19 Y.O. PAIN PRECEDENT OVERTURNED

Thousands of veterans previously denied disability benefits for pain issues related to their military service may now be eligible for that assistance, thanks to a federal court ruling this week. On April 4, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit overturned a 19-year-old precedent used in more than 11,000 VA claims denials that stated veterans had to have a clear medical diagnosis connected to their pain in order to be eligible for those disability payouts. Advocates said the ruling could be life-changing for individuals who are unable to work because of service-connected injuries but excluded from veterans assistance because of medical technicalities. “This was an all-or-nothing issue,” said Bart Stichman, executive director and co-founder of the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP). “This isn’t about arguing over the degree of disability where it is the difference of $2,000 or $3,000 a month in help. These are people who are getting zero benefits, despite their pain.”

The court challenge, which was brought by NVLSP, involved Army veteran Melba Saunders, who served in first Gulf War. She injured her knees during her seven years in service, a fact that military doctors noted in her files without determining a specific medical diagnosis of the issue. When she left the service and applied for veterans disability benefits, her claim was denied. VA officials acknowledged the problem stemmed from her time in service but the Board of Veterans’ Appeals cited a 1999 Veterans Court decision which held that “pain alone is not a disability for the purpose of VA disability compensation.” The new court ruling erases that precedent, at least for now. Veterans still need to show a clear connection between their pain and their military service to be eligible, but would no longer have to have a specific medical reason for the pain to apply for benefits. VA officials can appeal the decision, although it’s unclear if they will do so.

In a statement, Saunders’ lawyer, Mel Bostwick, called the court case “a significant victory for disabled veterans” and a long-overdue correction in VA policy. “Congress recognized that the nation owes these veterans for their sacrifices, and the court today vindicated the common-sense notion that this debt does not depend on whether a veteran’s disabling pain can be labeled with a specific medical diagnosis,” she said. Stichman said veterans who have previously been rejected for disability benefits — or who have avoided applying in the past because they assumed they would not be eligible — should now reapply to see if the new ruling will allow them to qualify.

“We just don’t know how many veterans this could affect,” he said. “We know the Board of Veterans Appeals has cited this precedent in more than 11,000 cases. But we don’t know about all the other veterans who never even applied.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Leo Shane III | April 5, 2018 ++]
Women Vet Equestrian Retreat and Vet Motorcycle Run

The moment you arrive at the Trinity Equestrian Center in Eau Claire, WI you sense the difference. It is a place of obvious beauty, with it's miles of white fencing, green pastures and gorgeous horses. Far more important, however, is what you sense but don’t see: Trinity is a place where tiny miracles happen. Every day-miracles of home, growth and healing. Horses are amazing therapists. Add a well trained staff and partnerships with the national organizations of Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH) and Equine Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), and the possibilities of successful therapy are endless.

Our horse therapy programs:
♦ Help heal spiritual, physical, emotional and cognitive injuries and disabilities
♦ Build relationship skills by developing confidence, improving communication, increasing self-worth, gaining patience, and learning the value of authentic leadership.
♦ Are a valued resource to the Chippewa Valley’s many youth agencies, diversion courts, schools, churches and non-profit organization.

The center has two upcoming events one for Women Veterans and the other for Veteran Motorcycle enthusiasts. If you are interested in finding more about this center, please contact Trinity Equine Center for animal assisted therapy. “Horsepower for Veterans” is an annual fund raiser to help with the Veterans Therapy Program.

Military Tattoo Criteria

Marine officials said April 3 that there have been no changes to the Corps’ official tattoo policy despite an announcement from a prior service recruiting station March 31 claiming a new lenient policy. The initial announcement of a substantial change making the tattoo policy more lenient appears to have stemmed from a misreading of an internal message distributed by the Corps’ Total Force Retention System. The confusion began when the Londonberry, New Hampshire, prior service recruiting station made a posting on its social media account claiming that Marine Forces Reserve would allow prior service Marines with out of regulation tattoos to join the reserves with various caveats. As long as the tattoos are “not egregious (face, hands, racist, etc.), we can get Marines back in who otherwise might not have the chance,” approval could be done at a lower level.

