

Did You Know?

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That as Chairman of the 1st 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 1st Division to see what we have accomplished up north. Part one was in last month's newsletter, here is part two:

Our 1st 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. PLEASE LET OUR WEBMASTER, JOHN LOS, KNOW IF THERE ARE ANY CHANGES IN THAT POSTED INFORMATION.

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

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 but be sure the spouses name is on the title. As a current Veterans Administration letter will be needed each year when filing 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 cancers 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 to place on these private headstones. And finally veterans can now get official pre-authorization to be buried in a Veterans Administration National Cemetery. This includes their spouse.

The Veterans Administration has rolled out a new appeals program called RAMP. It is expected to shorten the wait time for appeals. Right now they average well over 3 years and RAMP will take under six months.

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 9th District e-mail blast is working extremely well and over 200 members in that District have signed up for it. In the last 12 months over 230 separate e-mails have been sent. It is an extremely good tool for get veterans' information out in a timely manner. Other districts are encouraged to set one up.

The Veterans Administration will be issuing a universal veteran ID card early next year (or so they say). This card is now 4 years overdue. Details will follow as they are made available.

In closing, I wish to thank outgoing Commander Siciliano 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 our office at 312-980-4266, or e-mail me: Raymond.Toczek@va.gov.

A report is only good if someone reads it. Hope you
did!