

**Carlton County
Coordinator/HR Office**

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Carlton County

County-wide newsletter brought to you by the County Coordinator's Office

Issue 01 January / February / March 2024

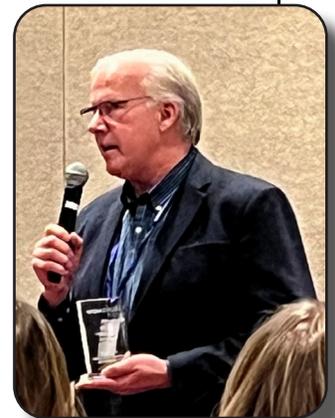
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PHHS Director Dave Lee Receives MSSA Legacy Award

Dave Lee, Carlton County Public Health and Human Services Director, was recently honored with the Minnesota Social Services Association (MSSA) Legacy Award. The award is issued to an individual working in the State of Minnesota who has had a significant positive impact on the delivery of health and human services on a number of levels. It recognizes an individual's outstanding contributions to the health and human services profession, and is voted on by the MSSA Board of Directors. The Board considers only those nominees who fit the following criteria: significant contributions to the health and human service field at a local level, the state level, and the national level, and consistent, impactful involvement with MSSA and/or other professional social services groups.

Carlton County Board Chairwoman Susan Zmyslony expressed on behalf of the County Board of Commissioners a deep appreciation for Mr. Lee's outstanding service to Carlton County as well as his significant, positive impact on the provision of public health and human services, locally, statewide, and nationally. "Dave's passion for helping people in need is unwavering, and his knowledge, intelligence, creativity, and collaborative approach to problem solving makes him an invaluable asset at all levels of service. We are so very fortunate to have Dave working for us here in Carlton County." Congratulations, Dave Lee!



Carlton County Recorder / Registrar of Titles Receives MCRA Award

On February 22, 2024 Carlton County Recorder/Registrar of Titles Kristine Basilici received the 2024 MCRA Member of the Year Award.

During her acceptance speech Basilici referenced the words of former Carlton County Recorder, Julius Baumann. In 1910 Julius wrote, "Every monument erected, every marker on one's grave, should bear witness of the service to humanity he gave". She then turned to the audience of County Recorders, Finance Officers and Auditor/Treasurers and said to them, "Service to Humanity is what is accomplished when each of you steps into your respective offices and roles".

Basilici went on to pay tribute to her staff, other county employees, the Carlton County Board of Commissioners and to her family as well.

Her final tribute was to the members of the Minnesota County Recorder's Association in which she thanked them for years of friendship and companionship.

Basilici is currently serving her 29th year with Carlton County. She plans to retire in the spring of 2025.

Carlton County Board Chairwoman Susan Zmyslony shared on behalf of the Carlton County Board that "Carlton County has been so fortunate to have Kris serve as our County Recorder these past several years. She is a forward thinking visionary in her approach to the work her office does, and she has done an outstanding job modernizing that department in a manner that significantly benefits the public. The Carlton County Board is very appreciative of her skillful and dedicated leadership, both locally and at the state level, and she very deserving of the MCRA Award. We are incredibly fortunate to have Kris working for us here in Carlton County." Congratulations Kris!



2024 Carlton County Board of Commissioners



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*Board meetings are held at the Transportation Building on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at 8:30 a.m. and the 4th Monday of every month at 4:00 p.m.

NE Minnesota Peer Breastfeeding Support Program

It may come as a surprise to some, but over the past 10 years three Northeast Minnesota Counties have had local hospitals discontinue the provision of routine labor and delivery services for a number of reasons. This change has forced many expectant families to look elsewhere for those services, resulting in having to travel greater distances, including out-of-county to find a suitable birthing hospital. To further complicate matters, after the baby arrives the families have to continue to travel to these more distant hospitals in order to receive valuable breastfeeding and lactation counseling and advice that Baby Friendly hospitals can provide. Unfortunately, for many families the lengthy travel creates financial hardship and ultimately is not a reasonable long-term option.

