

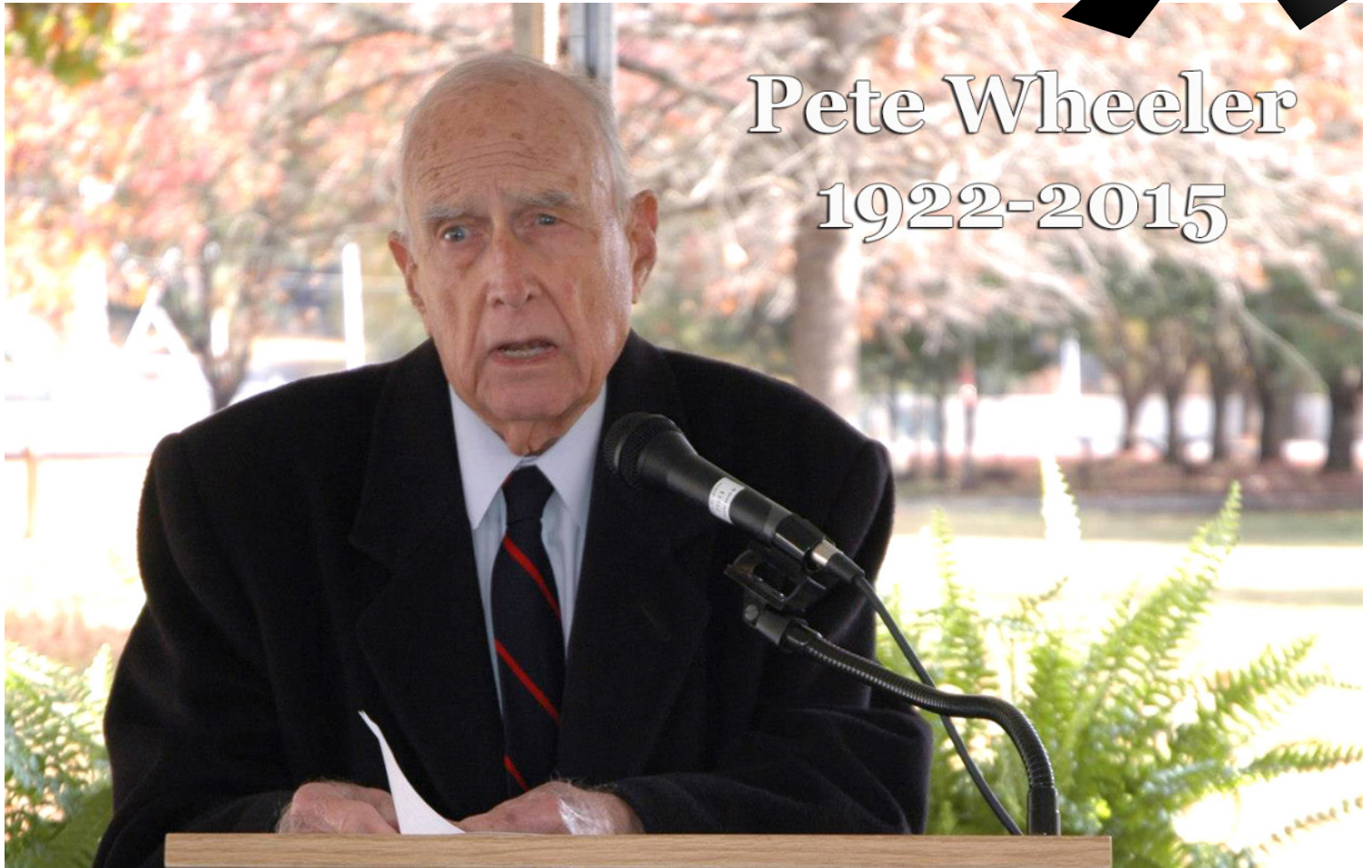
Veterans Bulletin

Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Nathan Deal
Governor

Georgia Veterans ... guardians of liberty
Spring 2015

Pete Wheeler
Commissioner



Pete Wheeler
1922-2015

Remembering A Great Man

*GDVS News Release
April 21, 2015*

Commissioner Pete Wheeler, leader of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service since 1954, died peacefully surrounded by family in the early morning, Tuesday, April 21, 2015.

Wheeler joined the GDVS in 1949 as director of the education division. In 1951 he was named assistant director of the department and served in that capacity until his appointment as the department's director (title later changed to Georgia Commissioner of Veterans Service) on June 26, 1954.

Fifteen reappointments later, Commissioner Wheeler was still in charge.

A decline in his health forced him to take a prolonged medical leave beginning in late 2014, but Commissioner Wheeler remained active. While delegating some day-to-day responsibilities, he nonetheless stayed on top of department business through daily phone calls with his assistants. He was adamant he would return to the office as soon as his physicians allowed.

For 66 years, he was a steadfast public servant and unwavering advocate for all veterans. Throughout his career, Commissioner Wheeler was a respected leader in the veterans community, whose experience and expertise was recognized and called upon at the national level.

continued on page 4

Also in this issue: VETERANS SERVICE BOARD ELECTS OFFICERS • GEORGIA HONORS VIETNAM VETERANS

Georgia Department of Veterans Service

VETERANS BULLETIN

Spring 2015

IN MEMORIAM: PETE WHEELER

PAGES 3-7

GDVS ADDRESSES VA POLICY CHANGES

PAGE 8

GEORGIA HONORS VIETNAM VETERANS

PAGES 8-9

MEMORIAL DAY 2015

PAGE 10

VETERANS NEWS HEADLINES

PAGE 11

VETERANS SERVICE BOARD ELECTS OFFICERS

PAGE 12

VSB APPOINTS INTERIM COMMISSIONER

PAGE 12

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Georgia Veterans Bulletin

The *Georgia Veterans Bulletin* is a publication of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, Public Information Division, Floyd Veterans Memorial Building, Room E-970, Atlanta, GA 30334-4800.

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Commissioner

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A NOTE TO OUR READERS

For decades, the *Georgia Veterans Bulletin* was a pride of the GDVS and our leader, the late Commissioner Pete Wheeler. In his honor, we are proud to present this special commemorative edition.

When I was hired in 2007, one of my primary responsibilities was taking care of the *Bulletin*. Many of my early conversations with Commissioner Wheeler were held over page proofs of this publication.

I arrived at an interesting time, as tight state budgets encouraged the elimination of paper publications like the old quarterly *Bulletin*, and it wasn't long before we were instead producing a monthly electronic version.

By the time I became public information director in 2013, the *Bulletin* had been defunct for a little over two years, the information that once graced its pages now delivered swiftly via the immediacy of websites, email lists, and social media platforms.

Still, Commissioner Wheeler would occasionally reminisce about the *Bulletin*, and it was not unusual to see an old copy lying open on his desk.

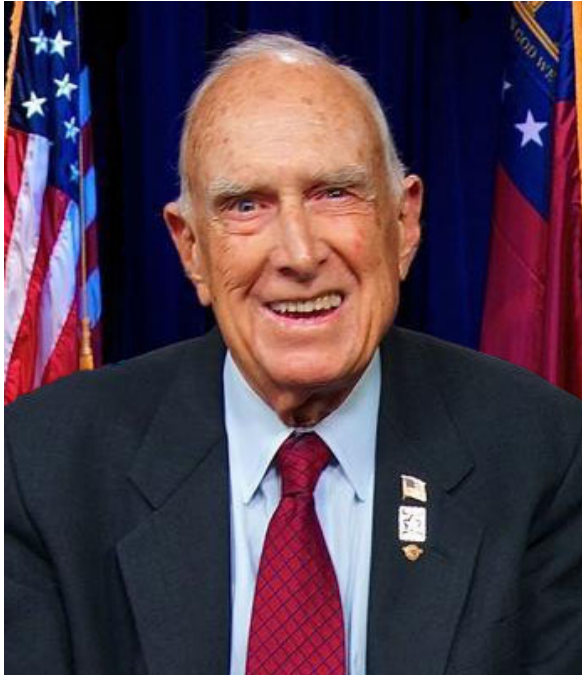
While we are not able to print this edition, the look and feel are as I found them back in 2007, and the content is arranged in the same fashion.

You may continue to find us online and elsewhere, but this is, one more time, your source for veterans news and information.

FOR THE COMMISSIONER,
Jon Suggs
Public Information Director



In Memoriam



**This issue of the
Georgia Veterans Bulletin
is dedicated to the memory of**

Pete Wheeler

GDVS Employee, 1949-2015

**Georgia Commissioner of
Veterans Service, 1954-2015**

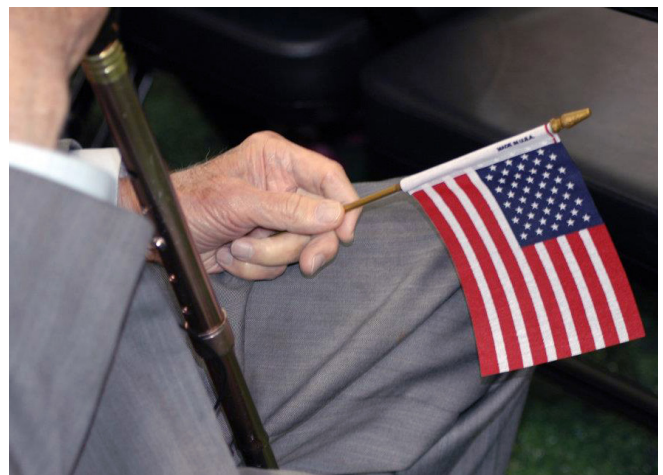
We asked for remembrances of Commissioner Wheeler to include in this issue. The response was overwhelming, far exceeding the space available, so we have instead set up a webpage to host them: <http://veterans.ga.gov/remembrance>.

If you would like to add a remembrance, there is a form to do so on the page. Please include your name, title, and connection to Georgia's veterans. If you worked at GDVS, please tell us where and when.

Thank you,

GDVS Public Information Division

**“... to the Flag of the United
States of America, and to
the Republic for which it
stands, one Nation under
God, indivisible, with
liberty and justice for all.”**



continued from front cover

Shortly after his appointment to lead the GDVS in 1954, Commissioner Wheeler joined the effort to recognize the new federal holiday, Veterans Day. He was named Georgia Chairman of the National Veterans Day Committee and in that capacity, together with Governor Herman Talmadge, he arranged a formal proclamation signing ceremony declaring the new holiday in Georgia. This proclamation signing became a tradition in the state, unbroken to this day; 2014 marked the first year Commissioner Wheeler was unable to attend.

In 1966, responding to the needs of the first veterans returning from the Vietnam War, as well as their families and survivors, Commissioner Wheeler created the Supermarket of Veterans Benefits, a one-day informational event designed to bring together every local, state, and federal agency providing service to veterans. The hugely successful program became an annual signature event of the GDVS, and the concept has been copied throughout the nation.

He was appointed chairman of the National World War II Memorial Advisory Board by President Bill Clinton in 1994 and served until the memorial's dedication with President George W. Bush in 2004. He was a past president of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs and remained active in that group throughout his career. He was a life member of the American Legion, DAV, and AMVETS, and a lifetime honorary member of the Atlanta World War II Roundtable.

Commissioner Wheeler was a proud graduate of the University of Georgia. He was a member of Kappa Sigma and was awarded that fraternity's lifetime achievement award. He was an attorney, admitted to the State Bar of Georgia in 1949 and admitted to practice before all state and federal courts.

A World War II veteran of the United States Army, Commissioner Wheeler joined the Georgia National Guard in 1950 and retired in 1978 at the rank of Brigadier General.



Caisson bearing Commissioner Wheeler approaches chapel. GDVS/Jon Suggs

In 1998, the General Assembly issued a resolution renaming the state's war veterans memorial complex as the "Pete Wheeler Georgia War Veterans Memorial Complex." Overseen by the GDVS and the Georgia Building Authority, the complex includes memorials to Georgia veterans from the Spanish-American War through Desert Storm/Desert Shield. Earlier this year, Commissioner Wheeler approved the design for the next addition, a memorial honoring those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan; it will be dedicated May 20.

Commissioner Wheeler was honored so frequently that a comprehensive list of his awards is difficult to compile. A few of the highlights include:

- Inducted into the inaugural class (2013) of the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame, for Dedicated Service
- Recipient of the Silver Helmet Award, presented by AMVETS
- Recipient of Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge George Washington Honor Medal
- Recipient of the American Legion Gold Honor Medal
- Recipient of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Silver and Gold Medals of Merit
- Recipient of the Patrick Henry Award, presented by the National Guard Association of the United States
- Recipient of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Lifetime Achievement Award
- Recipient of the Atlanta USO's

Patriot of the Year Award for 2011

- Honored with "Play it Again Pete," an annual golf tournament sponsored by the Military Order of the Purple Heart National Service Foundation to raise money for the Atlanta VA Medical Center's Homeless Veterans Program.

Pete Wheeler was born in Albany on Oct 19, 1922. He grew up in Crawford and lived most of his life in Atlanta.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 59 years, Geraldine; and a daughter, Jane Watkins. Survivors include a daughter and son-in-law, Frances and Mark Jones of Atlanta; son and daughter-in-law, Peter B. "Chip" and Debbie Wheeler of Lawrenceville; son-in-law, John Watkins of Snellville; and six grandchildren, Matthew Wheeler, Joshua Watkins, Joanna Watkins, Alex Jones, Charles Jones, and Jonathan Jones.

A funeral service was held at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 26, at Decatur First United Methodist Church, 300 E. Ponce de Leon Ave., Decatur, GA 30030, where he was a member, with the Rev. Dr. David Bevel Jones officiating. The committal service was held at 1 p.m. Monday, April 27, at Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery, 2617 Vinson Highway, Milledgeville, GA 31061. The family received friends from 2-6 p.m. Saturday, April 25, at A. S. Turner & Sons, 2773 N. Decatur Road, Decatur, GA 30033.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Georgia War Veterans Home, 2249 Vinson Highway, Milledgeville, GA 31061.



A bugler plays "Taps" following the 21-gun salute for Commissioner Wheeler.
GDVS/Jon Suggs



Honor Guard prepares to fold the flag over Commissioner Wheeler's casket.
GDVS/Brian Zeringue



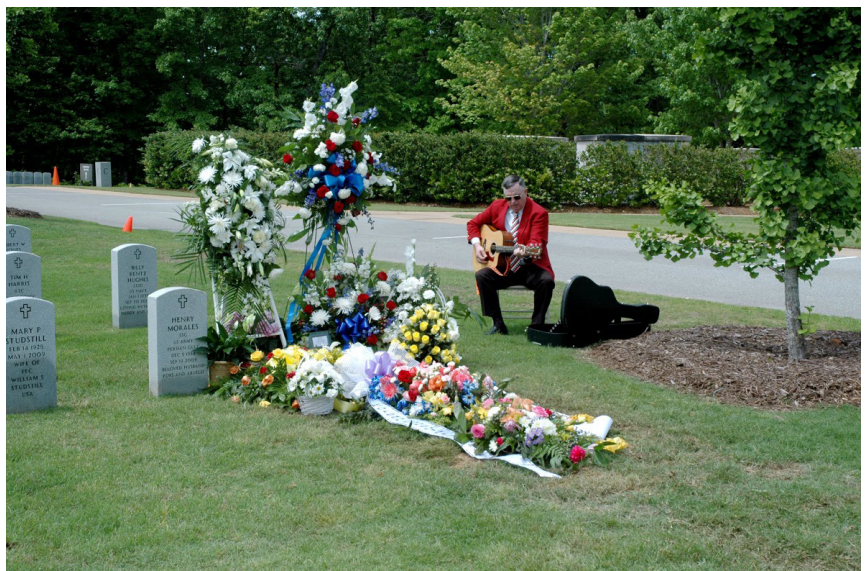
By order of Governor Nathan Deal, flags flew at half-staff on the day of Commissioner Wheeler's interment.
GDVS/Jon Suggs



Members of the Georgia Patriot Guard Riders and American Legion Riders escorted Commissioner Wheeler to GVMC-Milledgeville.
GDVS/Jon Suggs



GVMC-Milledgeville Director Russell Feagin recalls Commissioner Wheeler's well-known love of this chapel.
GDVS/Jon Suggs

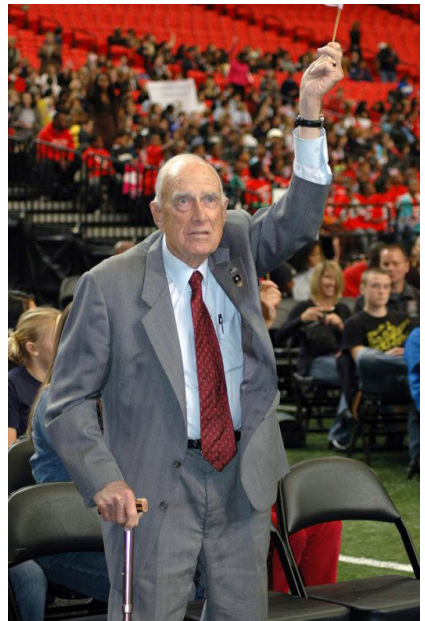
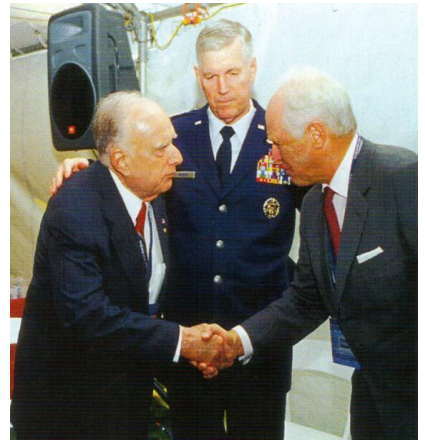
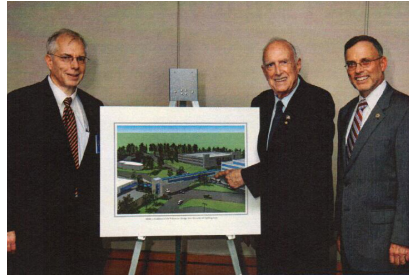
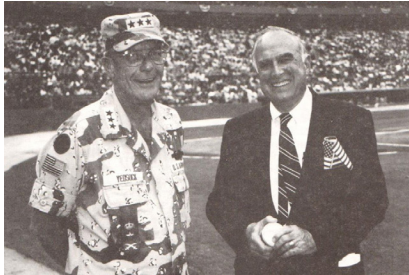


After Commissioner Wheeler was laid to rest, and mourners had mostly departed, a lone guitarist set up and sang "Georgia on My Mind." The man, who did not give his name, said Commissioner Wheeler had once mentioned he would like the song played at his funeral.
GDVS/Jon Suggs

Photos on pages 6-7 are drawn from GDVS archives, including issues of the Georgia Veterans Bulletin and the GDVS Annual Report. These are representative photos from a 66-year career. Visit us at facebook.com/gavetsvc, click Photos, then Albums, and find hundreds more in the album "In Memoriam."

Photo compilation: GDVS/Charlotte May





Thank You, Vietnam Veterans!



A crowd of Vietnam veterans gathered at the Georgia State Capitol Building for the state's Vietnam Veterans Day event, held March 30. At the event, Governor Nathan Deal announced the Vietnam Certificate of Honor program and presented the first certificates to Vietnam veterans representing 18 veterans service organizations. For program details, see page 9.

Photo courtesy of Governor's Official Photographer; for more, visit <http://photos.gov.georgia.gov>

GDVS Addresses VA Policy Changes

GDVS News Release

April 7, 2015

In light of recent changes to federal policy regarding veterans benefits, the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS) would like to remind veterans and their families of the availability of personal assistance in filing for earned benefits.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced changes to its application process, including standardizing claims and appeals forms and implementing a new "intent to file" form. The standardization is designed to streamline the claims process.

The new "intent to file" form replaces the informal claim process (through which applicants could submit a claim on any piece of paper) and sets a one-year timetable for the gathering of evidence to begin a claim once the intent to file form has been submitted.

VA accepts submissions of the new form electronically, on paper, and via phone.

However a veteran chooses to file, GDVS field service officers are available to assist. They are certified to counsel and assist veterans and their families throughout the claims process, from initial filing to (if necessary) the appeals stage.

"You don't have to do it alone," said GDVS Commissioner Pete Wheeler. "VA is making it easier than ever to file claims, but just because a form can now be submitted in minutes online does not mean that is always the best decision."

GDVS field service officers are trained professionals whose experience with the system can help veterans and their families avoid common mistakes that result in denied claims or delayed benefits.

Contact information for GDVS offices is listed at veterans.georgia.gov/field-offices; veterans may also call 404-656-2300 for directory assistance.

Georgia's Vietnam War Certificate of Honor Program

In conjunction with the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War, the State of Georgia wants to honor every one of its 234,000 Vietnam War veterans.

To accomplish this goal, the Georgia Department of Veterans Service, in partnership with the Office of Governor Nathan Deal, has created the Vietnam War Certificate of Honor program.

Every Georgia veteran with honorable service during the Vietnam War is eligible to receive this certificate.

With the help of veterans service organizations, word of mouth, and local media support, these Certificates of Honor will be ceremonially presented to every Vietnam War veteran in Georgia.

Each certificate is personalized with the Vietnam War veteran's name, rank, branch of service, and dates of service printed over the Seal of the State of Georgia and includes the official U.S. Department of Defense's Vietnam War Commemorative Partner logo.



Group (VSO) Application Procedure

Members of veterans service organizations are encouraged to apply to receive their certificates together. For information on making a group application, email certificates@vs.state.ga.us or call 404-463-3080.

Individual Application Procedure

To apply, please send your name, rank, branch of service, dates of service, and a copy of your DD Form 214 to certificates@vs.state.ga.us or Georgia Department of Veterans Service, 2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive SE, Atlanta, GA 30334, or call 404-463-3080 for more information.

Official Presentation

The State of Georgia would like veterans honored by this program to receive their certificates during a formal presentation. The Georgia Department of Veterans Service will work with VSOs and individual veterans to coordinate these presentations wherever possible.



*The Georgia Department of Veterans Service
cordially invites you
to attend the*

State of Georgia's Memorial Day Observance

*featuring the Dedication of the
Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial*

*11 a.m., Wednesday, May 20, 2015
Liberty Plaza
Atlanta*



Headlines Of Interest To GA Veterans

Online Course Helps Healthcare Professionals Better Serve Veterans and Servicemembers

The departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DoD) have announced the launch of an online continuing education course aimed at helping health care professionals better treat Veterans and Servicemembers. (4/27/15)

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2697>

VA Expands Choice Program Eligibility, Effective Immediately

In order to expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that it will determine eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program based on the distance between a Veteran's place of residence and the nearest VA medical facility using driving distance rather than straight-line distance. This change has been published in the Federal Register and is effective immediately. (4/24/15)

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2695>

Group of Respected Medical Experts to Advise VA on Health Care for 9 Million Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced a new 11-member Special Medical Advisory Group (SMAG) composed of leading medical experts to assist the Department in delivering health care to the 9 million Veterans enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration. (4/24/15)

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2696>

VA Extends Program for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the award of 20 contracts for the Assisted Living Pilot Program for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (AL-TBI). Originally slated to end in 2014, the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 ("VACAA") extended this program through October 2017. (4/13/15)

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2694>

New Members Appointed to VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans

Four new members have been appointed to the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, an expert panel that advises the Secretary on issues and programs affecting women Veterans. The Committee makes recommendations for administrative and legislative changes. (4/2/15)

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2693>

VA Announces New Grants to Help End Veteran Homelessness

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald today announced the award of nearly \$93 million in Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) 3-year grants that will help approximately 45,000 homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families. The grants will be distributed to 24 non-profit agencies in 15 communities. (3/31/15)

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2692>

VA Eliminates Net Worth as Health Care Eligibility Factor

The Department of Veterans Affairs is updating the way it determines eligibility for VA health care, a change that will result in more Veterans having access to the health care benefits they've earned and deserve. (3/17/15)

<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2684>

Mike Roby Named Interim Commissioner

GDVS News Release
April 28, 2015

Mike Roby, GDVS Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations & Claims, has been named Interim Commissioner of Veterans Service.

Phil Youngblood, Chairman of the Veterans Service Board, announced the appointment in a memorandum issued Tuesday, April 28. The interim period is therein defined as the period of time until the board “meets and decides on a selection for Commissioner.”

Mr. Roby is a 21-year employee of the GDVS, having joined in 1994 at the Griffin Veterans Field Service



Office. He served in progressively higher levels of responsibility from office manager to area supervisor

to regional director to assistant commissioner. When the late Commissioner Pete Wheeler began an extended medical leave last August, he designated Mr. Roby to oversee day-to-day operations in his absence.

Prior to his employment with GDVS, Mr. Roby served a 23-year career in the United States Army, retiring at the rank of Sergeant Major in 1994.

The next regular meeting of the Veterans Service Board is scheduled for 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 20, at the GDVS Central Office, Suite E-962, East Tower, Floyd Veterans Memorial Building, 205 Jesse Hill, Jr. Drive SE, Atlanta, GA 30334.

Veterans Service Board Elects 2015-16 Officers

GDVS News Release
April 9, 2015

Georgia's seven-member State Veterans Service Board recently elected new officers for 2015-16. Their terms began April 1.

Phil Youngblood, a retired Army First Sergeant and South Georgia native, was elected chairman. He was appointed to the Veterans Service Board by Gov. Nathan Deal in 2012. Before starting his 20-year career with the Georgia Department of Veterans Service in 1992, Youngblood worked two years as a lieutenant in the Thomas County Georgia Sheriff's Office upon retirement from the Army. His jobs with GDVS included office manager of the Valdosta VFSO and 14 years as manager of the South Georgia Region. Youngblood, who served 15 of his 20 years on active duty in the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, is a life member of the American Legion and is active in the American Legion at all levels. He has served as a post commander, district commander, and state commander of the American Legion Department of Georgia. He currently serves as director of the Georgia Boys State

Program and as judge advocate for his home post and his home district. He represents Georgia's American Legion on the National American Legion Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission. Youngblood, who now calls Quitman home, was born and raised in Thomasville. He is married to the former Yvonne Hall of Thomasville. They have two children (son, Scott and daughter, Niki) and three grandchildren (Gatlin, Grace, and Owen).

Charles Edward "Eddie" Whitted was selected as vice chairman. Whitted was appointed to the Veterans Service Board by Gov. Deal in 2011. Whitted began his career in building construction working for Orr International and Brown & Root construction companies. He then started his own business, B&W Construction and Door Company. He operated the business for 25 years, working there until his retirement. Whitted is currently president of Waycross Chapter 1070 Vietnam Veterans and has been a member of the Masonic Lodge for 40 years. He is a member of First Baptist Church in Blackshear. He and his wife, Brenda, reside in Blackshear.

Fred T. Fincher, Sr. was named board secretary. Fincher is serving his third term as a member of the Veterans Service Board. He was first appointed by Gov. Zell Miller and later reappointed by Gov. Perdue and again by Gov. Deal. A native and lifelong resident of LaGrange, Fincher served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1945-53 and was honorably discharged at the rank of Staff Sergeant. The retired businessman is an active life member of the American Legion who has served as Post 75 commander and as a state district commander. He is also a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Disabled American Veterans.

Serving as members of the State Veterans Service Board for 2015-16 with Youngblood, Whitted, and Fincher are Shawn Hanley of Atlanta, Ray Hendrix of Statesboro, James K. Hussey, Jr. of Appling, and Pat Phillips of Blairsville. The seven-member, governor-appointed, constitutional board recommends policy, procedure, and work projects for GDVS. Through the Commissioner of Veterans Service, the board controls overall veterans policy for the state.