

# Post 90 Gazette



January 2021

Edited by Amy Ostler and Harvey Hefley

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*See full story on page 6*

## VA Adapting to meet women Veterans' needs

This week I was given an incredible statistic: Just 20 years ago, VA served a little more than 150,000 women Veterans. This was before 9/11, an event that prompted so many American men and women to enlist and defend their country.

Today, VA is serving more than 740,000 women Veterans. That's more than four times as many women coming to the VA for the health care and benefits they earned through their service.

*See full story on page 3*

## VA Administers over 55,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses in two weeks

**WASHINGTON** — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that it has administered initial COVID-19 vaccine doses to more than 5,000 Veterans residing in its Community Living Centers and Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders Centers and more than 50,000 health care employees in its first two weeks (Dec. 14-Dec. 27) of providing COVID-19 vaccines.

*See full story on page 5*



## SCAM ALERT: Veterans targeted by fraudsters posing as government officials.

A new scam targeting military veterans and their families emerged recently in Utah.

The Utah Division of Consumer Protection and Department of Veterans and Military Affairs (UDVMA) are raising the alarm to get the word out to veterans and their families.

*See full story on page 6*



## Commander's Column

Marti Bigbie

Thanks to all who were able to join the Pearl Harbor Commemorate on December 7<sup>th</sup> and thanks to Jeffery J McKenna who was there near Lee Warren's flag and resting place with his book "Saving ... Dr. Warren .. "A True Patriot" And those volunteer's that were able to help with the laying of the wreaths for Wreaths Across America at the many cemeteries helping Valorie King DAR and Tony Kuhlmann.

The Christmas Bags were delivered by 7 Legion and Auxiliary members (thanks made my job less stressful this year). A total of 424 Christmas Bags (green bags were donated by Humana) with a few items and Christmas Cards signed by Students from 5 schools. WWII and Korean Pins were given to those American Legion members who served during that time. Some packages included Certifications for PUFL (Paid Up For Life) and continuous membership years. There were 12 packages mailed to Post 90 members that live outside the area. Members of the Ritual Team were given thank you gifts this year.



FOR those members that have not renewed their American Legion membership for 2021 your membership expired on 12-31-2020 but can be reinstated. To pay on line with a credit card go to [legion.org](http://legion.org) and with your membership number you can renew for the 2021 membership year. IF you are not planning on renewing please let me know ASAP so that further notices can be stopped.

STILL in need of chargers for old phones. If you have any I would be happy to stop by and pick up. These are needed for homeless Veterans.

Continue to stay safe, wear masks and remember social distancing when in or at gatherings.

## Commander Department of Utah

Marti Bigbie

Big thanks to all members and Posts that have forward membership dues and to those that went on line for the Department of UTAH to make the goals set by National. Currently 80%+ but still have a lot of members that have not renewed. WE do not want to lose a member from the 2020 membership year UNLESS they have passed or do not want to renew. If not, then let Randy Knight know so their name can be removed from further mailings. Current membership year ends 12-31-2020 but can be reinstated after 1-1-2021.

Continue to record all time spent, miles driven, money spent for the CPR report now to make it easier to remember when the CPR report needs to be submitted.

ALL stay safe, wear masks and remember social distancing when in or at gatherings

## VA Adapting to meet women Veterans' needs



December 9, 2020

This week I was given an incredible statistic: Just 20 years ago, VA served a little more than 150,000 women Veterans. This was before 9/11, an event that prompted so many American men and women to enlist and defend their country.

Today, VA is serving more than 740,000 women Veterans. That's more than four times as many women coming to VA for the health care and benefits they earned through their service.

This dramatic growth is a welcome sign that opportunities are opening up for women in the armed forces more than ever before. It also represents a challenge for VA, which needs to evolve to meet the needs of these women patriots.

The good news is that thanks to your hard work, VA is meeting this challenge by making sure we have the capacity to care for every woman who walks through our doors.

We have at least two women's health care providers at each of our health care facilities who provide gynecology, maternity, specialty care and mental health services for women. We are using our modernized electronic health record to more closely track breast and reproductive care in order to produce better health care outcomes for women. We are also reducing and eliminating gender disparities in areas like chronic disease management and prevention.

As a result, our latest outpatient surveys show that 83.8% of women trust the care they receive at VA. That trust reflects your ongoing commitment to making sure VA serves anyone who served this nation.

There is another kind of trust we need to instill at VA: trust that women will be treated with the respect they have earned. But we are making important progress here as well.

As soon as he took the job in 2018, Secretary Wilkie understood the importance of making sure all our women Veterans feel safe and comfortable here. VA has made it clear that this not a boy's club, and that there is no tolerance for sexual harassment, assault or any other behavior that creates a hostile environment for women.

We have backed up that policy with action that has been supported by VA staff across the country. We have trained staff on our collective responsibility to serve women Veterans, stressed the importance of taking sexual harassment incidents seriously, committed resources aimed at preventing these incidents from happening, and pushed for the thorough investigation of these incidents when they do occur.

In 2019, VA established a Harassment and Assault Policy and Reporting Task Force to strengthen efforts to crack down on assault and harassment, and boost reporting procedures. Many of you participated in 2019's Stand Up to Stop Harassment Now campaign, which encouraged patients, staff, visitors and volunteers to intervene whenever possible and report harassment to supervisors.

This year, I personally oversaw a council of experts within VA to ensure our efforts to keep women Veterans safe were strategically aligned and as strong as possible. VA also launched a database on sexual assault incident reporting that will help VA track and analyze sexual assault and harassment, and give us the information we need to target our efforts to reduce these incidents further.

And our Center for Women Veterans has amplified these messages to Veterans and staff through its "I Am Not Invisible" campaigns, new employee orientation sessions, outreach sessions with minority women Veterans, and more widely on social media.

When someone puts on the uniform, it doesn't matter if they're a man or a woman. What matters is that that person loves this country so much they are compelled to defend it, and that should compel us to do our very best to give them the respect and compassion they have earned when they arrive at VA.

I'm proud to be working with so many at VA who share this goal, and I thank you for getting us closer to it every day.

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*Pamela J. Powers is Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

## **Pearl Harbor Day and the USS Oklahoma Project**

Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Sean Everette / December 7, 2020

Dec. 7 is National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and a time when the U.S. remembers and honors the 2,403 citizens who were killed in the attack.

For the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the focus of Pearl Harbor Day is on the service members who are still unaccounted for from the attack. Over the past five years, the biggest effort to account for those service members has been the USS Oklahoma Project.

In 2003, there were 394 Sailors and Marines unaccounted for from the USS Oklahoma. The first of the USS Oklahoma Unknowns who had been buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu was disinterred that year.

Between 2007 and 2010, six identifications occurred from this disinterment and an additional disinterment of a single Unknown. The project was officially launched in 2015 and the rest of the USS Oklahoma Unknowns were disinterred in the second half of that year. Since 2003, 281 Unknowns have been accounted for.

Earlier this year, the USS Oklahoma Project hit the major milestone of completing the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequencing of the more than 5,000 DNA samples given to the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System's DNA lab for processing.

"This is huge for us because it allows us to complete our analyses of all of the USS Oklahoma remains, and therefore, identify as many service members as possible," said Carrie LeGarde, the USS Oklahoma Project lead. "The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System's DNA testing has been a really critical part, and so the family reference samples have



been the other half of that critical component, because we need to be able to match the DNA to something. We've had pretty good success with getting family reference samples."

Only 25 of the 113 still unaccounted for do not have family DNA reference samples on file. LeGarde said she hopes to be able to get those samples because the project is nearing its conclusion. "Once we reach the point where we've decided we aren't getting anymore family reference samples, we've analyzed all of the bones, and we've identified who we can at this point with the information we have, that will be the end, and that will be sometime in the near future," LeGarde said.

She said the project won't end without identifying as many Unknowns as possible, however. "The recent push for additional family reference samples has allowed us to make identifications that would have otherwise been extremely difficult," said LeGarde.

Those who have a family member unaccounted for from the USS Oklahoma or any of the other ships lost on Dec. 7, 1941, can contact the Navy Casualty Office at 800- 443-9298 to find out if there is a family reference sample on file for their family. If there is not, Navy Casualty can help collect that sample.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for Americans who went missing while serving our country, visit the DPAA website at [www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil), find us on social media at [www.facebook.com/dodpaa](https://www.facebook.com/dodpaa) or call (703) 699-1420/1193.

## TEAM UTAH:

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been looking forward to the development of a safe and effective vaccine. We now have two of them. Eventually, the vaccines will be available to the general public and will help stop deaths from COVID-19.

Many people have questions about vaccines, how they work and when will vaccines become available. You can get answers to those questions at our vaccine webpage at [coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine](https://coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine)

We have worked with the Utah Department of Health on an email education series about the vaccines. An email from the series is below. We will forward you a few of them in the coming weeks.

To receive ongoing messages after we stop forwarding them, please sign up to receive them on your own.

The sign-up form is here: [coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine/#sign-up](https://coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine/#sign-up)

### **Please forward the link to friends, family and stakeholders.**

This will help us keep all of Utah informed with facts. People who sign up will receive a short series of welcome emails with educational information about the COVID-19 vaccine, then will be subscribed to an email newsletter that will be published every 1 to 2 weeks.

There's something critically important to know about the COVID-19 vaccination plan: we need to keep up on healthy behaviors even as the vaccine rolls out. That means you can't toss those masks out just yet.

Over the past several months, you've made extra efforts to follow health guidelines to slow the spread of coronavirus. The sacrifices you've made haven't always been easy or convenient.

Since we've made it this far, we don't want to lose momentum in our fight against COVID-19.

Even as the vaccine becomes more available, we need to stay vigilant to stay safe from COVID-19. Preliminary data shows the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines are safe and effective. They'll help keep you from getting severely ill with COVID-19, but we don't know yet if people who have been vaccinated can get infected and spread the virus to others, even though they won't get sick themselves.

Whether or not you've been vaccinated, please keep practicing safe behaviors that we know reduce the spread of COVID-19, until it's safer.

- **Wear a mask** when you're in close contact (closer than 6 feet) with anyone who doesn't live in your home, especially indoors.
- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Try to **keep at least 6 feet or 2 meters** between you and people who don't live with you, especially indoors.
- **Stay home** if you have symptoms of COVID-19, tested positive and should be isolated, or you're waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
- **Follow [quarantine guidelines](#)** if you're exposed to COVID-19.

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VA began vaccinating Veterans and frontline employees at [37 initial](#) VA medical centers according to its [COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan](#), following the [Food and Drug Administration's Dec. 11 decision](#) to issue an Emergency Use Authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine.

The 37 initial sites to first receive the vaccine were selected based on several factors, including having the capacity to store the vaccine at extremely cold temperatures and the ability to offer high-throughput vaccination. Last week, VA announced it began COVID-19 vaccinations at [128 additional sites](#) using the Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines. Both vaccines require two doses for maximum efficacy.

"I couldn't be happier with the work VA employees are doing in taking this important first step toward the end of the pandemic," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Successfully implementing a plan like this in the nation's largest health care system takes planning, collaboration and teamwork. As vaccines become more widely available, we will continue to implement our plan to offer them to any Veteran or employee who wants one at no cost."

Per recommendations from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, VA will continue to vaccinate health care personnel, as well as community living center and spinal cord unit residents.

VA's ultimate goal is to offer COVID-19 vaccinations to all Veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated. As vaccine supplies increase, VA care teams will reach out to eligible Veterans to schedule vaccinations. There is no need to preregister or come to a facility to sign up.

Veterans can get up-to-date information and sign up to receive updates on VA's [COVID Vaccine webpage](#).

## Scam Alert: Veterans targeted by fraudsters posing as government

A new scam targeting military veterans and their families emerged recently in Utah. The [Utah Division of Consumer Protection](#) and [Department of Veterans and Military Affairs \(UDVMA\)](#) are raising the alarm to get the word out to veterans and their families.

The new scam came to light after a veteran's spouse alerted the Division of Consumer Protection. While it can take a few forms, the essential elements are the same:

- 1) Scammers pose as a government employee.
- 2) Call their target by their name.
- 3) Ask for a donation or offer new benefits to the veteran in exchange for personal and financial information.

But no government agent will ask for a donation to a charity in their official capacity, and veterans benefits are not contingent on providing information over the phone.

If you have questions about your benefits, reach out to UDVMA directly at [veterans@utah.gov](mailto:veterans@utah.gov).

## **This is an Important message concerning recent monthly co-pay suspensions**

On April 6, VA stopped sending monthly copay billing statements. The suspension applied only to Veterans who had copayments for medical care or prescriptions. This will run until Dec. 31, 2020. Unless otherwise directed, VA will resume sending out monthly copay patient statements beginning in January of 2021.

Veterans will receive a patient statement that may include the total amount of any:

- New copay charges for medical care and prescriptions they received from April 6, 2020, through December 31, 2020
- Unpaid copay charges for medical care and prescriptions they received before April 2020

We understand this may impose a financial burden on some of our Veterans, and we're doing everything we can to help. If you can't make your payments when billing starts again, please call us at 866-400-1238 or 844-698-2311 (TTY: 711). We'll help determine your debt relief options.

Learn more about requesting financial hardship assistance

For debt related to VA benefits, please contact the VA Debt Management Center at 800-827-0648 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET Monday through Friday.

**For more information, please visit: <https://www.saltlakecity.va.gov/patients/billing.asp>**