



VETERANS AFFAIRS



The Cost of Freedom

Dear Veterans, Families, and Members of Our Community,

This month we pause to reflect on the meaning of Memorial Day, a solemn and significant national observance held each year on the last Monday in May. This day stands as our nation's foremost time to mourn and honor the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country.

Originally known as Decoration Day, Memorial Day was formally established in 1868 through General Orders No. 11 issued by John A. Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, designating a nationwide day of remembrance in which communities would decorate the graves of fallen soldiers with flowers. The observance grew out of earlier Civil War-era traditions, when communities across both the North and South began placing flowers on soldiers' graves as acts of remembrance and healing. These early tributes reflected a shared effort to honor sacrifice and restore dignity to those who had died in the conflict.

From this tradition of floral tributes also grew the symbolism of the red poppy. Inspired by the World War I poem "In Flanders Fields," the poppy became a powerful emblem of remembrance for those who died in battle. After the war, it was adopted internationally as a symbol of honor and sacrifice, and in the United States it became closely associated with Memorial Day. Wearing a red poppy serves as a visible reminder of the lives lost in service to our nation and the enduring cost of freedom.

Today, Memorial Day remains a time not only for remembrance, but also for reflection. The modern proclamation calls on all Americans to observe the day in a spirit of gratitude and reflection, recognizing that the freedoms we enjoy come at a profound cost.

As you are enjoying the sunshine and warm weather, whether it's a backyard BBQ, time spent outdoors, or gathering with family and friends, I encourage each of us to take a moment to honor those who gave everything in service to our nation. Their service is the reason these moments are possible, and remembering that connection is a simple but important way to recognize their sacrifice.

Jessica
Jessica Walker
Director

Highlights

Veterans
Breakfast

Memorial Day
Salute

Healing with VR

Mindful Eating

Senior Summit

Free Service
Plaque

VA Health Connect

REPRESENTATIVE JIM STRUZZI INVITES YOU



3RD ANNUAL VETERANS BREAKFAST

FREE CATERED BREAKFAST
GUEST SPEAKERS
DMVA RESOURCES

SATURDAY, MAY 16TH
ARMED FORCES DAY
9:00AM - 11:00AM

FRATERNAL ORDER OF EAGLES #1468
420 PHILADELPHIA STREET
INDIANA, PA 15701



PLEASE REGISTER BEFORE MAY 8TH
ONLINE AT WWW.REPSTRUZZI.COM
OR CALL 724-465-0220

VETERANS ROAD TO HEALING

theveteransroadtohealing@gmail.com 724-761-0039 or 724-840-4756

Memorial Day Salute to Fallen Veterans

May 24, 2026



This is a ride to support our Veterans through the Veterans Road to Healing (VRH)

The ride will consist of a "Pass in Review" of Greenwood and Oakland Cemeteries in Indiana PA

There will be an honoring ceremony taking place at the Indiana County War Memorial

We will start at Levery Brewing Company and end at Levery Brewing Company located on Wayne Ave in Indiana for an amazing after party featuring: **Willow Hill!**

Registration and sign in from 2:30PM-3:30PM with KSU at 3:45PM


(Registration Fee: \$20 per rider \$5 extra for passenger)

All street legal vehicles welcome

BASKET RAFFLE SILENT AUCTION 50/50

Please RSVP no later than May 17, 2026

Mark Hitchcock, Chaplain @theveteransroadtohealing@gmail.com



A Salute to Our Veterans

Indiana County, PA

America 250 PA

"A Salute to Our Veterans"

Join us for a program in Memorial Park honoring all Indiana County veterans and service members.


June 26, 2026
6:30 PM
Bring Lawn Chairs

To compliment the evening celebration, the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County will feature an exhibit highlighting the six branches of the U. S. military.

Reception to follow
621 Wayne Avenue
Indiana, PA

RSVP
hgsic.org or call 724-463-9600

Veteran Spotlight



Brian D. Jones proudly served in the U.S. Navy from March 23, 1987, to June 15, 1997, as a Cryptologic Technician Maintenance Petty Officer Second Class (CTM2). In this specialized role, he was responsible for maintaining critical cryptologic, signal collection, and communication center equipment

His service included assignments at Naval Security Group Activity (NSGA) in Key West, Florida, USS John F. Kennedy (CVN-67) during Operation Desert Storm, RAF/NSGA Edzell in Scotland, and NSGA Sugar Grove in West Virginia.

