

THE VETERANS BULLETIN

The Official Newsletter of the Union County Office of Veteran Services

Welcome to the second edition of **The Veterans Bulletin**, the official newsletter of the Union County Office of Veteran Services. This new quarterly publication is intended to keep our veterans and their families informed about programs, services, events and celebrations honoring Union County Veterans and Active Military residents.



Also in this Issue:

- Veteran Events - 1
- Disability Benefits for Veterans - 2-3
- UC-HERO Website - 3
- Veterans Resources - 3
- Women Veterans SHERO Nominations - 3
- Union County Office of Veterans Services Directory and Staff - 4

Memorial Day Celebration

On May 23, 2020, the Union County Office of Veteran Services, along with Union County Freeholder Vice Chairman Angel Estrada, Freeholders Sergio Granados, Angela Garretson, Chris Hudak, Andrea Staten and Sheriff Peter Corvelli joined Robert Jeans of the Kenilworth Veterans Center and VFW 2230 and Jim Daly of VFW Post 355 at the Graceland Cemetery in Kenilworth. Approximately 150 volunteers came out to place American flags on the graves of veterans in honor of Memorial Day.

The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders supplied more than 30,000 flags to mark veterans' graves throughout Union County. Thanks to all the wonderful volunteers and the Union County Prosecutor's Office for assisting with the flag deployment!



A Service of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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DID YOU KNOW?

THE BLUE WATER NAVY VIETNAM VETERANS ACT BEGAN ON JANUARY 1, 2020

LEARN MORE AT VA.GOV
Search for "Blue Water Navy"



The Blue Water Navy Act of 2019 Update

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that it approved retroactive benefits of **over \$140 million** for claims filed under the new Blue Water Navy (BWN) Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (PL 116-23). These disability benefit payments were paid out to qualifying veterans and their families in January and February 2020 since the law went into effect on January 1, 2020.

The BWN Act provides that any Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard or other military service member **who served as far as 12 nautical miles from the shores of Vietnam from January 9, 1962 to May 7, 1975** is presumed to have been exposed to herbicides, and may be entitled to get service connection for any of the 14 conditions the VA relates to herbicide exposure. **The new law also extends to Veterans who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone between September 1, 1967 and August 31, 1971.**

As of January 1, 2020, any Blue Water Veteran who meets the new eligibility criteria may submit a VA disability claim. The VA encourages any Veteran who thinks that they may be eligible for Blue Water Navy benefits to contact an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) to assist with the application process. Information and resources about the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, eligibility requirements and how to file an initial or a supplemental claim can be found online at <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/blue-water-navy.asp>.

Top Ten Reasons Why Veterans Do Not Pursue VA Benefits

A recent survey compiled on the U.S. Veterans Compensation Program website showed there are many reasons that veterans have for not pursuing VA benefits or for not filing or following up on VA disability compensation and pension claims. According to many sources, there are ten widely held reasons why many veterans do not apply:

- 1. I don't know where to start my claims process.** Many veterans have indicated that they are unsure of where to start in matters of confidentiality and privacy, and as a result have little interest in pursuing VA benefits. Vietnam Era veterans are particularly sensitive regarding this because they had a bad experience while in uniform.
- 2. I didn't know I was eligible.** Far too many veterans are unaware of their eligibility status. Many veterans assume that since they aren't registered to use VA services, they are automatically ineligible for benefits. One veteran said, "I never retired from the military, so I always believed I was ineligible for benefits." This is not true.
- 3. I am not eligible.** Honorably discharged veterans are 100% eligible for benefits if they meet the criteria. Veterans with a Bad Conduct Discharge are not eligible for benefits. However, many veterans with a discharge that is Other Than Honorable may qualify to have their discharge upgraded if they apply to the VA for benefits. Also, a veteran with a General Discharge is often eligible for benefits. Such veterans should use a Veteran Service Officer (VSO) if they wish to file a claim.
- 4. I don't want to go through the "red tape."** Many veterans believe that pursuing VA benefits is a matter of going through a very complex and confusing system involving mounds of documents. While it is true there are times when much paperwork is involved, a competent VSO can greatly help steer veterans through the process. Also, once a veteran files a disability claim, it is the VA's responsibility to obtain a veteran's service and medical records.
- 5. I don't know who to contact.** Many veteran service organizations are available for free to help veterans.

Top Ten Reasons Why Veterans Do Not Pursue VA Benefits continued..




6. **I make too much money.** While income is a factor in disability pension benefit claims, a veteran's income does not affect entitlement for service-connected disability compensation benefits. There are many veterans who make over \$100,000 annually, and are receiving compensation for their service-connected disabilities.

