

THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES
COMMISSIONER'S 2004 ANNUAL REPORT**

TO

GOVERNOR MARK R. WARNER

AND

THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

VIRGINIA -- HOME OF AMERICA'S PATRIOTS

December 1, 2004

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Commissioner's Message

This past year has proven to be an interesting first year – certainly not without many challenges, but with some significant successes.

When I reflect on the history of Virginia, I think of her citizens being called to arms from the founding of this Commonwealth right up until the present. Today, young men and women who are members of the Virginia National Guard and the Reserve have again been called to distant lands in service to their nation.

The Department of Veterans Services stands ready to assist these young men and women as they return to Virginia, new veterans with many of the same issues as the veterans who served before them.

Since World War II, the department has met the challenges of returning service personnel. We served veterans of World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, and since 1990, we have reached out to those who have served in the Persian Gulf, in Africa, in the Balkans, in Afghanistan, and in Iraq.

To better serve Virginia's veterans, Governor Mark Warner took the initiative to review the programs the Commonwealth offers its veterans. There were several programs, but little coordination. Under the Governor's leadership, the General Assembly began a program of consolidation. Today, the Department delivers services in four major program areas – benefit claims, cemeteries, the care center, and certification of veterans educational programs.

The benefit claims section operates fourteen field offices located across the state to assist the veteran in applying for federal, state, or local veteran benefits to which they may be entitled. These offices are also available to those survivors of veterans who require assistance in application for federal veteran benefits.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) is now under the management of the Department of Veterans Services. This transition has not been easy but the VVCC is now an integral part of the department.

Two state-run Veterans Cemeteries – the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the recently dedicated new Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk – are ready to serve the veteran and his/her family in time of need.

The fourth service delivery section – the State Approving Agency for Veteran Education – came under the Department's umbrella on January 1 of this year.

Formerly a small agency, the Department of Veterans Services has experienced growing pains. Expanded responsibilities and a large increase in staffing prompted us to begin

looking at improved business practices and improved information technology to allow us to best address the needs of Virginia's large veteran population.

In September 2003, Governor Mark Warner led a group of veterans and local dignitaries in a groundbreaking ceremony for Virginia's second state-run veterans cemetery. On November 1, 2004, Governor Mark Warner dedicated the Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery. This cemetery, now open for burials, will meet the unmet needs of veterans in the Hampton Roads area for many years to come.

The Department is coming close to the date that will allow us to break ground for a second Veterans Care Center in Virginia. Funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has been received and state matching funds have been approved by the General Assembly. We are looking forward to breaking ground for the new care center in early 2005. To be located on the grounds of the Hunter Holmes McGuire U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Richmond, the new care center will serve the long-term care needs of nearly 200 veterans.

In early 2004, only one state had not contributed to the construction of the National World War II Memorial. Virginia. Governor Mark Warner, true to his word, arranged for the Virginia contribution and on May 13, 2004 Governor Warner presented a check in the amount of \$334,000 to General P. X. Kelley, Chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission. This check represented \$1 for each Virginian who served in uniform during World War II. The ceremony took place at the Virginia War Memorial and was attended by veterans and several members of the Virginia Assembly who served during WW II. The National World War II Memorial was dedicated shortly thereafter, on May 29, 2004.

Today, the Department is looking to the future to determine how we will address the needs of Virginia's veteran population over the next several years. Virginia is ranked in the top ten states for veteran populations. Over 750,000 veterans call Virginia "Home," and we are looking at the demographics of this population to try to determine if offices are staffed properly, if we should open additional offices, and how can we improve our itinerant services. Because federal VA disability claims are so complicated, our Veteran Counselors must perform much like non-attorney practitioners. Training has been ignored the last several years because of budget constraints. We are now trying to address this issue. We have and we will continue to reach out to veterans living in rural areas by conducting "Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits." We conducted a Supermarket in Abingdon in May, and on December 9, we will conduct a Supermarket in Middletown. We plan to hold four such events in 2005, in various parts of the Commonwealth. So far, the Supermarkets have proven to be successful in bringing the services of numerous state and federal agencies and veterans service organizations to the people.

I look at helping Virginia veterans two ways. First, it is the right thing to do – helping those who served. Second, I understand that if we do our job efficiently, we improve the overall economy of the Commonwealth. Last year, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs paid over \$1 billion in direct benefit payments to Virginia veterans and their survivors. The VA spent an additional \$600+ million in wages and maintenance for

various programs in Virginia. You can attach whatever economic multiplier you wish to the \$1.6 billion and you will gain insight into the economic impact veterans have on this state. On top of that, those dollars being spent in Virginia generate sales tax income for both the state and local government.

Among the Commonwealth's more than 750,000 veterans is a large and growing military retiree population. Each month the Department of Defense pays out over \$250 million (\$3 billion annually) to retirees. Here again, veterans make a substantial positive economic impact on the Commonwealth. Veterans represent one of the largest and most environmentally friendly industries in Virginia.

I intend to work over the next four years for the Department to be recognized as one of the best programs in state government. I want to thank the employees of this Department for their work in helping veterans. Each employee takes pride in the fact that they are personally involved in making life a little better for those who served this nation.

Jon A. Mangis
Commissioner
Department of Veterans Services

Comments from the Chairman, Board of Veterans Services

The Board of Veterans Services has been extremely active during 2004. Early in the year, the Board requested and received a policy paper from the Office of the Attorney General delineating the specific powers, duties and responsibilities of the three board-like entities created under the Department of Veterans Services – the Board of Veterans Services, the Veterans Services Foundation and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations. Armed with this opinion, the leaders of the three groups began a process of regular communication designed to facilitate smoother operations between the entities.

Senate Bill 412, passed by the 2004 General Assembly, improved inter-board communications even further by making the Chairman of the Board of Veterans Services an *ex officio* member of the Veterans Services Foundation and the Joint Leadership Council (JLC). The Chairmen of the Foundation and the JLC were made *ex officio* members of the Board of Veterans Services. The meetings of each group now include a report from the Chairman of at least one of the other groups. One of the results of the enhanced communications between the groups has been the development of a simplified methodology for the transfer of funds from the Foundation to the Office of the Commissioner.

Of the 3 key areas that are managed by the DVS (Cemeteries, Care Centers and Benefits Services), the Board has noted substantial improvement in two of the areas and a substantial degradation of the condition of the third. With the appointment of the Administrator of Veterans Cemeteries and the official dedication of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, we have made significant progress in improving the Veterans Cemetery function within the Commonwealth.

The receipt of funds from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in combination with state funds has permitted a start on needed facility improvements to the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke. A recent state inspection validated the excellent quality of care being provided to the residents of the VVCC. Although ground will soon be broken for the new Sitter-Barfoot Care Center (SBCC) in Richmond, the Board is extremely disappointed that, because of the decision to construct private rooms instead of semi-private rooms, and because of inflation, the funds originally allocated for this project are now insufficient to permit the construction of a 240-bed facility as originally planned. Therefore, the SBCC will open with a capacity of only 160 beds in 160 private rooms, with capacity to be increased as funding becomes available. The Board and the Commissioner are exploring all possible contingencies to obtain additional funding so that the facility can be restored expeditiously to the original.

