



WOODBURY COUNTY VETERAN AFFAIRS



Hello everyone – it's been a while! My sincerest apologies for the gap between newsletters. I'm Sasha Downs, CVSO, and I was on military orders for the past year. I'm happy to be back in the Woodbury County Commission of Veteran Affairs office and look forward to sharing updates and changes with you.

One important change you may have noticed is that our front door is now kept locked. This decision was made with safety in mind. If you need to visit the office, please give us a call at 712-279-6606 to schedule an appointment—we're happy to assist you!

Over the next few months, we'll be out in the community hosting local town events, bringing our office directly to you for the day! We'll also be completing some renovations and mandatory training, which will require brief office closures. Stay tuned for all the details!

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
LONI KUHLMANN

CVSO:
SASHA DOWNS
LISA ROBINSON

COMMISSIONERS:
JOSEPH DONOVAN
VALERIE ROSE
JOHN MANSFIELD
PHIL HINDS
ZANE CHWIRKA

1211 TRI VIEW AVE, STE A
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FAX 712-224-4093

HOURS: 8AM - 4PM

**Please make an
appointment.**

WEBSITE:
[HTTPS://WWW.WOODBURYCOUNTYIOWA.GOV/VETERAN_AFFAIRS/](https://www.woodburycountyiowa.gov/veteran_affairs/)

FACEBOOK:
[HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/WOODBURYCOUNTYVA](https://www.facebook.com/woodburycountyva)



Veteran Affairs News!

Let me introduce our newest Commissioners!



Tech Sergeant Phillip Hinds retired on 31 December 2025 with more than 21 years of honorable service in the United States Navy, Navy Reserve and Iowa Air National Guard.

TSgt. Hinds began his military career on 17 September 2004, enlisting in the United States Navy as a Gas Turbine Mechanic. His first assignment was aboard the USS Mustin (DDG-89), where he served on active duty until 2008. During this time, he was forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan and participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, supporting fleet readiness and overseas operations.

In 2008, TSgt Hinds transitioned to the Navy Reserve, where he retrained as an Equipment Operator First Class. He served with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 15 (NMCB-15) in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Assault Craft Unit 2 (ACB-2) in Little Creek, Virginia, contributing to construction, combat support and amphibious operations. His work with the Seabees highlighted his adaptability and dedication to mission success.

In 2017, TSgt. Hinds joined the Iowa Air National Guard, 185th Air Refueling Wing, Civil Engineering Squadron in Sioux City, Iowa. During this time, he supported response and recovery efforts for the 2020 Cedar Rapids-Iowa Derecho, deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and completed his most recent deployment to Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, providing critical support to infrastructure, construction and sustainment projects that ensured mission readiness.

Throughout his career, TSgt. Hinds completed Basic Engineering Common Core, Equipment Operator A-School, and Crane Operator School.

His personal awards and decorations include the Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal, three Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, the Iowa Humanitarian Medal, and he also proudly wears the Seabee Combat Warfare Specialist device.



Chief Master Sergeant Valerie Rose was the Mission Support Group Senior Enlisted Leader at the 185th Air Refueling Wing, Iowa Air National Guard, Sioux City, Iowa. She advised the Mission Support Group Commander on matters influencing health, welfare, morale, and effective utilization of the Group's 400 enlisted personnel. She also serves the community as a Police Officer for Sioux City, IA and is now a Commissioner of the Woodbury County Veteran Affairs.

Chief Rose enlisted in the Iowa Air National Guard in 1995. Following basic training and graduation from the United States Air Force Security Forces Academy at Lackland AFB, Texas, she returned to the 185th IAANG Security Forces Squadron in Sioux City, Iowa. She has deployed to various locations including Arizona, Hawaii, Japan, Curacao, and Kuwait in Support of Operations CONSTANT VIGIL, SOUTHERN WATCH, ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. Throughout her career, she served in many roles including the 185th Logistics Readiness Squadron First Sergeant and the Mission Support Group First Sergeant where she supported the mission through interaction and care of Airman and their families to ensure unit readiness. Chief Rose also served as the Wing Human Resource Advisor where she advised and assisted ANG senior leadership on strategic initiatives that directly affected organizational culture and force development. She also served as the HRA Program Support Coordinator at the National Guard Bureau at Joint Base Andrews where she developed curriculum used for force development and diversity and inclusion education at every ANG base. She has been involved with multiple councils and boards and is a member of the 185th and SCPD Honor Guard Teams.

Veteran Affairs News Continued...

VA: Health and Benefits app adds new Certificate of Eligibility enhancements

For Veterans, the journey to homeownership often begins with one essential document: the **Certificate of Eligibility** (COE). This certificate verifies eligibility for VA home loan benefits, making homebuying more affordable and achievable for eligible Veterans, service members and surviving spouses. With the latest update to the **VA: Health and Benefits mobile app**, viewing the latest COE has never been more convenient.

This enhancement enables eligible Veterans to view their active COE Home Loan Letter in real-time and take the next step toward homeownership. If a Veteran does not have an active COE and wants to use their benefit, or wants to make changes to their active COE, they should work directly with their mortgage lender or through VA.gov.

