



## Georgia Department of Veterans Service

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

May 2024

### HONORING THE FALLEN: REMEMBERING THOSE WHO GAVE ALL

Memorial Day gives us all an opportunity to reflect on the ultimate sacrifice men and women in the military made for the price of freedom.

“Their courage, dedication, and selflessness have shaped our history and preserved the freedoms we hold dear. We owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to those who gave their lives in defense of our country and our way of life,” said **GDVS Commissioner Dr. Patricia Ross**.

“Let us also extend our heartfelt gratitude to the families who have lost loved ones in service to our nation, for their sacrifice is also immeasurable. As we enjoy the blessings of liberty and freedom, let us never forget the price that has been paid for our freedom. Let us honor the memory of our fallen heroes not just on Memorial Day, but every day, by striving to be worthy of their sacrifice and by upholding the values for which they gave their lives.”

On May 23, 2024, the GDVS joined Governor Brian Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp to honor Georgia’s fallen service members at the State’s Memorial Day Ceremony.

Georgia’s veteran memorial cemeteries at Glennville and Milledgeville also paid tribute to Georgia’s heroes during their annual Memorial Day programs on May 27. Hundreds of veterans, family members, and friends attended programs at each cemetery, despite threatening weather.

In Glennville, state Representative Bill Werkheiser joined key note speaker LTCOL Melissa Hoaglin and a color guard from Fort Stewart in honoring the memory of those who have gone before us.

Severe weather moved Milledgeville’s ceremony into the onsite committal chapel, but the crowd quickly adapted to the change in venue. GDVS Chief of Operations and retired Sergeant Major Kerry Dyer provided the keynote address.



### SECOND ROUND OF RECIPIENTS SELECTED FOR THE GEORGIA MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES GRANT

The Georgia Veterans Mental Health Services Program (VMHS) supports mental and behavioral health providers who specialize in services for military service members, veterans, and their families.

The **Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Aspire Health Partners** and **Emory Healthcare Veterans Program** were selected as the 2024 recipients. They will continue their work providing accessible, confidential, and high quality behavioral healthcare services to military service members, veterans, and their families, caretakers, and survivors.

The VMHS grant program, first established in 2023, receives funding through state appropriations. After a successful implementation, funding was increased to \$1 million in 2024 to continue enhancing the impactful work of these programs in critical areas.

“We are thankful for the continued investment from Governor Kemp and our legislators to grow these vital networks of care and make Georgia a great place for our military veterans in which to live, work, and thrive,” said **GDVS Commissioner Dr. Patricia Ross**.

For more information on the grant program and how it impacts veterans, [read more on the GDVS website](#).

### HINESVILLE VA CLINIC TO BE RENAMED FOR LOCAL VIETNAM WAR HEROES

The VA Clinic in Hinesville, Georgia will soon bear the name of four local heroes who were killed in action during the Vietnam War.

President Joe Biden signed new legislation on May 13, 2024, to name the building the John Gibson, Dan James, William Sapp, and Frankie Smiley VA Clinic. The bill was first introduced by **U.S. Representative Buddy Carter** in 2023 and was supported by every member of the Georgia Congressional Delegation.

All four veterans were native to Liberty County and died during battles in the Vietnam War in 1968.

“I am incredibly proud of this accomplishment and credit the amazing residents of Liberty County with giving these brave young heroes the permanent recognition they deserve in the home they gave their lives to protect,” said Carter.



## SALUTE TO PROGRESS: NEW PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES ADDRESS VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

Across the state, new initiatives are growing to help veterans secure stable housing and establish new community networks.

At a recent groundbreaking, **Tunnels to Towers** announced a partnership with Home Depot and elected officials to build a collaborative new facility in Mableton—the Atlanta Veterans Village. The facility will provide safe and secure housing for nearly 100 veterans in the Atlanta area.

