

THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES
COMMISSIONER'S 2005 ANNUAL REPORT**

TO

GOVERNOR MARK R. WARNER

AND

THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

VIRGINIA -- HOME OF AMERICA'S PATRIOTS

December 1, 2005

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Commissioner's Message

I'm proud to report that the Department of Veterans Services will end 2005 on a much sounder financial footing than at the end of 2004. Governor Warner's initial budget request included an additional \$630,372, which gave us the financial resources to fill all currently authorized positions in the Benefit Services and Cemetery Services sections. Delegate Kirk Cox sponsored a budget amendment that added an additional \$300,000 and six Veterans Service Representative (VSR) positions, and Governor Warner added an additional \$124,258 for training, equipment, and office space for the new VSRs. By the end of the year, we'll have put 15 new VSRs in the field.

The General Assembly also increased the spending authorization level for the Virginia Veterans Care Center, allowing the VVCC to provide enhanced health care to Care Center residents. Additionally, the State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education saw a bump in spending authorization in 2005, allowing the SAA to hire two additional education specialists.

Ground was broken on the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center on November 1, and the center is expected to be completed in mid-2007. The Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center will offer 160 skilled nursing care beds to veterans in Central Virginia. The department has already submitted an application for federal funding to construct an 80-bed addition. Expected to cost \$8 million, the project will be jointly funded by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the federal government, with the Commonwealth paying \$2.8 million, or 35% of expected project costs, and the federal government paying \$5.2 million. The 2005 General Assembly committed the Commonwealth's share of the project costs through a Treasury Loan. This commitment put the 80-bed addition on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' project funding list, though ranked at number 78 of 129. This means that it will likely be 2008 or later before construction begins.

Through the efforts of Senator John Edwards, the department was appropriated \$50,000 in 2005 to plan for a third care center in the Hampton Roads area. That study is underway. In anticipation that the study will determine a need for a care center in the Tidewater region, the Department of Veterans Services submitted an application for federal funding, and the project is ranked 128 of 129 on the construction priority list. A commitment of state funding will move the Hampton Roads project up on the priority list.

In July the department completed its Strategic Plan – the capstone document that will guide department activities in the years to come. Each of the department's five sections also completed Service Area Plans that detail section-specific objectives. Like the Strategic Plan, the Service Area Plans are blueprints to guide the sections down the road. The department worked closely with the Board of Veterans Services' Strategic Planning Sub-Committee to develop goals and objectives that will allow the department to reach out to and better serve its customers.

I take great pride in joining a winning team. Every employee of the Department of Veterans Services is dedicated to fulfilling the department's mission of serving Virginia's veterans. As we move into 2006, our efforts will be focused not only on reaching out to more veterans but on improving the services we currently offer. With the support, wisdom, and guidance of the Governor, the members of the General Assembly, and our citizen board members, I know we'll succeed.

Vincent M. Burgess
Acting Commissioner
Department of Veterans Services

Comments from the Chairman, Board of Veterans Services

The past year has been one of both progress and sorrow for the Board of Veterans Services. Board members were deeply saddened by the deaths of fellow members Mel Drisko and George Duggins. Their perceptiveness, sage advice, and, most importantly, their unflagging commitment to Virginia's veterans, will be truly missed. Another loss was Board member Hershel Gober, Chairman of our Strategic Planning Sub-Committee, who resigned to pursue business opportunities out of the Commonwealth. Finally, the Board was shocked by the loss of Commissioner Jon Mangis, who left the Department of Veterans Services to return home to Oregon. Mel, George, Hershel, and Jon were all stalwart supporters of veterans programs in the Commonwealth, and did much to advance the cause of Virginia's veterans in just two short years.

The 2005 General Assembly session was a watershed for veterans programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Governor Warner's budget included an additional \$630,372 for the Department of Veterans Services – fully funding all authorized programs and positions.

The decision to place members of the General Assembly on the Board of Veterans Services was fully vindicated when Delegates Kirk Cox and Vivian Watts and Senator John Edwards each sponsored budget amendments that sought to increase the number of Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs). It was Delegate Cox's amendment for six additional VSRs and \$300,000 to pay them that carried the day, and the additional VSRs were deployed to the field after July 1, 2005.

Delegate Mark Cole sponsored legislation that strengthened the veterans hiring preference in state and local government, and Senator Edwards championed a budget amendment that provided \$50,000 to plan for a veterans care center in Hampton Roads. During the veto session, Governor Warner added an additional \$124,258 to the department's budget, providing funding to train and equip the six new VSRs authorized by Delegate Cox's budget amendment.

In order to effectively assist the department with strategic planning issues, the Board formed an ad-hoc Strategic Planning Sub-Committee in early 2005. Later renamed the Strategic Planning and Budget Sub-Committee, this select group of Board members helped the Department of Veterans Services refine its mission, vision, and value statements, sharpening the focus of the department in serving Virginia's veterans. The sub-committee also worked with the department to outline the high-level, agency-wide goals that will guide department operations in the years to come. Fittingly, the department's top two goals focus on awareness of and access to veterans services – in other words, letting Virginia's veterans know just what services the Department of Veterans Services provides, and then making those services accessible to more of Virginia's veterans.

While the Board was pleased with the emphasis on outreach, service, and training embodied in the department's strategic plan, we felt that additional resources, over and

above those captured in the department's strategic and service area plans, should be deployed to the field to better serve Virginia's veterans. Accordingly, the Board recommended that the department include in its budget request funding and position authorization such that VSRs could be placed at the Hampton and Salem VA Medical Centers and at a third office in Northern Virginia. The Board also recommended that the department request funding and position authorization to adequately staff the cemeteries.

The members of the Board of Veterans Services look forward to the release of Governor Warner's budget request on December 16 and to the 2006 General Assembly session. Both are opportunities for Board members to play key roles in ensuring the Department of Veterans Services is staffed and funded to serve those Virginians whom we are pledged to support – the veterans of our great Commonwealth.

John A. Anderson, MD, JD
Chairman
Board of Veterans Services

Comments from the Chairman, Joint Leadership Council

During the tenure of Joint Leadership Council (JLC) Chairmen Daniel Miller and Connie O'Neill, the Council has grown from infancy to adulthood. This remarkable maturation is due in great part to the leadership of our previous Chairmen and the collegial cooperation of our member organizations. In the brief span of two years the JLC has grown to a membership of 22 organizations, established its Constitution, Bylaws, Mission, and Vision, and developed common Veterans' Legislative Agendas for both 2005 and 2006. Shared purpose has now become the hallmark of the Joint Leadership Council in both fact and deed.

Our Legislative Agenda for 2006 continues the Joint Leadership Council's traditional support for a third veterans' care center in Hampton Roads; establishment of a third veterans' cemetery in Southwest Virginia and continued funding support for the Virginia War Memorial and its outstanding education programs. In recognition of the ongoing service and sacrifice of our active duty, reserve and guard military members, the JLC is supporting the construction of a Fisher House at McGuire VA Medical Center; in-state tuition for members of the US Armed Forces and their families on duty assignment in Virginia, and funding support for the Virginia Guard's recruiting, retention and family support services. In addition to these most important actions, the JLC supports a one dollar state income tax check off to aid the Department of Veterans Services and a one-time, no-cost single-vehicle registration for Virginia's Veterans.

In endeavoring to seek implementation of its Legislative Agenda for 2006, the Joint Leadership Council has developed a campaign plan that will allow the voice and power of Virginia's Veterans Community to be heard and felt throughout the upcoming 2006 legislative session in Richmond. Both together and separately the Veterans Service Organizations that constitute the Joint Leadership Council will work closely with the Governor, the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services and Legislature of our great Commonwealth to provide support and necessary services to those who have born the burden in the defense of freedom and democracy.

