



Press Release

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Story honored as Veteran Service Officer of the Year

JONESBOROUGH – Not quite six years ago, Jerry Story came out of retirement to assist fellow veterans in obtaining benefits. Today, Story was honored as the Veterans Service Officer of the Year-East Region for his excellence in assisting veterans in our region.

The East Region encompasses 34 counties with 43 VSOs according to Tim Forte, Regional Director-East with the State's Department of Veterans Services. Forte was on hand Thursday to present the award to Story.

VSOs are trained and accredited to provide assistance to veterans, their dependents, and survivors. In addition to making sure veterans who are eligible have access to healthcare and disability benefits, he can assist in getting lost medals replaced; tracking down military records; housing and transportation; and ultimately burial and survivor benefits.

As a Vietnam-era Air Force veteran, Story knew the difficulties he and other veterans had understanding and accessing benefits. He sees it as his purpose to make sure his fellow veterans receive the services and benefits to which they are entitled.

"The biggest thing is making sure they have healthcare," Story said. "That's the first thing I ask them is are you getting healthcare. We have one of the top 10 VA hospitals in the system with Mountain Home, and they need to utilize it."

The second thing Story works on is discovering if the veteran has a service connected disability for which they should receive care and, in some cases, compensation.

"For instance, if they fell off the back of a truck and broke their ankle while in the service and now that ankle is giving them trouble, we need to follow up on that," he said. "That's a documented service injury and is covered."

One new service Story is able to offer veterans is to facilitate virtual hearings with a Veterans Law Judge of the Board of Veterans' Appeals. By the end of the year, video conferencing capabilities will be available in Story's office.

“Previously the veteran had to travel to Nashville or our VA hospital campus in Johnson City for hearings, which were conducted virtually from that location,” Story explained. “Now we eliminate the need to travel. They can come to Jonesborough, and I can be with them if they need me.”

Hearings most often center around service-related disabilities. Veterans who are determined by VA to be disabled by an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service are eligible for compensation and treatment.

The most common disabilities connected to service are tinnitus, hearing loss and post-traumatic stress disorder. Benefits for service connected disabilities also include those exposed to Agent Orange. The VA identified 14 presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides. Ranging from Type 2 Diabetes and heart disease to Multiple Myeloma and Parkinson’s Disease, the conditions qualify for treatment and disability income for eligible veterans.

“Mountain Home takes care of people from all over the United States because it is a very good hospital, one of the top 10 in the country,” he said. “They’re coming here for care from Washington state, Illinois, Maine, Connecticut, Rhode Island and pretty much all the states around us. But they’re not just coming here and leaving. They’re moving here and retiring here.”

Since its creation as a county department, our VSO has helped thousands of veterans and their families navigate VA benefits. 92 out of 95 counties in Tennessee having a Veterans Service Office.

Veterans needing assistance can schedule an appointment to meet with Story by calling (423) 753-1628. His office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.