



## Georgia Department of Veterans Service

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

December 2024

### FOUR DECADES OF DEDICATION: CELEBRATING RITA BARNHART’S RETIREMENT

A thread deeply woven into the fabric of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, Rita Barnhart, is saying farewell after serving Georgia’s veterans and their families, caretakers, and survivors for over 40 years.

Barnhart first began working for the department as a secretary typist under GDVS Commissioner Pete Wheeler in 1983. She later became a Veterans Benefits Counselor, trained to assist veterans and their families file and track the status of their veterans benefits claims. Barnhart, recognized for her diligent and dedicated work, was promoted to manage the Canton office in 2009.

She has been a witness to major changes in the agency across the years. From carbon paper typewriters to having access to VA through digital platforms, she’s seen it all—but her stability and reliability have made her an outstanding advocate for veterans and their families in north Georgia.

Her depth of knowledge in veterans benefits is immeasurable. During her time at the GDVS, Barnhart has assisted multiple generations from the same family. A Vietnam veteran referred her to his Gulf War veteran grandson, and the son of a WWII vet received pension help for his father before receiving help with his own claim.

“Rita instills confidence in veterans near and far to reach out to her for help,” said GDVS North Region Director Ken Childre. “I’m not sure anyone in this department now or future will ever commit themselves to this job for over 40 years and that is a testament to her and how she feels about her clients.”

Barnhart also recalls assisting three WWII Prisoners of War who visited her on a regular basis. “I will never forget those 3 gentlemen. They started me on the path to digging in and getting every benefit they deserved,” said Barnhart.

For Barnhart, the work is just her desire to make a difference in the lives of the veteran community.

“The challenge of battling for them, the success stories and the gratefulness of our claimants were a potent combination for my heart. I will sorely, sorely miss them,” said Barnhart.



## IN REMEMBRANCE: WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA 2024

The somber sight of Christmas wreaths laid upon on the headstones of fallen service members is a touching moment, allowing family members and friends to cherish memories of their departed loved ones as they head into the holiday season. Georgia’s Veteran Memorial Cemeteries (GVMC) in Milledgeville and Glennville held their annual public Wreaths Across America ceremonies on Saturday, December 14, 2024.

Volunteers, family members, and friends assisted staff in laying wreaths on the gravesites of our fallen heroes. Ernie Cowart, Director of the Georgia Veteran Memorial Cemetery—Glennville, said this was one of the best attended events in GVMC—Glennville’s history. “It’s an emotional and touching ceremony. A sign of remembrance and honor for those buried here,” said Cowart.

Sergeant Major (ret.) Sarita Dyer was the keynote speaker at this year’s ceremony at GVMC Milledgeville. “The ceremony was a solemn act of respect and reverence and we must never forget, or we will relive the past,” said Dyer.



## A TRIBUTE TO BRAVERY: CLINIC RENAMED FOR VIETNAM VETERANS

The VA clinic in Hinesville, Georgia now bears the names of four Vietnam War veterans from Liberty County who were killed in combat.

The John Gibson, Dan James, William Sapp, and Frankie Smiley VA Clinic was christened during a ceremony on December 2, 2024 hosted by U.S. Representative Early “Buddy” Carter and Scott Isaacks, director and chief executive officer of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Health Care System.

Representative Carter introduced the bill to rename the clinic and supported it through Congress after local veterans and the community proposed the idea in October 2022. It was signed into law in May 2024.

“Each of these men represent the very best of American valor and sacrifice,” said Isaacks. “Choosing service over self, demonstrating a level of courage and commitment that humbles us all.”



## 100 YEARS OF INSPIRATION : CELEBRATING VERA “BUNNY” FARMER

Georgia native Vera “Bunny” Farmer, a WWII Veteran and trailblazer for women in the military, recently celebrated her 100th birthday.

Farmer grew up in Naylor, Georgia on a dairy farm. After watching her father help those less fortunate, decided to join the military and serve her country.

She served in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) during WWII, working on critical aviation operations, transporting sensitive equipment, and building electronics for military vehicles. She met her husband, William, during her time working for the WAAC.

Farmer celebrated her 100th birthday party at Magnolia Place in Roswell with her senior living community. GDVVS Commissioner Dr. Patricia Ross attended to celebrate and honor Farmer’s life and service. Commissioner Ross also presented Farmer with a special certificate signed by Governor Brian Kemp.

