

## Solano Veterans Scene – November 2011

### County launches monthly column on veteran topics

This article is the first in what will be a monthly update on the services offered to veterans and their families. This is probably our first introduction, so let me give you some background.

I am the new director of the Solano County Veteran Services Office, which is located on the fourth floor of the County Administration Center in downtown Fairfield. I came to this post after serving as a deputy secretary for the California Department of Veteran Affairs in Sacramento and a tour as the county veteran service officer in Yolo County.

The office is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday to provide complete and comprehensive benefit evaluations and claim filing assistance. Our staff includes veteran representatives Bill Alcares and Dennis Murphy and our administrative assistant Louise Mueller.

It's a small staff but we work very hard to achieve our goal of connecting Solano County veterans and their families to the benefits they have earned by serving our country. There are four major areas of benefits for veterans and over the coming months I will cover them in detail as well as pass on new information regarding changes in the complicated world of the Veterans Administration – known simply as the VA.

Today I will discuss briefly the eligibility requirements for and how to access VA health benefits.

**Basic eligibility:** You must have served in the active military, naval or air service and you must have been discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable to qualify for VA health care benefits. Reservists and National Guard members may also qualify for VA health care benefits if they were called to active duty (other than for training) by a Federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty.

**Minimum duty requirements:** Veterans who enlisted after September 7, 1980, or who entered active duty after October 16, 1981, must have served 24 continuous months or the full period for which they were called to active duty in order to be eligible. This minimum duty requirement may not apply to veterans who were discharged for hardship, early out or a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty.

**Income limits:** Your current income matters. Unless you have a service-connected disability, the Veterans Administration has maximum income limits to access the health benefit.

**Signing up:** To sign up for the VA health benefit, all you need to do is bring your DD-214 (discharge form) and we will help you fill out the very simple paperwork. You may also go to the Mare Island VA and go to the eligibility window for help.

Next month we will discuss one of the most common disabilities that veterans sustain due to military service, hearing loss and tinnitus.

*Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or [TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com](mailto:TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com). The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.*