As a necessary bridge between Virginia's Veterans and the government of our Commonwealth, the Joint Leadership Council holds a position of trust and responsibility. The Council accepts this position as a cheerful and honorable duty.

Semper Fidelis,

Frank G. Wickersham III
Chairman
Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

Comments from the Chairman, Veterans Services Foundation

The past year saw the Veterans Services Foundation continue its mission of providing supplemental funding to support veterans programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Veterans Services Foundation Board of Trustees oversees the monies deposited in the Veterans Services Fund – a non-reverting trust fund on the books of the Comptroller of Virginia. In effect, the Fund is the “bank” for all monies donated to support veterans programs. The Fund is comprised of two types of accounts (or “sub-funds”) – a large, unrestricted account, and restricted accounts that contain monies donated for a specific purpose or purchase.

Foundation members closely monitor the restricted fund accounts to ensure that funds are spent only for the designated purpose. As the name would imply, funds from unrestricted account may be spent on a variety of purposes. In 2005, the Board of Trustees approved the use of up to \$50,000 to replace the walking trail at the McGuire VA Medical Center. The trail had to be replaced because the existing trail sat right on the site of the new Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center, and construction couldn’t commence on the SBVCC until the trail was replaced. Through innovative arrangements with the Virginia National Guard and VDOT, and with the timely assistance of the Governor’s office, the project was brought in for only \$7,654 – the cost of the replacement exercise stations. It was the timely injection of additional funds that moved the project to completion and allowed for ground to be broken on the SBVCC.

The Foundation looks forward to working with the Department of Veterans Services in the year to come to provide supplemental funding for such key projects.

John Hanson
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Veterans Services Foundation

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

Serve Virginia's veterans and their dependents by ensuring they receive the benefits, support, quality care, and recognition they have earned through service and sacrifice

Vision

Become the benchmark for the delivery of quality veterans programs at the state level and help ensure Virginia veterans receive the federal benefits to which they are entitled

Values

- **Service:** *Deliver the best service possible to Virginia veterans – they deserve no less*
- **Dedication:** *Bring an unflinching commitment to helping all of Virginia's veterans*
- **Excellence:** *Continually strive to be the best at what we do*
- **Involvement:** *Involve all stakeholders – veterans, veterans service organizations, department staff, policy makers, and legislators – in developing and implementing top flight veterans programs*
- **Innovation:** *Constantly seek new and/or better ways to deliver service to our veterans*
- **Openness and honesty:** *Deal with all stakeholders in a direct and sincere manner*
- **Accountability:** *Create a climate of ownership at the lowest level possible*
- **Flexibility:** *Encourage our front-line managers to use their initiative and experience to accomplish the mission*

Department Overview

Since 1942, Virginia has shown its respect and honor to veterans by serving them as effective advocates. Prior to 2003, veterans services in Virginia were fragmented among the former Department of Veterans Affairs, which operated the benefits and cemeteries programs; the Virginia Veterans Care Center, which was operated by a series of contractors under the supervision of a Board of Trustees; and the Department of Education, which oversaw the activities of the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education. In 2003, these services were consolidated under one agency, known as the Department of Veterans Services (DVS).

The Department of Veteran Services is organized into four service delivery branches – benefits, cemeteries, care centers, and veterans education – and an administrative section. Integral components of the Department of Veterans Services’ team are the three board-type entities – the Boards of Veterans Services, the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations, and the Veterans Services Foundation, that work collaboratively to support the effective delivery of services to Virginia’s veterans.

The Benefit Services section assists veterans of the armed forces and their dependents in obtaining entitlement benefits from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition to the services offered at the section headquarters in Roanoke, the Benefit Services section operates 19 field offices throughout the Commonwealth, with two additional field offices scheduled to open in the near future.

Virginia’s veterans cemeteries provide burial and perpetual care services to veterans and eligible dependents. The Virginia Veterans Cemetery, in Amelia, is a 129-acre facility. The Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, in Suffolk, is a 73-acre facility.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center, located adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center, is a 240-bed facility that provides long-term skilled care and assisted living services to veterans of the armed forces. The groundbreaking ceremony for the 160-bed Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center, located adjacent to the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, was held on November 1, 2005. Construction is expected to be complete in mid-2007.

The State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education reviews and approves post-secondary education programs operating in the Commonwealth, ensuring the programs meet strict federal qualification guidelines. Veterans may only use their G.I. Bill and other educational benefits at programs approved by the SAA.

The Board of Veterans Services is responsible for formulating policies, developing procedures, reviewing department budget submissions, and making recommendations for the efficient and effective delivery of veterans services, as well as studying all matters affecting the welfare of Virginia’s veterans.

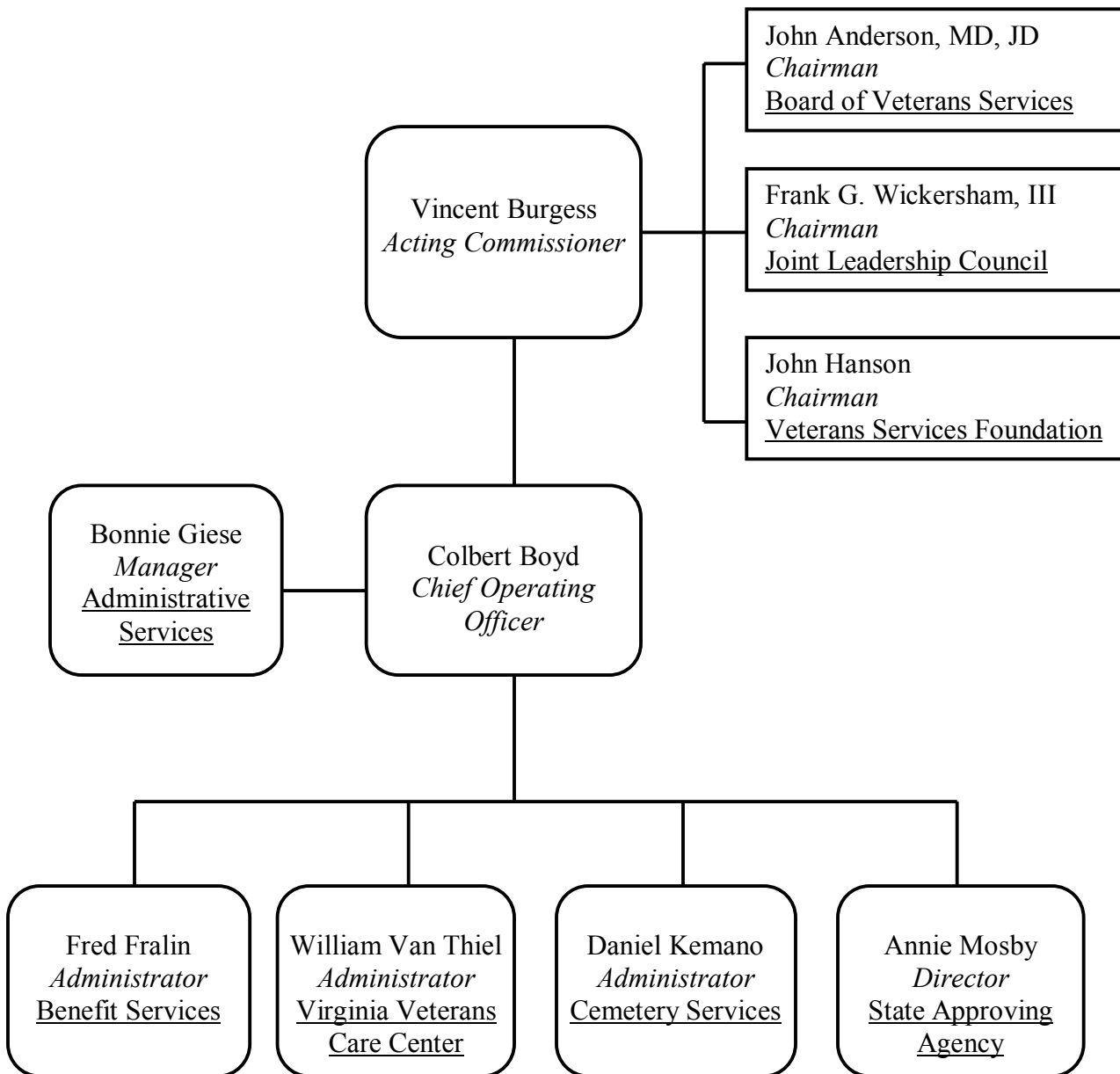
The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) advises the Department of Veterans Services on matters of concern to veterans and their families.