Carlton County, through the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program, offers nutrition and breastfeeding education and support to eligible women during their pregnancy and post-partum. These benefits and services are offered through a variety of platforms, including in-person appointments at the local WIC clinic, phone appointments, and online education options through the "My MN WIC" app. Northeast Minnesota also has an additional WIC grant to offer lactation support to WIC participants through the Peer

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Recorders Office Receives Gift

Carlton County resident Terry Heggemeir stopped by the Carlton County Recorder's Office to "gift" 1935 county maps. The maps will join a collection in the Recorder's Office. Although the maps are not "official" recorded documents, at times these maps have been useful for historical research purposes. Thank you Terry!



Pictured above L to R: Chief Deputy Recorder Heather Nylund, Terry Heggemeir and Recorder/Registrar of Titles Kristine Basiliaci

Public Health In Action Corner

Foundations of Community Health:

An Introduction to Your Public Health Department

Health starts where we live, work, learn, and play.

Opportunities for health begin in families, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Carlton County Public Health is committed to working with partners from across our community to ensure that everyone can make decisions that allow them to live long, healthy lives, regardless of who they are, how much they make, or what their background is.



Building a Foundation for Health

The health of our community depends on a strong and stable foundation. Like any construction project, building community health requires a variety of skill sets. Many sectors have a role to play. The groundwork for good health includes things like:



- Quality education
- Access to health care
- Employment opportunities
- Affordable housing

What is Public Health's role?

Carlton County Public Health professionals help build the foundation of our community's health by delivering a variety of programs that are required by the state of Minnesota. These programs are designed to give everyone a chance to be as healthy as possible by:



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

- Preventing illnesses before they start.
- Promoting health opportunities for all.
- Protecting those who face significant barriers to health.

Carlton County Public Health will publish ongoing quarterly messages through this newsletter.

Assessor's Office Overview

The purpose of this office is to administer and establish a fair and equitable valuation and tax assessment in accordance with the Minnesota State Laws and Regulations. The County Assessor has direct supervision over all Assessor staff within Carlton County. Work is performed under the general guidance of the Carlton County Board of Commissioners, Commissioner of Revenue, and the Department of Revenue.

Responsibilities

The following duties are normal for this job. These are not to be construed as exclusive or all-inclusive. Other duties may be and are required and assigned.

- Determines the classification and estimated market values of all property in the county and makes the assessment based on the data collected by local assessors, the sales analysis reports, and the knowledge of established assessment standards and practices.
- Investigates and recommends with respect to all the applications for reduction of valuation, homestead, classifications, and settlement of taxes, as prescribed by the Board of County Commissioners and Commissioner of Revenue.
- Reviews all conveyances of property valuation splits, determines the assessed valuation of properties transferred and maintains a topographical / parcel map of the county as prescribed by the Commissioner of Revenue.
- Administers any special programs as prescribed by the Department of Revenue and State Legislature pertaining to property tax aids, credits, etc.
- The office **does not set levies, taxes, nor spending**. That is only the authority of your local elected officials.

Ways to Reduce Your Property Taxes

The Minnesota Department of Revenue details multiple property tax reduction programs on their webpage. Please visit <https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/property-tax-refund> for MN property tax reduction information. Three of these programs are summarized below.

Property Tax Refund — For Homeowners and Renters — File by August 15, 2024

There are two types of Homestead Credit Refunds:

- Regular — based on your income and property taxes
- Special — based on how much your property tax increased

You may be eligible for one or both refunds even if you have not qualified in previous years. 2023 Form M1PR, Homestead Credit Refund (for Homeowners) and Renter's Property Tax Refund can be found at: https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2023-01/m1pr_22.pdf. Instructions for Form M1PR can be found at: https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2023-02/m1pr_inst_22.pdf.

Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral — Senior citizens who need help paying for their property taxes may qualify for the Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral Program. To qualify, you must be 65 or older. If married, and one of you is 65 or older, the other must be at least 62. Your household income must be \$60,000 or less. You must have lived in, owned your home, and had it homesteaded for the last 15 years. Other liens against your property must be less than 75% of the estimated market value. You must not have a reverse mortgage, a life estate, or any state or federal liens on your property. More information for this program can be found at: <https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/property-tax-deferral-senior-citizens>.

