



State of Florida
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Commissioner of Agriculture

James S. "Hammer" Hartsell
Executive Director

DATE: March 15, 2022

TO: The Honorable Ron DeSantis
The Honorable Ashley Moody
The Honorable Jimmy Patronis
The Honorable Nikki Fried

FROM: James S. "Hammer" Hartsell
Executive Director

SUBJECT: Quarterly Report – Second Quarter, Fiscal Year 2021 - 2022

The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs submits the Quarterly Report for the Second Quarter of the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year, covering the period October 1 - December 31, 2021.

The Quarterly Report is submitted pursuant to the procedures authorized by Rule 55-1.003 Florida Administrative Code (06/10/2008).

If you have any questions regarding any matter covered by this report, please contact Executive Director James S. Hartsell at (727) 518-3202 or Legislative and Cabinet Affairs Director Roy Clark at (850) 487-1533.

CC:

Chris Sprowls, Speaker of the House, Florida House of Representatives
Wilton Simpson, President, Florida Senate
Chris Spencer, Policy Director, Governor's Office of Policy and Budget
Eric Miller, Policy Chief, Local Administration and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee
Diana Caldwell, Staff Director, Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security
Robert Tornillo, Senior Cabinet Aide, Office of Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis

Attachment 1: FDVA Quarterly Report

ATTACHMENT 1
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SECOND QUARTER REPORT
October 1 – December 31, 2021

This report covers the activities of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) for the Second Quarter of the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year.

1) Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs Administrative Highlights

a) Current Issues/Concerns

i) Executive Direction:

Executive Director Major General James S. "Hammer" Hartsell received a proclamation commemorating December 7th as Major General Hammer Hartsell Recognition Day in his home town Lake Wales. Lake Wales Mayor Eugene Fultz and a group of local veterans arranged the surprise event in honor of General Hartsell. Executive Director Hartsell has earned many medals and achievements during his service as the U.S. Marine, but he was very humbled to receive this honor in the town where he was born and spent his youthful years. He shared the secret behind his nickname "Hammer" with his fellow veterans at the event.



Deputy Executive Director Bob Asztalos and Communications and External Affairs Director Steve Murray met with Collier County officials in Naples to discuss State Veterans' Homes expansion on October 5. FDVA Leadership collaborated with the Department of Management Services and the Collier County Commission for site survey and application procedures necessary to potentially build a new State Veterans' Nursing Homes in the county. Collier County

Commission Burt Saunders and Government Affairs Manager John Mullins presented the joint proposal to General Hartsell on October 19.

As of December 2021, FDVA received notification of \$5.8 million in the Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The grant funds were authorized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to assist with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. FDVA has designated the funds to offset incurred revenue losses, address staffing shortfalls, purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies, and other COVID-19 related matters.

Communications and External Affairs Director and Emergency Coordinating Officer Steve Murray provided continuous updates to the agency regarding the Governor's mitigation and remediation efforts on COVID-19. Additionally, FDVA Emergency Coordinating Officer Director Murray provided progressive weather updates to the State Veterans' Homes. In addition, FDVA Office of Communications produced the *Forward March* Veterans' Newsletter for October, November and December.

Deputy Executive Director Asztalos and Chief of Staff Carter attended a monthly webinar with the VA Grant and Per Diem Program Office on October 13.

During the second quarter, Chief of Staff AI Carter attended the 2021 Florida TaxWatch annual training conference and the Falls Prevention Program Steering Committee meetings.

Executive Director Hartsell and Communications and External Affairs Director Murray attended the National Association of State Directors of Veterans' Affairs (NASDVA) conference in Montgomery, Alabama on November 6. At the meeting, Executive Director Hartsell addressed the state directors on Florida's legislative session and proposed veteran initiatives, including the

Veterans Treatment Court, suicide prevention programs, and homelessness resources. In addition, as the Southeast District Vice President of the NASDVA Executive Committee, Executive Director Hartsell briefed the committee on VA benefits and tools.

Executive Director Hartsell served as a keynote speaker at the Disabled American Veterans Department of Florida Service Officer Certification Training Conference in Lake Mary and Military Order of the World Wars monthly luncheon in Jacksonville.

Communications and External Affairs Director Murray was interviewed by ABC Action News Anchor-Host Jamison Uhler on November 3. The interview highlighted the operation and projects of the State Veterans' Homes.

Communications and External Affairs Director Murray participated in the FDVA Media Outreach and Branding Services Public Response meeting in Largo on December 15.

Executive Director Hartsell attended the Tunnels to Towers Let's Do Good Village Groundbreaking ceremony at the Baldomero Lopez SVNH in Land O' Lakes on December 10. The village will provide 100 mortgage-free homes to our nation's greatest heroes and their families. During this quarter, Executive Director Hartsell also conducted site visits to the following State Veterans' Homes and Veterans' Field Services staff located at the VA facilities.

- On December 8, the new SVNH at Lake Baldwin in Orlando and the Ardie R. Copas SVNH in Port St. Lucie.
- General Hartsell also visited VA facilities in the surrounding area, including Lake Baldwin VA Outpatient Clinic (OPC), Orlando VA Medical Center (VAMC) and West Palm Beach VAMC.
- On December 10, the Douglas T. Jacobson SVNH in Port Charlotte and Lee County Healthcare Center in Cape Coral.
- On December 11, the Alexander "Sandy" Nininger SVNH in Pembroke Pines, Broward County VA OPC and Miami VAMC.
- On December 13, the Baldomero Lopez SVNH in Land O' Lakes and the New Port Richey VA OPC.

Deputy Director Asztalos and Chief of Staff Carter met with Field Office Supervisor Mark 'AJ' Johnson in Middleburg on November 18. During this quarter, Deputy Director Asztalos also conducted site visits to the following State Veterans' Homes and Veterans' Field Services staff located at the VA facilities.