That streamlining removed the need for a commanding general endorsement, but didn’t necessarily put the power of approving out of regulation tattoos in the hands of prior service recruiting commanders, as the Londonderry station initially believed. Commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller updated the tattoo policy in 2016 to allow tattoos to extend further on the upper arms and thighs. See Article in full, this article was cut down to fit the area allowed in this newsletter. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | April 3, 2018 ++]
TriWest Healthcare Alliance, which contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs to arrange private-sector care for veterans through the VA Choice program, warned April 3 in an apocalyptic letter to lawmakers that another funding shortfall could lead to restricted care for veterans, as well as layoffs and financial ruin for the alliance. In a letter sent to leaders on the House and Senate VA committees and congressional appropriators, TriWest President and CEO David McIntyre Jr. criticized Congress for failing to address the shortfall in the massive spending bill passed March 23, the funding uncertainty threatens TriWest’s network of private-sector medical providers, he wrote.

“I cannot predict how much longer this company’s owners and employees are going to be willing or able to stay at this work,” McIntyre wrote. The company is preparing to lay off up to 25 percent of its workforce, which accounts for 700 people. “Veterans will be denied access to the community provider network we have constructed to support VA, providers likely will experience substantial claims payment delays, and TriWest will be forced to reduce as much as 25 percent of our workforce just to survive, if that’s even possible,” McIntyre wrote.

Former VA Secretary David Shulkin warned lawmakers during his last few appearances on Capitol Hill that funds for the Choice program would be depleted by early June. The program allows veterans to receive care in the private sector if they live more than 40 miles driving distance from a VA facility or have to wait more than 30 days for an appointment. If Congress doesn’t approve more funding soon, Shulkin has said, the VA must further limit the number of veterans who could use private-sector medical care.

TriWest, based in Phoenix, is one of the third-party administrators that run the program. The company works with the VA and approximately 200,000 private-sector medical providers to schedule appointments for veterans in 28 states in the Midwest and along the West Coast. It also operates in Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands. As the June deadline approaches, TriWest faces a “very real financial threat,” McIntyre wrote. The company is preparing to lay off up to 25 percent of its workforce, which accounts for 700 people. “Veterans will be denied access to the community provider network we have constructed to support VA, providers likely will experience substantial claims payment delays, and TriWest will be forced to reduce as much as 25 percent of our workforce just to survive, if that’s even possible,” McIntyre wrote.

This marks the third instance in one year that the Choice program has faced a funding crisis. The last time, in December 2017, Congress approved $2.1 billion to keep the program going. As of mid-March, about $1 billion remained, and the VA was spending about $370 million through the program each month. [Source: Nikki Wentling | Stars & Stripes | April 3, 2018 ++]

133,000 Vets Get Refund

This month the Pentagon will begin sending notifications to more than 133,000 veterans who may qualify for a refund of federal taxes paid on disability severance pay dating back to January 17, 1991.

Under federal law, veterans who suffer combat-related injuries and who are separated from the military are not supposed to be taxed on the one-time lump sum disability severance payment they got from the military.

For years the Defense Department (DoD) improperly withheld taxes on these payments from thousands of unsuspecting veterans, who were typically unaware that their benefits were being improperly reduced.

Vet’s Vantage

Retirement

After 20 years with Waushara County, (the last 1 1/2 with Veterans Services), I am retiring June 8, 2018. This position will become an Assistant CVSO position and a Veteran will be assisting the County Veterans Service Officer! Please be patient with the new person, this is a lot to learn in a short time!

You never stop learning!

I would like to thank my boss. Bill Rosenau for having faith in me and educating me to the same level of education that he has. Together, we successfully put in 100’s of claims in with the VA and helped a lot of veterans. I personally want to thank each veteran that walked through our doors. You are my heroes!

Dawn DeBraal, Benefits Specialist
On Saturday June 2, 2018 at 1:00 PM, Highground Veterans Memorial Park at W7031 Ridge Rd, Neillsville WI 54456 will be hosting a Tribute to the Military Working Dogs. For more information call 715-743-4224 events@thehighground.us

www.thehighground.us
http://www.facebook.com/TheHighgroundVeteransMemorial/theHighground

JUNE 2, 2018 NEILLSVILLE

TRIBUTE TO MILITARY WORKING DOGS

Military Family Camp

For Youth Development for Healthy Living for Social Responsibility.

Calling all youth from military families (current or past) ages 8-17

Camp Jorn YMCA

No cost to attend one or two week session. Find info on line at campjornymca.org or call:

715-543-8808

No cost thanks to the YMCA of the USA’s Strategic Initiatives Fund and generous matching donor!

BEST CAMP EVER!
The Department of Veterans Affairs, facing intense scrutiny amid reports of widespread dysfunction and a controversial push by the Trump administration to outsource more medical care, has tens of thousands of full- and part-time vacancies nationwide, according to data compiled by veterans advocates, lawmakers and federal unions. Most urgently, the agency's health-care network needs thousands of primary care physicians, mental-health providers, physical therapists, social workers - even janitorial staff, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, told The Washington Post in an interview. Of equal concern, he said, VA lacks enough human-resources personnel to vet candidates and make the hires. "It's crippling our ability to deliver health care to our vets," Tester said. "... It's effectively pushing veterans outside the system."

President Donald Trump, and the conservative groups advising him, has seized on the long waits many veterans face at government facilities as grounds for aggressively expanding a program that enables patients to seek services from private providers at taxpayer expense. The proposal is deeply divisive, however, with opponents, including Democrats and Republicans in Congress, saying the effort could further weaken VA. Max Stier, president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service, said that when Trump took office, he put into place a federal hiring freeze that has been a particular problem for VA as it looks to add staff. While doctors were exempt from the hiring freeze, the human resources professionals needed to make the hires were not, he noted, citing a 2017 report by the Government Accountability Office. VA's human resources division remains short-staffed and continues to struggle with hiring even after the freeze was lifted, Stier said.

VA officials said the vacancy rate in human resources is 11.5 percent, or 540 employees. That has not affected "our numerous staffing successes," said Curt Cashour, a VA spokesman, who noted that the department has added nearly 15,000 staff since Trump came into office. Across the agency, there were more than 33,000 full-time vacancies as of early March, Cashour said. He would not provide the number of part-time vacancies, a figure also believed to be in the thousands. "Historically, one of the main benefits of working at the VA is stability. Unfortunately, people working in the health-care field are increasingly not viewing the VA as stable, and it is making recruitment more difficult because of that," said Randy Erwin, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees. "It is a real problem."

A Senate hearing was scheduled for 11 APR to confirm Paul Lawrence to become VA's undersecretary for benefits, a key post that has gone without a permanent leader since October 2015. Lawrence is a retired Army officer and vice president of the consulting firm Kaiser Associates; his nomination is considered noncontroversial. The role of undersecretary for health also remains vacant. Cashour said the VA is "making steady progress" in its search for a permanent appointee. "VA has made phenomenal progress during the Trump administration when it comes to VA staffing," Cashour said. More than one-third of veterans enrolled in the VA system - which serves 9 million veterans a year at 1,200 hospitals and clinics - now receive care from private doctors.

At a hearing before he was fired, Shulkin spoke about the difficulty in hiring doctors and nurses, mental health care professionals and benefits claims officers. The agency offers lower pay than the private sector does and involves a tedious, government mandated recruiting process. It is not clear what is nominee Jackson's philosophy regarding outsourcing care. But health-care experts and veterans advocates say the private system is also overwhelmed by long wait times. The solution is not outsourcing more care, said Rick Weidman, executive director of policy and government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America. "You can't just toss millions of veterans into the private health-care system, which wasn't built to care for their specific needs as vets," he said. "The VA needs full staffing. It's irresponsible and not fair." [Source: Emily Wax-Thibodeaux | The Washington Post | April 10, 2018 ++ Pictured below Texas VAMC waiting room.
SOLO HONOR FLIGHT

If you have never heard about the Solo Honor Flight before keep reading this e-mail. The Solo Honor Flight program is different from the traditional honor flight program that is done in 1 day. If you have heard about the Solo Honor Flight feel free to stop reading this article.

The Solo Honor Flight is a National Program run by Jane Julian. Jane is the TLC/Lone Eagle/ Solo Program Director and she can be reached at https://www.honorflight.org/honor-flight-solo-program/

The purpose of the program is to catch the Veterans that are not served by any local Honor Flight hubs and or there are special circumstances that the Veteran may have.

In my case I was invited to join an Honor Flight by a Vietnam Vet and his twin brother who was in during the Vietnam War plus 7 members of their family that left 6 April 2018 and flew back the morning of 8 April 2018. There was a recommended donation of $450 per person that paid for the flight on Southwest Airlines with a two day night stay at the BWI Hilton in Baltimore. There was also covered dinner at the hotel Friday night, breakfast buffet Saturday morning, lunch boxes on the bus, dinner at the Golden Corral and a breakfast buffet Sunday morning before our flight. Because there was total of 8 of us that were going with the Veterans and we doubled up the hotel rooms our cost was spread out amongst us. The new cost was $256.25 per person. As a group we tossed in another $50 per person for a grand total of $306.25 per person. Trust me I was waiting for the other shoe to drop because there was no way this would be the final cost. The shoe never dropped and this was the cost.

The Solo Flight organized it for the tour bus to have a police escort the whole time to bypass traffic and to get us to all the monuments. The Police Escort was in the front and the back of the bus. I have zero complaints with the weekend that we had with the Veterans. The Solo Honor Flight program is a top notch program, I highly recommend it.

SOLO HONOR FLIGHT
(From the Website)
1. Ideally designed for WWII, Korean War or Vietnam veterans and accompanying family or friends (“guardians”) willing to fund and secure their OWN transportation to the Baltimore Washington (BWI) Airport or the BWI Hilton.
2. Multiple tour dates available for the veteran and guardians.
3. More than 1 guardian can accompany the veteran. However the maximum party size cannot exceed 5, including the veteran.
4. Veteran can arrive and depart the D.C. area on a date, time and method of their choosing.
5. the Honor Flight Solo participant will be a part of a large group of veterans from all over the US.
6. Experience trip leaders lead the operation securing wheel chairs, O2 etc.
Ella Davis Hudson remembers stacking bricks to make a kitchen to play house. The next thing she knew, the 9 year-old was running down the driveway, blood streaming from the gash above her eye. She doesn’t remember the actual blast from an atomic bomb. Sixty years ago, on March 11, 1958, an Air Force bomber dropped a nuclear weapon on a farm in the rural Mars Bluff, S.C. community outside Florence. The radioactive payload either wasn’t loaded in the warhead or didn’t detonate — the stories differ. But the TNT trigger for the bomb blew a crater in Walter Gregg’s garden and the blast shredded his farm house about 100 yards away.

Hudson, a cousin, had been playing with two of Gregg’s children in the backyard. The atomic warhead would have been 30 kilotons — twice as powerful as the bomb that devastated Hiroshima in World War II. Florence, five miles away, would have been obliterated. Most of the rest of the 30,000 residents of Florence County would have been wiped out or sickened by radiation. You’d think the crater site would be one of those ghoulish attractions that become a heavily promoted tourist site. But today it sits almost in obscurity on private property, in the woods at the edge of the backyard of a home in a modest neighborhood near Francis Marion University. The tale, on the other hand, is anything but fun. They called the lost bombs “broken arrows.” When Hudson came to her senses that day in 1958, she was running frantically, with fallen electric lines singing around her. Helen Gregg, one of the daughters Hudson was playing with, remembers getting up from the ground to find an entire stand of pines, where the 6-year-old had just climbed down from her tree fort, flattened. Hudson had been struck in the forehead by a brick. Holladay, somehow, was uninjured. The story told in Mars Bluff is that the bomb was launched inadvertently, bumped loose from a B-47 when the plane hit an air pocket as a crew member leaned over the launch trigger to check it. The military never officially exhibit at the Florence County Museum. That wasn’t enough to rebuild the house, much less replace the possessions lost or stolen in the aftermath, Holladay said. “My daddy resented it all his life.” The Greggs later appeared on the television show “I’ve Got a Secret” and stumped the panel trying to guess what the secret was. In 2008, making an effort to recognize the event, county historians erected the markers at the site and held a commemoration ceremony attended by about 100 people. “It’s not many towns that can say they had an atomic bomb drop and nothing (deadly) happened,” said Marshall Yarborough, the Florence County Historical Commission chairwoman. Internet-recirculated reports of the ceremony and flurries of social media postings continue to spur the curious to come see the site. The historical commission is seeking to buy that wedge of the property from the owner to turn into a park, Yarborough said. But no luck so far. Hudson carries the scar on her forehead to this day. She doesn’t dwell on the incident or often talk about it. Out to dinner once, she and her husband, Knapp Hudson, surprised a table of Air Force officers who were talking about the Mars Bluff bomb by introducing her to them. But mostly, “it’s just too fantastical to tell people,” she said. “It’s like a chapter in your life you just close.” Holladay will still pause to take a breath when she talks about it. “I think I’m lucky to be alive,” she said. [Source: The Post and Courier of Charleston (S.C.) | Bo Petersen | March 31, 2018]
If you have been denied Energy Assistance, and you are a veteran, you may have one more option to seek help. Heat for Heroes will first need a denial from Energy Assistance and they might be able to help you with your energy bill. If you have been denied by Energy Assistance, please call 800-891-9276

Center for Vet Issues: (Homeless/Near Homeless) Angela Kalsbbeck MSW 920-906-4779
JOBS!!! Low Income/Disabled/ Newly Returned or Vets between the ages of 18-24. Corey Skaags DWD counsels & helps with resume’ building for jobs at Waushara Co. Court House on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays each month 9am-2pm. Call 920-251-4761 for appt.
Issues many different, AODA, Mental Health and other issues: Cal Stammer 715-409-3767