

# Did You Know?

**(By: Raymond P. Toczek Legion Service Officer)**

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That as Chairman of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division VA&R committee I am required to make a report each year to that Division. I thought it would be informative to our members who live outside the 1<sup>st</sup> Division to see what we have accomplished up north. Part one was in the June newsletter, here is part two.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> Division website is a good place to find current information affecting veterans benefits and programs. Check it out at <http://www.ilfirstdivision.org/>. We have finally added a “tab” entitled Posts to Rent. You can get a drop down menu listing all the Posts and point-of-contacts for those who rent their halls.

Our Division hosted several District revitalization projects. They were very successful and helped our Division get many new transferred in members. We had a Service Officer at each one and as veterans had questions on their Veterans Administration benefits we assisted them. Several new claims were filed.

On March 11<sup>th</sup> 2017 we held our annual Service Officer Training class. We had over 100 attend and lots of valuable information was given out. Guest speakers included both the new Hines Hospital Director and the Chicago Regional Office Director. Three social workers from Hines also attended and gave us an inside view on what a Social Worker does. This information was well received.

By now most service-connected disabled veterans are aware of the great property tax reduction/exemption but if not here is what they receive:

Vets rated 30-40%	\$2,500 reduction in assessed value
Vets rated 50-60%	\$5,000 reduction in assessed value
Vets rate 70% or more	NO PROPERTY TAXES!

If you were not aware of this you can contact your property tax office and ask for an amendment to your tax bill. This benefit in most respects passes on to the surviving spouse. As a current Veterans Administration letter will be needed each year veterans are encouraged to sign up for an eBenefits account so they can print out these letters right from home.

There were several major changes in Veterans Administration benefit laws. The first was regarding contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. Several types of cancer and Parkinson's disease can now be considered service-connected in most cases. There was a change in the Bronze Medallion for veterans who purchased headstones for private cemeteries. Veterans who died all the way back to World War I can now have their families order the Medallion. And finally veterans can now get official pre-authorization to be buried in a Veterans Administration National Cemetery.

I continue to push our comrades to take advantage of both the eBenefits and the My healthvet websites. There are very useful tools and one can check their claims and appeals or e-mail questions to their doctor. The veterans scratch off lotto tickets are still being sold by the State of Illinois and your Department benefits in part from their sales.

I attended several town hall meetings at the VA Regional Office and Jesse Brown hospital. I made our presence known by wearing my cover and asked several pointed questions from the floor. I will continue to attend these events and ask others to come out and wear your blue hats.

The Cook County Recorder of Deeds has come out with a veterans discount card. This can be obtained at the downtown office of the Recorder or one of four suburban locations. This card entitles veterans to special discounts in participating businesses in Cook Co.

The Veterans Administration will be issuing a universal veteran ID card early next year (or so they say). Details will follow as they are made available.

In closing, I wish to thank outgoing Commander Whyte for letting me serve on this committee and as one of the Division Service Officers. If you should have any comments or concerns regarding this report or a question on any VA benefit program please call me at 312-980-4264. I have 24/7 voice mail. Or e-mail me: [Raymond.Toczek@va.gov](mailto:Raymond.Toczek@va.gov).