- On October 27, the new SVNH at Lake Baldwin in Orlando and the Ardie R. Copas SVNH in Port St. Lucie.
- On October 28, the Alexander Sandy Nininger SVNH in Pembroke Pines.
- On November 19, the Emory L. Bennett SVNH in Daytona and the Clyde E. Lassen SVNH in St. Augustine.
- During the week of December 6-11, the Robert H. Jenkins State Veterans' Domiciliary Home (SVDH) in Lake City, Jacksonville University VA Clinic, Jacksonville VA OPC, Naval Air Station Jacksonville Office, Daytona Beach VA OPC and Viera VA OPC.

Further, FDVA hosted the Military Legislators Reception as a joint event with Florida Veterans' Foundation, Veterans Florida and Florida Department of Military Affairs in honor of their leadership and continued efforts to identify and undertake unique challenges for servicemembers, veterans and their families.

Deputy Executive Director Asztalos participated in the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame (FVHF) Council monthly meetings during this quarter. The nominations application for the FVHF Class of 2022 are open until May 31, 2022 at [Nomination Form – Florida Veteran's Hall of Fame](#).

Deputy Executive Director Asztalos participated in monthly meetings and Annual Ambassador meetings with the Florida Veterans Foundation (FVF). Additionally, Deputy Executive Director

Asztalos provided guidance and support to the FVF Chairman and President Lew Wilson for the Foundation's operations and initiatives.

Executive Director Hartsell and Communications Director Steve Murray met with the Florida Veterans Foundation's Leadership in Tallahassee on October 12.

Communications and External Affairs Director Murray presented an agency update to the Veterans Florida Board of Directors meeting in Tallahassee on November 30.

❖ **Veterans Education and Awareness**

Executive Director Hartsell, Deputy Executive Director Asztalos, Communications and External Affairs Director Murray and Division of Veterans' Benefits and Assistance Director Don Stout attended the County Veteran Service Officer Fall Training Conference in Safety Harbor on October 4. Director Hartsell addressed the class on the long-standing partnership with veteran organizations in the state to increase veteran benefits and reach out to our state's 1.5 million veterans and their families. He inspired the class to make an efficient effort to veteran outreach activities and ensure that Florida continues to be the most sought-after state by veterans in the nation.

Executive Director Hartsell collaborated with Colonel Benjamin Ringvelski to promote the National Reserve Officers Training Corps program offered at Florida State University and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.

Executive Director Hartsell and Communications and External Affairs Director Murray participated in the Health Care Workforce Coalition Media Roundtable in Tallahassee on November 1.

Chief of Staff Carter attended the Disney SALUTE in honor of National Veteran and Military Family Month in Orlando on November 19.

FDVA Leadership continuously connects and collaborates with other organizations that support veterans and their families. During the second quarter, Executive Director Hartsell and/or Deputy Executive Director Asztalos met with many veteran organization outreach programs, projects and initiatives to assist veterans and their families. The organizations include; the Florida Health Care Association (FHCA), FHCA Workforce Committee, FHCA Reimbursement Committee, Concerned Veterans for America - Florida, the Patriot Services Group, Mission United Advisory Council of United Way of Hillsborough County, Tampa Bay HEAT Homeschool Resource Center, Bay Area Legal Services, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, and the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office.

Executive Director Hartsell, Deputy Executive Director Asztalos and FDVA Leadership also participated in veteran-related events; Annual Veterans Day at the Veterans Memorial Park, Veterans Day at Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins Jr. Museum, the Hillsborough Community College job fair, the Henry W. McMillan National Guard Armory ceremony, All American Heroes rally at Deerlake Middle School, memorial services at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, the annual Wreaths Across America Capitol ceremony, the Leatherneck Golf tournament of the Marine Corps League, Work Day event in Tallahassee, Legionnaires ceremony at American Legion - Post 108, the Homes For Our Troops Community kickoff and Vet TalkX at Northeast Florida Community Veterans Engagement Board.

❖ **Suicide Prevention/Governor's Challenge Efforts**

FDVA collaborated with veterans and military organizations to unveil the initiative to prevent suicide among servicemembers, veterans and their families. The initiative is known as the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among servicemembers, veterans and their families. The statewide initiative uses evidence-based practices to address the mental health needs to prevent and reduce suicide attempts. The program is in conjunction with the U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs (VA) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In addition, the program encourages interested stakeholders to increase their statewide suicide prevention efforts. In support of mental health, FDVA website provides resource links at <https://floridavets.org>.

Chief of Staff Carter and FDVA Leadership participated in monthly virtual sessions with the Governor's Challenge Workgroups and the Florida Suicide Prevention Coordinating Council. Chief of Staff Carter also participated in the Florida Suicide Prevention Interagency Action Committee (SPIAC) monthly meetings.

FDVA also collaborated with The Fire Watch to launch an innovative Veteran Suicide Prevention Program. Executive Director Hartsell participated in the Fire Watch film segment with the Northeast Florida Watch Stander program on October 28. In addition, in a suicide prevention outreach effort, Executive Director Hartsell met with the University of Florida Health Brain Wellness Program committee and Crisis Center of Tampa Bay President and CEO Clara Reynolds.

❖ **Women Veterans**

Deputy Executive Director Asztalos collaborated with the Florida Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. At the monthly committee meetings, Executive Director Asztalos proposed an initiative to increase outreach to the women veterans through social media and a survey to identify the needs of women veterans.

Executive Director Asztalos and Florida Women Veterans Coordinator Vanessa Thomas attended the women veteran honor ceremony in Destin Beach on November 11.

❖ **Community Outreach**

Executive Director Hartsell served as a keynote speaker at the Volunteers of America luncheon event in Tallahassee on November 5.

Executive Director Hartsell met with President of St. Leo University Dr. Jeffrey D. Senese in St. Leo on November 11. Later that afternoon, he joined Congressman Gus Bilirakis for the Veterans Resource Fair at the Pasco-Hernando State College in Wesley Chapel.

Deputy Executive Director Asztalos, Chief of Staff Carter and FDVA Leadership represented FDVA in the community at conferences with; Siemens digital industry software, Shield of Faith Missions, Florida State University Student Veteran Center, Guardianship Reform Task Force WebEx, University of Florida Health Hospital Jacksonville Brain Wellness Program grand opening, the Florida PALMs' virtual module workgroups session, and the Military Appreciation event at the Tampa Bay Lightning.

