

2026 May Veteran Voices - WA Dept of Veterans Affairs

Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs sent this bulletin at 05/11/2026 11:24 AM PDT

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Greetings from your WDVA Director: David Puente Jr.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and it reminds us that some of the toughest battles our Veterans face are the ones no one can see.

Traumatic Brain Injury doesn't always look like an injury, it often shows up in the everyday moments of frustration, anxiety, or feeling overwhelmed. These are not signs of weakness; they are signs of how the brain heals and adapts after injury. At WDVA, we want every Veteran and family member to know they're not alone. Our TBI Toolkit is designed to help you recognize these invisible challenges and connect with support that can make a real difference. Reaching out is a strength, and your WDVA is here to walk alongside you.

New Tools, New Resources — Explore the Updated TBI Toolkit



The WDVA TBI Toolkit gives Veterans and families quick, accessible information and resources to support life after a traumatic brain injury. It includes clear education on TBI, guided journaling prompts, and connections to state and national support networks.

Designed to help Veterans find the right support at the right time, the toolkit is a simple, year-round resource that strengthens the connections between recovery, community, and care. Visit the TBI Toolkit webpage: <https://www.dva.wa.gov/tbitoolkit>



WDVA News and Current Events

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Memorial Day Events & Observances - Submit your events

Memorial Day is the one day set aside for the specific purpose of honoring those that have given their lives in defense of our great nation. It is a day to remember their sacrifice and their courage to be willing to give it. We remember our loved ones. They are our friends, our family, and our fellow service members. The calendar says we set aside one special day...., but our hearts and minds know we remember them always. - **WDVA Director, David Puente Jr.**

Memorial Day, which is observed on the last Monday of May, commemorates the men and women who died while in the military service. In observance of the holiday, many people visit cemeteries and memorials, and volunteers often place American flags on each grave site at national cemeteries. A national moment of remembrance takes place at 3:00 p.m. local time.

Visit our [website](#) for an update of events and observances taking place across the state. Don't see your event listed? Submit your event to us at communications@dva.wa.gov and we'll get it uploaded.



May is Military Spouse Appreciation Month

This Military Spouse Appreciation Month, we honor the strength, resilience, and sacrifices of military spouses across Washington State and beyond.

From navigating frequent moves and career changes to supporting their families, communities, and fellow service members, military spouses are the backbone of our military community. Their dedication, leadership, and service deserve recognition not just this month, but every day.

The Washington State Military Spouse Liaison advocates for spouses of Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Service Members and Veterans.

The Washington State Military Spouse Initiative works to reduce and remove employment barriers for military spouses and connect them to the resources they and their families need to thrive in our State.

Resources:

- [Washington State Military Spouse Career Resource Directory](#)
- [Military Spouse Career & Education Resources | Military OneSource](#)
- [Provider Appreciation Day – National Association for Family Child Care](#)

Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee community conversations strike up dialogue on how to better serve Whitman County



The Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee (VAAC) & Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC) helped to provide community connections to your WDVA in Whitman County. The event consisted of three major components: a Women Veterans "She Served" Forum, a VAAC Community Conversation, and a Veterans Resource Fair.

All three focused on identifying needs, improving access to benefits, and strengthening support networks for Veterans in Whitman County.

The day opened with an in-person forum hosted by the **Washington Women Veterans Advisory Committee (WVAC)**. The purpose was to listen directly to women Veterans, understand their regional needs, and discuss how to improve equitable access to earned benefits. Participants were encouraged to share experiences, highlight barriers, and help shape future WDVA outreach and support strategies.

Hosted by the **Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee (VAAC)**, the community conversation brought together service providers, community partners, and Veterans to

discuss how organizations currently support Veterans, and where gaps remain. Some of the gaps mentioned were transportation challenges, funding and budget issues and connecting with younger generation Veterans.

The afternoon concluded with a **resource fair** featuring state and federal VA representatives, resource service providers, advocates, and community organizations. Veterans and families could meet one-on-one with providers to learn about benefits, healthcare, education, employment, and support programs.

Photos: [2026.05.06 VAAC Community Conversation & Resource Fair | Women Veteran Forum | Flickr](#)

Check out what's happening at our Veterans Homes and Transitional Housing Program

Washington Veterans Home in Port Orchard

With hands that have served and stories that run deep, the Veterans in our Memory Care unit at the Washington Veterans Home in Port Orchard recently spent time tending to their courtyard garden—planting far more than vegetables and herbs. Each seed placed in the soil carried a sense of pride, purpose, and peaceful reflection.



