

This Veterans Newsletter is compiled and provided by the Seminole County Veteran's Services Office. Its intent is to keep Seminole County Veterans informed about their rights, benefits, and news of interest. It is non-political and, except where noted, all articles are excerpted from outside sources. Local events honoring/supporting Veterans will be included as made available. You are encouraged to provide feedback and recommendations, as this is your Newsletter. Together with my small Team, I hope you find it both valuable and interesting.

Ed Burford, Seminole County Veterans Services Officer

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Veterans Appreciation Lunch, 2020 - Ed Sends – The 2020 Veterans Appreciation Lunch will be held on Wednesday March 25, 2020, for the Veteran and one guest. It will be held in the Sanford Civic Center, 491 E Seminole Blvd, Sanford, FL 32771. Doors open at 11:00 am, the activities will begin at 11:30 am., and should be concluding at 1:00 pm. To reserve your spot, email Jholder@seminolecountyfl.gov and provide your name, telephone number and if you are bringing a guest. Seating is limited to the first 300. I look forward to seeing you there. Ed

Seminole County February Veteran of the Month - Ed Sends - On February 25th, 2020, Electronics Mate 3 Paul R. Bertram, was named the Veteran of the Month for February 2020. He enlisted the U.S. Navy on April 12, 1971 and was discharged on March 7, 1973, he was an Electrician's Mate serving on the USS Hassayampa (AO 145) from 1971 until 1973, during this time he was in the territorial waters of Vietnam for eleven months while refueling approximately 234 U.S. Navy war ships with over 90 million gallons of ship and aviation fuel, making nineteen line swings, discharged during a reduction in Navy strength, his last assignment was as part of the decommissioning of the submarine USS Trosk (SS-423). Electronics Mate 3 Bertram upon returning to civilian life, started his own business in architectural graphic design, in Seminole County, and ran PRB Design for 28 years, the next eleven years were spent in Washington DC where he promoted Energy Efficiency for Buildings, briefing congress and the Executive Office. Electronics Mate 3 Bertram is the former President of the Construction Specifications Institute, he sits on the Board of Directors for the National Institute for building Sciences, and on the Board of Directors of Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs, he fully retired in 2016 and dedicated his retirement to helping veterans in need. His military awards and decorations include the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, he was presented his service dog in June 2019, named Walker. Electronics Mate 3 Paul R. Bertram, we honor you.

Military Retirees Can Be Court-Martialed After All, Appeals Court

Decides Military.com, Week of February 03, 2020. In the latest turn of a dramatic and winding court saga, a naval appeals court has released a split decision finding that a Navy retiree was properly court-martialed and convicted for a crime committed after he had left active duty. The decision was published Jan. 24 by the Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals, with four judges agreeing with the final decision and three others dissenting. [Read more.](#)

More Than 3 Dozen Military Hospitals to Stop Treating Retirees, Families, Memo

Shows Military.com, Week of February 10, 2020, Military families and retirees receiving care through 38 military hospitals nationwide will soon be forced to go off-base instead, and some pharmacies at those hospitals will stop providing drugs to those not on active duty, Military.com has learned. A 12-page memo, reviewed by Military.com, was sent to the commanders of 50 military treatment facilities, or MTFs, targeted for changes. [Read more.](#)

These Military Medical Facilities Will Stop Seeing Retirees and Military Family Members MOAA, February 19, 2020, Approximately 84,000 active duty family members and 110,000 military retiree beneficiaries will be impacted by military treatment facility (MTF) downsizing proposed in a [DOD report to Congress](#) released Feb. 19. [Read more.](#)

What You Need to Know About the Proposed VA Budget MOAA, February 12, 2020, The White House's FY 21 VA funding proposal would add more than \$22 billion to the department's budget over the current fiscal year – a move that includes increased funding for several programs championed by MOAA in recent years, and continues almost a decade of funding for VA modernization. The \$243.3 billion budget is 10% more than the \$220.7 billion enacted in FY 20 and comes in a proposal that includes level or reduced funding to [many other federal agencies](#). Among the programs that would benefit from the increased funds: [Read more.](#)

Update your contact information in minute's #VetResources, February 13, 2020, Moving? Taking an extended vacation? New phone number? Simply want VA to reach you at a different address? Whatever the reason may be, you can update your contact information on VA.gov in minutes. [Read more.](#)

Military Sisterhood Initiative to go live February 18, #VetResources, February 13, 2020, The free social platform is designed to connect women Veterans to VA and other resources, like peer-to-peer support, online courses and in-person events across the country. [Read more.](#)

Veterans can now access patient billing statements online, #VetResources, January 29, 2020, AccessVA is a convenient new service allowing Veterans access to patient billing statements online. The new feature is for Veterans who receive care at a VA hospital or clinic for non-service-connected conditions and may owe a co-payment (Veterans are not billed for service-connected care). [Read more.](#)

VA Program Provides Veterinary Care for Some Service Dogs Military.com, Week of February 03, 2020. If you have a service dog from an accredited agency, you may be able to get veterinary care for it from the VA. Veterans who have a service dog to assist them in functioning because of a severe mobility impairment due to visual, hearing or mental health issues are eligible for the program. [Read more.](#)

