



ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2023

July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Sacrifice.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Find us online
veterans.nebraska.gov



@NEVetsAffairs



Table of Contents

Director's Message.....	3
Fiscal Year 2023 at a Glance.....	4
Agency Overview	
Mission & Vision.....	7
Statutory Authority.....	8
Appropriations Data.....	9
Central Office.....	10
State Service Office.....	11
State Veterans' Homes.....	14
Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Alliance.....	17
Programs	
Nebraska Veterans Aid.....	19
Waiver of Tuition & Reservist Tuition Credit.....	22
Vets Get Pets.....	23
Welcome Home.....	25
Special Events & Outreach.....	26

Director's Message

Thank you for taking a moment to read the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023. Our agency has continued to grow and take on more—and bigger—projects as we strive to serve more Nebraskans, and this fiscal year has been no different.

Over the course of FY 2023, we continued work on the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home expansion and moved closer to establishing our second state veterans cemetery in Grand Island. We hosted our largest veterans Welcome Home Picnic, held our first women veterans symposium, and helped commemorate the centennial of the Nebraska State Capitol on Veterans Day. We helped facilitate our 50th rescue pet adoption through the Vets Get Pets program and continue to look for more unique benefits and services we can offer to our state's veterans and their families.



This annual report highlights all these programs and more. It provides a snapshot of the agency and the services we provide along with a variety of metrics and data points to show how we're doing. It also includes historical data to give further context on where we've come from and how we've grown, which is something we're very proud of.

Year after year, we've connected with more of Nebraska's veterans and their family members. We've helped secure more benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for them. We've launched new state programs to deliver additional services and expanded existing programs to deliver more benefits. And we plan to continue growing the ways we serve Nebraska's heroes.

Thank you again for taking the time to read through our annual report. We're very proud of the work we do serving Nebraska's veterans and have tried to highlight that here. If you have questions, please reach out to our offices, and if you're a veteran, I highly encourage you to stop by and see what benefits and services are available to you and your family.

Thank you,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hilgert".

John Hilgert
Director

FY 2023 At a Glance



Leadership from the Missouri Veterans Commission visited the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home to learn best practices from the NDVA leadership team.

Nebraska Veterans Aid
funds distributed
\$976,456

Ratings received for
veterans with NDVA-
represented powers
of attorney
338,490



Governor Pillen hosted his first Veterans Roundtable and met with past and present Veteran Service Organization leaders in April.



A group of Gulf War veterans joined Secretary of State Evnen to meet with the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the United States, who wanted to thank them for their service.



World War II veteran Lawrence Veed received his high school diploma through our Operation Recognition program on Veterans Day 2022. Photo courtesy of NTV News.

\$475,626
total amount paid to
veterans and families
through claims clinics



Denise Rohan, the first woman to be elected National Commander of the American Legion, was the keynote speaker at our first annual Nebraska Women Veterans Symposium.



NDVA received VA's Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence award for the virtual claims clinic initiative and was presented the trophy by VA Secretary Denis McDonough [right].

Retroactive benefits paid
to Nebraska veterans and
family members through
virtual claims clinics

\$276,412

Agency Overview

MISSION

Our mission is to honor Nebraska veterans and their families by providing excellent service, assistance, and care through:

- ★ **Veterans Services** to help veterans identify and access federal and state benefits including disability compensation, pension and healthcare available through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as the Nebraska Veterans Aid fund, tuition waivers and other state services;
- ★ **Nebraska State Veterans' Homes** to ensure eligible veterans and family receive the highest quality assisted living and skilled nursing care at one of four nursing homes across Nebraska; and
- ★ **Nebraska Veterans Cemeteries** to ensure eligible veterans and family receive an honorable final resting place maintained to the highest national standards.



VISION

As the state's chief advocate for veterans, the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs will serve as a trusted and reliable resource for Nebraska veterans and their families. NDVA will enhance operational efficiency by promoting consistent program delivery and fostering a culture of excellence, dignity, and respect.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

NDVA was created by LB 187 and LB 240 of the 1947 Session of the Legislature. Of note, Nebraska State Veterans' Homes trace their roots to 1887. LB 340 of the 2017 Session of the Legislature merged the former Department of Health and Human Services Division of Veterans' Homes into the Department of Veterans' Affairs, effective July 1, 2017.

Neb. Rev. Stat. 80-314 to 80-322 and 80-325 to 80-337 guide the Nebraska State Veterans' Homes. Neb. Rev. Stat. 80-401 to 80-415 and 80-901 to 80-903 outline the roles and responsibilities of the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs and provide for state veterans benefits and services. Neb. Rev. Stat. 12-1301 established the Nebraska Veteran Cemetery System.

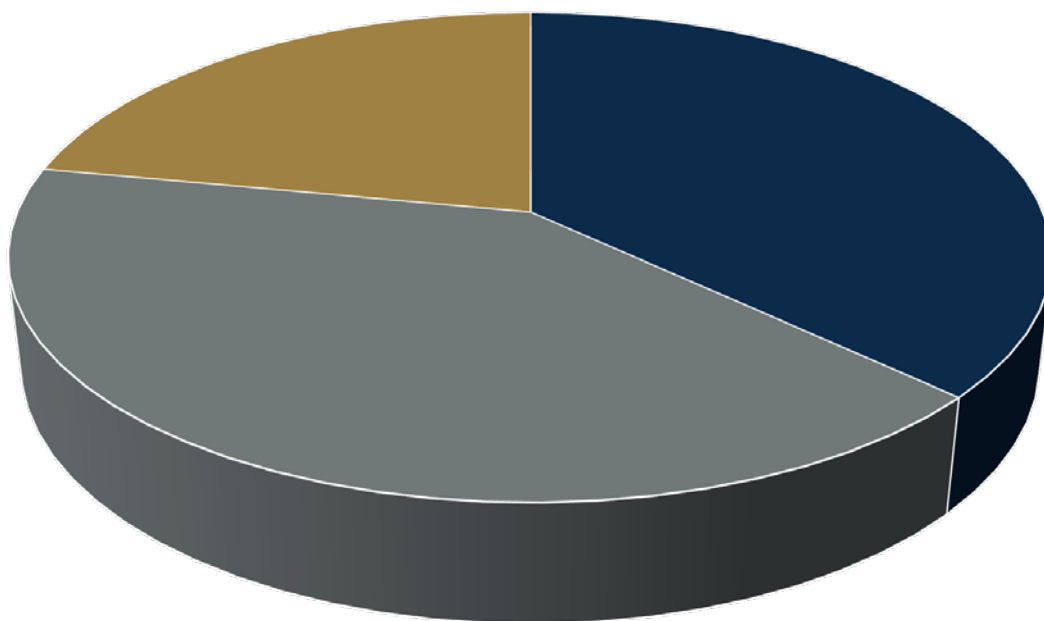


APPROPRIATIONS

NDVA's operating budget is a mix of state general funds, state cash funds, and federal funds from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). These funds support agency programs such as the four state veterans' homes, our State Service Office and their outreach activities, the Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Alliance (and soon the cemetery at Grand Island), and support staff such as human resources, finance, legal, and others.