Brian is married to Louise (Short) Jones and enjoys spending time with family and friends. In his free time, he enjoys camping, nature walks, and both listening to and playing music.

Currently, Brian works as a CDL Class A driver for Taylor Services Inc., operating a tri-axle and hauling coal to U.S. Steel facilities and regional power plants. He also remains deeply committed to serving fellow Veterans as the Commander of VFW Post 1989, where he plays an active leadership role in supporting the local Veteran community.

Indiana County VA Clinic

1-877-626-2500

When you hear the prompt "Welcome to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Altoona VA Medical Center", enter **extension 15567** to be transferred to the Indiana VA Clinic Operator



Veterans Trust in VA Hits Record High

Overall trust in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reached a record high, with 82% of Veterans reporting confidence in VA services during the first quarter of fiscal year 2026. Trust in outpatient health care is even higher at 93.6%. VA leadership emphasizes that prioritizing Veterans begins with listening to their feedback and improving services based on their experiences.

[Survey results](#) show strong performance across key areas: 77.3% of Veterans found it easy to access services, 81.4% received the care they needed, and 79.5% felt valued. Since 2016, VA has collected millions of survey responses, including detailed comments that help guide improvements.

VA's impact this quarter includes serving 4.8 million Veterans through over 29 million health care encounters, answering 14.5 million calls, and processing hundreds of thousands of claims and benefits. Veterans are encouraged to stay engaged, share feedback, and access support through VA resources to help shape future services. [Read More](#)

Scams Targeting Family Members

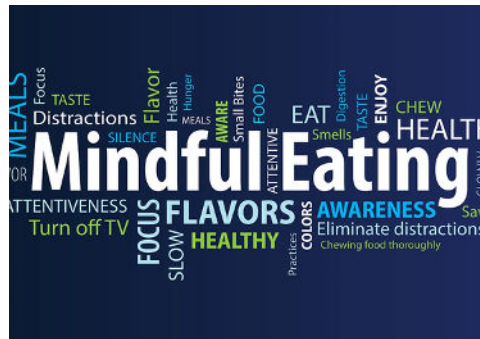
Scammers often target surviving family members after a Veteran's death, exploiting grief and benefit payments to commit fraud. They may pose as military officials or claim shared service to gain trust, using urgent, high-pressure tactics through phone, email, text, or social media. The VA emphasizes that many memorial and survivor benefits are provided at no cost, including burial in a national cemetery, funeral honors, headstones, burial allowances, and survivor benefits.

To avoid scams, families should rely only on official government websites, avoid sharing personal information with unverified sources, and never pay for free VA services. Veterans can protect their families by completing a pre-need eligibility determination for burial in advance. Promptly reporting a Veteran's death is critical to stop benefit payments and avoid overpayment issues. Suspected fraud should be reported to VA, the Federal Trade Commission, or VSAFE. Staying informed and cautious helps families safeguard benefits and honor their loved ones. [Read More](#)



Healing with VR

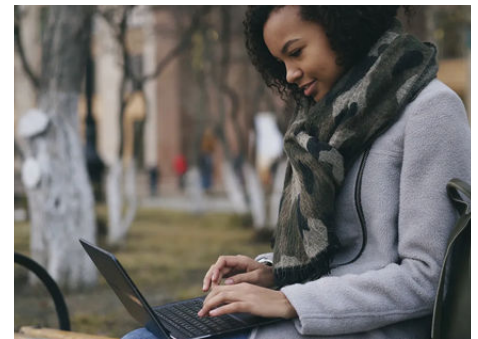
The VA is using innovative technology like virtual reality (VR) to support Veterans' whole health, including physical recovery, mental wellness, and lifestyle improvements. Army Veteran Jeffrey Brunnelson, who suffered multiple strokes, used VR tools such as virtual fishing, meditation, and telehealth programs to stay engaged and motivated during recovery. With VA support, he improved his diabetes, lowered his A1C significantly, and regained strength in his weakened arm—eventually no longer needing assistive equipment. VR provided an affordable, effective way to continue therapy at home. Today, Brunnelson maintains healthier habits and credits VA care and innovation for his progress, reflecting the growing impact of immersive technology in Veteran rehabilitation. [Read More](#)



Mindful Eating

Mindful eating helps Veterans develop healthier relationships with food by focusing on awareness, body cues, and enjoyment. Many struggle with overeating, distracted eating, or emotional snacking, despite understanding nutrition basics. Mindfulness encourages being present without judgment and paying attention to hunger, fullness, and the sensory experience of eating.