The Veterans Services Foundation is responsible for raising funds, identifying existing revenue sources for veterans programs, and administering the Veterans Services Fund.

The recently formed Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee advises the Commissioner of Veterans Services on any and all matters pertaining to the administration of any veterans care center established in the Commonwealth.

Department Organization

as of November 30, 2005



Benefits Services

Mission

Assist Virginia's veterans and their dependents in obtaining benefits to which they are entitled under federal, state, and local laws.

Services and Organization

The Federal Government, through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) provides many benefits and services to those who served this nation in times of war and peace. Among these benefits and services are compensation for service-connected disability or death, income-based pensions, medical care, educational benefits, and home purchase assistance.

The Benefits Services section of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services assists Virginia's veterans in gaining access to the benefits to which they are entitled through their service and sacrifice. While Veterans Service Representatives (claims agents) are able to help many veterans over the phone, much of the assistance takes place at a field office or "itinerant" contact point. During these face-to-face contacts, Veterans Service Representatives guide veterans through the myriad steps required to file a USDVA claim.

Developing a solid claim is more than a matter of completing the application. Supporting documents, sometimes decades old, often must be retrieved from federal and state archives. The process is labor-intensive. A Veterans Service Representative may spend an hour visiting with a veteran, but then spend 20 hours or more in finding records and completing the necessary supporting documentation. All of this hard work pays off if the USDVA approves the claim.

In FY2005 the Benefit Services section operated 15 field offices across the Commonwealth, in Accomac, Big Stone Gap, Bristol, Cedar Bluff, Charlottesville, Front Royal, Hampton, Lynchburg, Norfolk, Quantico, South Hill, Staunton, Richmond, Roanoke, and Wytheville. The field offices were staffed by 22 full-time Veterans Service Representatives, 13 full-time Administrative Assistants, and three part-time Administrative Assistants. Service areas are detailed in Table 1.

The number of Veterans Service Representatives and Administrative Assistants assigned to each field office is dependent on available resources and the number of veterans expected to be served. The number of days each office is open in an average week also varies according to need and resource availability. All offices are open five days a week, with the exception of the Accomac office, which is closed when the Veterans Service Representative is providing service at an itinerant service point.

In addition to serving veterans at the 15 field offices, the Benefit Services section also assists veterans at itinerant service points. The itinerant service points are, in effect,

satellite field offices, with the space being provided by federal, state, and local government agencies and private organizations, including veterans service organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Because the organizations often provide the space at no charge, the itinerant service points allow the department to reach out to and serve a greater number of veterans without incurring the cost of fixed operating facilities. Beginning July 1, 2005, all Veterans Service Representatives are required to provide itinerant service at least one day per week.

The Benefit Services section is headed by the Benefits Services administrator, assisted by two regional managers who provide guidance and supervision to the field office managers. The Benefits Services manager and two regional managers also provide assistance during the claims appeals process. Finally, the Benefit Service section maintains an office in Washington, D.C. to represent clients before the Board of Veterans Appeals, part of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Activities

The Benefits Services section helped Virginia veterans file 18,550 claims in FY2005, of which 70% were approved by the USDVA. If approved by the USDVA, a claim results in two types of award – monthly compensation based on the level of disability and a “retroactive” award back to the claim date. While most “retro” awards are relatively small, some can reach the six-figure level. There were eleven such retro awards in FY2005. Three awards topped the \$200,000 mark, with the largest being \$232,719. In FY2005 over 1,300 retro awards for Virginia veterans were approved by the USDVA, representing almost \$24 million. Claims activity is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Veterans Service Representatives and Administrative Assistants had 117,096 contacts with Virginia veterans in FY2005. This number does not reflect the number of unique veterans served, as individual veterans often have multiple contacts with Veterans Service Representatives. Just over 67% of the contacts took place over the phone, 29% occurred in one of the 15 field offices, with the remaining 4% taking place at one of the itinerant service points. Contact activity is shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Helping a veteran file a claim can be a lengthy process. Thirty minutes spent with a veteran during a walk-in visit may translate to several hours spent gathering necessary documents and completing required forms. Though some phone contacts can be handled rather quickly, such as a referral to another office or source of information, most involve questions about pending claims or possible entitlement to benefits. While inquires into the status of pending claims may require little time with the client, significant time is often required to obtain an response from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. A five-minute phone conversation with a veteran can easily translate into thirty minutes spent obtaining the information the veteran has requested.

If a phone call concerns possible entitlement to VA benefits, the complexity of benefit eligibility rules means that a Veterans Service Representative can spend significant time

on the phone with a client obtaining the information necessary to determine potential eligibility. Frequently, a Veterans Service Representative will complete the entire claims process over the phone and through the mail, as some clients suffer from poor health or lack the transportation needed to reach a field office or itinerant point.

A comparison between FY04 and FY05 shows an increase in client contacts in FY05 – 117,096 vs. 106,212 in FY04, with more new and reopened claims filed on behalf of Virginia's veterans in FY05 than in FY04: 16,705 vs. 16,050. The number of employees dedicated to Benefit Services remained at 40 in FY05.

In FY05 there was no significant increase in the number of itinerant points visited but there has been a significant increase since July 1, 2005. This increase is attributable to the increase in full-time veterans' service representatives and compliance with the statutory requirement that beginning July 1, 2005 all representatives are required to travel to an itinerant location at least one day per week. Itinerant services points that were eliminated because of budget cuts in previous years were reestablished and new ones created. Table 6 compares Benefit Service Section activity in FY04 and FY05.

Table 1
Benefit Services Section Field Office Service Area – FY2005

| <u>Field Office</u> | <u>Counties Served</u> | <u>Cities Served</u> |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Accomac | Northampton and Accomack | |
| Big Stone Gap | Dickenson, Lee, and Wise | Norton |
| Bristol | Scott, Smyth, and Washington; Sullivan, TN | Bristol, VA and Bristol, TN |
| Cedar Bluff | Buchanan, Russell, and Tazewell | |
| Charlottesville | Albemarle, Culpeper, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Nelson, and Orange | Charlottesville |
| Front Royal | Clarke, Fauquier, Frederick, Loudoun, Page, Rappahannock, Shenandoah, and Warren | Winchester |
| Hampton | Charles City, Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Mathews, and York | Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, and Williamsburg |
| Lynchburg | Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Buckingham, and Campbell | Bedford and Lynchburg |
| Quantico | Arlington, Caroline, Fairfax, King George, Northumberland, Prince William, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Westmoreland | Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, Manassas, and Manassas Park |

Table 1**Benefit Services Section Field Office Service Area – FY2005**

| <u>Field Office</u> | <u>Counties Served</u> | <u>Cities Served</u> |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Richmond | Amelia, Chesterfield, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Essex, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, King and Queen, King William, Lancaster, New Kent, Middlesex, Powhatan, Prince George, Richmond, and Surry | Colonial Heights, Hopewell, Petersburg and Richmond |
| Roanoke | Alleghany, Botetourt, Buchanan, Craig, Floyd, Franklin, Henry, Patrick, Pulaski, and Roanoke | Covington, Danville, Martinsville, Roanoke, and Salem |
| South Hill | Brunswick, Charlotte, Greensville, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Pittsylvania, Prince Edward, Southampton, and Sussex | Danville and Emporia |
| Staunton | Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge, and Rockingham | Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, and Waynesboro |
| Tidewater | Southampton and Sussex | Chesapeake, Franklin, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach |
| Wytheville | Bland, Carroll, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, and Wythe | Galax, Radford, and Wytheville |

Table 2
Claims Submitted to USDVA - Sorted by Month
 July 2004 – June 2005

| MONTH | NEW | REOPEN | 21-8416 | EVR | TOTAL CLAIMS |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| JULY | 1,035 | 333 | 60 | 26 | 1,454 |
| AUGUST | 1,094 | 232 | 26 | 22 | 1,374 |
| SEPTEMBER | 1,148 | 258 | 24 | 11 | 1,441 |
| OCTOBER | 1,117 | 217 | 26 | 9 | 1,369 |
| NOVEMBER | 1,046 | 213 | 23 | 11 | 1,293 |
| DECEMBER | 923 | 209 | 59 | 20 | 1,211 |
| JANUARY | 1,203 | 297 | 417 | 221 | 2,138 |
| FEBRUARY | 1,149 | 273 | 353 | 236 | 2,011 |
| MARCH | 1,412 | 273 | 105 | 40 | 1,830 |
| APRIL | 1,198 | 218 | 63 | 28 | 1,507 |
| MAY | 1,162 | 242 | 26 | 15 | 1,445 |
| JUNE | 1,201 | 252 | 17 | 7 | 1,477 |
| TOTALS | 13,688 | 3,017 | 1,199 | 646 | 18,550 |

Terms used in table:

New: A first-time claim.

Reopen: Reopen a denied claim or make a modification to an existing claim, such as for a new medical condition or disability or an increase in an established disability.

21-8416: The VA Form 21-8416 is used to report a claimant's medical expenses for the previous year, so that the claimant may claim partial reimbursement for medical expenses. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist claimants in completing this form.

EVR: Eligibility Verification Report. Submitted annually by some pension recipients to verify income and continuing eligibility. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist pension recipients in completing this form.

Table 3
Claims Submitted to USDVA - Sorted by Field Office
 July 2004 – June 2005

| FIELD OFFICE | NEW | REOPEN | 21-8416 | EVR | TOTAL CLAIMS |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------|---------------------|
| ACCOMAC | 375 | 2 | 41 | 27 | 445 |
| BIG STONE GAP | 1,080 | 156 | 131 | 60 | 1,427 |
| BRISTOL | 736 | 69 | 103 | 54 | 962 |
| CEDAR BLUFF | 957 | 0 | 69 | 38 | 1,064 |
| CHARLOTTESVILLE | 311 | 107 | 65 | 32 | 515 |
| FRONT ROYAL | 534 | 42 | 12 | 21 | 609 |
| HAMPTON | 1,791 | 598 | 41 | 23 | 2,453 |
| LYNCHBURG | 374 | 27 | 169 | 82 | 652 |
| QUANTICO | 716 | 121 | 9 | 16 | 862 |
| RICHMOND | 758 | 229 | 55 | 17 | 1,059 |
| ROANOKE | 561 | 254 | 73 | 43 | 931 |
| SOUTH HILL | 502 | 112 | 137 | 87 | 838 |
| STAUNTON | 949 | 152 | 195 | 92 | 1,388 |
| TIDEWATER | 4,021 | 1,148 | 99 | 54 | 5,322 |
| WYTHEVILLE | 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 23 |
| TOTALS | 13,688 | 3,017 | 1,199 | 646 | 18,550 |

Terms used in table:

New: A first-time claim.

Reopen: Reopen a denied claim or make a modification to an existing claim, such as for a new medical condition or disability or an increase in an established disability.

21-8416: The VA Form 21-8416 is used to report a claimant's medical expenses for the previous year, so that the claimant may claim partial reimbursement for medical expenses. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist claimants in completing this form.

EVR: Eligibility Verification Report. Submitted annually by some pension recipients to verify income and continuing eligibility. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist pension recipients in completing this form.

Table 4
Client Contacts - Sorted by Month
 July 2004 – June 2005

| MONTH | OFFICE WALK-INS | PHONE | ITINERANT POINT | MONTHLY TOTAL |
|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| JULY | 2,910 | 6,976 | 347 | 10,233 |
| AUGUST | 2,935 | 6,947 | 306 | 10,188 |
| SEPTEMBER | 2,904 | 5,976 | 287 | 9,167 |
| OCTOBER | 2,895 | 5,835 | 321 | 9,051 |
| NOVEMBER | 2,620 | 6,344 | 252 | 9,216 |
| DECEMBER | 2,330 | 6,694 | 216 | 9,240 |
| JANUARY | 3,385 | 7,707 | 451 | 11,543 |
| FEBRUARY | 2,956 | 5,549 | 424 | 8,929 |
| MARCH | 3,083 | 7,270 | 432 | 10,785 |
| APRIL | 2,631 | 6,553 | 521 | 9,705 |
| MAY | 2,717 | 6,289 | 410 | 9,416 |
| JUNE | 2,786 | 6,408 | 429 | 9,623 |
| YEARLY TOTALS | 34,152 | 78,548 | 4,396 | 117,096 |

Terms used in table:

Office Walk-Ins: Number of clients who visit a DVS field office

Phone: Number of phone calls received by DVS field offices

Itinerant Point: Number of clients who visit an itinerant service point

Table 5
Client Contacts - Sorted by Field Office
 July 2004 – June 2005

| FIELD OFFICE | WALK-INS | PHONE | ITINERANT POINT | OFFICE TOTAL |
|------------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| ACCOMAC | 1,032 | 3,283 | 61 | 4,376 |
| BIG STONE GAP | 3,721 | 3,261 | 0 | 6,982 |
| BRISTOL | 1,613 | 2,379 | 0 | 3,992 |
| CEDAR BLUFF | 2,613 | 1,993 | 0 | 4,606 |
| CHARLOTTESVILLE | 994 | 784 | 0 | 1,778 |
| FRONT ROYAL | 717 | 1,051 | 0 | 1,768 |
| HAMPTON | 4,706 | 6,701 | 220 | 11,627 |
| LYNCHBURG | 1,411 | 4,811 | 126 | 6,348 |
| QUANTICO | 1,025 | 3,753 | 202 | 4,980 |
| RICHMOND | 1,930 | 5,228 | 648 | 7,806 |
| ROANOKE | 1,439 | 5,624 | 78 | 7,141 |
| SOUTH HILL | 934 | 1,563 | 489 | 2,986 |
| STAUNTON | 2,750 | 2,993 | 456 | 6,199 |
| TIDEWATER | 9,196 | 35,097 | 2116 | 46,409 |
| WYTHEVILLE | 71 | 27 | 0 | 98 |
| TOTALS | 34,152 | 78,548 | 4,396 | 117,096 |

Terms used in table:

Walk-Ins: Number of clients who visit a DVS field office

Phone: Number of phone calls received by DVS field offices

Itinerant Point: Number of clients who visit an itinerant service point

Table 6**Comparison of Benefit Services Section Activity: FY04 vs. FY05**

| Field Office | New and Reopened Claims FY04 | New and Reopened Claims FY05 |
|--|---|---|
| Accomac | 427 | 445 |
| Big Stone Gap | 808 | 962 |
| Bristol | 1,378 | 1,427 |
| Cedar Bluff | 942 | 1,064 |
| Charlottesville | 393 | 515 |
| Front Royal | 720 | 609 |
| Hampton | 2,359 | 2,453 |
| Lynchburg | 508 | 652 |
| Quantico | 568 | 862 |
| Richmond | 551 | 1,059 |
| Roanoke | 695 | 931 |
| South Hill | 598 | 838 |
| Staunton | 1,163 | 1,388 |
| Tidewater | 4,940 | 5,322 |
| Wytheville | Included in Roanoke | 23 (May and June only) |
| Total | 16,050 | 16,705 |
| Client Contacts (Walk-In, Phone, Itinerant Point) | FY04 | FY05 |
| | 106,212 | 117,096 |
| Employees dedicated to Benefit Services | FY04 | FY05 |
| | 40 | 40 |

Cemetery Services

Mission

Provide a dignified final resting place for veterans and eligible dependents at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk.

Services and Organization

The Cemetery Services section of the Department of Veterans Services operates Virginia's two state-owned and run veterans cemeteries – the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk. The cemeteries provide veterans and eligible family members with a dignified and honorable final resting place.

The cemeteries accommodate three types of interments: in-ground burial of casketed remains, in-ground inurnment of cremated remains, and above ground inurnment of cremated remains in a columbarium. Cremated remains are inurned in the same manner and with the same honors as casketed remains. For in-ground burials of casketed remains, the upright headstones are made of marble at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery, while upright headstones at the Horton Cemetery are made of granite. Ground inurnments are marked with flat gray granite markers at both cemeteries, while above ground (i.e. columbarium) inurnments are marked by an inscribed niche cover – marble at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery, granite at the Horton Cemetery.

Any member of the armed forces of the United States who dies on active duty, anyone retired from military service, or any veteran discharged under conditions other than dishonorable or undesirable conditions is eligible for interment in a Virginia veterans cemetery, provided that they are a legal resident of Virginia at the time of their death, or were a legal resident of Virginia at the time of initial entry into the armed forces. Also eligible for burial, if they meet certain requirements, are members of the reserve forces and the National Guard, Commissioned officers of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, American merchant seaman, and some others.

Dependents, including the legal spouse (or widow or widower) and/or an unmarried minor child under age 21, are also eligible to be buried in a Virginia veterans cemetery. In addition, an unmarried adult child, who, before the age of 21, became permanently incapable of self-support because of physical or mental disability, may also be interred.

There is no charge for the gravesite/columbarium or necessary interment services for a qualified veteran at a Virginia veterans cemetery. The Commonwealth furnishes the gravesite, opens and closes the grave, orders a grave marker from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), places the grave marker, and furnishes perpetual care of the gravesite without charge. The veteran, however, must purchase a casket and a vault or

grave liner for in-ground burials, or a plastic or metal urn for cremated remains, through a private funeral home.

For each veteran buried in state-operated veterans cemetery, the Department of Veterans Services receives a \$300 reimbursement, called a “plot allowance,” from the USDVA. Dependents are charged an amount equal to the USDVA plot allowance. These monies, representing from 25 to 30% of the section’s annual budget, are used to fund both current operations and maintenance projects. The bulk of the section’s budget comes from the General Fund. Through the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) and various Veterans Service Organizations, the department is seeking to increase the plot allowance to at least \$500 per veteran.

To eliminate any administrative difficulties that may occur at the time of death, veterans are encouraged to complete a “pre-application” for burial in a Virginia veterans cemetery. While the department will not assign a specific gravesite when a pre-application is submitted, the pre-application process ensures that all required paperwork has been submitted and verified. At present, 2,254 pre-applications are on file at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery, while the Horton Cemetery has 958 pre-applications on file. The pre-application process is free of charge.

The Cemetery Services section is led by the Cemeteries Administrator, who also serves as the on-site Superintendent of the Horton Cemetery. Administrative duties are accomplished by a full-time Administrative Coordinator and a part-time Administrative Assistant. While department staffing guidelines call for a groundskeeping staff of five, the Horton Cemetery groundskeeping staff consists only of a Grounds Supervisor and Funeral Team Leader. Because the Horton Cemetery grounds staff is short-handed, the Cemetery Administrator and administrative staff provide extensive assistance to the groundskeeping staff.

The Virginia Veterans Cemetery, located southwest of Richmond in Amelia County, has a staff of five. A full-time Superintendent and a part-time Administrative Assistant are responsible for all administrative duties. The grounds are presently staffed with a full-time Grounds Supervisor, a full-time Funeral Team Leader and a part-time grounds worker.

Activities

The Virginia Veterans Cemetery was dedicated in May of 1997, with the first burial service being conducted on June 17, 1997. The Virginia Veterans Cemetery currently has 29 acres developed with an additional 100 acres – representing three additional phases – available for future development. To date, the average annual burial/inurnment rate at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery has been less than 200 burials per year. If this rate remains relatively constant, the Virginia Veterans Cemetery should be in full operation for another 80 years.

Phase One of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery was dedicated on November 1, 2004, and the first burial service was conducted on December 13, 2004. Construction of three additional phases will be completed when needed. The average annual burial/inurnment rate at the Horton Cemetery is expected to be 450 to 500 burials per year. If this rate remains relatively constant, the Horton Cemetery should be in full operation for approximately sixty years.

Both cemeteries host Memorial Day services sponsored by local veterans groups. The cemeteries hold “Open House” events on Veterans Day designed to inform veterans, family members, friends, and members of the public of the burial benefits available to veterans and eligible family members. Cemetery tours are given year-round upon request, as is assistance with completing pre-application documents.

The Virginia Veterans Cemetery performed 188 burials in FY05, while the Horton Cemetery performed 255 burials. Table 7 shows burial activity from FY1997 through FY2005. Also included are burial figures for the first five months of FY2006.

Table 7: Cemetery Burials FY1997 – FY2005

Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Amelia

| | <u>FY97</u> | <u>FY98</u> | <u>FY99</u> | <u>FY00</u> | <u>FY01</u> | <u>FY02</u> | <u>FY03</u> | <u>FY04</u> | <u>FY05</u> | <u>FY06</u> |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| July | N/A | 5 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 13 | 16 | 14 | 18 | 16 |
| August | N/A | 9 | 8 | 12 | 13 | 15 | 9 | 14 | 17 | 16 |
| September | N/A | 11 | 3 | 9 | 5 | 17 | 10 | 10 | 16 | 20 |
| October | N/A | 5 | 8 | 9 | 13 | 19 | 14 | 23 | 17 | 15 |
| November | N/A | 7 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 13 | 18 | 11 | 20 | 18 |
| December | N/A | 14 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 16 | 16 | 19 | 18 | |
| January | N/A | 7 | 8 | 10 | 12 | 11 | 19 | 17 | 16 | |
| February | N/A | 9 | 6 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 11 | |
| March | N/A | 12 | 9 | 11 | 12 | 18 | 18 | 13 | 16 | |
| April | N/A | 9 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 12 | 8 | 15 | 12 | |
| May | N/A | 3 | 9 | 17 | 12 | 16 | 12 | 13 | 11 | |
| June | 2 | 4 | 12 | 9 | 9 | 14 | 16 | 15 | 16 | |
| Total | 2 | 95 | 91 | 124 | 121 | 175 | 169 | 179 | 188 | |

Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, Suffolk

| | <u>FY05</u> | <u>FY06</u> |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| July | N/A | 42 |
| August | N/A | 40 |
| September | N/A | 39 |
| October | N/A | 28 |
| November | N/A | 35 |
| December | 34 | |
| January | 47 | |
| February | 29 | |
| March | 40 | |
| April | 44 | |
| May | 28 | |
| June | 33 | |
| Total | 255 | |

State Approving Agency for Veterans Education

Mission

Improve awareness of and access to post-secondary education opportunities for veterans and eligible family members.