Appropriation Breakdown

General Funds	\$41,601,098
Cash Funds	\$48,813,484
Federal Funds	\$30,057,227
<hr/>	
Program Total	\$120,471,809



INSIDE THE AGENCY

CENTRAL OFFICE LINCOLN

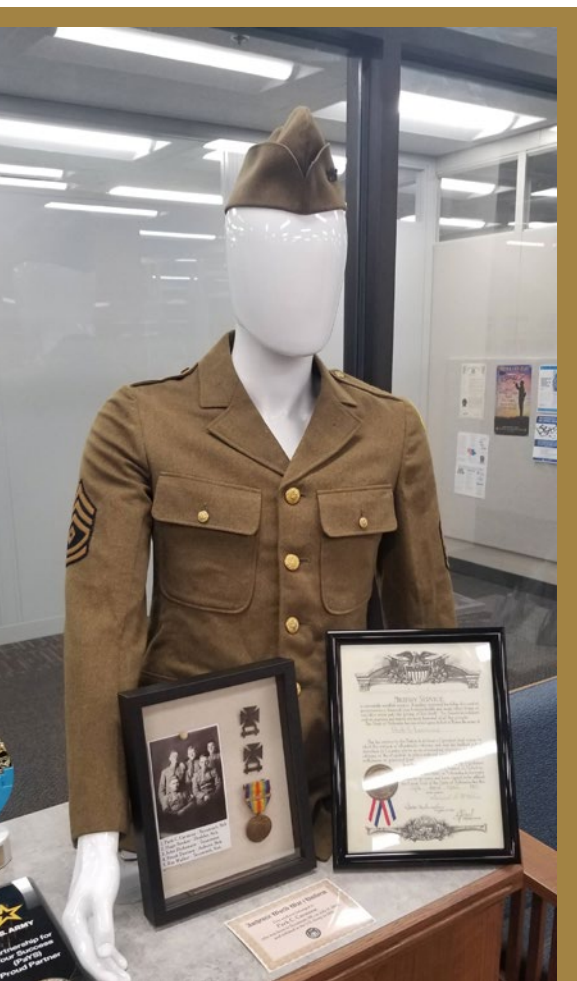
The Central Office houses our agency's leadership and administrative teams including legal, accounting, human resources, communications, IT, and clinical support.

Walk-ins are welcome to get help with benefits and services, get copies of DD-214s, and more. Our front desk team handles a number of programs including the Veteran Registry, Vets Get Pets, Waiver of Tuition, Reservist Tuition Credit, DD-214 filing and lookup, and filing grave registration cards.



**301 Centennial Mall South, 4th Floor
Lincoln, NE 68509-5083
(402) 471-2458
ndva@nebraska.gov**

**Office Hours 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Monday through Friday**



FY 2023 Discharge Documents

Discharge Documents Received and Filed.....1,694
Total Discharge Documents on File.....748,944
Requests for Discharge Documents.....1,578

FY 2023 Veterans Registry

Applications Received and Filed.....5,068
Total Veterans in the Registry.....169,754

FY 2023 Grave Registration Cards

Grave Registrations Received.....5,068
Total Grave Registrations on File.....97,520

This authentic World War I Army uniform was donated by the family of Park C. Carmine, born in Tecumseh, Nebraska, on July 31, 1896, and is now on display in our welcome area.

STATE SERVICE OFFICE

LINCOLN

The State Service Office is dedicated to helping veterans and their family members apply for eligible benefits. Services include interviewing military veterans, their spouses, and dependents to establish tentative eligibility for veterans’ benefits provided by federal and state laws; advising applicants with claims before the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and assisting them in the accurate completion of application forms and transmitting them to the proper federal or state agency for processing. They also assist and manage both initial appeals and appeals to the Board of Veterans Affairs. From state to federal to other benefits, the State Service Office is here to serve those who have served our Nation.

