

*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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**From your Veteran Staff**, regardless of your religious affiliation, we hope you have a wonderful holiday season. As you enjoy your family and friends, please remember those men and women of the military who will not be home this season. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers for a safe return. We are honored to have served you in 2019 and look forward to a prosperous and memorable 2020. *Ed and Cathy*

**Heels and Holsters – Ed Sends** – Again I am overwhelmed at the generosity of the residents of Seminole County. A special thank you to Heels and Holsters. In November they provided 15 Thanksgiving baskets for the Veterans of Seminole County, in need; it was packed with everything they needed for a delicious Thanksgiving dinner, including a full turkey. In December they provided this office with 25 baskets to be given to Veterans, in need. Those that know me know that I am not normally a loss for words, but today I am. One of the Veterans wrote a thank you card which expresses the smiles and gratefulness of those who received a basket, "After being completely beaten down, it's a blessing to see the kindness of others and their willingness to help those in need. God bless and please share my sentiments with the rest of 'the angles'." Thank you Heels and Holsters, this Holiday Season, you have made a difference. For more about Heals and Holsters, look for them on Facebook.

**VA Offers Tips on Coping with PTSD During Holiday Season** Military.com, Week of December 09, 2019. The holidays are a time for coming together with family and friends, but they can also bring on added stress for veterans dealing with PTSD, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. There can often be that person at holiday gatherings who just has to ask awkward questions of the veteran with post-traumatic stress, the VA said in a list of tips on its VAntage Point blog. [Read more.](#)

**Seminole County December Veteran of the Month - Ed sends** - On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Chief Petty Officer Dennis Latta, was named the Seminole County December Veteran of the Month. He entered the U.S Navy in 1973 and was honorably discharged in 1976, he later spent four years in the U.S. Navy reserve and ultimately retired 16 years later from the U.S. Coast Guard as a Chief Petty Officer, after spending over 24 years active and reserve.

Chief Petty Officer Latta has a storied life and career, for three years he was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Papua, New Guinea; for seven years he lived on a sail boat; during his reserve time, he worked five years for the VA Regional Office in St. Petersburg and the VA Out Patient Clinic in Fort Myers; moving to Seminole County 27 years ago, he became the Central Florida - Florida Department of Veterans Supervisor, overseeing 13 Florida Department of Veterans Affairs personnel and will retire in December 2019. It is estimated that over the 27 years of service to Veterans, he touched the lives of over 70,000 Veterans, survivors and dependents.

Chief Petty Officer Latta's military awards and decorations include the National Defense Service Medal, the Coast Guard Reserve Good Conduct Medal with 4 clusters, Coast Guard Special Operations Service Ribbon, the Navy Sea Service Deployment Ribbon x 2, the Coast Guard Recruiting Ribbon, the Coast Guard Unit Commendation Ribbon,

the Coast Guard Presidential Unit Citation with Hurricane Device, a Coast Guard Letter of Commendation Award x 2; in his civilian life he was the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs Employee of the year, and two times the Field Services Supervisor of the year. Chief Petty Officer Dennis Latta, we honor you.

**UCF RESTORES looking for volunteers in a PTSD study** - *Ed sends* - UCF is currently recruiting male veterans and male civilians for a computer attention study that aims to help develop more accurate ways of assessing for PTSD. Depending on the study and time spent participating (less than 1 hour or 3 hours), participants may be eligible to receive a gift card for \$10 or \$75. Interested participants can call the UCF RESTORES graduate researchers at (407) 823-1669, or email Krystal Morrison at [krystal.morrison@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:krystal.morrison@knights.ucf.edu)

**Orlando VA medical Center will be closed December 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>** – *Ed Sends* - President Trump signed an Executive Order declaring December 24, 2019 a federal holiday. On December 24, the Orlando VA Healthcare System will be closed for outpatient appointments. The emergency department at the Orlando VA Medical Center in Lake Nona is open 24 hours/seven days a week for Veterans seeking emergency care. Veterans who receive care at any of the Orlando VA Healthcare System sites of care can call the VISN 8 Clinical Contact Center (1-877-741-3400) 24 hours a day on December 24 and December 25 to have their health questions or concerns answered. Nurse triage and pharmacy consultation will remain available 24 hours each day and medical providers will be available on December 24 from 7:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and on December 25 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. The Orlando VA Healthcare System will resume normal operations on Thursday, December 26. Veterans may also visit <https://vaurgentcarelocator.triwest.com/> for a list of Urgent Care locations and guidelines.

