



You Served Us.
Now Let Us Serve You.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY
VETERANS SERVICES



Veterans Services Office staff, from left, Ali Ha-Sidi, Richard Kelley, Suzi Vinci and Craig Rudley pose outside Sacramento County Veterans Services' 19th Street office.

PHOTO BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY



Dear Readers,

Sacramento County is proud to be home to more than 100,000 veterans. If you are one of them, we thank you for your service. Sacramento County is committed to serving those who served us through the Veterans Services Office. I had the opportunity to work as the County Veterans Services Officer at the Veterans Services Office in Kings County, where I saw the life-changing effects of this work.

County Veterans Services staff are a vital link in helping veterans get access to compensation for service-connected disabilities, medical care, burial assistance, college fee waivers and more. Most of the staff at Sacramento County Veterans Services are former members of the armed forces themselves and are compelled by this common bond to help their brothers and sisters in arms.

If you or someone you love would like to know more about the benefits earned through service in our nation's military, please contact Sacramento County Veterans Services today.



Sincerely,
Bradley J. Hudson
Sacramento County
Executive Officer
U.S. Air Force Veteran

Cover: U.S. Army veteran Carmelita Crenshaw, of Elk Grove, stretches out her arms to one of her sons.

PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL

You Served Us. Now Let Us Serve You.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

For the Veterans Services staff in the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance, "veterans helping veterans" is more than just a slogan — it's a mission. More than 100,000 county residents have served in the American armed forces. Sacramento County Veterans Services staff are veterans advocating on behalf of fellow servicemen and servicewomen to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits they've earned.

"We have a lot of vets who try to navigate through the VA system themselves," says Lester Heatley, County Veterans Services Officer. "The Veterans Administration has done a lot of work creating a self-service environment for our veterans. The downside to that is that veterans applying on their own don't know all the rules and requirements of obtaining benefits, and our staff does. So even if you submit a claim on your own, it's in your best interest to sit down with us and see if there are other benefits you may be leaving on the table."

The list of benefits is long. They include pensions; compensation for disabled veterans and their families; health care; waivers for college fees and vehicle-registration fees; education and career counseling; home loans; property-tax exemptions; burial allowances; and insurance programs.

"These staff members are people who have shared some of the same experiences."

LESTER HEATLEY
COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES OFFICER,
SACRAMENTO COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES

The County also assists veterans seeking employment through the Job Talk program and entrepreneurs through Business Resources for Veterans.

Benefits belong to any former serviceman or servicewoman in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard or National Guard with active duty. The honored status of "veteran" isn't limited to those who served in a war zone or got injured in the line of duty.

Helping veterans get recognized for their service is one reason Sacramento

County participates in a statewide program for issuing official identification cards. These cards provide veterans with a valid form of ID that can convey discounts and special considerations.

"The ID card has become a validation for veterans who feel they haven't received recognition," says Heatley, who served in the U.S. Army. "It says, 'I'm a veteran, I served.'"

The first step to getting an ID card or benefits assistance is contacting Veterans Services at 916-874-6811. The main office is located at 2007 19th St. in Sacramento. The County also has posted a claims representative one day a week inside the County of Sacramento North Service Center, 3331 Peacekeeper Way, McClellan, CA.

"We're bringing our services to the communities," Heatley says, "and we've identified three, possibly four, locations for new outreach centers."

Contacting Veterans Services shouldn't be daunting or intimidating — after all, staff members have been in the exact same position.

"A lot of veterans have participated in some pretty traumatic events and have a hard time relating what happened to them to people who weren't there," Heatley says. "It's really important for veterans to understand that these staff members are people who have shared some of the same experiences. Our staff are veterans assisting other veterans."



Carol Stober suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from her service in the Air Force. She was unable to work and ended up homeless before receiving her veterans compensation.

PHOTO BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY



PTSD AND OTHER INJURIES: SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

It's not always easy to spot an injury or illness that results from military service. Sometimes symptoms develop years after your service has ended. Compensation could be available for physical conditions, such as chronic knee pain, or mental conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) or other injuries. Even if you aren't sure if your injury is service-related, the best thing to do is contact Sacramento County Veterans Services. Expert claims representatives will help you file a claim.

