



# THE FEDERAL MARINER

VOLUME 4 • ISSUE 1  
JANUARY - MARCH 2015



MSC \* NOAA \* ARMY COE \* MARAD

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE SEAFARERS INTERNATIONAL UNION'S GOVERNMENT SERVICES DIVISION

## SIU Successfully Supports JHSV CIVMARS *Eligible Seafarers Now Entitled to New Awards Program*

After many months and numerous rounds of meetings with Military Sealift Command (MSC) representatives, SIU officials have successfully reached an agreement which provides monetary and time-off incentives for unlicensed CIVMARS.

The JHSV Awards Program recognizes the efforts of unlicensed CIVMARS who complete joint high-speed vessel training requirements for the demanding and highly skilled work aboard JHSV-class ships. It also is meant to encourage CIVMARS who complete this training to remain sailing aboard JHSVs.

Unlicensed CIVMARS are entitled to the following types of monetary awards and bonuses: Watch-standing CIVMARS – for example, Boatswains Mate (W); Able Seaman (W) and Engine Utilityman (W) – will receive an opening \$3,000 monetary award for the completion of the initial JHSV training along with the completion of a four-month assignment. This \$3,000 is a one-time award.

Unlicensed CIVMARS working as ships' communications officers, chief radio electronics technicians, junior supply officers, steward-cooks, cook-bakers and utilitymen will be eligible for a \$2,000 initial award once he or she completes the opening JHSV training and finishes a four-month assignment.

To encourage CIVMARS to keep sailing on the JHSVs, and to recognize their hard work and the minimal habitability conditions aboard the vessels, the union also advocated for additional bonuses to be paid for CIVMARS who stick with those ships. For a JHSV AB/EU who completes refresher training and an additional four-month assignment, there will be a \$2,000 bonus. These bonuses are limited to one \$2,000 bonus payment for every two years of work on the JHSV class.

For the same reasons outlined above, bonuses of \$1,000 will be available to ships' communications officers, chief radio electronics technicians, junior supply officers, steward cooks, cook-bakers and utilitymen.

In addition to the incentive awards and bonuses, the SIU pressed for more recognition for unlicensed CIVMARS working on JHSVs in the form of time-off



The joint high-speed vessel *USNS Trenton* rolls out in preparation for launch at Austal USA shipyard earlier this year. The ship will carry an SIU crew when it joins the MSC fleet. (U.S. Navy photo)

awards. CIVMARS will be entitled to a 16-hour time-off award for every four-month tour he or she completes. CIVMARS may take this leave time in between their four-month tours if they choose to lengthen their leave periods between voyages.

The program is outlined in the MSC Quality Management System (QMS) Procedures Manual. Along with this document the union negotiated an MOU to spell out future negotiating rights.

MSC has agreed to retroactively apply the awards program to those CIVMARS who have been working to

make the JHSV initiative a successful, safe and productive effort.

Currently, four JHSV vessels operate in MSC's fleet: the *USNS Spearhead*, *Choctaw County*, *Millinocket* and *Fall River*. Twenty-two unlicensed and licensed crew members are slated to sail aboard each vessel. It is anticipated that there will be a total of 11 ships in this class – all to be crewed by MSC CIVMARS.

For more information about the award and incentive program, contact your union representative, or send an e-mail to [siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org)

## USTRANSCOM Commander Selva Backs U.S. Mariners

### MSC Executive Director Thackrah Offers Important Updates on Agency's Key Planning

The commanding officer of the U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) and the executive director of the U.S. Military Sealift Command (MSC), respectively, recently offered strong words of support for civilian mariners and also provided timely updates about their agencies.

Gen. Paul Selva of USTRANSCOM and John Thackrah of MSC addressed the executive board of the Maritime Trades Department (MTD) Feb. 19 in Atlanta. The MTD, a constitutionally mandated department of the AFL-CIO, is composed of 21 international unions (including the SIU) and 21 port maritime councils in the United States and Canada representing nearly 5 million working men and women. SIU President Michael Sacco also serves as president of the MTD.

Selva described Sacco as "a counselor, a teacher and a friend – a person who isn't bashful about making your case to our nation's leaders. He has served you well."

