

Department of Veterans Affairs

At a Glance

Commissioner: THOMAS J. SAADI

Established: 1986

Statutory authority: C.G.S. Chapter 506 Sec: 27-103-27-37
Central office: 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Number of full-time employees: 194

Recurring operating expenses 2019-2020: \$25,309,655

Agency generated revenue 2019-2020: \$24,173,896

History

Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs is the nation's first and longest operating state Veterans home.

Connecticut has the distinction of being the first state in the Nation to have a home dedicated to Veterans. Benjamin Fitch, a wealthy Connecticut businessman, promised Soldiers serving in the Civil War a place to call home when they returned from battle. A man of his word, the Fitch's Home for Soldiers and their Orphans was opened in 1864 and is currently incorporated into the Connecticut General Assembly.

In 1940, the home was moved to its current location in Rocky Hill and with each succeeding period of war, new generations of Veterans presented unique needs and hardships, which required the development of a comprehensive system of health care and social and rehabilitative services. In order to better serve these and future generations of Veterans, the Connecticut General Assembly created the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in 1987. Today the DVA provides Connecticut's nearly 200,000 Veterans with four core services: (1) Long-term and Chronic disease Healthcare Center, (2) Residential Facility with Rehabilitative Programs and Services, (3) Cemetery and memorial services with cemeteries in Darien, Rocky Hill, and the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown; and (4) Office of Advocacy and Assistance with Veteran Service Officers located in each Congressional District to help Veterans navigate services and benefits they have earned.

Mission

"Serving Those Who Served"

Enhance the lives of Connecticut's Veterans by providing:

Advocacy and assistance to Veterans, their spouses or eligible dependents in obtaining benefits to which they may be entitled to under federal, state, and local laws; long-term and chronic disease healthcare; and cemetery and memorial services for Veterans and eligible dependents.

Collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies, Veteran service organizations, community partners, volunteers, and Veteran supporters.

Cultivate a work environment of compassion, teamwork, professional development, and employee engagement.

Vision

Provide Connecticut's Veterans and their dependents proactive, world-class, and values-based service excellence.

Statutory Responsibility

Office of the Commissioner

The Commissioner is appointed by the Governor and is responsible for the administration of the Department. The Commissioner is specifically tasked with assisting Veterans, their spouses, eligible dependents and family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits accruing to them under federal, state and local laws, disseminating information and assisting eligible individuals to access these services and programs which include but are not limited to: educational, training, employment and reemployment programs; health care and rehabilitation programs; housing services, home loans, and burial benefits.

The Commissioner is also responsible for outreach to Veterans and community agencies; liaisons with legislature, statutory and legislative authorities and Veteran service organizations; assessment of the efficiency of programs and evaluation and development of new initiatives to better serve the more than 200,000 Connecticut Veterans and their families.

The Commissioner of Veterans Affairs also oversees development of an agency-wide long range plan; the review of all appeals and final decisions made by Veterans regarding adverse decisions affecting benefits to Veterans participating in state programs; the enforcement of all regulations and procedures enacted in accordance with the provisions of General Statutes Chapters 54 and 506.

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) assists Veterans and their families in accessing federal, state and local benefits and entitlements. Veterans Service Officers (VSO) are accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and assist Veterans and their families with documentation and filing of claims for disability, compensation and/or pension. OA&A offices are located in each of the five Congressional Districts with offices in Bridgeport, Waterbury, Milford, Newington and Norwich and include bilingual staff and woman VSOs.

Additionally, advocacy work is performed throughout the state on a staff available, rotating basis at satellite office locations and through numerous job, senior and health fairs throughout the state. DVA VSOs also conduct interviews in skilled nursing facilities and Stand Down events and in response to referrals throughout the state and ascertain the type and level of assistance and representation those Veterans need in order to apply for an obtain the benefits to which they are entitled.

Sgt. John L. Levitow Healthcare Center

The Healthcare Center provides continuous professional comprehensive healthcare to Veteran Patients requiring twenty four hour nursing care. An individual Plan of Care is developed and continually updated throughout the Veteran Patient's stay to ensure that quality health care services are provided to assist the Veteran Patient reach his/her maximum potential. In addition, the focus is on patient centered

care whereby the Veteran's preferences are honored and reflected in the plan of care.

