

San Joaquin
County Veterans
Service Office
is here to help,
because ...

**We
Know VA
Benefits**



When veterans apply for VA benefits, they don't have to go it alone.

Changing Lives, Every Day



San Joaquin County's VSO believes helping veterans get the benefits they've earned is something to celebrate

by Matt Jocks

There are bosses who will tell you not to take your job personally. Virginia Wimmer is not one of them.

As the head of the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office, Wimmer and her colleagues shepherd veterans through the sometimes intimidating bureaucratic demands of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The stakes are high: financial compensation, health care and other benefits.

To persevere, Wimmer and her colleagues take satisfaction in helping veterans gain access to the benefits they have earned. A veteran's success is their success.

"When you are able to help someone access their benefits, you have changed someone's life. If you are not internalizing that, then [working in the VSO] is probably not a good fit," she says. "You have to feel like you're not just helping a stranger. They become our family – our brothers and sisters, our moms and dads."

Before veterans service officers can advocate for veterans, they often need to educate them about the many benefits for which they qualify. And before they can educate, they need to get them in the door.

"Honestly, I feel like that's more than 50 percent of my role," Wimmer says. "To reach out, to energize them and get them in here to seek the benefits."

To that end, Wimmer attends town halls and benefit events, in addition to reaching out to faith-based groups and local and state politicians. She also reaches out to homeless shelters and community centers because, as Wimmer says, "a lot of the veterans who need our help are not socially connected."

Once in the door, Wimmer and her colleagues try to make the veterans aware of what they have earned and how to access it.

"We consider ourselves the navigators of the VA system," she says. "We are the veterans' eyes and ears and fingertips."

Wimmer, a retired U.S. Air Force senior master sergeant, says the job requires tenacity, passion and compassion. Filing for a claim or trying to unspool red tape is often a lengthy process. Repeated emails and phone calls are often required and, as a liaison, she sometimes hears the frustrations from the veterans she is serving.

"That's OK," she says. "I don't mind being the pincushion."

More often than not, there is a payoff.

"When we win a claim – oh yes, we celebrate," she says. "It's pretty awesome when we win. When a vet is awarded their claim, we know we are changing their lives."

"When you are able to help someone access their benefits, you have changed someone's life."

Virginia Wimmer
Veterans Service Officer,
San Joaquin County



Veterans Service Officer Virginia Wimmer says veterans' successes are her successes.
PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN



**SAN JOAQUIN
SUPPORTS ITS
VETERANS**

The San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office (VSO) is a county government department under the Health Care Services Agency of San Joaquin County, located in Stockton, California. The VSO consists of the Director who is appointed by the County Board of Supervisors as the County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO), three professionally accredited veteran service representatives and a senior office assistant. The mission of the Veterans Service Office is to provide professional benefits counseling and assistance to, and advocacy for, veterans and their families. The Health Care Services Agency serves the community through the coordination of essential health care programs for the residents of our county and, in addition to the VSO, includes Behavioral Health Services, the Public Guardian/Conservator, Public Health Services, Correctional Health Services and Emergency Medical Services.

The Agency ensures that mandated functions and services for the health of our residents are provided in an efficient, effective and culturally appropriate manner. California is home to nearly 1.8 million veterans and active service members and the modest staff of San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office proudly provides beneficial services to the approximately 36,400 veterans residing within San Joaquin County.

Greg Diederich, Director
San Joaquin County Health
Care Services Agency



Somewhere to Turn



First with PTSD and later with cancer,
Tino Adame has relied on VSO

by Matt Jocks

Tino Adame will likely never be famous. But he is known where he needs to be known.

A Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam, the Stockton resident has been both a longtime beneficiary and longtime advocate of the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office. He has been on the scene long enough to have friends he has never met.

"The homeless vets have my info," Adame says. "I'll have guys come to me and say, 'Tino, I need help.' And I say, 'How did you know my name?' And they'll say, 'Oh, we know about you.'"

Adame's story is the story of millions of veterans.

He has dealt with post-traumatic stress disorder, battles with alcohol and, more recently, prostate cancer and lung tumors, a likely result of exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. He has also dealt with the San Joaquin County VSO for more than 20 years and can rattle off the names of those who have headed the office.

