



Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Cultivating community connections
– empowering Georgia’s veterans
and their families to flourish.

April 2023

GOVERNOR KEMP SIGNS VETERANS LEGISLATION: CREATES VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES PROGRAM GRANT



The Georgia Department of Veterans Service and members of the Veterans Service Board joined **Governor Brian Kemp** and state legislators for the signing of bills supporting our military service members, veterans, and their families passed during this legislative session.

Governor Kemp signed **SB 21** which provides for changes in the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation and **HB 175** which enables disabled veterans to receive a Title Ad Valorem Tax exemption on their primary vehicle while using a distinctive veteran’s license plate of their choice. Previously, veterans were required to use the disabled veteran license plate to receive the tax exemption.



Governor Kemp also signed **HB 414**, which creates a competitive grant program for nonprofit behavioral health clinics who provide services to military service members, veterans, and their immediate family members.

To be eligible, organizations must be non profit (501 (c)3) providers in the state of Georgia who: provide clinical services; utilize evidence –based practices; integrate military cultural competency training for staff members; and connect clients with appropriate community – based behavioral health services upon discharge in a timely manner.



Funded through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2023, the total amount of grant dollars available is \$750,000. Subject to the availability of funding, competitive matching grants will be awarded to nonprofit community behavioral health programs that meet eligibility criteria. Applicants **MUST** have matching funding for consideration.

The application for consideration for grant funds is available at <https://gdvsmentalhealthgrant.smapply.io/>. The deadline to apply is May 10, 2023.

Questions on the process and required documentation should be sent to gavetsvc@vs.state.ga.us.



GEORGIA MILITARY VETERANS HALL OF FAME PORTRAITS UNVEILED

On April 20, 2023, 31 new inductees in the 2021 and 2022 classes of the Georgia Military Veteran Hall of Fame were unveiled at the Georgia State Capitol. Veterans, family members, and friends joined Lt. Governor Burt Jones and state representatives to celebrate the brave and selfless Georgians inducted into this rare and noble hall of fame.

Since its inception in 2013, the GMVHOF has inducted 162 Georgia veterans. Veterans are nominated in one of three categories: Valor, Achievements, or Service.

For more information, visit <https://gmvhof.org/>.



GDVS CEMETERIES PREPARE TO HONOR OUR HEROES



As the nation prepares to honor our fallen heroes on Memorial Day, the Georgia Department of Veterans Service is preparing to welcome over 500 visitors to the pristine grounds of our treasured state veterans cemeteries in Milledgeville and Glennville.

“The cemeteries are shrines to our fallen veterans and their families. Since their opening, each cemetery has ensured every interment is conducted in an honorable and dignified manner, the grounds are maintained in outstanding conditions, and every visitor recognizes the reverence in which these facilities are held,” explained Russell Feagin, GDVS Director of Health and Memorials.

The avenue of flags is displayed at both cemeteries during Memorial Day, Flag Day, Veterans Day, and Wreaths Across America. It is an amazing sight to behold, and speaks to the dedication and hard work of the staff at both cemeteries. “There are very few staff members at each cemetery and yet they are responsible for mowing, edging, pruning, and more,” explained Feagin. “Their primary responsibility is honorable interment of our deceased veterans and their family members.”

As the cemeteries continue to grow in size and use our veterans and their families can rest assured that these cemeteries will always be maintained to the highest standards and provide the honor and respect that their service to our country deserves.

For more information on Georgia’s state veteran cemeteries, visit <https://veterans.georgia.gov/cemeteries>.

A WELL DESERVED QUILT OF VALOR



A cherished Quilt of Valor was bestowed upon Canton Veterans Service Officer Manager, **Rita Barnhardt**.

“Rita is an immeasurable and priceless resource for those who have benefited by her guidance,”

said **Bill Harper**, Ministry Leader with Canton First Veteran Ministry.

Harper presented the quilt especially created for Barnhardt in late April. “She has provided skilled navigation of many rules and regulations that are often intimidating to veterans not used to seeking any deserved assistance, from lack of awareness, concern about rejection, or general reluctance to ask for something they may not believe they have earned,” said Harper.

Barnhardt, who has served the community for almost 40 years, says she was completely surprised and deeply touched by this honor. “It truthfully brought tears to my eyes. These claimants are the very reason I love my job and continue to come to work every day. I have a fabulous group of veterans and survivors in my area. They’re entirely TOO kind to me.”

Although Barnhardt is not a veteran, to Harper “...the product she has continuously and consistently delivered as a Veteran Service Officer in Cherokee County deserves similar recognition, from serving those that HAVE endured combat – her work has made a significant difference in a multitude of Veterans’ lives, over many years.”

The Quilt of Honor was created especially by Christine Twiss and is inscribed **In Gratitude for all you do for Veterans, Rita Barnhart. Thank You.**

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER: MELISSA INGLE



Americus Office manager, **Melissa Ingle**, is the first GDVS Employee of the Quarter for 2023!

She has been a valued member of the GDVS since September 2002.

A 10 year veteran of the U.S. Navy, Ingle attained the rank of Aviation Storekeeper 2nd Class.

Ingle stands out among her peers for her dedication to teamwork. During the transition to a new veterans benefits software system, she proactively learned and asked questions to figure out the best ways to adapt to the new claims filing environment.

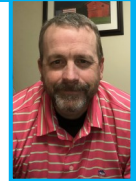
“To me, my employment with GDVS is more than just a job. It is a rewarding experience every day that I can help a veteran,” said Ingle.

Ingle is well-connected in the Americus community and also serves as an American Legion service officer at her post. She helps spread awareness of new programs and initiatives from the state and VA with veterans in her area.

For Ingle, the best reward of working with the GDVS has been “the opportunity to assist veterans and their families for the last 20 years.”

GET TO KNOW YOUR VSO:

KEVIN WHITLOCK



Educating veterans about possible benefits they may be unaware of is what motivates Milledgeville Office Manager **Kevin Whitlock**.

This Milledgeville native served 21 years in the Air Force and as a drug agent with AFOSI 21. He retired from Moody AFB in Valdosta, Georgia as a Master Sergeant in 2014.

One of his favorite parts of working for the Georgia Department of Veterans Service is informing veterans they have been awarded benefits as a result of their claim.

Whitlock describes himself as persistent, determined and proactive, with determination as his greatest strength. However, what he wants Georgia veterans to know about him is that he is honest and thorough.

When he is not serving veterans, Whitlock enjoys the lake life and playing golf. Among his travels, his favorite destination was St. Andrews, Scotland – the birthplace of golf.

Whitlock is most passionate about his family, and his newborn grandchild always makes him smile.

His advice to new and future VSOs? “Don’t take anything at face value. There is always more under the surface. Find it.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

We CARE Veteran Resource Fair 2023

–Rome, May 18th

–Marietta, August 4-5

LET’S CONNECT: Suicide Prevention Summit

–Kennesaw State University, May 24–25

INAUGURAL WOMEN’S GALA

–Middle Georgia State University, June

10. Reserve tickets at: [Women Veterans of Georgia Celebrating 75 Years of Courage](https://www.womenveteransofgeorgia.org/)