

11/06/09

Charlotte County Veteran Services: Service for Those That Served and Their Families

By Victoria Carpenter, Director of Charlotte County Human Services

The Charlotte County Veteran Services Office, a Division of the Human Services Department within Charlotte County government, was created by Florida State Statute to assist veterans and their dependents in times of need, and to file for all County, State or Federal benefits earned by virtue of the military veteran's service to a grateful nation. This office is not a branch of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the County Veteran Services Officer does not approve or deny VA claims. However, veterans and their families can rely on the Officers to know their entitlements and benefits. The services and assistance provided by the Veteran Services Officers do not require any charges or fees.

The Veteran Services Officers complete annual training courses for State certification and know the meaning, application and the extent of laws that have been passed by the U.S. Congress in the interests of veterans and their dependents. They also know the rules and regulations adopted by the VA to clarify and implement those laws. The Veteran Services Officers apply specialized knowledge in the best way suited to the needs of every individual veteran or other beneficiary who requests assistance.

Serving as a trusted and respected partner in collaboration with other agencies when assisting veterans, the Veteran Service Officers maintain the highest level of training and education to best serve veterans. The Officers are skilled in being sensitive and helpful to veterans and dependents in their time of need, and in providing assistance and counseling to veterans and their families. Other services the Officers provide are initiating and completing claims to be submitted to the VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg's Department of Veterans' Affairs and other appropriate agencies with accuracy and professionalism.

Additionally, the Charlotte County Veteran Services Officers provide outreach programs that include in-home visits, assisted living facilities and nursing homes to make available the latest VA updated information. Officers are also available for presentation or lectures to community organizations.

It's never too late for a veteran to file for VA benefits, no matter how many years have passed since the military service. Laws concerning VA benefits are constantly changing and it is best to file for any and all VA benefits that might be available. To file an initial claim for VA Benefits, veterans should call and set up an appointment for the initial counseling. Once the initial counseling is completed, an Officer will guide the veteran in gathering all the required documents and any medical information that is needed.

There are three locations of the Charlotte County Veteran Services Office. The Main Office is located at the Cultural Center at 2280 Aaron Street, Port Charlotte and is open Monday through Friday for appointments only from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Englewood Office, located at 6868 San Casa Boulevard, is open Mondays and Wednesdays for appointments only from 7:30 a.m. to noon and from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Englewood Office is also open Friday mornings 7:30 a.m. to noon for walk-ins. The Punta Gorda Office is located at 512 East Grace Street and will accept appointments on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

We encourage the community to contact the Veteran Services Offices with any questions pertaining to VA Benefits, to make an appointment for assistance with filing a claim, or to request a guest speaker. Call James Barrett, Veteran Services Officer, at 941.764.5579 or e-mail him at James.Barrett@CharlotteFL.com. Englewood residents, please call David Donohew at 941.681.3716 to make an appointment.