

SPOTLIGHT

Texas is made up of 254 counties, each with a team of locally elected and appointed county officials serving their community. Polk County's elected offices include a County Judge and four Road & Bridge Commissioners that make up the Commissioners Court, the County Court at Law Judge, four Justices of the Peace, four Constables, a County Clerk, District Clerk, District Attorney, Treasurer, Tax Assessor-Collector and Sheriff.

There is no hierarchy in county government, so the only boss of these elected officials is ***You, the People.***

There are two District Court systems that serve Polk County, the 258th and the 411th Courts, which are responsible for appointing our County Auditor. The County Judge appoints the Emergency Management Coordinator, and all other officials are appointed by the Commissioners Court to run various county departments. These include Aging Services Director, Environmental Enforcement Officer, Fire Marshal, Grant & Contract Coordinator, Human Resources Manager, IT & Systems Administrator, Maintenance Superintendent, Museum Curator, Permits/Inspections Supervisor, Social Services Director and Veterans Services Officer. Learn more about your local offices by reading this latest installment of

Spotlight on Polk County:

Veteran Services Officer

602 E. Church St. Ste. 119 Livingston, TX 77351

936-327-6838

Polk County

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ON POLK COUNTY: Veteran Services Officer Melissa Gates

The Polk County Veteran Services Office is proud to serve our 4,268 Veterans residing in Polk County. County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) are located in virtually every county in the state for the purpose of assisting Veterans and their families receive the benefits they are entitled to from the Department of Veterans Affairs. CVSOs are trained by the Texas Veterans Commission, and must either be Certified or Accredited with the State to hold this position.

The most common benefits sought are Service-Connected Compensation, Non-Service-Connected Pension, Survivor Benefits and Burial Benefits. Service-Connected Compensation is a benefit Veterans are entitled to when they incur a chronic disability or disease while in service. The Non-Service-Connected Pension is a monetary benefit which is available for Veterans who either have a permanent and total non-service-connected disability or are 65 years of age or older. This benefit has at least a one-day wartime service requirement as well as income limits. There is also what's referred to as a Special Monthly Pension which is better known as Aid and Attendance. For those Veterans who are in need of assistance with their Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and their medical expenses have now increased due to the need for additional assistance in-home, assisted living, or nursing home care, this benefit can supply the additional funds necessary to help cover those additional care expenses. For Surviving Spouses there are also two monetary benefits available, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) or Survivor's Pension. DIC is the benefit a survivor would receive if the Veteran's death was directly related to a Service-Connected Disability. The Survivor's Pension, like the Veteran's Non-Service-Connected Pension, is an income based program, and the deceased Veteran had to meet the same wartime service requirement for the Surviving Spouse to also be eligible for this benefit. There is also an Aid and Attendance rate available for the surviving spouse if needed.

Some other day to day tasks that the Veteran Service Officer can assist with is filling out and submitting enrollments to the Veterans Health Administration, VHA audits, requests for DD214s and other service related records, or if you just don't know where to start and you need advice with a VA related issue.

The current Veteran Service Officer, Melissa Gates, has been with the department since April 2008. For most of that time, all visits were on a walk-in basis, however since the onset of COVID, the office is now by appointment only. Please call 936-327-6838 or email Melissa.gates@co.polk.tx.us for assistance or to schedule an appointment Monday through Thursday.

The Veteran Service Office is located at 602 E. Church St. Ste. 119, Livingston, TX, 77351.