



# VETERANS AFFAIRS



## Shining a Light on Veterans This Fall

Dear Veterans, Families, and Members of Our Community,

As autumn arrives, we are reminded of the importance of reflection, gratitude, and action. October offers a meaningful opportunity to honor the service of our Veterans while also focusing on health, awareness, and community support.

This month, we observe Breast Cancer Awareness Month, highlighting the importance of early detection and care. The VA is committed to providing Veterans with access to screenings, treatment, and support services to maintain their health and well-being. Preventive care saves lives, and we encourage all eligible Veterans to take advantage of these services.

October also brings a solemn occasion: the Final Salute Ceremony on October 11th, honoring eight unclaimed Veterans from Indiana County. This ceremony ensures that every Veteran is remembered and respected, even if they have no family to honor them. It is a moving reminder of our community's responsibility to recognize the service of all Veterans.

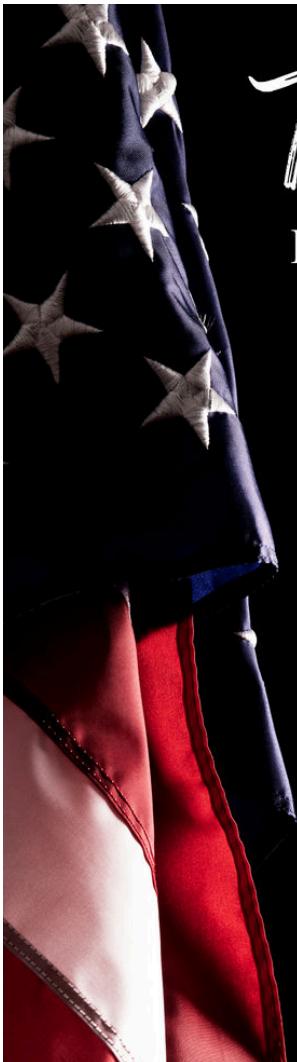
Operation Green Light, taking place in November, provides another opportunity for the community to show support. This initiative demonstrates our commitment to Indiana County Veterans by shining a light on their service and sacrifices. Residents are encouraged to place a green light in a visible location, such as a porch or window, throughout November. Veterans can visit our office during October with proof of service to receive a free green light bulb. Local businesses are also invited to participate, illuminating their premises to create a unified display of support.

Building on that commitment, Indiana County is proud to host its first-ever Veterans Expo and Stand Down event in November. This gathering brings dozens of services directly to Veterans under one roof, offering access to health resources, employment assistance, mental health support, essential supplies, and more. It is an excellent opportunity for Veterans and their families to connect with the resources they need while highlighting the community's ongoing dedication to their well-being.

Through these fall initiatives—whether accessing preventive health care, honoring Veterans at the Final Salute, participating in Operation Green Light, or attending the Veterans Expo and Stand Down—we continue to affirm our respect, support, and gratitude for those who have served.

*Jessica*  
Jessica Walker  
Director


Highlights
The Final Salute
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Informal Conferences
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# The Final Salute

Please join us as we lay to rest 8 Unclaimed Veterans

Saturday, October 11th  
Oakland Cemetery, Main Flag Pole  
11:00 am



Members of the public are welcome and encouraged to attend.  
*"We don't know them all, but we owe them all"*

Hosted by the Indiana County Coroner and Department of Veterans Affairs  
Urns provided by Robinson-Lytle-Shoemaker Funeral Home  
For questions please call 724-465-3996 or 724-465-3815

## Veteran Spotlight



Ed Baker proudly served two years in the U.S. Army with the 9th Infantry, including a year in Vietnam in 1967. His service earned him the Combat Infantry Badge and two Purple Hearts. After military service, Ed worked 20 years in a steel mill and then retired from PennDOT in 2009 after 25 years. A dedicated family man, Ed has been married for 50 years and is the proud father of two daughters, grandfather of two, and great-grandfather of two. When he's not tending to his garden or yard, Ed serves as the chaplain at VFW Post 1989.

Indiana County and the Department of Veterans Affairs presents

# OPERATION GREEN LIGHT



Join us in making Indiana County a beacon of support!

