

Journal Register

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

THE OLDEST NEWSPAPER IN ILLINOIS™

NOVEMBER 2, 2005

AMVETS national commander says veterans symposium being planned

By **JOHN REYNOLDS**

STAFF WRITER

AMVETS is planning a national symposium in Chicago of nearly 1,500 veterans next year to find out what they need and how best to deliver those services.

"At least half of the veterans at the symposium will be under the age of 40," said Ed Kemp, national commander for AMVETS (American Veterans). "That way, it will give us a good cross-section between older and younger veterans. It is just to find out how the VA (Veterans Affairs) can better serve veterans."

Kemp, of Waterloo, Iowa, was in Springfield Tuesday as part of a statewide tour. He took office as the AMVETS national commander in September.

Plans call for the Chicago symposium to be held Oct. 18-21.

Attendees will address some of the challenges faced by service members coming home from Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere as they transition to post-military life. The symposium will focus on ways to ensure that these new veterans, as well as current veterans, have sufficient access to health care, education, civilian employment and job-training benefits.

"They are still delivering benefits like they did 50 years ago," Kemp said of the VA. "They do a good job ... but there might be other ben-

efits the veterans could better use."

Kemp made his comments in the gift shop of the Abraham Lincoln Museum before touring the facility. Other local stops included the World War II, Korean and Vietnam war memorials at Oak Ridge Cemetery, Camp Butler National Cemetery and the AMVETS state headquarters.

"Every year, the national commander goes out and tours as many states as he can. ... We go around, visit the posts and talk to the grassroots people to find out what they want us to do at the headquarters for them," Kemp said.

AMVETS, headquartered nationally in Maryland, provides support for veterans and members of the active military and participates in community service projects that help the general public.

Kemp previously served as national vice commander of the organization. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1962-66, spending most of his enlistment at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.

AMVETS is the nation's largest veterans service organization open to anyone who has honorably served or is still serving in the U.S. armed forces, including those in the National Guard and Reserves, regardless of when they served.

John Reynolds can be reached at 788-1524 or john.reynolds@sj-r.com.