

THE VETERAN'S BULLETIN

*The Official Newsletter of the Union County
Office of Veteran Services*

Welcome to The Veteran's Bulletin, the official newsletter of the Union County Office of Veteran Services. This publication is intended to keep our Veterans and their families informed about programs, services and events for Union County Veterans and active military residents.



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A Service of the Union County Board of County Commissioners

UNION COUNTY
We're Connected to You!

Union County Veterans First To Participate In HOPE PGA Golf Clinic

Union County Veterans are enjoying the benefits of golfing thanks to a golf clinic sponsored by the New Jersey Professional Golf Association (PGA) HOPE (Helping Our Patriots Everywhere) program. The first clinic, which began in June, gave Veterans six weeks of free golf lessons under the instruction of professional golfers at the Galloping Hill Golf Course in Kenilworth, NJ. Union County is the first county in New Jersey to partner with the HOPE PGA program. For more details, please read the story on page 2.





Union County Veterans Get In The Swing At First HOPE PGA Golf Clinic

Army Veteran Pamela Ghee hadn't ever thought about picking up a golf club until she learned about the Professional Golf Association HOPE Golf Clinic at the Galloping Hill Golf Course in Kenilworth last June. Along with nine other Union County Veterans, Pamela signed up for the clinic, and has enjoyed both the lessons and camaraderie of playing with her fellow Veterans.

"It's been a great experience for me," said Pamela, who is an Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel. "I enjoy the challenge, and the coaches are great and very patient."

Sponsored by the New Jersey Golf Foundation since 2016, PGA HOPE is a flagship military program designed to introduce golf at no cost to Veterans in order to enhance their physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being. Union County is the first county in New Jersey to host a PGA HOPE golf clinic. The Union County Office of Veterans Services met with PGA HOPE officials in May to organize the event. The one-hour clinics were held at the Galloping Hill Golf Course Learning Center from June 7th to July 26th, and included professional instruction in golf handle grip, swing adjustment, club selection and pitch and putting.

The HOPE program helps Veterans through the social interaction the game of golf provides. Learning and playing the game of golf is a proven activity that has positively impacted thousands of disabled Veterans nationwide. "It's a way for Veterans to get out and focus on something else," said HOPE golf coordinator Jared Forest, also an Air Force Veteran. "You can see the results immediately."

Marine Corps Veteran David Penna said coaches Baker Maddera and Jorge Diaz have given him valuable tips on improving his golf swing in a very short time. "They are excellent in getting you to improve your hand grip and follow through on your swing," said Penna. "I am enjoying the game more and getting more satisfaction every time I go out there."

The Union County Veterans Service Office has scheduled another PGA HOPE golf clinic beginning on Tuesday, August 24th until September 28th, from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Veterans interested in signing up can go to the UC-Hero website at <https://ucnj.org/uc-hero/>.





New County Rental Assistance Program Can Help Veterans Impacted By COVID-19

The Union County Board of County Commissioners launched a new rental assistance grant program in August to provide financial relief for Union County residents, including Veterans, who are unable to meet their rental obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the Union County Emergency Rental Assistance Program (UC ERAP), eligible tenants can receive up to 12 months of assistance for unpaid back rent and utility bills.

The funds will be awarded to landlords and utility providers on behalf of tenants who are eligible for the grant. Landlords and tenants are encouraged to register for this program on the Union County online portal at ucnj.org/rental-assistance to expedite the grant process. Both landlords and tenants must fill out their own applications. The program's application portal will close on September 27.

The portals include guidance on assembling the information and documents necessary to apply for funding. To qualify for the ERAP funding, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Applicants must be a Union County resident primarily responsible for paying rent;
- Make less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) of Union County, which is less than \$78,500 for a family of four;
- Experienced a loss of income since March 13, 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Provide required supporting documentation (copies of identification, tax returns, lease or other proof of income/residence may be acceptable, etc.).

Once the application is submitted, applicants will be notified of the funding decision. If approved, the funds will be provided directly to the landlord or utility provider.

Free COVID-19 Vaccination Boosters Available for County Residents

Union County residents, including Veterans and their families, who are already vaccinated against COVID-19 can now receive a free third shot at county vaccination centers if they are in an immunosuppressed category. The approved third shot applies to residents who have already received two doses of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. Those who received the Johnson & Johnson single shot vaccine are not eligible at this time. Residents eligible for a third shot include cancer patients and organ donation recipients, among others. More details can be found from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html. The CDC does not recommend additional doses or booster shots for any other population at this time.

Eligible county residents need to wait four weeks after their second shot of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine in order to receive their third shot. Appointments for the third shot can be booked online at the Union County vaccination website at ucnj.org/vax. Eligible residents can also visit any vaccination site in the county on a walk-in basis with proof of their first two shots. Union County has permanent vaccination centers at Kean University's Downs Hall in Union, Dunns Sports Center in Elizabeth, and Plainfield High School in Plainfield, as well as mobile vaccine clinics. For details about Union County's vaccination clinics, and home vaccination services for the home bound and additional COVID-19 resources, visit ucnj.org/covid19. For additional assistance, contact the Union County COVID-19 Call Center at **908-613-7829** during regular weekday business hours.



Emergency Food Sites for County Veterans

Union County residents, including Veterans and their families, who are still experiencing food insecurity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, can obtain free food packages at upcoming Union County emergency food distribution events. The county has scheduled the following dates and locations in August for emergency food distributions:

- Tuesday August 24, walk-up at the Gerald B. Green Plaza in Plainfield beginning at 11 a.m.
- Saturday, August 28, walk-up at Warinanco Park in Roselle beginning at 8 a.m.

Food packages will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis and no registration is required. Upon arrival, proof of New Jersey residency and indication of how many people reside in their household must be provided. Recipients will receive an emergency box of produce and shelf stable food, with enough to sustain a family for several days. Food distribution events are posted on the Union County website at ucnj.org/covid19/food-distribution-events.



VA Opens Rapid Job Retraining Program

A new job retraining program designed to assist Veterans who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic was introduced by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in May. The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) is open to approximately 17,000 Veterans, and is targeted towards those who are without stable employment due to coronavirus closures, layoffs or health complications.

VA officials have identified more than 200 high-demand occupations for Veterans to consider, including architecture, engineering, construction, personal care and service careers. Under the program, qualified Veterans can receive education benefits equal to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, including tuition costs and housing stipends, for up to 12 months, with the goal of learning a new skill or completing a certificate program in that time frame. These include associate degrees, non-college degrees, and certificate programs. To qualify, Veterans must be between the ages of 22 and 66, have an honorable discharge, and not be currently enrolled in a federal or state jobs training program.

Union County Veterans who may qualify for VRRAP benefits can apply online on the VA website at <https://www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance/>.

VA Awards \$418 Million In Homeless Grants

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded \$418 million in grants in June to 260 non-profit organizations to assist homeless Veterans and their families with housing services under the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program. Among the local SSVF agencies that received grants who service Union County Veterans were Catholic Family and Community Services in Newark, which received a \$1.8 million grant, and Community Hope, Inc. in Parsippany, which received a \$2.7 million grant.

Under the program, VA awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives who can provide supportive services to very low-income Veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing. These agencies are authorized to use the funds to rapidly re-house Veterans and their families who become homeless or prevent them from becoming homeless. More information on the homeless grant program is on the VA website at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/index.asp>.



VA Offering New COVID-19 Mortgage Relief Programs for Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is offering two new programs for Veterans experiencing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The VA Partial Claim Payment Program and the COVID-19 Refund Modification Program are designed to help VA-guaranteed home loan holders bring their mortgages current and resume making regular payments to avoid foreclosure.

The VA Partial Claim Payment Program is a temporary program that began on July 27, 2021, and runs through Oct. 28, 2022. Under this program, the VA will make any overdue mortgage payments to the lender and then create a second mortgage on the property. The second mortgage is interest free, and no payments are due until the Veteran sells the home or pays off the original mortgage. At that time, the borrower must repay the VA any money received under this program before they own the house free and clear. Borrowers can pay the money back early with no penalty, and are relieved of having any overdue payments affecting their credit or continuing to accrue interest or penalties.

The COVID-19 Refund Modification Program can give borrowers up to a 20% reduction in their monthly mortgage payments. Again, VA will make any overdue payments to the lender and create a second mortgage on the property. However, under this program, the lender is encouraged to modify the existing mortgage to make it easier for the veteran to resume making payments. The lender can modify the original mortgage by adding up to 10 years to the repayment schedule. The mortgage restructuring is designed to help the borrower make affordable monthly payments and still pay down the loan principal, while the VA assists by making any overdue payments under the program.

Both programs require the Veteran to enter into a forbearance agreement with the lender. Veterans can get a COVID-related forbearance through **September 30, 2021**. Union County Veterans who need assistance with a VA home loan should contact their mortgage lender or call a VA loan technician at **877-827-3702**. Veterans can find more details about the COVID-19 relief programs on the VA website at <https://benefits.va.gov/homeloans/cares-act-frequently-asked-questions.asp>.



Property Tax Exemption Expanded for New Jersey Disabled Veterans

Governor Phil Murphy signed new legislation on July 22nd which grants New Jersey veterans and servicemembers easier access to higher education, expands access to the disabled veterans' property tax exemption, and establishes an annual grant program within the Troops to College Program to recognize institutions of higher education that offer extensive veteran programs and services.

One of the new laws extended the state property tax exemption for totally and permanently disabled veterans and their surviving spouses who occupy a unit in a cooperative or mutual housing corporation in which they are tenant shareholders. Previously, the disabled veterans tax exemption only applied to sole owners of a house, condominium or an apartment. Union County Veterans who qualify for the expanded property tax exemption can apply for it at their local tax assessor's office. More information about the provisions of the new veterans legislation can be found on the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website at <https://www.nj.gov/military>.

September Marks 20th Anniversary of 9/11

In recognition of the upcoming 20th Anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Union County community is invited to honor the memory of the 60 county residents who perished in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks of September 11, 2001. Union County residents can attend ceremonies on Saturday, September 11th, at the following locations around the county:

Union County:

**20th Anniversary September 11, 2021 Remembrance Ceremony,
Union County 9/11 Memorial, Echo Lake Park, 143 Mill Lane, Mountainside,
near the Springfield Avenue entrance at eastern end of the park;
11 a.m. to 12 p.m.**

Cranford:

**September 11, 2021 Memorial Service, 9/11 Memorial, Cranes Park,
corner of Springfield and North Union Avenues;
6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.**

Elizabeth:

**September 11, 2021 Remembrance Ceremony, Midtown Pedestrian Plaza,
West Grand Street next to 9/11 Monument at the Train Station;
8:46 a.m. to 9:46 a.m.**

Roselle Park:

**September 11, 2021 Remembrance Service, Kelly-Kaufers Memorial Park,
Laurel Avenue, between the Emergency Medical Service building and Firehouse;
7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.**

Westfield:

**September 11, 2021 Remembrance Ceremony, September 11th Memorial,
North Avenue at East Broad Street;
8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.**

Upcoming County Veteran Events

POW/MIA Recognition Day:

The annual POW/MIA Recognition Day memorial service is scheduled to be held Friday, September 17, 2021 at the front of the Union County Courthouse in Elizabeth, NJ. The Union County Veterans Services Office will inform county veterans and local veterans groups of the time of the event on our website at <https://ucnj.org/uc-hero>.

Union County First Swing Golf Clinic:

On Saturday, September 18, 2021, the Union County Veteran Services Office, in partnership with the National Amputee Golf Associates, will hold the "First Swing" Golf Clinic for county residents and Veterans with physical disabilities. The event will be held at the Galloping Hill Golf Course Learning Center at 3 Golf Drive in Kenilworth, NJ from 8:30 a.m. until 12 p.m. The program includes instruction by golf and healthcare professionals. Admission is free and no golfing experience is necessary. Pre-registration for the clinic is required. Attendees can sign up on the Union County website at www.ucnj.org/opdsn-reg, or by calling the Union County Veteran Services Office at 908-527-4918 or 908-527-4719, Monday to Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

If you are a Union County Veteran, and wish to file a disability claim, please contact the Union County Office of Veteran Services at 908-527-4918/4719, Monday to Friday, 8am to 4:30pm. We will keep your information confidential and schedule an appointment to file your claim.

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 by appointment** only at 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 our website at <https://ucnj.org/uc-hero>.

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 on Memorial Day weekend
- Provides contact & referral information for housing, mental health, education, job training/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 our Veteran Services staff:

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

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

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

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