What does the Office of Veterans Services offer veterans?

This is a question that is asked by a number of veterans. Veterans who have not used the Office of Veterans Services (OVS) think that the OVS duplicates services offered by the Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA). While both the OVS and the VA accept new claims filed by veterans, the goal of OVS is to help you obtain the maximum benefits allowed under the law. Also, the OVS specializes in handling appeals and denials of benefits. Most veterans who seek the services of the OVS do so because they desire personal assistance in putting their claims together, their claim in the appeal/denial process or, they want to reopen a claim for a service-connecte condition that has become permanent. OVS is the single office within the State government responsible for the welfare of veterans and their dependents.

It acts as a liaison between the governor and veterans’ groups and organizations; its role is to act as an advocate for veterans’ issues. The following are interesting facts about OVS and its offered services.

- Client base includes individuals seeking verification of military service, including National Guard and Reservists who performed training during a period of war, so they can receive military service credit for retirement from the State or counties.
- Clients include individuals who are applying for a State Special Housing Grant for totally disabled veterans for the purpose of purchasing or remodeling a home to improve handicapped-accessibility; those requesting necessary verification of disability status to apply for County tax exemptions on real property owned and occupied as a home by a totally disabled veteran or their spouse; those inquiring about tax exemptions on passenger cars owned by totally disabled veterans; veterans seeking veterans’ license plates; and those seeking to obtain copies of death and marriage certificates, when needed for a veteran’s claim.
- Offices are located at each neighbor island county and are staffed by a counselor and clerical support providing the same services as the Oahu office.
- OVS is also responsible for the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery in Kaneohe and is tasked to provide funds for the maintenance and repair of the seven veterans cemeteries located on the neighbor islands. This role was assigned to the OVS when the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl) closed to casket burials; the Federal response to Hawaii’s need for this type of burial was that space could be made available in Washington.

We answer the most frequently asked question about OVS

To keep all OVS offices operating Mon-Fri with standard business hours.

Decrease the number of in-person Advisory Board meetings normally held each month on Oahu, and look at technology to conduct meetings via video conferencing.

Continue to serve veterans through outreach, to include Molokai and Lanai and areas on each island with pockets of veterans who are under served.

Continue to seek federal funds to expand and enhance our statewide veteran cemetery system.

Continue to advocate for veterans and their dependents with the Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA), State and Federal Legislators.
As you are aware, we have ongoing contacts with the VA. This spring we met in Washington, D.C. with Gen. Eric Shinseki, VA Sec., and Tammy Duckworth, Dpty. Sec. for Intergovernmental Affairs. In May, the Dpty. Sec. came to Hawaii and after one-on-one meetings and a keynote speech at our Memorial Day ceremony at the HSVC. In Aug., I participated in a working lunch meeting with Gen. Shinseki again to discuss issues concerning Hawaii’s veterans. Also in Aug. Sen. Akaka’s bills visit a hearing and, and I had the opportunity to express some needs of Hawaii returning National Guard, Reservists, veterans and their family members.

Capitol Improvement Projects (CIP): Certain veteran cemetery CIP projects are, or may be, eligible for reimbursement under the Dept. of VA State Cemetery Grants Program (SCGP).

OVS received VA grant approval based on our request and plans for the West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery (WHVC) Phase II. The $2,755,694 VA grant approval has allowed us to proceed with Phase IIC, and a top- ping off blessing of the committal shelter occurred on Jul. 21. The committal shelter is the first permanent bldg, erected at the cemetery. The project also includes 100% funding for the construction of in-ground cremation vaults, a columbarium, a scattering garden, a storage facility with a fenced service yard, a road, a memorial walk, an assembly area, restrooms and supporting infrastructure to include utilities, landscaping, and irrigation. It is ongoing and the committal shelter is complete and was used for Veterans Day. The remainder of the project is on schedule and should be completed by the end of calendar year 2009.

OVS received a VA grant for $435,000 for the WHVC Phase IIIB expansion. That project was completed at the end of Mar., adding 260 direct burial plots, which more than doubled the size of the cemetery districting before.

