



# VETERANS CONNECTIONS

News from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs ★ Volume 6, Issue 4 ★ April 2026



## ★ Message from IDVA Director Terry Prince

The IDVA Field Services team was out in full force this month at events across the state including a comprehensive USDVA Resource fair held in Chicago. Special shout out to the Metro Region Supervisor, Robert Iverson, who worked behind the scenes with the VA and the University of Chicago who hosted this important event. Hundreds of veterans were served, and we look forward to the next event!

Additionally, IDVA VSOs and field support staff set aside their daily duties for their annual training. They learned about new benefits, brainstormed best business practices, received updates from central office, and heard from external partners. This training is important to ensure our VSOs are better equipped than ever.

Hiring at IDVA is a priority, and we continue to aggressively recruit, hire, and train. The process begins with recruiting, and our team pulled out all the stops to coordinate and execute a career fair where nearly 200 people learned about careers with the State. This is another example of IDVA creating opportunity in the community. You won't find our recruiting team at their desks too often, because they are eager to bring the best talent to IDVA to serve veterans.

May prepares us for summer, where opportunities to be in the community are endless. Memorial Day, along with Veterans Day, is the most important day of the year for IDVA. We will be honoring those who have sacrificed their lives for our nation. It is also the launch of a summer of fairs, parades, and events, where IDVA will be present for veterans.

Sincerely,

**Terry Prince**, Director and U.S. Navy Veteran

# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Resource Fair

IDVA, Boeing, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a day-long veteran resource fair featuring federal and state claims services, physical and disability exams, and presentations. IDVA Veteran Service Officers were out in full force. The VSOs met with hundreds of veterans to assist them with claims. Metro Region Supervisor Robert Iverson III coordinated the operation, and the results were outstanding. It was a classic IDVA team effort. If you are seeking support from a Veteran Service Officer, please find one near you here: <https://veterans.illinois.gov/serviceoffices/vso-locator-countylist.html>



*Veteran Service Officers Cynthia McKee and Tanya Reyes assist veterans as part of IDVA's claims operation.*



*Director Prince, with Veteran Service Officer Michele Richards, who kept the system running smoothly.*

# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

The Will County Veteran Assistance Commission hosted the ribbon-cutting ceremony to open the Veteran Assistance and Support Center at 1300 Copperfield Road in Joliet. It is a one-stop shop located in a newly renovated county building alongside the Workforce Center of Will County.



Director Terry Prince, State Representative Stephanie Kifowit, Veteran Service Officer Shynae Murphy, Will County VAC Superintendent Jennifer Solum, and Northern Region Supervisor Robert Iverson III.

# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ IDVA is Hiring

Hundreds of jobseekers attended the first statewide career fair hosted in Chicago by IDVA, CMS, and the Malcolm X Career & Workforce Development Department. Recruitment Specialist Candice Rudd planned the fair to connect job seekers to various agencies and resources under one roof. Twenty state agencies were on the Malcolm X College campus to showcase the wide range of jobs available across the state, from serving veterans, maintaining infrastructure, protecting communities, preserving open spaces, and more. Resume assistance, career counseling, veteran outreach, and disability services were offered. Online job searches can be challenging and impersonal. Career fairs enhance the process through one-on-one conversations, advice, and human connection. The exchanges in the room were robust, and many job-seekers left with a renewed sense of possibility. If you are interested in a job with IDVA, [please visit here](#).

Also, learn about applying for state jobs and interview tips at one of IDVA's virtual job fairs offered throughout May.