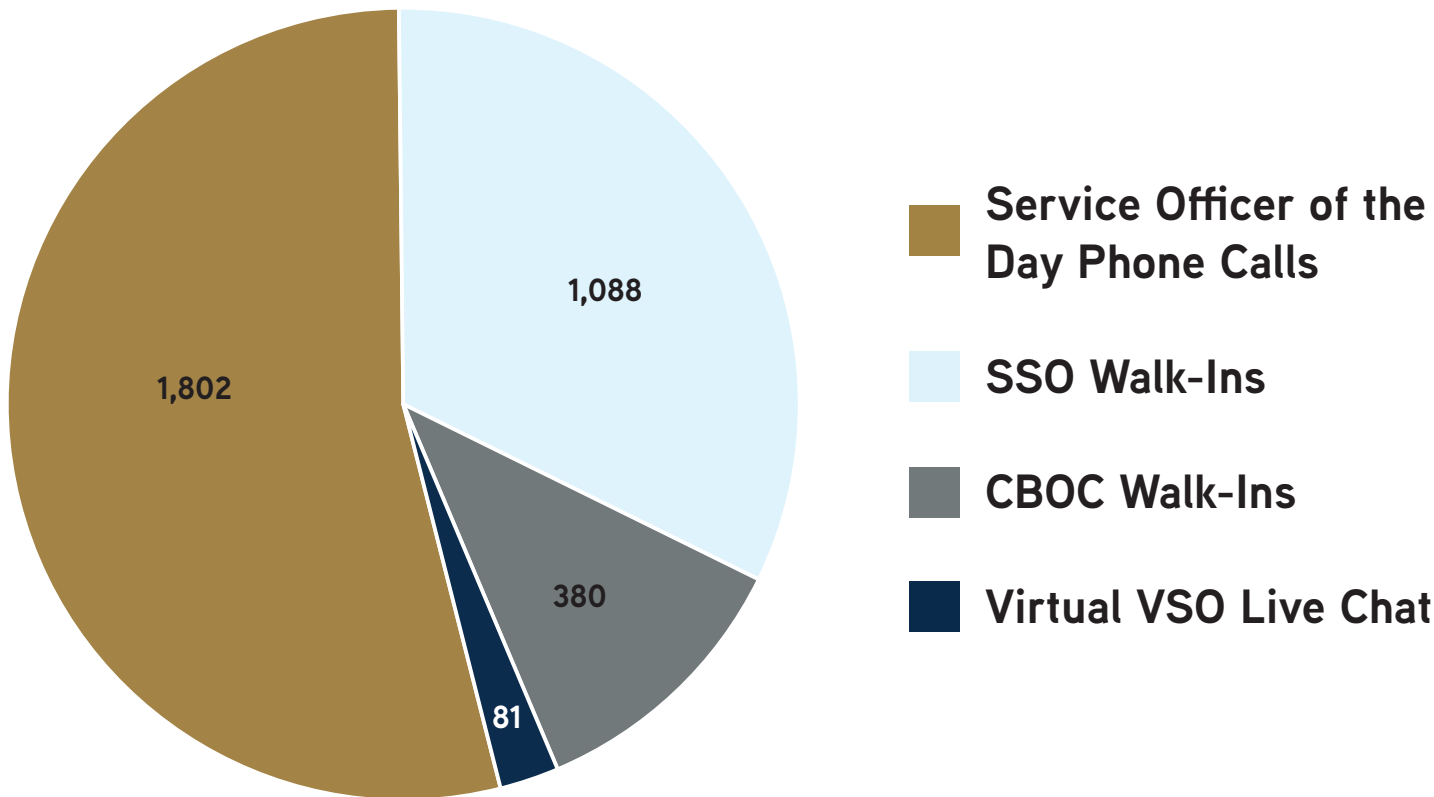
During FY 2023, the SSO had 3,351 unscheduled interactions with veterans. These were through phone calls, walk-ins, or messages through our website’s live chat feature, called the “Virtual Veteran Service Officer”. Data on these veteran-initiated contacts is below. A “Service Officer of the Day” is assigned each day to handle all walk-ins and phone calls while other service officers handle pre-scheduled appointments.



**3800 Village Drive
Lincoln, NE 68516-4737
(402) 420-4021
ndva.sso@nebraska.gov**

**Office Hours 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday through Friday**

Unscheduled, Veteran-Initiated Contacts



STATEWIDE OUTREACH TO CONNECT WITH VETERANS ACROSS NEBRASKA

The SSO outreach team travels the state to attend various events and meet with veterans throughout the year. They stop at the Nebraska State Fair, veteran service organization conferences and post meetings, hunting expos, Buddy Checks, career fairs, and other events likely to have veterans in attendance. Not only do they share information about NDVA and VA benefits and services, but they are able to assist in filing and reviewing veterans' claims on the spot. **In FY 2023, the outreach team attended 102 events around the state, both in person and virtually.**



Our State Service Office outreach vehicle helps promote the agency when our outreach team is traveling around the state. Photo from the Lincoln Veterans Parade in 2022 by Randy Kassebaum of OneSource Marketing.

Service Officers Take Aim at Claims

The SSO hosted several in-person claims clinics throughout the state in partnership with county veterans service officers (CVSOs) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). Over the course of these clinics, 432 claims were submitted and reviewed, **resulting in \$199,213.20 in retroactive benefits paid to Nebraska veterans or family members.**

The SSO also collaborated with CVSOs and VBA to conduct a virtual claims clinic in January 2023. The objective of a virtual claims clinic is to review claims that have been sitting in the Veterans Benefits Management System longer than 125 days and solve whatever issues are holding up the claims. CVSOs are also encouraged to review claims they've submitted that are still pending. The three groups then work together to move these claims forward in the process. During the FY 2023 virtual claims clinic, 172 claims were submitted and reviewed, including 52 PACT claims. Of these, 73 claims were closed and 15 were cleared, **resulting in \$276,412.85 in retroactive benefits paid to Nebraska veterans or family members.**

We're looking forward to more in-person and virtual claims clinics as we work to connect with more veterans and families throughout the state and help them secure the benefits and resources they've earned in the service of our Nation.



After receiving the Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence award for our virtual claims clinic initiative, NDVA presented an overview of the program at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Annual Training Conference so other states and territories can implement a similar program to better serve their veterans.

FY 2023 CLAIMS, RATINGS, AND COMPENSATION

In FY 2023, almost 1.5 million claims were submitted by NDVA for Nebraska veterans and their families. Over the course of the fiscal year, nearly 340,000 ratings and over 1.1 million non-ratings were received. Ratings include claims submitted to the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) that require a rater decision (e.g. disability compensation, pension, etc.) while non-ratings are claims submitted to VBA resulting in status changes (apportionment, drill pay, dependency, etc.).

Claims paid in FY 2023 resulted in almost \$1.1 billion in benefits dispersed to Nebraska veterans and their family members.



The entrance to the NDVA State Service Office, located inside the Lincoln VA Regional Office, where walk-ins are always accepted!

The average service-connected veteran residing in Nebraska receives \$1,500 per month, tax free, from the federal government. That money helps support them and their family and gets spent in our Nebraska communities. In addition, these funds have a multiplier effect as they are spent at Nebraska businesses, including retail stores, restaurants, rent, health services, insurance, entertainment, and recreation, who in turn spend a portion of them within the community and state. The Nebraska Commission on Military and Veterans Affairs' *Economic Impact of Nebraska Military Assets* report showed that multiplier was 1.80 for FY 2023.

Nebraska currently ranks #1 in the percentage of veterans receiving service-connected benefits, per capita, and NDVA's goal is connect with more veterans to connect them with the benefits they've earned and continue to help grow Nebraska.

Claims Filed*	1,455,516
Ratings Received	338,490
Non-Ratings Received	1,116,919
Benefits Paid	\$1,088,631,505

**for those represented by NDVA-accredited POAs.*
Data provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

STATE VETERANS' HOMES

NDVA operates four state veterans' homes across Nebraska that offer nursing and assisted living care for veterans and eligible family members such as spouses, surviving spouses, and Gold Star parents. Our homes offer a variety of physical, occupational, speech, and restorative nursing therapy services as well as many recreational activities and religious services.

Admission applications are reviewed quarterly by the Veterans' Homes Board, which is composed of two members selected by each of the recognized veterans service organizations in Nebraska and the director of NDVA who serves as the permanent board secretary.