❖ **Legislative Activities**

Executive Director Hartsell represented the Florida Cabinet at the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Dedication ceremony at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell on October 6.

Executive Director Hartsell and FDVA Leadership attended the 2021 State Leaders Holiday reception at the Governor's Mansion in Tallahassee on October 30 and December 15.

Deputy Executive Director Hartsell, Deputy Executive Director Asztalos and FDVA Leadership met with the Governor's Staff and Governor's Office of Policy and Budget (OPB) regarding the department's proposed budget and veteran-related Bills for the 2022 Legislative Session. Executive Director Hartsell presented the department's FY 2022-23 budget outlook to the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff Beau Beaubien and Director of Legislative & Intergovernmental Affairs Stephanie Kopelousos in Tallahassee on October 12.

On December 2, Deputy Executive Director Asztalos met with the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff Katie Strickland and Governor's Senior Advisor Drew Meiner. At the meeting, he provided status updates for department operations, challenges and construction progress of the two new State Veterans' Homes in support of the department's budget for FY 2022-23.

FDVA Leadership's desired endeavor is that the agency continues to assist with strengthening the state's support for Florida's 1.5 million veterans and their families with education, healthcare, mental health, employment and family programs. Throughout 2021, Executive Director Hartsell provided progressive updates to the legislators and committee members about the COVID-19 pandemic impacts and implemented protocols at State Veterans' Homes and Division of State Veterans' Benefits and Assistance functions.

Executive Director Hartsell and FDVA's Suicide Prevention and Research Specialist Lauren Stentz presented at the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs and Space, and Domestic Security on November 2. Executive Director Hartsell also presented at Military and Veterans Affairs and Space, and Domestic Security Committee meetings on October 12 and November 1. FDVA Leadership also attended the Senate Committee meetings with Military and Veterans Affairs and Space, and Domestic Security during the 2022 interim session in support of veteran mental health and suicide prevention effort and other veteran-related initiatives.

Executive Director Hartsell and FDVA's Suicide Prevention and Research Specialist Lauren Stentz presented at the House Local Administration and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on October 20. Legislative Affairs Director Roy Clark and Public Information Administrator Jeffrey "Jeff" Obos joined Hartsell at the meeting.

During the 2022 Session, Executive Director Hartsell, Deputy Executive Director Asztalos, Legislative Affairs Director Clark and FDVA Senior Management met with legislators and/or represented FDVA at committee meetings in support of the FDVA budget for FY 2022-23 and the following Legislative Bills in Tallahassee.

- Representative Daisy Morales proposed House Bill (HB) 0045 - Educational Opportunities for Disabled Veterans.
- Representative David Smith proposed HB 0063 - Recognizing Veteran Suicide.
- Representative Joseph Casello proposed HB 0115 - State Park Fee Discounts.
- Representative Marie Paule Woodson proposed HB 0131 - Florida Is For Veterans, Inc.
- Senator Danny Burgess proposed three veterans-related Bills: Senate Bill (SB) 0302 - Recognizing Veteran Suicide, SB - 0896 Educator Certification Pathways for Veterans, and SB 1712 - Veteran Suicide Prevention Training Pilot Program. As a former Executive Director of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, he also provides strong support for the FDVA budget at the senate committee meetings supporting Florida veterans.
- Representative Jay Trumbull proposed HB 0539 - Nursing Home Financial Reporting.
- Senator Victor M. Torres, Jr. proposed SB 0466 - Military Medics and Corpsmen of Florida Program.
- Senator Janet Cruz proposed four veterans-related Bills: SB 0550 – Unlawful Employment Practices, SB 0554 - Educational Opportunities for Disabled Veterans, SB 0556 - Medical Marijuana Identification Cards for Service-disabled Veterans, and SB 0562 - Military Occupational Licensure.
- Representative John Snyder proposed HB 0573 - Educator Certification Pathways for Veterans.
- Representative Matt Willhite proposed HB 0683 - Recreational Licenses and Permits for Military Servicemembers and Veterans.
- Representative Dotie Joseph proposed HB 0727 - Exemptions from Toll Payment for Disabled Veterans.

- Representative Tobin Rogers 'Toby' Overdorf proposed HB 0755 - Alcohol Purchases by Veterans' Service Organizations.
- Representative Tyler I. Sirois proposed HB 2103 - Homeless Veteran Housing Assistance in Brevard County.
- Representative Traci Koster proposed HB 2165 - Florida Veterans Legal Helpline.
- Representative Fiona McFarland proposed HB 2291 - Veterans in Crisis Emergency Fund.
- Representative Michael "Mike" Gottlieb proposed HB 2891 - Sunrise Senior, Veteran and Children's Educational and Wellness Center.
- Representative Stan McClain proposed two veteran-related Bills: HB 2929 - State Veterans' Nursing Home in Marion County, and HB 3269 - Veterans Helping Veterans - Veterans Outreach Program.
- Representative Cord Byrd proposed three veteran-related Bills: HB 3041 - Five Star Veterans Center Homeless Housing and Re-integration Project, HB 3473 - K9s for Warriors - Lifetime Care & Mental Health Support for Veterans, and HB 4201 - Northeast Florida Women Veterans Inc - Women Veterans Ignited.
- Representative Wyman Duggan proposed HB 3399 - The Fire Watch Project, Inc.
- Representative Emily Slosberg-King proposed HB 3443 - Operation Phoenix.
- Representative Bob Rommel proposed HB 3485 - Quantum Leap Farm Equine Assisted Therapy for Veterans.
- Representative Andrew Learned proposed HB 4343 - Regional/National Adaptive Sports Training Center.
- Representative Wyman Duggan proposed HB 4477 - Florida Veterans Communications Pipeline.
- Representative Mike Giallombardo proposed HB 4625 - Home Base Florida Veteran and Family Care.
- Representative Fentrice Driskell proposed HB 4829 - SOF Missions - Suicide Prevention.
- Representative Sam Garrison proposed HB 9049 - K9s for Warriors Center for Operations and Training.
- Representative Blaise Ingoglia proposed two veteran-related Bills: HB 9201 - Mid Florida Community Services, Inc., Veteran Ride Program and HB 9207 - K9 Partners for Patriots Mental Health Expansion.
- Representative Jason Shoaf proposed two veteran-related Bills: HB 9337 - Warrior's Restoration, Inc - Long-Term Housing for Veterans, and HB 9371 - Forgotten Coast K9, Inc.
- Representative Anthony Rodriguez proposed HB 2125 - Veterans Access Clinic at Nova Southeastern University.
- Representative Traci Koster proposed HB 2165 - Florida Veterans Legal Helpline.
- Representative David Smith proposed two veteran-related Bills: HB 2211 - Veterans Entrepreneurship Initiative - Seminole County Expansion, and HB 2239 - UCF-Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinic for Florida Veterans and First Responders.
- Representative Ardian Zika proposed HB 2249 - Veterans Intervention Program.
- Representative Wyman Duggan proposed two veteran-related Bills: HB 2255 - Aspire Health Partners / Centerstone - Military Veterans and National Guard Mental Health Services, and HB 2259 - Substance Use and Mental Health Treatment for Veterans.
- Representative Fiona McFarland proposed HB 2291 - Veterans in Crisis Emergency Fund.
- Representative Michelle Salzman proposed HB 2371 - Monument to Women Veterans.
- Representative Bob Rommel proposed HB 3485 - Quantum Leap Farm Equine Assisted Therapy for Veterans.