OVS completed new assessments of monuments and memorials that include all eight State veterans’ cemeteries in compliance with Hawaii State law. OVS determined in-ground cemeteries were in need of repair or capitol improvements. Neighbor island cemeteries repair and maintenance is the responsibility of the respective counties. Therefore, we have taken the necessary measures to coordinate with the Senators and Councils concerning repairs, and offered suggestions for state Capitol Improvement Projects (CIP) that may be eligible for federal reimbursements.

The new project assessments we conducted in 2008 and again this year led us to develop a list of project needs, which I submitted to the Legislature and to VA. We have VA grant pre-approval to proceed with construction and repair of the cemeteries statewide. These include nine columbaria with 576 niches for East Hawaii Veterans Cemetery II (EHVC), three columbaria with 192 niches for Kauai Veterans Cemetery, and one columbarium with 64 niches for Molokai and Lanai Veterans cemeteries. In addition, we have submitted pre-approval requests and are coordinating with VA for enhancements at Kauai Veterans Cemetery to include a maintenance facility, new gates, and road signage as soon as we obtain 5.1 acres of land to double the cemetery size.

For the neighbor island columbarium projects, we have asked and received approvals for DADS to act as our project officer and we are awaiting the start of these neighbor island projects.

Director’s Message (continued from page 1)

Finally, at HSVC our 3-phase project is progressing.

- Phase I, the slope stabilization is complete. The problem area was graded to lessen the severity of settling gravesites so cemetery groundkeepers can devote less time to grave repair and more efforts to cemetery beautification.

HSVVC operations, maintenance, and repair are the direct responsibility of OVS.

- As I reported in the last Hawaii Veteran, we began minor repair and maintenance projects at HSVC in June to address age deterioration of the Admin. Building and all 4 flag poles. We replaced the Admin. Building, repaired and waterproofed the roof, and repaired the glass sliding doors. We also finished restaining three sections where survey points had been covered with sediment from the slope. These sections are now available, allowing more active usable area, and minimizing damage in any one specific area.

- We completed repainting the Admin. Building.
- We re-reamed and repaired walkways at the Flag Plaza that were damaged due to an earthquake a few years ago.

- We repaired light fixtures throughout the cemetery.

- We repaired mechanisms and replaced pulleys in all 4 flag poles.

OVS continues to purchase screened fill dirt to complete burial vaults in the cemetery. This along with the burial vaults and an improved burial process help to decrease the number and severity of settling gravesites.

- Lee gave the Welcome Remarks and the National Anthem was sung.
- The Welcome Remarks and I served as the Master of Ceremonies. Special keynote speaker, Attorney Gen. Mark Bennett who represented the Gov. gave the Veterans Day Address. Special keynote speaker, VA Deputy Undersecretary for Memorial Affairs, Steve Muro also presented me a VA State Cemetery Grant check which represents 100% funding for expansion and improvements at the WHVC and the Island of Hawaii. One of the highlights of this year’s ceremony was the honoring of WWII veteran and volunteer at the HSVC, Mr. Zane Schlemmer, by Maj. Gen. Lee and myself.

The Wreaths Across America Ceremony was held on Dec. 13, 2008 at the Flag Pole Plaza on the grounds of the HSVC. For this ceremony, wreaths are placed at the same time across the continental United States and Hawaii. Unfortunately, with Hawaii’s time zone, ours was held at 7 am and was only attended by the participants and the cemetery staff. Six wreaths were presented, one for each branch of service and one for POW/PK.

On May 24, 2009, for Memorial Day we had over 200 Girl Scouts from troops across the island to help decorate each grave with an American Flag and lei.

On May 25, 2009 we held the Governor’s Memorial Day Ceremony. There were over 700 attendees with Lt. Gov. Duke Aiona giving the Memorial Day address. As Dir. I presided as Master of Ceremonies as the program opened with the Hawaiian Oli (chant) and Hula followed by the traditional Parade of Veterans Org. Flags. Maj. Gen. Lee gave the Welcome Remarks and the Na Leo Lani Choir sang the National and State Anthems. The highlight of this year’s ceremony was the Honor and Respect paid to our veterans by the Honorable L. Tammy Duckworth, Maj. ILARNG, Asst. Sec., Dept. of VA. Refreshments, as always, were provided by the Fleet Reserve Assc., Branch #46 and the Women’s Auxiliary.

In closing, your Office of Veterans Services here is here to serve you and is diligently working for you throughout Hawaii.

I hope you all enjoyed a wonderful Holiday Season and I wish you all a Safe and a most Blessed New Year.

Photo by Jayme Sato

Duckworth sharing an inside joke with Sen., Akaka and Dir. Moses. Duckworth said, this is a replica of the Hofi sky. No, probably not. #46 and the Women’s Auxiliary.
L. Tammy Duckworth joins us at HSVC on Memorial Day

Assistant Secretary of Public and Inter-governmental Affairs for the United States Department of Veterans Affairs L. Tammy Duckworth was our distinguished guest speaker for this year’s Memorial Day Ceremony. Duckworth was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and previously was the director of the Illinois State Department of Veterans Affairs.

Duckworth has many ties to Hawaii. Duckworth is a McKinley high school and University of Hawaii graduate. She is a Maj. in the Illinois Army National Guard and was the director of the Illinois State Dept. of Veterans Affairs. Duckworth was awarded the Purple Heart Medal when the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter she was co-piloting was hit by a rocket propelled grenade, fired by Iraqi insurgents. She is still flying after receiving these severe life threatening injuries. Duckworth received many awards, such as the Air Medal and the Combat action badge. She has dedicated her life to public service by advocating on behalf of disability rights and veterans. Duckworth testified several times before Congress regarding medical care and employment for veterans. Duckworth had the opportunity to speak at hundreds of events in 50 states and 4 territories. Yet she accepted Hawaii’s invitation to honor our Hawaii veterans. She is to be considered the voice and face of the veteran community. We were very happy to have had her as our distinguished guest speaker.

Duckworth spoke about the price of freedom, that freedom is what we keep fighting for. “As we join together to pay tribute to the men and women who wore our nation’s uniform. And for whom duty to country meant more to them than their own lives.” Duckworth participated in the placing of the wreath and waived at the 1st Battalion, 171st Aviation Hawaii Army National Guard pilots as they flew over Memorial Plaza.

Our veterans were pleased that Duckworth stayed after the Memorial Day Ceremony to talk with them. Duckworth gave words of encouragement and inspiration from her stories.

Duckworth said with sentiment, “The fact is I should have really died out there in that dusty field in Iraq. And not a day goes by that I don’t wake up, say a silent prayer and think of my buddies who saved my life. I think of the names that go unanswered at roll call. They are why I wake up every day with a sense of purpose and a renewed vow to live my life to the fullest. I’m not living just my life, I’m also living the unfinished lives of my fallen comrades, and because of them, I -- we veterans, must be better. How could I ever dishonor them and their families by wasting my second chance. I will not.”

Duckworth gave a most moving speech. She prayed for the troops who are still fighting for our freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Herring Kalua steps down from the Advisory Board

Herring Kalua attended his last Advisory Board meeting. His term has ended for the Advisory Board and he wishes to concentrate on other Hilo projects.

Mr. Kalua said that he enjoyed serving on the board. He was happy to see the State Veterans Home in Hilo. Mr. Kalua will still be an active participant in all things relating to veterans. Thank you to Mr. Kalua for his service and dedication to all veterans.

Mr. Norman Stahl will fill in for Mr. Kalua as the East Hawaii Advisory Board member until he is installed as an official board member by the Gov. He is a veteran and is an active participant in veteran issues.

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If you are interested in obtaining a electronic copy of the Hawaii Veteran newsletter please mail your email address to OVS at 459 Patterson Rd., E-Wing, Room 1-A103, Honolulu, HI 96819-1522 or email ovs@ovs.hawaii.gov.
OVS Services List continued from page 1

or California for Hawaii’s veterans. Veterans throughout the State wanted another solution - the creation of a veterans cemetery that could accept casket burials on Oahu.

