

Buffalo/Niagara Falls selected as site for 2023 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs annual conference

Gov. Kathy Hochul on Friday announced the selection of Buffalo/Niagara Falls as the site for the 2023 annual conference for the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. The summer conference will bring in delegations from NASDVA's members who represent all 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. NASDVA members support veterans, service members and their families in accessing their local, state and federal benefits earned in service in the U.S. military.

NASDVA works with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and state leadership to develop initiatives, advocate for, and share best practices for veterans programs, benefits and services on a biannual basis.

A press release noted, "The New York State Division of Veterans' Services will act as moderators for the event and present policies and programs to state leadership on the successful policies and programs that make New York state the best place for veterans and their families to call home."

Hochul said, "It is our duty to ensure that our veterans and their families continue to receive the services they need. I'm proud that the nation's leading veterans experts will convene here in New York to discuss ways to improve and expand the programs that help our heroes. Our veterans and active military personnel answered the call to serve and protect our nation, and we must continue to do the same for them."

Nationally, NASDVA members, including NYS DVS, are the sec-

ond-largest provider of services to veterans and their families. In the calendar year 2021 alone, NYS DVS' accredited veterans benefits advisers – veterans themselves – brought in more than \$700 million in tax-free monetary benefits from the VA for New York's veterans and their family members. Additionally, the division remains a leading entity for direct advocacy on behalf of veterans, service members, and their families in obtaining the full range of state and local veterans benefits.

Hochul's team said she "continues to make New York's veteran families a top priority of her administration and budget. In her FY 2023 budget and State of the State address, Gov. Hochul proposes to invest a million dollars to expand the number of veterans benefit advisers at DVS by 17 and grow outreach efforts to reach the 714,000 veterans that call New York state home. This is in addition to her proposals to increase veterans access to fresh foods, with \$225,000 in new and additional funds for the Fresh Connect Checks for Veterans program. \$50,000 in proposed funding will be allocated for additional digital veterans welcome center kiosks, which will be installed throughout New York state at New York State Thruway welcome centers, airports, train stations and other locations. Increased funding will go toward county and city veterans service agencies, who will have their annual state funding increased from a minimum of \$10,000 for each local veterans service agency to a minimum of \$25,000. Gov. Hochul also proposed an investment of \$7.7 million to expand the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veter-

ans' Support Program statewide, providing vital peer support and counseling services to veterans who are transitioning from military service to civilian life."

Director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services Viviana DeCohen said, "New York state is honored and eager to host our fellow sister states and territories with the shared goal of increasing knowledge and awareness about how to best serve our fellow veterans and their families. We are grateful to our partners in selecting Buffalo for the 2023 conference. We are confident that New York's vast military past, present and future will demonstrate the importance and value New York places on its veterans, service members, and their families."

President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Thomas P. Palladino said, "I want to congratulate the New York State Division of Veteran Services for being selected to host the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs training conference in Buffalo, New York, in August 2023. This conference affords the opportunity for all 50 states, five territories and the District of Columbia to collaborate and partner with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs to share best practices on how to provide superior services to our nation's veterans, their families and survivors."

Niagara County Legislator Chairwoman Becky Wydysh said, "Niagara County has a proud tradition of supporting our veterans, including becoming a Purple Heart County, instituting a Thank-A-Vet discount program and now embarking on creating a perma-

nent Purple Heart monument. But nothing is more important than helping veterans get the services they need and deserve. That's why we look forward to welcoming the National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs to our region as they discuss how we can best meet the needs of those who have stood up for our country and our freedom."

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown said, "Buffalo is proud to co-host the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs annual conference. We are proud that so many of our residents have answered the call to service over the course of our city's long history. My administration, working with our partners in state government, is doing much to honor and preserve their memories. I am especially proud of what will be Buffalo's newest monument along the waterfront, a memorial to African American soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen. Working with Gov. Hochul, I hope to continue making Buffalo a premiere tourist and convention destination that will bolster our local economy while also showcasing Buffalo's proud history to critically important groups like this."

Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino said, "Our city and our region welcome the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. The organization's work with veterans and their families to ensure effective programs and services is critical. We are honored to be their host."

For more information on veterans benefits, or to make an appointment with a veterans benefits adviser with the New York State Division of Veterans' Services, call 888-838-7697.

IN THE NEWS

Niagara County has COVID test kits for not-for-profits, businesses

COVID-19

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Niagara County Legislator Rick Abbott announced Niagara County has tens of thousands of coronavirus tests kits from New York state that it is making available to not-for-profits and businesses. The tests are available through the Niagara County Department of Emergency Services.

"I delivered tests kits to People Inc. and FeedMore WNY a few weeks ago at their request, and I know there are other organizations that, perhaps given what they do, feel testing can help them continue operating safely," Abbott said. "So, when we received this latest batch, I suggested we make them available to any not-for-profit or business in Niagara County."

Niagara County Emergency Services Director Jonathan Schultz said the county received more than 50,000 test kits from the state at a time when the demand from the public for the kits has decreased sharply as the number of coronavirus cases has been dropping.

"We have heard from municipalities that were hosting kit giveaway events that the demand just isn't there, so when Legislator Abbott suggested offering them to not-for-profits and businesses, I was on board," Schultz said. "We are at a stage where we are encouraging people to mitigate their own COVID risk, so for organizations and businesses that may serve high-risk groups like the immunocompromised or the elderly, testing may still be important."

Schultz said any not-for-profit or business interested in test kits should email their request, including how many kits they would like, to NCEM@niagaracounty.com. Someone will then reach out to schedule a pickup time.

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