

## **2008 REPORT OF BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

C.R.S. 28-5-703 requires that “the Board shall study periodically the problems of veterans and based on such studies shall propose such programs or statutory changes as it may deem advisable or necessary for veterans’ assistance by the state of Colorado or political subdivisions thereof.”

The Board published its Strategic Plan last year in December. It was distributed during January and February to the Governor, the Legislature, the Veterans Service Organizations and other interested parties.

Every quarter the Board reviewed its goals to ensure that it was staying on track. Insights gained by developing the plan and reviewing the goals enabled the Board to establish and prioritize a list of the needs of Colorado Veterans.

The Board will review its goals during the December 2008 meeting and will revise some of the goals based on what they have learned during the past year. New objectives will be established for the year 2013.

The Board will continue to work with its Strategic Plan and in doing so will be better able to guide the State in meeting Veterans’ needs for the next five years.

### **LEGISLATIVE ISSUES AND ACTIONS BY COLORADO BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Part of the statutory mission of the Colorado Board of Veteran Affairs (CBVA) is to advise the executive and legislative branches of Colorado’s state government concerning issues of importance for the well being of veterans throughout the state. The CBVA works closely with the United Veterans Committee of Colorado (UVC) on their legislative agenda.

Some of the legislation that the Board worked on during the past year is summarized here. The most important bill for the Board was HB-078 which restored \$2.9 million to the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF). This returned to the VTF the \$2.3 million plus interest that was taken to help with the state budget crisis in 2003. This was a commitment by Governor Ritter. The Board thanks the Governor for his support and also thanks Rep. Bernie Buescher and Sen. John Morse for their work in getting this bill passed.

Several resolutions honoring veterans and supporting national veterans’ issues were passed. SB-108 passed which issues free fishing and hunting licenses to Purple Heart recipients residing in Colorado. HB-035 extended the Military Family Relief Check-off thru 2011. Seven-hundred thousand dollars was authorized in the budget for capital construction at the State Veterans Nursing Home at Homelake. This will be matched with \$1.4 million from the Federal Department of Veteran Affairs to remodel the Domiciliary Units at Homelake.

Board members Marvin Meyers, Ralph Bozella, and Bill Sinclair spent a great deal of their personal time at the state legislature proposing, planning, testifying and working on legislative issues that impact Colorado’s veterans. A very cooperative working relationship with the UVC has again led to a productive legislative session for the Veterans of the state.

### **OPERATION RECOGNITION**

In 2001, the Board initiated Operation Recognition, a program for World War II veterans who dropped out of high school to serve our nation during the War, to receive postponed diplomas. Operation Recognition graduated nearly 50 veterans in 2002. The program received the support and cooperation of the Colorado Department of Education and many school boards throughout the state. In 2003, Senate Bill 03-100 statutorily authorized local school boards to issue high school diplomas to veterans who left high school to join the armed forces during a time of war, to include WW II, Korea, and Vietnam. The legislation included language stating that recipients must be at least 60 years old to be eligible. The Board believes that this belated recognition serves to spotlight veterans' contributions and, at the same time, does not encourage our students to drop out of school. More than 420 veterans have received their high school diplomas since the spring of 2001. Not all school districts report their veteran graduates, but we have accounted for 15 veteran graduates from various high schools throughout the Denver metro area for the 2007-2008 school year. The Board wishes to recognize Brandt Erickson, a volunteer staff member from American Legion Post 1, Denver, for his work to coordinate Operation Recognition. Board member Ralph Bozella also volunteers his time to provide information and coordinate this worthy program for Colorado veterans.

### **VSO TRAINING**

Under the supervision of the Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs, the annual Colorado Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) training was held in early May 2008. This year's training was the largest and most successful ever held, with over 200 attendees. At the end of the week-long training session, a test was administered that will serve as a baseline for future training progress. Additionally, evaluation sheets were collected from all attendees to establish a pattern of continuous improvement and efficiency of this annual training. The VA Regional Medical Center also holds a monthly update for Colorado Veterans Service Officers.

### **COLORADO VETERANS MONUMENT**

C.R.S. 24-80-1401(2) requires that one member of the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs be a member of the Preservation Trust Committee for the Colorado Veterans Monument located off Broadway just west of the Capitol. George D. Thomas is filling that position for a term of three years. Tim Drago worked this past year with a fundraising committee composed of Bennie Milner (Senator Ken Salazar's staff), Bill Holen (Congressman Ed Perlmutter's staff), William Alston (Governor Bill Ritter's staff), House Representatives David Balmer, Stella Garza-Hicks, Frank McNulty, Joe Rice, Spencer Swalm and CBVA member, George Thomas. A fundraising event was held on 23 February 2008 at the Colorado History Museum. A total of \$52,000 was raised for the Preservation Trust Fund (PTF). The current balance in the PTF is \$70,000 which raises about \$3,000 in interest annually. Annual operating expenses for the monument are approximately \$4,000. Tim Drago and his working group will look to add additional funds to the PTF so that interest can cover the expenses. Future events which use Lincoln Park, where the monument is located, will pay a \$150 per day fee which will go into the PTF. The CBVA continues to be concerned about the upkeep of the monument. Proper upkeep should reflect the State of Colorado's pride in those men and women who have served their nation and state.

### **COLORADO STATE PARKS**

Veterans with a Disabled Veterans License Plate get free entry to State parks. If age 64 or older, the disabled veteran has the privilege of an Aspen Leaf holder which discounts overnight camping fees by 50%. There are free or discounted passes for those on active duty or retired military. The detailed report is attachment 1.

### **DIVISION OF WILDLIFE**

The Division issued 421 free combination small game and fishing licenses as of 1 October 2008. These are issued free to Purple Heart recipients and to disabled veterans. The detailed report is attachment 2.

### **DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE**

As of 1 January 2008, there were 110,059 vehicles registered with one of the following veterans or military license plates:

- 1) Free; Medal of Honor Recipient, Disabled Veteran (50% or more disabled), Former Prisoner of War, Disabled Veteran Handicap, Purple Heart, Pearl Harbor Survivor, and Medal of Valor.
- 2) Payment of a one-time fee and required taxes and fees; U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Army Fourth Infantry Division, U.S. Army Special Forces, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard Commemorative, Vietnam Veteran, Korean War Veteran, Fallen Service Member, Honorably Discharged Veteran, Bronze Star Medal and Bronze Star with "V" medal. The detailed report is attachment 3.

### **COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT (CDLE)**

The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) delivers the entire array of labor and employment services to Colorado veterans at all 79 of its State and County-run One Stop Workforce Centers and satellite offices around the state. All CDLE and County Labor and Employment Specialists provide veterans with employment services such as Job Matching and Referral to posted job openings, Vocational and Career Guidance, Labor Market Information, Workshops on Resume Preparation and conducting effective Job Searches. One Stops also refer eligible and qualified veterans to appropriate Workforce Investment Act (WIA) training programs as well as referrals to skilled trade apprenticeships programs throughout the state. Additionally, One Stops are tied in to and make appropriate referrals to multiple Federal, State, and local agencies in the community that provide supportive services to people in need. As illustrated in the chart below, 36,650 veterans registered for employment assistance with the Department last Fiscal Year. This represents a slight increase in registrations from the previous year. Colorado Veterans enjoyed over a \$3.00 an hour higher average wage at placement than non-veterans. The complete report is attachment 4.

#### **Colorado Veteran Demographics**

		<b>Age Demographics</b>								
<b>10/01 thru 9/30</b>	<b>Total Vets</b>	<b>18-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Campaign Badge</b>	<b>Disabled Vets &lt;30%</b>	<b>Special Disabled &gt;30%</b>	<b>Recently Separated</b>
<b>FY 07</b>	34,943	16,445	9,727	8,757	30,514	4,429	13,990	4,121	1,149	4,785
<b>FY 08</b>	36,650	16,680	10,222	9,733	31,940	4,710	7,868	5,734	1,201	4,713

(Source: 9002)

### **STATE VETERANS NURSING HOMES COMMISSION**

The State Veterans Nursing Homes Commission completed its first full year of activity in 2008. Their draft report is at attachment 5. The Board of Veterans Affairs played a key role in establishing this commission and has keen interest in their activities since veterans at the State Veterans Nursing Homes constitute a small but vulnerable population. The Board has some concern over the lack of veteran representation on the commission and would like to see it increased as the commission matures.

Perhaps the most pressing issue, not addressed in the commission report, is the proposal to remove the Trinidad home from the 505 Enterprise within the Division of State Veterans Nursing Homes. This proposal was presented to the Board during the December meeting and by resolution, the Board agreed to support the proposal. Trinidad is not certified as a VA Nursing Home and does not receive the VA reimbursement for veteran residents. Trinidad has had a low veterans census and has been losing money (about \$1M per year) for the past three years. Because it is not a VA certified home, and has drained funds for the 505 Fund, it places the VA payments to the other homes at some risk. It is the Board consensus that Trinidad should be removed from the 505 Fund or perhaps sold to private management. Any change would require legislation.

### **DIVISION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

The Division of Veterans Affairs (which includes the Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado) serves as the “hub” of the State's network of County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO). Claims from veterans normally flow from the CVSO to the Division which processes them and then forwards them to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) for action or adjudication. Service Officers in the Division are accredited with the USDVA to represent veterans as their 'attorney in fact' for appeals. During the year, 8403 entitlement claims were processed—a nearly 50% increase over 2007. Settled claims generated about \$50M in new entitlements to Colorado veterans. The complete Division report is attachment 6.

### **VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY OF WESTERN COLORADO**

The Grand Junction Cemetery was opened in 2002 and now holds the remains of 1083 veterans, 299 spouses and one dependent. Customer satisfaction with services and maintenance continues its enviable record with an average rating of 4.94 out of a possible 5.0.

Long term funding for the Cemetery is an issue that will require action in the near future. The annual operating costs of about \$250,000 are offset by three sources of revenue: a GF appropriation of \$130,025, USDVA burial fee reimbursements of about \$52,000 per year, and the Colorado Income Tax Check-off of about \$58,000 per year. The shortfall of expense over revenues drawn from the Cemetery fund which is the residual of the \$300,000 State contribution to the construction for the Cemetery. The Cemetery now requires some major maintenance (water erosion of a columbarium and walkway, \$90,000 in FY 08-09, and investment in additional columbarium space (\$84,000) in FY 10-11). This exceeds the funds available from all sources. The Department and the Bard will be structuring funding alternatives to meet these needs. The complete report from the Cemetery is attachment 7.

### **VETERANS TRUST FUND**

The Veterans Trust Fund received an appropriation of \$716,693 for FY 07-08. Of that amount a total of \$680,961 was appropriated for administration and grant expenditures. An additional \$35,732 went to the Division of Veterans Affairs for operations. \$603,250 was provided to the grant program. Of the \$603,250 provided for grants \$589,785.16 was expended and \$55,340.84 was returned to the fund.

Grants were provided to American Legion Posts, Veterans of Foreign Wars Posts, Disabled Veterans Chapters, and the Regional Office of the Disabled Veterans of America, and the State Veterans Nursing Home at Homelake, Rifle and Walsenberg.

Veterans in nine (9) rural communities were assisted via transportation, employment assistance and homeless programs that provided a means for veterans and dependents to meet medical appointments, find jobs and other needed services. The VTF assisted in the operations of six

(6) major homeless/incarcerated veteran projects in the metropolitan areas of Denver, El Paso, Weld, Jefferson, Mesa and Pueblo Counties. The trust fund also provided funds for the purchase of four (4) vehicles to accommodate transportation programs and nursing home residents. Funds were also provided for a veterans employment services in Aurora, and Northglenn .

Grants for vehicles will provide for the continuance of programs or ongoing service to the veteran community for many years to come. A total of 7,717 veterans were reported to have received either a direct or indirect service, through grantees, from the Veterans Trust Fund. The full report is attachment 8.

Attachments:

1. Colorado State Parks
2. Division of Wildlife
3. Department of Revenue
4. Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE)
5. State Veterans Nursing Homes Commission
6. Division of Veterans Affairs
7. Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado
8. Veterans Trust Fund

| **VSO TRAINING**