



# VETERANS NEWS AND VIEWS

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## Stars and Stripes Honor Flight Continues 2009 Flight Schedule

The Stars and Stripes Honor Flight Program has completed one flight and is still intending to fly 2 more times in 2009..

The dates of the flights are as follows:

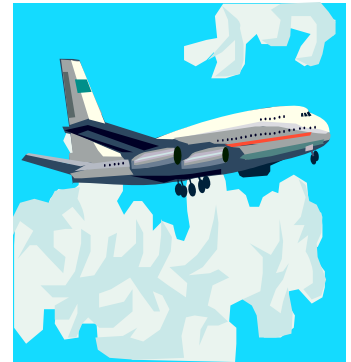
June 27 and September 26, 2009.

The Honor Flight Program seeks to honor the service of any WWII veteran, as well as any terminally ill veterans by providing a one day trip to Washington D.C. to visit their memorials. This, at NO COST to the veteran.

As of this writing, there are approximately 650 veterans on the “waiting” list for flights.

Fundraising continues in an effort to clear this waiting list and accommodate as many veterans as possible. WWII veterans are dying at the rate of nearly 900 per day, nationwide, so there is a sense of urgency in the efforts of the program.

**NOTE :** We need volunteers to come to the home-coming events for these returning veterans!!



**We invite any and all to come join us at Mitchell Field the night of June 27. The flight is scheduled to land at about 9:30 P.M.**

## WDVA Budget Battle Continues

The “back-and-forth” continues in Madison regarding the entire State budget.

The Joint Committee on Finance has completed their initial “look” at the WDVA budget, and made, what first appeared to be some positive changes. Unfortunately, they didn’t carry through with all that needed to be done.

We still need everyone to be talking to the State Legislators to push for alter-

nate sources of funding to prop up the Veterans Trust Fund, otherwise, WDVA may as well close their doors, as we will not have any “real” benefits in place.

Having something on paper is nice, but without funding, it may as well not exist.

## VA SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE

WASHINGTON – To ensure veterans with emotional crises have round-the-clock access to trained professionals, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun operation of a national suicide prevention hot line for veterans.

“Veterans need to know these VA professionals are literally a phone call away,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. “All service members who experience the stresses of combat can have wounds on their minds as well as their bodies. Veterans should see mental health services as another benefit they have earned, which the men and women of VA are honored to provide.”

The toll-free hot line number is 1-800-273-TALK (8255). VA’s hot line will be staffed by mental health professionals in Canandaigua, N.Y. They will take toll-free calls from across the country and work closely with local VA mental health providers to help callers.

To operate the national hot line, VA is partnering with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

“The hot line will put veterans in touch – any time of the day or night, any day of the week, from anywhere in the country – with trained, caring professionals who can help,” added Nicholson. “This is another example of the VA’s commitment to provide world-class health care for our nation’s veterans, especially combat veterans newly returned from Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The suicide hot line is among several enhancements to mental health care that Nicholson has announced this year. In mid July, the Department’s top mental health professionals convened in the Washington, D.C., area to review the services provided to veterans of the Global War on Terror.

VA is the largest provider of mental health care in the nation. This year, the Department will spent about \$3 billion for mental health. More than 9,000 mental health professionals, backed up by primary care physicians and other health professionals in every VA medical center and outpatient clinic, provide mental health care to about 1 million veterans each year.

## OPERATION FREEDOM MILWAUKEE COUNTY ZOO

Once again this year, Milwaukee County will be hosting the annual Operation Freedom at the Milwaukee County Zoo.

As in years past, you must obtain a wristband in order to enjoy free admission to the zoo.

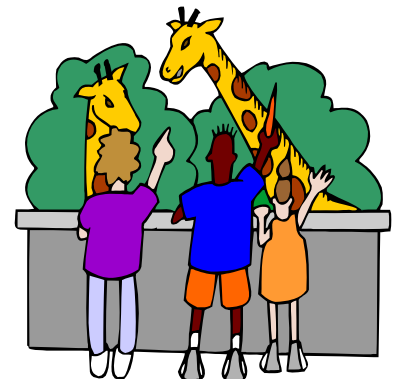
I have the “sign-up” sheets and the wristbands in my office. You are limited to a maximum of four (4) for yourself and your **IMMEDIATE** family.

