

Online exchange shopping to open to vets

A Defense Department retail board in 2014, gave the go-ahead to a plan to open online exchange shopping to all honorably discharged veterans, with hopes of starting the program on Veterans Day in 2017. It seems that plan is coming to fruition.

The move, originally proposed by the Army and Air Force Exchange Service in 2014, was approved by the Executive Resale Board and is currently undergoing beta-testing.

Opening the Exchange to the about 20 million honorably discharged U.S. veterans comes with a strong business case, Exchange officials have said. By early July, 90,000 veterans had attempted to register to exchange shop online starting Nov. 11

Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) estimated its annual sales would climb by \$185 million to \$525 million and earnings would increase by \$18 million to \$72 million. It could bring as much as \$108 million annually in support for Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs, which rely on Exchange dividends for the bulk of their funding across the services.

All veterans are being encouraged to take the first step in this process by confirming veteran eligibility status at <https://www.vetverify.org>. It might be a multi-step process, if the Defense Manpower Data Center lacks information to verify a veteran served and received an honorable discharge.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license and also issues Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Scott Holwell if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To determine if you are eligible for any of these benefits, call or visit our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Scott Holwell, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us.