



Rensselaer County  
 Unified Family Services  
 Veterans Service Agency  
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# Rensselaer County Veterans Newsletter

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STEVEN F. McLAUGHLIN  
 County Executive

PETER K. GOEBEL  
 Director

## Commissary, Military Service Exchange, and MWR access extended to more Veterans beginning January 1, 2020

New law provides eligible Veterans and Primary Family Caregivers with access to DoD and Coast Guard commissaries, exchanges, and morale, welfare, and recreation retail services.

According to the Department of Defense, starting Jan. 1, 2020, all service-connected Veterans, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war (POW), and individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible Veterans under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) can use commissaries, exchanges, and morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) retail facilities, in-person and online.

For more information regarding these privileges and access to military installations, visit <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/expanding-access>

Who is eligible Jan. 1, 2020:

- Veterans
  - Purple Heart recipients
  - Former Prisoners of War
  - Veterans with 0-90% service-connected disability ratings
 (For former service members who have not yet sought disability compensation from VA, call our office at 518-270-2760)
- Medal of Honor recipients and Veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings are already eligible under existing DOD policy.
- Caregivers
  - On Jan. 1, individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the PCAFC will be eligible for these privileges.
  - For information about primary family caregivers in the PCAFC, visit <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>.

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### Van Transportation...

- \* *Don't drive* and need to get to the Stratton VA Medical Center?
- \* We offer complimentary van transportation to and from the VAMC for **most morning** medical appointments.

For more information please call (518) 270-2760.



### VETERANS CRISIS LINE

**1-800-273-8255**  
 PRESS 1

**\*\*Confidential chat at  
 Veterans CrisisLine.net  
 or text to 838255\*\***  
 TTY service 1-800-799-4889

**Confidential support 24  
 hours a day, 7 days a  
 week, 365 days a year,  
 for veterans and their  
 loved ones**

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## Required credentials-

## ●Veterans:

- On Jan. 1, Veterans eligible solely under this act who are eligible to obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card must use this credential for in-person installation and privilege access. The card must display the Veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED). Apply here: <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic/index.asp>.
- Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA healthcare, or who are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a Veteran Health Identification Card will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange, and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel.
- Medal of Honor recipients and Veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings are eligible for DoD credentials under DoD policy.

## ●Caregivers:

- Eligible caregivers will receive an eligibility letter from VA's Office of Community Care.
- If you are a primary family caregiver under the PCAFC and lose your eligibility letter, please call 1-877-733-7927 to request a replacement. Please allow two weeks for processing.

## Find out more about military resale privileges:

- Army and Air Force Exchange Service (<https://www.shopmyexchange.com/vets>)
- Coast Guard Exchange (<https://shopCGX.com>)
- Defense Commissary Agency (<https://www.commissaries.com/>)
- Navy Exchange (<https://www.mynavyexchange.com/>)
- Marine Corps Exchange (<http://www.mymcx.com/>)
- MILITARY STAR Card (<https://www.myecp.com/>)
- American Forces Travel (<https://www.americanforcestravel.com>)
- Veterans Canteen Service (<https://shopvcs.va.gov>)

**HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP)**

Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) opens from November 12, 2019. In New York State, please visit the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance website at [www.otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/](http://www.otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/) to determine how you can apply in your area. For more information about HEAP and other programs you may be eligible for please visit [www.mybenefits.ny.gov](http://www.mybenefits.ny.gov) or contact the OTDA Hotline at 1 (800) 342-3009 for more HEAP information.

**For information on assistance programs visit National Grid's website: [ngrid.com/discount](http://ngrid.com/discount); or call the Rensselaer County DSS HEAP Unit (518) 266-7960.**

## ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS FOR BURIAL—IN ADVANCE OF NEED

Many individuals would like to know, in advance, whether they are eligible for burial in a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery. To assist them, VA is launching an initiative, the “Pre-Need Eligibility Determination Program”, specifically aimed at helping individuals with burial planning and making sure their wishes are known.

VA will upon request make pre-need determinations of eligibility for burial in a VA national cemetery in advance of need. Having this information will help Veterans use the VA benefits they have earned, for their families and for themselves.

Once VA determines that individuals are eligible, those individuals will be entitled to the same benefits they would receive were a determination made at the time of need (time of death). These include any or all of the following, at no cost to the family:

- Burial in any open VA National Cemetery, including opening and closing of the grave
- Grave line
- Perpetual care of the gravesite
- Government-furnished upright headstone, flat marker or niche cover
- Burial flag
- Presidential Memorial Certificate

### ELIGIBILITY

The law provides eligibility for burial in a National Cemetery to:

- Members of the Armed Forces
  - Veterans who have met minimum Active Duty service requirements as applicable by law and who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable
- Members of the Reserve components of the Armed Forces are also eligible, provided they:
- Died while on Active Duty under certain circumstances, or while performing training duty
  - Have 20 years of service creditable for retired pay; or
  - Were called to Active Duty and served the full term of service.

The Veterans’ spouse, minor children and under certain conditions dependent unmarried adult children are eligible for burial even if they predecease the eligible Veteran.

### Applying for Benefits

VA encourages Veterans and their spouses to apply for a pre-need burial eligibility determination. Authorized representatives can also apply on behalf of eligible claimants.

To apply, submit:

- VA Form 40-10007, Application for Pre-Need Determination of Eligibility for Burial in a VA National Cemetery; and
- Proof of military service, such as DD-214, if available. If unable to locate proof of military service, apply anyway as VA will attempt to obtain military records necessary to make a determination.

Information should be submitted to the VA National Cemetery Scheduling Office by any of the following methods:

- Fax: 1-855-840-8299 (this is a toll-free number)
- Email: [Eligibility.PreNeed@va.gov](mailto:Eligibility.PreNeed@va.gov)
- Postal mail: NCSO, P.O. Box 510543, St. Louis, MO 63151

Individuals do not need to request a pre-need burial determination to be eligible at the time of need. There is no obligation for those found eligible to be buried in a VA National Cemetery.

### What to Expect After Applying

VA will review pre-need burial applications and provide written notice of a determination of eligibility (a decision letter). VA will save the information electronically for future reference and to expedite processing burial claims at the time of need.

### At the Time of Need

At the eligible individual’s time of need (death), the family or personal representative responsible for making the final arrangements, should contact VA’s National Cemetery Scheduling Officer to request burial benefits. VA will confirm the pre-need eligibility determination and schedule the burial.

Because laws and personal circumstances change, VA will validate the pre-need decision using the laws in effect at the time VA receives the burial request. They will also check for any bars to receipt of the burial benefit.

Please note that applicants may indicate a preference for a VA National Cemetery on the application form, but a pre-need determination of eligibility does not guarantee burial in a specific VA National Cemetery or a specific gravesite. VA assigns gravesites in cemeteries with available space once death has occurred and the burial is scheduled.

*\*\*Save copies of all documents submitted and the decision letter received\*\**

## A Message from the Veterans Service Agency Director

As our Christmas and Holiday Season ends for this year and we greet another New Year, let us never forget to remember those less fortunate than us; especially other Veterans who have sacrificed so much to allow us to better appreciate the freedoms we have been so fortunate to receive. All Veterans should register as soon as possible at the VAMC in Albany.

In this New Year, we should vow to appreciate our Veterans more and help those we are able to assist. Let's get to work to help other Veterans this year. The best way to help other Veterans is to ensure that all Veterans are members of Veterans Posts they are eligible to join so that the Posts can have a greater positive impact on our fellow citizens and on our great nation.

Remember to obtain your Lifetime Liberty Pass from New York State, if you have a 40 percent or greater service-connected disability rating; and don't forget to obtain your Rensselaer County Return-The-Favor Card.

Remember to find those deceased Veterans that we can honor. Everyone at your Posts and every Veteran out there should know at least one Veteran that the Honor-A-Deceased Veteran Committee can remember in the monthly poignant ceremony and each Post should also contact the Rensselaer County Legislature to honor our living Veterans at (518) 270-2880 or email them at: [Renscoleg@rensco.com](mailto:Renscoleg@rensco.com). This is a straight forward process and won't take much time, and it is very much appreciated.

Join those local Veterans Service Organizations and Posts to help other Veterans less fortunate than you.

Thank you all for what you do for Veterans. Help other Veterans. Find your niche!

Sincerely,

*Peter K. Goebel*

### Upcoming Events...



Call our office to inquiry about listing your event

January 13th...Honor-A-Deceased Veteran Ceremony—County Legislative Chambers at 8:15 am:  
*William J. Rentz, Jr., USAR, SP6—Vietnam Era*

January 20th...Martin Luther King, Jr. Day-OFFICE CLOSED

February 10th...Honor-A-Deceased Veteran Ceremony-County Legislative Chambers at 8:15 am:  
*Donald J. Keeler, USN, Machinist Mate 2c-WWII*

February 17th...President's Day-OFFICE CLOSED

### RETURN THE F.A.V.O.R. VETERAN DISCOUNT PROGRAM

#### ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

Eligibility for the Rensselaer County Veterans' Discount Program is for Veterans or the widows/widowers of Veterans.

Eligibility for a Veterans ID Card is dependent on being an honorably discharged Veteran of the United States Military.

The Veteran or widow/widower MUST apply for the card in person.

Receipt of the Veterans FAVOR card is dependent on the Veteran or widow/widower's filing of an original or certified Discharge (DD-214 / Report of Separation) at the Rensselaer County Clerk's Office.

#### WHERE DO I APPLY?

Rensselaer County Clerk's Office  
105 Third Street  
Troy, NY 12180  
(518) 270-4080