Here are some possible signs of service-connected injury or disability:

- Reliving the traumatic event
- Nightmares/flashbacks
- Avoiding situations that remind you of the traumatic event
- Lack of trust or loving feelings toward people
- Hyper-alertness
- Trouble sleeping
- Substance abuse
- Chronic pain
- Chronic fatigue
- Joint and/or muscle pain
- Leukemias and some cancers

Worth the Fight

VETERAN GOES FROM HOMELESS
TO HOMEOWNER AFTER GETTING
VETERANS COMPENSATION

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

Carol Stober's nightmares started not long after two traumatic incidents she experienced at Beale Air Force Base. Carol worked on the flight line at Beale during the Vietnam era. While at Beale, her boyfriend died in a motorcycle accident. Then, she witnessed a fatal bomber crash. The U.S. Air Force honorably discharged her in 1974, after telling her that her father was in the hospital and near death. These events caused her to experience depression and nightmares that continue to this day.

"It was traumatic," she recalls.

Carol didn't realize until years after her service that these were symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition where a person's reaction to a traumatic event does not go away over time. These reactions can disrupt daily life by causing the person to relive the event, avoid situations similar to the event or be hyper-alert.

Despite her symptoms, Carol didn't get help. She says when she was discharged, she didn't know that she could receive services through the Veterans Administration.

After the Air Force, she married and had three children. In 1996, she became a single parent when her husband died of a brain aneurysm. She worked to provide for her children, but by 2009, she could no longer work.

Carol inquired about VA disability benefits, as she realized that many of her problems could be traced to her tenure in the Air Force. Suzi Vinci, her Sacramento County Veterans Claim Representative, filed her claim in December

2010. But once it was filed, Carol encountered frustrating roadblocks. The Oakland VA Regional office kept telling her that her application was being processed, but it seemed to remain in the development stage. In September 2012, she became homeless. When she called the homeless coordinator at the Oakland office, she says he didn't have time to talk to her.

But Carol persevered. In February 2013, she sent a letter to her congressman. Three months later, she was approved for VA compensation with 70 percent disability and got retroactive

payments, which enabled her to rent an apartment.

"I couldn't have made it without [the assistance of my congressman] and [my Veterans Claim Representative] Suzi," Stober says. In January 2014, her status was upgraded to 100 percent disability.

Carol recently purchased her own home through a VA home loan program.

"It's hard to believe that in a year's time I have gone from being homeless to buying a house," she says. "Now I don't have to suffer. My quality of life is 100 percent better."

Carol has advice for other vets who are discouraged in the VA process. Her story is proof that with determination and advocates like Sacramento County Veterans Services on your side, getting the benefits you're entitled to is possible.

"It's your right," she says. "It takes time. It is worth waiting for. You can access people like Suzi to help. Don't hide that you are hurting. Get the help that you need. Call your representative if you need help."

**"Now I don't
have to suffer.
My quality
of life is 100
percent better."**

CAROL STOBER
VETERAN



Vincent Armlin is attending San Jose State on the College Fee Waiver Program. His tuition is free because his father is a service-connected Marine Corps veteran.
PHOTO BY BASIL SAR

Higher Learning

VETERAN'S SON ATTENDS COLLEGE ON TUITION WAIVER PROGRAM

FREE COLLEGE TUITION

Most servicemen and servicewomen have heard of the GI Bill, which defrays the cost of college following their honorable discharge. But many don't know that their family members also may qualify for financial support as an incentive to pursue their educational goals.

Under the [College Fee Waiver Program for Veteran Dependents](#), eligible dependents do not have to pay tuition at any California community college, California State University campus or University of California campus. The program is open to eligible dependents of veterans who were disabled or killed in the line of duty.

The Sacramento County Veterans Services Division administers this benefit and determines eligibility on behalf of the California Department of Veterans Affairs. To learn more, visit www.calvet.ca.gov or consult a Veterans Claims Representative:

In person 2007 19th St., Sacramento
Phone 916-874-6811
E-mail DHA-VET@saccounty.net

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Vincent Armlin plans to follow in his father's footsteps and enlist in the Marine Corps. First, though, he'll complete his degree in Justice Studies at San Jose State University, with tuition fully funded by the College Fee Waiver Program for Veteran Dependents.

Vincent's father, Frederick, retired to Sacramento after serving 21 years in the Marines, reaching the rank of Gunnery Sergeant. Eldest child Erica attended UC Santa Cruz, also on the fee waiver program; she's now 24 and employed in retail management.

Vincent, 19, planned to join the Corps straight out of high school, but his parents convinced him that a college education would boost his military career.