- Representative Dianne "Ms. Dee" Hart proposed HB 3539 - Veterans Resource Center Phase II.
- Representative Mike Giallombardo proposed two veteran-related Bills: HB 4625 - Home Base Florida Veteran and Family Care, and HB 4627 - Vets in Class - Guest Lecturer to Substitute Teacher Pilot Program.

Executive Director Hartsell, Deputy Executive Director Asztalos, Legislative Director Roy Clark and FDVA Senior Management also met with Representative Allison Tant, Representative William Cloud "Will" Robinson Jr., Representative Linda Chaney, Representative Dana Trabulsky, Representative Patt Maney, Representative Elizabeth Fetterhoff, Representative Nicholas X Duran, Representative Jenna Persons-Mulicka, Representative Clay Yarborough, Representative Joe Harding, Representative Paul Renner, Representative Cyndi Stevenson, Senators Tina Scott Polsky, Senator Douglas "Doug" Broxson, Senator Lori Berman, Senator Dennis Baxley, Senator Kathleen Passidomo, Florida Senator Kelli Stargel and Florida Senator Linda Stewart.

❖ **Proclamation**

Governor DeSantis signed proclamations in Florida to commemorate veterans for their selfless dedication to the nation. FDVA Office of Communications drafted the following proclamations for the Governor.

- On November 3, Governor released the Veterans Day in Florida Proclamation.
- On December 7, Governor released the Florida Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Proclamation.
- On December 16, Governor released the Battle of the Bulge Day in Florida Proclamation.

ii) **Division of Veterans' Benefits and Assistance:**

❖ **Bureau of Veterans' Claims Services**

The Bureau of Veterans' Claims Service's second quarter production review of rating decisions dipped from the previous quarter, partly due to the limited personnel holidays and the increase of appellate hearings. The Bureau continues to have an increase of virtual hearings for the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA). The Bureau of Claims Services processed 10,823 claims rating decision reviews of disability benefits claims through the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). Claims Services provided walk-in services, while the St. Petersburg Regional Office prefers in-person visits by appointment only.

Local in-person personal hearings continued at a steady pace. The Veterans' Benefits and Assistance statewide phone and email box received 6,180 inquiries throughout this quarter. The Bureau has conducted 551 hearings. As always, we continue to stand ready to meet the increasing demands of veterans' appeals requirements.

Event	First Quarter	Second Quarter	YTD FY 2021-22	Second Quarter YTD FY 2020-21
Retroactive Compensation	\$54,895,241	\$45,088,978	\$99,984,219	\$89,389,433
Largest Single Retro. Benefit (1)	\$433,959	\$421,176	\$433,959	\$705,032
Debt Waiver Resolutions	\$79,744	\$36,222	\$115,966	\$12,107
Notices of Disagreement	2,983	2,517	5,500	4,707
Statements of Argument in Appeals Cases (2)	102	71	173	368
Act as Representative at Hearings*	216	420	636	161
Veterans' Appeals Hearings*	142	131	273	249
Number of Ratings Reviewed	13,690	10,823	24,513	20,311

- (1) The “Largest Single Retro. Benefits” Year to Date for FY 2020-21 and the Actual for FY 2021-22 reflects only the largest benefit amount that was received for the quarter.
- (2) The appeals representation process includes formal filing of the appeal application, and paralegal representation with the veteran at the Regional Office and in teleconferences with the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

❖ **Women Veterans**

Florida Women Veterans Coordinator Vanessa Thomas attended a monthly teleconference with the National Center for Women Veterans (NCWV). Coordinator Thomas provided updates to the department on medical services for Women Veterans and services supporting women veterans. Some key topics included: 1) “She Wears the Boots”, a Podcast for Women Veterans presented by the Veterans Health Administration, with a focus to get more listeners; and 2) the Million Veteran Program (MVP) with a focus to encourage ambassadorship in enrolling more women veterans into the program. MVP has targeted an 11 percent increase in the number of women veterans for the coming year. In December, she also attended the National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators (NASWVC) monthly meeting. Coordinator Thomas also met with the MISSION UNITED Council, which seeks to provide women veterans with resources.

