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Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida

Newsletter

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More than 100 women veterans from Florida take part in all-female Honor Flight

STARS AND STRIPES

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by SARA SAMORA

WASHINGTON — It took almost three years to make happen, but 109 women veterans from Florida were finally able to visit the nation's capital and see memorials that honor those who served. "I think they've been overlooked for a long time, and we found on past Honor Flights, we've had very, very few females apply," said Liza Diana Walters, Honor Flight Villages' Flight Director. "We take at the most, a couple per flight, so I hope that this will raise awareness for the female vets and encourage them to come on Honor Flights."

The Honor Flight network is an organization that flies veterans to visit memorials in Washington, D.C., free of charge. For Honor Flight Villages in Florida, it was the first time the organization flew an all-female Honor Flight. Walters said the Tri-County Women Veterans approached Honor Flight Villages in 2019 to ask whether the group would organize an all-female flight. The group had been scheduled to visit in May 2020, but the coronavirus pandemic caused the Honor Flights to shut down for two years. Now that the all-female flight has come to fruition, Walters said they hope it will draw attention to the contributions of women veterans.

On the Honor Flight's first day in Washington, the veterans toured the Navy Museum as their first stop. Later, they visited the World War II Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial.

Connie Plotkin, 74, joined the Air Force in 1969 as a medical technician. She served five years and attended nursing school. She then commissioned into the Army Reserve in 1984 and retired in 2008. "I had to get out because I was of age," Plotkin said of her time in the service. "I was 60, so they made me get out. But I love my military career. It was the highlight of my life." She served in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War in the early 1990s and later Operation Iraqi Freedom. She also met her husband during her time in the service. They'll celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary this year. "It's been very emotional today, coming in and having people clap for you," Plotkin said of her Honor Flight visit to Washington. "It's just unbelievable. I served in Vietnam, and at that time, it wasn't the same as it is now. It's been a long time coming. It really feels good."

On Wednesday, their tour of the city's memorials will include the Military Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. The museum reopened May 27 after a six-month partial renovation.

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Nancy Atkinson, 80, joined the Navy in 1972, serving 14 years on active duty and 14 years with the Reserve. “I had been a civilian nurse for quite some time,” she said. “I felt like I was going nowhere, and I was really impressed with the military because I worked as a civilian nurse in a military hospital. And when they allowed you to come in with a dependent child, I signed up.” Atkinson said she never thought she would be part of an Honor Flight. “I haven’t been with this women’s veterans group that long, and they included me in everything and really encouraged me to go, and so it’s been a wonderful two days,” she said.

Gloria Corbet, 82, served in the Army from 1965 to 1985, working with computers. Her favorite memory from her service was shocking her father when she told him that she joined the Army. “I said, ‘I never had a red light over my door before, I’m not going to have one now,’” Corbet said. “You don’t have to worry about anything. But he was in the second World War. He thought all the women were red-light girls.”

When Dixie Thalwitzer, 81, graduated high school, she knew she was going to join the Air Force, she said. When she first joined, she worked as a communications and teletype operator. Thalwitzer left the service after she married but reenlisted in the 1980s. By that time, her kids had grown up and she attended nursing school. She worked as a medevac nurse and officer in the Air Force and was in a squadron that flew C-141 and C-130 cargo aircraft. “I’m very honored to be asked to come [on the Honor Flight],” Thalwitzer said. “We’re all female veterans, and it’s really special to be recognized.”

Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida 2022 Retreat

Register Now!

August 12, 2022

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Five ways to access VA care virtually during and after COVID-19 pandemic

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Treva Lutes is the Communications Director of VA's Office of Connected Care

This March marks a difficult anniversary: two years since the COVID-19 pandemic began. In that time, all of us have been affected by COVID-19 – most of all, those who have lost loved ones to the virus. We all want to return to a sense of normalcy. To keep the most vulnerable members of our communities safe, please continue to follow the precautions deemed necessary in your area. And to keep yourself and your family safe, get the COVID-19 vaccine and booster shot if you are able to do so. Here are five ways that Veterans can access VA care safely and easily from home. And remember, these virtual resources are available to you anytime – whether it's related to COVID-19 or not.

1. Get mental health care through telehealth

If you are feeling stressed, anxious or depressed, or if you feel that the pandemic is making your mental health symptoms worse, speaking with a mental health provider is an important first step. Virtual appointments reduce risk of COVID-19 exposure. Switch to a video visit to reduce your risk of COVID-19 exposure. You can meet with a VA mental health provider through VA Video Connect, VA's secure videoconferencing app. You can set up a video appointment



from home, and there is no copay for using VA Video Connect. For more information, contact your local VA medical center. If you need immediate mental health support, contact the Veterans Crisis Line by calling 800-273-8255 and pressing 1, or text 838255. It's free and confidential.

