonwealth came to provide information and assistance to all veterans who attended and needed the assistance.

---

## **Kentucky Veterans Cemeteries Reach**

**New Milestone: 20,000th Interment**

**July**



On July 3rd the cemeteries division conducted its 20,000th interment. Since the first interment at Kentucky's first Veterans Cemetery, Kentucky Veterans Cemetery West(KVCW) in 2004, the five State Veterans Cemeteries (SVC) have conducted 20,000 honorable and dignified interments for our veterans and eligible family members. KVCW has conducted 6,103 interments, KVCC has completed 9,343, KVCN has conducted 2,674 interments, KVCNE has completed 1,759 interments and KVCSE has completed 121 interment since they opened in 2018. This closing fiscal year the SVC Division conducted 1,564 honorable and dignified interments.

## KDVA 2023 Commanders State Conference August







KDVA State Commanders' Conference, Lexington, KY, Thursday-Friday, August 24-25, 2023. Over 100 participants attended the networking/training conference to include several Biden Administration VA leadership appointees, VA Midsouth Healthcare Network mental health and VA medical centers leaders, three national Veteran Service Organizations' executive directors, Kentucky's military leaders, federal/state/local government partners, and a host of Kentucky VSOs leadership.

Key guest speakers and panelists for the event included: Governor Andy Beshear, the Honorable Maureen Elias, Deputy Chief of Staff Department of Veteran Affairs, Dr. M. Christopher Saslo, Assistant Undersecretary for Health for Patient Care Services, John Boerstler, Chief Veterans Experience Office, and Maj. Gen. Johnny K. Davis, Commander, United States Army Recruiting Command and Fort Knox.

---

## **Kentucky State Fair**

### **August**



KDVA participated in the Kentucky State Fair by featuring a booth where veterans could get some information on their benefits and contact info for starting their benefits journey. Additionally KDVA hosted Don Jenkins, Medal of Honor recipient as a guest at the booth for anyone to meet and learn about his experiences.

## **Patriot Day Ceremony State Veterans Cemetery Central in Radcliff**

# September





The Patriot Day Ceremony was put on by Fort Knox at the Kentucky Veterans Cemetery Central in Radcliff, Kentucky, Sept. 11, 2023. The ceremony had Commissioner Whitney Allen and Major General Johnny Davis, U.S. Army Recruiting Command and Fort Knox Commander, who paid homage to the sacrifices made and 2,996 lives lost 22 years ago. It is a time to honor and memorialize them and to also recognize the service of our first responders. Never Forget.

## KDVA's 25th Anniversary Celebration October



On October 5th, KDVA celebrated its 25th Anniversary at the Frankfort Capitol Building in Kentucky. Along with Governor Andy Beshear, current leaders and members of KDVA; our guest speaker was the first Commissioner for KDVA: Retired General Les Beavers.

"This 25 year mark is a milestone, a moment in time of recognition and appreciation," Beavers said. "But it's also recognizing the continuing services and care of our veterans that's got to go on. Some of us won't be here for the 50th, but I want it to exist and live on, its mission to live on of serving our veterans. There's no more honorable mission than that after you're out of uniform. I look at it as a milestone but also as a start to the next 25 years."

Quarter of a century with a swath of talented veterans and state employees trying to help veterans following their time in the service. This is arguably one of the most difficult transitions for veterans as they go from having a support system of the military back into the civilian world where they most likely have to rebuild that kind of network. KDVA has been here to help them.

"I wanted to impart from the beginning to all the people of KDVA that it was a passion for serving veterans and let that infect the whole organization," Beavers said. "That's what we're here for. It's not about us and I try to live that everyday. The bottom line is that it was an absolute honor to have that job. To be in the beginning where we're actually building something from nothing and see it last."

Marty Pinkston, KDVA's second Deputy Commissioner recalls his time with KDVA...

"I tell people all the time that the very best job I ever had in my life was my time with the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs," Pinkston said. "Because I knew for a fact, that when I went home everyday, there were veterans who were better off than when I got to work that morning. It just does not get better than that."

While KDVA gets to celebrate this milestone, they also know the progress made has to continue for the younger veteran generations. Caring for our veterans is of national importance.

"With the way the world is today, the defense of our nation rests on it," Beavers said. "If people don't want to serve their country because of the way they're treated afterwards, then we'll lose our identity as a sovereign nation. National Defense is part of taking care of veterans because it impacts those who step up next. I think were a part of a bigger issue of supporting people who defend the country, continue to do that so others will want to defend the country. People who are doing the day-to-day work need to hear that."