"If you're going to be competitive in this day and age, you've got to have that degree," Frederick says. "I retired from the Marines 12 years ago, and I was just ahead of that power curve, the education push. Now, to make myself competitive, I'd have to [graduate college]."

Vincent came to the same conclusion. A participant in the USMC Platoon Leaders Class, a commissioning program for officer candidates, he chose San Jose State in order to be close to home but still "far enough away to get some separation from my parents."

"It's made a huge difference for my family. My parents really have a lot more financial freedom."

VINCENT ARMLIN
STUDENT ON THE COLLEGE FEE
WAIVER PROGRAM

The fee waiver program also played a role in his decision. As long as he attended a community college or public university within California, all his mandatory state fees would be covered — no student loans or debt.

"It's made a huge difference for my family," he says. "My parents really have a lot

more financial freedom. They only have to pay living expenses, so it's helped a lot as far as financial burdens."

Like most military couples, Frederick and Patricia Armlin went around the world for deployments, though after becoming parents, their postings became exclusive to California. Vincent was born in Escondido, grew up in Oceanside, then moved to Livermore and Dixon before settling down in Sacramento for high school.

The Armlins learned about the fee waiver program, along with other programs for disabled veterans, after Frederick left the Marine Corps. Frederick recommends that other servicemen and servicewomen be even more proactive than he was about claiming such benefits.

"When you do your disability, you should start that before you separate out," says Frederick, who works as a veterans' representative for a trade school. "It takes a while. Don't do like I did — I waited four or five years before I went after it, and it doesn't back-date at that point."

Regardless of timing, though, the Armlins say the college fee waiver benefit is worth pursuing.

"Anyone who has the opportunity to take advantage of this program should definitely do so," Vincent says.

A Family Affair

VETERAN BENEFITS HELP WIDOW AND DAUGHTER OF SERVICEMAN

BY MIKE BLOUNT

The first time Sherron Thomas saw her future husband Harold, he was taking charge of a chaotic scene. The divorced mom and her three kids were involved in a car accident in 1992. Her car was totaled. Her son broke his collar bone. But, thankfully, no one was severely hurt.

Harold, a 20-year Air Force veteran, quickly pulled over and put his military training to use. He checked to make sure everyone was OK. He made sure Sherron and her son were able to get to the hospital. He even offered his phone number so he could be a witness for Sherron to file a claim with her insurance company.

Even though the incident was traumatic, Sherron believes it was a blessing in disguise because it brought them together.

"He directed the situation and took control of it," Sherron says. "That was just like him to step up in the line of duty."

Sherron says Harold was always prepared for any situation, thanks to his military background.

While he was stationed at an Air Force base in Thailand, he was responsible for guarding containers of Agent Orange, an herbicide used by the military that has been linked to long-term health issues. By the time he retired, Harold had risen through the ranks to become a technical sergeant. But his daily exposure to the toxic chemical eventually took its toll.

Harold was diagnosed with prostate cancer in September 2011. Shortly after he was diagnosed, he

made an appointment with Veterans Services to file a claim.

When he passed away in November of that year, his benefits helped pay part of the funeral cost. Sherron says it took the pressure off of her during a difficult time for the family. He received a full military burial.

"Even though my husband was gone, the funeral made me so proud of him and his service to this country," Sherron says.

In May 2012, Harold's payments were approved for his service-connected disability. Sherron received back-pay for the months the claim was being processed. Most importantly, the money would help

ensure their 17-year-old daughter, Alisha, would be able to go to college.

"The benefits have been such a blessing," Sherron says. "It allows us to continue to make our mortgage payments. We have medical benefits. Alisha will be able to go to college and have her tuition paid. It's wonderful."

Sherron is even eligible for financial assistance for college. She's looking into

going to school with her daughter next year. Sherron says none of it would be possible without the help of her Veterans Claim Representative, Richard Kelley.

"We are so fortunate that we had a representative help us with filing a claim," Sherron says. "He knew what questions to ask and explained everything to us. Without his help, we wouldn't have known what paperwork to file or anything. These benefits have been a great resource for our family."

"These benefits have been a great resource for our family."

SHERRON THOMAS
WIDOW OF VETERAN HAROLD THOMAS



Sherron Thomas and daughter Alisha Thomas pose with a picture of Harold Thomas and his burial flag. Sherron says the benefits she's receiving because of her husband's service help her have a better quality of life.

