

Special license plates support veterans

There are many ways to show you are a veteran or to show that you honor veterans, their families and their service to our country. You can buy and wear hats, pins, vests, shirts and jackets, or you can buy a bumper sticker for your car.

There are also ways to accomplish this recognition and benefit the 56 County Veteran Service Offices across California that provide services to our veterans on a daily basis.

State-issued veterans license plates let everyone who sees your car know that you are either a veteran or that you honor the service of military members who have served our country. These plates come in many formats and prices ranging from free to an extra surcharge on your vehicle license fee.

There are also many stickers that may be placed on the plates that show the unit of the veteran and many other aspects of military service.

There is the basic Veteran plate or one that says "Honoring Veterans." Reasons to order these plates are personal, but they are often to:

- show compassion to injured or hospitalized veterans;
- honor veterans lost in service as well as the families of those veterans;
- affirm your status as a veteran or as a member of a veteran's family;
- honor Americans currently on active military duty or serving in the reserves; or
- support the members of our veterans service organizations.

Both of these plates may be purchased by anyone whether you are a veteran or not. Most people who purchase the Veteran plate are actually veterans. The "Honoring Veterans" plates are popular with those who just want to make a statement that they are supportive of veterans.

Purchasers can also display a sticker on the plate that commemorates the different units of the armed forces or veteran service organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign War, American Legion, AMVETS or Vietnam Veterans of California among others. There are 78 stickers to choose from and they are at no additional charge.

The extra surcharge to get these plates goes to a special fund that supports the activities of your local County Veteran Service Office. This fund is distributed by the state to all 56 County Veteran Service Offices in the state. So you can honor your service or that of another and support the County Veteran Service Office at the same time.

Other special license plates are available that are free to qualified recipients. Some of these plates have the yearly tag fees and some do not. Documentation is required.

- The Disabled Veteran plates are for 100 percent disabled veterans with service-connected mobility impairment or those veterans who have service-connected disabilities that require the use of an assistive device to walk, have lost a limb due to a service-connected condition or are blind due to a service-connected condition.

- The Congressional Medal of Honor plates and Purple Heart plates honor the respective medal recipients.
- Pearl Harbor Survivor plates are very rare these days due to the age of the survivors.
- Gold Star plates are for the families of service members who died while in the service.
- The Legion of Valor plate honor recipients of the Army Medal of Honor, Navy Medal of Honor, Air Force Medal of Honor, Army Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, or Air Force Cross.
- Prisoner of War (POW) plates honor those who veterans who were incarceration by the enemy during time of war.

Veteran license plates are always a great way to show your pride in your service or that of those who serve. For more information on getting veteran plates, go to the California Association of County Veteran Service Officer website at www.cacvso.org.

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.