Simple strategies include reducing distractions by eating at a table, checking in with hunger levels before and during meals, and slowing down to savor flavors and textures. Practicing self-compassion is essential, as food and body image can trigger strong emotions. With patience and practice, mindful eating can support better choices and overall well-being. [Read More](#)



Knowledge is Power

[VeteranTraining.va.gov](#) is a free, confidential online resource offering self-paced mental health tools for Veterans, available anytime. The platform provides practical courses on topics like substance use, anger management, sleep improvement, problem-solving, recovery planning, and parenting. Each course includes videos and interactive activities to build real-life coping skills and improve overall well-being. Veterans can learn techniques to manage anger, reduce insomnia, navigate life challenges, and strengthen family relationships. While these tools are valuable and easily accessible, they are not a replacement for professional care. Veterans are encouraged to explore additional VA mental health services and support options as needed. [Read More](#)

Resources



SENIOR SUMMIT 2026
Brought to you by the INDIANA COUNTY ELDER ABUSE TASK FORCE

SAVE THE DATE
Wednesday
May 13th, 2026
8:00 a.m. to Noon

YMCA OF INDIANA COUNTY
60 N. Ben Franklin Rd
Indiana, PA 15701
LIGHT REFRESHMENTS



LT COL MICHAEL CHRISTY
UNITED STATES ARMY

USA RETIRED
FINAL RANK: Lieutenant Colonel
SERVICE YEARS: 1966 - 1984
MOS: 46A-Public Affairs
PRIMARY UNIT: 1969-1970, 1542, HHC, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry

BRIEF MILITARY HISTORY
Lt Col Christy's military career spanned 20 years, beginning in 1966 when he joined the U.S. Marine Corps. Following two years active duty, he spent another two years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. In 1969, he joined the Army National Guard. In 1966 he went on active duty in the U.S. Army. After 18 years on active duty, he retired in 1984.
Lt Col Christy saw action in Vietnam with Delta Force and was awarded two Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts. As an accomplished writer, Lt Col Christy contributed to several TV military documentaries and significant military publications.

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Free Military Service Recognition Plaque

Together We Served (TWS) is offering free military service recognition plaques carefully created by military experts, with the highest quality graphics and accurate content to deliver the finest presentation of your military service in your size choice plaque you can print out and frame. Makes a beautiful wall display for any Veteran or Family Member of a Veteran. Claim your plaque [HERE!](#)



The service dog programs of America's VetDogs were created to provide enhanced mobility and renewed independence to Veterans, active-duty service members, and first responders with disabilities, allowing them to once again live with pride and self-reliance. America's VetDogs specializes placing highly-skilled service and guide dogs to individuals with physical injuries, PTSD, hearing and vision loss, and seizures.

Our mission is to help those who have served our country honorably live with dignity and independence. All services are provided at no cost — including transportation to and from our campus in Smithtown, New York, instruction, and more.

For more information, visit: America's VetDogs



VA Health Connect is a non-emergency medical service that allows you to speak with a nurse to determine the right course of action. This service is available 24/7 nationwide and veterans enrolled in VA Healthcare automatically have access. This telehealth service can address a wide range of health concerns over the phone and prevent an unnecessary trip to urgent care or the emergency room.

Reach VA Health Connect at 855-679-0952. As always, during a medical emergency, immediately call 911.

Thank you for reading!

Indiana County Department of Veterans Affairs	(724) 465-3815
https://www.indianacountypa.gov/departments/veteran-affairs/	825 Philadelphia Street Second Floor, Court House Indiana, PA 15701

