



# CHICAGOSALUTES

SECOND QUARTER: 2024

## MAYOR'S OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWSLETTER

Highlighting our Military and Veteran Community.



## **HISTORIC PASSING OF VETERAN HIRING PREFERENCE IN THE CITY OF CHICAGO**



In April, our City Council unanimously approved an amendment establishing a Veterans' hiring preference across all city departments, expanding the current preference to all job categories within the city of Chicago.

"This is a historic day not just for our Veteran community but also for the city of Chicago. While the current hiring preference primarily focuses on public safety roles, it was crucial that we expand its scope. We recognize the diverse range of skills and expertise that veterans bring to the table, from skilled labor to IT and beyond," stated Alderman Villegas, Chair of the Council's Veteran Caucus and former U.S. Marine who spearheaded this legislation.

The Department of Human Resources (DHR) will lead both the implementation and expansion of the Veteran Hiring Preference program within the city of Chicago.

## **LANDMARK AMENDMENT ESTABLISHING A VETERAN PREFERENCE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Along with the Veteran Hiring Preference, City Council approved a landmark amendment, also sponsored and led by Alderman Gilbert Villegas, paving the way for the establishment of veterans' preference in affordable housing units. This groundbreaking amendment mandates that various developers across Chicago grant preference to veterans for a minimum of 10% of the affordable units required under the City's Affordable Requirements Ordinance, whether provided on-site or off-site.

"This ordinance will significantly enhance the lives of Chicago's veterans by offering them greater access to affordable housing opportunities," said Alderman Villegas. "Our veterans represent the best of us—they are brave, resilient, and dedicated to serving the American people. Now, as a city, we have the opportunity to support our veteran community by allocating more affordable housing options for them."

Under the amendment, developers of residential projects subject to the Affordable Requirements Ordinance must allocate 10% of the total number of affordable units for veterans for a 30-day period following the opening of the residential project for resident applications.



## PROVIDING BENEFITS DIRECTLY TO OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center’s outreach team, under the leadership of Grant Jacobson, Market Growth Coordinator and U.S. Army Veteran, has partnered with the City of Chicago to provide essential resources directly to veterans in their communities. This initiative ensures that veterans can access 100% of their earned benefits without needing to travel across town.

By collaborating with local Aldermen and Alderwomen and utilizing Ward offices and community centers, Jesse Brown VA and partner organizations regularly operate in 13 wards, with plans for further expansion.

The success of this initiative is driven by the Intergovernmental Taskforce, which includes key stakeholders such as the Federal VA, Vet Centers, Cook County Veterans Assistance Commission (VACCC), the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA), and other government agencies dedicated to Veterans Affairs. Ward offices include:

- 4th Ward - Lamont Robinson
- 6th Ward - William E. Hall
- 10th Ward - Peter Chico
- 12th Ward – Julia Ramirez
- 15th Ward – Raymond Lopez
- 19th Ward – Matthew O'Shea
- 28th Ward - Jason Ervin
- 29th Ward - Chris Taliaferro
- 30th Ward - Ruth Cruz
- 36th Ward – Gilbert Villegas
- 41st Ward - Anthony Napolitano
- 45th Ward – James Gardiner
- 47th Ward – Matt Martin
- 50th Ward – Debra Silverstein





## MEMORIAL DAY PARADE

The City of Chicago held its Memorial Day Parade, one of the largest in the nation, to honor all the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our country. This year's parade featured nearly 100 organizations and included over 2,500 JROTC students.

### PARADE GRAND MARSHAL

Rear Admiral Zeita Merchant served as this year's Parade Grand Marshal. Born in Chicago, Rear Admiral Merchant recently made history as the first African American woman to be promoted to flag rank in U.S. Coast Guard history. Her 27-year career includes commanding maritime operations across Lake Michigan and the Western Rivers, as well as leading crucial marine safety and security missions in the Gulf of Mexico and along the Southeastern Atlantic Seaboard.

Beyond operational roles, her strategic insight has been pivotal in serving as Special Assistant to the 27th and 28th Vice Commandants, House Congressional Fellow, and Executive Strategic Planner.



Rear Admiral Zeita Merchant





## WOMEN'S VETERANS DAY IN THE CITY OF CHICAGO

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On June 12th, 2024, the City Council passed a resolution sponsored by Alderman Villegas and the Veterans Caucus, declaring June 12th as Women's Veterans Day in Chicago. This date commemorates the historic signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act on June 12th, 1948, which officially recognized women as regular members of the United States Military.

During the City Council meeting, twelve women veterans from various conflicts and eras were honored and presented with the official resolution.





## HONORING A WWII 'NISEI SOLDIER'

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The Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs had the honor of attending the award ceremony for Enoch Kanaya, a Chicago WWII Veteran who served with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Japanese American unit. Mr. Kanaya was awarded the French Legion of Honor, France's highest decoration and one of the most prestigious in the world.

During WWII, over 120,000 Japanese Americans, including Enoch Kanaya and his family, were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated. Mr. Kanaya was just 16 years old at the time. Three years later, he volunteered to join the U.S. Army to serve his country. Despite the challenges they faced, more than 12,000 Nisei (second-generation Japanese American) volunteers, including Mr. Kanaya, answered the call to serve, even as some of their families remained imprisoned.

The actions of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team distinguished them as the most decorated unit for their size and length of service in U.S. military history. When asked why he and others volunteered to fight while their families were imprisoned, Mr. Kanaya replied, "We are Americans. We wanted to not only fight for our country but also to fight to keep all other Japanese Americans free from those camps." President Harry Truman commended the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, stating, "You fought the enemy abroad and prejudice at home, and you won," during a White House ceremony on July 15, 1946.



## MONTFORD POINT MARINES REDEDICATION CEREMONY

In 1942, the Marine Corps established Montford Point Camp at Camp Lejeune, creating a separate and segregated training ground for African American recruits. These pioneering individuals, known as the Montford Point Marines, were the first African Americans to serve in the Marine Corps since the American Revolution. They paved the way for the integration of the U.S. armed forces, making significant contributions to military history and civil rights.

In May, the 6th Ward Office, led by Alderman William E. Hall, along with the Montford Point Marines Association Chicago Chapter, celebrated a rededication ceremony and flag raising in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood. This event honored the courage and perseverance of the Montford Point Marines and their lasting impact on the Marine Corps and American society.

The ceremony brought together dozens of supporters, including Mr. John Vanoy, an original member of the Montford Point Marines and one of the first Black men to train at Camp Montford Point in 1943.

Director Kevin Barszcz had the opportunity to speak and pay tribute during the ceremony. He remarked, "Separate but equal is something I have heard way too often from the generation of veterans who have gone before me. It's because of men such as Mr. John Vanoy and others like him that I, as a young Latino who joined the military, didn't have to hear the same words as they once did, separate but equal."

The legacy of the Montford Point Marines was on full display, highlighting the enduring impact of these trailblazing Marines on the ongoing pursuit of equality and justice. The Montford Point Marines continue to inspire future generations, reminding us of the strength and resilience required to overcome adversity and achieve lasting change.



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## CELEBRATING NATIONAL FLAG DAY IN CHICAGO

In honor of National Flag Day, celebrations were held throughout the Chicagoland area, including in the 15th Ward with Alderman Raymond Lopez and Alderwoman Nicole Lee, and in the 24th Ward with Alderwoman Monique Scott. These events also featured resources for veterans and their families, provided by Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, the Mayor's Office of Veteran Affairs, and other agencies.



## VETERANS PROSPERITY SUMMIT SUPPORTING THE AUBURN GRESHAM COMMUNITY

The Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Intergovernmental Taskforce on Veterans Affairs, organizes Prosperity Summit events across Chicago, bringing government agencies and resources directly to the communities where veterans live. In June, Veterans New Beginnings, along with 17th Ward Alderman David Moore, hosted us at their facility in the Auburn Gresham Neighborhood.





## RICKOVER NAVAL ACADEMY HOSTS FIRST WOMAN CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

Hyman G. Rickover Naval Academy High School in the Portage Park neighborhood had the honor of hosting Admiral Lisa Franchetti, who made history in November 2023 by becoming the first woman to serve as the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and the first woman to join the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The academy held an assembly for the entire school to hear and learn from Admiral Franchetti. Students had the opportunity to ask questions and gain insights from her remarkable career in the U.S. Navy.



## PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN POLAND AND THE ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

The partnership between the Illinois National Guard and Poland began in July 1993 under the Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP), marking one of its earliest and most successful collaborations. Over the years, this relationship has thrived through extensive military engagements, including joint training exercises, medical assistance, and cybersecurity initiatives. They have also jointly participated in various operations, such as deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, where they have consistently served alongside Polish troops since 2003. Elected officials, veteran organizations, supporters, and members of the Illinois National Guard, including Major General Rodney Boyd—who hails from Chicago and holds the distinction of being the highest-ranking person of color in Illinois National Guard history—attended the Polish Flag Raising Ceremony at the Daley Center across from City Hall.



## MEMORIAL DAY VETERAN HIRING AND RESOURCE EXPO

National Louis University, led by Lauren Schmidt, and the Jesse Brown VITAL team held a Veteran Hiring and Expo event in downtown Chicago. This event provided veterans, reservists, and their family members with valuable resources and employment opportunities within city government, as well as state, county, and partner agencies. The city of Chicago was well represented through departments such as the Department of Human Resources, Chicago Police Department, and Chicago Fire Department, all providing essential information and resources.



## VA HOME LOAN EDUCATION SUPPORTING THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY

The Arthur Lockhart Foundation, in collaboration with the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and VA Housing Education, hosted a VA Home Loan Education Workshop in the Austin Community. This workshop educated veterans on how to utilize their VA Home Loan benefits to purchase property in Chicago.



## **DOG TAG CAPSTONE EVENT ENTREPRENEURIAL FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

The Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs had the honor of serving as a Capstone Reviewer for Dog Tag's Capstone Pitch Presentation, a key milestone before graduating from the Dog Tag Entrepreneurial Fellowship Program designed for service-disabled veterans, military spouses, and caregivers.

As part of the Fellowship Program's Capstone Curriculum, fellows showcase their acquired knowledge by developing a formal business plan, budget, and pitch presentation. Ten participants from the Chicago cohort had the opportunity to present their business concepts to their peers, Dog Tag staff, and guest reviewers. This event serves as an exciting and inspiring learning opportunity for the fellows, reinforcing the entrepreneurial mindset and allowing them to apply their newfound knowledge to professional and personal growth. Learn more about Dog Tag: [www.dogtaginc.org](http://www.dogtaginc.org)



## **CHICAGO FIRE DEPARTMENT INTRODUCTION TO VETERAN BENEFITS**

The Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Taskforce, presented on benefits for military veterans and service members during the Chicago Fire Department's training program. Veterans preparing to become firefighters with the City of Chicago learned about their qualifying benefits and valuable resources available to veterans. This knowledge is crucial for their personal benefit and for assisting veterans and their families they may encounter in the field.