The current head, Virginia Wimmer, did the follow-through in getting his cancer ruled a service-connected disability. The resulting check in the mail meant that Adame's nine-week course of cancer treatment was a blow to the body but not the bank account.

For veterans, however, the issues that came

from their service are rarely isolated. Adame says that learning his condition was service-connected raised the PTSD issues that brought him to the VSO for the first time, back in 1980.

"I didn't know what PTSD was — never heard of it," he recalls. "I started having flashbacks and wondering, 'Why am I feeling this way?'"

Through the VSO, Adame got the answer to that question and then the treatment. He said the VA "wasn't ready" for the large number of veterans suffering from PTSD, but with the help of the VSO, he was able to get his condition rated as service-connected, gaining him access to treatment.

That treatment has led Adame full circle. He works for the American Legion, getting veterans, many of them homeless, into the VSO for help.

"They'll tell me their stories," he says, "and I'll say I'll get them help. But I'm not going to just get them money. I'm straight up with them. They need to get into rehab."

That is something Adame has no doubt about.

"[The VSO] helped me keep my head together," he says. "You have to help yourself in order to help others."

"Without them, I would have been in deep trouble. That's for sure."

Tino Adame knows how important the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office is in helping veterans. The VSO helped him get benefits, and now Adame refers other veterans to the agency for help in claiming the benefits they have earned.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN

"[The VSO] helped me keep my head together. Without them, I would have been in deep trouble."

Tino Adame
Veteran, U.S. Marine Corps

SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITY

Service-connected disability compensation is a monthly tax-free benefit paid to veterans with physical or mental conditions that were incurred or aggravated during active duty, active duty for training or inactive duty for training.

The amount of the award is based on the degree of disability (rated in increments of 10 percent). Compensation may also be given to conditions connected to the original

disability, even though they did not arise until after service was completed.

In most cases, medical evidence is required to support the claim of injury and its connection to the time of service.

However, some circumstances qualify as presumed disability, even in the absence of specific evidence, such as former prisoners of war or veterans exposed to Agent Orange while serving in Vietnam.



Who is eligible?

Veterans who can demonstrate their disability arose as a result of service.

How do I apply?

The San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office can help file your claim the right way the first time. Call 209-468-2916 or toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

Keeping Vets ★ = Healthy = ★

Amanda Huch needed one thing to get her medical benefits — and VSO helped her get it

by Matt Jocks

For veterans like Amanda Huch, the slow grind of working with the federal government was more than a minor inconvenience — it was affecting her physical health.

Huch, a Navy veteran now living in Lodi, deals with a medical condition that requires regular medication. The only thing standing in her way of getting that medication was a piece of paper — her DD214, a certificate of discharge from the military.

Without it, Huch couldn't access her U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health benefits. And without those, she could neither obtain a prescription nor pay for the medication.

"I basically had to deal with it by going without my medication," she says. "It was really rough."

Huch, who did not wish to disclose her illness, says it wasn't a life-or-death situation, but not having her medicine did affect her quality of life.

"It made it a lot harder to work," she says.

In the pursuit for her DD214 form, Huch was bounced from office to office by phone and email, and still no DD214 was coming. She even considered writing her congressman for help.

"It made me feel angry, frustrated and powerless," Huch says. "We had served our country. This wasn't supposed to be happening."

The way out of the red-tape maze came when Huch attended a presentation that pointed her toward the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office. The office and County Veterans Service Officer Virginia Wimmer became Huch's advocate, eventually obtaining the DD214, providing the link to a doctor and her medication.

"They called me and emailed me regularly and always made sure I knew what was going on," Huch says. "A lot of it was [Wimmer's] tenacity. But her empathy was also a great comfort for me. She really saved the day."

After experiencing what felt like a hopeless situation, Huch is now being treated regularly by a doctor, back on her medication and "coming along really well." Her path to wellness all started with a little help from San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office.

"I felt like they really cared about me and they did everything within their power to get me what I needed," she says.