For many of our residents, gardening is more than an activity; it's a familiar rhythm that brings comfort and connection. As they worked the soil, shared memories surfaced—of past gardens, family traditions, and time spent outdoors throughout their lives. The courtyard filled with quiet conversation, gentle laughter, and the steady focus that comes from doing something meaningful with one's hands.

The garden itself has become a cherished space, offering calm moments, sensory engagement, and a place where our veterans can nurture something that grows under their care. Watching the plants take root and flourish mirrors the resilience and spirit our veterans carry with them every day.

This simple act of gardening continues to enrich our community, reminding us that even small moments can cultivate joy, dignity, and connection.



WVH is starting a new boxing program

A [new boxing program](#) and boxing gym is coming to Washington State Veterans Home in 2026. With support from a local boxing gym and the Rock Steady boxing program, Washington Veterans Home is launching a boxing gym designed for residents living with Parkinson's disease. The program helps improve balance, coordination, mobility, and endurance, while also supporting confidence, focus, and mental health.

[PHOTOS](#)

Walla Walla Veterans Home

The Walla Walla Veterans Home recently benefited from a meaningful Eagle Scout project led by Cooper Phillips of a Kennewick Boy Scouts troop. After visiting the campus and spending time with residents, Cooper chose the Veterans Home as the site for his project, collaborating with the Activities Department to design and assemble a new greenhouse for year-round gardening. The project fulfilled a long-held wish among residents who had hoped for a dedicated space to grow flowers and produce.



The effort came together through extensive planning, coordination with staff, and support from the resident council, which funded the greenhouse. Facilities staff prepared the site with a new paver pad, and a team of scouts and leaders arrived to complete the assembly. In partnership with a local restaurant, a shared meal was provided for veterans and the scout group, creating a warm moment of community connection.

To commemorate the occasion, Cooper also presented a handcrafted shadow box featuring the U.S. flag and emblems of all military branches—a meaningful tribute to the veterans who call Walla Walla Veterans Home their own.

Washington Soldiers Home in Orting

The Washington Soldiers Home in Orting hosted its annual fishing derby, made even more spirited by a friendly competition with the Washington Veterans Home in Retsil. Residents,



staff, and volunteers gathered at the pond for a morning of steady casting, shared encouragement, and plenty of excitement as fish were reeled in throughout the event.

One resident earned top honors by catching 11 trout, while the smallest catch measured just 2 inches and the largest an impressive 22 inches. Each fish caught was prepared on site by the kitchen team and served fresh to participating residents, adding a delicious touch to the day.

The event was supported by dedicated volunteers and the Nisqually hatchery, whose generous stocking of the pond helped make the derby a success. The gathering brought together community, camaraderie, and a healthy dose of friendly rivalry—another memorable day at the Washington Soldiers Home.

PHOTOS: [2026.04.18 Washington Soldiers Home Fishing Derby | Flickr](#)
VIDEO RECAP: <https://youtu.be/YEigjPX-EH8>

Spokane Veterans Home

The Spokane Veterans Home enjoyed a truly uplifting visit from a group of Riverside Middle School students who joined our veterans for a lively morning of bingo. The students brought treats to share and spent time sitting with our residents, chatting, laughing, and creating meaningful connections across generations.



The room was filled with energy—smiles, friendly competition, and plenty of shared stories. Moments like these remind us how powerful simple acts of kindness can be and how much joy comes from bringing our community together.

It was a wonderful experience for everyone involved, and the memories made will be cherished for a long time.



Transitional Housing Program

The Transitional Housing Program was recently represented at the Naches Trail Career Day by Program Manager Melissa Weitzel, who spent time engaging with students and sharing insights about the work being done to support Washington's veterans. Her presentation sparked lively conversations, with students especially captivated by her discussion on invasive species—earning plenty of laughs and making the day memorable for everyone involved.

Teachers and staff expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn more about how state programs, including those connected to the Governor's Office, contribute to serving communities across Washington. The visit offered meaningful interaction for both students and adults, highlighting the value of connecting young learners with public service professionals.

The event was warmly received, and the school extended its gratitude for Melissa's participation and the positive impact she made during Career Day.

