

Living Legend



Best known for her current position on the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office leadership team, Chief Fiscal and Property Officer Pam Rodriguez was a trendsetter and pioneer for women in the Kansas Army National Guard Aviation field. Her dedication to duty and professionalism was as evident then as it is today. The following excerpts are from the book *Living Legends and Full Agency: Implications of Repealing the Combat Exclusion Policy*, written by G.L.A. Harris featuring Pam Rodriguez.

Everything about this senior military officer indicates that she is very much a lady. Yet, her hard-charging demeanor and sometimes candid use of what she refers to as “salty language” for which she makes no apology says that this is a woman who must be taken seriously and is not to be messed with. Colonel Pamela Rodriguez has earned all of her military honors by studying in the school of hard knocks and outperforming her competition in a career that is still considered today by many to be a boys club. As the first female aviator in the Kansas Army National Guard (KSARNG), the first female Company Commander and Commander at any echelon of the KSARNG, the first female Battalion Commander of the Arizona Army National Guard (AZARNG), the first and only female Commander of the Army National Guards (ARNG) Western Army Aviation Training Site (WAATS) and only the second woman in the U.S. Army to fly the Skycrane helicopter, Colonel Rodriguez is every bit the overachiever she had to be when the perception for women aviators was that they lacked the right stuff to be pilots. She is the second female in her family to join the military; her father is a veteran of WWII. Colonel Rodriguez had not considered the military as a career until her sister joined the KSARNG and convinced her to follow suit. Ironically, it was not until sometime later in her mid-career that she discovered that her father was the subject of a famous WWII unit. Unbeknown to her and while writing a paper about it two years prior, Colonel Rodriguez discovered that her father was part of the 37th Tank Battalion, and Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Abrams after whom the tank was named, during the Ardennes campaign of the Battle of the Bulge.

Colonel Rodriguez described her joining the KSARNG as a fluke because at the time, KSARNG had an enlistment bonus that enticed her. She was also fortunate in being assigned to an aviation unit and was later recruited to become a pilot. Colonel Rodriguez was 24 years old when she joined the enlisted corps.

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Living Legend Cont-

She was the first female in an aviation unit of 250 men and functioned as the administrative support, given her secretarial skills as a civilian. However according to the Colonel, “they didn't know what to do with me.” During the first year of her assignment, even as a member of the unit, she was disallowed from accompanying the rest of the unit in the field because, as they explained, someone had to remain in the unit should the men’s wives call. But, little did Colonel Rodriguez know that she was actually following the path of another woman who was only attached but not assigned to the unit yet who failed abysmally because she lacked the army field experience, unlike the then Private First Class (PFC) Rodriguez, PFC Rodriguez was approached by the Unit Commander and told that they would give her a chance and for several years she remained the only female in the aviation unit.

Sometime in 1980, one of the pilots in the unit approached her about becoming a pilot as the National Guard was instituting a new initiative in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program through the University of Kansas that would enable enrollees to bypass the first two years of training in light of their completion of basic training in the enlisted corps. Colonel Rodriguez secured her undergraduate degree through the program, earning her the commission as an officer in the KSARNG. Colonel Rodriguez’s no-nonsense approach in getting things done identified her as a leader as early as during her days in basic training when she prematurely replaced her predecessor due to poor leadership. Subsequently, she progressed from the supervision of a platoon to commanding a battalion. One of her last assignments in the AZARNG was as the Commander of the ARNG’s WAATS where she was not only selected to lead the training of flight and crew members in their transition from the Cobra helicopters to Apache helicopters, but she was also honored by having her name on a bronze plaque inside an 80,000 sq. ft. hangar as being the commander at the time the building was completed.

While Colonel Rodriguez has never served overseas, she has participated in the preparation of deploying troops forward during Operation Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom. Particularly during Operation Desert Shield/Storm, despite her goal to deploy to Saudi Arabia, the leadership believed that her skills could be more invaluable at the stateside headquarters, in deploying the required troops for the war effort.

However, Colonel Rodriguez was keenly aware that even though as a woman and pilot, she had served in combat heavy attack units, given the restriction on where as a woman she could and could not be assigned, for professional mobility, it was important for her to move to the operations side for battalion level command experience. She subsequently transferred to a combat support unit as its operations officer, although this was a non-aviation unit, to gain operations experience. Though Colonel Rodriguez could have delayed for another two years, after 27 years of military service and bouts of a form of degenerative arthritis, she retired from the AZARNG.