Services and Organization

Operating under a contract with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education reviews, evaluates, and approves post-secondary education and training programs offered by educational institutions, businesses, and industries in the Commonwealth of Virginia. After a program has been approved, veterans and other persons eligible for benefits under Titles 38 and 10 of the U.S. Code may enroll and receive financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The SAA ensures compliance with state and federal regulations through on-site visits to active institutions and establishments.

The SAA has a secondary mission of making veterans and eligible family members aware of veterans education and training programs. Outreach activities are conducted at job fairs, presentations at military bases in the Commonwealth, and at the department's Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits.

With just seven employees, the SAA is the smallest section in the Department of Veterans Services, but has the responsibility of providing supervision and support for 656 education and training institutions. While some institutions only offer one program, in many cases an institution will offer multiple programs, each requiring separate approval. The institution with the most approved programs is Virginia Tech, with 250.

Activities

As part of its mission to review, evaluate, and approve post-secondary education and training programs, the SAA accomplishes two types of approval actions – Program Approval and Other Approval. Program Approval Actions deal with initial or revised approval of an educational program, while Other Approval Actions focus on revisions to a previously approved publication or document containing program or policy information.

The SAA accomplished 4,620 Program Approval Actions between October 2004 and September 2005, with 4,402, or 95%, being approved, and 218 being disapproved. During the same period, SAA handled 956 Other Approval Actions, of which 889, or 93%, were approved and 67 were disapproved. Table 8 shows Program Approval Actions, while Table 9 details Other Approval Actions. Data is presented for federal fiscal year 2005, as SAA activity is tracked on that basis.

A key element of the review, evaluation, and approval process is the “Supervisory Visit,” in which an SAA official visits the educational institution and meets with key staff members. SAA’s contract with the USDVA called for visits to 294 (70%) of the 420 active institutions in FFY05. The SAA exceeded this goal, making supervisory visits to 309 facilities (84%). Supervisory visit activity is detailed in Table 10.

Table 8**State Approving Agency for Veterans Education
Program Approval Actions: October 2004 - September 2005**

| Oct - Dec 2004 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-----|------|------|----------|
| Number of Applications Received | 1,053 | 358 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Number Approved | 1,052 | 338 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Number Disapproved | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 99.99% | 94% | 100% | 100% | N/A |

| Jan - Mar 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|------|------|----------|
| Number of Applications Received | 682 | 565 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Number Approved | 669 | 539 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Number Disapproved | 13 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 98% | 95% | 100% | 100% | N/A |

| Apr - Jun 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|------|------|----------|
| Number of Applications Received | 544 | 513 | 1 | 8 | 0 |
| Number Approved | 496 | 443 | 1 | 8 | 0 |
| Number Disapproved | 48 | 70 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 91% | 86% | 100% | 100% | N/A |

| Jul - Sep 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|------|------|----------|
| Number of Applications Received | 521 | 363 | 6 | 4 | 3 |
| Number Approved | 498 | 337 | 6 | 4 | 3 |
| Number Disapproved | 23 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 96% | 93% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

| Oct 2004 - Sep 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|----------|
| Number of Applications Received | 2,800 | 1,799 | 10 | 17 | 3 |
| Number Approved | 2,715 | 1,657 | 10 | 17 | 3 |
| Number Disapproved | 85 | 142 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 97% | 92% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

IHL = Institute of Higher Learning
NCD = Non-College Degree Program
APP = Apprenticeship Program
OJT = On the Job Training Program
LIC/CERT = Licensing/Certification Program

Table 9**State Approving Agency for Veterans Education****Other Approval Actions: October 2004 - September 2005**

| Oct - Dec 2004 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|------|------|----------|
| Number of Applications Received | 108 | 71 | 6 | 36 | 0 |
| Number Approved | 99 | 70 | 6 | 34 | 0 |
| Number Disapproved | 9 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 92% | 99% | 100% | 94% | N/A |
| Jan - Mar 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
| Number of Applications Received | 83 | 107 | 7 | 51 | 0 |
| Number Approved | 81 | 98 | 7 | 51 | 0 |
| Number Disapproved | 2 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 98% | 92% | 100% | 100% | N/A |
| Apr - Jun 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
| Number of Applications Received | 109 | 111 | 17 | 44 | 3 |
| Number Approved | 101 | 102 | 17 | 44 | 0 |
| Number Disapproved | 8 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 93% | 92% | 100% | 100% | 0% |
| Jul - Sep 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
| Number of Applications Received | 76 | 103 | 9 | 25 | 2 |
| Number Approved | 72 | 92 | 9 | 25 | 2 |
| Number Disapproved | 4 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 95% | 90% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Oct 2004 - Sep 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | LIC/CERT |
| Number of Applications Received | 376 | 392 | 39 | 134 | 5 |
| Number Approved | 353 | 363 | 39 | 132 | 2 |
| Number Disapproved | 23 | 29 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| Percentage of Applications Approved | 94% | 93% | 100% | 99% | 40% |

IHL = Institute of Higher Learning

NCD = Non-College Degree Program

APP = Apprenticeship Program

OJT = On the Job Training Program

LIC/CERT = Licensing/Certification Program

Table 10
State Approving Agency for Veterans Education
Supervisory Visits: October 2004 - September 2005

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Oct - Dec 2004 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | Total |
| Number of Visits | 4 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 11 |
| Jan - Mar 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | Total |
| Number of Visits | 33 | 31 | 6 | 3 | 73 |
| Apr - Jun 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | Total |
| Number of Visits | 63 | 41 | 11 | 26 | 141 |
| Jul - Sep 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | Total |
| Number of Visits | 47 | 59 | 3 | 13 | 122 |
| Oct 2004 - Sep 2005 | IHL | NCD | APP | OJT | Total |
| Number of Visits | 147 | 137 | 20 | 43 | 347 |

IHL = Institute of Higher Learning
 NCD = Non-College Degree Program
 APP = Apprenticeship Program
 OJT = On the Job Training Program

Virginia Veterans Care Center

Mission

Provide affordable, high quality, and comprehensive nursing and domiciliary care to Commonwealth of Virginia veterans residing in the Virginia Veterans Care Center.

Services and Organization

Opened on Veterans Day, 1992, the Virginia Veterans Care Center provides state-of-the-art long-term health care for up to 240 veterans in 120 semi-private rooms. Of the facility's 240 beds, 180 are dedicated as skilled nursing care beds, including 60 dedicated to the care of Alzheimer's patients. There are 60 beds serving assisted-living (domiciliary care) patients.