Important: Participation in the Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral Program is voluntary. If you participate, a tax lien will be placed on your property. This lien must be satisfied when your property is sold. In the event of your death, your heirs must satisfy the lien before they can acquire clear title. Read the instructions on the back of form CR-SCD carefully before completing the application. Homeowners with a reverse mortgage do not qualify to participate in this program.

Homestead Exclusion for Veterans with a Disability — You may qualify for a property tax exclusion on your homestead if:

1. You are an honorably discharged veteran who has a service-connected disability rating of 70% or higher
2. You are a surviving spouse of a qualifying veteran
3. You are a primary family caregiver of a qualifying veteran

More information for this exclusion can be found at: <https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/market-value-exclusion-veterans-disability>.

Minnesota Property Tax Refund

Carlton County would like to remind all homesteaded property taxpayers to research and apply for the Minnesota Property Tax Refund (PTR) from the State of Minnesota's Department of Revenue.

For those who are unaware, The State of Minnesota Department of Revenue has two types of Homestead Credit Refund and you may qualify for both. They are:

- Regular – this is based on your income and the amount of property taxes paid. You must have lived in your home on January 2, 2023, and your total household income must be less than \$128,280. The maximum refund is \$3,140.
- Special – this is based ONLY on how much your property tax increased. You must have lived in your home January 2, 2022, and January 2, 2023, and your property tax increased at least 12% and a minimum of \$100. This increase cannot be due to improvements done to your property (i.e.: new construction, remodel, etc.)

You may claim your refund online, through a software provider or through the mail (there are printed out applications in both the County Assessor's and County Auditor's offices available, but the program itself is administered entirely by the Department of Revenue). For more information please go to <https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/homeowners-homestead-credit-refund> or call (651)-296-3781.

Make sure you use your property tax statement that is mailed out in March or April (mid-July for manufactured homes in a park). DO NOT USE the Notice of Proposed Taxes.

Historically, Carlton County residents have qualified for an average refund of approximately \$1,026. According to the MN Department of Revenue only 70% of eligible residents in Carlton County apply for the PTR. This means 30% of Carlton County residents are forfeiting this money, **YOUR MONEY** simply because they do not apply! All residents are strongly encouraged to apply for this refund. This program is intended to help offset property taxes for residents who experience financial hardships, or live in an area with unusually higher needs of services which can drive up local costs, there causing higher property tax levies upon its residents. Many of our residents who apply and are awarded a refund use that refund to make the 2nd half property tax payments in the fall.

Please share this newsletter and word of the Property Tax Refund with all homeowners you know. There are millions of dollars of refund monies that go unclaimed annually!

County Trails Get 'Huge Win' for Public Access

The Carlton County land department took to social media last week to celebrate expansion of its trail network and partnerships with local "hook and bullet" clubs that proved invaluable to making it happen.

"This partnership led to 11 miles of non-motorized recreation trails being established and reopened after suffering from winter storm damage," the land department wrote on Facebook, showcasing pristine-looking hunter-walking and hiking trails outside Wrenshall and Moose Lake.

The newest trails, outside Wrenshall and bordering Wisconsin off County Road 4, feature 4 miles of public-access trails, including a connector to the North Country National Scenic Trail — a 4,800-mile stretch from the Missouri River in North Dakota to the Appalachian Trail in Vermont.

"The new [North Country Trail] segment that was finished there in late 2023 was a critical connection between the Superior Hiking Trail/NCT to the west and an existing NCT segment in Wisconsin, and it eliminated a dangerous road walk," said Matthew Davis, regional trail coordinator for the trail association based in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.

In addition to the North Country Trail Association, Pheasants Forever and the Ruffed Grouse Society were also key partners with Carlton County in trail expansion and restoration.

"In addition to connecting a section of the North Country Trail, this property provides public access to more than 600 acres of landlocked Carlton County owned land," said Sabin Adams, Minnesota public lands manager for Pheasants Forever. "It truly is a missing puzzle piece and a huge win for public access."