The COE feature was deployed through a phased rollout from March 2-5 to ensure a smooth transition. Activation began with 5% of users on March 2, expanded to 25% on March 3, 50% on March 4, and concluded with full deployment to all users on March 5. This phased approach was intended to ensure minimal disruption throughout the implementation process. This update underscores VA's commitment to streamlining processes, reducing wait times and empowering Veterans with the tools they need to pursue a VA home loan.

The VA: Health and Benefits mobile app is a Department of Veterans Affairs application that continues to modernize the way Veterans view their benefits by providing secure, convenient access to VA benefits and services. From health care appointments to benefit status updates, the app simplifies and improves the Veteran experience. For more information about this update and its impact, visit the VA: Health and Benefits mobile app. For more information, visit the VA Home Loan Program.

More Commissioner News!

Our very own Woodbury County Commissioner, John Mansfield, will be Iowa's honoree at the 2026 Purple Heart Patriot Project. He will be traveling to New York this month which is a multi-day event honoring Veterans who were wounded in combat.

The trip is sponsored by the National Purple Heart Honor Mission, a non profit organization honoring Purple Heart recipients.

Have a safe and fun trip John!



Veteran Affairs News Continued...

VA Math How it works

Understanding VA Math is critical because it helps set realistic expectations and prevents frustration when combined ratings don't equal simple addition. When Veterans understand how ratings are calculated, they can make more strategic decisions when filing claims—especially when pursuing increases or additional conditions that meaningfully impact their overall rating. This knowledge ultimately helps Veterans advocate for themselves more effectively and maximize the benefits they've earned.

Most Veterans think "VA Math" is wrong—but it's not. It's just not what we consider "normal" math. The VA views each Veteran as a 100% "whole person," like a fully charged battery. Every service-connected condition reduces what remains of that battery—not the original 100%. For example, if you have a 70% rating and then receive an additional 30% rating, that 30% is not taken from the original 100%. Instead, it's applied to the 30% you have left.

30% of 30 = 9
 $70 + 9 = 79$, which is then rounded to 80%
 That's why a 70% + 30% rating equals 80%—not 100%.

It's also important to understand that a 10% rating doesn't automatically bump you to the next level.

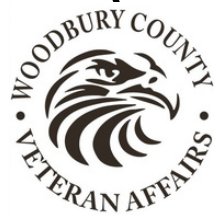
For example: If you're already at 90%, you only have 10% of your "battery" remaining. A new 10% rating would be calculated like this:

10% of 10 = 1
 $90 + 1 = 91$, which rounds down to 90%

In VA Math, 10% of 10% is just 1%—not a full 10-point increase.

Upcoming Events

- **May 25- Memorial Day (Office Closed)**
- **June 1-5 (Office Closed, Nationals Training)**
- **June 17- Town Event, Merville, IA**
- **July 3rd- Independence Day Observance (Office Closed)**
- **July 4- Bronson Parade**



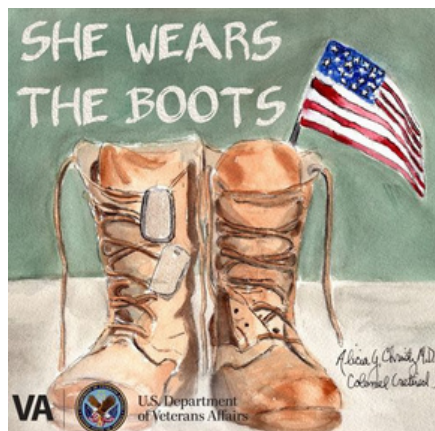
American Legion: 515-323-7532
VA Benefits Hotline: 1-800-827-1000
QTC: 1-800-682-9701
VES: 877-637-8387
Optum Serve/LHI: 866-933-8387
Sioux City CBOC: 605-232-2800
Sioux Falls VA Hospital: 1-800-316-8387



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Veterans in Suicidal Crisis

The VA will provide, pay for, or reimburse emergency care for certain veterans and individuals, for ambulance transportation costs, follow-on inpatient, or residential care related to the event for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days, including social work. Inform the emergency care provider to report your emergency treatment to the VA Centralized Emergency Care Reporting Center as soon as possible after your treatment starts by using the VA Emergency Care Reporting portal or calling the VA 72-Hour Notification Hotline at 844-72-HRVHA (844-724-7842).



Military dates to remember:

April (**Month of the Military Child**)

- 5- Gold Star Spouses Day
- 9- National Former POW Recognition Day
- 14- Air Force Reserve Bday
- 23- Army Reserve Bday
- 30- National Military Brats Day

May (**Month of the Military**

Caregiver/Military Appreciation Month)

- 1- Silver Star Service Banner Day
- 13-20 Armed Forces Week
- 13- Children of Fallen Patriots Day
- 20- Armed Forces Day
- Last Monday- Memorial Day
- Friday Before Mothers day- Military Spouse Appreciation Day

June

- 6- D Day
- 12- Women Veterans Day
- 14- Flag Day/Army Bday
- 23- Coast Guard Auxiliary Bday
- 25- Anniversary of Korean War
- 27- National PTSD Awareness Day



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