

The Island News



Larry Dandridge

How can you help veterans and their families?

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Read online at: <https://yourislandnews.com/how-can-you-help-veterans-and-their-families/>

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By Larry Dandridge

This week's article is a plea to everyone for help in finding veterans and referring them to a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) and the VA. Finding veterans in need and getting them help is the best Christmas gift and this gift is free!

As a 100% disabled veteran I know how important VA healthcare, mental healthcare, prescription drug, hearing aids, eyeglasses, service-connected \$\$\$\$ compensation, home loans, employment assistance, education, training, pensions, life insurance, skilled nursing care, home healthcare, adult daycare, dementia care, hospice care, caregiver training, caregiver respite, family, and other VA benefits are.

Despite the tremendous efforts of the VA, the military, Veterans Service Organizations, Veterans Service Officers, the S.C. Department of Veteran Affairs, and many other

organizations, tens of thousands of veterans still do not know what their benefits are and do not apply for those benefits.

Frequently the veterans who contact me are senior citizens, with many health conditions, and are jobless. Many have limited computer skills, anxiety, and depression. Many of those health conditions are military service-connected and many veterans are in health, financial, housing, employment, or other crisis.

When I ask the veteran, "Why have you waited so long to seek help from the VA?" they tell me things like:

– I did not need VA help when I was young and left the military but as I got older, my health worsened, and more and more service-connected health issues began to plague me.

– I did not want to take away from other veterans who need those services much more than I do.

– I just did not know that I could get VA help in the areas that I need help with.

I am hoping that this article will help everyone who reads *The Island News* to make it their mission to find veterans and give them some basic information about veterans' benefits and encourage them to visit or call their local VSO or VA Office. Ask your co-workers, your fellow house of worship members, your servers at restaurants, your fellow club members, homeless people, and others you meet:

- Are you a veteran?
- Are you a veteran in crisis (health, homeless, jobless, or other)?
- Are you a veteran and do you know what your veterans' benefits are?
- Have you applied for your veteran's benefits?
- Have you applied for veterans' healthcare?
- Have you applied for service-connected disability compensation (which will soon be over \$4,000.00 per month for veterans rated by the VA as 100% disabled)?

If they answer "no" to any of the above questions tell them:

- Veterans' Crisis Line. Dial 988 and press 1 is for veterans and their family members and anyone who knows about a veteran in crisis. This line is manned

24/7. No matter what problem the veteran is facing, the VA has the resources to help.

- The VA is fully funded to provide veterans benefits to every veteran. Veterans' benefits are not just for the veterans who need them the most.
- Veterans' benefits include VA healthcare, prescription drug, hearing aids, eyeglasses, service-connected \$\$\$\$ compensation, home loans, education, employment assistance, pensions, life insurance, CHAMPVA health insurance, family, home health care, aid attendance, hospice, and many others.
- Perhaps the two of the most valuable VA benefits that veterans have earned include VA healthcare and service-connected disability compensation.
- The VA healthcare system is the largest and best healthcare system in the world and the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and Health Care System is one of the top two of the 167 VA Medical Centers.
- The Ralph H. Johnson VA Healthcare System has Community-Based Out-Patient Clinics in Beaufort, North Charleston, Trident-North Charleston, Goose Creek/Charleston Naval Weapons Station, Hinesville, Ga., and Savannah, Ga.
- Veterans may also be approved to use civilian community healthcare.

Veterans Service Officers

A VSO will help veterans and their family members to find out what their VA benefits are and apply for those benefits. There are VSOs working for many Veterans Service Organizations (VFW, American Legion, DAV, PAV, AMVETS, VVA, etc.) and the S.C. Counties. VSO services are free. Veterans can find their county VSO at <https://scdva.sc.gov/county-veterans-affairs-offices>. Below is a partial list of VSOs in the Lowcountry:

Beaufort County VSO: 100 Clear Water Way, Beaufort, S.C. 29906; 843-255-6880.

Colleton County VSO: Janet D. Smith, 843-549-1412, cvao@colletoncounty.org.

Charleston County VSO: David J. LeBlanc, Sr., 843-974-6360, vaoffice@charlestoncounty.org.

Hampton County VSO: Sharon Johnson, 803-914-2085/2087, sjohnson@hamptoncountysc.org.

Dorchester County VSO: Johnny K. Brown, 843-832-0050, JKBrown@dorchestercountysc.gov.

Jasper County VSO: Alton Jenkins, 843-726-7727, ajenkins@jaspercountysc.gov.

Berkeley County VSO: Jan Helton, 843-377-8506, jan.helton@berkeleycountysc.gov.

Chatham County, Ga., VSO: Reggie Lewis, 912-920-0214, Ext. 2194, reggie.lewis2@va.gov, 1170 Shawnee Street, Savannah, Ga. 31419.

Liberty County & Hinesville, Ga., VSO: Charles Isaac, 912-408-2948, charles.isaac@vs.state.ga.us, 500 East Oglethorpe Highway, Hinesville, Ga. 31313.

Beaufort DAV Chapter VSO: Michael Vergantino, 843-301-2543, mlv1030@gmail.com.

Hollywood SC American Legion VSO: Charlie Tupper (843) 709-7523, Charles.R.Tupper@gmail.com

Veterans can also find an accredited representative a VSO or a VA accredited Lawyer or Claims Agent by:

– Going to eBenefits
at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/manage/representative> to find a local representative (including a recognized VSO, an attorney, or a claims agent) by state/territory, zip code, or the organization's name.

– Searching the VA Office of the General Counsel's list
at <https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.aspto> to find VA-recognized organizations and VA-accredited individuals by name, city, state, or zip code.

One Department of VA and three VA Administrations

There are three Veterans Administrations under the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA).

VHA provides veterans their health care including organ transplants and plastic surgery. VBA is responsible for initial veteran registration, eligibility determination, and administration of the VA's five key lines of non-medical benefits to service members, veterans, and their families including Home Loan Guarantee, Insurance, Vocational

Rehabilitation, Employment, Education, Compensation, and Pension. Read A to Z about the VBA at <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/>.

Veterans can get help with finding out what their VA healthcare benefits are and their eligibility for VA healthcare at their local VA Medical Center Eligibility Office and Clinic.

They can also get help finding out what their VA benefits are at any Veterans Benefits Regional Office and by going online to <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>.

Veterans can find VBA Regional Offices at <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/offices.asp>. Veterans can get information about benefits or file a claim for benefits by visiting our website at www.va.gov. The Columbia, S.C., VBA Regional Office is located at 6437 Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, SC 29209, phone 800-827-1000.

Veterans with claims-specific or other questions may request information via <https://ask.va.gov> or telephone at 800-827-1000.

*Larry Dandridge is a Vietnam War wounded warrior, disabled veteran, ex-Enlisted Infantryman, ex-Warrant Officer Pilot, and retired Lt. Colonel. He is a past Veterans Service Officer, a Patient Adviser at the RHJ VA Hospital, the Fisher House Charleston Good Will Ambassador, and the VP for Veteran Affairs for the local Army Association Chapter. Larry is the author of the award-winning book *Blades of Thunder* and a contributing freelance writer with the *Island News*. Contact him at LDandridge@earthlink.net or 843-276-7164.*