



Press Release

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For more information, please contact:
Susan Saylor | Communications Director
ssaylor@washingtoncountyttn.org
(423) 753-1620

Veteran Service Office helps veterans secure benefits

JONESBOROUGH – Navigating the forms associated with securing benefits for honorably discharged veterans and their spouses is a daunting task, unless you’ve met Jerry Story.

Story joined Washington County nearly five years ago as its first Veteran Service Officer (VSO). At that time, he worked out of a small office in the Historic Courthouse in Jonesborough. Once Story’s reputation for assisting grew, he needed a bigger office.

“I average between 12 and 15 people a day,” Story said. “Since I started working as the VSO, I’ve had more than 8,000 calls, emails and other forms of contact with local veterans.”

This steady stream of veterans needing assistance navigating their benefits led to the relocation. The VSO office is now in space once occupied by the District Attorney on the first floor of the George Jaynes Justice Center. 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.”

Disability compensation is paid to veterans who are determined by VA to be disabled by an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service. 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."

Nearly 15 people a day visit Story's office to seeking assistance in navigating their VA benefits. Story's office is quite common across the state, with 90 out of 95 counties in Tennessee having a Veterans Service Office to assist veterans and their families by answering questions, advising, and educating them as to benefits available from federal, state, county, and local resources. Filling out the proper forms is a large part of applying for services and benefits. Story can help fill out necessary claim forms and serve as an advocate during and after the process.

VSO's are trained and accredited by the VA or other recognized organizations 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.

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.