7. **I was denied after the war.** Many veterans are denied after first applying for benefits, whether it was a few months after serving in a war zone or years later. This was particularly true for veterans suffering from PTSD or from disabilities resulting from Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War. Laws and regulations regarding changes in entitlement for disabilities previously denied occur all the time. Veterans who were denied benefits for disabilities that are still active should consult with a good VSO and consider reapplying for VA benefits.

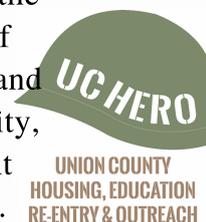
8. **I don't know what to apply for.** Many veterans have ailments related to their military service and aren't sure which ones to submit for compensation. A good example of this is hearing loss due to noise exposure while in service. This is why discussing any type of disability with an experienced VSO is very important.

9. **I can't prove my health problems are related to my time in the military.** Finding a good VSO is very important in securing disability compensation for a service-connected condition. An experienced VSO can help veterans find missing medical evidence in their military files or VA records which can provide the link between their medical conditions and military service.

10. **Other veterans are more deserving.** A lot of veterans believe that other veterans are more deserving of benefits and do not want to take money away from them by applying. This could not be further from the truth. Each veteran's claim is judged on its own merits and is either approved or denied.

Union County Heroes Veteran Resources

The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders has sponsored the UC HERO program in honor of our veterans. The initiative offers services through various county agencies, including the Office of Veterans' Services, the Division on Aging and Disability Resources, Division of Individual and Family Support Services, Workforce Development/American Job Center, and partnership with local veteran groups. UC HERO seeks to increase awareness of eligibility, entitlements, benefits programs, and services provided to veterans by various Government agencies. Veterans and residents can find the UC HERO website at www.ucnj.org/uchero.



Women Veterans Day is celebrated on June 12th every year, however, due to Covid-19 our office was unable to host any in person events during the month of June. We won't let that stop us from honoring some outstanding and inspiring female Veterans. Our office is looking for nominations of women veterans throughout Union County to be recognized as a "SHERO." If you would like to nominate a female veteran who lives in Union County, please submit their name, address and a brief summary of her military service and accomplishments by **August 28th, 2020** to our Veteran Service Coordinator, Janna Williams at jwilliams@ucnj.org. Three women will be chosen for an honorary presentation by the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders!

The Union County Office of Veteran Services

The Union County Office of Veteran Services is a vital link between men and women who served their country and the services available from Federal, State, County and Municipal levels of government as well as the private sector. Veteran Services provides advocacy, information and referrals for veterans and their families on a wide variety of financial, health and quality-of-life issues related to VA benefits and services.

Service is available on our toll-free hotline 866-640-7115 and our office in the Union County Administration Complex in Elizabeth. For more information, please contact our county Veteran Service Coordinator, Janna Williams, at 908-527-4918 or go to www.ucnj.org/departments-of-economic-development.



Here are some of the many services offered by the Office of Veterans services for FREE to Union County Veterans and their family members!

- Provides eligibility criteria for all veteran benefits and entitlements
- Assists in securing copies of lost military documents, such as the DD-214 (military separation document)
- Guides applications to the VA for service-connected compensation and pension claims
- Helps veteran’s widow/widower and children apply for benefits
- Helps with appeals for denied benefit applications
- Provides death and burial benefit information
- Coordinates annual placement of flags on veteran graves in Union County during Memorial Day weekend
- Provides contact and referral information for housing, mental health, education, job training and placement, financial and medical/nursing home services
- Facilities transportation to VA Healthcare System at Lyons and East Orange through the Union County Paratransit system

Union County Office of Veteran Services Directory

For questions or information regarding veterans benefits and services, please contact any of the following members of our Veteran Services staff:

- **Janna Williams – Accredited Veteran Service Coordinator**
Phone: 908-527-4918 Email: jwilliams@ucnj.org
- **Kenneth Glick – Veteran Service Representative**
Phone: 908-527-4719 Email: Kenneth.Glick@ucnj.org
- **Richard Zalinkanskas – Assistant Veteran Service Officer**
Phone: 908-527-4946 Email: rzalinkanskas@ucnj.org



LOCATION OF OFFICE OF VETERAN SERVICES:
UNION COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
10 ELIZABETHTOWN PLAZA
ELIZABETH NJ 07203

HOURS OF OPERATION:
MONDAY—FRIDAY 8:00 AM—4:30 PM
TELEPHONE: 908-527-4918/4719
CLOSED SATURDAY AND SUNDAY
WEBSITE: WWW.UCNJ.ORG/UCHERO

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