

GDVS APPOINTS NEW SOUTH REGION DIRECTOR

Sherri Whitfield has been selected as the next South Region Director of Veterans Benefits.



She succeeds Vince Pritchett, who retired as the Regional Director after 20 years of service with GDVS.

“What we do as Veterans Service Officers is so very important. We can effect change in a veteran’s life and livelihood, as well as their families,” said Whitfield. “I look forward to continuing to do great things for the Department and for our veterans.”

Before joining the GDVS, Whitfield served in the U.S. Army. She was a Combat Signaler and received extensive training as a Computer Support Specialist. She retired as a Staff Sergeant in 1999.

Following her retirement from the Army, Whitfield joined the GDVS and went to work helping Georgia’s veterans and their families for 18 years. An Albany native, Whitfield previously served as the manager of GDVS’s Albany office, a District Manager, and as part of the GDVS Training Division.

“The transition from Trainer to Director has been seamless. I will continue to be involved in training personnel and be instrumental in helping our veteran service officers become the best VSO they can be.”

GROWING TOGETHER: GDVS LAUNCHES LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Learning what it means to be an effective leader is what participants in the 12-month inaugural leadership institute class are striving to accomplish.

9 full-time employees were selected as part of the inaugural class. They showed demonstrated commitment to GDVS, potential for professional growth, and had long-term goals for continued employment with the department. Nearly all divisions of the department are represented. Participants range from seasoned employees with over 15 years of experience to those still in their first years with the GDVS, like Nakezia Whitehead. Whitehead has been with GDVS for just over one year and was fascinated to learn how the department encompassed different functions, like the State Approving Agency, to deliver different sorts of benefits to veterans.

Others are using the opportunity to improve their professional skills, like Appeals Assistant Director DeMario Rucker, who has been with the GDVS for over 10 years. “I am learning how to manage time, make tough decisions, and solve problems in difficult situations,” said Rucker.

Participants finished the first session on August 22. The session was held over 2 days and included visits to the Joseph Maxwell Cleland Atlanta VA Medical Center and the Senator Johnny Isakson Atlanta VA Regional Office and attendance at a GDVS board meeting.

For Cartersville Office Manager Steven Hungarter, the classes were powerful. “From budget analysis to the ethos of public speaking, you could tell there was thought and effort into training us,” said Hungarter.



STATE APPROVING AGENCY: ENSURING EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS FOR VETERANS

In 1947, Congress created State Approving Agencies as a safeguard for education benefits granted by the GI Bill® earlier in 1944.

The diligent work and administration of Georgia’s State Approving Agency (SAA) ensures the educational benefits Georgia veterans and their family members use go only to well respected, accredited institutions.

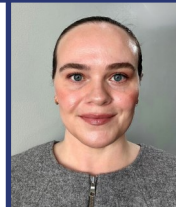
“All schools, facilities, and programs must be approved by our office before VA will pay out any education benefits,” said SAA Senior Coordinator Lily Snyder.

Snyder, who has been with SAA for 16 years, says it is her goal to support veterans and their beneficiaries to use their VA education benefits to receive the education and training they seek. “I am here to help, whether that’s the veteran, beneficiary, school official or employer.”

When she is not traveling or assisting veterans, Snyder is crafting, baking or playing with her pet Chihuahua Anya and cat Yasha. They always make her smile.

Her advice to veterans who inquire about education? “Learn about the education benefits that you have, how to use them, and to realize certain decisions you make can affect how the benefits are paid out. Don’t wait for time to run out.”

For more information on the SAA, educational benefits in Georgia, and how to become an approved institution, visit <https://veterans.georgia.gov/education>.





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

August 2023

THOUSANDS ATTEND WE CARE VET FAIR

For VSOs with the GDVS, the words “we care” were put into action at the 2nd annual We CARE Veterans Resource Fair in Cobb County on August 4-5.

Over 3,000 people attended the 2-day event. Over 300 veterans, service members, and family received assistance with their claims and benefits from the GDVS.

“If we weren’t there to provide that assistance, then they may have missed out on much needed benefits,” explained GDVS North Region Director Ken Childre.

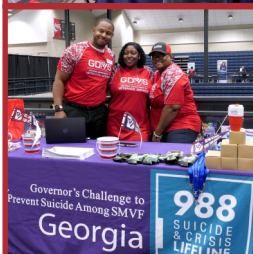
For Veteran Service Officer Christina Williams, the presence of GDVS had a huge impact on the veterans she assisted. “Some veterans were fortunate enough to file claims and the ones who weren’t left with more knowledge than they came in with. They were simply grateful to have a game plan.”

United Military Care established the We CARE Veterans Resource Fairs in 2022. It is open to all veterans regardless of when they served, their discharge status, or whether they are enrolled in the VA health care.

“If we can provide them with even the smallest bit of info, that spreads to others and our clientele increases,” said Childre.

“Most folks only think veterans are entitled to/eligible for only certain things, but when they are able to come to these fairs, they get to see that there are other organizations in their community that are willing to provide assistance to them.”

The next We CARE Fair will be held in Dekalb County on September 13, 2023. For more information, please visit <https://www.wecarevetfair.com/>.



40 YEARS WITH GDVS!

Join us in congratulating **Rita Barnhardt** for 40 years of serving Georgia veterans!

Among the many veterans she has helped, she fondly recalls taking care of multiple generations of the same families.

“A Vietnam vet referred me to his grandson’s case from the Gulf War. A Korean vet referred to me his daughter who served during the mid 1990s. A WW2 veteran’s son helped him file for pension, then came back to file his claim after getting dad fixed up.”

Thank you for your service, Rita!



UPCOMING EVENTS

September 8 : PACT Act Claims, GA International Convention Center, 9a.m.–4p.m. - [The Warrior Alliance/ Veterans Administration PACT ACT Claims Filing Tickets, Fri, Sep 8, 2023 at 9:00 AM | Eventbrite](#)

September 12 : Operation Reveille, VA Healthcare System Services to Homeless - [2023 Operation Reveille](#)

September 13: We CARE Veterans Fair Dekalb, Piedmont Technical College and Conference Center, 9:30a.m.–4p.m. - [Dekalb | 13 September | We CARE Veterans Res \(wecarevetfair.com\)](#)

September 26: PACT Act, Georgia Tech, 10a.m.–2p.m. - [Georgia Tech PACT Act](#)

September 30: PACT Act, Augusta Technical College, 9a.m.–4p.m. - [The Warrior Alliance/ VA PACT ACT Claims Filing- Augusta Tickets, Sat, Sep 30, 2023 at 9:00 AM | Eventbrite](#)

GMVHOF AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS

Thanks to the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame (GMVHOF), two JROTC students from Kings Academy of Woodstock are entering college this year with scholarships honoring Georgia veterans.

Joshua Acklen of Roswell and David Blackwell of Marietta were each presented with a \$4,000 scholarship at a recent ceremony held at the Veterans Memorial Walk in Johns Creek’s Newton Park.

The scholarship program was first created in 2020 by Col. Paul Longgrear, GMVHOF Founder, to inspire and prepare future leaders of America. “This will encourage some of our Georgia high school students to consider becoming part of their school’s JROTC Program,” explain GMVHOF director Col. Rick White (retired).

Acklen’s scholarship is in honor of the late “Submarine” Mike Kotler, a U.S. Navy veteran. Blackwell’s scholarship is in honor of Tommy Clack, a retired U.S. Army Captain. For more information on the scholarship program, please visit <https://gmvhof.org/>.