FY 2023 Home Application Data

Applications Received.....	393
Carried Forward from Previous Year.....	6
Total Processed.....	357
Approved.....	378
Denied.....	8
Cancelled by Applicant.....	12
Applications to Carry Forward to Next Year.....	11
Applicants on Waiting List as of June 30, 2023.....	277
Total Admissions during FY 2023.....	147

CENTRAL NEBRASKA VETERANS' HOME, KEARNEY



CNVH is a skilled nursing facility that's licensed for 225 beds. At 330,000 square feet, it's comprised of

six neighborhoods, each with three homes, serving 12-15 members each. Every home has its own kitchen, dining area, living room, den with rotating library selection, private dining room, spa room, and patio with gazebo. The state-of-the-art facility boasts a wealth of recreation and activity areas including a wood shop, salon, canteen, and multiple kilns.

FY 2023 Expenses:
\$26,466,503



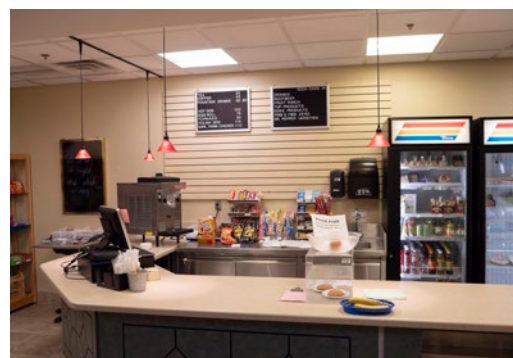
EASTERN NEBRASKA VETERANS' HOME, BELLEVUE



ENVH has 120 licensed beds grouped in four wings: two 30-bed skilled nursing care wings, 30

assisted living beds, and 30 beds for skilled dementia care. Specialized services such as physical therapy, plus a wide range of recreational and religious services are offered to the residents. The campus features several walking paths and a gazebo, plus 15 acres of gardens, including rain gardens, a Purple Heart garden, and member gardens.

FY 2023 Expenses:
\$16,025,721



Home Highlight

In July 2022, the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home celebrated its 15th anniversary (*top right*). A lot has changed in the time since the facility opened, and in early 2022 a groundbreaking was held (*bottom right*) to kick off construction of an expansion that will create rooms for 30 new skilled nursing beds, replace 30 semi-private assisted living beds with 24 private assisted living beds at the facility, and provide space to expand services to include an adult day health care program, a new level of service not currently offered by NDVA.



NORFOLK VETERANS' HOME



NVH is licensed for 159 beds and features six separate living units, each

designed to meet the specific needs of the members who reside there. Indoor amenities include a chapel, barber/beauty shop, library, and more. Outdoor areas include "Heroes Park", an eight acre venue featuring a large covered pavilion, walking paths, memorial benches, playground, basketball court and beautifully landscaped grounds, and a "Memorial Flag Plaza" with an honorary memorial wall.

FY 2023 Expenses:
\$17,603,221



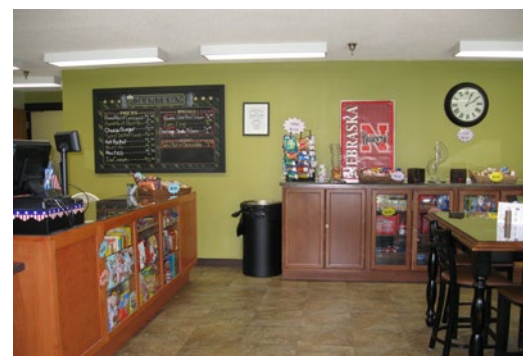
Learn more about our facilities and even take virtual tours at veterans.nebraska.gov/homes

WESTERN NEBRASKA VETERANS' HOME, SCOTTSBLUFF



WNVH is located on 32 acres at the northern edge of Scottsbluff with over 93,000 square feet of private and communal space for up to 109 members. Outdoors, members can enjoy the horseshoe pit, putting green, and a well-stocked fishing pond surrounded by a lighted concrete walkway. Indoors, the options for socializing include a state-of-the-art exercise room, a canteen loaded with snacks and beverages, spacious craft rooms, and the ever-popular billiards room.

FY 2023 Expenses:
\$11,937,010



NEBRASKA VETERANS CEMETERY AT ALLIANCE



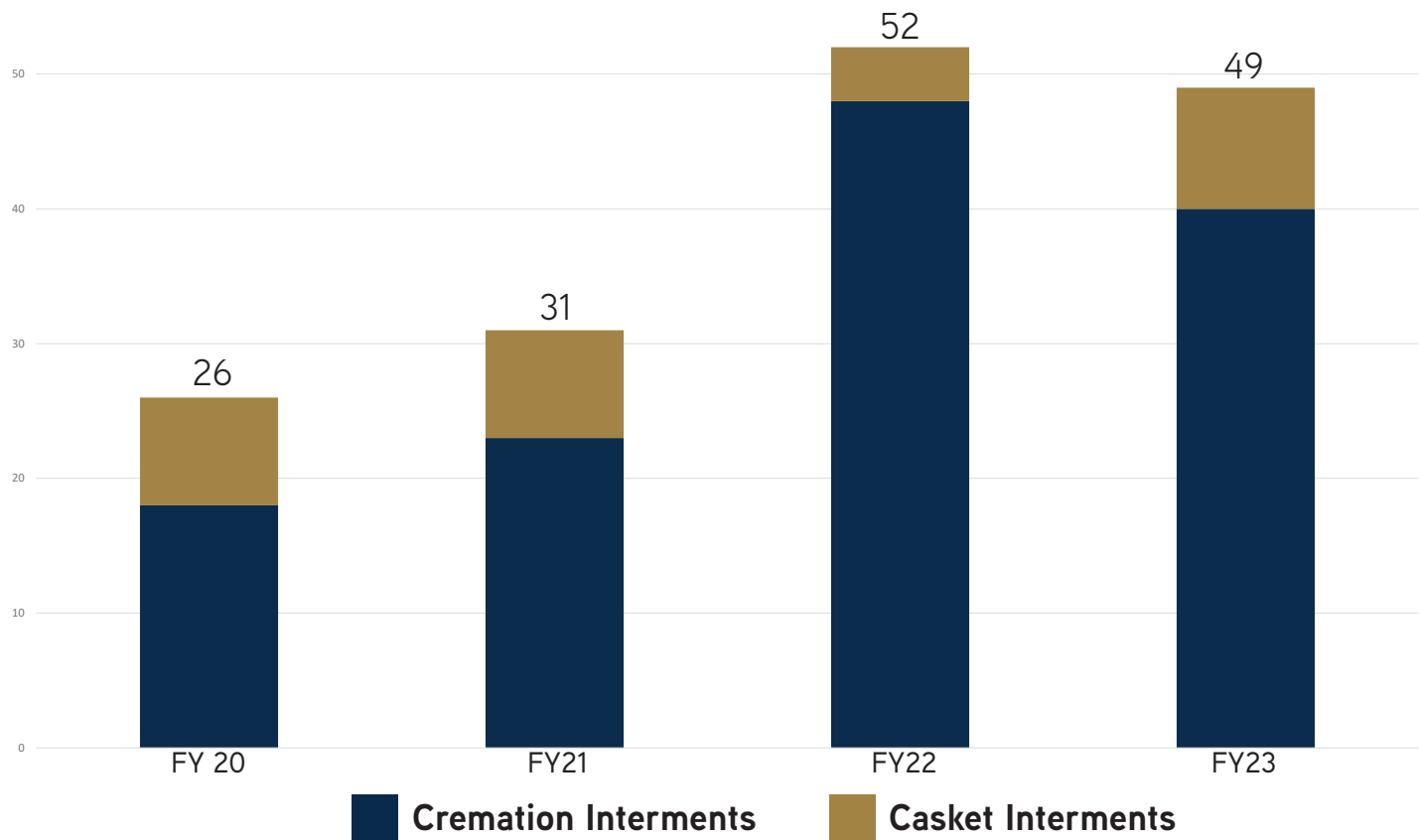
The Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Alliance (NVCA) was dedicated August 13, 2010, with the first interment held on January 21, 2011. In FY 2023, 36 veterans and 13 dependents were interred at NVCA.