**MOAA Asks Congress to Support Coast Guard Authorization Act**, MOAA November 15, 2019, MOAA addressed a letter of support to House and Senate leadership on Nov. 21 for [S. 2297, the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2019](#). The bill, which passed the Senate's Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, authorizes appropriations for the Coast Guard through fiscal year 2021. Section 221 of the legislation contains a provision protecting Coast Guard service members' pay in the event of a lapse in appropriations or shutdown. In addition to compensation for active duty members, the language covers basic housing allowance (BAH), funding for the reserve component, and authorized travel for funerals. The bill also ensures retired members and their families receive uninterrupted retirement pay, survivor benefits, combat-related disability pay ([CRSC](#)), VA compensation for disability ([CRDP](#)), and medical care. [Read more.](#)

**Tricare Costs Changing in 2020** Military.com, 2 Dec 2019, with a new year on the horizon, Tricare enrollment fees and copays will be changing in 2020. By law Tricare fees go up slightly every year. For retirees the cost bump is tied to the annual cost of living increase (COLA), while other fee increases are set ahead of time by Congress.

While the changes are small, the costs do go up for many Tricare recipients. [Read more.](#)

### **Here's When You Can Get Your Military, Retiree, or Annuitant Tax**

**Statement**, MOAA December 9, 2019, Retirees and annuitants who receive payments via the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) will be able to access tax forms via the [myPay](#) online portal later this month, DFAS announced Dec. 5. DFAS users can request a tax statement be mailed to their home address [via the DFAS website](#). Here are the scheduled myPay release dates for late 2019 and early 2020: **Dec. 19:** Retiree 1099-R, **Dec. 21:** Annuitant 1099-R. [Read more.](#)

### **Congress Has Released Its \$738 Billion Defense Budget. Here's What's**

**Inside** Military.com, 9 Dec 2019, House and Senate negotiators have reached a deal on a defense policy bill aimed at avoiding a government shutdown, creating a [Space Force](#), and getting rid of the so-called "widow's tax" that has been a main goal of military families for years. [Read more.](#)

**Here's What's In, What's Out of the Finalized Defense Bill** MOAA, December 11, 2019, After months of deliberations between House and Senate lawmakers, Congress unveiled its conference report of the FY 2020 defense authorization bill Dec. 10. The \$738 billion defense bill authorizes everything from pay and benefits for service members and families to the size of the force. [Read more.](#)

**DFAS Newsletter**, December 19, 2019, The December 2019 Retiree Newsletter is now available online. It contains helpful information about convenient options for getting your tax documents, tools to make filling out required forms faster and easier, the SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination, what to expect in the year-end mailing, 2020 COLA, Annuitant CEI change, and who to contact for pay and benefit questions, as well as news about TRICARE, Army Emergency Relief and the Armed Forces Retirement Homes. We also have a downloadable PDF version of the newsletter you can share with friends. [Retiree Newsletter](#)

**VA launches Solid Start to ensure Veterans are contacted during initial transition**, Press Release, Dec. 2, 2019 (WASHINGTON) — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in collaboration with the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security, introduced VA Solid Start which will proactively contact all newly separated service members at least three times during their first year of transition from the military.

The program will engage contact with approximately 200,000 Veterans each year and is part of Executive Order 13822 which was issued to improve mental health care and access to suicide prevention resources available to transitioning uniformed service members in the year following discharge, separation or retirement. "The stress of transition from service can lead to challenges or unmet health care needs for Veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Through VA Solid Start, the department will ensure consistent, caring contact and help new Veterans get a solid start on their civilian lives."

The goal is to establish a strong relationship between VA and transitioning service members, promoting awareness of VA benefits, services and partner resources available to them. *Veterans within their first year of separation from uniformed service experience suicide rates nearly two times higher than the overall Veteran suicide rate. Contacts through VA Solid Start — via phone calls or emails — will ensure transitioning service members are aware of the free VA mental health resources the department offers Veterans for up to a year, regardless of discharge status or service history.* [Read more.](#)

**[#VetResources](#) - for Veterans, their Families, Caregivers, and Survivors, Ed Sends** - The National Resource Directory is a searchable database of resources vetted for the use of service members, veterans, family members and caregivers. It is a free DoD/DoL/VA service that links more than 14,000 resources for services that support recovery, rehabilitation, and community reintegration. [Read more.](#)

**MOAA, Other Groups Ask VA to Expand List of Diseases Linked to Agent Orange Exposure** MOAA, November 15, 2019, MOAA is among 20 veteran and military service organizations asking the VA to add four diseases to the Agent Orange presumption list in an effort to help thousands of affected veterans receive benefits. In a Nov. 15 letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, leaders of the groups requested the immediate addition of hypertension, bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinson's-like symptoms to the list. Each of the diseases has been linked to exposure to Agent Orange by researchers from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. [Read more.](#)

**This is the 2020 Veteran Disability Pay Raise** Military.com, Week of December 02, 2019, standing by for that annual cost-of-living increase for your Department of Veterans Affairs disability pay? Wait no more. Officials have just announced exactly how much disabled veterans can expect those monthly disability payments to go up in 2020. Disability compensation rates are going up 1.6% for 2020. So what does that mean for you? [Read more.](#)

