Attorneys Learn VA Law to Support Veterans
Ongoing wars in two locations keep the Pennsylvania Bar Association’s Military and Veterans Affairs Committee busy with the PBA’s LAMP (Legal Assistance for Military Personnel) program, but the committee also works to support the veterans of this and past wars through programs such as the recent Veterans Administration Law CLE program on Feb. 17, 2009. Presented in Harrisburg and simulcast to numerous locations throughout the state and to Cleveland, Ohio, the event was a joint program of the PBA MVA Committee, the Pennsylvania Bar Institute and Widener University School of Law. Designed to teach practitioners how to pursue a VA claim for pension- or disability-related compensation, the program drew 103 participants and covered everything from the nuts and bolts of filing the initial claim to the steps for making the highest level appeal. Professor Tom Reed, head of Widener law’s Veterans Legal Aid Clinic, lead a group of VA experts in conducting the program.

Because of veterans’ need for assistance with appeals and the opportunity now available for attorneys to assist veterans, the PBA MVA Committee, PBI and Widener plan to offer the program again on Aug. 14, 2009. The program meets the VA requirement for attorneys who wish to practice in this area. As of June 2008, attorneys who wish to represent veterans with compensation or pension claims and appeals must be accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Anyone considering taking the CLE in August should call the VA at (202) 461-4995 and have their initial accreditation completed beforehand. The initial accreditation process consists of application (VA Form 21a) to the General Counsel of the VA, self-certification of admission information concerning practice before any other court, bar or state or federal agency and a determination of character and fitness. The General Counsel will presume an attorney’s character and fitness to practice before the VA based on state bar membership in good standing unless the General Counsel receives credible information to the contrary. According to the VA, a lawyer must complete his or her initial accreditation with the VA before taking the CLE program. They will not bend on this requirement and will not give after-the-fact credit. Thus, some lawyers earned CLE credit at the February training but will not be credited for their hours by the VA.

Once accreditation is received, three hours of a qualifying CLE must be completed during the first year, followed by three credits every two years.