The Care Center provides on-site physical therapy, respiratory therapy, and podiatry care, as well as many other ancillary health care services. The Care Center also offers such amenities as a wheelchair accessible nature trail and deck, library, chapel, barbershop, billiard room, and wood working shop.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center is located adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center, a 288-bed facility that provides a wide range of health care services.

With over 200 employees, the Care Center is by far the largest section in the Department of Veterans Services. The Care Center's largest operating divisions are the nursing, housekeeping, and dietary sections.

Volunteers play an important part in Care Center operations, assisting in many areas of patient care. The facility interacts with approximately 30 Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and over 120 individual volunteers, who, in addition to donating generously of their time, also donate both money and material to improve the welfare of Care Center residents.

Working in conjunction with the VSOs and individual volunteers, staff members hold numerous activities for VVCC residents, including two "carnivals" for residents and their families. Attendance at each of the carnivals exceeded 400. The VVCC was pleased to again host a stop-over and dinner for over 350 veterans on their way to Washington D.C. as part of the annual "Run-For-The-Wall" event. The "Bikers" visited with VVCC residents, shared experiences, and "showed off" their bikes.

Each year, the VVCC conducts "Operation Holiday Spirit" (OHS) and raises approximately \$20,000 in donations to purchase Christmas gifts for all Care Center residents. As of November 30, 2005, "OHS" has a balance of approximately \$14,000. The funds will provide gifts and activities for the residents, and will ensure that every resident receives something for Christmas.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center receives no operating funds from General Fund appropriations and operates entirely on revenues produced through caring for Veterans. Revenue sources are Medicaid, Medicare, Hospice Medicare, per diem payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and private funding sources. Per diem payments from the USDVA accounted for approximately 20% of VVCC revenues in FY05. Of the balance, 62% of the funding for care was provided by Medicaid, 26% by private funds, 11% by Medicare, and 1% by Hospice Medicare.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center provided 61,292 patient days of care and 20,588 days of assisted living care to Veterans in the Commonwealth. The “patient day” measure is used for billing purposes and to track occupancy. A patient day is one day spent by one patient in the Care Center. Dividing the number of patient days in a given month by the number of days in that month gives the average occupancy for the period in question.

Activities

The Virginia Veterans Care Center had a 94% average occupancy level in FY05 – with an average of 93% of the nursing care and 97% of the assisted living beds being occupied. The Care Center has more recently been trending toward occupancy rates of 98% and 97% respectively. In contrast, at the end of FY04, the USDVA nursing care facilities at the VA Medical Centers in Richmond and Salem had a 78% and 94% occupancy rate, respectively, and the assisted living facility at the Hampton VA Medical Center had a 70% occupancy rate. Table 11 shows Care Center patient days and occupancy levels.

In July, 2005, the USDVA conducted the annual survey/inspection of all of the departments of the Virginia Veterans Care Center. The Care Center was found to be in full compliance with USDVA standards in all areas.

In August, 2005, the Care Center underwent a detailed State licensure and Medicaid/Medicare compliance inspection by the Virginia Department of Health’s Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection to determine compliance with the federal requirements for nursing facilities participating in the Medicare and/or Medicaid programs. Only one deficiency (with no patient harm) was cited, a testimony to the Care Center’s commitment to delivering quality health care to Virginia’s Veterans.

This year the Facility has begun a \$1,000,000 Construction/Renovation Project as part of the USDVA’s “State Home Construction Grant” program. In addition to a 3,600 square foot storage/maintenance building and in-house resident clothing laundry facility, the Care Center is undergoing a major “face-lift” that encompasses everything from flooring to wallpaper to furniture. This will be the facility’s first major renovation since its construction in 1992.

Table 11
Virginia Veterans Care Center
Patient Days and average occupancy level - FY05

| Month | Patient Days Nursing | Average # of Nursing Beds Occupied | Occupancy Level: Nursing | Patient Days Assisted Living | Average # of Assisted Living Beds Occupied | Occupancy Level: Assisted Living |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| July | 5,303 | 171 | 95% | 1,757 | 53 | 94% |
| August | 5,292 | 171 | 95% | 1,775 | 51 | 95% |
| September | 4,984 | 161 | 92% | 1,707 | 50 | 95% |
| October | 5,207 | 168 | 93% | 1,758 | 49 | 95% |
| November | 5,002 | 161 | 93% | 1,769 | 50 | 98% |
| December | 5,279 | 170 | 95% | 1,816 | 51 | 98% |
| January | 5,191 | 167 | 93% | 1,650 | 51 | 89% |
| February | 4,792 | 155 | 95% | 1,504 | 53 | 90% |
| March | 5,263 | 170 | 94% | 1,664 | 56 | 89% |
| April | 4,984 | 161 | 92% | 1,773 | 58 | 99% |
| May | 5,099 | 164 | 91% | 1,788 | 58 | 96% |
| June | 4,896 | 158 | 91% | 1,627 | 57 | 90% |
| Monthly Average | 5,108 | 168 | 93% | 1,716 | 56 | 94% |
| Total Patient Days: FY05 | 61,292 | | 93% | 20,588 | | 94% |

Administrative Services

Mission

Support the delivery of quality services to Virginia's veterans.

Services and Organization

The Administrative Services section is the department's support branch, providing accounting, budget, human resource, information technology, payroll and procurement support to the four service-delivery programs.

The Administrative Services section is comprised of fourteen employees— ten full-time and four part-time. This is a 1% increase over the past year. One additional part-time employee has been added to the procurement area. Procurement responsibilities have grown over the past year to include procurement decentralization and training, Small, Women, and Minority (SWAM) owned business reporting, fixed asset accounting, and office space rental and lease renewal.

The four-service delivery programs fund Administrative Services. Each program is charged a proportionate share of the costs based on time spent in support of the program. As the largest customer, the Virginia Veterans Care Center funds an estimated 80% of Administrative Service operations with the Benefits Services section, the Cemetery Services section, and the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education funding the remaining 20%.

Performance Measures and Strategic Planning

The Department of Veterans Services relies on six performance measures to help track resources used, work produced, and achievement of intended results. Each measure is linked to a specific objective, and is designed to highlight those areas where the department is succeeding in its efforts to serve Virginia's veterans or where the department has been less than successful.

The department's performance measures are shown in Table 12. Each of the measures focuses on increasing the level of service provided to Virginia's veterans, whether by helping veterans file more claims, increasing the number of outreach activities, or providing a dignified final resting place to more eligible veterans.

The performance measures outlined below are taken from the Virginia State Government Planning and Performance System. In the coming year, this system will be replaced by a new Strategic Planning System that links strategic planning to budget development.

