

# ADRS working for wounded veterans

*Because Alabama is one of the states with the greatest number of reservists and guard members serving in the War on Terrorism, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services has been at the forefront of efforts to better serve wounded veterans.*

## A partnership that works for vets

To formalize ADRS' role in assisting returning veterans, in FY 2006 the department entered into an agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Alabama.

Peggy Anderson, ADRS' statewide coordinator for employer development, said the department's partnership with Veterans Affairs makes sense.

"The V.A. has been referring vets to us for some time, but this agreement formalizes and better structures the referral process," she said.



*ADRS Commissioner Shivers shakes hands with Veterans Affairs Director Ricardo F. Randle after the men signed an agreement formalizing the partnership between ADRS and the VA.*

"Through this agreement, the V.A. can tap into our specific areas of expertise: employer development, rehabilitation technology, specialty counselors, and disability management."

VRS has also appointed six

rehabilitation counselors strategically located throughout the state to serve as liaisons to the V.A.

## National conference held in Alabama

In September, the department



*ADRS Commissioner Steve Shivers speaks at the National Summit on Wounded and Injured Veterans in September 2006.*

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– Peggy Anderson  
ADRS Statewide Coordinator for Employer Development

also participated in the first-ever Wounded and Injured Veterans' Summit, a national conference that was held in Auburn.

The one-and-a-half day workshop was designed to connect programs that focus on the recovery, rehabilitation, and employment of wounded and injured veterans and their families.

The event was attended by several state and national government officials, including Alabama Gov. Bob Riley, Charles "Chick" Ciccolella, assistant secretary for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service at the U.S. Department of Labor; Leslye Arshat, deputy

undersecretary of defense for military community and family policy; Major General

Kenneth Farmer, commanding general of the North Atlantic Regional Medical Command and Walter Reed Army Medical Center; Vice Admiral Daniel Cooper, undersecretary of benefits in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; and Dr. Michael Kilpatrick, deputy director for force health protection and readiness programs in the U.S. Department of Defense.

ADRS Commissioner Steve Shivers was among several government officials who participated in the "Governor's Panel" discussion on transition collaboration.

► *For another story about a wounded veteran served by ADRS, see Page 14*



*The Marine Corps awarded Lance Cpl. Corey Webb a 'meritorious mast' for exceptional performance on duty and a meritorious promotion for combat actions while in Iraq.*

## Injured vet grateful for ADRS assistance

Marine Lance Cpl. Corey Webb had been in Iraq for two weeks when he was injured after his unit came under enemy fire. The Springville man sustained a broken collarbone and a leg injury that would later require amputation.

When he returned home, Webb tackled his recovery with the "can-do" attitude that he had learned as a Marine.

He was a bit lost, though, when it came to returning to the workplace.

Prior to his deployment, the young man was preparing to begin work as a lineman for Alabama Power Co., but after his injury it was clear he wouldn't be able to perform the duties of that job. Despite that, he was determined to work with the company.

Alabama Power, a longtime customer of the department's Employer Services, referred Webb to ADRS for assistance in finding a place with the company.

Peggy Anderson, ADRS' statewide coordinator for employer development, and Kristie Grammer, a rehabilitation counselor and the department's V.A.

liaison in the Birmingham area, worked diligently with Alabama Power to find a position for the young man.

He eventually was hired as a dispatcher in the company's appliance sales division.

Within a few months, he departed for the Anniston Army Depot, where he is a property management specialist.

Today, with VRS' support, the 25-year-old is pursuing a bachelor's degree at Jacksonville State University.

He's grateful for the assistance he has received through VRS, which he praises for being a "single point of contact."

"It's so much simpler," he said. "If I need anything, I know I can call VRS."

The Springville native said VR services are especially valuable to "career military," who might not be familiar with the intricacies of searching for employment.

"A lot of these guys who've never done anything but serve in the military don't know how to find a job," he said. "They don't know how to create a resume, set up interviews, or anything related to finding work. VRS gives them the tools they need to get back to work."



*Kenneth visits with Leslie Dawson, a vocational rehabilitation counselor/employer development coordinator in the Tuscaloosa VRS office.*

**D**uring his last month in Iraq, Army National Guard Sgt. Kenneth Lewis' home was a tent near the Syrian border. "You stayed in a tent or you stayed in a bombed-out Iraqi guard building," he said. "My house was a tent. We had mortars coming in every evening or every other evening. They bombed a mess hall – it was on the news – that was about 300 yards from where my bed was."

The trauma of that bombing and his stay in Iraq still reverberates three years later. When he was sent back to



*Kenneth uses a stool that he can lower and raise to keep him from having to bend or stand for long periods.*

the states in December 2003 – less than a year after he was deployed – Kenneth expected to be home with his family within a matter of weeks. But his physical condition wouldn't allow it.

While in Iraq, he had been bitten by a sand fly, requiring a monthlong course of chemotherapy. The more-lasting injury, however, was sustained when he fell flat on his back from a semi-trailer truck. From December 2003 until March 2005, his home wasn't a tent in Iraq, but a room in the barracks at Fort

Benning, Georgia. Already plagued by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), his physical condition, the uncertainty of his situation and the separation from his family drove him deeper and deeper into despair and depression. "I was miserable – flat miserable," he said.

When he was finally released from Fort Benning in March 2005, he turned his attention to his work situation. Before his deployment to Iraq, Kenneth had worked as a plumber at Druid City Hospital in Tuscaloosa, but the hospital wouldn't allow him to return to work until he had a medical release from the Army – a process that would require at least six more weeks at Fort Benning. Uncertain what to do, he contacted Leslie Dawson, a rehabilitation counselor/employer development coordinator in the Tuscaloosa VRS office. She in turn contacted her counterpart in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Within a few days, Kenneth had received the OK to



*Kenneth Lewis uses his 'toilet caddy' to remove a toilet.*

return to work. Despite that, the 46-year-old was skeptical that he would be able to go back to his old job. His back injury, along with a degenerative bone disease, severely limited his ability to lift heavy objects and walk without assistance.

Again, Leslie was there. She consulted a rehabilitation technology specialist, who recommended a list of devices, including a scooter for improved mobility, a portable scaffolding for overhead work, a table with a hydraulic lift for heavy lifting, and a "toilet caddy" for removing and carrying toilets for repair. The cost of the accommodations was split between VRS and the VA.

These days, Kenneth is often seen zooming around the hospital grounds on his scooter, which he's decorated with a "Harley Davidson" sticker. He's glad to be working, glad to be back to a normal routine, glad to be home.

"It's good to have somewhere to get up and go in the morning and to be able to provide for my family" he said.

*Partners  
in Success*

Kenneth Lewis  
Vocational Rehabilitation Service  
Department of Veterans Affairs