Malcolm X College Executive Director of Career and Workforce Development Darwin Pettis, IDVA Recruiter and HR Specialist Ann Holladay, IDVA Assistant Director Anthony Vaughn, and IDVA Recruiter and HR Specialist Candice Rudd.

| ★ Serve those who served ★                                                                 |                |                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Join IDVA for a series of virtual job fairs to learn more about becoming part of Team IDVA |                |                                                                                                                                             |
| Date                                                                                       | Time           | Event Registration                                                                                                                          |
| 5/1/2026                                                                                   | 9:00-9:45 AM   | IDVA Extraordinary Employees                            |
| 5/4/2026                                                                                   | 12:00-12:45 PM | Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward...  |
| 5/7/2026                                                                                   | 2:00-2:45 PM   | How to read a Job Bulletin                             |
| 5/12/2026                                                                                  | 5:30-6:15 PM   | Interview Tips and Tricks                              |
| 5/13/2026                                                                                  | 10:00-10:45 AM | How to Certify Your Veterans Points                    |
| 5/15/2026                                                                                  | 2:30-3:15pm    | IDVA Extraordinary Employees                           |
| 5/18/2026                                                                                  | 5:30-6:15 PM   | Creating a Profile, Putting Your Best Foot Forward...  |
| 5/20/2026                                                                                  | 2:30-3:15pm    | How to read a Job Bulletin                             |
| 5/21/2026                                                                                  | 12:00-12:45 PM | Interview Tips and Tricks                              |
| 5/27/2026                                                                                  | 2:00-2:45 PM   | How to Certify Your Veterans Points                    |



# Illinois Veterans Advisory Council

The Illinois Veterans Advisory Council (IVAC) was established in 2004 to provide perspective, counsel, and new ideas to IDVA. The committee meets quarterly with IDVA to receive an update from Director Prince and other members of the executive leadership team and to discuss veterans' concerns and challenges. It comprises members of the General Assembly, External Agency appointees, IDVA Director appointees, and veteran service organizations. The committee is currently led by Chairman Robert Tyler, Chairman of MOAA, and Vice-Chair Shannon Yount, Office of the Attorney General.

If you are interested in participating in the committee, reach out to Legislative Director Alexa Koziol: [alexa.koziol@illinois.gov](mailto:alexa.koziol@illinois.gov).

Each year, the committee submits a report to the General Assembly. The 2026 report can be [read here](#).



## Women Veterans



### Margo Watson

**Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs Women Veterans Coordinator, Master Sergeant (USAR)t**

I am a Master Sergeant with 28 years of service in the United States Army Reserve, and my career is rooted in service and resilience. I began my military service as a Combat Medic and currently serve as a Personnel Specialist.

Following the September 11 attacks, I was mobilized to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, and Fort Knox, Kentucky, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Through every challenge, I learned that adversity does not break leaders—it builds them. These lessons have guided my leadership journey. My growth as a leader was forged through discomfort, teaching me to lead with integrity and rise when it matters most.

Today, I serve as the Women Veterans Coordinator for the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, Women Veterans Program. In this role, I am building a women veterans program anchored in four core pillars: Community, Equity, Recognition, and Empowerment. I advocate for women veterans whose strength is often unrecognized, yet undeniably powerful.

Women Veterans Coordinator Margo Watson was featured in the March edition of Healing Circle Network Magazine, an international publication, which recognized Women Veterans Month. In introducing the edition, the editor said, *"In this special issue, Margo Watson, Women Veterans Coordinator, is featured for her service and inspiring journey as a woman veteran. Her story reflects the courage and dedication shared by so many women who have worn the uniform. Stories like Margo's have the power to inspire, uplift, and connect women around the world—reminding them of their strength, their victories, and the importance of their voices."*



Margo Watson, Women Veterans Coordinator, and Cynthia McKee, Veteran Service Officer, attended the "Vets to Valor" event in honor of Women's History Month, presented by Nekohl Johnson.

This "Table Talk & Tea" gathering featured a panel of women veterans who shared their personal stories, reflecting on themes of leadership, healing, resilience, faith, identity, and service.



Shoshana Johnson, the first Black female prisoner of war in United States history, delivered the keynote address at the National Women Veterans United 21st Anniversary and Women’s History Month Tribute. A decorated veteran and bestselling author, Ms. Johnson wrote the memoir *I’m Still Standing: From Captured Soldier to Free Citizen – My Journey Home*. Her story is a powerful testament to resilience, recovery, and an unbreakable spirit of service, continuing to inspire and resonate with generations of veterans.