Please join us in wishing Pam and her family success in all their future endeavors as she moves on to the next chapter of her life.

Kansas Veterans' Home Updates

The Kansas Veterans' Home was honored to meet with and tour the American Legion Auxiliary National President Sharon Conatser recently. President Conatser was elected national president of the American Legion Auxiliary during the organization's National Convention in September 2015. She is a lifelong member of the ALA having joined through her father, a veteran of WWII and the Korean War. Her son and husband are also veterans with her husband, Marty Conatser, having served the American Legion as a past national commander. Pictured are ALA Unit 10 President Pixie Black, KVH Clinical Director Dan Laffery, KVH Superintendent Kafer Peele, ALA National President Sharon Conatser, ALA Unit 10's newest member Maggie Solomon, and ALA Representative to KVH Sue Boyd.



The Kansas Veterans' Home is honored to be a recipient of a grant for the purchase of equipment from the H.L. Snyder Medical Foundation again this year. In past years the foundation has sponsored purchases of a combination stimulator-ultrasound system and a Nustep recumbent trainer for therapy rooms and defibrillators for emergency carts. This year they have granted the facility \$10,750 for purchases in both rehabilitative therapy and daily nursing care.

With the growth at KVH over the last year or two the establishment of a second therapy room has been necessary. A portion of the HLSMF grant will fund the purchase of a Bariatric Upholstered Mat Platform for the Triplett Hall therapy space. Having this equipment available at the second location will save residents and therapists the time now spent having to go to a different building. The design of this platform is such that all sizes of residents will be safe using it.

The larger portion of this year's grant will go toward the purchase of scales that will allow residents of all abilities to be weighed in the bathing rooms. In addition to providing the option of a resident weighing in a wheel chair or on foot, the model chosen accommodates bariatric resident up to 800 lbs. The generosity of the grant means KVH will be able to install these scales in bathing areas at each nursing care residential area.

Kansas Veterans' Home Update Cont-

National Nursing Home Week at the Kansas Veterans' Home was spent celebrating the great state of Kansas.

On Monday, Elvis tribute artist, Franko Trujillo, gave a special performance for the residents as part of his cross-country tour of veteran hospitals and nursing homes.



Tuesday KVH dedicated the new relaxation garden designed and built by Madison Hovey for her Senior Leadership Project at Southwestern College. The residents are very excited about the wheelchair accessible planter boxes, wind-activated kinetic sculptures, and new space to get together outside. Those gathered for the dedication enjoyed sampling cookies from the various ethnic groups that settled Kansas.

Students from Trinity Lutheran School were out on Wednesday to perform numbers from their recent musical in the morning and Delbert and Friends arrived in the afternoon to fill it with music as well.



The 1st Infantry Division Band from Fort Riley arrived on Thursday for a very special performance. It was an amazing presentation of big band music, patriotic classics, and popular movie scores. While the music was great, visiting with active soldiers is a favorite part of visits from Fort Riley.



Kansas Veterans' Home Update Cont-

The Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard, also down from Fort Riley, arrived to demonstrate their skills for a gathering of residents, staff, family and friends. These soldiers have excellent horsemanship and spent time visiting with the residents after their demonstration. JDDJ, a mobile DJ service owned by Josh Dobbs, provided a battery-operated sound system that allowed a member of the team to provide information on the group and commentary on the demonstration.



All in all, it was a week of sampling Kansas goodies, celebrating the rich military history of Kansas with Fort Riley soldiers and spending time with some of our favorite folks from the community.

Late in 2015 the VFW Men's Auxiliary from Post 1254 donated three benches to the Kansas Veterans' Home. The group from Arkansas City had started the project earlier in the year under their president Steve Womack. Unfortunately, President Womack passed away last fall. The benches bear a plaque noting his contribution to the project. Right now the benches are near the area developed by Trent Ging as his Eagle Scout project over 2014 and 2015. KVH hopes to develop a more permanent location for the benches this year.



Kansas Soldiers' Home Update

The Kansas Soldiers' Home has gone through both the VA and the KDADS Surveys. While the survey periods were a stressful time for the staff, everyone has learned from the experiences and has improved the quality of care to those we serve as a result. Construction has started at Lincoln Hall, which is a domiciliary that is home to over 2 dozen veterans. The domiciliary is undergoing a complete renovation which will dramatically improve the quality of life for those veterans that live there. The renovation is expected to be completed in June.

