

NEWSLETTER

Written By : Donna Dognin

Connecticut Wartime Service Medal

Calling all Connecticut veterans with qualifying wartime service, you may be eligible to receive the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal, if you have not already done so. Qualifying wartime service is defined as a minimum of 90 days active service during a period of war (does not include training time); honorable or under honorable conditions discharge status; and a current resident of Connecticut, or a resident at the time of the qualifying wartime service.



If you are a veteran or the surviving spouse/ family member of a veteran that meets those requirements, please contact Veterans Strong Community Center. We are looking to host an event this summer to recognize and honor those veterans who have not yet received the medal. In particular, we are looking for Post-9/11 veterans, but all veterans who have not received the medal and qualify are encouraged to contact us.



Closed
Friday, April 3
Good Friday

We're always working to make sure our programs and services truly meet the needs of the people we serve — and the best way to do that is by hearing directly from you. Please take a few minutes to complete our short survey. Your feedback will help guide future programs, improve existing services, and ensure we're investing our time and resources where they matter most. Your voice matters. Thank you for helping us grow stronger, together.

[Take the Survey](#)



Upcoming Outreach

Thursday, April 9, 2026 - 8:30 am - 12:30 pm -
Thomaston Town Hall, Selectman's Conference Room

Thursday, April 16, 2026 - 10 am - 12:30 pm -
Manchester Veterans Coffee House - Army & Navy Club, 1090 Main St., Manchester - focus on ELPIS Alliance Sleep Savant Program

Wednesday, April 22 - Veterans Benefits Administration - office hours at Veterans Strong - **appointments necessary - no exceptions.** Call Donna @ 860-584-6258 to schedule your appointment to sit down with a representative from Veterans Benefits.

Thursday, April 23, 2026 - 11 am - 12:30 pm -
Harwinton Library, community room - General Benefits Overview / Seminar with Veterans Administration

Wednesday, April 29, 2026 - 10:30 - 11:30 am -
Bristol Senior Center, 240 Stafford Ave., Bristol -
Community Conversation on Gambling

New Faces

You might notice some different faces with us as we conduct outreach. We have a new partnership with Veterans Benefits Administration (VA disability claims, pension claims or burial benefits) to help provide greater outreach services. We are honored and proud to provide this additional service to the veterans in our catchment area.



**Closed - Friday, April 10,
Friday, April 17 and
Monday, April 20**

Spread the Word

- Help us reach more people by sharing our mission and work with your network. Follow us on social media, share our posts, and invite friends to join our cause.
- Social Media Links: Follow us on Facebook – [Veterans Strong Community Center](#) and [Elpis Alliance for Veterans](#). On Instagram at [VSCCBristolCT](#)
- Emails: info@vetstronginc.org
ddognin@vetstronginc.org
- Phone: 860-584-6258 / 6257
- By Appointment - 111 North Main St., Bristol, CT (ground floor)



News you need to know in the Veterans Health Administration

Fraud, Scams, and Suspicious Activity

VA Connecticut is committed to protecting the health, safety, and personal information of our nation's Veterans. Recently, there has been an increase in fraudulent scams targeting veterans for their healthcare appointments and requesting payment in advance.

VA does not require payment in advance for VA or Community Care appointments and encourages Veterans to verify any suspicious appointment communications directly with your VA medical facility.

If you receive a suspicious letter, call, or message:

- Do not send money or share personal or financial information.
- Contact your local VA medical center directly to verify any appointment.
- Report suspicious activity to your facility's Integrity and Compliance Officer, Integrity and Compliance Helpline at (866) 842-4357 or VHAOICHelpline@va.gov, VSAFE at 1-833-388-7233 or <https://vsafe.gov/> or the VA OIG Hotline at 1-800-488-8244 or <https://www.vaogig.gov/hotline/online-forms/submit-a-complaint>.

Your VA team is here to ensure your care is safe and legitimate.

Being vigilant against fraudulent attempts to steal personal information or money requires recognizing deceptive tactics used by scammers and actively refusing to engage. Stay safe, stay informed and always verify before you trust.

Thank you for your service and allowing VA Connecticut to serve you.

Announcements from our Partners

Fraud Alert for Veterans

⚠ DO NOT PAY FOR VA OR COMMUNITY CARE APPOINTMENTS UP FRONT

Protect yourself from a recent scam targeting Veterans.

A Veteran recently received a fake letter claiming he had a VA appointment and was asked to pay for the visit.

- VA later confirmed he was not enrolled in VA health care, and no appointment had been scheduled.
- The letter and payment request were fraudulent.

Remember:

- Veterans should never pay for any VA or Community Care appointment before or at the time of the appointment.
- VA does not charge upfront fees for appointments.
- VA does not send payment requests by email, text message, or phone.
- Community Care appointments are authorized by VA and are free to Veterans except standard VA co-pays when applicable.

If you receive a suspicious letter, call, or message:

- Do not send money or share personal or financial information.
- Contact your local VA medical center directly to verify any appointment.
- Report suspicious activity to your facility's Integrity and Compliance Officer, Integrity and Compliance Helpline at (866) 842-4357 or VHAOICHelpline@va.gov, VSAFE at 1-833-388-7233 or the [VA OIG](https://va.oig) Hotline at 1-800-488-8244.

Your VA team is here to ensure your care is safe and legitimate.

SEE SOMETHING. SAY SOMETHING.

General instances of non-compliance, including potential fraud, waste and abuse:
Office of Integrity and Compliance Helpline
VHAOICHelpline@va.gov or 866-842-4357 (VHA-HELP)

Veterans who suspect they have experienced fraud:
VSAFE Fraud Hotline
<https://vsafe.gov/> or 833-38V-SAFE

Reports made to VA OIC or VSAFE may be referred to the independent Office of Inspector General (OIG) for investigation into fraud or other wrongdoing or for its oversight of VA programs and operations.



Are you struggling with food insecurity? We get asked all the time where people can go for food resources. Here's a link directly to the search feature on CT Food-share's website - [Find Food](#)



Are you, or someone you know, struggling with thoughts of suicide?

VSCC can now offer QPR Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training. The QPR Institute's mission is to save lives and reduce suicidal behaviors by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. Contact Donna directly if you are interested in hosting or attending a training session - ddognin@vetstronginc.org.



Check our website and Facebook page for more events and activities, as well as our weekly schedule.

Save the Date

10th Anniversary Bash
Veterans Strong Community Center

Friday, August 7, 2026
6 - 10 pm
DoubleTree by Hilton, Bristol



Veterans Strong
Community Center, Inc.
Voices of Honor: Honoring All That Have Served
a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization





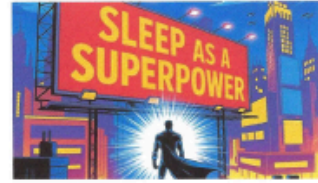
JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE THIS YEAR'S PATRIOTS' DAY HONOREES

TICKETS ARE \$25 AND INCLUDE A BUFFET DINNER, WATER/SODA/COFFEE AND DESSERT

FRI | 24 | 5:30PM
APRIL

BRISTOL SENIOR CENTER
240 STAFFORD AVE,
BRISTOL, CT

RSVP AND BUY TICKETS BY
4/17/2026 AT
INFO@VETSTRONGINC.ORG
860-584-6257



Elpis Alliance for Veterans

Sleep Rodeo (II) 2026

Saturday, April 11, 2026 2:00 - 4:00 pm

Online Zoom Invite to follow after registered.

You're Invited to the Sleep Rodeo with our in house nationally recognized sleep expert, along with the Elpis Alliance team for an engaging, hands-on Sleep Rodeo experience.

Learn how sleep impacts your health, wellness, performance, and creativity while discovering practical tips to:

Improve your nightly rest

Boost your energy and focus

Reduce health risks linked to poor sleep

Register at Elpisalliance.org:



FREE



FREE

11th Annual Youth Fishing Derby



American Legion Post 209, Forestville, CT

Sunday April 26, 2026

Rockwell Park, Bristol CT

Registration 6:30 am – 8:00am

Tournament 8:00 am – 11:00am

Trophies & Prizes

Age limit is 16 and under; 2 trout per child

Food Truck Provided by Steve's Top Dogs for Breakfast Needs



No Treble Hooks of any size will be allowed
Minnows, meal worms, worms or power bait are allowed.

FREE WORMS & MEAL WORMS DONATED BY TAL'S TACKLE



FEMALE VETERANS HIKE

For more information and registration:



HIKE #2

People State Forest
East River Road, Barkhamsted, CT 06063.

May 2nd 2026 8-11am

Hometown Hero Account



No monthly maintenance fee. No minimum balance. Packed with perks.

Created for those who give their all, the Hometown Hero Account offers exclusive perks, practical tools, and zero monthly fees. It's our way of giving back to the veterans, military service members, and first responders who give so much.

Appraisal Fee Reimbursement
Receive a \$500 appraisal fee reimbursement for new mortgages with Hometown Hero checking automatic loan payment.

Loan Rate Discounts
Enjoy a 0.25% rate discount on fixed-rate personal and auto loans with Hometown Hero checking automatic loan payments.

HELOC Special
Experience no annual fee on a Home Equity Line of Credit.

Special Mortgage Programs
Take advantage of First-Time Homebuyers and FHA Mortgages with low down payment requirements*.

Safe Deposit Box
Receive a FREE safe deposit box rental for six months*.

Estate Planning Support
Create your will, store documents, and safely share them from one secure platform with Paige.

*Participation in the First-Time Homebuyer Program is subject to eligibility requirements. Please refer to our website to learn more. *Offer is available to new safe deposit box owners only. Does not apply to existing rentals. The contents of the safe deposit box are not insured against loss by this financial institution or the FDIC. For your protection, you may wish to obtain your own box content insurance from an insurance company of your choice.



Come into any location to talk to a Banker or scan the QR code to open an account today.

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Equal Housing Lender | Member FDIC

Thomaston Savings Bank is a proud participant of the Veterans Banking Benefits Program and a proud member of the Association of Military Banks of America.



At Thomaston Savings Bank, we're proud to support those who serve our communities and our country. That's why we created the Hometown Hero Account—a premium checking account with added perks created for veterans, military service members, and first responders.



Easy to open and maintain
Open with just a \$10 minimum deposit. Enjoy no monthly maintenance service fee* and no minimum balance requirement.

Bank with your mobile device
Use our Mobile Banking app with Mobile Check Deposit, and make easy digital payments with Apple Pay®, Google Pay®, Samsung Pay®, and Zelle®.

Easy Access
Get to your cash anytime with our Visa® Debit Card and surcharge-free access to MoneyPass® ATMs nationwide.

Bank online on your time
Manage your account, view statements, and make transactions through Online Banking with Bill Pay.

All your finances, all in one place
View all your accounts, track spending, and manage your budget with iFi™, available at no cost through Online and Mobile Banking.

View and monitor your credit score
Keep track of your credit score easily with Credit Sense, a free tool available in Online and Mobile Banking.

Eligibility Criteria:

U.S. Veterans
Veteran
Veteran's Caregiver
Veteran's Beneficiary

U.S. Military Service
Members
Active Duty
Reservist

First Responders
Firefighter
EMT and Paramedic
Local, State, & Federal Law Enforcement

*Other fees may apply, including a \$2 monthly fee for mailed paper statements if you do not enroll in eStatements. Please read our Fee Schedule for details.



Come into any location to talk to a Banker or scan the QR code to open an account today.

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KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN

988&911

Knowing when and how to communicate the distinctions between 988 and 911 is critical.

People may not always know when to reach out for behavioral health support versus emergency services.

988

A Resource for Behavioral Health Crises

911

A Response System for Medical, Fire, or Police Emergencies

DESCRIPTION

The 988 Lifeline connects people with counselors who are trained to provide emotional support, crisis de-escalation, and local resources, without relying on law enforcement or emergency medical intervention unless necessary.

911 is the primary contact for medical emergencies, fire, crimes in progress, or other situations requiring immediate physical intervention. Although 911 is highly effective for emergencies involving physical harm, it is not specialized to manage behavioral health crises.

KEY FEATURES



Skilled, Caring Support 24/7: 988 counselors are trained to provide emotional and mental health support and crisis intervention.



Immediate Intervention for Physical Danger: 911 dispatches police, fire, or EMS to address urgent threats to life or safety.



Minimal Law Enforcement Intervention: Most crises are managed without involving law enforcement, reducing the likelihood of escalated responses.



Law Enforcement Involvement: Law enforcement officers are typically dispatched in crises involving potential violence or criminal activity.



Connection to Local Resources: People are referred to local mental health and/or substance use treatment services for follow-up care, ensuring continuity of support.

Summary: Both 988 and 911 provide critical support but focus on different crisis types. 988 specializes in behavioral health crises and offers crisis counseling and emotional de-escalation; 911 addresses physical dangers needing police, fire, or EMS. Understanding the distinction is essential to ensuring the appropriate response and care.

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

CTMOM 2026 FREE DENTAL CLINIC

VETERANS ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND!

Connecticut Mission of Mercy Free Dental Clinic



Making CT Smiles Healthier

APRIL 17-18, 2026

E. O. Smith High School

1235 Storrs Rd
Storrs, CT 06268

No Appointment Needed

First Come, First Served
Children under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian

Clinic Doors Open @ 7:00 AM



A Project of the Connecticut Foundation for Dental Outreach

For more information, visit our website www.cfdo.org or call (860) 863-5940

SERVICES PROVIDED:

- Exams
- Cleanings
- Fluoride Treatments
- Oral Health Education
- X-Rays
- Extractions
- Fillings
- Interim Partial Dentures (Limited)
- Root Canals (Limited Front Teeth Only)



You are cordially invited to attend the

**BRISTOL VETERANS COUNCIL &
VETERANS STRONG COMMUNITY CENTER**

**16TH ANNUAL
SALUTE DINNER**

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2026

5:00 PM: DOORS OPEN

5:45 PM: PROGRAM & DINNER

LUNA'S BANQUET HALL

164 CENTRAL STREET, BRISTOL, CONNECTICUT

**THIS EVENT SALUTES LOCAL AREA 2026 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO ENTER THE ARMED FORCES
OR ONE OF OUR NATION'S MILITARY ACADEMIES.**

FOR STUDENT RECRUIT, ADMISSION IS FREE.

FOR ALL OTHER ATTENDEES, ADMISSION IS \$30 PER PERSON.

PLEASE REPLY NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, MAY 1, 2026

Please make checks payable to: Veterans Strong Community Ctr.
Mail to: Veterans Strong Community Center,
111 North Main Street, Bristol, CT 06010

For additional information, please contact:

Donna Dognin 860-584-6258 | Email: info@vetstronginc.org
MSG (Ret) nm Gamache 860-977-2152 | Email: drillsgt81@gmail.com