

VETERANS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN BONNIE RIGGS

BULLETIN #2 2026-2027

You are invited to Santa's Castle's OPEN HOUSE!

On September 24th, the doors of the Castle will open from 11 am until 6 pm

to kick off the 2026 season, share information, and offer tours which include:

- What happens at the Castle and what the Elves do
- How to be referred by the chain of command
- How to refer Service Members to Santa's Castle
- How to volunteer
- How you can help
- Don't forget to check out our Donor and History walls

The Elves will be holding a **FILL the SLEIGH** event during Open House. If you would like to participate,

please bring a *new, unwrapped toy* to help fill our shelves for toy distribution.

When: September 24th - 11 am - 6 pm

Where: 2094 Bitar Ave JBLM, WA 98433

Google pin: <https://goo.gl/maps/s93v3i7d7FUBefVf7>

***Non-military personnel must obtain a visitor's pass to access JBLM.**

Please email admindirector@jblmsantascastle.org if you are a visitor so that the Elves can make the necessary arrangements.

To help preserve the magic of Christmas, Open House is an

ADULT (15 & up) ONLY event.

Follow Santa's Castle on Facebook & Instagram!

email admindirector@jblmsantascastle.org or president@jblmsantascastle.org Questions? Please call the Castle at 253-966-2355

VETERANS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN BONNIE RIGGS

BULLETIN #2 2026-2027



From Hope for Heroes Equine Therapy

"Discover the transformative power of horses at the nonprofit Hope for Heroes in Yelm, Washington. Veterans are empowered to learn invaluable coping skills and find solace in the company of these majestic creatures. The current system is not helping most of our Veterans. Join us, as we usher in a fresh approach to healing with horses. Combating PTSD and Saving Lives. Unleashing the Power of Equine Therapy."

Our staff is made up of passionate and dedicated individuals who are committed to helping our participants learn important horsemanship skills. They are all highly trained and experienced in working with horses and people. This helps our participants to be successful with their horse and have an enjoyable experience.

Our volunteers are the backbone of our organization. They help us with everything from cleaning stalls to leading horses. They are all passionate about our mission and are always willing to lend a hand.

Our veterans and active-duty personnel are the reason we do what we do. They have protected our way of life and now they are all facing challenges in their lives, but they are all determined to overcome them. We are honored to be able to help them on their journey.

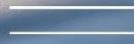
YELM, WA www.hopeforheroeswa.org/

HOPE FOR HEROES' HORSEMANSHIP CENTER

VETERANS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN BONNIE RIGGS

BULLETIN #2 2026-2027



8 Weeks – Hope, Healing and Equine Therapy.

***All of our classes for
Veterans and Active
Duty Military are at no
charge to the
participant.***

10 VA CLAIMS THAT CAN BE RATED 50% OR HIGHER

1		PTSD / MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS	RATINGS: 0%, 10%, 30%, 50%, 70%, 100%
2		SLEEP APNEA CPAP use may qualify for 50% under older criteria.	RATINGS: 0%, 30%, 50%, 100%
3		MIGRAINE HEADACHES 50% is the maximum schedular rating.	RATINGS: 0%, 10%, 30%, 50%
4		FLAT FEET (PES PLANUS) Up to 50% for severe bilateral symptoms.	RATINGS: UP TO 50%
5		CHRONIC SINUSITIS Up to 50% after repeated surgeries or near-constant symptoms.	RATINGS: UP TO 50%
6		ASTHMA	RATINGS: 10%, 30%, 60%, 100%
7		CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE	RATINGS: UP TO 60%, 80%, OR 100%
8		CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE (HEART DISEASE)	RATINGS: 10%, 30%, 60%, 100%
9		OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)	RATINGS: 10%, 30%, 60%, 100%
10		INTERVERTEBRAL DISC SYNDROME (BACK CONDITION)	CAN REACH 60% based on incapacitating episodes, and combined ratings can be much higher with radiculopathy.

FACEBOOK QUESTION

VETERANS:

WHICH VA DISABILITY
CONDITION DO YOU
THINK IS MOST
MISUNDERSTOOD
WHEN IT COMES TO
QUALIFYING FOR A
50% RATING OR HIGHER?

- A PTSD / MENTAL HEALTH
- B SLEEP APNEA
- C MIGRAINES
- D BACK CONDITIONS
- E SOMETHING ELSE



SHARE YOUR
EXPERIENCE BELOW! ↓

VETERANS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN BONNIE RIGGS

BULLETIN #2 2026-2027



VA DISABILITY CLAIMS – HOW CLAIMS ACTUALLY WIN



★ ★ ★

CATEGORIES • IN-SERVICE EVENTS • NEXUS

 MENTAL HEALTH TOP CLAIMS PTSD • Depression • Anxiety IN-SERVICE EVENT Combat • MST Harassment NEXUS EXAMPLES Combat • MST • Secondary	 MUSCULOSKELETAL TOP CLAIMS Back • Knees • Shoulder IN-SERVICE EVENT STR Injury • Repetition Heavy Lifting NEXUS EXAMPLES STR • Repetition • Injury	 NEUROLOGICAL TOP CLAIMS Headaches • Migraines • TBI IN-SERVICE EVENT Blast Exposure • Concussion Falls • Impact NEXUS EXAMPLES Blast • Concussion • STR
 RESPIRATORY TOP CLAIMS Asthma • COPD • Sleep Apnea IN-SERVICE EVENT Burn Pits • Smoke Hazardous Exposure NEXUS EXAMPLES Burn Pits • Smoke • STR	 CARDIOVASCULAR TOP CLAIMS Hypertension • CAD • Arrhythmia IN-SERVICE EVENT High Stress • Physical Strain Deployment NEXUS EXAMPLES Stress • STR • Secondary	 DIGESTIVE TOP CLAIMS GERD • IBS • Ulcers IN-SERVICE EVENT Combat Rations • Stress Medications • Contaminants NEXUS EXAMPLES Medications • Stress • STR
 GENITOURINARY TOP CLAIMS CKD • Stones • Incontinence IN-SERVICE EVENT UTIs • Dehydration Field Conditions NEXUS EXAMPLES UTIs • Medications • STR	 ENDOCRINE TOP CLAIMS Hypothyroid • Diabetes • Adrenal IN-SERVICE EVENT Burn Pits • Chemicals Medications • Stress NEXUS EXAMPLES Toxins • Stress • STR	 SKIN TOP CLAIMS Eczema • Psoriasis • Dermatitis IN-SERVICE EVENT Burn Pits • Chemicals Wet/Cold Conditions NEXUS EXAMPLES Exposures • Chemicals • STR
 HEARING / EAR TOP CLAIMS Hearing Loss • Tinnitus • Vertigo IN-SERVICE EVENT Noise Exposure • Explosions Aircraft • Weapons Fire NEXUS EXAMPLES Noise • Explosions • STR	 EYE / VISION TOP CLAIMS Blurred Vision • Dry Eye • Glaucoma IN-SERVICE EVENT UV Exposure • Screens Blast • Chemical Exposure NEXUS EXAMPLES UV • Screens • STR	 SYSTEMIC TOP CLAIMS Chronic Fatigue • Fibromyalgia • Lupus IN-SERVICE EVENT Deployment • Burn Pits High Stress • Infections NEXUS EXAMPLES Stress • Illness • STR

HOW CLAIMS WIN



CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

A diagnosed condition that is a disability.



IN-SERVICE EVENT

An event, injury, or exposure that occurred while on active duty.



MEDICAL NEXUS

✓ A medical link between the event and disability.

VA Disability Benefits

Blessings for a Veteran



You stood with courage, brave and strong,
Defending right against the wrong.
Through long nights, battles faced with might,
You held the line for truth and light.

Your sacrifice, your steadfast heart,
Has played a role in every part.
Through trials faced, through fear and pain,
You stood for freedom's lasting gain.

May peace now bless your every day,
And guide your steps along the way.
May joy and rest fill all you do,
With love and honor shining through.

For all you gave, for all you've done,
Your courage shines like morning sun.
We lift our hearts, our voices raise—
And thank you for your service always.

VETERANS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN BONNIE RIGGS

BULLETIN #2 2026-2027



VETERANS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

2026-2027 Department Chairman - Bonnie Riggs, briggs6012@gmail.com, 360-226-2886

Veterans, service members and their families often face unexpected challenges and the VFW Auxiliary is here to assist them in their time of