Healthcare Center Program Descriptions:

The Veterans' Health Care program is a major element of the Department's operations. The program offers progressive care including social, recreational and rehabilitative services dedicated to professional excellence. The Health Care Center has adopted a Rehabilitative Model of Care based on the definition of care developed by the noted nurse theorist, Virginia Henderson (Army School of Nursing). "To assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery or to a peaceful death that they would perform unaided if they had the strength, the will or knowledge. And, to do so in such a way as to help them gain independence as rapidly as possible."

The Healthcare Center is licensed by the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health as a 125 bed Skilled Nursing Facility. The Center opened its doors to the growing Veteran Patient community in October, 2008. Under the direction of the Healthcare Services Administrator, the medical, nursing, spiritual and rehabilitation professionals provide ongoing patient centered care to the Veterans.

The Center offers twenty-four hour quality health care to Veteran Patients with chronic and disabling medical conditions whose needs require specialized care. We treat a wide array of diagnosis including, but not limited to; Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), End Stage Renal Disease, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Accident (CVA), Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, End of Life and Palliative care, The Healthcare Center's medical team consists of Board Certified Physicians and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses who specialize in caring for Veterans who present with multiple complex conditions. The medical team provides health care management and primary care clinics for all Veterans at the Healthcare Center as well as those residing in the Residential Facility.

The Rehabilitation Program offers physical, speech, and occupational therapy where Veterans can increase strengthening and physical function under the supervision of professionals. The rehab program also contributes to increased quality in their overall mental health and well-being. The gym is well equipped and features large windows and a beautiful view of the picturesque campus.

The End of Life program provides special medical, psychological and spiritual care to the terminally ill. Pain management, special nursing visits, alternative therapies and volunteer companions are provided to comfort the Veteran Patient at end of life. A wide range of support and counseling services are available for Veteran Patients and their loved ones.

To be eligible for admittance, a Veteran requesting care at the John L. Levitow Healthcare Center must be a resident of the State of Connecticut and have served honorably. Applications for admission are required in advance and contain both a financial and medical component. Applicants are screened in accordance with state and federal guidelines as well as DVA policies.

Residential Facility

The Residential Facility is available to veterans seeking assistance to improve their overall quality of life after having suffered from the grave effects of being homeless, unemployed and challenged with addiction, medical and mental health problems. Veteran Residents have the opportunity to utilize a continuum of rehabilitation services which include shelter, food, an initial issuance of basic clothing and essential personal products, social work, clinic services, recreation, compensated work therapy program, vocational

training, education counseling, and job search assistance. Additional case management services are available to Veteran Residents through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Veteran Residents requiring support with substance abuse addiction have access to treatment also provided by (DMHAS) through a Memorandum of Understanding. Collaboration with our Federal and State partners, as well as local non-profits ensures Veteran Residents have access to any and all benefits and services they are eligible for. Individualized goals are established with regular follow up to ensure the greatest success possible in preparing Veteran Residents to return to independent living. For the 2019/2020 fiscal year, **25** Veteran Residents were admitted and **19** Veteran Residents successfully discharged back into the community. The average daily census for 2019-2020 was **128.55 (RF & PL) / 124.48 (RF Only)** veterans

Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Services

The Department operates a full-time Cemetery and Memorial Services Office at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus operates three state Veterans cemeteries.

The Cemetery and Memorial Services is responsible for coordinating burial benefits and assistance to thousands of Veteran families with burial plot coordination, ordering the Veteran headstone and foot markers, consultation on available benefits, assistance with interment ceremonies, processing of federal reimbursement payments and coordination of memorial ceremonies.

The DVA Veteran Cemetery System consists of three state cemeteries: the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery, located in Middletown; Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery, located in Rocky Hill; and Spring Grove Cemetery, located in Darien. The DVA is responsible for the care, maintenance and development of all three cemeteries and installs all headstones. The State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and contains over 12,884 remains of Connecticut Veterans. The Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery is reserved for the burials of Veterans residing at the State Veterans Residential Facility and HCC. The Spring Grove Cemetery closed for interments in 1980.