The Board has a significant concern about limited number of benefits offices & service officers available in the Commonwealth. In fact, the Board has noted a steady erosion of benefit representative availability for Virginia veterans over the past several years. Because of the gravity of this situation, the Board unanimously decided to make increasing the number of benefits service officers its number one priority and is

requesting immediate budget relief from the General Assembly and the Governor to address this critical problem. At its December 13, 2004 meeting, the board's activities will be devoted to reviewing the 2005 budget submission by the Department of Veterans Services, and to making recommendations, through Commissioner Mangis, to the Governor and General Assembly for improvements in funding for the department.

Finally, the Board of Veterans Services would like to remind all the citizens of the Commonwealth, and especially veterans, of our desire to receive your input as we go about your business. We encourage you to attend our quarterly meetings and invite public comment on our activities.

John A. Anderson, MD, JD
Chairman
Board of Veterans Services

Comments from the Chairman, Joint Leadership Council

Prior to and during the establishment of the Joint Leadership Council (JLC) of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), several naysayers and doubters raised their voices saying that getting different VSOs to work together and agree on anything would be impossible. “Like herding cats,” some said. But over the past year, the members of the JLC have proved the doubters wrong. Frank, open discussions at JLC meetings have shown that the members of Virginia’s VSOs are united in a common purpose – to advance the interests of Virginia’s veterans.

After its September meeting, the JLC created a 10-point legislative agenda, which we will carry to the Governor and the General Assembly during the 2005 General Assembly Session. Our top priorities are increased funding for the Department of Veterans Services, a State Veterans Care Center in the Hampton Roads area, and a State Veterans Cemetery in Southwest Virginia. If we’re unsuccessful during this General Assembly Session, we’re going to come back again next year, and the year after that, until our united voices are heard.

I’m a veteran of the U.S. Navy, so I often relate things to my naval service. To me, the Commonwealth’s government is like a battleship. It’s big and it’s heavy, so it takes a while to change course. But it’s also powerful, and once it’s on the right course, there is no stopping it. As I see it, the JLC was created to advise the Commonwealth on the right direction to take as far as veterans are concerned. We’re not there yet, but the turn has begun.

Cornelius T. (Connie) O’Neill
Chairman
Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

Comments from the Chairman, Veterans Services Foundation

As I reflect on the activities of the Veterans Services Foundation over the past year, I am heartened by all that the Foundation has accomplished, but am reminded that we have yet to turn our attention to the real purpose for which we were created – providing additional funding for veteran services and programs in the Commonwealth through the Veterans Services Fund.

With the completion of By-Laws, the Foundation now has in place its basic operating principles. With this administrative matter taken care of, our attention can now turn to developing the strategies and plans required to raise the money needed to help the Department of Veterans Services better serve Virginia's 750,000 veterans.

A key provision of the Foundation's By-Laws grants the Commissioner of Veterans Services, after consulting with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the authority to approve expenditures from the Veterans Services Fund of up to \$10,000, with the proviso that the monies to be expended must have been designated by the donor for the purchase of a specific item or for a specific program. Prior to the By-Laws being adopted, expenditures from the Veterans Services Fund could only be approved by the full Board of Trustees at a regular meeting. The new procedure will speed the delivery of donated funds and materials to the intended recipients, especially those at the Virginia Veterans Care Center.

In May, the Board of Trustees designated that \$14,000 from the Veterans Services Fund should be used to finance the training of personnel from the Department of Veterans Services' Benefit Services section. The technical training, the first in five years for the section, provided the type of instruction on current federal regulations and other matters that will pay off in better service to our veterans.

At present, the balance of the Veterans Services Fund stands at just over \$300,000. While not a trivial amount, it is but a fraction of what I believe the Foundation can raise in the coming years. Working closely with the Department of Veterans Services, the Foundation will put in place the operating structure and guidelines needed to manage an effective fundraising campaign. With donations from the citizens and businesses of the Commonwealth of Virginia, I believe we can raise the money needed to honor our commitment to those brave men and women who have defended this country at home and abroad.

John Hanson
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Veterans Services Foundation

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

To serve Virginia's veterans and their dependents by ensuring they receive the benefits, support, quality care, and recognition they have earned through service and sacrifice

Vision

Become the benchmark for the delivery of quality veterans programs at the state level

Values

- **Service:** *Deliver the best service possible to our veterans – they deserve no less*
- **Dedication:** *Bring an unflinching commitment to helping Virginia's veterans*
- **Excellence:** *Continually strive to be the best at what we do*
- **Involvement:** *Involve all stakeholders – veterans, veterans service organizations, department staff, policy makers, and legislators – in developing and implementing top flight veterans programs*
- **Innovation:** *Constantly seek new and/or better ways to deliver service to our veterans*
- **Openness and honesty:** *Deal with all stakeholders in a direct and sincere manner*
- **Accountability:** *Assign responsibility for program delivery to the lowest level possible*
- **Flexibility:** *Encourage our front-line managers to use their initiative and experience to accomplish assigned objectives*

Department Overview

Since 1942, Virginia has shown its respect and honor to veterans by serving them as effective advocates. Prior to 2003, veterans services in Virginia were fragmented among the former Department of Veterans Affairs, which operated the benefits and cemeteries programs; the Virginia Veterans Care Center, which was operated by a series of contractors; and the Department of Education, which oversaw the activities of the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education. In 2003, these services were consolidated under one agency, known as the Department of Veterans Services (DVS).

The Department of Veteran Services is organized into four service delivery branches – benefits, cemeteries, care centers, and veterans education – and an administrative section. A integral component of the Department of Veterans Services’ team are the three board-type entities – the Boards of Veterans Services, the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations, and the Veterans Services Foundation – which work collaboratively to support the effective delivery of services to Virginia’s veterans.

The Benefit Services section assists veterans of the armed forces and their dependents in obtaining entitlement benefits from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition to the services offered at the section headquarters in Roanoke, Benefit Services operates 15 field offices throughout the Commonwealth.

Virginia’s veterans cemeteries provide burial and perpetual care services to veterans and eligible dependents. The Virginia Veterans Cemetery, in Amelia, is a 129-acre facility. The Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery, in Suffolk, is a 73-acre facility.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center, adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center, is a 240-bed facility that provides long-term skilled care and assisted living services to veterans of the armed forces. Construction of a 160-bed Sitter-Barfoot Care Center, on the grounds of the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, will begin in the spring of 2005, with construction expected to be complete in fall of 2006.

The State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education reviews and approves post-secondary education programs operating in the Commonwealth, ensuring the programs meet strict federal qualification guidelines. Veterans may only use their G.I. Bill and other educational benefits at programs approved by the SAA.

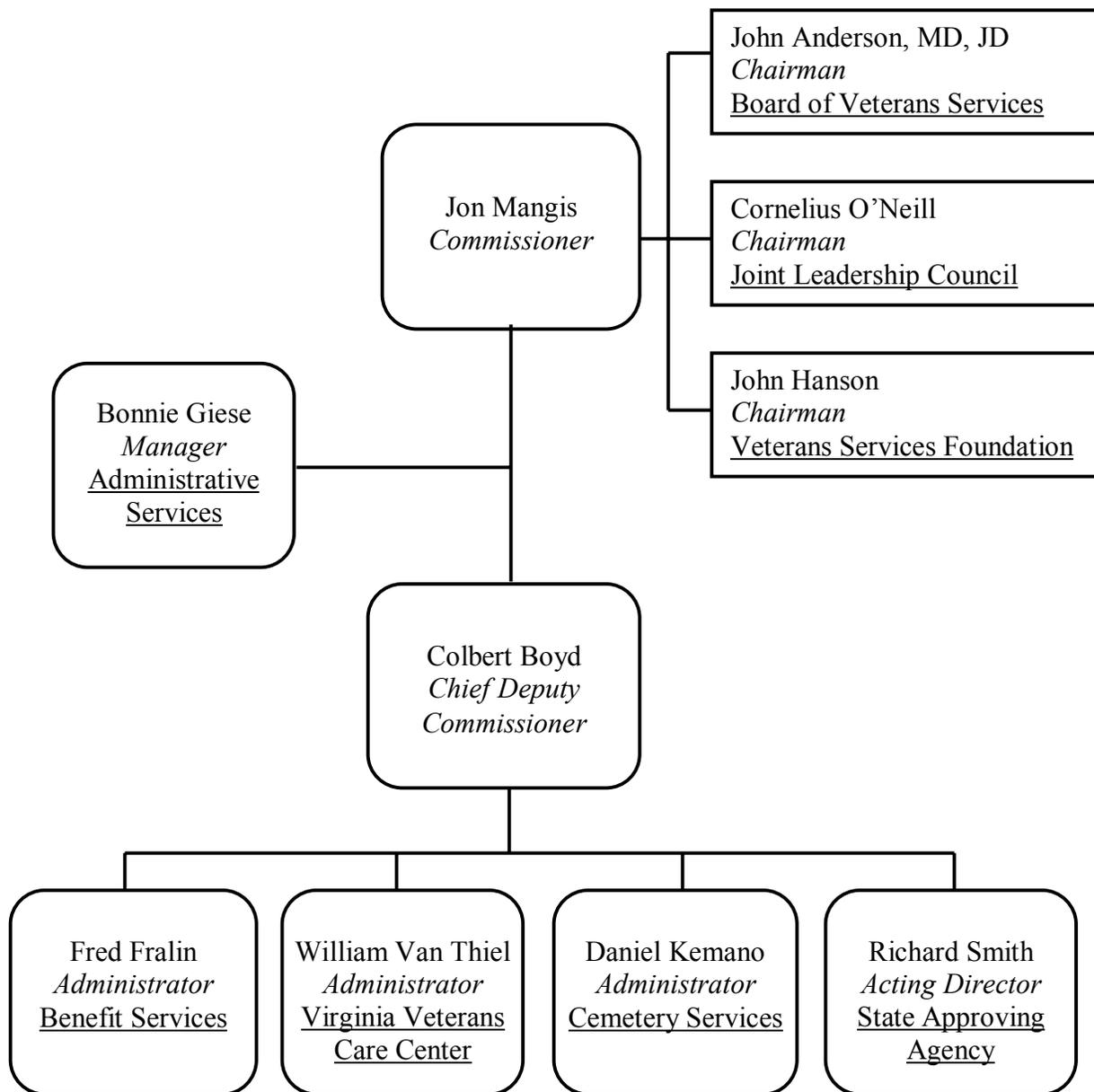
The Board of Veterans Services is responsible for formulating policies, developing procedures, reviewing department budget submissions, and making recommendations for the efficient and effective delivery of veterans services, as well as for studying all matters affecting the welfare of Virginia’s veterans.

The Veterans Services Foundation is responsible for raising funds, identifying existing revenue sources for veterans programs, and administering the Veterans Services Fund.

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) advises the Department of Veterans Services on matters of concern to veterans and their families.

Department Organization

as of November 30, 2004



Benefits Services

Mission

Assist Virginia's veterans and their dependents in obtaining benefits to which they are entitled under federal, state, and local laws.

Services and Organization

The Federal Government, through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) provides many benefits and services to those who served this nation in times of war and peace. Among these benefits and services are compensation for service-connected disability or death, income-based pensions, medical care, educational benefits, and home purchase assistance.

The Benefits Services section of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services assists Virginia's veterans in gaining access to the benefits to which they are entitled through their service and sacrifice. While Veterans Service Representatives (claims agents) are able to help many veterans over the phone, much of the assistance takes place at a field office or "itinerant" contact point. During these face-to-face contacts, Veterans Service Representatives guide veterans through the myriad steps required to file a USDVA claim.

Developing a solid claim is more than a matter of completing the application. Supporting documents, sometimes decades old, often must be retrieved from federal and state archives. The process is labor-intensive. A Veterans Service Representative may spend an hour visiting with a veteran, but then spend 20 hours or more in finding records and completing the necessary supporting documentation. All of this hard work pays off if the USDVA approves the claim.

The Benefit Services section operates 15 field offices across the Commonwealth, in Accomac, Big Stone Gap, Bristol, Cedar Bluff, Charlottesville, Front Royal, Hampton, Lynchburg, Norfolk, Quantico, South Hill, Staunton, Richmond, Roanoke, and Wytheville. The field offices are staffed by 16 full-time Veterans Service Representatives, five part-time Veterans Service Representatives, nine full-time Administrative Assistants, and seven part-time Administrative Assistants. Service areas are detailed in Table 1.

The number of Veterans Service Representatives and Administrative Assistants assigned to each field office is dependent on available resources and the number of veterans expected to be served. The number of days each office is open in an average week also varies according to need and resource availability. Nine field offices are open five days a week, while the other six offices are open from one day a week (Wytheville) to four days a week (Accomac).

In addition to serving veterans at the 15 field offices, the Benefit Services section also assists veterans at 25 “itinerant” service points. The itinerant service points are, in effect, satellite field offices, with the space being provided by federal, state, and local government agencies and private organizations, including veterans service organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Because the organizations often provide the space at no charge, the itinerant service points allow the department to reach out to and serve a greater number of veterans without incurring the cost of fixed operating facilities. In 2004, nine of the fifteen field offices provided some level of itinerant service, with schedules varying from once a week to twice a month to three or four times per year.

The Benefit Services section is headed by the Benefits Services manager, assisted by two regional managers who provide guidance and supervision to the field office managers. The Benefits Services manager and two regional managers also provide assistance during the claims appeals process. Finally, the Benefit Service section maintains an office in Washington, D.C. to represent clients before the Board of Veterans Appeals, part of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Activities

The Benefits Services section helped Virginia veterans file 18,408 claims in FY2004, of which 72% were approved by the USDVA. If approved by the USDVA, a claim results in two types of award – monthly compensation based on the level of disability and a “retroactive” award back to the claim date. While most “retro” awards are relatively small, some can reach the six-figure level. One Virginia veteran was awarded \$237,452 in June 2004. In FY2004 over 1,200 retro awards for Virginia veterans were approved by the USDVA, representing over \$23 million. Claims activity is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Veterans Service Representatives and Administrative Assistants had 106,212 contacts with Virginia veterans in FY2004. This number does not reflect the number of unique veterans served, as individual veterans often have multiple contacts with section personnel. Just over 64% of the contacts took place over the phone, 30.5% occurred in one of the 15 field offices, with the remaining 5.5% taking place at one of the 25 itinerant service points. Contact activity is shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Helping a veteran file a claim can be a lengthy process. Thirty minutes spent with a veteran file a claim during a walk-in visit may translate to several hours spent gathering necessary documents and completing required forms.

Though some phone contacts can be handled rather quickly, such as a referral to another office or source of information, most involve questions about pending claims or possible entitlement to benefits. While inquires into the status of pending claims may require little time with the client, significant time is often required to obtain an response from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. A five-minute phone conversation with a veteran can easily translate into thirty minutes spent obtaining the information the veteran has requested.

If a phone call concerns possible entitlement to VA benefits, the complexity of benefit eligibility rules means that a Veterans Service Representative can spend significant time on the phone with a client obtaining the information necessary to determine potential eligibility. Frequently, a Veterans Service Representative will complete the entire claims process over the phone and through the mail, as some clients suffer from poor health or lack the transportation needed to reach a field office or itinerant point.

A comparison between FY89 and FY04 shows fewer client contacts in FY04 – 106,212 vs. 126,017 in FY89, but more new and reopened claims filed on behalf of Virginia's veterans in FY04 than in FY89: 16,050 vs. 14,217. Between FY89 and FY04, the number of employees dedicated to Benefit Services dropped from 66 to 40, while eight field offices were closed or merged.

Between FY89 and FY04, there was a significant decrease in the number of itinerant points visited – from 110 itinerant points in FY89 to 25 in FY04. Much of this decrease can be attributed to a change in federal regulations effective January 1, 1996. Prior to 1996, all pension recipients were required to file an Eligibility Verification Report (EVR) on an annual basis. Required to be filed during the January to March time frame, the EVR is used to verify income and continuing pension eligibility, and Veterans Service Representatives are often called upon to assist pension recipients in completing this form. Beginning in 1996, however, pension recipients whose only sources of income were the USDVA pension and Social Security benefits were no longer required to file an EVR. With the change came a significant drop in EVR activity, and many itinerant points were eliminated as a result. Other itinerant services points were eliminated because of budget cuts. Table 6 compares Benefit Service Section activity in FY89 and FY04.

Table 1
Benefit Services Section Field Office Service Area – FY2004

<u>Field Office</u>	<u>Counties Served</u>	<u>Cities Served</u>
Accomac	Northampton and Accomack	
Big Stone Gap	Dickenson, Lee, and Wise	Norton
Bristol	Scott, Smyth, and Washington; Sullivan, TN	Bristol, VA and Bristol, TN
Cedar Bluff	Buchanan, Russell, and Tazewell	
Charlottesville	Albemarle, Culpeper, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Nelson, and Orange	Charlottesville
Front Royal	Clarke, Fauquier, Frederick, Loudoun, Page, Rappahannock, Shenandoah, and Warren	Winchester
Hampton	Charles City, Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Mathews, and York	Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, and Williamsburg
Lynchburg	Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Buckingham, and Campbell	Bedford and Lynchburg
Quantico	Arlington, Caroline, Fairfax, King George, Northumberland, Prince William, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Westmoreland	Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, Manassas, and Manassas Park

Table 1**Benefit Services Section Field Office Service Area – FY2004**

<u>Field Office</u>	<u>Counties Served</u>	<u>Cities Served</u>
Richmond	Amelia, Chesterfield, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Essex, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, King and Queen, King William, Lancaster, New Kent, Middlesex, Powhatan, Prince George, Richmond, and Surry	Colonial Heights, Hopewell, Petersburg and Richmond
Roanoke	Alleghany, Botetourt, Buchanan, Craig, Floyd, Franklin, Henry, Patrick, Pulaski, and Roanoke	Covington, Danville, Martinsville, Roanoke, and Salem
South Hill	Brunswick, Charlotte, Greenville, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Pittsylvania, Prince Edward, Southampton, and Sussex	Danville and Emporia
Staunton	Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge, and Rockingham	Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, and Waynesboro
Tidewater	Southampton and Sussex	Chesapeake, Franklin, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach
Wytheville	Bland, Carroll, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, and Wythe	Galax, Radford, and Wytheville

Table 2
Claims Submitted to USDVA - Sorted by Month
 July 2003 – June 2004

MONTH	NEW	REOPEN	21-8416	EVR	TOTAL CLAIMS
JULY	1,196	275	23	13	1,507
AUGUST	1,080	241	17	11	1,349
SEPTEMBER	1,011	217	22	10	1,260
OCTOBER	1,138	209	45	6	1,398
NOVEMBER	904	203	14	5	1,126
DECEMBER	887	186	63	24	1,160
JANUARY	1,185	248	534	275	2,242
FEBRUARY	1,090	218	522	317	2,147
MARCH	1,350	304	132	47	1,833
APRIL	1,194	281	93	44	1,612
MAY	1,064	176	55	29	1,324
JUNE	1,148	245	43	14	1,450
TOTALS	13,247	2,803	1,563	795	18,408

Terms used in table:

New: A first-time claim.

Reopen: Reopen a denied claim or make a modification to an existing claim, such as for a new medical condition or disability or an increase in an established disability.

21-8416: The VA Form 21-8416 is used to report a claimant's medical expenses for the previous year, so that the claimant may claim partial reimbursement for medical expenses. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist claimants in completing this form.

EVR: Eligibility Verification Report. Submitted annually by some pension recipients to verify income and continuing eligibility. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist pension recipients in completing this form.

Table 3
Claims Submitted to USDVA - Sorted by Field Office
 July 2003 – June 2004

FIELD OFFICE	NEW	REOPEN	21-8416	EVR	TOTAL CLAIMS
ACCOMAC	414	13	60	20	507
BIG STONE GAP	754	54	98	58	964
BRISTOL	1,287	91	152	78	1,608
CEDAR BLUFF	939	3	83	49	1,074
CHARLOTTESVILLE	290	103	46	28	467
FRONT ROYAL	697	23	74	36	830
HAMPTON	1,650	709	64	43	2,466
LYNCHBURG	487	21	200	83	791
QUANTICO	459	109	15	12	595
RICHMOND	458	93	45	15	611
ROANOKE	387	308	286	138	1,119
SOUTH HILL	461	137	142	95	835
STAUNTON	1,001	162	203	79	1,445
TIDEWATER	3,963	977	95	61	5,096
TOTALS	13,247	2,803	1,563	795	18,408

Terms used in table:

New: A first-time claim.

Reopen: Reopen a denied claim or make a modification to an existing claim, such as for a new medical condition or disability or an increase in an established disability.

21-8416: The VA Form 21-8416 is used to report a claimant's medical expenses for the previous year, so that the claimant may claim partial reimbursement for medical expenses. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist claimants in completing this form.

EVR: Eligibility Verification Report. Submitted annually by some pension recipients to verify income and continuing eligibility. Veterans Service Representatives frequently assist pension recipients in completing this form.

Table 4
Client Contacts - Sorted by Month
 July 2003 – June 2004

MONTH	WALK-INS	PHONE	ITINERANT POINT	OFFICE TOTAL
JULY	2,697	7,007	432	10,136
AUGUST	2,755	7,342	272	10,369
SEPTEMBER	2,532	2,958	860	6,350
OCTOBER	1,955	4,119	152	6,226
NOVEMBER	1,313	2,802	138	4,253
DECEMBER	1,377	2,758	149	4,284
JANUARY	3,060	7,370	371	10,801
FEBRUARY	2,342	3,586	1,339	7,267
MARCH	4,259	7,997	774	13,030
APRIL	3,154	7,113	440	10,707
MAY	3,783	8,029	371	12,183
JUNE	3,120	7,145	341	10,606
TOTALS	32,347	68,226	5,639	106,212

Terms used in table:

Walk-Ins: Number of clients who visit a DVS field office

Phone: Number of phone calls received by DVS field offices

Itinerant Point: Number of clients who visit an itinerant service point

Table 5
Client Contacts - Sorted by Field Office
 July 2003 – June 2004

FIELD OFFICE	WALK-INS	PHONE	ITINERANT POINT	OFFICE TOTAL
ACCOMAC	1,013	3,642	64	4,719
BIG STONE GAP	1,567	1,802	0	3,369
BRISTOL	3,669	4,969	318	8,956
CEDAR BLUFF	3,112	2,287	0	5,399
CHARLOTTESVILLE	900	916	176	1,992
FRONT ROYAL	616	1,291	271	2,178
HAMPTON	3,576	5,884	1,262	10,722
LYNCHBURG	1,721	6,550	178	8,449
QUANTICO	567	2,423	254	3,244
RICHMOND	1,688	5,672	650	8,010
ROANOKE	1,883	4,994	769	7,646
SOUTH HILL	833	1,649	167	2,649
STAUNTON	4,082	4,957	409	9,448
TIDEWATER	7,120	21,190	1,121	29,431
TOTALS	32,347	68,226	5,639	106,212

Terms used in table:

Walk-Ins: Number of clients who visit a DVS field office

Phone: Number of phone calls received by DVS field offices

Itinerant Point: Number of clients who visit an itinerant service point

Table 6**Comparison of Benefit Services Section Activity: FY89 vs. FY04**

Field Office	New and Reopened Claims FY89	New and Reopened Claims FY04
Accomac	275	427
Alexandria	458	Closed
Appalachia (now Big Stone Gap)	950	808
Bristol	821	1,378
Charlottesville	583	393
Danville	277	Closed
Fredericksburg (now in Quantico)	537	568
Front Royal	1,017	720
Hampton	802	2,359
Lynchburg	561	508
Martinsville	325	Closed
Norfolk (now Tidewater Regional office)	602	4,940
Petersburg	730	Merged with Richmond
Portsmouth	524	Merged with Norfolk
Richlands (now in Cedar Bluff)	874	942
Richmond	577	551
Roanoke	143	695
South Hill	494	598
Staunton	1,149	1,163
Suffolk	533	Merged with Norfolk
Virginia Beach	912	Merged with Norfolk
Williamsburg	664	Merged with Hampton
Wytheville	409	Included in Roanoke
Total	14,217	16,050
Client Contacts (Walk-In, Phone, Itinerant Point)	FY89	FY04
	126,017	106,212
Employees dedicated to Benefit Services	FY89	FY04
	66	40

Cemetery Services

Mission

Provide a dignified final resting place for veterans and eligible dependents at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk.

Services and Organization

The Cemetery Services section of the Department of Veterans Services operates Virginia's two state-owned and run veterans cemeteries – the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk. The cemeteries accommodate three types of interments: in-ground casket burials, in-ground burials of cremated remains, and above ground placement of cremated remains in columbariums.

Any member of the armed forces of the United States who dies on active duty, anyone retired from military service, or any veteran discharged under conditions other than dishonorable or undesirable conditions is eligible for interment in a Virginia veterans cemetery, provided that they are a legal resident of Virginia at the time of their death, or were a legal resident of Virginia at the time of initial entry into the armed forces. Also eligible for burial, if they meet certain requirements, are members of the reserve forces and the National Guard, Commissioned officers of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, American merchant seaman, and some others.

There is no charge for the gravesite/columbarium or necessary interment services for a qualified veteran at a Virginia veterans cemetery. The Commonwealth furnishes the gravesite, opens and closes the grave, orders and places a government grave marker, and furnishes perpetual care of the gravesite without charge. The veteran must, however, purchase a casket and a vault or grave liner for in-ground burials, or a plastic or metal urn for cremated remains, through a private funeral home.

For each veteran buried in a Virginia veterans cemetery, the Department of Veterans Services receives a \$300 reimbursement, called a "plot allowance," from the USDVA. These monies, representing from 25 to 30% of the section's annual budget, are used to fund both current operations and maintenance projects. The bulk of the section's budget comes from the General Fund. The department is working through the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) and various Veterans Service Organizations to lobby Congress to increase the plot allowance to \$500 per veteran.

Dependents, including the legal spouse (or widow or widower) and/or an unmarried minor child under age 21, are also eligible to be buried in a Virginia veterans cemetery. In addition, an unmarried adult child, who, before the age of 21, became permanently

incapable of self-support because of physical or mental disability, may also be interred. Dependents are charged an amount equal to the USDVA plot allowance.

To eliminate any administrative difficulties that may occur at the time of death, veterans are encouraged to complete a “pre-application” for burial in a Virginia veterans cemetery. While the department will not assign a specific gravesite when a pre-application is submitted, the pre-application process ensures that all required paperwork has been submitted and verified. At present, 1,193 pre-applications are on file at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery – 1,012 for a veteran and family member, and 181 for a veteran alone. The Horton Cemetery has 117 pre-applications on file – 90 for a veteran and family member, and 27 for a veteran alone. The pre-application process is free of charge.

The Cemetery Services section is led by the Cemetery Administrator, who also serves as the Superintendent of the Horton Cemetery. In addition to the Superintendent/Administrator, the Horton Cemetery is presently staffed by a full-time Lead Groundskeeper and by a part-time Administrative Assistant.

The Virginia Veterans Cemetery, located southwest of Richmond in Amelia County, has a staff of five – a full-time Superintendent, a part-time Administrative Assistant, a full-time Lead Groundskeeper, and one full-time and one part-time Groundskeeper.

Activities

Dedicated on November 1, 2004 by Governor Warner, members of the General Assembly, and local and federal dignitaries, the Horton Cemetery is expected to receive its first burials in December 2004. The first veteran interred will be Albert G. Horton Jr. who passed away in 2002, and the first spouse will be Evelyn Horton, who passed away in 2001. Mr. and Mrs. Horton are presently interred in a private cemetery.

The Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia performed 179 burials in FY2004. Table 7 shows burial activity from FY1997 through FY2004.

Table 7
Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Amelia
Burials FY1997 – FY2004

	FY1997	FY1998	FY1999	FY2000	FY2001	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004
July	N/A	5	6	8	9	13	16	14
August	N/A	9	8	12	13	15	9	14
September	N/A	11	3	9	5	17	10	10
October	N/A	5	8	9	13	19	14	23
November	N/A	7	7	8	6	13	18	11
December	N/A	14	7	7	8	16	16	19
January	N/A	7	8	10	12	11	19	17
February	N/A	9	6	12	12	11	13	15
March	N/A	12	9	11	12	18	18	13
April	N/A	9	8	12	10	12	8	15
May	N/A	3	9	17	12	16	12	13
June	2	4	12	9	9	14	16	15
Total	2	95	91	124	121	175	169	179

State Approving Agency for Veterans Education

Mission

Improve awareness of and access to post-secondary education opportunities for veterans and eligible family members.

Services and Organization

Operating under a contract with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education reviews, evaluates, and approves post-secondary education and training programs offered by educational institutions, businesses, and industries in the Commonwealth of Virginia. After a program has been approved, veterans and other persons eligible for benefits under Titles 38 and 10 of the U.S. Code may enroll and receive financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The SAA ensures compliance with state and federal regulations through on-site visits to active institutions and establishments.

The SAA has a secondary mission of making veterans and eligible family members aware of veterans education and training programs. Outreach activities are conducted at job fairs, presentations at military bases in the Commonwealth, and at the department's Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits.

With just five employees, the SAA is the smallest section in the Department of Veterans Services, but has the responsibility of providing supervision and support for 370 education and training institutions. While some institutions only offer one program, in many cases an institution will offer multiple programs, each requiring separate approval. The institution with the most approved programs is Virginia Tech, with 250.

Activities

As part of its mission to review, evaluate, and approve post-secondary education and training programs, the SAA accomplishes two types of approval actions – Program Approval and Other Approval. Program Approval Actions deal with initial or revised approval of an educational program, while Other Approval Actions focus on revisions to a previously approved program, such as a change to a publication or course offering.

The SAA accomplished 5,023 Program Approval Actions between October 2003 and September 2004, with 4,700, or almost 94%, being approved. During the same period, SAA handled 1,019 Other Approval Actions, of which 1,012, or almost 93%, were approved. Table 8 shows Program Approval Actions, while Table 9 details Other Approval Actions. Data is presented for federal fiscal year 2004, as SAA activity is tracked on that basis.

A key element of the review, evaluation, and approval process is the “Supervisory Visit,” in which an SAA official visits the educational institution and meets with key staff members. SAA’s contract with the USDVA called for visits to 259 (70%) of the 370 active institutions in FY04. The SAA exceeded this goal, making supervisory visits to 309 facilities (84%). Supervisory visit activity is detailed in Table 10.

Table 8**State Approving Agency for Veterans Education****Program Approval Actions: October 2003 - September 2004**

Oct - Dec 2003	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	1,363	425	1	3	36
Number Approved	1,358	415	1	3	36
Number Disapproved	5	10	0	0	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	99.63%	97.65%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Jan - Mar 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	572	336	1	2	3
Number Approved	568	325	1	2	3
Number Disapproved	14	11	0	0	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	97.55%	96.73%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Apr - Jun 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	318	448	3	6	3
Number Approved	293	388	3	6	3
Number Disapproved	25	60	0	0	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	92.14%	86.61%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Jul - Sep 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	860	612	13	7	1
Number Approved	766	508	13	7	1
Number Disapproved	94	104	0	0	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	89.07%	83.01%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Oct 2003 - Sep 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	3,113	1,821	18	18	43
Number Approved	2,985	1,636	18	18	43
Number Disapproved	138	185	0	0	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	95.57%	89.84%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

IHL = Institute of Higher Learning
 NCD = Non-College Degree Program
 APP = Apprenticeship Program
 OJT = On the Job Training Program
 LIC/CERT = Licensing/Certification Program

Table 9**State Approving Agency for Veterans Education****Other Approval Actions: October 2003 - September 2004**

Oct - Dec 2003	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	137	141	12	29	3
Number Approved	133	137	12	29	3
Number Disapproved	4	4	0	0	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	97.08%	97.16%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Jan - Mar 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	97	89	18	32	2
Number Approved	93	77	8	30	2
Number Disapproved	4	12	10	2	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	95.88%	86.52%	44.44%	93.75%	100.00%
Apr - Jun 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	103	93	8	44	1
Number Approved	100	89	8	44	1
Number Disapproved	3	4	0	0	0
Percentage of Applications Approved	97.09%	95.70%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Jul - Sep 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	109	106	9	38	19
Number Approved	102	93	9	38	4
Number Disapproved	7	13	0	0	15
Percentage of Applications Approved	93.58%	87.74%	100.00%	100.00%	21.05%
Oct 2003 - Sep 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	LIC/CERT
Number of Applications Received	446	429	47	143	25
Number Approved	428	396	37	141	10
Number Disapproved	18	33	10	2	15
Percentage of Applications Approved	95.96%	92.31%	78.72%	98.60%	40.00%

IHL = Institute of Higher Learning

NCD = Non-College Degree Program

APP = Apprenticeship Program

OJT = On the Job Training Program

LIC/CERT = Licensing/Certification Program

Table 10
State Approving Agency for Veterans Education
Supervisory Visits: October 2003 - September 2004

Oct - Dec 2003	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	Total
Number of Visits	0	1	0	0	1
Jan - Mar 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	Total
Number of Visits	18	24	5	8	55
Apr - Jun 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	Total
Number of Visits	70	61	6	13	150
Jul - Sep 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	Total
Number of Visits	40	49	3	11	103
Oct 2003 - Sep 2004	IHL	NCD	APP	OJT	Total
Number of Visits	128	135	14	32	309

IHL = Institute of Higher Learning
 NCD = Non-College Degree Program
 APP = Apprenticeship Program
 OJT = On the Job Training Program

Virginia Veterans Care Center

Mission

Provide affordable, high quality, and comprehensive nursing and domiciliary care to Commonwealth of Virginia veterans residing in the Virginia Veterans Care Center.

Services and Organization

Opened on Veterans Day, 1992, the Virginia Veterans Care Center provides state-of-the-art long-term health care for up to 240 veterans in 120 semi-private rooms. Of the facility's 240 beds, 180 are dedicated as skilled nursing care beds, including 60 dedicated to the care of Alzheimer's patients. There are 60 beds serving assisted-living (domiciliary care) patients.

The Care Center provides on-site physical therapy, respiratory therapy, and podiatry care, as well as many other ancillary health care services. The Care Center also offers such amenities as a wheelchair accessible nature trail and deck, library, chapel, barbershop, billiard room, and wood working shop.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center is located adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center, a 288-bed facility that provides a wide range of health care services.

With over 200 employees, the Care Center is by far the largest section in the Department of Veterans Services. The Care Center's largest operating divisions are the nursing, housekeeping, and dietary sections. Volunteers play an important part in Care Center operations, assisting in many areas of patient care. Members of Veterans Service Organizations, in addition to donating generously of their time, also donate both money and material to improve the welfare of Care Center residents. As of November 30, just over \$14,000 had been donated in support of "Operation Holiday Spirit." The funds will provide gifts and activities for the residents, and will ensure that each resident receives something for Christmas.

The Care Center operates entirely on Medicaid, Medicare, Hospice Medicare, and private funding. The facility receives no operating funds from General Fund appropriations. On average, 67% of the funding is provided by Medicaid, 24% by private funds, 8% by Medicare, and 1% by Hospice Medicare.

The "patient day" measure is used for billing purposes and to track occupancy. A patient day is one day spent by one patient in the Care Center. Dividing the number of patient days in a given month by the number of days in that month gives the average occupancy for the period in question.

Activities

The Virginia Veterans Care Center had a 95% average occupancy level in FY04 – with an average of 96% of the nursing care and 88% of the assisted living beds being occupied. In contrast, at the end of FY04, the USDVA nursing care facilities at the VA Medical Centers in Richmond and Salem had a 78% and 94% occupancy rate, respectively, and the assisted living facility at the Hampton VA Medical Center had a 70% occupancy rate. Table 11 shows Care Center patient days and occupancy levels.

In June and July, 2004, the Care Center underwent a detailed State licensure and Medicaid/Medicare compliance inspection by the Virginia Department of Health's Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection to determine compliance with the federal requirements for nursing facilities participating in the Medicare and/or Medicaid programs. No deficiencies were cited, a testimony to the Care Center's commitment to delivering quality health care to Virginia's veterans.

In June, a survey was conducted by mail, asking Care Center residents and their family members about such things as the quality of care received, quality of food, the friendliness & warmth of the staff, and their overall impression of the Care Center. Possible responses were Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, and Not Applicable. In 10 of 14 categories, including all directly related to resident care, the residents and family members rated the facility "Good and Excellent" over 90% of the time. Survey results are shown in Table 12.

Table 11
Virginia Veterans Care Center
Patient Days and average occupancy level - FY04

Month	Patient Days Nursing	Average # of Nursing Beds Occupied	Occupancy Level: Nursing	Patient Days Assisted Living	Average # of Assisted Living Beds Occupied	Occupancy Level: Assisted Living
July	5,498	177	98.53%	1,655	53	88.98%
August	5,492	177	98.42%	1,590	51	85.48%
September	5,241	175	97.06%	1,490	50	82.78%
October	5,397	174	96.72%	1,506	49	80.97%
November	5,244	175	97.11%	1,511	50	83.94%
December	5,363	173	96.11%	1,578	51	84.84%
January	5,365	173	96.15%	1,577	51	84.78%
February	5,065	175	97.03%	1,523	53	87.53%
March	5,281	170	94.64%	1,728	56	92.90%
April	5,097	170	94.39%	1,741	58	96.72%
May	5,317	172	95.29%	1,804	58	96.99%
June	5,127	171	94.94%	1,701	57	94.50%
Yearly Average	5,291	173	96.37%	1,617	53	88.37%

Table 12
Virginia Veterans Care Center
June 2004 Customer Satisfaction Survey

Question	Total Responses	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A	% Excellent and Good
1. Friendliness and Warmth of Staff	113	78	33	1	1	0	98.23%
2. Attentiveness of Staff	113	53	54	6	0	0	94.69%
3. Quality of Care	113	53	54	6	0	0	94.69%
4. Quality of Food	113	30	56	13	3	11	84.31%
5. Laundry Service	113	20	34	20	7	32	66.67%
6. Admission Process	113	63	39	2	0	9	98.08%
7. Therapy Department	113	42	38	5	0	28	94.12%
8. Activity Program	113	42	51	5	1	14	93.94%
9. Business Office	113	52	42	6	0	13	94.00%
10. Cleanliness of Building	113	50	39	12	1	11	87.25%
11. Response you receive from Staff	113	67	35	4	0	6	95.33%
12. Décor of Building	113	44	50	11	0	8	89.52%
13. Social Services Department	113	58	42	1	0	12	99.01%
14. Overall Rating	104	61	41	2	0	0	98.08%

Administrative Services

Mission

Support the delivery of quality services to Virginia's veterans.

Services and Organization

The Administrative Services section is the department's support branch, providing accounting, budget, human resource, information technology, payroll, and procurement support to the four service-delivery sections.

Prior to July 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs, with just over 50 employees, required an Administrative Services section of only four employees. A private contractor operated the Virginia Veterans Care Center and the State Approving Agency for Veterans Education was still part of the Department of Education, so a small administrative section sufficed.

Thirteen employees now work in the Administrative Services section – ten full-time and three part-time – a three-fold increase in one year. The additional employees were required to perform all of the accounting, HR, procurement, and other functions previously performed by the contract operator of the Virginia Veterans Care Center. The Care Center, with 80% of the department's employees and the lion's share of the department's budget, is the biggest "customer" of the Administrative Services section. Employees of the Administrative Services section continue to support the Benefit Services and Cemetery Services sections, and now support the employees of the State Approving Agency as well.

Performance Measures

The Department of Veterans Services relies on six performance measures to help track resources used, work produced, and achievement of intended results. Each measure is linked to a specific objective, and is designed to highlight those areas where the department is succeeding in its efforts to serve Virginia's veterans, and those areas where the department has been less than successful. However, each goal has a target achievement date that is five or ten years in the future, meaning that a setback one year can be overcome the next.

The department's performance measures are shown in Table 13. Each of the measures focuses on increasing the level of service provided to Virginia's veterans, whether by helping veterans file more claims, increasing the number of outreach activities, or providing a dignified final resting place to more eligible veterans.

Since the department has defined success as increasing the level of service, then four of the six programs measured can be said to have made progress in 2004. The number of benefit claims submitted has increased from 15,436 in FY2003 to 18,408 in FY2004, while the percentage of claims approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs increased from 64% to 72%. However, the percentage of appealed claims declined from 23% to 13.5%.

The increase in the number of first-time claims approved and the decrease in the number of approved appeal claims are related. First, more decisions are being made at the USDVA regional office level, resulting in more grants and fewer cases to be decided by the Board of Veterans Appeals. This means less cases need to be appealed. Second, a procedural change in the federal law resulted in an extremely large number of cases not being decided by the Board of Veterans Appeals, but instead being remanded back to the regional office level.

While the State Approving Agency increased the number of education program approval requests reviewed and acted upon within 30 days of receipt from 82% in FY2003 to 83% in FY2004, the number of outreach activities slipped from 17 to 14. A renewed department-wide focus on outreach activities in 2005 is expected to bring these numbers back up.

With the dedication of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery on November 1, 2004, the department expects the utilization of Virginia's veterans cemeteries to increase dramatically. Of concern, though, is the low utilization rate of the Virginia Veterans Cemetery. It is believed that the department's new marketing plan, currently under development, will help to boost the utilization rate of the Virginia Veterans Cemetery, but it is unlikely that burial rates there will approach those of the Horton Cemetery, located in the midst of the largest concentration of veterans in the Commonwealth.

Table 13
DVS Performance Measures

Number	Objective	Measure	Desired Outcome	FY 2003	FY 2004
1	Increase to 70% the approval rate of initial claims submitted to USDVA by the end of 2009	Grant approval rate on initial claims submitted to USDVA, using FY2003 as a baseline	Increased monetary benefits to veterans and their families	64%	72%
2	Increase by 5% each year the number of veteran benefit claims submitted to USDVA from 2005 to 2008	Number of veteran benefit claims submitted to USDVA, using FY2003 as a baseline	Increased monetary benefits to veterans and their families	15,436	18,408
3	Increase to 27% the approval rate of back-award claims submitted to USDVA by the end of 2009	Percentage of back-award appeal claims approved, using FY2003 as a baseline	Increased monetary benefits to veterans and their families	23%	13.5%
4	Increase to 90% the number of education program approval requests reviewed and acted upon within 30 days of receipt by the end of 2009	Percentage of program approval requests reviewed and acted upon within 30 days of receipt, using FY2001 as a baseline	Improved access to approved education and training programs	82%	83%
5	Increase to 25 the number of veterans education outreach programs and activities conducted annually by the end of 2009	Number of veterans education outreach programs and activities held per year, using FY2003 as a baseline	Increased awareness of educational opportunities available to veterans and eligible family members	17	14
6	Increase the utilization rate of the Virginia's state-run veterans cemeteries to 600 burials per year by 2014	Annual number of burials in Virginia's state-run veterans cemeteries by veterans and eligible dependents, using FY2003 as a baseline	Provide a dignified final resting place for more of Virginia's veterans and eligible family members	169	179

Governor's and Other Initiatives

The Department of Veterans Services, in conjunction with Governor Mark Warner and with the advice of the members of the Board of Veterans Services, develop annually a set of initiatives designed to guide department activity. While some the initiatives are designed to be completed by a specific date (for example, the end of the fiscal year or calendar year), others reflect longer-term, multi-year, or open-ended goals. The initiatives listed below reflect the mix of shorter and longer-term initiatives. Some have come to fruition, while others remain open or have yet to be started. The status of each initiative is as of November 30, 2004.

Table 14
Governor's and Other Initiatives

Initiative	Status
Secure federal funding for second state-run Veterans Care Center from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) for \$14,750,000 – 65% of total project costs	Open - USDVA grant approved, but will not be awarded until after submission of 100% complete architectural drawings
Secure Commonwealth of Virginia funding of \$7,942,000 for second state-run Veterans Care Center – 35% of total project costs	Closed - Commonwealth funding secured on May 17, 2002
Select architect for construction of second state-run Veterans Care Center on grounds of McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond	Closed - Clark-Nexsen architectural firm selected. Architectural drawings representing 35% completion submitted to USDVA on July 15, 2004
Complete construction of second state-run Veterans Care Center on grounds of McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond within 30 months of receipt of federal funds	Open - Federal funds will not be released until after submission and approval of 100% complete architectural drawings. Preparation of drawings underway. Construction expected to start in March 2005, with expected completion in the fall of 2006
Secure USDVA grant of \$984,329 for renovation of Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke - 65% of \$1,514,352 project	Open - USDVA grant approved, but will not be awarded until approval of all design plans

Secure Commonwealth of Virginia funding of \$530,023 for renovation of Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke - 35% of \$1,514,352 project	Closed - Commonwealth of Virginia funding secured and verified on 9/9/04
Complete renovations of Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke within 12 months of receipt of federal funds	Open - Renovation planning underway
Dedicate state veterans new cemetery in Suffolk by the end of November 2004	Closed - Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery dedicated on November 1, 2004
Seek additional public input and advice regarding management of state Veterans Care Centers by establishing an advisory committee and developing plan that addresses its scope, composition and function	Open - efforts underway to identify, vet, recruit, and appoint committee members
Improve service delivery in underserved areas of the Commonwealth by restructuring statewide contact points served by benefit/claims agents. By the end of FY05: 1) Conduct study of current service delivery; 2) Identify underserved areas; 3) Develop new service delivery plan	Open - planning for service delivery study underway
Improve service delivery in underserved areas of the Commonwealth by restructuring statewide contact points served by benefit/claims agents. In FY06, submit budget and/or legislative proposals to implement new service delivery structure beginning in FY07	Open - contingent on development of new service delivery plan
Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by developing and publishing a hard copy newsletter by December 2004, using an alternative (i.e. non-departmental) funding source	Open - development efforts to begin in December 2004

Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by developing and publishing a Department of Veterans Services electronic newsletter by December 2004	Closed - quarterly electronic newsletter published November 1, 2004
Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by becoming a regular contributor to state VSO newsletters by end of 2004	Open - will contact VSOs to identify submission deadlines, desired article length, subject, etc.
Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by establishing public service announcement process by December 2004	Open - development efforts to begin December, 2004
Improve veterans' awareness of federal and state benefits by conducting the Department's third "Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits" by December 2004	Open - Supermarkets conducted in Richmond (November 2003) and Abingdon (May 2004). Third supermarket to be held December 9, 2004 at Middletown Campus, Lord Fairfax Community College, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Work to increase USDVA burial allowance from \$300 to \$500. Submit resolution to the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) to seek Congressional support for increase in Federal FY05	Closed - Submitted resolution to NASDVA. Resolution passed and signed in March 2004. Awaiting USDVA and Congressional action
Work to increase USDVA burial allowance from \$300 to \$500. Ask Virginia Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) to support this initiative by adopting resolutions for consideration by each VSO's national organization	Open - Letter sent to Virginia VSOs on 5/7/04, asking that each draft a resolution for their national organization modeled on the NASDVA resolution. Several have already done so. DVS will work with national VSO offices for national resolutions.
Work to increase USDVA burial allowance from \$300 to \$500. Lobby Virginia Congressional delegation for support.	Open - Department will contact the Congressional delegation (through the Virginia Liaison Office) once support received from Virginia and national VSOs

<p>Work to remove USDVA's administrative restriction on placement of service-connected veterans rated 70% or greater in state veterans homes. Submit resolution to NASDVA to seek Congressional support in Federal FY05.</p>	<p>Closed - Resolution submitted to NASDVA in March 2004. Resolution passed and signed</p>
<p>Seek to remove USDVA's administrative restriction on placement of service-connected veterans rated 70% or greater in state veterans homes by working with Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) for their resolutions and support</p>	<p>Open - Letter sent to Virginia VSOs on 5/7/04, asking that each draft a resolution for their national organization modeled on the NASDVA resolution. Several have already done so. DVS will work with national VSO offices for national resolutions.</p>
<p>Work to remove USDVA's administrative restriction on placement of service-connected veterans rated 70% or greater in state veterans homes by lobbying Virginia Congressional Delegation for support</p>	<p>Open - Department will begin lobbying efforts in Fall, 2004 through the Virginia Liaison office</p>

The Year Ahead

As the Department of Veterans Services enters 2005, each of its four service delivery sections faces a unique set of challenges.

For the Benefit Services section, 2005 will bring a thorough review of its service delivery system. Working with the Board of Veterans Services and the Joint Leadership Council, the department will develop performance, service delivery, and staffing standards designed to guide the section for the next five years. The Governor's budget request will include the financial resources necessary to fill existing positions and staff existing field offices. In preparation for the 2006-2008 biennium, field office and itinerant service locations will be examined to ensure the effective deployment of resources.

The Cemetery Services section faces the challenge in 2005 of operating a new cemetery – the Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery – while working to increase the burial rate at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia. A joint marketing plan, already under development, will help increase awareness among Virginia's veterans of the tremendous benefits offered by Virginia's veterans cemeteries. Additional budget resources have been requested so that grounds keeping staff can be increased as the number of burials rises and so that Virginia's veterans cemeteries are maintained as a dignified final resting place for those whose who served this nation and Commonwealth.

The State Approving Agency for Veterans Education will focus on two activities in 2005. The first involves the section's primary mission of reviewing and approving the requests from post-secondary education institutions for program accreditation. In FY2004, 83% of requests were reviewed and approved within 30 days of receipt, with the goal being 90% by 2009. Secondly, SAA will work to increase the number of outreach activities, designed to increase the awareness of educational opportunities available to veterans and eligible family members.

The Virginia Veterans Care Center will undergo a much-needed renovation in 2005, with projects designed to improve the livability and operability of the facility. Funded jointly by the Commonwealth and the federal government, the renovation project is expected to cost almost \$1 million. Construction of the Sitter-Barfoot Care Center, on the grounds of the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, will begin in March 2005, with construction expected to be complete by the fall of 2006. The department will begin marketing, staffing, and operating studies in 2005, in preparation for the 2006 opening, and is committed to ensuring that all required actions are taken to guarantee continued federal and state funding.

The department will hold four "Supermarket of Veterans Benefits" in 2005. The supermarkets will bring together in one place representatives from numerous state, federal, and private agencies whose mission it is to help the veteran and his/her family. The supermarkets are designed to bring to the veteran and his/her family those services that may not be readily accessible, certainly not all under one roof.