Outreach Event:

- HerVOICE Virtual Series - the Series encompassed the voices of Women veterans with topics of serving in the military, the evolution of the military and transitioning back to civilian life.
- Monument to Women Veterans - the Monument to Women Veterans, Inc., a 501c3 Charitable Non-Profit Corporation established in 2011, has been paramount in recognizing and empowering our military women through various community outreach and awareness efforts. Their goal is two-fold: first to provide critical resources for female veteran care, and second to pursue the erection of a monument to honor all women veterans.
- Wound Warrior Project (WWP) hosted the October 7 Women Veterans Town Hall meeting in Jacksonville. WWP expressed a desire to assist FDVA with Women’s veteran issues and offered to sponsor the upcoming Women Veteran Conference in June 2022.
- FDVA met with Patriot Services to focus on Women Veteran Homelessness in northeast Florida. This collaboration is to provide safe housing for women veterans and their families.

❖ **Bureau of Veterans’ Field Services**

The Bureau of Veterans’ Field Services continues to provide in-person and virtual services to veterans and their families. Miami and Broward areas remain closed to VCE’s due to COVID-19 pandemic protocols. Field Services advocated for 34,392 veterans and their families completing 7,061 new disability claims. Field Services attended 127 outreach events including two Yellow Ribbon Reintegration events for Guard and Reserve Units and five Homeless Veteran Stand Down events. Field Services’ supervisors assisted the Bureau of Veterans’ Claims by reviewing and entering 690 rating decisions.

Event	First Quarter	Second Quarter	YTD FY 2021-22	Second Quarter YTD FY 2020-21
Number of Issue Resolutions	7,694	5,150	12,844	7,515
Total Amount of Issues Resolution	\$22,304,715	\$16,246,772	\$38,551,487	\$33,630,362
Outreach Visits	92	127	219	89
Veterans Served at Outreach	2,132	4,232	6,364	1,779
Bedside Interviews	11	12	23	25
Walk-ins / Counseling	12,116	10,418	22,534	11,713
Disability Claims	7,910	7,061	14,971	10,032
Voter Registration	687	640	1,327	1,544
Homeless Walk In	101	96	197	82
Ratings Reviewed	631	690	1,321	1,814

Event	First Quarter	Second Quarter	YTD FY 2021-22	Second Quarter YTD FY 2020-21
Reintegration and Pre-Deployment Events for Guard and Reserve Units	2	2	4	2
Homeless Veteran Stand Down Events	1	5	6	2
Medical Center Welcome Home Events	0	0	0	0
Congressional Open House Events	0	0	0	0
National Conferences	0	0	0	0
New Patient Orientation	0	0	0	12
Transition Assistance Briefings	19	17	36	14
Other Events	68	102	170	59

❖ **The Bureau of State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans' Education and Training**

The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, H.R.7105 / Public Law 116-315, continues to be most impactful for veterans, school officials, and the State Approving Agency (SAA). Chapter 33 Veterans must now verify their own enrollment to VA each month, school officials must adjust their processes to be compliant with the new laws. Schools are also now assigned debt by VA, if a student reduces or terminates training. The SAAs must enforce the more than 30 changes introduced by the law, as well as assist schools and veterans with the changes.

With a primary effective date for school process changes on August 1, 2021, SAA Technical Assistance to school officials peaked in the prior quarter at 720. As school officials worked on implementing the changes, Technical Assistance by the SAA reduced to 550 this quarter, freeing up time to focus on school review and SAA approval actions.

As the Omicron Variant of the COVID-19 virus raged, Congress passed H.R. 5545 - Remote Act, and President Biden signed the Bill in to a Law 117-76 on December 21, 2021. A passage of the public law extends the COVID-19 provisions for veteran beneficiaries attending schools, for those participating in VA Work Study and for veteran beneficiaries participating in OJT/Apprenticeship programs to allow safe remote learning.

Event	First Quarter	Second Quarter	YTD FY 2021-22	Second Quarter YTD FY 2020-21
SAA Programs Approved	4,428	5,581	10,009	8,344
Other Approval	681	780	1,461	1,618
Compliance Visits	18	13	31	64
Inspection Visits	3	8	11	10
Outreach Activities (1)	118	104	222	263
Liaison Activities (2)	119	159	278	396
Technical Assistance (3)	720	550	1,270	1,022

iii) Division of State Veterans' Homes:

The Division of State Veterans' Homes administration is diligently working on construction projects for two new State Veterans' Nursing Homes.

- **Ardie R. Copas State Veterans' Nursing Home in Port St. Lucie:**

The home is scheduled to open for resident admissions in the Spring of 2022. For admission, a veteran must be a Florida resident, honorably discharged from the armed services and have a certificate of need from a VA physician.

The 120-bed home in Port St. Lucie is named after Fort Pierce resident Sgt. Ardie R. Copas. Who was killed in action in Vietnam in 1970. The home has 60 beds reserved for residents with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Also, the home will include six bariatric rooms for patients with chronic and severe obesity. The home is equipped with additional facilities such as beauty and barbershop, café, chapel, a multi-purpose room, dining area and an in-house kitchen to serve daily fresh meals to the residents. The 121,000 square-foot facility is designed with the best effort to create a feel-like home atmosphere for the veterans' residents.

This will be the eighth Veterans' Affairs nursing home in the state. The other seven State Veterans' Homes are located in Daytona Beach, Land O' Lakes, Orlando, Panama City, Pembroke Pines, Port Charlotte and St. Augustine.

- **Lake Baldwin State Veterans' Nursing Home in Orlando:**

The home is scheduled to be open for resident admissions in the Spring of 2022. Indoor construction projects continue, which include HVAC certifications, plumbing rerouting, etc. The furniture installation and IT system migration at the facility is in progress. We continue to work toward a certificate of occupancy from AHCA.