Shine a **green** light for the entire month of November at your residence or place of business to help honor the service and sacrifices of our Veterans.

**SHINE A LIGHT  
SHOW SUPPORT  
RAISE AWARENESS  
THANK OUR VETERANS**



Veterans who have a DD-214 on file with the Indiana County Recorder of Deeds office can visit the Indiana County Department of Veterans Affairs office on the second floor of the courthouse to receive a FREE green light bulb. For more information please contact us at (724) 465-3815.





# EXPO AND STAND DOWN

November 7-8 | 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

KCAC, 711 Pratt Drive Indiana, PA

## Services Include:

- ★ 50+ Community Vendors
- ★ Health Screenings/Flu Vaccines
- ★ VA Healthcare Enrollment
- ★ Financial & Legal Resources
- ★ Mental Health Resources
- ★ Employment Resources
- ★ VA Program Resources
- ★ Workshops
- ★ Essential supplies will be distributed to Veterans on Saturday at 1 pm

## Additional Activities:

- ★ Free Breakfast & Lunch
- ★ Children's Activities
- ★ Free Haircuts
- ★ Drug Take Back Collection

*Open to the Public  
Saturday, 2:00-4:00 pm ONLY!*



**BRING PROOF OF VETERAN STATUS**

Questions? Call 724-465-3815  
Need a ride? Call or click [HERE](#)

Financial support also provided by a VTF grant from the PADMVA

Supply  
Distribution  
Saturday  
1 pm

Static  
Displays

Door Prizes  
&  
Raffles





## **Layered Protection in Suicide Crisis**

Army Veteran Jeremy Ruspantine nearly died by suicide after taking a bottle of prescription drugs when his PTSD symptoms worsened in 2022. Despite rebuilding his life after homelessness and treatment at Coatesville VA Medical Center, personal setbacks left him isolated and disconnected from his support network. Veterans are at high risk when lethal means—such as firearms or medications—are easily accessible. Simple barriers like gun locks or combination safes add time and space between suicidal thoughts and action, greatly reducing risk. Ruspantine survived thanks to intervention from loved ones but believes secure storage could have prevented his overdose. VA offers free gun locks and safes and encourages Veterans and families to contact their local Suicide Prevention Coordinator or call 988, press 1.

[Read More](#)



## **Healing Through Beekeeping**

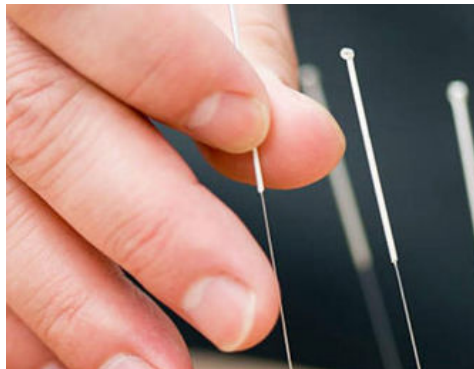
The Cleveland Botanical Garden, in partnership with VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System's Whole Health program, offers Veterans an 8-week beekeeping course to connect with nature, each other, and honeybees. The program combines hands-on hive work with lessons on pollination, honey harvesting, and wellness benefits, supporting Whole Health's mission to empower Veterans in their well-being. Participants value the camaraderie, the chance to try something new, and the satisfaction of producing their own honey. Many gain a deeper appreciation for bees and local honey while learning about gardening, self-sufficiency, and diet. The course fosters healing, skill-building, and environmental stewardship. Marine Corps Veteran Mischelle Kwa noted meaningful connections with fellow Veterans. The program concludes in October with a honey extraction event, where participants collect and bottle their homegrown honey.

