



## Georgia Department of Veterans Service

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

September 2023

### HURRICANE IDALIA ASSISTANCE

Was your home or business damaged by Hurricane Idalia?

Several Georgia counties are now eligible to apply for disaster assistance: Appling, Atkinson, Bacon, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Bulloch, Camden, Candler, Charlton, Clinch, Cook, Coffee, Colquitt, Echols, Emanuel, Glynn, Jeff Davis, Jenkins, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Screven, Tattnall, Thomas, Tift, Ware, and Wayne counties.

Individual assistance can fund individual and family recovery efforts after a disaster.

This may include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans for uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and businesses recover from the effects of Hurricane Idalia.

To register for assistance or for more information, visit [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov) or call 1-800-621-3362.

### GDVS ADDRESSES SUICIDE CRISIS DURING SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION MONTH

According to the latest VA data, suicide is the second leading cause of death among veterans under the age of 45. This alarming statistic speaks to the reason why the Georgia Department of Veterans Service’s Suicide Prevention and Outreach Team continue to focus on ways to address suicide prevention and awareness among service members, veterans and their families.

As September is Suicide Awareness and Prevention month, outreach events provided our team an opportunity to not only attend, but to host events throughout the Georgia’s veteran community. GDVS Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator Calandra Ferguson explains that as a member of the Governor’s Task Force to Prevent Suicide, the task force was able to connect with community partners and share how serious the suicide crisis has become in many corners of the Peach State.

“In a short span of time, several hundred service members, veterans, their families, and community members received education and were made aware of the suicide epidemic. They received information on Identifying Signs, Risk and Protective Factors, and how to aid someone in crisis.”

September’s outreach events include: connecting with veterans and state employees at the Floyd Veterans Memorial Building; VETLANTA’s Q3 Summit; a We CARE Resource Fair in Clarkston; a veterans benefits and suicide prevention awareness briefing at Norfolk Southern headquarters in Atlanta; a VFW Suicide Awareness Training in Warner Robins; and Be The One Suicide Awareness training at the American Legion Post 57 in Newnan.

At the end of the day, Ferguson explains, it is the “connectedness within our community which explains why we can and will continue to make a difference in the lives of service members, veterans and their families.”



## GDVS WISHES FOND FAREWELL TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MARK BANNISTER

After 16 years with the Georgia Department of Veterans Services, Executive Director Mark Bannister is off to enjoy retirement.

Bannister, who served for 20 years in the U.S. Army and retired as a Sergeant First Class, started working for the GDVS in October 2007 as a Veteran Education & Training Coordinator with the State Approving Agency, where he oversaw inspections of educational institutions and training facilities across the state.

He later became the agency’s Director of Operations in 2016 and was then appointed as the Executive Director of Health, Memorials Division, Finance & Development in January 2020. This roles gave Bannister a broad view of how the department was able to impact the lives of Georgia’s veterans and their families and helped shape his decisions to create better futures.

He passed the torch onto Mark Demers, who is now the GDVS’s Chief Development Officer. This new role blends duties from Finance and Development of the agency and oversees many essential functions, including: finance, budget, travel, and strategic planning; legislative research; and grant management.

Demers has been with the GDVS since December 2017 after retiring from the Army as a Sergeant Major. He previously worked within the agency as an Appeals Officer, Training and Development Specialist, and most recently as the Grant Program Implementation Manager.

“I feel it will be a very challenging role, but I am up for the challenge. I look forward to advancing the organization in any way I can.”


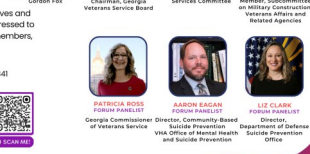


## STAFF SERGEANT FOX FORUM

Join us as we discuss current initiatives and challenges that still need to be addressed to prevent suicide in military service members, veterans, and their families.

10 am - 12:30 pm  
Georgia State Capitol, Room 341  
October 5, 2023

Can't join us in person? Watch from the forum! [facebook.com/gdvs](https://www.facebook.com/gdvs)

MR. AND MRS. FOX  
OSWINE REMARKE  
Parents of SFC Parker  
Gordon Fox

SHAWN HANLEY  
HOST & MODERATOR  
CEO, GreenVeterans  
Chairman, Georgia  
Veterans Service Board

U.S. REP. JUSTIN SCOTT  
FORUM PANELIST  
Member, House Armed  
Services Committee

U.S. REP. SANFORD  
BISHOP  
FORUM PANELIST  
Member, Subcommittee  
on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs and  
Related Agencies

PATRICIA BOSS  
FORUM PANELIST  
Georgia Commissioner  
of Veterans Service

AARON EAGAN  
FORUM PANELIST  
Director, Community-Based  
Suicide Prevention  
Unit, Office of Mental Health  
and Suicide Prevention

LIZ CLARK  
FORUM PANELIST  
Director,  
Department of Substance  
Abuse Prevention  
Office

On Thursday, **October 5, 2023**, GreenVeterans and the GDVS will host the Staff Sergeant Fox Forum at the Georgia State Capitol building. Veterans and their families are invited to join the event in person or virtually—you can find the live stream on the GDVS Facebook page.

## CELEBRATING OUTSTANDING SERVICE

“Our family’s decision to start a post-Army life in Georgia was a right one,” said a family grateful for the hard work of GDVS staff across the state.

Veterans have a reliable resource for help with unique issues in the GDVS.

The SAA was recently able to assist a family looking for answers about Chapter 35 benefits for their child who turned 18 while still attending high school and had a parent who is a 100% permanent and total disabled veteran.

They found the SAA through a simple Google search. “It seemed too good to be true,” said the family.

SAA helped the family contact VA and certifying officials to help their child receive benefits while maintaining college eligibility months.

The SAA’s dedicated work helped the family with resources and set the student up for a study abroad in later years.

## GDVS IS A PERFECT MATCH FOR VSO SHANNON DANIELS



Working for the Georgia Department of Veterans Services is the right fit for Hinesville Office Manager Shannon Daniels.

A native of Crestview, Florida, Daniels served 20 years in the Army as a Flight Operations Specialist. She retired in 2019 as a Sergeant First Class from Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia, where she was stationed for 6 years.

Daniels has been with GDVS for a little over two years and, as a veteran herself, she genuinely cares and takes pride in helping the veteran community. “I will do all I can to help veterans and their family members get the benefits they need.” It is her passion to be the “best version of me both professionally and personally.”

When she is not assisting veterans, you will find her enjoying church functions, singing, traveling, and cooking. In fact, she is enrolled in the Culinary Arts Program at Savannah Technical College. A wife, mother and dog parent to Chop, “the cutest and funniest little guy on the planet,” Daniels says her greatest strength is having a positive attitude and outlook on life.

Her advice to new VSOs? “Be customer service oriented, get to know your community and the resources available in the area, as well as the CFR. Having a positive attitude is going to help you tremendously.”