I can not mail them out to you, nor will I

“reserve” them for anyone. First-come, first-served.

There are a limited number of tickets available, as they have to limit the admissions and limit the number of people they have to feed.

I have attached a copy of their flier for further information.



### Flag Day Foundation to Honor Veterans

The National Flag Day Foundation is soliciting names of veteran who served in the armed forces after 1975.

The Flag Day Foundation intends to honor their service to our country at the annual Flag Day Celebration in Waubeka on June 14, 2009.

Please contact Jack Janik at 692-9111 for further details.



### Many Thanks to the Volunteers !!!

Every year, a dedicated group of your fellow veterans, and their families, as well as groups such as the Boy Scouts, help in getting the flags placed on the graves of our county's departed veterans.

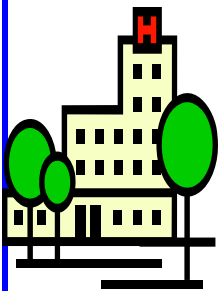
This year was no different. Without their help, my office could never get this huge task completed.

My hats off to all that helped !!

Your work does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.



### VA HEALTHCARE EXPANSION ???



We have heard in recent months that the VA will be expanding its enrollment of former Priority Group 8 veterans in the Healthcare System. (Group 8 are those who's income exceeds the "means test" threshold)

While there has been considerable "chatter", we have not seen any specific proposals.

From our discussions with local VA Officials, they believe that the enrollment will be expanded by raising the means test thresholds, and that will open the system up to approximately 10% more veterans who are currently excluded.

This change is supposed to take effect in June of 2009, but until we see some specifics, I am not holding my breath.

Keep your ears open. I'll give you the specifics, as soon as I have them.

### COME GET YOUR FREE MONEY !!!

It has come to my attention that there are now at least two separate groups who are circulating in our area, who purport to be able to get all veterans and their surviving spouses qualified for VA pensions.

What they are doing is not illegal.

At least one of these groups does use an accredited lawyer (out of Michigan) to insure that they submit the correct paperwork and documentation.

They are however, both trying to sell you something. One of them specializes in family trusts.

These benefits that they offer, are not new, not unique, and like most VA programs, have a whole list of "qualifiers" in order to obtain them.

I do the same thing that they do, and I won't try to sell you anything...



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**Record Budget Enhances VA's Ability to Become a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Organization**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced President Obama's 2010 budget for VA. The budget emphasizes a Veteran-centric commitment to expanded services with a 15.5 percent increase over 2009, the largest percentage increase for VA requested by a president in more than 30 years.

"Our 2010 budget represents the President's vision for how VA will transform into a 21<sup>st</sup> Century organization that is Veteran-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said. "This transformation is demanded by new times, new technologies, new demographic realities, and new commitments to today's Veterans. It requires a comprehensive review of the fundamentals in every line of operation the Department performs. We must be sure that valuable taxpayer dollars are invested in programs that work for our Veterans."

The centerpiece of the \$112.8 billion VA budget proposal is a dramatic increase in Veteran health care funding, with an 11 percent increase over the current year's funding (excluding one-time Recovery Act funds).

"Organizational transformation requires changes in culture, systems, and training," Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs W. Scott Gould said. "This will require resources, but it will also demand commitment and teamwork. The entire Department is dedicated to serving the needs of Veterans, and every VA employee has a stake in transformation to meet those needs."

That transformation is already underway. For instance, the enhanced use of automated tools, coupled with more efficient processes, recent staffing increases, and improved training is expected to reduce the compensation and pension claims processing time to 150 days in 2010, or 16 percent faster compared to 2008, while reducing the pending inventory and improving accuracy. VA anticipates an 8 percent increase in education claims in 2010 compared to this year due largely to the improved education benefits of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act. Nonetheless, VA's goal is to complete all education claims without any increase in average processing days.

"We are making the smart choices today to improve the services that our Veterans receive tomorrow," Secretary Shinseki said.

**A  
PARTING THOUGHT**

The summer is upon us!!!

We all have a thousand plans, and just as many places to be. Or, at least it seems that way.

We all need to take a step back and look at those among us, who have recently returned from serving in our military. Some from places

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