---

## **KDVA's Women Veterans Coordinator Becomes an Ambassador for the Military Women's Memorial October**



Dina Parrott was appointed as the Kentucky State ambassador by the Military Women’s Memorial, a 501c3 nonprofit dedicated to recognizing America’s service women, past and present. As an ambassador, Dina will help the Military Women’s Memorial broaden the nation’s perspective of service, commitment and valor to include the stories of military women past and present. By expanding public knowledge of women’s roles the Military Women’s Memorial expects Americans of all ages to be able to envision opportunities for success to have an impact to lead and make a difference. In a statement about the appointment, Dina said “I love that our stories will be told and live on forever. I am delighted to play a part in Her-Story



---

## Supporting Kentucky Veterans: A KET Forum





KDVA leaders and staff participated in a KET Panel forum taping session which will air November 13, 2023. Panel members included Commissioner Whitney Allen, KDVA, Anyah Hoang-Ansert, vice president of VOA, Robbin Higgins, Governor's Advisory Board for Veteran Affairs, Dr. Katherine Marks, Commissioner for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities, and Eileen Ward, KDVA Homeless Veterans program manager. Topics discussed include veteran concerns, mental health, employment and services to include homeless veteran program.

KET Forums | KET

---

## **Carl M. Brashear Radcliff Veterans Center Named Best of Kentucky in Nursing and Rehabilitation November**

*Local, Senior Living Community Wins Prestigious Statewide Award*



What's New at KDVA? On Thursday, November 16, the Kentucky Association of Health Care Facilities/Kentucky Center for Assisted Living (KAHCF/KCAL) honored the top long-term care facilities in Kentucky at their quality awards banquet. Carl M. Brashear Radcliff Veterans Center was honored to be a part of this elite group of leaders in the industry.

“We are honored to recognize these deserving providers at the top of their class,” said KAHCF/KCAL Interim President Ruby Jo Lubarsky, “During a tumultuous time of staffing shortages, our providers have faced these challenges with innovation and positivity. Each winner and their team have kept their residents’ quality of life at the heart of their work.” The Best of Kentucky – Nursing and Rehabilitation honorees must possess a CMS star rating of four or higher to apply.

“We are committed to serving Kentucky’s Veterans and serving those that have served.”

Long-term care providers attended the Annual Meeting & Expo, energized by general sessions challenging them with strategies to cope with stress on the job, hiring and retaining quality staff and regulatory issues. On November 15, KCAL held its “KCAL Day” for Assisted Living Communities. More than 100 vendors exhibited during the expo showcasing the latest innovations to providing quality care.

## Holiday Cards for Vets December



Secretary Eric Friedlander, Barbara Fox, and Heath Dolen from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services delivered holiday cards for veterans to the Frankfort Headquarters Office for KDVA Dec. 14, 2023. The 1,369 cards came from staff members and their families at the CHFS and students and staff at Stonewall Elementary School in Lexington. They will

be given to residents of the four Veteran Centers in Kentucky. CHFS has been gathering cards for veterans each year since 2018 for veterans.

## Upcoming Events

VA Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP)

*Presents*

### “A Veteran’s Forum”

*in collaboration with*

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



**Saturday, February 24, 2024**

**9AM to 2:30PM**

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
1930 Winchester Ave, Ashland KY, 41101  
RSVP at 502-564-9203

***“I hope to have God on my side, but I must have Kentucky”  
Abraham Lincoln***

She is a Mom, She is a Wife, She is a Daughter,  
She is a Friend, She is a Coworker...

# “She is a Veteran”

## *Celebrating History of Women Veterans*

Guest Speakers  
2 Hour Painting Session  
And more to come...

**Save the Date**

**March 2, 2024**

**9AM to 5PM**

**Hardin Post 113 1251 Ring Rd  
Elizabethtown, KY, 42701**



# HERE.IS.BETTER.

## MOVIE SHOWING & PTSD AND SUICIDE AWARENESS TOPIC DISCUSSION

HOSTED BY  
**DAV CHAPTER 003**  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
**KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

*Pritchard Community Center  
404 S Mulberry St, Elizabethtown, KY 42701*

**DATE: WEDNESDAY  
MARCH 20, 2024**

**TIME: 5:30 PM**

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**



Why is suicide risk higher in trauma survivors? It may be because of the symptoms of PTSD or it may be due to other mental health problems, like depression. Studies show that suicide risk is higher in persons with PTSD. Some studies link suicide risk in those with PTSD to distressing trauma memories, anger, and poor control of impulses. Further, suicide risk is higher for those with PTSD who have certain styles of coping with stress, such as not expressing feelings.