The 20-acre shrine gives Nebraska veterans a final resting place that is fitting of the honor they are owed. Burial fields are available for casket or cremation remains for veterans and their eligible dependents. Memorial Services are offered, with full military funeral honors, for all veterans. More information on the cemetery, eligibility, and services offered is available at veterans.nebraska.gov/nvca.



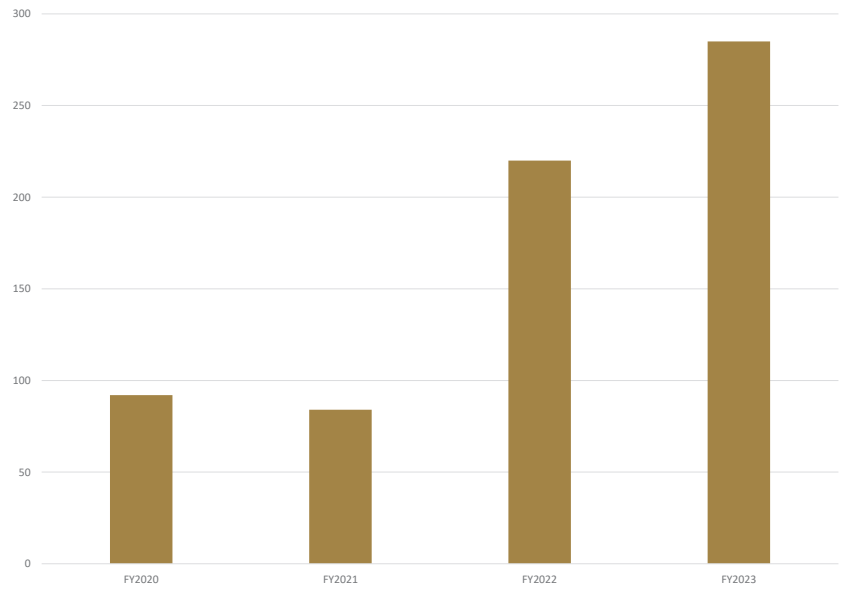
As of June 30, 2023, there have been 482 interments at NVCA and 386 families who have completed pre-interment planning.

Interments



Attendance Captured with Cemetery Visitor Log

According to sign-ins on the visitor log in NVCA's lobby, there were 285 visitors in FY 2023 and 38% of those visitors came from out of state. Please note, NVCA has visitors daily who do not sign into the visitor log.



COMING SOON!

Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Grand Island

Progress has started on our second state cemetery, the Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Grand Island, which is conveniently located halfway between Fort McPherson National Cemetery at Maxwell and Omaha National Cemetery at Springfield. A groundbreaking ceremony was held Nov. 10, 2023, and we look forward to dedicating and opening the cemetery in spring of 2025 so we can continue to serve Nebraska's veterans and their families with another option for dignified military burials.



Administration building rendering



Committal shelter rendering

Programs

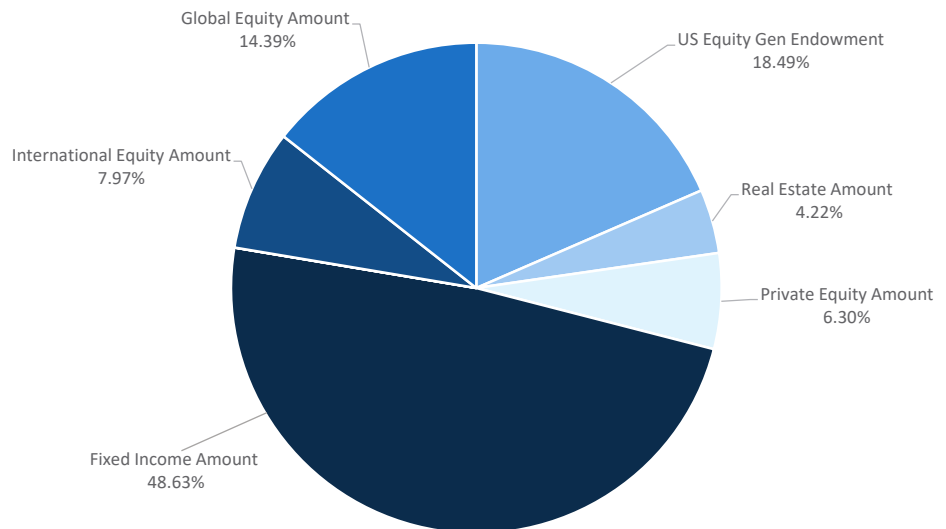
NEBRASKA VETERANS AID

Nebraska Veterans Aid can help veterans and their spouses or dependents with temporary financial relief in the event of a variety of emergencies. It can be used for food, fuel, shelter, transportation, daycare, funeral expenses, medical needs, and surgical items. **Nearly \$60 million has been distributed to eligible Nebraskans since the fund was created in 1921.**

Per state statute, applications must be made through a County Veterans Service Officer or Post Service Officer of any recognized veterans service organization and submitted to the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The principal investment for NVA is held by the Nebraska Investment Council and currently totals over \$52 million. The chart to the right shows how these funds are invested. Distributions to veterans come from interest earned from these investments, and in FY 2023 accumulated earnings and receipted funds available for distribution to eligible applicants totaled just over \$2.2 million.