WDVA Job Opportunities

APPLY HERE: [View all available career opportunities with WDVA](#)

Events & Observances Calendar

[Click here to view upcoming events](#)

May 2026

Submit an event
Submissions accepted will be added within 2 business days if your submission meets the criteria.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	10:00 THEASTON COUNTY Military Spouse Career Workshop 10:00 Veterans Tobacco and Nicotine Use -	10:00 KITSAP COUNTY Military Spouse Career Workshop	09:00 Interview Skills -	13:00 Salary Negotiations -		
17		12:00 Military Spouse Roundtable - 12:00 Military Spouse Listening Session - 13:00 LGBTQ+ Veteran Allyship Workshop 1 of 3 -	11:00 Veterans Employee Resource Group General Membership Meeting & Capital Campus Memorial Tour -	09:00 Washington Fallen Heroes Memorial -	13:00 LGBTQ+ Veteran Allyship, Workshop 3 of 3 -	
			13:00 LGBTQ+ Veteran Allyship, Workshop 2 of 3 -	10:00 Veterans Tobacco and Nicotine Use -		
24	09:00 The American Legion Memorial Day - 10:30 Olympia Thunder Run - 11:00 Memorial Day Event		09:00 USAJOBS Course of Action -	10:00 Preventing Veteran Suicide by Combating Stigma - Training -	10:00 PNW Women Veterans Connect -	07:30 PNW Women Veterans Engage & Network - 09:00 Tacoma Dome Veteran Resource Fair -



To submit an event, please email communications@dva.wa.gov

Veterans Training Support Center - Upcoming workshops

Program	Course & Link	Date	Time
Suicide Prevention	Veteran Tobacco and Nicotine Use	05/12/2026	3:00pm-4:30pm
Brain Injury & Recovery	Mindfulness Tools for Veterans & Families: Bridging the Gaps	05/14/2026	11:00am-12:00pm
Counseling	Chronic Pain, Trauma, and Recovery	05/15/2026	9:00am-4:00pm
Counseling	Prolonged Exposure Therapy for Veterans with PTSD	05/15/2026	9:00am-4:00pm
LGBTQ+ Veterans	LGBTQ+ Veteran Allyship, Workshop 1	05/19/2026	1:00pm-3:00pm
LGBTQ+ Veterans	LGBTQ+ Veteran Allyship, Workshop 2	05/20/2026	1:00pm-3:00pm
Suicide Prevention	PAUSE Lethal Means Safety	05/20/2026	1:00pm-2:30pm
Suicide Prevention	Veteran Tobacco and Nicotine Use	05/21/2026	10:00am-11:30am
LGBTQ+ Veterans	LGBTQ+ Veteran Allyship, Workshop 3	05/22/2026	1:00pm-3:00pm
Counseling	Introduction to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	05/22/2026	9:00am-4:00pm
Suicide Prevention	Combating Stigma	05/28/2026	10:00am-11:30am
Counseling	Nightmare Therapy	05/29/2026	10:30am-5:00pm

WDVA Program Videos



Check out the following Program Videos:

[WVH Foster Dog Program](#)

[Washington Department of Veterans Affairs Overview Video - Accessing Benefits and Veteran Programs](#)

Program Spotlight

Testimonial from Veterans Conservation Corps Intern

In the video story below, viewers hear from former Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) intern Niguel, who completed his internship with the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group in Belfair at the end of last November. The experience strengthened his commitment to pursuing a career in conservation and led him to apply for a master's program in Environmental Studies at Evergreen State College.

VCC also connected him with a former intern who completed the same program and another who is currently enrolled, helping build a supportive network as he begins his academic journey. Niguel's internship also demonstrates the cross-organizational collaboration that VCC makes possible. His position was funded by NOAA, a federal marine conservation and research agency, while the on-the-ground internship was hosted by a rural nonprofit in Mason County dedicated to supporting the local river ecosystem and salmon populations.

This partnership reflects coordination across federal, state, and local levels, with WDVA helping channel federal resources into a rural community.

[Click on the image below to hear more about Niguel's journey in the VCC.](#)



Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) Internship Spotlight - Niguel Quiroz - Salmon Enhancement Group

Veteran Conservation Corps Current Internship Openings

The [Veterans Conservation Corps \(VCC\)](#) program offers Washington State Veterans a powerful opportunity to heal, grow, and give back through hands-on environmental work. Whether you're looking for a new way to serve your community, want to develop skills in conservation or agriculture, or just want to connect with nature, VCC provides meaningful connection and pathways to purpose and well-being.



Current Internship Openings

- Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB) (Olympia)
 - [Garden Project Lead Builder Internship](#)
- Grays Harbor Conservation District (Elma)
 - [Prairie Habitat Restoration Internship](#)
- Lewis Conservation District (Chehalis)
 - [Prairie Habitat Restoration Internship](#)
- Thurston Conservation District (Tumwater)
 - [Prairie Habitat Restoration Internship](#)
- Tulalip Tribes Natural Resources Department (Snohomish County)
 - [Field Projects Program Internship](#)

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