Research suggests that for Veterans with PTSD, the strongest link to both suicide attempts and thinking about suicide is guilt related to combat. Many Veterans have very disturbing thoughts and extreme guilt about actions taken during times of war. These thoughts can often overwhelm the Veteran and make it hard for him or her to deal with the intense feelings.

### **“HERE IS BETTER”**

A soldier’s story is always personal, but never more than in *HERE. IS. BETTER.*, a documentary film with unprecedented access inside trauma therapy sessions of men and women veterans battling posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The powerful feature-length documentary *HERE. IS. BETTER.* offers a uniquely hopeful and impactful perspective on the rising mental health crisis in America. Each year, 8 million adults suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the U.S. alone, and veterans are more than twice as likely to have PTSD than civilians. *HERE. IS. BETTER.* follows four veterans, each with diverse backgrounds and service experience, as they undergo the most clinically effective, evidence-based trauma psychotherapies for PTSD.

The film features Army veteran and former politician Jason Kander, sharing his journey through treatment for the first time. A nationally recognized rising star in the Democratic Party with presidential aspirations, Jason stunningly dropped out of the Kansas City mayoral race by publicly announcing on Facebook that he would be seeking treatment for his PTSD. Jason had buried his PTSD for over 10 years since his time as a military intelligence officer in Afghanistan, an increasingly untenable situation that was having a ripple effect on his wife, Diana, and their young family.

Gaining unprecedented access to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the film also documents internationally recognized PTSD expert Dr. Kathleen Chard and her women veterans’ treatment group at the Cincinnati VA’s Trauma Recovery Center. Teresa, an Army veteran who served in Iraq, was still haunted by the day an IED went off by her convoy, nearly killing her husband, and what she could have done differently to alter the course of events that day. Tabitha, a Marine veteran, came to the program to “stay on the planet, above ground” for her two sons. Early in Tabitha’s training, a sexual assault that contributed to her PTSD occurred, deeply impacting her through two tours of duty and back home again.

At a veterans' retreat in Florida, John, who had served as a door gunner during the Vietnam War, finds himself at a crossroads in his life and is finally ready to seek the help he needs and begin to put together the pieces of his past. Recently retired and an empty nester, he was increasingly feeling a pronounced sense of isolation from his wife and family, themes he begins to explore in the therapy sessions he was introduced to at the retreat.

During the making of the film, these proud service members allowed cameras to document their experiences during their PTSD treatments and bear witness to their struggles and triumphs throughout their recovery. Their moving stories illustrate how the seemingly impossible can become possible and that you can face each day with hope. Life is worth the fight. HERE. IS. BETTER.

## VA News

### VA announces hundreds of millions in grant funding to help homeless Veterans after new data shows an uptick in homelessness

**WASHINGTON** — Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced two grant opportunities that will help Veterans experiencing homelessness and advance the Biden-Harris Administration's broader efforts to [reduce homelessness](#):

- [Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\) Grants](#): Within the coming year, VA will award hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to organizations that help rapidly rehouse Veterans and their families, prevent the imminent loss of a Veteran's home, or identify new, more suitable housing situations for Veterans and their families. The exact funding amount will be determined by VA's budget.
- [Legal Services for Homeless Veterans and Veterans At-Risk for Homelessness Grants](#): Within the coming year, VA will award more than \$26

million in funds to organizations that help homeless Veterans with legal representation, assistance with court proceedings, defense in criminal cases related to homelessness, and more.

This announcement comes shortly after the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released the results of the 2023 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, the annual effort to estimate the number of Americans – including Veterans – experiencing homelessness. The data shows that on a single night in January 2023, there were 35,574 Veterans who were experiencing homelessness, a 7.4% increase over 2022. This uptick mirrors the increase in homelessness among all Americans, which increased by 12% over 2022.

Ending Veteran homelessness is a top priority for VA and the entire Biden-Harris administration. In total, the estimated number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in the U.S. has decreased by 52.0% since 2010 and by 4.5% since 2020.

“One Veteran experiencing homelessness will always be one too many – and we will do everything in our power to ensure that Veterans get the safe, stable housing that they deserve,” said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. “These new grants are a critical part of that effort, empowering VA and our partners to provide more housing and wraparound services to more homeless and at-risk Veterans than ever before. Together, we will not rest until Veteran homelessness is a thing of the past.”