VETERANS BENEFITS FOR FAMILY

Certain benefits may be available to family members of veterans, regardless of their time served. Here is some additional information about veterans benefits for family members:

Veterans benefits for family members could include medical coverage, service-connected disability pay, commissary and base exchange privileges and more.

Up to \$2,000 in funeral cost reimbursement is available for service men and women who are deceased.

Chapter 35 Dependents Education Assistance (DEA) or the state college fee waiver program may be available for dependents of veterans.

Military service does not guarantee eligibility for veterans benefits for family members.

Veterans Claim Representative Richard Kelley helped with Harold Thomas' claim. Richard is retired from the U.S. Army.

PHOTOS BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY





Benefits You May Have Earned

SACRAMENTO COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES OFFICE CONNECTS VETERANS TO SERVICES

Sacramento County Veterans Services Office most commonly assists veterans and their families with the benefits listed below.

Disability Compensation — A tax-free monetary benefit paid to veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. Compensation may also be paid for disabilities that are considered related or presumed to be related to military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) — A tax-free monetary benefit generally payable to a surviving spouse, child or parent of service members who died while on active duty, active duty for training, inactive duty training or survivors of veterans who died from their service-connected disabilities. DIC for parents is an income-based benefit.

Pension — A benefit paid to wartime veterans age 65 or older who meet the income requirement.

Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) — An additional tax-free benefit that can be paid to veterans, their spouses, surviving spouses and parents. For veterans, SMC is a higher rate of compensation paid due to special circumstances for service-connected veterans.

Aid and Attendance — Veterans and survivors who are eligible for a VA pension and require aid and attendance of another person may be eligible for additional monetary payment.

Burial and Plot-Interment Allowances — Partial reimbursements of an eligible veteran's burial and funeral costs.

Health Care — Health coverage is available for those who served in the active military service and who were discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

College Fee Waivers — Available for eligible dependents of service-connected veterans. Waivers cover mandatory systemwide fees at any campus of the University of California, California State University (including the California Maritime Academy) or California Community Colleges.

OTHER BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO VETERANS

The following is a list of benefits and other resources veterans and their families may be eligible for outside of the county, including education, housing, tax exemptions and insurance. Sacramento County Veterans Services can assist and refer for these benefits/resources. More information on all of the benefits/resources listed below can be found at www.calvet.ca.gov or www.va.gov.

GI Bill — Educational benefits to advance the education and skills of veterans and service members.

Vocation Rehabilitation — Job training, employment accommodations, resume development and job-seeking skills coaching.

CalVet Home Loans — Below-market interest rates with low or no down payment requirements for nearly any veteran wanting to buy a home in California.

CalVet Homes — Provides the state's aged or disabled veterans with rehabilitative, residential and medical care and services in a home-like environment.

HUD-VASH — Long-term case management, supportive services and permanent housing support.

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans — The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans hotline (877-4AID-VET) offers veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness access to trained counselors 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Home Foreclosure Assistance — Help for veterans at risk of losing their home through foreclosure.

Disabled Veterans Exemption — The California Constitution and Revenue and Taxation Code Section 205.5 provides a property tax exemption for the home of a disabled veteran or an unmarried spouse of a deceased disabled veteran.

Motor Vehicle Registration Fee Waiver — Medal of Honor recipients, American Ex-Prisoners of War and Disabled Veterans are eligible for a waiver for motor vehicle registration.

Dental Benefits — Voluntary dental insurance can now be purchased through Delta Dental at reduced cost.

Life Insurance — The VA provides valuable life insurance benefits to give you the peace of mind that comes with knowing your family is protected.



Suzi Vinci is a Veterans Claim Representative with Sacramento County Veterans Services and served in the Navy/Naval Reserve.

PHOTO BY LAURA MARIE ANTHONY

GETTING YOUR CLAIM STARTED

Starting the process is easy. After you've made an appointment with Sacramento County Veterans Services, here are a few things you'll need to know:

Bring your Veterans Discharge Notification or DD-214 form. Veterans Services can help you get a copy of your DD-214 if necessary. Additional documents may be required to complete the claim.

Be prepared to answer questions about your service. A representative will ask you about the era you served in and your duties to determine your claim eligibility.

Once the paperwork is finished, the claim will then be sent to the Veterans Affairs office in Oakland to be processed.