In addition to the Lincoln Hall renovation, the KSH is also gearing up for the renovation of our skilled nursing facility, Halsey Hall. That project includes an upgrade to the electrical system, new flooring, new doors, new windows and the installation of PTAC units in all the residents' rooms. This will give the residents the ability to individually control their room climate instead of relying on the buildings steam heat and cooling system. This project is expected to start within the next couple of months.

The KSH Activities Department continues to provide a wide variety of options for our residents to stay engaged and active. With the beginning of the Championship Indoor Football League season, our residents get to enjoy the *Dodge City Law* home games thanks to the purchase of season tickets. The arena also helps bring awareness to our veterans and our facility via scrolling electronic banners during the games.



Kansas Soldiers' Home Update Cont-

The KSH family shared a very special day with a resident in February. Jack Wolfe celebrated his 100th birthday with a group of about 75 staff, residents and his family. Jack told the story of the purchase of his first car, which is still in his family.



Kansas Soldiers' Home Update Cont-

Residents working hard on decorating and filling Easter eggs with candy.



Residents, families, and staff members enjoyed hunting Easter eggs.



Memorial Day Services

The Memorial Day services are one of the largest ceremonies held annually at each cemetery. This year the weather was perfect with clear skies and mild temperatures at the state cemeteries. The KCVAO would like to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of the Cemetery managers, staff, and all the people and organizations who come together and give selflessly in order to make these events happen. So much goes on behind the scenes from the guest speakers, singers, bands, legion riders, and all the volunteers helping do their part to honor service members who have died. Record crowds estimated to be almost 2,000 in number, began arriving early to witness outstanding guest speakers, music, flyovers, and color guards all in honor of veterans. We continue to look to the future when we are able to partner with so many dedicated individuals and groups in hosting memorial services at the four cemeteries.



The Cemetery program has had a busy year honoring veterans and family members providing dignified services and memorials to ensure a final resting place for the men and women of Kansas who served their country with honor. The cemeteries combined to see an increase of interments and pre-certifications from the previous fiscal year at all four locations.

Kansas State Veteran Cemeteries



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Fort Dodge



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Fort Riley



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at WaKeeney



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Winfield

Pre-registration form [KCVA 200](#)

Veteran Services



NOVEMBER 11

Veterans Day is approaching, the day that is observed annually to honor military veterans of all branches of service. November 11th marks the end to major hostilities of World War I. Please recognize veterans and take a minute to reflect on the sacrifices they have made for their country.

The Veteran population in Kansas is 218,000 according to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics.



Thank you
Veterans!



Updated website connects women Veterans to VA news, resources

Women were limited by law to only two percent of the military until 1967, and accordingly made up a proportionally small percent of Veterans. Once that restriction was lifted, and after the transition to the all-volunteer force, women's representation in the military rose to around 15 percent in the early 1990s, roughly where it is today. The roles and opportunities open to them have also steadily increased in that time frame, culminating this year in the formal opening of all jobs in the military to all qualified women.

Since VA was established when women made up a very small fraction of the population of Veterans, it was not designed to be able to meet their gender-specific health needs. In order to ensure women Veterans would be treated equitably, the Center for Women Veterans was created by [law](#). It has a number of mandated functions, which include promoting the use of VA benefits by women Veterans, who traditionally were less likely to self-identify as Veterans or be aware of their eligibility. The center is also responsible for conducting outreach, disseminating information and serving as a resource center, publicizing the results of medical research of particular significance to women Veterans, and supporting the independent [Advisory Committee on Women Veterans](#).

Our mission includes serving as an advocate for cultural transformation to recognize the service and contributions of military and Veteran women and raising awareness of the responsibility to treat women Veterans with dignity and respect.

To better fulfill these functions and our mission using tools available today, we recently revamped our [website](#). It now includes a list of news stories updated every business day, useful [resources](#), a list of relevant upcoming [events](#), and information about ongoing and published [research](#). We're also excited to highlight women when they are featured as VA's [#VeteranOfTheDay](#) and encourage [submissions](#) of women to that program to recognize and honor Veterans. There are about 18,000 women veterans in Kansas which makes up a little over 8% of the veteran population.