Bill to Provide Service Dogs for Veterans with PTSD Passes House Unanimously Military.com, Week of February 10, 2020. A decade-long effort to have the Department of Veterans Affairs provide service dogs to veterans with mental health issues passed a major hurdle with House passage Feb. 5. The Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers, or PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act, would have the VA create a 5-year pilot to give grants to one or more organizations to train and provide service dogs to veterans with post-traumatic stress and other post-deployment mental health issues. [Read more.](#)

Letter to President Trump from Veterans Groups Seeks Addition of 4 Presumptive Diseases to Agent Orange List MOAA, February 7, 2020. Seven veterans service organizations (VSOs) have united to call on President Donald Trump to use his executive powers and add four scientifically connected presumptive diseases to the list of veterans' [diseases associated with Agent Orange](#). In a joint letter dated Feb. 10, the VSOs urge the president "to take action and to end the wait, needless suffering and disappointment for an entire generation of veterans." [Read more.](#)

Here's when the 4.1 million newly eligible veterans and caregivers will get access to online commissary benefits MilitaryTimes, January 29, 2020. It will be at least a month before the 4.1 million [newly eligible shoppers](#) — such as all service-connected disabled veterans — will have access to the MyCommissary portal and its benefits, officials said. [Read more.](#)

Eight ways to avoid fraud, Veterans Benefits Newsletter, February, 2020. Over the past four years, there has been a 4x increase in fraudulent activity against Veterans, their survivors, and dependents. VA is actively working to prevent these incidents, but the best line of defense against this criminal activity is you! [Read more.](#)

Don't Be Scammed — Part 1: Be Alert MOAA, January 29, 2020, I've been developing a presentation lately about frauds and scams. The reach of these crooks is so pervasive it's impossible to write about any specific threats. Everything is a threat. Here are some universal lessons to stay alert. [Read more.](#)

Don't Be Scammed — Part 2: You're the Victim, If the crooks get you, what do you do? Report the incident immediately to get records established indicating a crime was committed. Time is critical to get ahead of the crooks. In cases of suspected identity theft, report it to the police. Not that anything can be done to fix the problem, but it starts a record of the incident. This will come in handy down the line when it becomes difficult to distinguish between you and the scammers. [Read more.](#)

Don't Be Scammed — Part 3: Prevention MOAA, February 10, 2020. Given the cyber world we live in, expect that your personal information has been stolen many times. You are lucky if you haven't had several incidents already. What do you do to protect yourself? [Read more.](#)

After One Month, Newly Eligible Veterans Still Having Problems with Base Access Military.com, Week of February 10, 2020, One month after all disabled veterans were given commissary and exchange privileges, many are still running into base access issues. The Department of Veterans Affairs said it is working with the Defense Department to make base access easier for all newly eligible veterans. It was supposed to be simple. [Read more.](#)

United States Census Bureau, *Ed Sends* - In mid-March, all households in the United States, including those of service members, veterans and their families living in the United States, will receive an invitation to respond to the 2020 Census. For the first time, people can respond to the census online, by phone, or by mail. The online option could be particularly popular with enlisted active duty military members, more than half of whom are younger than 25 years old, according to Department of Defense (DOD) data from 2017. The Census Bureau has clear guidance to help active duty military and veterans understand [how to respond](#) to the 2020 Census based on where they are on April 1, 2020. [Read more.](#)

Sorting out Retired Pay, VA Compensation, and Tax Issues MOAA, February 7, 2020. The combination of service retired pay and VA disability pay causes some tax confusion. The tax rules for tax-free service retired pay are specific and limited. If you have taxable income reported to the IRS on a 1099R by your pay agency, it's taxable. The simple receipt of VA disability compensation does not allow you to declare your service retired pay tax-free. Service retired pay based on age or length of service is taxable and must be included in your taxable income. Receiving VA disability compensation does not change this fact. Any payments or benefits administered by the VA are tax-free and not included in your income. This is why you do not receive a 1099 tax form for VA payments and benefits, as these are not reported to the IRS. [Read more.](#)

How to Connect a Veteran or Survivor With Online Resources MOAA, February 19, 2020, I frequently speak with MOAA members who write or call in with questions for a veteran or survivor friend with limited or no computer resources and/or skills. Many are intimidated by the volume of information available online, or afraid they are going to be scammed or hacked. Others tell me that the VA's [updated "veteran friendly" website](#) is difficult to navigate for someone with limited online experience. If you know a veteran/survivor under these circumstances, here are some simple steps you can take to assist them to get information or to attain their VA benefits. [Read more.](#)

President Trump Signs Law to Help Veterans Find Jobs in Science and Tech Military.com, Week of February 17, 2020, A new law, signed by President Donald Trump this month, will make veterans eligible to participate in certain programs from the National Science Foundation, a move designed to introduce more vets to jobs in science and technology. The law, known as the Supporting Veterans in STEM Careers Act, extends to veterans specific NSF scholarship and fellowship programs and different kinds of grants. [Read more.](#)

Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one?

Did you know that VA offers same day services in Primary Care and Mental Health at 172 VA Medical Centers across the country? [Make the Connection Resource Locator](#)

Contact the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) (1-800-273-8255) and press 1, [Chat](#), or Text 838255.)