Within 90 days, you should receive a letter confirming receipt. Veterans or their family members can contact Veterans Affairs at any time to see where the claim is in the process.

Serving the Silent Heroes

Q & A WITH SUZI VINCI

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Suzi Vinci is always at work — even when she's not at the office. As a Veterans Claim Representative, Suzi works to make sure veterans and their family members get the benefits they are entitled to receive. Sometimes, that means striking up a conversation with a veteran's spouse at a local high school football game. At other times, she hands out her information to veterans she meets while shopping. And though Suzi is a veteran herself, she thinks of the servicemen and women she's serving as the "silent heroes" of our nation.

What made you want to do this job?

I'm a veteran myself. I felt the military was a calling, so I did it. I entered into the Naval Reserve Advanced Pay Grade Program in October of 1992. I was attached to the CINCPACFLT DET 520 out of Pearl Harbor, and then I recalled to active duty in 1996 where I recruited for six and a half years at the Naval Reserve Center on Elder Creek Road. I was awarded a Navy Achievement Medal for my recruiting efforts. When in uniform — I know it sounds strange — but people are drawn to it. People would come up and start a conversation and tell me about their family members in the military. That's the common bond that people in the military share.

What do you enjoy about working for Veterans Services?

This allows me to give back to my community. When I lay my head down on my pillow at night, I know I'm making a permanent, positive impact in people's lives. This is also the community that has given to me. I was born at Mather Air Force Base. I went to public school here and I pay my taxes here. This is my small way of giving back. All of the veterans of this country have given so much. I call them my silent heroes, because that's what they are. Not everyone knows who is a veteran, but I know them all by name when they come through my office.

Who may be eligible for benefits?

Anyone who has served in the military in any capacity, regardless of time served, may be eligible. The best way to know if you or a family member is eligible is to come into our office and talk with a Veterans Claim Representative.

What can a claim cover?

A claim can cover a service-connected disability. It can cover a nonservice-connected pension for members who served during a war-time period. There's widow's pension or death indemnity for surviving spouses. There's a number of things it could cover. The best way to find out is to come into our office. Anyone who's a veteran needs to contact a representative to find out what they are eligible for.

Was there a time that getting a veteran connected with their benefits affected you personally?

It happens a lot. But there is one specific veteran, whose wife came to see me when he was hospitalized in Sacramento. The doctors determined he had cancer

that had metastasized. He was at Hamburger Hill in Vietnam and was exposed to Agent Orange. His wife had tried to get him connected before, but they didn't have a representative and tried to fill out the paperwork themselves. The process can be extremely bureaucratic and intimidating. A lot of people just give up.

We filed the paperwork as quickly as possible. He ended up passing away, but his wife was awarded death benefits. She's now going back to school. She's even looking at starting a business and buying a home. She still calls me to this day. Things like that are what motivate me to keep doing my job.

"I know I'm making a permanent, positive impact in people's lives."

SUZI VINCI
VETERANS CLAIM REPRESENTATIVE

Your Next Mission

Don't wait. Call Sacramento County Veterans Services.

If you served, you may have earned the many benefits reserved for those who helped protect our country. Many veterans are suffering with service-connected disabilities that could entitle them to assistance. And many other veterans don't know these life-changing benefits exist. Don't wait — contact Sacramento County Veterans Services today.

Visit Sacramento County
Veterans Services Office
2007 19th St.
Sacramento, CA
Open: 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
Monday-Friday

County of Sacramento
North Service Center
3331 Peacekeeper Way, Ste. 200
McClellan, CA
Open: 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
Tuesdays

Call 916-874-6811

Email DHA-VET@saccounty.net

Benefits you may be eligible for

- » Compensation
- » Pension
- » Health Care
- » College Fee Waivers
- » Veteran ID Cards

GET YOUR ID CARD

Sacramento County Veterans Services issues official identification cards to men and women who have served in the United States armed forces. The ID card is a recognized form of identification. Your veteran status must be verified. Bring in your DD-214. If you don't have a copy of your DD-214, Veterans Services can help you get it. These ID cards provide benefits to the bearer, such as:

A form of valid ID accepted by government agencies and officials
Recognition of military service
Discounts from businesses that honor veterans
Specialized attention from paramedics and law enforcement

For an ID card, or to have your eligibility to veterans benefits reviewed, contact Sacramento County Veterans Services.



SACRAMENTO COUNTY VETERANS SERVICES