Kansas Provides In-State Tuition Rates for all Kansas Veterans

Kansas Provides In-State Tuition Rates for all Kansas Veterans

(Topeka, Kansas) - Today Kansas Governor Sam Brownback held a ceremonial bill signing for HB 2567, which expands eligibility for in-state tuition rates to veterans who had established residency in Kansas prior to service in the armed forces. Last year, legislation was passed (HB 2154) which authorized in-state tuition rates for all veterans using federal education benefits, along with all current members of the armed forces. These rates apply at all 32 public postsecondary universities and colleges in Kansas, regardless of time spent in the state.

“We want to make this as straight-forward as possible,” stated Blake Flanders, President and CEO of the Kansas Board of Regents. “Kansas now has one of the most accessible higher education systems in the nation for members of our armed forces, our veterans, and their families.”

If you are a current member of the armed forces stationed anywhere in the world, you can enroll in a Kansas public university or college and pay resident tuition rates. If you are a military veteran or their spouse or dependent child using federal benefits, or if you’re not using federal benefits but you were permanently stationed in Kansas or established residency in Kansas prior to service, you along with your spouse and dependents are also eligible to pay in-state rates.

Federal legislation known as the “Veterans’ Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act of 2014,” required all public universities and colleges to offer in-state tuition rates to veterans making use of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, who live in the state where the institution they intend to enroll is located, and file a letter of intent to establish residence in that state. Eligible spouses and dependent children also qualify for in-state tuition rates.

In 2015, in addition to extending this benefit to veterans, Kansas declared all current members of the armed forces to be residents of the state for tuition purposes (including army, navy, marine corps, air force, coast guard, Kansas army or air national guard, or any branch of the military reserves of the United States), along with the spouse and dependent children of current members who are enrolled or have been accepted for admission at a Kansas public postsecondary educational institution.

With the passage of HB 2567, eligibility for resident tuition is reinstated for those who had established residency in Kansas prior to service in the armed forces. To qualify, the veteran, veteran’s spouse or dependent, must live in Kansas at the time of enrollment. A similar provision had been in state law prior to the passage of 2015 HB 2154, but was inadvertently removed. The bill also provides reimbursement to any person enrolled during the 2015-2016 academic year who would have been entitled to resident tuition and fee rates if the eligibility criteria in this bill had been in effect, equal to the difference between rates. To confirm your eligibility, contact the Office of the Registrar at the institution at which you intend to apply or are currently enrolled.

Contact: Breeze Richardson – 785-291-3969 (office) or brichardson@ksbor.org

About the Kansas Board of Regents

The nine-member Kansas Board of Regents is the governing board of the state’s six universities and the statewide coordinating board for the state’s 32 public higher education institutions (six state universities, one municipal university, nineteen community colleges, and six technical colleges). In addition, the Board administers the state’s student financial aid, adult education, high school equivalency, and career and technical education programs. Private proprietary schools and out-of-state institutions are authorized by the Kansas Board of Regents to operate in Kansas. Visit the Kansas Board of Regents online at www.kansasregents.org.

VA Announces Additional Changes to Improve Veterans Crisis Line

Changes Support Crisis Line Staff and Creates Structure for Them to Succeed

Canandaigua, NY – Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson today announced improvements to enhance and accelerate progress at the Veterans Crisis Line, which serves as a life-saving resource for Veterans who find themselves at risk of suicide.

Today, during his third trip to the Crisis Line in a year, Mr. Gibson announced that the Crisis Line would form a stronger bond with VA's Suicide Prevention Office and Mental Health Services. This partnership includes VA's National Mental Health Director for Suicide Prevention as well as several hubs of expertise, including one Center of Excellence focusing on suicide prevention research and education located at the same medical campus as the Crisis Line responders in Canandaigua, NY.

Mr. Gibson also announced that the Veterans Crisis Line would now be under the direction of VA's Member Services, which has many efforts underway across the nation to restructure portions of VA that have direct contact with Veterans. This brings an expertise in ensuring that staff in these vital roles have more streamlined processes, adequate training and resources at their fingertips, to better serve Veterans.

These structural changes build on key hires made in the last year to lead the Crisis Line, including a director with extensive clinical social work background.

"I witnessed again today that the employees at the Veterans Crisis Line have a tremendously difficult job and they complete it with care, compassion and professionalism," said Mr. Gibson. I want to make sure that the trained professionals at the Crisis Line -- folks I consider the best in the business -- are able to focus on their core mission of focusing on the Veterans most in need of their help. They are life savers and we have to create the structure around them to succeed.

"Over the past year, we have put together a strong team to lead the employees at the Crisis Line. Today's announcement of a structural change within the Veterans Health Administration and additional support from our experts in suicide prevention is another step to make sure the employees and the Veterans they speak with have what they need give Veterans a safe place to call when they need us most."

As a part of the MyVA initiative, the largest restructuring in the Department's history, VA has

made improvements at the Veterans Crisis Line a key priority. By the end of this year, every Veteran in crisis will have their call promptly answered by an experienced VA responder. That will mean non-core calls will be directed appropriately to other VA entities that can best address their questions or concerns.

Already, VA has committed to increase staff at the Veterans Crisis Line. It now has more than 300 employees, and is in the process of hiring 88 more staff. At the same time, they have expanded the work area for responders and are making necessary technology improvements to phone systems and equipment to better handle the increased demand at the crisis line.

"Last year, counselors at the Crisis Line dispatched emergency responders to intervene and save the lives of Veterans in crisis more than 11,000 times," said Gibson. "That means, on average, we're stepping in to save 30 lives per day. Nothing could be more important."

Key Facts:

Since its launch in 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered nearly 2 million calls and nearly a quarter of those calls were answered last fiscal year 490,000.

The same is true for referrals to local VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators: One quarter of the 320,000 referrals made so far by crisis-line counselors were made in FY 2015.

Crisis Line counselors dispatched emergency responders to callers in crisis over 11,000 times last year (averaging 30 per day) and over 53,000 times since 2007.

Since adding chat and text services, they have engaged nearly 300,000 Veterans or concerned family members through chat or text.



Veterans in crisis may contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. They can also text or chat with our trained professionals online at VeteransCrisisLine.net.

KCVAO Mobile Services

The KCVAO Mobile Offices are Ready to Assist!

The Kansas Enhanced Veteran Services Program is a proven outreach program that makes applying for federal and state benefits easier for veterans and eligible family members. The staff at Hays and Emporia have partnered with many organizations and businesses in the last four years to assist veterans all over the state. We have provided top-notch veteran advocacy at fairs, parades, sporting events, and other locations throughout the State of Kansas.



With the addition of a third mobile office our agency can help your organization.



Veterans Day Parade in Leavenworth

If you have questions, or if you would like to schedule one of our vans for your event, please call the Program Supervisor, Brian J. Kronewitter, (785) 260-3100 or email brian.kronewitter@ks.gov. You can also download the form at the link below and email, fax, or mail it to the address or number listed on the form.

Events are scheduled on a priority first-come, first-serve basis with the many dates scheduled at least 45-60 days in advance. However, the KCVAO will make every effort to participate in your event if the date is available.

[Mobile Services Office Request Form](#)

[Mobile Office Schedule](#)

The Mobile Delivery Program Mobile Office Schedule						
EVENT	DATES		HOURS		LOCATION	CITY
	FROM	TO	FROM	TO		
American Veterans Traveling Tribute (E)	Oct 27	Oct 27	10 am	4 pm	Ray Miller Park	Leavenworth
Retiree Appreciation Day (W)	Oct 29	Oct 29	8 am	1 pm	Lewis and Clark Center	Ft. Leavenworth
Veterans Day Parade (E)	Nov 5	Nov 5	9 am	4 pm	Parade Route	Topeka
Sprint Veterans Day Commemoration (W)	Nov 10	Nov 10	9 am	4 pm	Sprint Campus	Overland Park
Veterans Day Parade (W)	Nov 11	Nov 11	9 am	4 pm	Parade Route	Leavenworth
Veterans Day Parade (E)	Nov 11	Nov 11	9 am	4 pm	Parade Route	Emporia
Museum After Hours (E)	Nov 18	Nov 18	12 pm	8 pm	KS. Historical Society Museum of History	Topeka
SCHEDULED CLOSED FOR THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	Nov 24	Nov 28	8 am	8 am	NA	NA
World War I and America (E)	March 1	March 2	4 pm	7 pm	Public Library	Independence



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For information on VA Education Benefits click on the links below
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[How To Use Your Education Benefits Brochure](#)

For information on the State Approving Agency Process click the link below
[SAA Approval Process](#)