2) Required Items per Florida Administrative Code/F.A.C. 55-1.003(s):

a) Contracts (F.A.C. 55-1.003(e))

- i. Purchase Orders processed: 587 for the total of \$1,906,777.
- ii. E-Quotes processed: 40.
- iii. Confirming Order Justification (COJ): 13.
- iv. Processed four Surplus Property requests.
- v. NEW - FDVA "Veterans Alternative Treatments" legislative contract with the University of South Florida, executed 11/30/2021. Total contract amount \$200,000.
- vi. NEW - FDVA "Media Outreach & Branding Services" solicitation (Request for Proposal - RFP) issued 11/3/2021. Addendum No. 1 issued 11/17/2021. Proposal opening held 12/1/2021. Evaluation Committee meeting held 12/13/2021. Intent to Award to Quest Corporation of America, Inc., issued 12/13/2021. Contract execution pending as of 12/20/2021. Total contract amount \$327,280.
- vii. NEW - FDVA "Professional Nurse Agency Staffing" solicitation (Invitation to Bid - ITB) issued 12/14/2021. Addendum, bid opening meeting, intent to award, and contract execution pending. Total contract amount to be determined.
- viii. NEW - FDVA "VISN-16 Pharmacy Services" contract with USDVA, executed 9/30/2021. Total contract amount \$600,000.
- ix. PRIOR - FDVA "VISN-16 Pharmacy Services" contract with USDVA, closed out 10/4/2021. Total contract amount \$600,000.
- x. PRIOR - FDVA "VISN-8 Pharmacy Services" contract with USDVA, closed out 10/4/2021. Total contract amount \$2,500,000.
- xi. FDVA "EHR/EMR System" contract Amendment No. 2 (new system interface) with MatrixCare, Inc., executed 12/13/2021. Total contract amount \$2,636,738.
- xii. FDVA "Time Clock & Payroll-Based Journal System" contract Amendment No. 1 (additional user licenses) with ITCS/Web-Clock, executed 11/22/2021. Total contract amount \$368,303.

- xiii. Douglas T. Jacobson SVNH “Automatic Transfer Switch” contract Amendment No. 1 (extension) with Santa Fe Professional Services, Inc., executed 11/4/2021. Total contract amount \$201,250.
- xiv. Clifford C. Sims SVNH “Automatic Transfer Switch” contract Amendment No. 3 (additional services & extension) with Zabatt Engine Services, Inc., executed 11/8/2021. Total contract amount \$215,322.
- xv. Clifford C. Sims SVNH “Lightning Rod System” solicitation (Sole Source) PUR-7776 Purchase Intent Notice issued to VBS 11/5/21 and expired 11/30/21 (no protests). PUR-7778 Decision Intent Notice issued to VBS 12/1/21 and expired 12/6/21 (no protests). Contract awarded to Bonded Lightning Protection, Inc. on 12/7/2021. Total contract amount \$48,600.
- xvi. Emory L. Bennett SVNH “Automatic Transfer Switch” contract Amendment No. 2 (extension) with Zabatt Engine Services, Inc., executed 12/13/2021. Total contract amount \$173,857.
- xvii. NEW - Robert H. Jenkins Jr. SVDH “Resident VHS Primary Care” contract with USDVA, executed 12/3/2021. Total contract amount \$132,000.
- xviii. PRIOR - Robert H. Jenkins Jr. SVDH “Resident VHS Primary Care” contract with USDVA, closed out 12/13/2021. Total contract amount \$154,337.

b) Consultants (F.A.C. 55-1.003(h))

- i. None

c) Leases (F.A.C. 55-1.003(i))

- i. FDVA Office of General Counsel prepared updates to the Land Use Management Plans for six State Veterans’ Homes in accordance with Section 253.034(5), Florida Statutes, pertaining to BOTIITF leases: 3873, 4007, 4261, 4339, 4415, and 4462. Short term accomplishments will be next reported on 11/29/2026, and next updates to the Land Use Management Plans will be due on 11/29/2031.

d) Lawsuits/Claims in Litigation or Settled this Quarter (F.A.C. 55-1.003(3) (k) and (3) (l))

- i. **3 - General Liability Claims:** (0 new this Quarter), 0 won, 0 settled, 0 lost, 3 pending.
- ii. **1 - Employment Liability Claims:** (0 new this Quarter), 1 won, 0 settled, 0 lost, 1 pending.
- iii. **0 - Other Liability Claims:** (0 new this Quarter), 0 won, 0 settled, 0 lost, 0 pending.

e) Contracts and agreements required to carry out programs approved by the Legislature or Governor and Cabinet (F.A.C. 55-1.003(3) (e))

- i. None

f) Professional Services (F.A.C. 55-1.003(3) (k))

- i. None

g) Notifications to State Attorneys, Sheriffs or other Law Enforcement (F.A.C. 551.003(3) (m))

- i. None.

h) Donations (F.A.C. 55-1.003(n))

i. Non-Cash Donations Received by State Veterans’ Homes

Second Quarter				
Facility	Item	Quantity	Value	Total
	Robert H. Jenkins SVDH had no donations this quarter.			
Robert H. Jenkins SVDH, Lake City				\$0

	Ardie R. Copas SVNH had no donations this quarter.			
Ardie R. Copas SVNH, Port St. Lucie				\$0
	Emory L. Bennett SVNH had no donations this quarter.			
Emory L. Bennett SVNH, Daytona Beach				\$0
	Baldomero Lopez SVNH had no donations this quarter.			
Baldomero Lopez SVNH, Land O' Lakes				\$0
	75" Vizio TV	1	\$800	\$800
	Microwave	1	\$75	\$75
Alexander "Sandy" Nininger SVNH, Pembroke Pines				\$875
	Clifford C. Sims SVNH had no donations this quarter.			
Clifford C. Sims SVNH, Panama City				\$0
	70" LG TV	1	\$598	\$598
	75" TCL TV	1	\$1,000	\$1,000
	LG DVD PLAYER	2	\$30	\$61
	Sylvania DVD Portable Player	17	\$85	\$1,445
Douglas T. Jacobson SVNH, Port Charlotte				\$3,104
	Clyde E. Lassen SVNH had no donations this quarter.			
Clyde E. Lassen SVNH, St. Augustine				\$0
Total Non-Cash Donations				\$3,979
(1) State Veterans' Nursing Home (SVNH)				
(2) State Veterans' Domiciliary Home (SVDH)				

ii. Cash Donations Received by State Veterans' Homes

Facilities	First Quarter	Second Quarter	YTD FY 2021-22
Robert H. Jenkins SVDH, Lake City	\$810	\$530	\$1,340
Ardie R. Copas SVNH, Port St. Lucie	\$0	\$0	\$0
Emory L. Bennett SVNH, Daytona Beach	\$0	\$1,300	\$1,300
Baldomero Lopez SVNH, Land O' Lakes	\$651	\$1,598	\$2,249
Alexander "Sandy" Nininger SVNH, Pembroke Pines	\$1,100	\$1,000	\$2,100
Clifford C. Sims SVNH, Panama City	\$1,025	\$500	\$1,525
Douglas T. Jacobson SVNH, Port Charlotte	\$0	\$1,481	\$1,481
Clyde E. Lassen SVNH, St. Augustine	\$1,454	\$1,000	\$2,454
Total Cash Donations	\$5,040	\$7,409	\$12,449

i) Memberships in Professional Organizations Paid (F.A.C. 55-1.003(p))

