



### The First African-American Veteran Patient

Ever heard of Joshua Williams?

His is an important name in the history of American Veterans.

Joshua Williams was the first African-American Veteran ever admitted to the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, which is now the Dayton, Ohio, VA Medical Center.



Joshua Williams was the first African-American treated for his wounds in what is known today as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Joshua Williams was admitted to the home in March of 1867. He lived out the remainder of his life—three more years—there. The cemetery where Joshua Williams lies is now known as the Dayton National Cemetery.

Abraham Lincoln authorized the creation of National Homes to care

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### Did you know???

**DVOP**—Disabled Veteran Outreach Program - This term is sometimes mis-used in identifying an individual, rather than a program. The DVOP specialist's role is to facilitate intensive services to Veterans with special employment and training needs (barriers to employment). These services include: conduct an assessment; develop and document a plan of action; provide career guidance; coordinate supportive services; establish contacts with local businesses; provide referrals to training and job vacancies; and conduct outreach activities.

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**LVER**—Local Veterans Employment Representative (Program) - Unlike the acronym "DVOP", LVER actually does refer to an individual. The LVER specialist works with other service providers to promote Veterans as job seekers who have highly marketable skills and experience. They advocate for Veterans for employment and training opportunities with business, industry and community based organizations by participating in a variety of outreach activities such as career fairs, coordinating with unions, apprenticeship programs and business organizations. They establish and maintain regular contact with employers, conduct training for Workforce Services staff on Veterans programs and issues, and plan and facilitate the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

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If you aren't familiar with (and using) "Veterans Upward Bound" (VUB) of Montana as a resource, you may be missing out. Besides offering free college prep classes at several campuses around the state, they have information on many other service

providers, organizations and programs specifically for Veterans. They also publish an extremely informative monthly newsletter. Check out their website at: <http://vubmt.com>

Select Newsletter on the top-line menu, then; Select whatever month's newsletter you prefer.

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Final Rule for Priority of Service for Veterans.

The notice has been posted to Inside the Insider from: <http://insider.dli.mt.gov/wsd/resources/veterans.asp> and in the WSD Veterans section from: <http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/veterans/vetresources.asp> and a cross link under features on the WSD home page. <http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/veterans/vetpriorityofservice.pdf>

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Information on the wars, campaigns, or expeditions for which a campaign badge has been authorized may be found at <http://www.opm.gov/veterans/html/vgmedal2.htm>.

- Tell Veterans about
- [www.vetsuccess.gov](http://www.vetsuccess.gov)
- [www.vetbiz.gov](http://www.vetbiz.gov)
- [www.jofdav.com](http://www.jofdav.com)
- [www.vetjobcentral.com](http://www.vetjobcentral.com)
- [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)
- [www.trooptube.tv/home](http://www.trooptube.tv/home)
- [www.montana.edu/ttt](http://www.montana.edu/ttt)
- [www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday](http://www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday)
- [www.aw2.army.mil](http://www.aw2.army.mil)
- [www.military.com](http://www.military.com)
- [www.oefoif.va.gov](http://www.oefoif.va.gov)

## Estimate Your Disability Retired Pay

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) launched their new Medical Disability Retired Pay Estimator, an interactive online tool for medically retiring Wounded Warriors, available at the [DFAS website](http://www.dfas.mil) at

<http://www.dfas.mil/militarypay/woundedwarriorpay.html>

The scenario-driven tool provides users the ability to estimate their post retirement income from DoD and VA such as retired pay, Concurrent Receipt and Combat Related Special Compensation. Results also include how calculations are produced based on current law and the impact of legislation on total disability income.

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## Post-Deployment Podcast

Servicemembers and their families can get help coping with post-deployment stress through a new series of podcasts called "There and Back: Learning About Depression," the initial ten minute podcast in the "There and Back" series, is a tapestry woven of education, encouragement and emotional intimacy. Listen to "[There and Back: Learning about Depression](#)," or visit the Podcasts section of the [Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury](#) (DCoE) website at:

<http://www.dcoe.health.mil:80/>

for this and future podcasts. To receive future episodes of "There and Back," you can also subscribe free at iTunes.com.