• OVS oversees a 200-bed, long-term care State Veterans Home in Hilo. This facility will utilize funds from the VA and the Hawaii Health Systems Corporation to develop, construct, maintain and operate this facility. One unique feature of this facility is that both veterans and their spouses will be able use it.

• Act 63, passed in 1993, by the 18th Legislature, State of Hawaii, and amended in 1997, tasks the OVS to: “inspect every three years all state war memorials and veterans’ cemeteries for repair and maintenance deficiencies, and report all repair and maintenance problems at these memorials and cemeteries to the adjutant general, comptroller, and the legislature prior to the start of the next regular session.” The purpose of these inspections is to ensure that these war memorials and cemeteries are in good repair and worthy of the honor and respect due the memories of those they represent.

• The OVS maintains an official copy of the DD214 (the Discharge and Separation Document) given to each individual discharged from the military, including Reservists and National Guard members as long as they were on active duty, listing Hawaii as their home of record.

• OVS offers assistance with name changes, discharge upgrades, short term counseling and notary public services.

• OVS, as a State agency, is able to refer individuals who do not qualify for VA services to State services.

• OVS main office is co-located with the VA benefits office at Tripler Hospital because it offers direct benefit services to veterans and their family members. OVS has offices on Maui, Kauai and the Big Island.

• In fiscal year 2002, over 22,000 veterans found value in services offered by the OVS. OVS strives to increase outreach to veteran, and in the fiscal year 2008 alone more than 46,000 veterans were seen.

• OVS is one of 56 similar offices with names such as the Office of Veterans Services, State Department of Veterans Affairs, or Commissions for Veterans. They are located in each state as well as Puerto Rico, Guam, Virgin Islands, American Samoa, North Mariana Islands, and Washington D.C.

• OVS helps Hawaii’s economy by obtaining VA payments for veterans who qualify for either pension or compensation.

• OVS also ensures that veterans eligible for VA medical care or prescription drugs are aware that they may be eligible for this service for free or with a co-payment.

• In fiscal year 2007, the VA provided $337,437,000 in total expenditures for treatment, care, and monetary payments to veterans and their family members in Hawaii.

• The staff of the OVS is “Proud to serve those who served our Country.”

KMR Groundbreaking Ceremony at Hilo

Hawaii Army National Guard Keaukaha Military Reservation (KMR) Joint Military Center.

On hand were Gov. Linda Lingle, Maj. Gen. Robert Lee and Dir. Mark Moses. KMR will become a one stop shop for military personnel services. A branch office of OVS will be moved into the new KMR building. In the Community Service Building will be the OVS offices, recruiting office and family support center. There will be a classroom and assembly building as well.

Korean War Veterans

The Hawaii Coordinator of the Korea Revisit Program is accepting applications for the 2010 Revisit to Korea. Hawaii veterans who served in Korea between Jun. 25, 1950, and Oct. 15, 1954, are eligible to participate in the ROK Government-sponsored Korea Revisit Program. Also, for those who participated in this program more than 10 (ten) years ago may be eligible to repeat the Revisit. For information and application, contact your nearest KWVA chapter or the Hawaii Coordinator at 808-235-5713, e-mail: magnum44@hawaii.rr.com

The rising costs to produce the Hawaii Veteran Newsletter

As mailing expenses constitute approximately half of the cost of producing the Hawaii Veteran Newsletter. In an effort to continue providing you with the newsletter, we are asking your cooperation in accepting the newsletters electronically (by email) if at all possible. We understand some of you don’t have direct access to computers or email. Therefore you can pick up a hard copy at all the branch offices of OVS. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated. If you wish to participate in this manner, please provide us with your email address. Contact OVS by email ovs@ovs.hawaii.gov or call us at 433-0420. A copy of the newsletter will be available on the OVS website at www.hawaii.gov/dod/ovs