



Georgia Department of Veterans Service

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

June 2025

SERVICE STARTS HERE: TRAINING TO SUPPORT VETERANS, FAMILIES & SURVIVORS

The Georgia Department of Veteran Service takes time once a year to ensure our Veteran Service Officers maintain their VA accreditation and are fully prepared to help Georgia’s veterans and their families, caretakers, and survivors receive the benefits, care, and opportunities they earned through service to our county.

This year, GDVS staff met at Central Georgia Technical College for a week of in-person classes and collaboration with their colleagues.

VSOs participated in sessions led by their peers, the GDVS Training Division, and a representative from the National Veterans Legal Program.

GDVS staff complete 40 hours of training annually with in-person, hybrid, and digital classes offered throughout the year. Their culminating activity is a comprehensive exam covering state and federal veterans benefits.

For more information on GDVS and the help we offer to Georgia’s military and veteran community, visit <https://veterans.georgia.gov>.



HEROES IN A NEW ROLE: BRIDGING MILITARY MEDICAL SERVICE AND CIVILIAN CARE

Central Georgia Technical College (CGTC) will soon offer a direct pathway for military medical personnel to receive a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) license through a streamlined curriculum.

Passed in 2024, Georgia Senate Bill 449 authorized new pathways for military medics, medical technicians, and corpsmen to utilize their military service as vital experience while transitioning to the civilian workforce.

Recognizing the extensive healthcare experience of

military medical personnel, the new pathway program provides a bridge between military and civilian healthcare careers.

The Georgia Board of Nursing (GBON) approved the curriculum and program in May.

CGTC will serve as the first launching ground and as a model for other Technical College System of Georgia institutions.

The program is set to launch in Fall Semester 2025 and is enrolling students now.



GET TO KNOW YOUR VSO: BARRY HUNTER



For nearly 15 years with the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, Rome office manager and VSO Barry Hunter has served the veterans of Georgia with a steadfast commitment to make a difference in their lives.

An Army veteran, Hunter served over three years in various roles throughout his military service. He served in the 25th Infantry Division during the Vietnam War in a helicopter repair unit as a computer supply specialist.

Hunter joined the GDVS in 2010 with a goal to give back those who had faithfully served and his passion for helping veterans has not gone unnoticed. Governor Brian Kemp recently received a "job well done" letter from a veteran who said Hunter's "personality, dedication, integrity, and determination is beyond question."

After over 20 years of health challenges and attempts to file claims for compensation, it was Hunter's work that resulted in the veteran receiving the correct disability rating. "We should we all take a lesson from Mr. Hunter's level of effort and then the country as a whole would prosper greatly," wrote the veteran.

When he is not providing outstanding service to veterans, Hunter enjoys reading science fiction and horror books. He has published a book and is working on his second. Although he loves to read, what brings a smile to his face are his 7 grandchildren, 2 great grandchildren, and memories of his beloved late wife to whom he was married to for 59 years.

His advice to new and future VSOs? "Really listen to veterans, learn everything you can, keep good notes, and care. A lot of them just want someone to listen."

BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING LEGACIES

On June 12, Women Veterans Appreciation Day recognizes the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act. Georgia's women veterans were celebrated at a ceremony at the Capitol.

GDVS Executive Director of Field Operations and Appeals Shelly-Ann Simpson was recognized and commended for her work serving veterans.

"Serving those who served is meaningful and personal," said Simpson. "When recognition does come, I see it as confirmation that this heart work is making a difference. It encourages me to keep showing up and giving my best."



STRENGTH, STRATEGY, SURVIVAL: GUIDING THE NEXT GENERATION

Over 200 campers in Paulding County are prepared to "Survive in the Wild" thanks to GDVS Cartersville VSO and office manager Steven Hungarter who created Kids vs. Wild summer program.

"The camp puts kids in guided yet authentic wilderness scenarios which captures attention and praise with parents and children," said Hungarter.

The classes consist of teaching participants to make homemade bug spray, start camp fires with flints, land navigation, and first aid. On the final day of the camp the kids play an interactive "catch the flag" activity to utilize their new skills.

It is a balance of fun, learning, and outdoor activities. The Kids vs. Wild camp is a part of the annual Surge Camp in Paulding County.



FLYING WITH DISTINCTION

Hard work is not always recognized, but Governor Brian Kemp commended GDVS staff for working hard to ensure that our nation and state flags are presented with the reverence they deserve.

Chief Financial Officer Mark Demers and network administrators Jerry Lahr and William Wilson received commendations from the Governor for their adherence to flag code and creating an environment of respect, honor and excellence.