Public Service

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) is responsible for assisting veterans and their families in accessing federal, state and local benefits and entitlements. Veterans Service Officers, accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, assist veterans and their families with documentation and filing of claims for disability, compensation and/or pension. Staff offices are located in each of the five Congressional Districts (Bridgeport, Waterbury, Milford, Newington and Norwich) and include bilingual staff and a woman's veterans' services coordinator. Additional advocacy work is performed throughout the state on a staff available, rotating basis at satellite office locations and through numerous outreach events (Job/Senior and Health Fairs throughout the state). Veterans Service Officers also conduct interviews in skilled nursing facilities throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted and ascertain which benefits these veterans are currently receiving and/or entitled to receive.

This year OA&A serviced 1328 walk-in veterans and/or dependents; answered over 32,000 telephone inquiries; acquired 892 new clients and filed 1407 new claims and reopened hundreds of existing claims. Special outreach included 32 community outreach events including benefit fairs, seminars, and numerous "Yellow Ribbon" briefings for Connecticut National Guard and Reserve Units prior to, and immediately upon returning from deployment. These advocacy efforts resulted in over \$2.8

million in new income and benefits to Connecticut veterans and their families. Due to COVID-19, outreach events have been temporarily suspended across the state but are expected to resume in the future.

In Fiscal Year 2019-2020, the Office of Advocacy and Assistance also reviewed the eligibility status of more than 1000 veterans and/or dependents of veterans in the state's 344 skilled nursing homes and assisted living facilities. These benefits have provided a direct savings to the state where the clients are Medicaid recipients and in other cases served to delay the time when clients may be forced to rely on state funded services.

OA&A also manages the Connecticut Wartime Service Medals and Registry program and this year awarded over 1,197 additional medals – bringing the total number of Wartime Service Medals awarded to eligible veterans since 2006 to over 40,000 recipients. Currently there are over 300,000 veterans registered with the Connecticut Veterans electronic registry.

OA&A manages the Veterans Identity on the CT Driver's License Program. The office is responsible for verifying the service of the CT Veteran and transmitting that information to the CT-Dept. of Motor Vehicles with 1553 applications processed during this period. Since the inception of the program in January 2013, more than 12,000 applications have been processed by this office.

OA&A provides training for all town, city and municipal veterans representatives. This program provides a single source point of contact in the veteran's hometown to act as a liaison for veteran's benefits and services. To date, more than 140 towns have appointed a veteran's representative and nearly 200 volunteers have completed a benefits training seminar since the training was first offered in Oct 2012.

The Connecticut Veterans INFO line (1-866-9CT-VETS) continues to receive an average of 30 calls per day. This popular number provides veterans an easy access to general benefit information, assistance with requesting military records, referrals to other state agencies, and helpful information on the location and availability of the Congressional District Office.

Residential Facility Programs/Services:

New or Revised Policies:

- Veteran Residential Facility Policy Omnibus Update effective January 17, 2020.
- Residential Facility Policy and Procedures for Influenza (flu) or Gastrointestinal (GI) Outbreaks effective 2/26/2020. Provide detail as to process to follow in handling and managing residents with the flu and GI issues as well as managing an outbreak of the same.
- Temporary Residential Inspection Policy effective March 26, 2020 and revision update completed on July 17, 2020.
- Enhanced Health and Safety Protocols to Minimize Risk of Exposure to Covid 19 initial one issues on March 16, 2020 with various revisions made during the COVID 19 pandemic with the latest updated revisions done dated July 10, 2020.
- Covid-19 Residential D-Wing Isolation Procedures dated April 2, 2020. Provide detail process to follow have residents placed in Isolation wing.

Section 4. TIME LIMITS:

Veteran Residents participating in the VVTP will have a maximum of twenty four (24) months participation.

If at the end of a twelve (12) month period, a Veteran Participant has not found outside employment and wishes to continue with the VVTP, the Veteran Participant must provide the following:

- Documentation of a “good faith effort” in the pursuit of finding outside employment at regular intervals;
- Documented attendance at employment skills classes, such as resume writing or computer training;
- Be compliant with either IEP or IAP;
- Be compliant with any other recommended courses of action as directed by the Residential Facility Director or designee; and
- Be compliant with monthly Residential Facility program fees.

After twelve months VVTP Participants who are in compliance with the above can apply for an additional twelve (12) months of program participation. An initial extension request shall be subject to review and approval by the Residential Facility Director or designee.

Section 5. EXTENDED PROGRAM PARTICIPATION:

a. In circumstances where a Veteran Participant has been unable to secure lasting and sustainable community based employment at the end of their twenty four (24) months of participation, due to circumstances beyond Resident Veteran’s control including, but not limited to:

- Past criminal convictions;
- Age limitations;
- Medical, Mental Health or Physical limitations, and wishes to continue with the VVTP, the Resident Participant may request consideration for Extended Program Participation (EPP).

Veteran Participant may be eligible for Extended Program Participation (EPP). The EPP allows the Veteran Resident to continue to perform basic moderate vocational activities, to improve their economic situation and to continue to engage in purposeful activity for social and therapeutic purposes.

The request for EPP participation will be reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Treatment Team which will make a recommendation to the Residential Facility Director. The Residential Facility Director will take the recommendation to the Commissioner or designee thereof, for review. The Commissioner or designee may waive the 24 month period and allow the Veteran Participant to continue under the EPP.

Continued Extended Program Participation will be reviewed quarterly by the Interdisciplinary Treatment Team to determine continued participation.

Section 6. HOURS OF PARTICIPATION:

The maximum number of hours bi-weekly for participants under the VVTP is set at sixty (60) hours with no more than six (6) hours per day.

The maximum number of hours bi-weekly for participants under the Extended Program Participation is set at forty (40) hours with no more than four (4) hours per day.

As part of the implementation of the new program policy Commissioner Saadi placed a moratorium on the 24 month cap on participation for current Veteran Participants seeking EPP eligibility. The moratorium is good through May 1, 2019 allowing current participants to be evaluated for potential Extend Participation in the program. The Vocational Coordinator has begun meeting with all VVTP Participants to review their goals and objectives, review progress made and to determine who may request consideration for extend participation.

Vocational & Educational Services:

THE VVTP Policy was updated to comply with the new HCC Licensing requirements that VVTP Participants go through a full background check to ensure they are eligible to be assigned in the HCC. The background checks will be done for any new participants being assigned to the HCC.

Vocational & Educational Services:

- 6 Veterans Residents from the Residential Facility obtained community gainful employment – One of those was hired at our Healthcare Facility
- 4 Veteran Residents from the Residential Facility attended college degree programs
- 1 Veteran Resident attended a technical school training program
- 1 Veteran Resident completed an internship with a local environmental agency
- 4 Veteran Residents discharged to the community with full or part time employment

The Vocational Department continues to make referrals for Resident Veterans to receive employment readiness and job search assistance from our community partners at the CT Department of Labor and Easter Seals Veterans Rally Point.

The Vocational Department continues to provide transportation services to Veteran Residents to assist them in commuting to work, attending college or other training program, court appointments, probation appointments and housing appointments.

The pandemic during the last part of the fiscal year and the impact it had on society as a whole created some difficult challenges for those Veteran Residents who were enrolled in school, who were employed and out of work for a time and those seeking employment. The Vocational Department continued to provide support and guidance to the Veteran Residents to achieve their educational and vocational goals. Veteran Residents completed the spring 2020 semester, those searching for employment had interviews and some obtained employment. Support and guidance was also provided to those who were employed to assist them in maintaining their current employment.

Substance Abuse Treatment/Recovery Support:

Through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs and The Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS), substance abuse treatment and recovery support has continued to be provided to Veteran Residents residing at the Connecticut Department of Affairs by the Veteran's Recovery Center. The program provides Outpatient programming and various outpatient services to DVA Veterans as well as to CT Veterans and National Guard members in the community. The program is staffed by a Clinical Psychologist, one Substance Abuse Counselor, and one Secretary. In FY 2019/2020 there were a total for 47 clients served. DVA residents 26 and National Guard Service members 21.

Patriots' Landing Temporary Housing Program (Veteran Families):

The Patriots' Landing Program has been in operation since 2014. This program offers temporary housing to veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk for homelessness. The Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs provides physical housing for up to five veteran families. All five houses are fully furnished and maintenance and utilities are covered by the agency. Residential Facility staff work collaboratively with a Program and Case Manager provided through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Case management services ensure that each Veteran Family obtains the necessary benefits and services needed to successfully transition to permanent housing. For FY2019/2020, we had 4 discharges to independent living and 3 admissions to the program with the average occupancy rate for Patriots' Landing during this period of 87.41.

