

Compensation and benefits assistance available for veterans twice a month in Pass Christian

By Toni Miles

For many veterans, obtaining the benefits they earned through military service can be a complicated and frustrating process. From gathering medical records to completing extensive paperwork and understanding eligibility requirements, the path to receiving compensation is often filled with obstacles.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), hundreds of thousands of disability compensation and pension claims remain pending nationwide. As of late May 2026, the VA reported more than 578,000 pending claims, including nearly 82,000 claims that had been pending for more than 125 days, the threshold the agency uses to define a backlog. While the VA has made progress in reducing wait times and processing claims faster than in previous years, many veterans still experience delays or struggle to understand the system.



Recognizing these challenges, a local veteran and veterans' group is stepping forward to help fellow veteran service members in the Long Beach and Pass Christian communities. The volunteer assistance sessions, offered twice each month, are designed to provide veterans and their families with guidance on a variety of matters, including disability compensation claims, survivor benefits, pension applications, appeals and identifying resources available through federal and state veterans programs.

Tina O'Shields, Veterans Service Officer, Staff Sergeant Donnie Leo-Levins American Legion Post 1995 in Long Beach, who has held federal and county level VA accreditation will be available at Daddy's, located at 885 East North Street in Pass Christian, on the first and third Thursdays of each month from 1 to 3 p.m. to assist Veterans with questions concerning VA compensation and benefits claims.

Veterans' advocates say that the pro-



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cess can be especially difficult for older veterans, those coping with service-related illnesses or disabilities, and individuals who may not have access to transportation, technology or knowledgeable assistance. Missing documentation, unfamiliar terminology and uncertainty about available benefits can discourage veterans from filing claims or appealing denied decisions.

Mississippi veterans may qualify for additional state benefits, including property tax exemptions for certain disabled veterans, specialized license plates and other programs that are not always widely known. Veterans' advocates stress that understanding the full range of available benefits is an important part of ensuring that those who served receive the support they have earned.

The local outreach effort reflects a simple mission: ensuring that no veteran has to navigate the benefits system alone. For many who have served their country, access to accurate information and compassionate guidance can be the first step toward obtaining the compensation, care and recognition they deserve.

One Book, One Pass selection announced

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Events begin this fall for the annual community reading project, One Book, One Pass. The 2026 selected author is award-winning war correspondent Sebastian Junger and the book selection is *In My Time Of Dying: How I Came Face to Face With The Idea of an Afterlife*.

Over the next several months, the community is encouraged to read the book and engage in book discussions, panel discussions, and other programs that will culminate in the Author Presentation by Junger on Thursday, November 19, at 6:30 p.m. at the Randolph Center in Pass Christian.

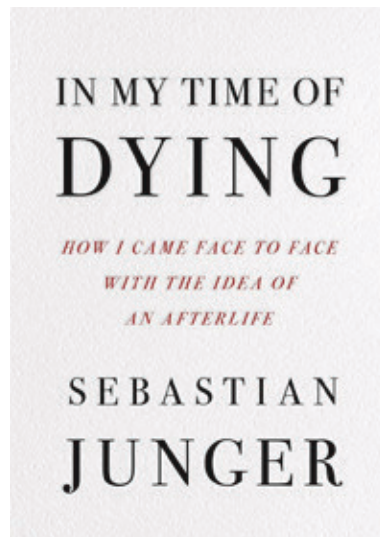
Junger is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Perfect Storm*, *Fire*, *A Death in Belmont*, *War*, *Tribe*, *Freedom* and this year's selected book, *In My Time of Dying*. As an award-winning journalist, a contributing editor to *Vanity Fair* and a special correspondent at ABC News, he has covered major international news stories around the world and has received both a National Magazine Award and a Peabody Award. Junger is also a documentary filmmaker whose debut film, *Restrepo*, was nominated for an Academy Award and won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance.

In the One Book One Pass selection, *In My Time of Dying*, a near-fatal health emergency leads to a powerful reflection on death-and what might follow. The book is part medical drama, part searing autobiography and part rational inquiry into the ultimate unknowable mystery.

Copies of *In My Time of Dying* are available for check out at the Pass Christian Library or for purchase at Pass Christian Books.

Residents can also follow the "One Book One Pass" program on Facebook.

The Randolph Center is located at 315 Clark Avenue. For more information, call the Pass Christian library at 228-452-4596.



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