To learn more, the Pine Knot News spoke with Carlton County land director Greg Bernu and others about the Wrenshall developments, which began with the purchasing of what had been known as the White property, a 200-acre parcel of land featuring wooded terrain and an abandoned railroad grade.



County Trails continued on next page

Continued: County Trails

"It's a cool area, where you're starting to get into clay cuts that make for deep gorges," Bernu said. "It's a fantastic piece to walk."

Hiking has taken off as a pastime, even more so since the Covid-19 pandemic.

"People need to get out and do a little wandering — or nature bathing or forest bathing," Bernu said. "Those are fancy words for a walk in the woods. But we've got to de-plug from our machines once in a while and see what else is out there. 'Forest bathing' is the catchiest phrase I've heard."

When the Wrenshall land was privately owned, the county was denied easement to access available land, featuring old logging roads and a railroad grade. But once the property came up for sale around 2020, the county revisited the parcel. The land department, self-sustaining with endeavors such as logging contracts, didn't have the money to buy the property itself. But Pheasants Forever and the North Country Trail Association did, contributing \$270,000 and \$30,000, respectively, to go with a county contribution in the neighborhood of \$30,000. After purchase, Pheasants Forever gave its stake in the land to Carlton County.

"That's how we got that portion of trail," Bernu said, allowing the county to tie into the Wisconsin portion of the North Country Trail and take that part of the trail entirely off paved roads.

The trails outside Wrenshall are non-motorized and feature wider hunter-access trails along with narrower hiking trails. Of course, following the 2022-23 winter and its record snowfall — including the wet, heavy snow from the "blue" snowstorm of December 2022 — the trail was a disaster. Bernu said some snow shoers tried to navigate the trails, creating winding paths befitting a snowshoe hare around debris and "smooshed" trees that bent over with the weight of snow.

"The storm just mangled the trails," Bernu said.

The county tried to clear the trails last year, but its equipment didn't have the horsepower to make a dent in the damage.

Enter the Ruffed Grouse Society, which last summer assessed the damage. Gary Dotts, a Brainerd-based grant consultant for the society, and Bernu walked the trails together. Dotts subsequently supervised the \$9,500 process to contract with a heavy equipment operator out of Effie, Minnesota, to clear the trails. The contractor used a "linebacker," which grinds forest debris, including up to 20-foot trees, into mulch.

"We've got some funds to assist with this type of stuff," Dotts said, describing a \$300,000 fund the society is using for projects across the forested part of the state. "The average user does not see the restoration efforts that go into opening up existing trails."

The work included clearing the hunter walking trails and even creating some new loops to make the access larger.

The trail is now all mulched over and planted with clover. Dotts said it figures to be like a carpet in a couple of years.

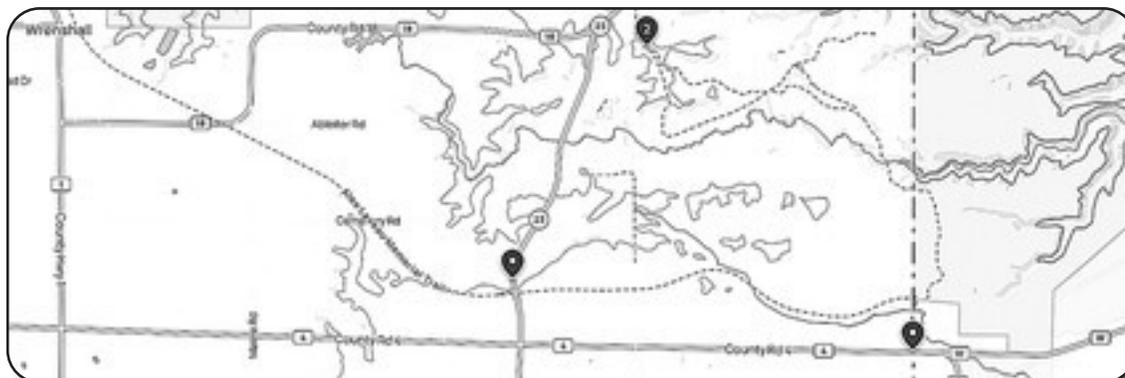
"With the world being taken over by motorized trails, the Ruffed Grouse Society wants to make sure the non-motorized experience still gets some trails," Dotts said.