Table 12
DVS Performance Measures

| Number | Objective | Measure | Desired Outcome | FY 2003 | FY 2004 | FY 2005 |
|---------------|--|---|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 | Increase to 70% the approval rate of initial claims submitted to USDVA by the end of 2009 | Grant approval rate on initial claims submitted to USDVA, using FY2003 as a baseline | Increased monetary benefits to veterans and their families | 64% | 72% | 70% |
| 2 | Increase by 5% each year the number of veteran benefit claims submitted to USDVA from 2005 to 2008 | Number of veteran benefit claims submitted to USDVA, using FY2003 as a baseline | Increased monetary benefits to veterans and their families | 15,436 | 18,408 | 18,571 |
| 3 | Increase to 27% the approval rate of back-award claims submitted to USDVA by the end of 2009 | Percentage of back-award appeal claims approved, using FY2003 as a baseline | Increased monetary benefits to veterans and their families | 23% | 13.5% | 26.6% |
| 4 | Increase to 90% the number of education program approval requests reviewed and acted upon within 30 days of receipt by the end of 2009 | Percentage of program approval requests reviewed and acted upon within 30 days of receipt, using FY2001 as a baseline | Improved access to approved education and training programs | 82% | 83% | 91% |
| 5 | Increase to 25 the number of veterans education outreach programs and activities conducted annually by the end of 2009 | Number of veterans education outreach programs and activities held per year, using FY2003 as a baseline | Increased awareness of educational opportunities available to veterans and eligible family members | 17 | 14 | 19 |
| 6 | Increase the utilization rate of the Virginia's state-run veterans cemeteries to 600 burials per year by 2014 | Number of burials in Virginia's veterans cemeteries by veterans and eligible dependents, using FY2003 as a baseline | Provide a dignified final resting place for Virginia's veterans and eligible dependents | 169 | 179 | 443 |

Governor's and Other Initiatives

The Department of Veterans Services, in conjunction with Governor Mark Warner and with the advice of the members of the Board of Veterans Services, develop annually a set of initiatives designed to guide department activity. While some the initiatives are designed to be completed by a specific date (for example, the end of the fiscal year or calendar year), others reflect longer-term, multi-year, or open-ended goals. The initiatives listed below reflect the mix of shorter and longer-term initiatives. Some have come to fruition, while others remain open or have yet to be started. The status of each initiative is as of November 30, 2005.

Table 13
Governor's and Other Initiatives

| Initiative | Status |
|---|---|
| Secure federal funding for Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) for \$14,749,800 – 65% of total project costs | Closed - USDVA grant awarded August 3, 2005 |
| Secure Commonwealth of Virginia funding of \$7,942,200 for Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center – 35% of total project costs | Closed - Commonwealth funding secured on May 17, 2002. |
| Select architect for construction of Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center | Closed - Clark♦Nexsen architectural firm selected. Architectural drawings representing 35% completion submitted to USDVA on July 15, 2004 |
| Complete construction of Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center within 30 months of award of USDVA grant | Open - USDVA grant awarded August 3, 2005. Groundbreaking Ceremony held November 1, 2005. |
| Secure USDVA grant of \$984,329 for renovation of Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke - 65% of \$1,514,352 project | Closed - USDVA grant of \$1,082,767 awarded June 8, 2005. This represents 65% of the \$1,665,788 project |
| Secure Commonwealth of Virginia funding of \$530,023 for renovation of Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke - 35% of \$1,514,352 project | Closed - Commonwealth of Virginia funding secured and verified on 9/9/04. Commonwealth funding increased to \$583,026 - 35% of project costs. |
| Complete renovations of Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke within 12 months of receipt of federal funds | Open. USDVA grant awarded June 8, 2005 |
| Dedicate state veterans new cemetery in Suffolk by the end of November 2004 | Closed - Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery dedicated on November 1, 2004. First burial service |

| | |
|--|--|
| | was on December 13, 2004. In FY05, 255 burials were performed. |
| Seek additional public input and advice regarding management of state Veterans Care Centers by establishing an advisory committee and developing plan that addresses its scope, composition, function, etc. | Closed - Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee established. First meeting held on June 24, 2005 |
| Improve service delivery in underserved areas of the Commonwealth by restructuring statewide contact points served by benefit/claims agents. By the end of FY06: 1) Conduct study of current service delivery; 2) Identify underserved areas; 3) Develop new service delivery plan | Open - service delivery study underway |
| Improve service delivery in underserved areas of the Commonwealth by restructuring statewide contact points served by benefit/claims agents. In FY06, submit budget and/or legislative proposals to implement new service delivery structure beginning in FY07 | Open - contingent on development of new service delivery plan |
| Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by identifying sources of alternative funds (i.e. non-departmental funds) that might be used to develop and publish a hard copy newsletter by the end of FY06 | Open - development efforts to begin in FY06 |
| Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by developing and publishing a Department of Veterans Services electronic newsletter by December 2004 | Closed - first edition of quarterly electronic newsletter published on November 1, 2004 |
| Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by becoming a regular contributor to state VSO newsletters by the end of FY06 | Open - working with VSOs to identify submission deadlines, desired article length, subject, etc. |
| Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by establishing public service announcement process by the end of FY06 | Open - development efforts to begin in FY06 |
| Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by conducting the Department's third "Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits" by December 2004 | Closed - Supermarkets conducted in Richmond (November 2003), Abingdon (May 2004), Middletown (December 2004), South Boston (April 2005), Norton (June 2005), Wytheville (August 2005), and Warsaw (October 2005) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Work to increase USDVA burial allowance from \$300 to \$500. Submit resolution to the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) to seek Congressional support for increase in Federal FY05 | Closed - Submitted resolution to NASDVA. Resolution passed and signed in March 2004. Awaiting USDVA and Congressional action |
| Work to remove USDVA's administrative restriction on placement of service-connected veterans rated 70% or greater in state veterans homes. Submit resolution to NASDVA to seek Congressional support in Federal FY05. | Closed - Resolution submitted to NASDVA in March 2004. Resolution passed and signed |
| Secure federal funding for Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) for \$14,749,800 – 65% of total project costs | Closed - USDVA grant awarded August 3, 2005 |
| Secure Commonwealth of Virginia funding of \$7,942,200 for Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center – 35% of total project costs | Closed - Commonwealth funding secured on May 17, 2002. |
| Select architect for construction of Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center | Closed - Clark♦Nexsen architectural firm selected. Architectural drawings representing 35% completion submitted to USDVA on July 15, 2004 |
| Complete construction of Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center within 30 months of award of USDVA grant | Open - USDVA grant awarded August 3, 2005. Groundbreaking Ceremony held November 1, 2005. |

The Year Ahead

Just as in 2005, each of the Department of Veterans Services' four service delivery sections faces a unique set of challenges in 2006. With the completion of a unified Strategic Plan, all four sections are working towards common, high-level goals, with section-unique goals captured in the Service Area Plans.

The Benefit Services section has set seven major goals for FY07 and beyond, including the development of an on-going/refresher training program, the institution of a benefits awareness marketing program, increased outreach to veterans at itinerant services points, and the upgrade of the functionality of field office. All of these efforts are designed to enhance services at existing offices and to reach additional veterans through increased outreach and access.

With the opening of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, the Cemetery Services section is well placed to serve veterans in the Hampton Roads area. Open less than a year, the Horton Cemetery has already performed 439 burials, a testimony to the need of a cemetery in that part of the Commonwealth. While marketing and outreach efforts increased the burial rate at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia, that cemetery is still underutilized, and additional efforts will be launched in FY07 to improve awareness of the services offered in Amelia. Cemetery staffing levels remain a concern, especially at the Horton Cemetery. Additional funds and positions are needed to keep up with current burials, maintain the cemetery grounds to national shrine status, and market the cemetery to serve even more Hampton Roads-area veterans and their dependents.

The State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education added two part-time educations specialists in late 2005, which will allow the SAA to provide additional access to veterans education programs. SAA will also continue efforts, begun in 2005, designed to increase the number of outreach activities designed to increase the awareness of educational opportunities available to veterans and eligible family members.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center is in the midst of a \$1.5 million renovation, the first major overhaul since the facility opened in 1992. Staff turnover, particularly among the nursing staff, is major concern for department leaders, but it is believed that initiatives underway and soon to be launched will help correct this issue. Ground was broken on the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center, located adjacent to the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, on November 1, 2005. Construction is expected to be complete by mid-2007. The department will begin marketing, staffing, and operating studies in 2006, in preparation for the 2007 opening, and is committed to ensuring that all required actions are taken to guarantee continued federal and state funding.