Second Quarter	
The National Association of State Directors of Veterans' Affairs, Inc.	\$1,050



3) Veterans Florida (VF)

The Veterans Florida submitted the Legislative Budget Request (LBR) for FY 2022-23 to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, Governor's Office of Policy and Budget, and legislative appropriations committee. The highlights of the FY 2022-23 LBR request:

Operations Funding	\$400,000 Recurring	Increase of \$55,894 Recurring
VETS Program Funding	\$2,000,000 Non-recurring	Increase of \$700,000 Nonrecurring; restores to FY 2020-21 funding level

VF appointed Keshia Valverde as the Veterans Employment and Training Services Coordinator. Keshia will lead the VETS team with providing services to veterans seeking career, entrepreneurship, and SkillBridge assistance.

OPPAGA released the 2021 Report at the end of December and we will be distributing it to stakeholders shortly. We continue to await the results of the EDR Report.

❖ Marketing

October's marketing theme was manufacturing, with blog and social media posts detailing industry information and success stories from program participants. The video team started filming new regional highlight videos in Tampa, Boca Raton, and Fort Myers. November was veteran success month headlined by the "Florida Welcomes Veterans" webinar featuring speakers from Enterprise Florida, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Florida's SBDC, and the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation. The event was extremely successful with over 200 viewers from around the world and an average viewing time of 40 minutes. The replay is available [here](#). Veteran success continued with the marketing team highlighting program participants. During the second quarter, the theme also included in-depth profiles on the 2021 Battle of the Pitches winners, and the content continues to lead our strong performance on social media. Longer-form blog content as well as strategic cross-posting of relevant content continues to drive strong performance on social media with LinkedIn performing particularly well. VISIT Florida's \$225K LinkedIn campaign wrapped up and we're analyzing the initial results show higher efficiency compared to the previous campaigns.

Network Partner	Performance		
	October	November	December
Unique Website Visitors	3,449	8,198	8,778
Facebook Organic Post Reach	6,855	27,083	10,003
Newsletter Subscribers	35,257	35,316	35,318
LinkedIn Post Reach	8,170	13,602	20,873
Twitter Post Reach	4,282	5,868	3,631

❖ Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS)

The VETS team continues contacting and assisting veterans who are looking for employment and training services.

❖ Career Services Program

The team continues the work to expand both workforce grant employers and career matching opportunities to benefit our veterans. The team attended 698 job fair and events during this quarter.

Veteran Leads Metrics				
Month	Grant Reimbursement Amount	Job Fair	Website	Total
October*	\$171,821	48	104	152
November*	\$94,575	104	153	257
December	\$0	23	266	289
Total	\$266,396	175	523	698

* Budget has been depleted.

❖ Veteran Agriculture Program

VF was awarded a federal three-year Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Program grant by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to conduct the Veterans Florida Agriculture Program. The Veterans Florida Agriculture Program is an immersive, hands-on six-month paid fellowship, and selected veterans study at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Research and Education Center. In October, VF began with the second year of the Veterans Florida Agriculture Program three-year award.

VETS Director Jeremy Sinnemaki attended a virtual meeting with the USDA/AGVETS Project Directors and presented at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Veteran Business Resources Webinar. Director Sinnemaki and Entrepreneurship Partner Development Manager Amy Entress attended the Farmer Veteran Coalition 2021 Conference in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Research and Education Partnership Status				
Partners	Location	Pending	Active	Completed
Fort Lauderdale REC	Davie	0	1	1
Gulf Coast REC	Wimauma	1	2	0
Mid-Florida REC	Apopka	0	1	1
Tropical Aquaculture Lab	Ruskin	0	1	0

❖ U.S. Department of Defense SkillBridge

Veterans Florida continued to expand the DoD SkillBridge fellowship offerings with employers throughout the State of Florida to serve our transitioning active duty servicemembers. Additionally, during the second quarter, VF partnered with the Pensacola Police Department to the SkillBridge opportunities for servicemembers. VF team attended 50strong SkillBridge Connect servicemembers Opportunity Fairs.

SkillBridge Partnership Status				
Partner	Location	Pending	Active	Completed
ARES Technical Services	Kennedy Space Center	3	0	0
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity	Statewide	1	1	0
Florida Highway Patrol	Statewide	14	4	1
Piper Aircraft	Vero Beach	4	1	0
S&B Metal	Lakeland	3	1	1
University of Florida IFAS	Statewide	6	10	3
Vineyards Country Club	Naples	1	0	1
Vets2PM	Statewide	6	1	6
Total		38	18	12

❖ **Entrepreneurship Program**

The new entrepreneurship partners are preparing for their spring offerings. The Request for Qualifications (RFQ) is still open, and we continue to accept proposals for the fiscal year 2021-22 entrepreneurship services. The team is evaluating options to expand the program virtually to areas of Florida that do not currently offer an in-person program.

❖ **Development**

The following corporate donation received from Boeing for SkillBridge and VETS Program Support.

Funder	Amount	Purpose	Status
Boeing Grant	\$75,000	Career Services Support	Not Awarded
Boeing Corporate Donation	\$9,000	SkillBridge Support	Awarded
USDA - AGVETS Program	\$745,245	Veterans Florida Agriculture Program	Ongoing through 2023
Bob Woodruff Foundation	\$100,000	VETS Program	Not Awarded

❖ **Board of Directors Meeting**

The Board of Directors approved the Board approved the Legislative objectives and current financial statements at the monthly meeting on November 30, in Tallahassee.



NO FLORIDA VETERAN LEFT BEHIND

4) Florida Veterans Foundation (FVF)

The Foundation operates for the direct and indirect benefit for the veterans of Florida, the FDVA and State Veteran Service Organizations (VSO). FVF is a 501(C) (3) nonprofit operating for charitable and educational purposes. The Foundation operates solely on grants, donations and fundraisers. The Foundation operates with two full-time employee and one part-time intern.

❖ **Board of Directors, FVF Staff & Volunteer Outreach**

All FVF board of directors are volunteers who donate time and resources to support the Foundation’s mission and its programs to help veterans in need. FVF highlights Board Member Paul Kimbel, who secured donations of special medical equipment, 120 slings/lifts, 6 shower chairs, 35 walkers, 12 ramps and two crutches for Veterans at the Disability Achievement Center.

Team Members	Hours	Events	Veterans Served
Board of Directors & Volunteers	1,852	421	37,511
New Volunteers	12	9	27
FVF Headquarters Staff Received Calls		17	550

Outreach Metrics	Reach	Followers
Facebook	290,076	16,136
Newsletter Subscribers	3,349	31%
Veteran Data Services	32,733	
Website Page Views	24,129	Unique Views - 20,282

❖ **Incoming Grants, Fundraising and Donations**

Created a new donation webpage for donors to select Veterans in need options.

Below is an overview of funds raised FY 2021-22 fiscal year to date.

Grants, Fundraising & Donations via Donations Webpage	First Quarter	Second Quarter	YTD FY 2021-22
Corporate / Business Grants	\$56,300	\$115,230	\$171,530
Direct Public Support	\$68,358	\$84,737	\$153,095
Agency Grants	\$21,000	\$107,784	\$128,784
Special Events	\$7,950	\$22,874	\$30,824
TOTAL	\$153,608	\$330,625	\$484,233

❖ **FVF Grants and Funds**

Revenue / Projections	Amount
Incoming Grants Approved	\$290,000
Incoming Grants Pending Approval	\$20,000

❖ **Florida Veterans Support Crisis Hotline**

In addition to the Foundation’s Veterans Crisis Support Lines, FVF continues its partnership with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay to support Suicide Prevention, Opioid Addiction and Mental Health issues. The center attains approximately 12,000+ calls per quarter.

❖ **COVID-19 Project Relief Fund**

The Foundation has partnered with the American Legion of Florida and created the COVID-19 Project Relief Fund to help veterans affected by the pandemic with various needs.

❖ **FVF Outreach Programs**

YTD Veterans Assistance = \$177,499 July 1, 2021 thru December 31, 2021	
Veterans Homeless Shelter Programs	COVID-19 Project Vet Relief Fund
VA Pension Claims Assistance	Homeless Meals and other Assistance
Emergency Referral Services	Veterans Recognition Awards
Volunteer Recruitment Program	Emergency Shelter Assistance
Veterans Nursing Home Packages	Blankets, Socks & Meal Drives
Medical Equipment Drives	

❖ **Aging Wartime Veterans**

VA Pension - Aid & Attendance Financial Workshops Claim partners provides free seminars and received approvals for Aids & Attendance Claims.

Forgotten Warrior Project Approved Year to Date	*267 Claims
Average Benefit Per Veteran Over 3 Years	\$51,200
Average Total Veteran Benefits Over 3 Years	\$13,670,400
Economic Impact	x 2.39
Total Amount with Economic Impact	\$32,672,256
<i>*Figures based on three-year life expectancy after claims approval.</i>	

❖ **Legacy of Service**

The Foundation signed a recent Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Sachs Media who has designed a “Legacy of Service” campaign to further the mission of the Foundation to help veterans in need. It is fully funded by outside sources who support the project through paid advertising.

❖ **Gadsden Flag License Plate**

FVF has contracted with Strategic Digital Services to help promote the sale of the License Plate Vouchers. Funding helps the foundation continue its mission of helping Veterans in need. The plate goes into production when 3,000 vouchers are sold. FVF sold approximately 665 vouchers sold.

❖ **Volunteer Florida Grant (VFG)**

Ongoing grant to recruit and track 400+ volunteers, their hours and participation, etc. As of September 30, we have cataloged over 411 new volunteers on record who assist with the grant requirements and have logged in over 6,000 hours of volunteer work.

❖ **A State at War, Florida during WWII Documentary**

A new project in collaboration with 82 West Productions to produce a film on Florida during WWII explores the contributions Floridians made and their sacrifices that helped to win the war. FVF retains 10 percent of all monies for the project along with future DVDs and other sales.

❖ **Forward March Ambassadors for Veterans Council**

FVF Ambassadors supports the FVF with sustainable funding and extended outreach.

❖ **DHSMV Veterans Recognition Program**

The Foundation partnered with the Department of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) to recognize those Troopers who are veterans and who went beyond the call of duty to help our citizens and veterans.



❖ **Board Members and Staff Participated in the following Events:**

Veteran Treatment Courts	Veterans Council Meetings	PTSD Awareness Summits
Transport Fallen Veterans	Community Veterans Fundraise	Vietnam Veterans Bracelet
Veterans Task Force Seminars	Florida Veterans Council	Veterans Recognition Events
WWII Project Presentations	Homeless Vets Meal Deliveries	Flag Dedications
Burial & Memorial Services	Senior Veterans Events	FVF Board Meetings
Veterans Workforce Meetings	Virtual Networking Events	Veterans Transition Consulting
Veterans Graves Maintenance	Veterans Workshops	Veterans Death Transportation
Veterans Flag Presentations	HUD Vash Programs	Women Veterans Workshops
Veterans Recognition Events	Afghanistan Withdrawal Group	Veterans Claims Seminars
DAR & SAR Events	Gold Star Families Events	Veterans Day Ceremonies

Acknowledgement: FVF is grateful for FDVA's partnership through the provisions of office space, administrative and legal collaboration efforts that helps to support FVF mission objectives.