"This block of public land will provide opportunities for hunting, trout fishing, hiking, biking, birding and many other outdoor activities," Adams said. "We are extremely pleased that we could be a partner in acquiring this property and not only protect wildlife habitat but make important connections."

For Bernu, the creation of the North Country Trail tie-in, along with additional hiking and hunter-walking loops, showcased an ideal scenario, in which public and private groups partnered to create greater public access to forestland.

"It was so much fun that it all came together," Bernu said. "We can't always afford it, but what else can we do? We started calling hook and bullet clubs, because we know they sometimes have money to spend. I can't talk it up enough about the work that's been done out there."

Editor's note: Visit <https://co.carlton.mn.us/230/Recreation> and click on the "Walking trails" link to find maps and learn how to access PDF maps to a user's phone.



Employee Service Awards

Alex Bresina - Transportation
10 Years

Roxann Filipiak - Sheriff's Office
30 Years

Veteran's Corner - Did You Know

In one of the largest-ever expansions of Veteran health care, all Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards during military service – at home or abroad – will be eligible for VA health care beginning March 5, 2024.

At the direction of President Biden, VA is expanding health care eligibility to millions of Veterans – including all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other combat zone after 9/11 – years earlier than called for by the PACT Act

VA announced that all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care beginning March 5, 2024. This means that all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States will also be eligible to enroll.

As [directed by President Biden](#), this expansion of VA health care eliminates the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act – meaning that millions of Veterans are becoming eligible for VA health care up to eight years earlier than written into law. This is a critical step forward because Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled Veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in [overall quality ratings](#) and [patient satisfaction ratings](#). Additionally, VA health care is often [more affordable](#) than non-VA health care for Veterans.

VA encourages all eligible Veterans to visit VA.gov/PACT or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and apply for VA health care beginning March 5. Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on August 10, 2022, more than 500,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care.

“If you’re a Veteran who may have been exposed to toxins or hazards while serving our country, at home or abroad, we want you to come to us for the health care you deserve,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “VA is proven to be the best, most affordable health care in America for Veterans – and once you’re in, you have access for life. So don’t wait, enroll starting March 5th.”

“Beginning March 5, we’re making millions of Veterans eligible for VA health care years earlier than called for by the PACT Act,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D. “With this expansion, VA can care for all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11. We can also care for Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty here at home – by working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays, and more. We want to bring all of these Veterans to VA for the care they’ve earned and deserve.”

In addition to expanding access to VA care, this decision makes it quicker and easier for millions of Veterans to enroll. Many Veterans believe they must apply to receive [VA disability compensation benefits](#) to become eligible for VA health care, but this is not correct. With this expansion and other authorities, millions of eligible Veterans can enroll directly in VA care – without any need to first apply for VA benefits.

This expansion of care covers Vietnam Veterans, Gulf War Veterans, Iraq War Veterans, Afghanistan War Veterans, Veterans who deployed in support of contingency operations for the Global War on Terror (Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission), and [more](#).

This expansion also covers many Veterans who never deployed as a part of a conflict but were exposed to toxins or hazards while serving in the U.S. Specifically, under this expansion of care, any Veteran who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity (TERA) – at home or

Article continued on next page

Employee Assistance Program

The MCIT Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a risk management tool designed to help employees and officials of MCIT members identify and resolve challenges that may affect their personal life or performance at work. It is a voluntary program that can assist employees, their spouse and dependents with difficult personal concerns through no-cost access to qualified counselors. Call 1.800.550.6248 to connect with an Employee Assistance Program counselor.