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## Use myPay to Get 2009 Tax Statements

Military servicemembers, military retirees and annuitants paid by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) can expect to receive their 2009 tax statements soon. DFAS customers with [myPay](#) access will be able to retrieve their tax statements electronically up to two weeks sooner than those relying on regular mail delivery. DFAS customers who have forgotten their personal identification number (PIN) or wish to open a myPay account can do so on the [myPay website](#) at

<https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>

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## American Legion Offers Nursing Scholarship

Applications are available for the American Legion's \$3,000 Eight and Forty Lung and Respiratory Disease Nursing Scholarship for registered nurses. The deadline to apply for the nursing scholarship is May 15. Selections will be announced July 1. For more information or to request an application packet, contact your local Eight and Forty Scholarship chairman or write to The American Legion, Attn: Eight and Forty Scholarships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206. For more information, visit the [American Legion website](#).

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## Air Force to Hire Disabled Students

Air Force organizations have the opportunity to begin hiring students March 17 for temporary, funded positions as part of the 2010 Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities. Students who work in the temporary positions during the summer have their salaries paid by the Department of Defense with funding for the program running May 15 through Sept. 30. Air

Force organizations interested in participating in the program should contact their local civilian personnel office for more information. For more information on the program, visit the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities website at [www.wrp.gov](http://www.wrp.gov).

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Joshua Williams cont'd from page 1

for disabled, injured, and sick soldiers who fought to preserve the union, including those who served with U.S. Colored Troop (USCT) regiments. The National Homes was the precursor to today's Department of Veterans Affairs, with 153 medical centers and nearly 300,000 employees who care for all Veterans.

Joshua Williams served as a private for the Union forces in the Civil War and received a serious leg wound. His military service records described him as 6 feet 1 inches tall, "copper" complexion, brown eyes, and curly hair. He was listed as "free."

By 1869, his wound affected the entire left side of his body and doctors at the National Home classified him as totally disabled for pension purposes—which was \$8.00 per month.

Approximately 180,000 African Americans served as volunteer soldiers in 163 US Colored Troops units, comprising roughly 10% of the Union Army during the Civil War. Of the 198,000 African Americans that served in the Union forces, 36,847 died.

Approximately 21,000 Union veterans were admitted to four 'homes' between 1866 and 1881, and of that number, 195 were US 'Colored' Troops.

Information on how to contact each of the services is listed below:

## DoD To Implement Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay

The Defense Department announced today the services' implementation plans to provide retroactive stop loss special pay. Active, reserve and former service members who had their enlistment extended or retirement suspended due to stop loss are eligible for this special pay, if they served on active duty between Sept. 11, 2001 and Sept. 30, 2009.

Service members may begin submitting their claim for retroactive stop loss special pay on Oct. 21, 2009. In accordance with the 2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act, all applications must be submitted to the respective services no later than Oct. 21, 2010. Eligible personnel will receive a payment of \$500 per month for each month (or any portion of a month) that a member was retained on active duty due to stop loss. Applicants for retroactive pay who are no longer in the military had to be honorably discharged, and for those who were stop lossed in fiscal 2009, may only receive payment from one stop loss authority; either the money appropriated for stop loss special pay in the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, or the money allocated for retroactive stop loss special pay in the 2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act, but not both.

Service members must provide documented proof they were stop lossed with their claim. Family members of deceased service members should contact the appropriate military service for assistance in filing their claim.

Army: Go to <https://www.stoplosspay.army.mil> or email RetroStopLoss Pay@CONUS.Army.Mil

N a v y : E m a i l NXAG\_N132C@navy.mil

Marine Corps: Go to <https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/stoploss> or email stoploss@usmc.mil

Air Force: Go to <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/stoploss/>

Stop loss provides a valuable and critical tool to quickly retain and generate forces to surge in a major conflict. However, as deployment schedules stabilize, the department must then adapt and minimize its use of stop loss. The Secretary of Defense announced in March a comprehensive plan to eliminate the current use of stop loss, while retaining the authority for future use under extraordinary circumstances.

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## Remember to Update DEERS

It's important for families to keep their DEERS records up-to-date whenever changes occur. Contact information on DEERS can be updated in person at a military ID card issuing facility, online, and by phone, fax or mail. There are two secure online options via either the new [myDODbenefits website](#), or the [Beneficiary Web Enrollment](#) website. Both are available to people who have an active DFAS-issued myPay personal identification number. Beneficiaries can call the Defense Manpower Data Center's support office at 800-538-9552 (866-363-2883 TTY/TDD) to update addresses, e-mail addresses and phone numbers. Changes can also be faxed to 831-655-8317, or

mailed to DMDC Support Office, 400 Gigling Road, Seaside, CA 93955-6771.

Learn more about [military benefits and DEERS](#) on Military.com.

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## In-State Training

Many of our Workforce Services Division Employment Specialist staff continue to participate in training that enhances their familiarity with Veterans services. We appreciate their passion and support of Montana's Veterans.

Basic Veterans Benefits Course:

James Korth—Bozeman  
Jacklyn Damm—Sidney  
Heather Merritt—Libby

Case Management:

Heather Merritt—Libby

All training is conducted at (or under the auspices of) the National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) in Denver, CO. Congratulations to these specialists.

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## Virtual Vietnam War Wall

First click on a state. When it opens, scroll down to the city and the names will appear. Then click on their names. It should show you a picture of the person, or at least their bio and medals.

This really is an amazing web site. Someone spent a lot of time and effort to create it.

I hope everyone who receives this appreciates what those who served in Vietnam sacrificed for our country.

Virtual Wall cont'd on page 4

**Virtual Wall cont'd from page 3**

The link below is a virtual wall of all those lost during the Vietnam war with the names, bio's and other information on our lost heroes. Those who remember that timeframe, or perhaps lost friends or family can look them up on this site.

<http://www.virtualwall.org/iStates.htm>

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## DoD Assessing Disability Ratings

A recent review by a Department of Defense Physical Disability Board of Review (PDBR) resulted in 61 percent of applicants having their status changed from a medical separation to retirement on the permanent disability list. This review is open to eligible Veterans of the DoD, Guard and Reserve and Coast Guard. Eligible Veterans can request a PDBR by submitting a Department of Defense Form 294, which is available at <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/efoms/dd0294.pdf>.

Veterans requesting a PDBR must mail their completed and signed DD Form 294 to SAF/MRBR, 550 C St. W., Suite 41, Randolph Air Force Base, TX 78150-4743. Applicants may submit statements, briefs, medical records or affidavits supporting their application.

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## Wounded Warriors find relief on Big Mountain

WHITEFISH — Some astonishing things happened a few weeks ago up in Whitefish, on the snowy side of a mountain.

Ian, for once, didn't fall down.

And Shane, for the first time in a very long time, forgot all about the pain in his arm but only because his legs hurt so badly.

And Pam, well, Pam was so perfectly happy that she couldn't decide whether to laugh or to cry, and so she did both.

"It's a miracle," she said, "that's what it is. Look at me" she stretched her arms as wide as they would go, turned her face to a patch of blue sky "I'm here, and I'm alive. I'm totally alive."

Which is a fact that, not so many months ago, she didn't necessarily take for granted.

Pam Smejkal, like Shane Ugliono and Ian Lennon, is a warrior. A wounded warrior, to be precise.

They all served in this country's military campaigns in Iraq or Afghanistan, and they all came home very different people than they were when they shipped out.

For Pam, it was a smallpox vaccine that overloaded her immune system. For Ian, a fuel tanker that blew up, engulfing him in a fiery miasma. For Shane, an ambush sprung straight from desert sand, slamming 16 bullets into his body.

"It changes you," fellow warrior Eddie Vidro said. "Sometimes, it makes you stronger. Sometimes not. It can be a dark place."

Recently, these soldiers emerged into the clean, crisp whiteness of a Montana winter, brought to Whitefish Mountain Resort by the non-profit Wounded Warrior Project. They came to ski and to snowboard, to have some fun and to declare, once and for all, that they are not only alive, but living large.

The Wounded Warrior Project is a national effort, born back in 2003 to deliver comforts to hospitalized veterans. Today, the group is an advocate, a rehabilitator, a support system.

"They saved my life," Vidro said.

They took him to a Mets game, and they took him fishing, and organized a bicycle tour with other vets straight through the mean streets of New York City and on out into the Hamptons.

"That's what it's about," Vidro said. "I get to spend time with fellow wounded warriors, people who are going through the same issues that I'm going through. To me, it's the best therapy I could have — better than any medication or any doctor."

Shane Ugliono was in Walter Reed Army Medical Center when he learned about the Wounded Warrior Project. From the start, he said, "it looked like the kind of thing that would get me up and get me going."

Ugliono has a wife and three kids, and he has a left arm that was quite nearly shot off.

"It was crazy over there," the sniper team leader said. "It was like the wild West —

Wounded Warriors cont'd on page 5

constant firefights, IEDs, suicide bombers. It was totally insane.”

When he arrived in Iraq, the “push” had squeezed insurgents from both the north and the south, pinching them into an ancient and holy city in the middle. That’s where Ugliono landed, in Samarra.

One day, as he and his men were rooting suspected suicide bombers out of an encampment, the ground quite literally opened beneath his feet.

“They’d dug tunnels,” Ugliono said, “and they came right up out of the ground.”

Only one other survived.

Today, Ugliono’s recovering from a traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and a badly injured back, and he can’t feel his arm from the bicep down.

He gets confused sometimes, and depressed, and he can’t always remember things.

“You don’t get used to it,” he said, “but you accept it.”

For a long time, Eddie Vidro didn’t accept it.

He doesn’t talk much about his time in the desert, but he’ll tell you all about coming home.

He’ll tell you about locking himself away in a dark room, about tuning out his wife and son while he made mental lists about how best to end his life.

“I didn’t want to see anyone,” Vidro said. “Before I got involved with the

Wounded Warrior Project, I was nobody. I was less than nobody. I was a dead man.”

His wife signed him up, he said, “and now look at me.” Vidro smiled, stuck out a foot encased in a big, plastic ski boot. “We’re like instant family. If they can do it, then so can I.”

“This place is a long, long way from Iraq,” he said. “This place is a long, long way from everywhere I’ve been. This is Montana, man, and I’m on a Montana mountain.”

This particular mountain — home to Whitefish Mountain Resort — is no stranger to wounded warriors, and boasts a particularly fine adaptive ski program. They have tools for skiers without legs, skiers without sight and, perhaps especially, skiers without confidence.

Bob Heim directs the ski and snowboard school here, and he figures “we can get just about anybody started.”

Some come to reclaim a sport they thought they’d lost. Some come to experience something new, and to prove to themselves that “I can” is still part of the vocabulary. It helps with balance, coordination and motor skills, Heim said, and it helps with understanding that many limitations are self-imposed.

Like a snowball down the back of the neck, it’s a reminder that living is more than just being alive.

Last year, volunteer ski coach Jan Richards skied here with a wounded warrior who was a double amputee. “He said, ‘This is the best week of my whole life.’ Can you believe that?”

“After everything he’d been through, and this was the best time

of his life. I think he found something up here that he didn’t know he’d lost.”

A year ago, Pam Smejkal couldn’t walk, couldn’t brush her own hair. Gravity, she said, was pulling her down into places she didn’t want to go.

Today, she digs in her metal edges, resists gravity’s steady pull, carves and turns and, suddenly, surprisingly, transforms falling into flying. She’s laughing, and crying, and the wind is freezing a thin film of tears onto her flushed cheeks.

Up on the chairlift, she forgets she’s always been afraid of heights. On the slopes, she forgets her fear of speed. The whole town of Whitefish, she said, seems to be cheering her on.

“I’m just overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness,” she said. “Everything here is way bigger than life.”

Higher on the hill, Shane Ugliono is feeling the burn of leg muscles not used in a long, long time, as he drops down the shadowed north face. Eddie, riding the summit chair, breaks out of dreary gray clouds into sparkling sunshine, with views stretching away into the Canadian Rockies and his son is with him on top of the world.

“He’s happier here,” Eddie Jr. said of his dad. “He has more energy, that’s for sure.”

And Ian Lennon, finally, has called it a day, after making a long run without falling, not even once.

“Sometimes,” he said, “it feels good to quit when you’re ahead, for a change.”

## The DVET Corner

### FCJL (Federal Job Order Listings)

This requirement started in 1974 under the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act. It required and affirmative action plan to hire and advance qualified Veterans. It required the listing of openings (exception of top executives and short term jobs) with the local employment office. At that time the requirement affected employers with a contract of \$10,000.00 or more.

In 1998 the Veterans' Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) was enacted. It expanded the Mandatory Listing requirements to campaign Veterans, changed the reporting requirements and increased the listing requirements to contracts \$25,000.00 or more per year.

In 2000 the listing requirements were expanded under the Veterans' Benefit and Health Care Improvement Act. It expanded the requirements to target recently separated Veterans (one year), and changed the reporting requirements.

In 2002 the Jobs for Veterans' Act expanded the criteria to include veterans separated within the last 3 years. It deleted Veterans of the Viet Nam era; added Veterans with an Armed Forces Service Medal; increased the contract amount to \$100,000.00 or more; required listing of openings with an "appropriate employment service delivery system." It also required service delivery systems to provide priority of referral to qualified Veterans.

### Employer Requirements:

The FCJL contractor is to undertake appropriate outreach and positive recruitment activities that are designed to recruit qualified:

- Disabled Veterans
- Recently separated veterans
- Armed Forces Service Medal Veterans

The contractor should enlist the assistance and support of:

- LVER
- VA Regional Office
- Veteran Counselors at College Campuses
- Veteran Service Officers

The contractor can fulfill listing requirements:

- By listing with the employment service delivery system
- Can also use third parties such as private sector job banks, recruiting services, etc.
- Using Vet Central

Currently, employers are mandated by their federal contract to list jobs with Workforce Centers, or other sites mentioned above, nearest the contract site if their contract is \$200,000.00 or more.

### How to Build and Maintain a Mandatory Employer List:

- Identify contractors and sub-contractors by noting where the work is being performed. Is it on a federal site? Is it freeway construction? Are Davis-Bacon (not Little Davis-Bacon) wages being paid?

- Utilize [www.fedspending.org](http://www.fedspending.org) to develop a list for your locality. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Sometimes you will be sent a list of Mandatory Employers. Those listed should be contacted to see if they still qualify to be on the list. If an employer was awarded a contract and it has been fulfilled they sometimes remain on the list and it periodically needs updating.

- Someone needs to be delegated to develop and update the list.

If you need more information regarding an employer in your area, or want to have a technical assistance event the OFCCP (Office of Contract Compliance Program) can send a person to present Federal Contract Requirement information. Their office is in Denver and can be reached at 1-720-264-3200.

### An Overview of VA Home Loans

The VA Loan Guaranty Program began in 1944 in order to give soldiers returning from war the same opportunities to own homes as their civilian counterparts. Today, the general purpose of VA home loans is to provide Veterans with secure home financing in appreciation for their service to America. The program is administered by the Veterans Benefits Administration, an organizational element of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

A VA loan is made by a VA-approved mortgage lender with a portion backed by the good faith and credit of the U.S.

*VA Loans cont'd on page 7*

## Operation Afterhours

### Veteran Services Takes on New Hours to Reach Out to Veterans

(GREAT FALLS) – Supporting Montana's Veterans continues at the Great Falls Job Service through "Operation Afterhours". For Veterans who are out of work or are underemployed, there is now additional help to hurdle those challenges – after hours.

As part of Operation: Afterhours, the Great Falls Job Service Workforce Center is teaming up with Montana Veterans Affairs to connect Veterans with valuable resources available to them during extended hours.

Normally, workforce consultants at the Great Falls Job Service are available during standard business hours (Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.). Operation Afterhours opens the doors to the Job Service -- just for Veterans -- once a month, later into the evening.

"Every Montana military Veteran should have access to programs and services that can help get them through these tough times," says Dave Delaney, a Great Falls Workforce Consultant and Veterans Representative. "And we are committed to making this happen for each of them."

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*VA Loans cont'd from page 6*

Government. The benefits of the VA loan program create one of the safest and most secure home financing options for VA-eligible borrowers.

Although there are over 23 million people eligible for VA home loan benefits, less than 10 percent have a VA mortgage. Typically those with two

years of active duty in branches of Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard are eligible for the VA Home Loan Guaranty Program. Some surviving spouses and Reservists/National Guard members also qualify.

A Certificate of Eligibility (COE) is needed before anyone can apply for a VA loan. A COE tells lenders how much entitlement a borrower has. Most COEs can be obtained by an approved VA lender on behalf of a borrower using a system called ACE.

Borrowers can expect to find the following benefits associated with VA loans:

- No down payment (100% financing)
- No private mortgage insurance (PMI)
- Relaxed qualifying standards
- Competitive interest rates
- Cash-out and debt consolidation
- Streamline rate reduction
- No penalties for mortgage prepayment

Generally, full entitlement is for a loan of \$417,000. Income and credit qualifying is required before a loan of any amount is made. The VA guidelines for income and credit qualifying are more relaxed than that of many conventional loan programs.

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## Veterans Service Officers

Veterans Service Officers (VSO) are a vital link between the Veteran, Veteran Service Providers, DVOP/LVER Specialists, and the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment staff.

Below is an **updated** listing of Montana's VSO(s) and their contact information.

**Belgrade:** 406-388-4601

Kelly Ackerman  
Janine Mahn

**Billings:**

Cheryl Heald 406-656-0584  
Dorothy Jarosz 406-248-8579

Jay Gaffri 406-259-5419

**Butte:** 406-533-0910

David Williamson

**Great Falls:** 406-452-2265

Valarie Martin  
David Capps  
Mark Blake

**Havre:** 406-265-4225

Diana LaBuda  
Judy Loendorf

**Helena:**

406-495-2080/2081/2082  
Elizabeth Larson  
Jack Morgan  
Lori Perkio

**Kalispell:** 406-755-3795

Sherry Stewart  
Jane Gerald

**Lewistown:** 406-538-3174

Sue Foster

**Miles City:** 406-232-1203

Michael Cohan

**Missoula:** 406-542-2501

Len Leibinger  
Melinda Buxton  
Andrea Montee

**Wolf Point:** 406-653-5105

Chelly Harada

## Time with Tina

*Contributed by:  
Tina Whiting  
Veteran Intensive Services Coordinator (VISC)  
Workforce Services Division*

It's April and spring has come in true Montana style. Beautiful one day and the next there's white stuff on the ground. The past three months have brought snow, ice, snow, wind, sunshine, a little more snow and a time change. If one were to compare the events that are occurring throughout the state to serve Veterans and the changes in weather, it might be a close call.

As many of you know there have been some rather scathing reports concerning the success rate of VA Vocational Rehabilitation (Chapter 31). In Montana we are taking information like that, tucking it away and moving in a direction that provides aggressive, intensive, custom approach to serving Chapter 31 Veterans. Guidance was issued to states to do just that, and we took it to heart. We looked at what other states are doing, what other states have in place for guidance, direction and tracking of Chapter 31 Veterans and developed our own process based on what we did or didn't see in other states.

This process (Chapter 31 process) has moved smoothly from a rough draft to actual implementation starting April 1<sup>st</sup>. When the rough draft was done, it was critical that field staff who would be using the new process could provide their feedback about it. Questions, comments and concerns were collected and presented to three different groups of field staff. Each group worked diligently providing input to 57 questions in 4 hours. Each

groups' input was combined into one format and what could be applied was, and concerns were noted. Also, a 6 month review is already scheduled so any issues that come up between now and then can be addressed.

The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between USDOL VETS, VA VR&E, and Montana Department of Labor & Industry is in the final review by parties who are signing it. This is a paramount event. This MOA has specific responsibilities for all parties and agencies working with Chapter 31 Veterans. The spirit of the MOA is cooperation, partnership, and the best interest of the Veteran. Overall, the Chapter 31 process and the associated agreement are coming along just as hoped.

In addition to improving the Chapter 31 process, the state has had three Veteran Service Provider Meetings in Bozeman, a Semi-annual Veteran Service Provider Meeting in Missoula, and most recently, the Helena area has started holding a monthly Veteran Service Provider Meeting. (Other areas of the state are looking to conduct their own Veteran Service Provider Meetings in the future.) The Great Falls Job Service is offering after-hours services to Veterans once per month. Also there was a day and a half conference for Veterans Representatives only; not even the managers were invited. Finally, Billings, Bozeman, Glendive, Great Falls, and Hamilton are all getting ready for their respective Veterans Stand Downs.

Everyone can help a Veteran. It isn't nearly as important *what* you do to help Veterans; it's that you *choose* to help Veterans. Regardless of whether you are a case manager, a benefits advisor, an organization, an agency, make donations of time or materials to

Veteran organizations, buy from Veteran thrift stores, are a friend to a Veteran, or a family member of a Veteran; that you choose to be involved has an impact. And it is appreciated.

All of this to say, Montana sees ways to better serve Veterans and it is our goal to do so. Every person who works with Veterans programs really has a heart for Montana Veterans; regardless of what they do to help Veterans, everything counts equally.

*The VISC is responsible for coordinating efforts between the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) staff and the DVOP/LVER staff within Workforce Services.*

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### *Afterhours cont'd from page 7*

**Operation Afterhours is conducted on the 3rd Tuesday of the month (upcoming schedule is Apr 20, May 18, and Jun 15) from 5:30-8:00 p.m., at the Great Falls Job Service Workforce Center, 1018 7<sup>th</sup> Street South.** Veterans will get information on training and educational opportunities that will add to their job skills and abilities. They will learn how to register and find work through the Job Service and how to file for Unemployment Benefits if they are eligible.

Plus there will be information and assistance on resources available right here in our community, including obtaining records, low-cost health insurance, public assistance, credit counseling, treatment programs, senior services, and much more.

For more information, please contact the Great Falls Job Workforce Center at 791-5800.

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