2. Switch from in-person appointments to video visits

Video visits are designed to fit easily into your daily routine. Using VA Video Connect, you can meet with your VA care team over a secure video connection from wherever you are. There's no need to drive to a VA medical center or clinic or wait in the waiting room. You can switch to a video visit if you want to stay home to reduce your risk of COVID-19 exposure – or if you just prefer receiving care from home. A video visit may be a good fit if getting to a VA facility is difficult for you, if you need to stay home to care for kids or other family members, or if you're too busy to make time for an in-person appointment. "Veterans can choose a VA Video Connect visit if they prefer staying home because of the omicron variant or for any reason," said Dr. Leonie Heyworth, clinical deputy director at VA's Office of Connected Care. "It can be simply because they prefer the convenience of meeting with their VA care team from home." And if you want to include family members or other caregivers in your VA care decisions, you can add them to the video visit so they can participate from anywhere. Video visits are free and are a good fit for many primary care and mental health visits.



3. Use the Annie app if you have vaccine side effects or if you test positive

The Annie App for Veterans sends automated text messages that can help you learn about COVID-19, cope with stress related to the pandemic and support you if you are exposed to or test positive for COVID-19. If you just received or are about to receive the vaccine or a booster shot, text messages from Annie can help you learn what side effects you could experience. Annie provides blood pressure info virtually to doctor. Veterans measure their vital readings and send them securely. If you test positive for COVID-19, Annie can check on your symptoms and give you guidance on when to seek care if your symptoms worsen – or when you can stop isolating once you feel better. Annie can also send messages to help Veterans cope with feelings of stress, isolation or fatigue related to the pandemic.



4. Find your VA COVID-19 test results and vaccine records on My HealtheVet

If you received a COVID-19 test or the COVID-19 vaccine at VA, you can use your My HealtheVet Premium account to find

your test results or vaccination record online. To find your COVID-19 test results, follow these steps. And if you want to locate your COVID-19 vaccination record, follow these steps. Don't have a My HealtheVet Premium account? Premium accounts are free. And you can get one in person at a VA facility or online by following these instructions. Along with accessing COVID-19 information, you can use My HealtheVet to request refills of your VA prescriptions, find your VA medical records and exchange secure messages with your VA providers.

5. Have your VA care team monitor your chronic condition or COVID-19 recovery

VA's Remote Patient Monitoring – Home Telehealth (RPM – HT) program lends a hand to help Veterans manage chronic conditions, like diabetes or heart disease. Veterans measure their vital readings and symptoms and send them securely to their assigned RPM – HT Care Coordinator for review. The Care Coordinator collaborates with the Veteran's care team to help the Veteran manage their care. Over the past two years, the RPM – HT program has helped Veterans who are recovering from COVID-19 at home. U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Michael Novielli took part in the RPM – HT program after contracting COVID-19 in April 2020. When his RPM – HT Care Coordinator noticed unusual symptoms, she helped Novielli get in-person care quickly. "If I wasn't on the telehealth, I would have stayed home with the pneumonia," Novielli said. "And who knows what would have happened?" Read his full story on Vantage Point. Ask your VA provider if RPM – HT is a fit for your care needs and learn more on the Telehealth Services website.

US Department of Veterans Affairs CMV- News Update April 6, 2022

Veterans Resource Fair

The Mercy Foundation held its inaugural Veterans Resource Fair at the Kissimmee Civic Center Arena on June 11. The event had a lot to offer veterans such as job opportunities, medical care and clothing. This event assisted over 100 veterans and their families. They were able to help dozens register for VA healthcare and initiate compensation claims. The services at this fair included over 40 vendors specializing in VA benefits, health insurance, housing assistance, free clothes, free food, drug and alcohol counseling referrals, equestrian programs and more. In one day, our partners provided more than \$500,000 in economic benefits. The Mercy Foundation would like to thank Kissimmee Mayor Olga Gonzalez, US Representative John Cortes, Florida State Senator Victor Torres Jr., Florida State Attorney Monique Worrell, County Commissioner Cheryl Griebis and others for attending. This free event aimed to bring resources to our bravest brothers and sisters in the area.

Pictures are from the Veterans Resource Fair.