Carlton County Committee's

Building Committee -
2nd Wednesday of the month at 1:00
p.m.
(Government Services Building -GSB)

Committee of the Whole -
1st Tuesday of the month at 4:00 p.m.
(TB)

Diversity Committee -
4th Tuesday of the month at 9:00 a.m.
(PH&HS)

Finance Committee -
1st Tuesday of the month at 2:30 p.m.
(TB)

Policy Committee -
3rd Monday of the month at 2:00 p.m.
(Law Enforcement Center - LEC)

Management Team -
1st Tuesday of the month at 8:30 a.m.
(GSB)

Wellness Committee -
2nd Wednesday of the month at 8:30
a.m. (Varies)



Are you interested in submitting an article in the next Carlton County Newsletter? Email or mail your articles and pictures by the June 21, 2024 deadline to:

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*Please note that all submissions are subject to editing, as needed.

Carlton County Land Commissioner Says Farewell

Carlton County Land Commissioner Greg Bernu says farewell after 16 years. Congrats on your retirement Greg!

I started here in November of 2007, replacing at the time the longest serving Land Commissioner Milo Rassmussen (34 years). I received my Bachelor's degree in Forestry from the University of Minnesota in 1981, being the sole person responsible for keeping the grade curve low and making my classmates appear stellar. Entering the profession in the early 80's was difficult as there were still many graduates with Viet Nam preference points being selected for the few jobs available with the US Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management or the State of Minnesota DNR. Plenty of my early jobs were temporary in nature and my first full-time benefitted job was a position with the Forest Service out of Ogden, Utah.

Missing the abundance of water and tired of being poked and stabbed and bit by western desert flora and fauna, I moved back to Minnesota. After bouncing around with Minnesota Power, Blandin and a couple of Metro area cities, I was hired by Pine County in 1987 as the County Forester. Finally, with a dedicated income, I could afford to have a girlfriend and ended up marrying her up on Chandalar Lake, Alaska, at a mining camp 200 miles north of Fairbanks. Other jobs after Pine County were applied for and hired as the costs to raise a family consisting of my daughters Katt and Emily, two dogs, numerous cats, mice, rats, fish, guinea pigs and a pair of horses needed more and more so I worked for Lake County Forestry, Midwest Timber sawmill (Two Harbors), Potlatch, US Forest Service, Pine County (encore performance) and then Carlton County.

After 16 years working at Carlton County, I realized I did my time, and hopefully did it well. Memorable experiences were the large Land Exchange between Carlton County and Fond du Lac, strategic land purchases that better defined Carlton County Public Lands, helping connect two ends of the North Country Trail, and just working with a great bunch of people.

(Carlton County Board Chairwoman Susan Zmyslony, on behalf of the County Board, would like to thank Greg for his 16 years of exceptional service to the Board and the citizens of Carlton County, and express a deep appreciation for his professionalism, his hard work, and for his marvelous sense of humor. The Board also welcomes newly appointed Land Commissioner Mark Westphal, who had the benefit of working with Greg for 16 years and appears to share both his passion for the forest and his good humor. The Carlton County Land Department will continue to find itself in the best of hands.)



Continued: Veteran's Corner

abroad – is eligible for VA health care. VA has determined that Veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in a TERA: air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires); chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water); occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams); radiation (nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, radiation from military occupational exposure); warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons); and [more](#). VA will use all available information to determine if Veterans participated in a TERA, including military records and service connection.

VA is executing a nationwide campaign to ensure that as many Veterans as possible enroll. To date, VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,500 events nationwide, \$13 million in [paid advertising](#), 88,000 earned media clips, more than 400 million emails and letters to Veterans, VA's first-ever text messaging campaign, the creation of a [one-stop-shop PACT Act website](#), and more. This is the largest outreach campaign in VA history, which has one goal in mind: ensure that all Veterans – and their survivors – get the health care and benefits they deserve under the PACT Act.

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping Veterans and their survivors, visit VA's [PACT Act Dashboard](#). To apply for care or benefits today, visit [VA.gov/PACT](#) or call 1-800-MYVA411. More information on eligibility can be found at [VA.gov/PACT](#) or contact your local County Veterans Services at (218) 499-6838 to apply.

"This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer."