



MIDDLESEX COUNTY IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY

101 INTERCHANGE PLAZA • CRANBURY, NEW JERSEY 08512

Telephone: (609) 655-5141 • Fax: (609) 655-4748

Website: www.mciauth.com • E-mail: mciaadmin@mciauth.com

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VA Rep Gives Roosevelt Vets Benefits Briefing

OLD BRIDGE – Depending on their generation, veterans are seeing a broad contrast of benefit eligibility requirements, a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs representative told residents at Roosevelt Care Center at Old Bridge Tuesday.

In more recent years, medical provisions for servicemen and women transitioning back to civilian life have drastically changed, said Frank Quadrino, a manager with the federal department's outreach program, as he conducted a presentation on VA benefits at Middlesex County's long-term care center.

Today's military personnel face harsher requirements than Quadrino's audience, a small, venerable troop of former soldiers, who had been spared such scrutiny.

"Nearly 10 percent of our long-term care residents here are veterans," said Alan Fialka, administrator at the Old Bridge facility, an operation overseen by the Middlesex County Improvement Authority. "The vast majority of those residents are enlistees from the World War II era. We felt it was important that they understand the benefits that stem from the sacrifices they've made for their country."

For younger veterans, the government has made it standard practice to examine time-in-service, combat experience, the scope of duty-related injuries and even income thresholds, before extending specific benefits, Quadrino explained.

In contrast, most of Roosevelt's veterans bypassed this probing, qualifying for many of the medical benefits after serving one day on active duty and receiving an honorable discharge.

Under certain circumstances, these two prerequisites could entitle them to free hearing aids, dental work and eye glasses, as well as assistance with hospice, long-term care and reduced prescription prices through the VA's many program offerings, he added.

"Do you know how much hearing aids cost on the outside?" Quadrino asked. "Five-thousand dollars; if you were an infantryman, I know a lot of them qualify because they were exposed to loud noises."

One of the younger faces in the crowd was that of Old Bridge resident Debbie Horbal.

She had planned an afternoon visit to Roosevelt's subacute unit to see her 90-year-old father Michael Horbal, a former Army soldier, who spent about four years fighting in the Pacific theater of World War II.

The presentation introduced her to subsidized caregiver programs for veterans, as well as recommendations to bring her father in for an annual visit to the VA doctors. This would better his chances at enrolling in various other programs, should the elder Horbal ever require more extensive services, Quadrino said.

"That's very important to know – that he should see a doctor there once a year," Debbie Horbal said. "I've been taking care of him by myself for three years."

On a mission to keep veterans informed of their benefits, Vitas, an outside hospice group, has been organizing these educational sessions, including Tuesday's gathering at Roosevelt, around the region.

"(Military service) changes who you are: body mind and soul – but very much the body," said Greg Delahanty, a veteran and Vitas representative.

Upon closing remarks, the speakers left attendees with a few parting informational resources, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs brochure "Health Care Benefits Overview" and the 2013 edition of "Federal Benefits for Veterans Dependents and Survivors."

For more information on Roosevelt Care Centers' programs, contact staff members at 732-360-9830 or by logging onto www.rooseveltcarecenter.com.

MEDIA CONTACT: Jane Leal, 609-655-5141, jl@mciauth.com