**Veterans Can Now Learn about Their Toxic Exposure Risks with New VA App** Military.com, Week of December 02, 2019, for veterans who think they were exposed to toxic substances during their service, the Department of Veterans Affairs has a mobile application that will help them answer questions about what this potential exposure means for their long-term health. Originally designed for VA providers, Exposure Ed now let's anyone view a list of service-related exposures -- broken down by type, conflict and date or location of service. [Read more.](#)

**5 Things You Need to Know About the Widows Tax Repeal Included in the NDAA** MOAA, December 11, 2019, The finish line in the fight to repeal the "widows tax" is [within sight](#), and while there are still critical hurdles to clear, the final product of this extensive effort on behalf of military survivors is taking shape. Here is what's known about the plan outlined in the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to end the [Survivor Benefit Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset](#). Visit [MOAA.org](#) or follow [MOAA's social media platforms](#) for updates; the House agreed

to the conference report by a vote of 377-48 on Dec. 11, with Senate action expected soon. [Read more.](#)

**'We Did It': Military Widows, Supporters Celebrate After Senate NDAA Vote** MOAA, December 19, 2019, Military widows hugged and shared thumbs-up gestures as they embraced each other, celebrating a surreal moment nearly two decades in the making. Just hours after the Senate approved the FY 20 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on Dec. 17, military widows gathered in Washington, D.C., to mark the expected repeal of the "[widows' tax](#)" with federal lawmakers and representatives of veterans service organizations. Efforts to repeal the Survivor Benefit Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset, commonly called the widows tax, had been rejected at various points in the legislative process at least a dozen times, so widows were used to disappointing news. MOAA has been engaged with this offset since the inception of the Survivor Benefit Plan in 1972 – picking up support along the way and making incremental gains while Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) continued to support legislation for total repeal since his arrival in Congress in 2001. [Read more.](#)

**Veterans Can Attend Their VA Claims Hearings at Home Starting Next Year** Military.com, Week of December 16, 2019, Veterans who appeal a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) decision on their benefits claim will soon be able to make their appearance before the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) from the comfort of their home. Beginning in 2020, VA will implement virtual claims appeals through the same technology they use for virtual medical appointments. The technology has been tested more than 150 times and works on both computers and cellphones. [Read more.](#)

**VA MISSION Act: Answers to questions about VA's urgent care benefit,** VAantage Point, December 1, 2019, Have a sore throat, earache, or strained muscle? Then consider contacting your VA facility or using the community [urgent care benefit](#) available to eligible Veterans under the MISSION Act. VA facilities across the country offer same-day primary care and mental health services, and many offer additional services as well. With the new community urgent care benefit, eligible Veterans can also visit a local walk-in retail health clinic or urgent care center that is part of VA's contracted network. Urgent care providers treat non-emergent symptoms or conditions such as ear infections, minor burns, and mild skin infections. [Read more.](#)

**Design Approved for Gulf War Memorial on National Mall,** Military.com, 2 Dec 2019, the effort to build a National Desert Storm Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., passed a significant milestone last week with formal approval of a design concept granted by the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts. Now, the plan is to have the memorial dedicated by [Veterans Day](#) 2021, which would mark the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Gulf War, said Scott Stump, CEO and president of the National Desert Storm War Memorial Association. The design will be unveiled this week. [Read more.](#)

**6 TRICARE Resources You Might Not Know About** MOAA, December 2, 2019, TRICARE Open Season continues through Dec. 9, and while MOAA has [many, many](#) resources that can help you make informed decisions about your

plans, there's always more material out there. If you're in the market for a new plan, or if you're just looking for more guidance on how to use your existing coverage, consider these links as you go about your Open Season prep. [Read more.](#)

**K9s for Warriors provides service dogs for Post-9/11 Veterans**, VAantage Point, November 6, 2019, K9s for Warriors is a non-profit organization that provides trained service dogs for Veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and/or military sexual trauma related to their service. The group helps to end Veteran suicide and to restore dignity and independence to those who have served in the military. K9s for Warriors matches Veterans with a service dog and guides them through three weeks of training with their new dog free of charge. Service dogs are scientifically proven to lower symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and social isolation while increasing life satisfaction and overall psychological well-being. [Read more.](#)

**Congress Overrides Pentagon on GI Bill Transfer Rules** Military.com, 16 Dec 2019, a paragraph hidden deep inside the pending National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) eliminates the Pentagon's ability to cap which troops can transfer the [Post-9/11 GI Bill](#). Currently, service members are only eligible to [transfer GI Bill benefits to their dependents](#) when they reenlist (or obligate) for at least another four years. Restrictions on who can transfer their GI Bill benefits to their dependents limited members to: [Read more.](#)

**Newsletter from your local Seminole County Veterans' Services Office Staff**

**Thank you for your service to our Country!**

***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.).