The general said he appreciated the chance to discuss what he views as "the foundation of the strength of our nation, which is our maritime trades and the ability to move our forces to any point on the globe at the time of our choosing. Without you – without all of your efforts – that would not be possible. ... I am of the firm belief that this nation is and will always remain a maritime nation."

Selva noted that the MTD board and guests in the audience included representatives from all components



SIU President Michael Sacco (left) thanks Gen. Paul Selva for his remarks at the Maritime Trades Department winter meeting Feb. 19 in Atlanta.

of the maritime industry. With that in mind, he said the nation "depends on you not only for its economic security but for its actual physical security. I'm a big fan of saying if we have to get into a fight, I want it to be an away game. You are the people that make that possible, whether you're crewing the ships that are in our surge fleet or our Ready Reserve fleet, or whether you're crewing the American-flag international trade vessels that are so important to our national defense."

The general then explained why he believes in the great value of laws and programs that sustain the U.S. Merchant Marine, including the Jones Act, the Maritime Security Program and its related Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement.

Selva also acknowledged the proud legacy of the U.S. Merchant Marine. "Throughout the history of our military and throughout the history of this industry, you have stood side-by-side with us," he said. "It's almost not fair to call you civilians; you are part of our military. You are part of the fiber that makes us successful. In any fight, I can guarantee that 75 percent of the cargo that moves to sustain the fight or deploy to the fight is going to move on the vessels that you build, crew and maintain."

He wrapped up his remarks by pointing out, "Together, the strength of this nation can be put on any point on the

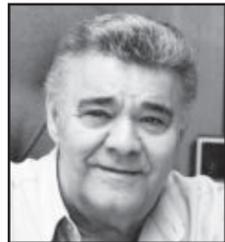
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## President's Column

### Working for a Bright Future - And Why Unions Matter

As we approach the second quarter of the New Year, I remain optimistic about the future of organized labor, even while being realistic when it comes to the challenges we face. That optimism comes from an unwavering belief in what our movement stands for: dignity in the workplace, fair treatment, protections for employees, fair wages, and decent benefits.

No one denies that these are tough times for labor, but history is on our side. History and the experiences of working people around the world have proven that when workers have the right to organize and bargain collectively, societies enjoy shared, sustainable prosperity. That's not because of handouts, but rather because of fair compensation for on-the-job production.



Michael Sacco

Our country needs a revived middle class, along with an economy in which a living wage and good job opportunities are the norms. We need an economy where workers are valued for their contributions and respected for their work which is vital to the success of businesses and all the agencies which make up our state and federal governments.

Unfortunately, that won't happen as long as the right to join or form a union remains out of reach for most American workers. I'm reminded of an Ivy League study that concluded in part, "Restoring the middle class means reversing the disconnect between wages and productivity, which means giving workers power to collectively negotiate for better terms of employment and a larger share of the rewards of growth." Public employees who selflessly serve their communities and our nation are especially under attack right now from politicians more interested in winning elections than recognizing the contributions of civil servants. Unions are on the front lines in the fight to protect workers' health, promote a safe work environment, and stand up for the wages, pensions and other benefits of public sector employees.

It does not take much searching to find news stories of public unions fighting to push back against politicians working to strip away collective bargaining rights put in place to protect and support public service employees – teachers, police officers, fire fighters, EMTs, community nurses, and many others who work each day to protect and serve you and me.

The path to restoring the connections between protecting workers and growing our middle class is multi-faceted but attainable. It includes bolstering labor laws so that employees have a fair shot at voting for union representation. Raising the minimum wage (as many states are doing) also is an important step in the right direction.

That path also includes public investment in education and apprenticeship programs, especially for young people, who have suffered greater income loss than any other demographic. It's certainly no secret that we also need more infrastructure investment, and tax laws that are fair.

It may sound like a pipe dream, but I'm also not giving up on revitalizing the "Made in USA" label. I recently saw an editorial cartoon that featured someone wearing only a towel, and that person said, "My mother refuses to buy anything not made in America." That cartoon made its point without trying to be funny, and while the image reflected a not-so-fictional symptom, the cure is within our reach. Buy union, and if that's not possible, at least buy American. Support political candidates who will enhance "Buy American" safeguards, properly enforce our trade laws and eliminate incentives for shipping our jobs overseas.

My bottom line is that the labor movement is all about helping working families use trade unionism to build a better life. Our way works – for employees and for employers, whose unionized workforces typically are more productive and less prone to turnover.

As AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka – a great friend of our union and a tremendous leader – recently put it, the best way to fair pay is a union contract. The best way to retirement security is a union contract. And the best way to a better tomorrow, so you can give your family a decent life and a strong future, comes back to a union contract.

Of course, even a unionized workforce may face setbacks that aren't their fault and that cannot be avoided. But the numbers don't lie: Yearly reports from the government show that union members normally enjoy higher pay and better benefits than unrepresented workers. They also have a voice in the workplace, access to a grievance procedure, and other protections and benefits that were hard-earned over many decades.

Not all of labor's best days are in the past. We've got a lot to offer, and I know our union will do its part throughout 2015 to not only look out for our own members, but also promote trade unionism to unrepresented workers wherever and whenever possible. The sooner our movement achieves significant growth, the sooner the backbone of America's economy – its middle class – will grow and prosper. America's working families deserve nothing less.

### Seafarers International Union Directory

Michael Sacco, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

David Heindel, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Kermett Mangram,  
*Vice President Government Services*

Chester Wheeler,  
*Asst. Vice President Government Services*

## MTD Speakers Salute Mariners

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globe that we choose, because we have combined military and civilian capacity in a way that no other nation can, and no other nation ever will. I've had more than one national leader from around the world say to me precisely the following: 'We have no idea how you do what you do, but we're glad America knows how to do it.' And you're it. I thank you for your dedication, your support, your patriotism, your loyalty to this task of defending our nation."

USTRANSCOM oversees eight combatant commands and additional subordinate agencies, including MSC.

Meanwhile, Thackrah said he sees a steady future for mariners in the agency's fleet, regardless of whether those seafarers are from the private sector or whether they work directly for the government. He said that despite a major reduction in government spending on transportation (partly due to the drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan), MSC projections for the next five years show little change in their anticipated need for merchant mariners.

"I think it's a good-news story that in this downturn, (in this) potentially sequestered world as we say in our budgetary-speak, that we're going to be able to maintain our headcount," Thackrah told the board. "Are we going to retire some ships? Yes, but we're bringing a lot of new equipment aboard."

He pointed out current new-build programs including the joint high-speed vessels (JHSV), and the mobile landing platforms (MLP). Eleven JHSVs are planned, as are at least three MLPs. Thackrah also mentioned various special mission ships that are being added to MSC's fleet.

The executive director described the components of U.S. sealift capability, including more than 9,600 mariners (roughly 5,300 from the public sector) sailing with MSC, 60 ships in the Maritime Security Program fleet, 26 prepositioning ships, 14 surge sealift vessels and 46 ships in the Ready Reserve Force (RRF). He talked about options for replacing vessels in both the RRF and surge fleets.

In recalling the history of MSC and its forerunner (the Military Sea Transportation Service), Thackrah said that since World War II, its missions have grown from two to more than 20 today. "What we've learned over time is how to do these missions with civilian mariners, and not (Navy) sailors," he said.



SIU Asst. VP Chet Wheeler (left) is pictured with MSC Executive Director John Thackrah.

However, his presentation also pointed out the decline in the privately owned U.S.-flag fleet since the end of World War II. Along with lamenting that development, he expressed a desire for additional U.S. shipyards. "I'm glad to have the ones that we have; there's just not enough," Thackrah stated. Specifically, he said there aren't enough yards for repairs of military ships, especially in times of crisis.

Thackrah concluded his remarks by applauding the U.S. Merchant Marine.

"Mariners are precious to us," he said. "It doesn't matter whether it's a contract-operated ship or a CIV-MAR-operated ship. I need to keep these people safe."

He described mariners as the "backbone of our sealift enterprise. In times of crisis, our nation calls upon maritime labor unions to crew our surge sealift and MARAD Ready Reserve Force ships.... We are incredibly proud to serve side-by-side with the men and women that you represent that work for us at Military Sealift Command that go to sea every day."

## Inquiring Mariner

This quarter's question was answered by SIU Government Services Division members at the CSU in Norfolk, Virginia, in mid-January

### Question: What is the favorite port you have visited?



Candace Poole

I loved Panama! The climate, the scenery. Just a great place to visit.



Curt Hallam

Sasebo, Japan. I love the culture of the Japanese people.



Robert Weaver

Gaeta, Italy, aboard the USS Mt. Whitney. Beautiful place and great food.



Corey Merchant

Bahrain is the nicest place I've visited. Just enjoyed it being so different.



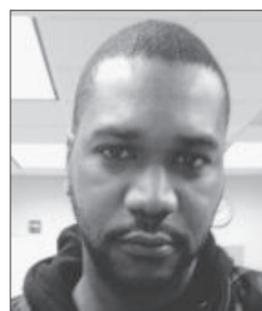
Oligario Johnston

I loved Bahrain. The people are really friendly and the atmosphere is very nice.



Christopher Owens

I really enjoy going to Subic Bay. It's a little different, but I always have a great time there.



Reuben Lewis

I'd say Malta. It is such a beautiful, beautiful country.



Cassius Jenkins

I am a "king" in Djibouti. I love visiting there.

Check for the latest SIU news on [www.seafarers.org](http://www.seafarers.org), on Twitter @SeafarersUnion and on our Facebook page (linked on the website's home page)

# Understanding Your Benefits And How to Secure Them

## You're Thinking of Retiring – Things to Consider

### Retiring Abroad

Many Federal Mariners spend a good part of their lives travelling across the world. Exposure to different ways of life, making enduring connections with friends abroad, maintaining a second home in another country and understanding the expenses of growing older in the U.S. have prompted many mariners to consider retiring abroad.

In 2013 approximately 373,000 retired Americans lived outside the U.S. Most Americans who retire outside the U.S. retire to Canada. Other large groups of retirees find themselves in Japan, Mexico, Germany, Greece, Poland, Italy, Israel and the Philippines.

But if you are not a citizen of the country you may choose to live in, what should you consider before making the move? For starters, it's important to be aware of taxes. Even if you live abroad you will probably pay taxes as a result of the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act. The Act allows the IRS to monitor expatriates via their tax payments and finances. The U.S. has many different tax treaties which spell out which government will be collecting more taxes and every government has different rules to avoid double taxation.

To avoid problems or snafus which may lead to an audit, finding a tax professional with international experience and consulting tax preparers in the U.S. and the foreign country you reside in may help. Living abroad does not automatically mean an expatriate is taxed double – it may mean that the paperwork for filing taxes is more complicated and requires extra effort and review.

Another way to ensure your economic security and personal safety when living abroad is to update your

legal papers (living will, will and powers of attorney) to make sure they are applicable in your new home. The United States consulate where you are living may be able to recommend an English-speaking lawyer.

In the event of family or other emergency in your home abroad or in the U.S., be sure all family members and friends have good contact numbers and addresses to communicate with you. The State Department has implemented the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program for U.S. citizens travelling or living abroad. U.S. citizens can enroll in the program to give the local Embassy or Consulate a way to reach you in the event of an emergency or political change requiring evacuation.

There are websites dedicated to help people considering retiring abroad as well as organizations offering advice. AARP and the group American Citizens Abroad offer helpful information.

### Steps to Take on the Road to Retirement – Preparation is Essential

SIU representatives receive many questions about retirement requirements and processes. Over the next year the SIU anticipates the development of comprehensive retirement information for members of the SIU Government Services Unit. The SIU believes that this will be a helpful service as federal agency human resources and benefits offices are scaled back because of budgetary issues.

Federal employees have many benefit options. Retirement is a big step for those in federal service; it can be a complicated process and requires lots of lead time to fully prepare. Understanding how to make the most of your benefits by carefully reviewing your work history, filing the correct forms and ensuring you know your TSP withdrawal options can mean the difference between a comfortable or difficult retirement. Here are some things to consider:

**TSP Options:** Federal mariners should review withdrawal options at least six months to a year before you retire. One option is to leave your money

in the TSP and re-allocate then to other TSP funds. However, employees may also have the option to receive annuities, transfer your money out of the TSP into another retirement account, receive a lump sum payment or take several types of partial withdrawals. These choices require careful review for financial planning and tax purposes.

**Life and Health Insurance Options:** You are probably eligible to take your life and health insurance with you when you retire from federal service. It's important to understand how these benefits will fit into your family's coverage and whether it is worth carrying these benefits after you leave work. Also important to know are the correct forms that will ensure continuation of coverage should you determine to carry these benefits into retirement.

**Determining Whether You Need Civilian Deposit, a Re-Deposit or a Military Deposit:** One of the most complex areas of retirement planning is determining whether you may need to make a deposit for military service, if you took a refund as a re-hired federal employee or if you were a temporary employee for a period where no retirement deductions were withheld.

The Federal Mariner included a column about this important issue in the January-March 2014 issue, available in the CIVMARS News section of the SIU website. You can help yourself determine whether a deposit/re-deposit makes sense by calculating how much the deposit would be versus how much more monetary benefit you would otherwise get during your retirement. This analysis cannot be done quickly, especially if you need to contact Office of Personnel Management to figure out the deposit amounts you may owe.

These are just a few of the issues federal mariners will need to consider. Research your options, and consult professionals whom you trust to give you unbiased and fully informed advice on an issue which will have an important impact on your life after work.

## SIU CIVMARS in Action



This photo from Electrician Paul Barbadillo shows crew members aboard the *USNS Wally Schirra*, a Military Sealift Command vessel which is part of the agency's fleet of 14 dry cargo/ammunition ships (abbreviated as T-AKE). Through underway replenishments, the *Schirra* and its sister ships deliver various cargoes to other vessels at sea.

## SIU Government Services Mariners Honored at Annual AOTOS Dinner

Members serving aboard the *USNS Richard E. Byrd* during a daring rescue at sea were honored at the United Seamen's Service 2014 Admiral of the Ocean Sea (AOTOS) dinner, held in New York City on Nov. 7, 2014. For their professionalism and devotion to duty, the mariners of the *Byrd* were presented with the AOTOS Mariners' Plaque.

On July 28 last year, the crew of the *Byrd* rescued nine mariners whose Yemeni-flagged cargo ship (the *Al Saed-1*) had lost power and was adrift in the Gulf of Oman. With the *Al Saed-1* taking on water, the foreign mariners abandoned ship and embarked in a life raft – but not before sending a call for help.

The *Byrd* was the first ship to respond to the distress signal, and rescued the Yemeni sailors around 9 a.m. local time. They were

subsequently evaluated by the *Byrd's* medical staff, and no injuries were reported. One of the *Byrd's* sister ships, the Seafarers-crewed *USNS Amelia Earhart*, then picked up the *Al Saed-1* crew and transported them back to Yemen.

Afterwards, the Commander of the Navy's 5th fleet communicated to the *USNS Richard E. Byrd* his admiration for expertly rendered assistance to *M/V Al Saed-1*. "Your efforts exemplify the U.S. Navy's commitment to the safety of all mariners," he wrote. "You can be justifiably proud of your efforts and teamwork."

The AOTOS gathering is considered one of the U.S. maritime industry's premier events. Typically, no more than a few vessels and crews are honored each year.

## SIU Government Services Division Representative Spotlight: Sam Spain

Sam Spain is the SIU Government Services Division representative in Norfolk, Virginia. It may be an understatement to say he comes from a seafaring family – Sam has an uncle, brother and two nephews who sail as U.S. Merchant Mariners, and he had a grandfather who retired from the industry. Sam joined the SIU in 1990 in Norfolk and sailed for a dozen years as a member of the steward department. He began as a steward assistant aboard the *Cape Isabel* and finished as the chief steward on the *Steven L. Bennett*. Sam was a frequent upgrader at the SIU-affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education, located in Piney Point, Maryland.



Sam came ashore as a patrolman in Norfolk in 2002. His experience living and working in Norfolk gives him firsthand knowledge and an excellent understanding of the pressures and burdens of Federal Mariners working on vessels serving the Navy fleets. The Seafarers hiring hall location, three blocks from NOAA, allows Sam to be available to that Norfolk NOAA unit at a moment's notice. Sam began working in the Government Services Division in 2014. Since starting his work with the Government Services unit, Sam has represented CIVMARS in disciplinary actions. He has negotiated MOUs and various policies and procedures impacting MSC and NOAA Federal Mariners. Sam has also attended a Labor-Management Forum for ACOE covering a wide range of issues for the ACOE mariners. Sam is enjoying meeting the SIU Government Services Federal Mariners and looks forward to continuing to work with this unit.

## Submissions Wanted

Attention all ACOE, NOAA, SBRF-MARAD and MSC federal mariners: Your work on behalf of our government is vital. Your union appreciates all you do in your workplace and on behalf of our nation.

We want your voices to be heard! We want to make sure we are writing about issues and topics that are of importance to all our Government Services units. Please send your comments, pictures and requests for coverage to [siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org)

We will do our best to print your photos and publish articles based on your requests.

Be active. Stay involved. Support the *Federal Mariner* and your union!

# Your Union On Watch – Key Current Issues We’re Following

The following summaries touch on a few important subjects the SIU is monitoring and addressing on behalf of the membership:

**Phased Retirement:** An initiative of the Obama Administration, phased retirement is intended to allow employees to transition into retirement by continuing to work on a part-time basis. Federal employees will be eligible for a portion of their retirement annuity for the time they are not working. The goal is to enhance mentoring and training for younger employees who will be following those experienced workers as they begin to finish their federal government careers. There has always been informal mentoring between more experienced unlicensed crew and newer CIVMARS coming up the ranks.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has reviewed the possibility of different groups of workers participating in the phased retirement program. The SIU has communicated to the Military Sealift Command (MSC) that the union sees several benefits in allowing CIVMARS to participate in a phased retirement program. The union will continue advocating for participation.

In fact, at the most recent Labor-Management Forum, SIU representatives asked MSC leaders to determine whether OPM and the Department of Defense will commit to applying the phased retirement program to unlicensed CIVMARS. The union believes this will help improve manning issues, overdue relief concerns and help train and support the next generation of CIVMARS.



Union and MSC representatives meet at SIU headquarters for the most recent Labor-Management Forum.

Similar communications will be made with NOAA, ACOE and MARAD – SBRF.

If you would like to share your thoughts about CIVMARS participating in a phased retirement program, send them to [siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org)

**New Leave Policies for Childbirth, Adoption and Foster Care:** President Obama, in an effort to support, recruit and retain federal workers, issued a memorandum authorizing agencies to take up to six weeks of paid leave to care for a newborn child, to handle adoption proceedings, for the placement of a foster child and other sick-leave eligible uses. In accordance with the January 15, 2015 memorandum, OPM and federal agencies must now review existing policies to determine how the new policy will be incorporated.

Additionally, in a separate memo titled Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and dated June 23, 2014, President Obama called for the update and review of existing agency leave policies to ensure that employees were educated about their those guidelines and, where possible, to expand availability of workplace flexibilities.

The SIU has notified MSC of the agency’s obligation to review new types of advanced leave and we have received a commitment from MSC that it will do so. The SIU will be conferring with MSC, NOAA, ACOE and MARAD - SBRF representatives this quarter, to ensure that federal mariners receive all the benefits to which they are entitled. Each year SIU representatives help many federal mariners who have given birth, who are sick, or who care for a sick family member navigate their way through the complex puzzle of federal leave policies. We will continue to follow this issue closely to ensure that MSC, NOAA, ACOE and MARAD- SBRF will make this benefit available to all eligible employees.

## How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy. The union’s website – [www.seafarers.org](http://www.seafarers.org) – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at:

[www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp](http://www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp)

Forms are also available under “union forms” in the SIU membership tab.

### Contact Information

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## Your Valued Military Service Can Earn You \$1,000 When You Purchase a New Home



Call 1-866-378-1486 or visit [UnionPlus.org/Mortgage](http://UnionPlus.org/Mortgage) to learn more about the Union Plus Mortgage Veterans Grant.

As a Veteran, you’ve served our country, now we want to serve you by offering a \$1,000 grant when you purchase a home through the Union Plus Mortgage program.

**Make your dream of home ownership a reality!** The \$1,000 Union Plus Mortgage Veterans Grant makes home ownership more affordable for veterans by helping with expenses for your newly purchased home.

### Grant Requirements:

- Open to veterans of all branches of the U.S. military
- Must be an active union member or retiree
- Must apply within 90 days of closing on a Union Plus mortgage

**Don’t Miss Out!** Limited funds are available for this grant. Additional terms and restrictions may apply.



*This benefit is for union members only*