“Every American deserves a safe and affordable home. Like air, water, and food, housing is a basic human need required for the health of individuals, communities, and nations,” said **U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Director (USICH) Jeff Olivet**. **VA is a critical part of USICH's efforts to prevent and end homelessness.** “The Biden-Harris administration’s plan calls on all parts of the federal government, as well as mayors, landlords, developers, and everyone involved to help us build a future where no one experiences the tragedy of homelessness and everyone has a safe and affordable home.”

From day one, the VA has taken aggressive action to combat Veteran homelessness. VA has [permanently housed 38,847 homeless Veterans](#) thus far in 2023, surpassing [the calendar year goal to house 38,000 Veterans](#) two months early. This year, VA has also [expanded access to health care](#) for homeless Veterans, expanded [access to legal assistance](#) for homeless Veterans, helped [more than 145,000 Veterans and their families retain their homes and avoid foreclosure](#), and [awarded more than \\$1 billion](#) in grant

funding to help homeless Veterans. In partnership with HUD, VA also convened 10 national HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) bootcamps, in which local VA homeless program staff with public housing agencies from across the country participated in intensive two-day workshops to improve coordination to more quickly rehouse Veterans through the HUD-VASH program. During 2023, the HUD-VASH program helped over 13,000 Veterans exit homelessness and obtain permanent affordable housing with supportive services.

There are many possible reasons for the increase in homelessness among Veterans and all Americans in January 2023, including the cost of housing and the end of COVID-related supports. VA will investigate these barriers and do everything in its power to help Veterans overcome them.

VA's efforts to combat Veteran homelessness are grounded in reaching out to homeless Veterans, understanding their unique needs, and addressing them. These efforts are built on the evidence-based "[Housing First](#)" approach, which prioritizes getting a Veteran into housing, then providing them with the wraparound support they need to stay housed, including health care, job training, legal and education assistance, and more. This initiative is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's broader efforts to [prevent and end homelessness](#). President Biden has also called on Congress to triple the number of Veterans who receive housing vouchers – a critical tool to help prevent Veteran homelessness.

For more information on the SSVF grant opportunity, visit [here](#). For more information on the legal services for homeless Veterans grant opportunity, visit [here](#).

For more information about VA's comprehensive efforts to end Veteran homelessness, visit [VA.gov/homeless](https://www.va.gov/homeless).



## I Support Veterans License Plates



### Who is eligible

Any owner of a noncommercial motor vehicle required to be registered for use on Kentucky Highways.

### Steps Requirement

Application must be made at your local County Clerk's office. Upon receipt of this plate, your regular (special) issue license plate must be turned in or issued to another vehicle.

### Decal Expires Customer's Birth Month

\$10.00 of the initial and \$5.00 of the renewal registration fee goes to the Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs. For more information, please visit <http://veterans.ky.gov> . This plate is available for personalization with an additional \$25.00 fee annually. Personalization is limited to a maximum of 5 characters.

Relevant KRS [186.162](#)



## Useful VA Links

- **VA Housing Assistance Page** - Information about home loans, eligibility, interest rates reductions and other related topics: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/>
- **National Center for PTSD** - Provides information and resources to veterans, care providers and organizations relating PTSD: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
- **Covid-19 Vaccine Updates** - Latest updates on Covid-19 guidance and vaccinations: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>
- **VA Life Insurance (VALife)** - <https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp>
- **Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E)** - job training, education, employment coaching, etc.: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp>

## Upcoming Veterans Dates and Events

- New Year's Day (**Jan. 1**)
- Martin Luther King Jr.'s Day (**Jan. 15**)
- "A Veterans' Forum" Event and Homeless Standdown Event (**Feb. 24**)
- "She is a Veteran" Women Veterans Event (**Mar. 2**)

## Resources for Veterans



## Flood Relief

Have you been affected by flooding in Eastern Kentucky? The Governor's Office has prepared a list of resources designed to help you make it through this challenging time.

Click here for more information:  
<https://governor.ky.gov/disaster-response/flood-resources>

[View this email in your browser](#)

You are receiving this email because of your relationship with Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. Please [reconfirm](#) your interest in receiving emails from us. If you do not wish to receive any more emails, you can [unsubscribe here](#).

This message was sent to jamesh@ky.gov by KDVA.PIO@ky.gov  
1111 Louisville Rd Suite B Frankfort, KY 40601

 [Unsubscribe](#) | [Manage Subscription](#)