Amanda Huch couldn't gain access to Veterans Administration health care, despite having served in the Navy. The San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office helped her connect with health care benefits, so she could get medication she badly needed. PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN

"I felt like they really cared about me and they did everything within their power to get me what I needed."

Amanda Huch
Navy veteran

HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

The Veterans Affairs comprehensive medical benefits package includes primary, preventative and specialty care; prescriptions; mental health care; home health care; geriatrics and extended care; medical equipment and prosthetics. Most veterans qualify for cost-free services, while others have co-pay requirements.

Mental health care benefits include inpatient and outpatient

treatment at VA facilities, as well as community-based outpatient treatment. Comprehensive vision benefits are offered to many veterans who are visually impaired. Qualifying veterans receive comprehensive dental benefits. Others can receive reduced-rate dental insurance from the VA Dental Insurance program.

Assisted living and home health care is available for qualifying veterans.

Who is eligible?

Veterans must have served in the active military, naval, or air service and separated under any conditions other than dishonorable. Other service requirements may apply.

How do I apply?

Don't wait until your condition gets worse. Start the process to get medical coverage today by contacting the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office at 209-468-2916 or toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.



Kimberly King suffered from back pain for years before discovering her injury was service-related and could qualify her for disability compensation.
PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN



“[My veterans service representative] told me I deserve to have these benefits just as much as any other veteran.”

Kimberly King
Air Force veteran

Not Backing Down

After suffering for years with back pain, veteran discovers her injury was service-related

by Amanda Caraway

After years of suffering, Kimberly King is thrilled to finally receive the medical care she needs, and she owes it all to San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office.

King served as a staff sergeant and aircraft mechanic in the Air Force from 1980 to 1988, during which time she injured her back while working on a B-52.

“I still remember the pain,” King says. “It was so intense, I couldn’t move. It hurt to breathe.”

The military hospital told King she had Scheuermann’s disease, a spinal disorder. Unable to continue working as a mechanic, King began working as a recruiter. She left the military when she married and worked as a UPS driver for 25 years.

It wasn’t until recently that the pain in King’s back returned. When her

doctor did X-rays, the true cause of her back pain was discovered.

“He said I never had Scheuermann’s disease,” King says. “I was shocked. I spent all those years thinking I had a disease instead of treating my injury.”

The doctor discovered King has spinal compression caused by the injury she sustained while working on the B-52 all those years ago. When she learned the pain was due to an injury she received while serving in the Air Force, King decided to visit the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office to find out if she qualified for any benefits.

“I was surprised by how many benefits I was entitled to,” King says. “There seems to be a program for every need that I have. I feel so fortunate I went to see them.”

All of King’s medical bills are covered now that she has health benefits through

the Veterans Health Administration, and King is finally receiving the help she needs: physical therapy, yoga, visits to a pain clinic – everything she requires to manage her back pain.

In addition, King is receiving monthly disability payments, and both she and her family members qualify for the education benefit.

“I was thrilled when I learned my daughter could go to any state school for free,” King says. “They really know what they’re doing at the [San Joaquin] office.”

King is especially grateful for her veterans service representative, Jerry Jolly, who helped her discover all the benefits she’s entitled to because of her years of service.

“He’s an awesome person,” says King. “He told me I deserve to have these benefits just as much as any other veteran.”

PENSION

Veterans age 65 or older with financial challenges can get supplemental income through the Veterans Pension and Survivors Pension benefit programs. This tax-free monetary benefit is payable to low-income wartime veterans or low-income, un-remarried surviving spouses and/or unmarried child(ren) of a deceased veteran with wartime service.

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Who is eligible?

Veterans age 65 or older with limited or no income and/or permanently disabled veterans. Certain service requirements also apply.

How do I apply?

Contact the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office at 209-468-2916 or toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

AID AND ATTENDANCE

If veterans need extra care as a result of age or disability, the aid and attendance benefit provides an additional monetary payment to veterans already receiving pension. The payment is for a veteran or spouse who needs help with daily tasks such as bathing, dressing and eating. The funds provided through the benefit may be used to help pay for in-home care or an assisted living facility.

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Who is eligible?

Veterans and survivors who are eligible for a VA pension and need help with daily tasks.

How do I apply?