Cemetery and Memorial Services Office

The State Veterans' Cemetery in Middletown is open for burials six days a week and contains over 11,500 remains of Connecticut Veterans. The Col. Raymond Gates Cemetery has 1600 Veterans interred on its grounds. The Spring Grove Cemetery closed for interments in 1980.

From July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, 707 interments were performed at Connecticut State Veterans Cemeteries.

Improvements/Achievements for Fiscal Year 2018-2019

DVA-Wide 2018-2019

- In the Residential Facility completed the renovation of living space in C Wing of the East Residential Building. This project created 24 semi private independent living spaces. Previously this area housed up to four residents for a total of 48 residents. This project was wholly funded by donated funds. This project program is known as DVA Quality of Life Improvements This project serves as a template for additional renovations of the residential rooms in other wings of the Residential Facility.
- In order to enhance safety and quality of life the DVA opened bids on January 30, 2019 to upgrade the residential buildings 2, 3 and 4 consistent with the American With Disability Act (ADA). This project utilizes more than \$1,617,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans

Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.

- As part of the continued effort to improve safety campus wide the Agency moved forward into construction phase for a campus wide fire alarm upgrade project and sprinkler installation in the Residential Facility Main Dining Room. This project was made possible through more than \$2,000,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.
- At the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown the Agency made great progress with the construction phase on two major projects which will raise, realign, and clean existing headstones and expand the cemetery burial capacity within current boundaries to preserve burial options for Veterans for the next decade or more. These projects totaling \$8,628,989 are 100% federally funded by the U.S. Veterans Administration National Cemetery Administration.
- Also for the DVA Cemetery Services Program a comprehensive master plan was completed in March of 2019 which focused on the capacity of current cemeteries in Middletown and Rock Hill. This study revealed a window of 10-12 years of burial services availability. If burial services increase this window will certainly close sooner possibly 8 – 10 years. The CT DVA will now look at options disclosed in this master plan to insure burial options for Connecticut's more than 185,000 Veterans and eligible spouses remain at a state operating and federally supported Veterans Cemetery.

Office of Advocacy and Assistance 2019-2020

- OA&A continues to support the nearly 190K veterans in CT through all means possible despite Covid-19 pandemic
- More than 1,197 Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medals were issued this year totaling more than 40,000 medals awarded since 2006.

Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Services 2019-2020

- The Cemetery and Memorial Services Office (CMS) has fully transitioned to the federal VA's BOSS system, Burial Operations Support System, streamlining scheduling and ordering headstones
- Burial Services Office answered more than 7,700 inquiries and saved Veterans' families more than \$2,000,000 by utilizing DVA burial services.
- Burial Services Office collected \$366,649 in federal reimbursement burial allowances for the General Fund. Also, installation payments for over 2,400 federal Veteran headstones/foot markers were processed totaling \$230,000.
- Burial Services continued to support dignified burial services six days a week at our State's two active Veteran's cemeteries

Safety and Security 2019-2020

- Conducted several fire drills throughout the agency.
- Conducted In-Service training for all employees.
- Supported Middletown cemetery for multiple events by assisting with parking detail.
- Four (4) Security patrol vehicles purchased from Fleet and put in use for patrol operations.
- Replaced previously leased Security vehicles.
- All Officers attended Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVOC) Hosted by Connecticut State Police.
- All Officers trained on the administration of Naloxone (Narcan).

- Narcan boxes installed in East and West Barracks.
- Narcan put in Security Vehicles Medical bags.
- New Medical Emergency Response bags purchased and stocked. Locations: All Security Vehicles, Security HQ, Security Gate House, Administration Building.
- Two Part-Time Officers hired.
- Office Assistant hired.
- Ballistic Vests acquired for Officers following OSHA assessment of job duties.
- Following NP-5 Contract new Uniforms were acquired for Officers.
- Confined Spaces inspection and program implemented with Physical Plant Supervisor Lansdale & Grounds Director Ballard
- Completed a yearlong OSHA Confined Spaces project with the Physical plant and Grounds Director. Training and Equipment provided.
- Completed an OSHA Workplace Noise Assessment. Data was provided by OSHA showing that a Hearing Conservation program was needed. Training was completed, equipment was provided, and hearing assessment of all grounds crew was performed.
- New Security Reporting System created by DAS was put into use through Biznet. Updates included: Ability to add pictures, witness/victim statement forms within the report, quick search of case reports and log entries via search bar, easier program to navigate and make changes to if needed.
- Created a staff vehicle form and updated all staff vehicle records in Security S2 system. This allows Officers to search for vehicle and owner information within our system.
- Created new General Memorandum of Parking Privileges for Resident's Vehicles on grounds. Currently working to update all Resident's vehicle records.
- Created a Community Relations Officer Program for the Residential Facility.
- Appointed a new Traffic Officer.
- Appointed new Lead Investigator.
- Continued our frontline work through the Covid-19 pandemic and were available for assistance for all Security needs throughout campus.

Projects and Operations Management 2019 – 2020

The CT DVA Projects and Operations Division staffs the following Agency disciplines: emergency management, facilities maintenance, building services, transportation, environmental management, strategic planning, information technology, energy efficiency and project management with the collective responsibility for three state veteran cemeteries and a 92 acre campus with more than 600,000 square feet of facilities. Projects and Operations functions to synchronize and coordinate these functions to support the DVA's mission, core functions, and customer satisfaction.

Projects and Operations Management Accomplishments for 2019 – 2020

- Instituted a basic electronic work order system in December 2019 that eliminated a 8 part carbon copy form that was processed manually.
- Managed the emergency response to deal with the COVID19 pandemic affects and effects on DVA operations and Veteran Resident environments. Instituted many operational measures to provide the best possible protection to staff and residents during the most infectious and effective pathogen known to Connecticut Veterans since 1918.
- Entered construction phase on a critical project - Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Improvements to Residential Facilities. This project utilizes more than \$ 1,600,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program. This project will

be complete in Winter 2021.

- Construction was completed of a campus wide fire alarm upgrade and sprinkler installation in the main dining room. This project utilizes more than \$2,000,000 in federal funds from the U. S. Veterans Administration State Home Construction Grant Program.
- Construction was completed on two break-thru projects at Middletown State Veterans Cemetery with a combined total of \$ 8,628,989 in federal funds from the U.S. Veterans Administration National Cemetery Administration. These projects raise, realign, and clean existing headstones and expand the cemetery within current boundaries to preserve burial options for Veterans for the next 15 years.
- Provided transportation services for resident Veterans and outside Veterans using the Federal VA system to medical appointments, and recreational activities.
- Worked with local volunteers who support maintenance and upkeep at the Darien State Veterans Cemetery, the original Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery
- Worked with several volunteer organizations on maintenance and upkeep support at the DVA main campus
- Assisted with the successful licensing transition of the Sgt John L. Levitow Healthcare Center from a Chronic Disease Hospital to Skilled Nursing Facility.
- Completed a ASHRAE level II energy audit of the DVA Main Campus utility services and received a grant from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to conduct a level III audit.
- Serve on the Governor's Senior Steering Committee and serve as the Project Team Lead for establishing best acceptable practices for state agencies to achieve energy goals

Information Technology Accomplishments for 2019 – 2020

- Upgraded all desktop and laptop computer devices to the Windows 10® platform
- DVA staff began prior to the COVID19 pandemic to operate in Microsoft Teams and Office environments allowing a smooth transition for staff to telework and maintain communications in support of operations
- Maintained the electronic medical records system to improve clinical service delivery to residents
- Continued improvements and updating of the DVA website to better inform Veterans and their families
- Continued improving one of the best Veterans “Apps” which provides fingertip access to vital services for Veterans and those wanting to support Veterans

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

Veterans requesting care from the DVA must be residents of the State of Connecticut at the time of application. A Veteran must have been discharged with other than a dishonorable discharge and be a current resident of the State of Connecticut. Application for admission may be requested in advance. Fact sheets detailing admission requirements are available along with a general information booklet, or consult our website at www.portal.ct.gov/DVA.

Human Resources

The Human Resources department provides support and assistance to employees. This includes recruitment, staffing and personnel transactions such as position vacancies, employee leaves, retirement, Family and Medical Leave Act, Workers Compensation and management of all position actions in

CORE- CT. The Human Resources department also oversees all labor relation activities including collective bargaining, discipline, investigations as well as providing guidance to managers and supervisors regarding employee relation issues.

Affirmative Action

The DVA's Affirmative Action Plan is filed biennially and is in compliance with the requirements of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, pursuant to the Regulations for Affirmative Action by State Government, Sections 46a-68-31 to 46a-68-74. The DVA is strongly committed to equal employment. Affirmative action and equal employment are immediate and priority objectives and they play an important and necessary role in all stages of the employment process. The DVA continues to monitor and improve its practices in employment and contracting, giving special consideration to affirmative action goal attainment.

Fiscal Updates

Fiscal Office continues working with Agency departments to prioritize expenditures in order to achieve reductions as required by the Governor and OPM in FY20. The DVA's FY20 Operating Expenses (OE) was reduced 1% and the Personal Services (PS) was increased 1% comparing to FY19 expenditures.

DVA continues to be innovative applying a fiscally strategic service model to meet the challenges of budget constraints by employing a fiscally conservative approach to managing our bottom line and to meet our core mission of "serve those who served".

Special Events

Stand Down - Our signature event, Stand Down brings together more than 100 agencies and social service organizations for Veterans for services such as medical and dental screenings, employment and educational assistance, legal and motor vehicle help, state and federal Veterans Affairs benefits information, and housing referrals. Transportation is also provided through the Connecticut Department of Transportation. In 2019, more than 900 Veterans attended Stand Down.

Veterans Hall of Fame - Since its inception in 2005, we have received over 100 nominations annually for this award that recognizes Veterans who no longer wear the uniform but continue their selfless service to their communities. 41 nominations have been submitted for 2020. This year's ceremony will be held in March 2021 due to the pandemic.

"Heroes for Hire" – The DVA continues to partner with the Department of Labor in organizing and supporting Veteran job fairs around the state in an effort to match qualified Veterans with businesses and organizations interested in hiring them. Another event postponed due to pandemic.

Veterans Day Ceremony - The DVA held a ceremony on campus for Veterans residing on the campus that brought state and local officials out to celebrate Veterans. Ceremony will continue this year, Nov. 11th.

Vietnam & Korean Veteran Ceremonies – The DVA in conjunction with the Lieutenant Governor's office have been traveling the state honoring Vietnam & Korean Veterans weekly. Vietnam Veterans are presented with the Vietnam Veteran Pin. These events will continue throughout the next fiscal year

as well. These events have been postponed due to pandemic.

Volunteer Services

Volunteers continued to log several hours prior to the pandemic in support of Veterans Home activities. Volunteers are comprised of individuals who volunteer their time with Veterans on campus, as well as community groups who come to complete specific projects on the grounds of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Stand Down 2019: A state-wide outreach held at the Department providing services to homeless and needy veterans, was another success. More than 900 veterans attended the event which was held on the grounds of the Veterans' Home in Rocky Hill. Over 110 state, federal and private agencies attended and provided assistance and resource information to Veterans in need. In addition, there were over 300 Volunteers supporting the event along with numerous monetary and in-kind donations. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Stand Down 2020 will continue, however in a different way. Virtual informational sessions will be conducted and various locations throughout Connecticut will be supplying personal items to Veterans in those area.

Community Partnerships

Saluting Branches – September 13, 2019 - Arborists from around the east coast spent the day at the Middletown Veterans Cemetery providing approximately \$100,000.00 worth of in-kind services from cutting down trees, grinding and removing tree stumps, trimming trees and hedges, planting new trees, etc. Plans are currently on hold for 2020 due to COVID.

Giving Days - Companies and Organizations from across CT consistently providing a day of service on the grounds of DVA and at the Middletown and Rocky Hill Veteran Cemeteries. This service consists of grounds work, weeding, planting flowers, trimming grass & hedges, cleaning up fallen debris, painting and assisting with basic administrative duties such as filing, storing old document, purging documents to be sent to storage or destroyed. In 2018-2019 Cigna, Medtronics, Aspen RE and several other organizations participated in Giving Days. These services are priceless and enhance the quality of life and appearance of our grounds for Veterans on the DVA campus and those utilizing the State Veterans Cemeteries. Current Giving Days have been on hold due to COVID.

Donations – Community partners continue to donate personal needs items for Veterans on campus. During the pandemic, donations of face masks (surgical and handmade), bottled water, coffee, beverages, snacks, toiletries, electronics and various other needed items have been provided.