[Read More](#)



## **Service and Strength**

Navy Veteran Lee O. McKinnon, honored by the Columbia VA Health Care System ahead of his 100th birthday, vividly recalls serving aboard the USS Calvert during the 1942 North Africa invasion. Enlisting at 17 after Pearl Harbor, he operated a 40-millimeter anti-aircraft gun and survived intense combat. McKinnon made the Navy his career, serving on multiple ships, training Canadian forces, participating in atomic tests at Bikini Atoll, and earning numerous medals over 30 years. Retiring in 1972, he settled in South Carolina, later working in civil service and education. Reflecting on his century of life, McKinnon credits faith, family, and integrity for his resilience, cherishing his family and the opportunity to return home safely from service. [Read More](#)



## **Best Pain Therapy?**

VA's whole health approach connects patients with services addressing physical, psychological, social, and economic factors affecting wellbeing. A Minneapolis VA study examined complementary and integrative health therapies for chronic pain delivered through VA and community care. Findings showed VA acupuncture and chiropractic were more beneficial than community care, while community care medical massage outperformed VA services. Twelve VA acupuncture visits produced clinically meaningful pain improvements. Results vary based on patient characteristics and clinic quality. Research like this helps identify effective treatments and optimal delivery methods. Veterans interested in managing pain are encouraged to consult their VA provider to explore available therapy options. [Read More](#)



## **Informal Conferences**

Veterans who disagree with a VA benefits decision can request a Higher-Level Review (HLR), conducted by an experienced claims processor who did not handle the original claim. The HLR includes an optional, one-time informal conference, allowing Veterans or their representatives to discuss errors in fact or law from the prior decision. New evidence cannot be introduced, and reviewers only consider what was in the file at the time of the original decision. After the conference, VA issues a new decision, which may uphold, overturn, or request additional evidence. Veterans are encouraged to request this conference to clarify misunderstandings and ensure they receive the benefits they've earned. [Read More](#)

## Resources



### **Guide & Service Dogs: VA Support for Veterans**

The VA proudly supports guide and service dogs for Veterans, providing independence, safety, and companionship that help Veterans live fuller lives. Guide dogs assist those who are blind or visually impaired by helping them navigate surroundings safely, while service dogs aid Veterans with physical or hearing disabilities, alerting them to household sounds and assisting with tasks like balance or retrieving objects.

To qualify for a VA service dog, Veterans must be registered for VA health care and may be referred by their primary care provider for evaluation by a specialist. The clinical review considers the Veteran's ability to care for the dog, the goals the dog will help achieve, and whether other assistive technologies or therapies are appropriate.

Veterans approved for service dogs are referred to Assistance Dogs International-accredited agencies, and there is no cost for the dog or its training.

Key VA benefits include:

- Vet care, including prescribed medications and office visits
- Equipment such as harnesses or backpacks
- Vaccinations and prescribed food on a case-by-case basis

Routine grooming, boarding, treats, non-prescribed food, and non-sedated dental care are not covered. [Learn More](#)



### **Plan Your Future with VA Educational and Career Counseling**

The VA's Personalized Career Planning and Guidance (PCPG), or Chapter 36, provides free educational and career counseling to help Veterans and eligible dependents make informed decisions about their next steps.

You may be eligible if any of the following apply:

- You qualify as a Veteran or service member for educational assistance under a VA education program,
- You separated from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable within the past year,
- You'll be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable from active duty within the next six months, or
- You're a service member or Veteran currently eligible for VA education benefits.

What benefits can I get?

- Career counseling to help you decide which civilian or military jobs you want
- Educational counseling to help you find a training program or field of study
- Academic and adjustment counseling to address issues or barriers that may get in the way of your success
- Resume support and goal planning to help you reach your career objectives

Apply today to access personalized guidance and resources.



### **VA-SBA Partnership Empowers Veteran Entrepreneurs**

Whether you're a Service member, Veteran, or military spouse, the SBA offers free programs to help you launch and grow your business. Boots to Business, Boots to Business Reboot, and the Military Spouse Pathway to Business provide an introduction to essential skills such as developing business concepts, creating a business plan, and accessing SBA resources, all led by experienced SBA experts and their network of business advisors. After completing one of these free courses, participants can continue learning through Boots to Business Revenue Readiness, an online course also offered at no cost in partnership with Mississippi State University. Participants are encouraged to explore SBA resources, including Veterans Business Outreach Centers, SCORE, Small Business Development Centers, and Women's Business Centers, to support their entrepreneurial goals. [Learn More](#)

*Thank you for reading!*

Indiana County Department of Veterans Affairs	(724) 465-3815
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