**Register at The Military Women’s Memorial to collect and preserve our history**

The Military Women’s Memorial honors the commitment, contributions, and experiences of Servicewomen.

Servicewomen, past and present, are invited to share their stories in the Memorial’s registry to archive their contributions.



Women Service Members, Veterans, and Reserve/National Guard, join the 2026 Military Women’s Memorial’s #StriveFor500 campaign, challenging every state and territory to register at least 500 military women to preserve their powerful stories in the National Digital Repository.

In 2025, Illinois surpassed its goal and registered 533 women veterans, making Illinois a Gold Status state.

Our 2026 campaign is underway. Our goal? Gold Status for the second year in a row, and for more women veterans to tell their own stories.

Join us. Step up. Be counted



It only takes a few minutes to register yourself at [www.womensmemorial.org](http://www.womensmemorial.org)  
Every zip code. Every rank.  
Every era—from the Revolutionary War to present day.



Candice Rudd, Recruitment Coordinator, welcomes job seekers to the IDVA table at the resource fair at the 25 Illinois Women Veterans Leaders of 2026 event at Malcolm X College.

# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Volunteer Week: April 19-25

Volunteers at the IDVA Veterans' Homes say the work does not require special skills, only a willingness to show up, listen, and spend time with residents.

At the Veterans' Home at LaSalle, Martha Harden of the Ottawa American Legion Auxiliary helps with bingo, Memorial Day poppy-making, and small comfort items such as neck pillows and treat bags. "They love it. It's their favorite activity," she said regarding bingo, which draws about 40 to 45 residents. Martha said volunteers can help by reading, taking residents outside, or simply talking with those who do not have family nearby. "Just call and ask," she said.

In Quincy, Cathy Shanks volunteers in the garden at the Veterans' Home at Quincy, where she said the setting gives residents a place to gather and connect. "There was such communication with no communication," she said, recalling a resident who had suffered a stroke and could no longer speak. Cathy said the laughter and conversation she hears there make the effort worthwhile. "Just hearing their joy is more than enough," she said.

In Chicago, Brian Supancic and his wife, Sandra, have spent years bringing food, gifts, and companionship to residents at the Veterans' Home at Chicago. Brian said the work is a way to give back. "You never got here without help from somewhere, somehow, whatever," he said. "It's kind of good to pay back."

The opportunities for volunteers are endless: gardening, woodworking, transportation, fishing, companionship, and much more. Across the homes, the message from volunteers is the same: small acts of service can make a big difference for veterans who deserve to be remembered. Sandra said the most meaningful part is consistency, "Once they've seen that you keep coming back, it's a whole different ball game."

To learn more about volunteering and apply, [please visit here](#).



*Veterans' Home at LaSalle: Left to right: Resident- Charles Ortman. Volunteer- Martha Harden, Resident- Richard Rivara.*



*Veterans' Home at Quincy: U.S. Army Veteran Rich Fisher and Volunteer Cathy Shanks.*

# ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Purple Up Day

April is the Month of the Military Child, where we thank military children for their sacrifice, resilience, and service. Children support their parents through time away from one another, moves around the globe, and are concerned for the safety of their mom or dad. IDVA honored them by wearing purple to support and uplift military children. A big thank you to our team for purpling up!



*Veterans' Home at Anna*



*Springfield Central Office*



*Veterans' Home at Quincy: Administration Left to right: Jessica Williams, Kim Niekamp, Steve Stewart, Tracy Alexander, Carla Trautvetter, Devyn Winters, Tracy Brown, Lisa Schnelle, Hannah Ajdinovich, Tina Powell, Danell Tullock, Andrew Juette, Tim Kane (partially hidden in back), Chuck Newton, and Valerie Peterson.*



*Springfield Central Fiscal Office*



*Veterans' Home at Quincy: Hammond Hall left to right: Whittany Flambeau, Rheagan DeVerger, and Peggy Johnston*



*Veterans' Home at Quincy: Fifer residents & staff gathered to show off their purple on Purple Up Day. Left to Right Billy McGahan (front, seated), Dana Herring, Kelsey Terwelp, Janet Llewellyn, Melissa Hickman, Jill Stump, Jim Muldoon, Scott Alberts (back), Greg Flachs, Angie Strang, Madeline Patterson, Vallerie Horschler (seated), Ken Kestner*

## ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Purple Up Day



Veterans' Home at Manteno: Front Row: left to right: Jillian McLain, Tanya Smith, MeLinda Marrs, and Mary Graves  
Back Row: left to right: Brenda Colclasure, Becky Wilder, Tamara Lippelt, Michelle Landsmann, Trisha Meherg, Rhonda Boudreau, JuTun Andrews-King, and Rose Ann Winkel.

## ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Quilts of Valor



Left to right: Deb Sherrock from Quilts of Valor, Air Force veteran Albert Bruno, and his daughter Judy Sheehan.

Veterans' Home at Chicago resident and Air Force veteran Albert Bruno is wrapped up in his Quilt of Valor delivered by VFW Post 3579. Quilts of Valor have been crafted since 2003, when Catherine Robert imagined how she could bring hope and healing to veterans. Her dream is Quilts=Healing. Today, thousands of volunteers, following strict quilting guidelines, create quilts and award them to veterans to say, **"Thank you for your service, sacrifice, and valor in serving our nation."**



# Executive Leadership Quarterly Meeting

The IDVA Executive Leadership team, which oversees Audits, Communications, Equal Employment, Field Services, Fiscal, Human Resources, Labor Relations, Legal, Legislative Affairs, Operations, Policies, Programs, Procurement, State Approving Agency, Women Veterans Program, and the five Veterans' Homes, meets for a two-day quarterly meeting to brainstorm how to serve veterans at the highest level. It's an important time to meet in person for a staff that is located across the state. The April off-site meeting was held at the Veterans' Home at Anna, where the team enjoyed fishing with residents of the home.



*Executive Leadership Team: The Department of Children and Family Services offered its Marion location to the Executive Leadership Committee for its final day of off-site meetings.*



*U.S. Army Veteran Riley Stockton with U.S. Marine Corps Veteran and IDVA Labor Relations Director Shannon Clay.*



*U.S. Army Veteran Ed Charles and his son, Dave, show off their catch with Senior Policy Advisor Hannah Bonecutter.*



*U.S. Army Veteran Ed Charles and his son Dave Charles.*



*U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Robert Belcher and his wife, Sherry.*



# Do you have a Compliment, Recommendation, Question, or Complaint?

## Illinois Veterans Accountability Unit (VAU)

### Let us Know!

If you are an Illinois veteran or other Illinois resident who seeks services from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA); a resident of any Illinois Veterans' Home, a family member of a resident, a visitor of any Illinois Veterans' Home; a vendor and/or contractor of the IDVA; or staff of the IDVA, we want to hear from you.

This office welcomes feedback about the services being provided to the veterans of Illinois. If you received exceptional service or have concerns involving any member of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, please let us know.

Email us at

**[IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov](mailto:IDVA.accountability@illinois.gov)**

or Call our Toll-Free Helpline

**1-855-660-7011**

More information about the VAU can be found on the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs website

**<https://veterans.illinois.gov/>**

The VAU maintains the confidentiality of investigations, complainants, and witnesses to the maximum extent allowable, but must disclose complaints to the Office of the Executive Inspector General (OEIG).

You can obtain more information about the OEIG or file a complaint with the OEIG directly through its website at <https://oeig.illinois.gov/>.

Our mission at the IDVA is very simple. To serve those who have served. In doing so, we serve not only the men and women who have worn the uniform, but also their families. It is our privilege to be able to help our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to our nation. Our goal is to empower our veterans and their families to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We know there are many veterans within our great state who do not require any assistance – but we still want to encourage you to “Stand Up and Be Counted!” by registering with your local VSO. In doing so, you’re helping IDVA to do a better job of planning for services, seeking federal funding and understanding the needs of our veteran communities statewide. [Click here to register.](#)

**We thank you for your service and for your sacrifice and we at the IDVA look forward to offering our services to you.**

**IDVA** ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS

★ Follow us