The new facility will feature livable apartments, cafeteria access, 24/7 support services, a business center, a community gym, and more. Tunnels to Towers has created housing for veterans in need in 10 other states.

Other cities have continued to support and enhance homeless veterans initiatives, including a refresh of Savannah’s “Tiny Homes for Big Heroes.” Savannah’s **Tiny House Project**, located at the Cove at Dundee, provides permanent and affordable housing for 46 veterans in 123-square-foot homes. The Home Depot Foundation and the Chatham Savannah Authority for Homeless recently worked with over 300 volunteers to update homes with fresh paint, flowers, and new community areas.

The GDVS is also continuing to provide resources for veterans experiencing homelessness. At a recent outreach event in Gwinnett County, the GDVS, VA, and the Georgia Department of Human Services joined veteran service organizations at American Legion Post 352. Attendees were able to meet with local, state, and federal organizations to receive housing help, Goodwill vocational training, start VA healthcare enrollment, and more.

## NEVER TOO LATE: VIETNAM VETERAN GETS HELP WITH CLAIM

Barry Hunter, veteran service officer and manager of the GDVS Rome office, recently received a letter of commendation from a Vietnam War veteran he assisted through a complex claim.

Originally sent to the Office of Governor Kemp, the letter praised Hunter for his diligent assistance. The veteran, frustrated by navigating VA claim procedures alone, first heard about the GDVS from a fellow Vietnam War veteran who received assistance at a GDVS office.

Hunter, a Vietnam veteran himself, was determined to help.

Almost 18 months of work – including claim development, referrals, document requests, status checks, and regular communications on what to expect next – the veteran had a successful claim.

“I believe it is important in today’s environment to acknowledge the dedication and service of civil servants who do great service to the State of Georgia,” said the satisfied veteran.

## ORDER UP: GVSF HOSTS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

On April 29, the **Georgia Veterans Service Foundation (GVSF)** hosted an inaugural Veterans Legislative Update and Breakfast to discuss new and upcoming changes in Georgia law.

State officials, including state Senator Chuck Payne and state Representative Josh Bonner, were in attendance to discuss the role the legislature plays in addressing the needs of Georgia’s veteran and military communities.

The GVSF is focused on supporting mental and behavioral health care services, connecting the housing insecure to resources, and supporting the need for additional state veteran nursing homes.

The board is hoping for support as they work to raise significant funding to subgrant to veteran serving organizations in communities across Georgia.

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



## GET TO KNOW YOUR VSO: WINSLOW HILL

For Army veteran **Winslow Hill**, helping veterans is like helping family.



“This is my passion. I love giving 100% in every task I do for veterans and their families,” said Hill.

Hill hails from San Diego. After serving in the Army for 21 years, he retired as Sergeant First Class.

Hill has worked with GDVS for a little over 10 years. He currently assists veterans and their families, caretakers, and survivors in our Grovetown office.

When he is not addressing the needs of veterans, his focus is on taking care of his special needs daughter.

His advice to future and new VSOs? “Always listen to what the veteran needs, call another seasoned VSO for help, and always verify your work with the VA claim. Remember what we do can be life changing.”

## WE CARE VET FAIR RETURNS TO ROME

On May 16, over 1,750 veterans and families met with local, state, and federal resources and non-profits at the We CARE Vet Fair at the Rome Forum River Center.

GDVS Veteran service officers were on hand to help file claims, status check previously submitted claims, and help with referrals to additional services.

Over 80 claims were started on-site throughout the day. GDVS staff were also able to meet and start working with over 120 veterans.

“It was awesome getting to watch our VSOs in their element. It is one of the few times that I get to see them in action and they DID NOT disappoint,” said GDVS North Region Director Ken Childre.

Sponsored by United Military Care, We CARE Vet Fairs are Georgia’s largest military and veteran resource fairs. Two more are planned for later this year: October 5<sup>th</sup> at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta and November 1<sup>st</sup> in Marietta.