Contact the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office at 209-468-2916 or toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

A Bright Spot Amid the Pain



Veterans Service Office supports family members in time of need

by Amanda Caraway

In November 2015, Marie Richard buried her husband, Wylie S. Richard, a U.S. Army veteran. His death was preceded by a long period of pain and suffering – he had diabetes and pancreatic cancer resulting from exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

“It has been a very difficult time,” Richard says.

When her husband became ill, Richard went to the local Veterans Affairs hospital to inquire about home health care assistance. The hospital told her that his veteran benefits only covered one-hour visits three times per week.

“That was not enough,” Richard says. “It was too hard for me to move him, bathe him and change his clothes on my own. And he was in so much pain. I couldn’t lift him without hurting him. I was desperate for help.”

Richard contacted the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office to see if there was any way to get more assistance. S. Michelle Payne was her veterans service representative.

“They were very accessible and willing to help,” Richard recalls. “Michelle was wonderful and helped me get additional care for my husband.”

Payne helped Richard file a claim, and the VA hospital was notified that Wylie was entitled to more benefits since his illnesses were caused by exposure to

Agent Orange. Finally, Wylie began getting the help he needed.

“I was surprised the VA hospital didn’t know what benefits Wylie was entitled to,” Richard says. “I don’t think we would have received the help we needed without Michelle and the staff at the Veterans Service Office.”

When Wylie passed away, Payne helped Richard file for the burial benefit to cover some of the costs.

Because her husband’s death resulted from war injuries, Richard received the maximum benefit. Wylie was buried in the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon and received a headstone at no cost to the family.

“Once Wylie passed on, I helped Marie file for survivor benefits,” Payne says. “She now receives a portion of Wylie’s Social Security, plus secondary health care coverage through CHAMPVA (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the

Department of Veterans Affairs).”

Richard can also qualify for educational benefits, and the aid and attendance benefit to help pay for home health care or assisted living if she needs it in the future.

“We are here to help veterans navigate the system and get the benefits they have earned,” Payne says. “Veterans should contact the department to find out if they qualify.”

“I don’t think we would have received the help we needed without ... the staff at the Veterans Service Office.”

Marie Richard
survivor



Marie Richard's husband, Wylie S. Richard, passed away in November 2015 due to illness resulting from Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War. Marie Richard received help to bury her husband as well as survivor benefits with the assistance of the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office.
PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN

VA BURIAL ALLOWANCE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers a burial allowance to surviving spouses of eligible veterans to help cover costs. The allowance is paid to surviving spouses upon notification of death. The amount varies, with a larger amount given when the death is caused by a condition resulting from war injuries. Other surviving relatives, including children, may file to receive the benefit if it's not claimed by the spouse.

All qualifying veterans receive a free headstone and can be buried in a state or national veteran cemetery, whether they receive the burial benefit or not. The closest qualifying cemetery to San Joaquin is located in Dixon, but a veteran can choose any cemetery.

Who's eligible?

Surviving spouses of veterans who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable and who meet other requirements.

How to apply?

The San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office knows what it means to mourn our servicemen and women. Call today for help with burial benefits at 209-468-2916 or toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.



VOCATIONAL SERVICES



U.S. Navy veteran Kevin Walker participated in the vocational rehab program, putting him on a path to becoming a counselor.

Putting Veterans to Work

Of the challenges faced by veterans with service-connected disabilities, the difficulty in finding and maintaining employment is central.

Those veterans are eligible for assistance in many forms from the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office. Through the office, veterans can receive educational and vocational training and counseling, help in job placement, and financial assistance through the

training process.

More targeted assistance is also available – tutoring, readers for the visually impaired, sign-language interpreters for the hearing impaired, as well as medical and dental treatment.

Veterans whose disability renders them unsuitable for employment can get assistance in independent living skills.

Kevin Walker of Stockton was a beneficiary of the vocational

rehab program. Its assistance led him through Delta College and University of the Pacific to a master's degree from California State University, Sacramento, and a new career counseling veterans.

"If I hadn't had this program, I never would have had the educational opportunities I did," Walker says. "When I work with these veterans, the ones that get me the most are the ones with stories that are similar to my own."

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

A Path to Education

The difference between veterans and their dependents attending college or having to choose another path often comes from the assistance programs offered at the federal and state levels.

James Reece, a veteran of the Army and Navy living in Manteca, is able to watch his son Darius follow a path from Modesto Junior College to UC Davis, avoiding a large student loan debt, thanks to the CalVet College Tuition Fee Waiver, authorized by the California Department

of Veterans Affairs and administered by county veterans service officers.

"As a parent, you always want your child to do better than you did," James Reece says. "For him to be able to get a start like this, it's a beautiful thing."

Other programs are available from the federal VA:

The Post-9/11 GI Bill offers veterans who served after Sept. 10, 2001, 36 months of entitlement over a 15-year eligibility period. The assistance can be

used in colleges, universities, trade schools, apprenticeships and flight schools.

Children of veterans who are permanently disabled or who die from service-related conditions are eligible for assistance for colleges, apprenticeships, tutoring and work study.

The San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office can help connect veterans and dependents to education benefits. Call 209-468-2916 or toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.



At left, Darius Reece has been able to pursue an education at Modesto Junior College and UC Davis thanks to father James Reece's service in the Army and Navy.

TREATMENT COURT



Jeremy Caylor went through the San Joaquin Veterans Treatment Court, which takes into account the unique needs of veterans.

A Court Built for Veterans

Many veterans face challenges that follow a road through mental health issues, substance abuse and financial woes, a road that sometimes leads to the criminal justice system. The goal of the San Joaquin Veterans Treatment Court is to see that the story doesn't end there.

The Veterans Treatment Court pulls together judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, treatment

providers, the Department of Labor and veterans service and advocacy groups at all levels to deal holistically with veteran offenders. The goal is to keep the veterans involved with their community and family, as opposed to jail.

Jeremy Caylor of Stockton was a product of the process after his DUI arrest. Now, his goal is to join it on the other end as a substance

abuse counselor. Caylor was afforded treatment for anxiety and post-traumatic stress issues, as well as rehabilitation through Alcoholics Anonymous.

"This allowed me to right my wrongs," Caylor says. "To show the community that I can be a good, productive member of society. It has been really great for me."

We Have Your Back



If you are a veteran in San Joaquin County and haven't connected with the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office, you may be missing out on a valuable resource in our community.

The San Joaquin County VSO is able to advocate for veterans and help them navigate the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs system to help them get the benefits they have earned.



Veterans Service Officer Virginia Wimmer

San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office



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www.sjgov.org/veterans/

TOP 5 MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What services are available at the San Joaquin County Veterans Service Office?

Veterans and their families receive comprehensive and professional benefits counseling, information and referral services to job opportunities, health care benefits, housing referral resources, community resources, and the list goes on. As accredited veterans service representatives, we specialize in providing the most current and compassionate advocacy services that veterans and their families deserve.

2. How do I locate my military records or those of a relative?

The easiest and most timely way is to request copies of military records and/or "Report of Separation from Active Military Service" (DD214 form or equivalent), from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). The staff at the San Joaquin Veterans Service Office will prepare and submit the request form. NPRC will normally respond within 48 hours for funeral or burial purposes. NPRC will also respond rapidly to requests for homeless and terminally ill veterans as well.

3. Am I eligible for burial at a national cemetery?

If you served in a branch of the military and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, you may be eligible for burial in a Department of Veterans Affairs national or state veterans cemetery. It is not necessary nor possible to reserve burial at the VA national cemetery. To locate the nearest VA national cemetery or state veterans cemetery, visit www.cem.va.gov.

4. Are there any benefits for Army and Air National Guard or Reservists?

Members of the National Guard activated for federal service during a period of war or domestic emergency may be eligible for certain VA benefits, such as VA health care, compensation for injuries or conditions connected to that service and burial benefits. Activation other than for federal service does not qualify Guard members for all VA benefits.

5. I am active duty. What VA benefits am I entitled to before I depart from military service?

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was established to meet the needs of separating service members during their period of transition into civilian life by offering job-search assistance and related services. TAP consists of comprehensive three-day workshops at selected military installations nationwide.