Learn more about the program at veterans.nebraska.gov/nva.

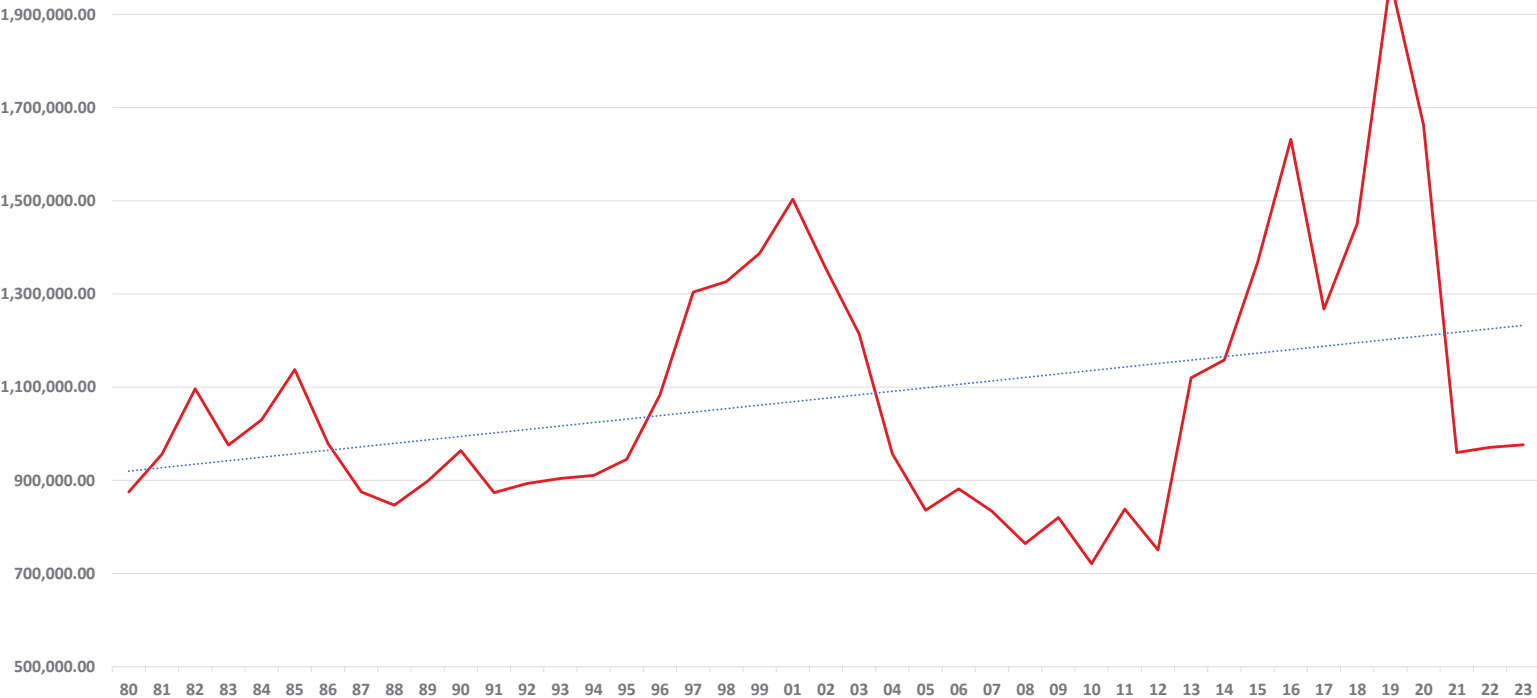


FY 2023 NVA Application Data

Applications Carried Forward from Previous Year.....	20
Applications Received in FY 2023.....	475
Total Applications and Reconsiderations.....	495
Applications Approved for Assistance.....	354
Applications Denied.....	91
Applications Cancelled by Applicant.....	13
Reconsiderations Reversed (Approved).....	4
Reconsiderations Upheld (Denied).....	4
Pre-authorized Applications to Carry Forward to Next Year.....	29

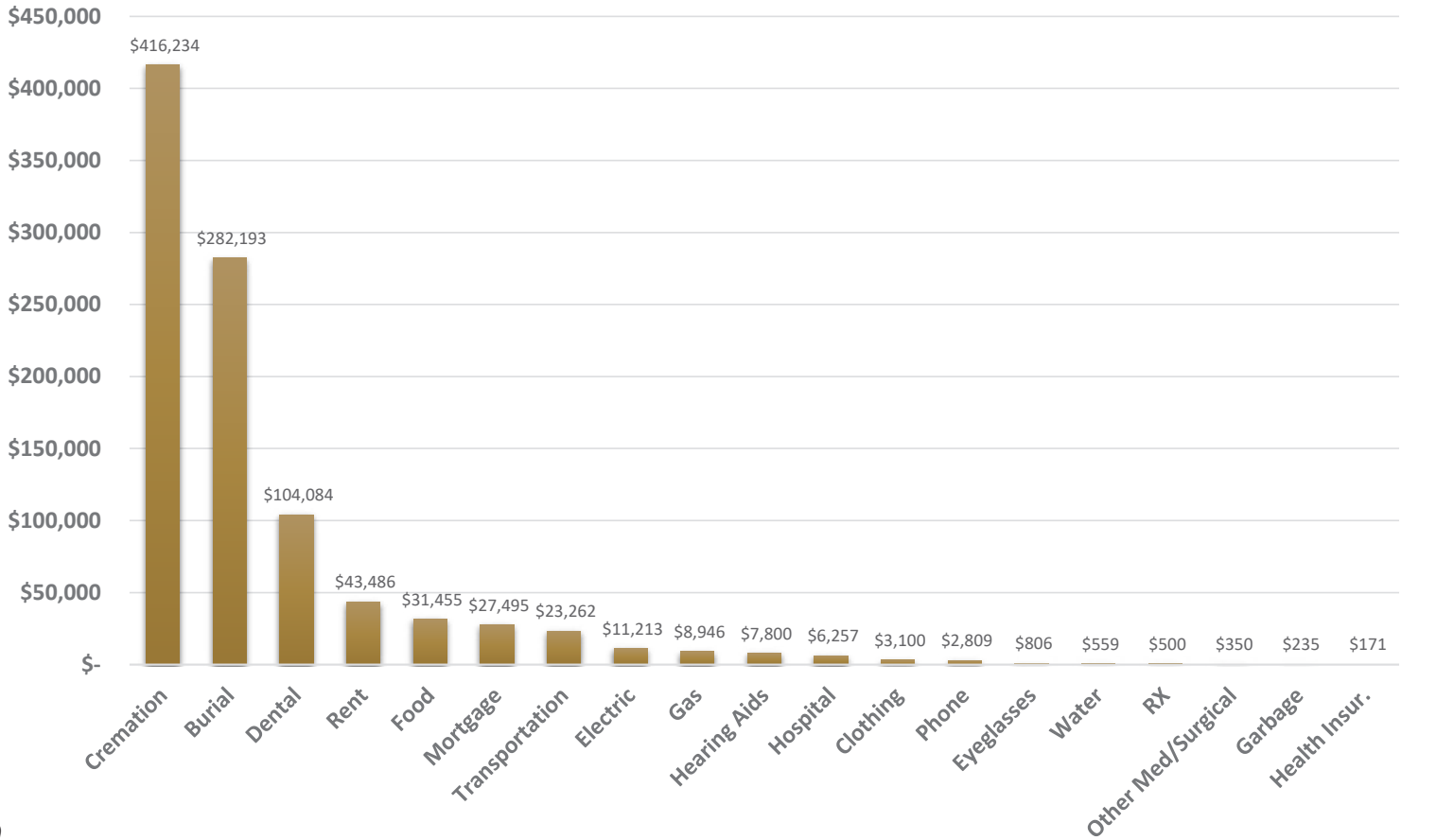
NVA Disbursements by Year

Below is NVA spending over the past several decades. Annual expenditures range from around \$750,000 to nearly \$2 million per fiscal year. The peak in FY 2019 was partly due to additional funding being available to veterans impacted by Nebraska’s historic flooding.



FY 2023 NVA Disbursements by Category

NVA funds can be used for a variety of expenses from rent and utilities to medical bills to burial expenses. Below you can see what types of expenses NVA funds were used to cover throughout FY 2023.



This chart shows the amount of NVA funds received by veterans in each county for FY 2023. Applications for these funds must be completed by the CVSO or a veteran service organization post officer in the county nearest the applicant's place of residence.



This chart has been adjusted to show NVA funds distributed to each county based on the veteran population of the county to more accurately reflect the impact of the funds per capita.



WAIVER OF TUITION

The Waiver of Tuition is a state program available to dependents of an eligible veteran that may be used to waive 100% of a student's tuition charges and tuition-related fees to the University of Nebraska campuses, Nebraska state colleges, and Nebraska community colleges.

Waiver of Tuition can be used to receive one degree, diploma, or certificate from a community college **and** one baccalaureate degree from the university or a state college. If the student wishes to take full advantage of the Waiver program, the degree, diploma, or certificate must be earned before the baccalaureate degree. Once a baccalaureate degree has been earned, the student is no longer eligible to receive Waiver; there are no extensions or exceptions to this rule.

Information on the program is available at veterans.nebraska.gov/waiver.



FY 2023 Waiver Application Data

Applications Received.....	499
Carried Forward from Last Year.....	21
Total Applications.....	520
Total Processed.....	487
Approved.....	455
Denied.....	10
Cancelled by Applicant.....	22
Carried Forward to Next Year.....	33

RESERVIST TUITION CREDIT

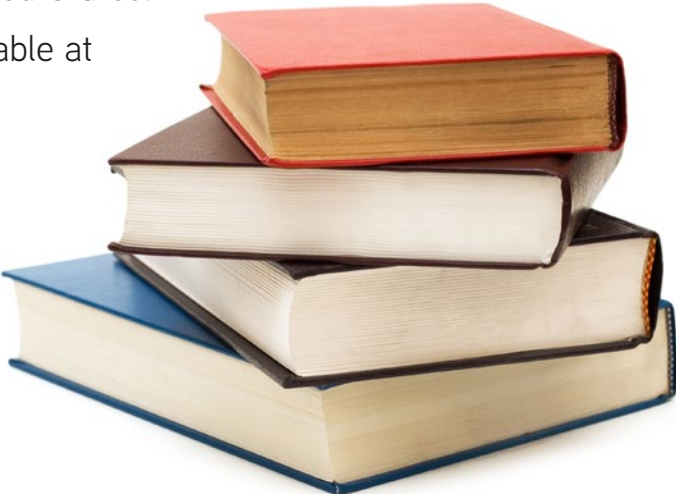
Nebraska residents who are members of a Nebraska-based unit of the Active Selected Reserve may be eligible for a 75% tuition credit (or 50% if pursuing a graduate or professional degree). Tuition credit may be granted to 200 applicants each calendar year who are attending University of Nebraska campuses, Nebraska state colleges or Nebraska community colleges.

The University of Nebraska, the Nebraska State College System, and the Nebraska Community College System participate in a tuition credit program that will provide a credit for 75% of the tuition charges (or 50% if pursuing a graduate or professional degree) for members of Nebraska-based units of the Active Reserve of the armed forces of the United States.

More information on the Reservist Tuition program is available at veterans.nebraska.gov/reservist-tuition.

FY 2023 Tuition Credit Application Data

Applications Received.....	28
Approved.....	27
Denied.....	1



VETS GET PETS

Nebraska veterans can have up to \$350 in rescue pet adoption fees covered through Vets Get Pets when they adopt from an organization licensed by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. In FY 2023, NDVA facilitated 43 adoptions and ended the fiscal year with \$14,702.50 in program funds for future adoptions. A statewide media campaign is running to let veterans know about the program and use those funds!



FY 2023 Vets Get Pets Applications

Received.....	53
Approved.....	43
Cancelled.....	8
Pending.....	2

Spotlight: NDVA Celebrates 50th Vets Get Pets Adoption

On March 28, Army veteran Scott Henry adopted Chicken Alfredo (who now goes by Bear) from the Animal Shelter of Northeast Nebraska, making Bear the 50th adoption to be facilitated through the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs (NDVA) Vets Get Pets program.

Henry, who served in the Military Police Corps in the late 90s, suffered a stroke in 2021, leading to stability issues. During a visit to the Bellevue University's Military and Veteran Services Center he learned about JAVELAN, a program that helps train and provide service dogs for veterans and retired first responders, and NDVA's Vets Get Pets program which could help cover his adoption fees.

"I love the Vets Get Pets program. There are a lot of veterans out there who just need a companion to help fight loneliness or give you something to do—a reason to get out of the house," Henry said. "Bear can help prevent falls or help me get up from falls, but he's also a great dog. He's great with my grandkids and a big fuzzy friend. I want there to be a thousand Vets Get Pets adoptions by the end of the year."

Helping Vets Get Pets

Vets Get Pets was created by the Nebraska Legislature in 2020. Senator Anna Wishart championed the program as well as a specialty license plate to provide necessary funding. Her bill was amended into LB 944, which was approved by the Legislature and signed by Governor Pete Ricketts on August 6, 2020. Vets Get Pets license plates went on sale January 1, 2021, and the first pet adoption, an Australian cattle dog/husky mix named Donatello, was finalized July 23, 2021.

"The response to Vets Get Pets has been overwhelmingly positive," said NDVA Director John Hilgert. "It's one of the more fun programs NDVA administers, but the impact is real and the feedback we've gotten from veterans who have utilized it is tremendous. Companion animals can do so much to enrich our lives, and we're excited to hear more stories like Private Henry's as we help more veterans get pets."



Funding for the program comes from the sale of Vets Get Pets license plates, which are available to purchase through the Nebraska DMV. Plates cost \$5 for the alphanumeric version or \$40 for a custom message. To date, nearly 1,000 specialty plates have been purchased by Nebraska drivers to help support the program.

Information about utilizing Vets Get Pets to cover adoption fees, as well as details on purchasing a license plate can be found at veterans.nebraska.gov/vetsgetpets.



A Second Chance for Bear

The Vets Get Pets program has had support from a number of Nebraska animal rescues, including the Animal Shelter of Northeast Nebraska, where Henry adopted Bear. “This is one small thing we can do to recognize our veterans’ sacrifices,” said Lisa Doescher, the manager of the shelter, who is herself a veteran. “It may seem small to some, but it means the world to others. Everybody deserves a second chance. Every animal that comes here was unwanted and these animals deserve a second chance. In some ways it’s a second chance for the veterans who adopt them, too.”



Bear, a white, two-and-a-half-year-old Great Pyrenees, is one of those second chances. He was found as a stray in Texas and sent to a shelter there where he ended up on the euthanasia list. Luckily for Bear, the Animal Shelter of Northeast Nebraska has partnerships with several shelters and brings animals to Nebraska when it identifies a good match. When Henry visited the shelter and explained he was looking for a dog through the JAVELAN program, Doescher thought of Bear. She contacted the shelter in Texas, and volunteers drove Bear the 14 hours to Norfolk to meet Henry. They turned out to be a perfect match. Then, JAVELAN sent a trainer to do a behavioral assessment to determine if Bear was a good fit for its program. He was. Now, Henry and Bear are set to start the JAVELAN program in late April.

Founded as a non-profit in 2017 and now part of First Responders Foundation, JAVELAN is focused on connecting veterans and retired first responders with service dogs and providing the necessary training to both the dog and the handler. The community-based training lasts between

three and six months and comes with lifetime support, should the need for additional training or retraining arise.

“I’ve seen the difference these dogs can make in people’s lives and have gone through that experience,” said JAVELAN co-founder Bob Dean. “We recently trained our 100th team which is quite a milestone for us. We want to give back to the veterans and first responders who have done so much for us, so we’ll do everything we can to connect and train them.”

What Could Be Better?

Several studies have shown the health benefits of pet ownership, including studies done at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These benefits can include reductions in depression, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as increased opportunities for exercise and social interaction.

“I want everyone to know about this program,” Henry said. “There are people like me with a family and grandkids, and another grandkid on the way, but there are other veterans out there who don’t have that. I want them to know about Vets Get Pets and that they can get a pet like Bear for free. What could be better?”

WELCOME HOME PROGRAM

Our Welcome Home program includes two components: a Welcome Home packet sent to each Nebraska service member when they discharge from the service and a Welcome Home Picnic hosted by the governor for these new veterans and their families.

Our Welcome Home packet contains a wealth of information on county, state, and federal benefits; resources for employment opportunities and career advancement; and much more. In addition, we have partnered with the VA's Veteran Experience Office to include the VA's official welcome packet to ensure veterans get information on all the benefits available to them.

During FY 2023, we sent out 2,083 Welcome Home packets.

For the Governor's Welcome Home Picnic, we invite each service member who has discharged over the past 12 months, as well as their family members, for a backyard barbecue with games, recognition, and plenty of food. We invite exhibitors from a host of veteran service organizations, state agencies, job recruiters, and other groups to share information and resources with our state's newest veterans. Finally, at the end of the event, the governor presents each veteran with a special Welcome Home challenge coin.



2022 Governor's Welcome Home Picnic

Over 150 people attended our Welcome Home Picnic in 2022. A variety of veterans' service organizations were at the event to share information on benefits for veterans and their family members, opportunities for networking and veteran organization membership, and resources for veteran employment. Capital Humane Society attended with two dogs to help promote the Vets Get Pets program, which provides funds to help veterans adopt companion animals.



Special Events & Outreach



Attendees participated in a yoga activity during our first annual women veterans symposium.



Members of the community filled the lawn at NVCA's Memorial Day service.



Our hearing room at the Nebraska State Capitol was packed for Vietnam War Veterans Day, and Governor Pillen personally pinned nearly 100 Vietnam Era veterans with commemorative Vietnam War lapel pins.



Director Hilgert spoke at the Memorial Day ceremony held at McCook's Memorial Park Cemetery.



Governor Pillen, NDVA Director Hilgert, a group of state senators, and others spoke on veteran-related legislative issues at the 2023 Veterans Legislative Day.



NDVA partnered with the Capitol Commission to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Nebraska State Capitol on Veterans Day 2022.



The Capitol building was lit green as part of Greenlight A Vet on Veterans Day.



In May, NDVA was invited to help Gov. Pillen present medals to 100-year-old WWII veteran Robert Reisser.



Our homes' activity directors plan special events and activities throughout the year. In 2023, the Scottsbluff High School Orchestra played its season finale at WNVH.



NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Sacrifice.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS