

## UPDATES & RESOURCES

### VA BOSTON UPDATES

This spring, the VA rolled out new guidelines for offering extended hours clinics in Primary Care and Mental health. VABHS recently joined this effort, expanding clinics to early morning, late afternoon, and Saturday mornings. The needs of women veterans can be addressed in a single visit during a variety of alternate times. If you cannot make an appointment during normal business hours (8AM-4PM), consider asking for a 7AM appointment, a 4:30 PM appointment or visit us in Brockton, West Roxbury, or JP in the primary care clinics Saturday mornings! You asked for it...we listened!

Staffing additions are also underway in Brockton's Women's Health Clinic. We look forward to introducing you to a new RN Nurse Care Manager and a new Nurse Practitioner in the coming months. We are also welcoming the first LGBT psychology fellow to VABHS this fall. She will be spending time both in JP and in Brockton, including two half days per week in the Brockton Women's Health Clinic.

The VABHS Women Veterans Program is hosting a program October 17-18 to address money management proficiency of women Veterans. The program, Real Financial Literacy, is a joint effort of Self Esteem Boston and the WAGE project and aims to change a woman's financial self-sufficiency for the rest of her life. These interrelated, highly interactive, nuts-and-bolts workshops uniquely combine confidence-building and negotiation, budgeting and money management, and salary negotiation, all aimed at boosting a woman's ability to secure a fair salary and position. For more information or to register, contact Carolyn Mason Wholley at 617-981-9277 or email your name and phone number to Carolyn.masonwholley@va.gov

All the best  
Carolyn Mason-Wholley, LICSW  
(WVN Committee Member)



### MEMBER OF WVN STEERING COMMITTEE ONE OF FIRST FEMALE MEMBERS VOTED INTO THE ANCIENT AND HONORABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY OF MA



Chartered in 1638 by the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony, the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company is the third oldest chartered military organization in the World, the oldest in the Western Hemisphere. Its role at the start was to protect the Commonwealth from foreign invasion, civil unrest, and attacks from Native Americans. As the military came under federal auspices, the group transitioned into a more ceremonial role, appearing in various events throughout the Commonwealth and each year, members travel to a foreign country to serve as military ambassadors. The organization's headquarters, on the fourth floor of Faneuil Hall, also serves as a museum commemorating the city's historic role in the country's military conflicts.

Three officers from the Massachusetts National Guard; Lieutenant Colonel's Catherine M. Corkery, Christine Hoffmann, and Margaret White, were voted into the group in 2012. They are the first women in the 374-year-old organization.

Catherine was officially inducted 17 September 2012 at Faneuil Hall. "I am very excited to be a member of this organization", Catherine said, "it gives me a way to continue to serve the Veteran community and advocate for the military." Catherine was undaunted by the fact that she was joining an organization that was dominated by men, as a woman in the military, she knows how to succeed in an organization often considered predominantly male. She expects this will be much the same dynamic.

Catherine recently retired from the Massachusetts National Guard (MA NG) after 32 years of service. She began as an enlisted soldier, was commissioned and assigned to various units throughout her career. She served on active duty as an Organizational Development Consultant/Trainer at the National Guard Professional Education Center in Little Rock, Arkansas, and deployed to Baghdad, Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her full time career within the MA NG has been widespread, ranging from human resources, training and organizational development, to operations and logistics in both combat and domestic environments. She is active as both an officer and member of several international, national, and state organizations. Catherine currently serves on the Steering Committee for the Women's Veterans Network.



**NEW Veteran Resource Website!!** Services and support for veterans just a click away with new web portal [www.MassVetsAdvisor.org](http://www.MassVetsAdvisor.org) in the perfect resource for veterans to easily access their benefits from the comfort of their own homes, on their own time. The website managers will be working with veterans and Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) across the Commonwealth to help them utilize the website and connect to all of the benefits and services they have earned. [www.MassVetsAdvisor.org](http://www.MassVetsAdvisor.org) is just one more way that the Patrick-Murray Administration has continued to make Massachusetts the Nation's leader in providing services and outreach for our state's veterans.

Department of Veterans' Services  
Attn: Womens Veterans' Network  
600 Washington Street, 7th Floor  
Boston, Massachusetts 02111

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SAVE THE DATE!  
**9TH ANNUAL WVN APPRECIATION DAY EVENT!**  
NOV. 7th, 2013  
- see info on page 1 -



Department of Veterans' Services  
Attn: Women Veterans' Network  
600 Washington Street, 7th Floor  
Boston, Massachusetts 02111



Phone: 617-210-5958,  
Fax: 617-210-5755



dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us  
[www.mass.gov/womenveterans](http://www.mass.gov/womenveterans)

This is a publication by: The Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Department of Veterans' Services  
Governor Deval Patrick - John Polanowicz, Secretary - Coleman Nee, Secretary, DVS

### SAVE THE DATE!

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26TH, 2013**  
**WOMAN VETERANS' NETWORK 26TH ANNUAL LUNCHEON**  
**11AM TO 2PM**

**AT LOMBARDO'S - 6 BILLINGS STREET • RANDOLPH, MA**

**THE MA GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON  
WOMEN VETERANS AND THE WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK  
CORDIALLY INVITE WOMEN VETERANS OF ALL ERAS AND BRANCHES TO  
THE 26TH ANNUAL LUNCHEON**

**THIS YEAR WE WILL TRIBUTE THE WOMEN VETERANS OF THE KOREAN WAR.**

**TICKETS ARE \$25 PER PERSON.**

**THERE WILL BE A NEW ENGLAND ROASTED TURKEY DINNER,  
JEWELRY SALE AND DRAWING. LUNCH WILL BE SERVED AT 12PM.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT  
JUNE NEWMAN AT 781-849-3226 OR EMAIL JUNIEBUG@BELD.NET  
OR VIVIANA MARCOTTE AT 617-210-5958.**

**RESERVATION DEADLINE OCTOBER 21ST. NO TICKETS SOLD AT DOOR.**



# Women Veterans' Network

of Massachusetts

Fall 2013

### NEWS & UPDATES!

[WWW.CYBERACES.ORG](http://WWW.CYBERACES.ORG)

On behalf of the Governor's STEM Advisory Council, the Military Asset and Security Strategy Task Force, the Department of Veterans' Services, the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, and Cyber Aces, we invite you to register and spread the word about an exciting education and workforce development opportunity for high school and college students, jobseekers, and veterans/members of the armed services. For more details on this free online training and competition visit: [www.cyberaces.org](http://www.cyberaces.org)

### 9TH ANNUAL WVN APPRECIATION DAY EVENT!

**SATURDAY, NOV 7th, 2013**  
**11AM to 1PM at Memorial Hall**  
**MA State House - Boston, MA**

Join the Women Veterans' Network of the MA Department of Veterans' Services as they host the 9th Annual Women Veterans' Appreciation Day event at the State House!

This event commemorates the women veterans that have served in our military throughout history and also celebrates the 2013 Deborah Sampson - Outstanding Woman Veteran of the Year!

Refreshments and snacks will be available, ALL veterans and families encouraged to attend.

**FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

\*\* If you know a woman veteran in your community whose military and community service is extraordinary that you wish to nominate for this prestigious award please visit [mass.gov/veterans](http://mass.gov/veterans) or email [dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us](mailto:dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us), call 617-210-5958 for a nomination form today!

**Nomination DEADLINE:**  
**Oct 15th, 2013**



WVN Steering Committee Members

### A MESSAGE FROM THE WVN COORDINATOR!

2013 has been a trailblazing year for women in the military and veterans! The number of women joining the military is growing and the women veteran population as a whole is continuing to grow. According to the current Veteran Population Statistic Report, Massachusetts has gone from approximately 26k women veterans to 32k! That's a huge increase and definitely indicative of the fast growing population of women that are also joining the military. With this increase in numbers and the ban lift of women in combat early this year; our challenges and unique needs as women veterans are being highlighted more and more.

The MA Women Veterans' Network Steering Committee are working hard each year to expand our events to

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women veterans throughout the state and consistently reminding our providers that women veterans have a key resource here at the WVN. Our 5th annual Women Veterans' Conference brought over 375 women veterans attendees and over 65 exhibitors!

**Our 5th annual Women Veterans' Conference brought over 375 women veterans attendees and over 65 exhibitors!**

It was our largest conference to date. We were so thrilled to meet so many women veterans that shared their stories and wanted to know more ways on how they could become involved in helping other veterans. It continues to be an honor to oversee this program and with the assistance of our committee and providers, I'm sure we will continue to grow in our outreach efforts! Stay connected and if you know a woman veteran make sure she's a member of the network. **Together we are stronger!** - Viviana Marcotte

### 5TH ANNUAL WOMEN VETERANS'

The 5th Annual Women Veterans' Conference took place on June 15, 2013 on the scenic UMass Boston campus. MA Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Coleman Nee welcomed over 375 women veterans and introduced the speakers in attendance: Chancellor J. Keith Motley, of UMass Boston, MA Representative Linda Dean Campbell, and Commissioner of Boston Veterans' Services Francisco Urena.



Keynote speaker, Sergeant Kayla Williams who is an OIF veteran and author of *Love My Rifle More Than You*, gave an empowering speech to the women veterans in the audience. "The military seemed like a great opportunity. I decided I wanted to master Arabic so I became a linguist and found myself learning Arabic during 9/11. After those events, it was clear I was going to deploy, it was only a matter of time."

Williams continued by reinforcing that women are continuously harm's way overseas and have been surviving combat for a while. She also described how life in Iraq and life within her unit was like. "Being the only woman in remote areas in Iraq had 2 contradictory effects on me. - CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

## WOMEN VETERAN STORIES

### FROM NAVY TO THE WHITE HOUSE: ONE WOMAN VETERAN'S STORY...

Why did I join the Navy? I have a family history with the Navy. My Grandpa was Naval Academy Class of 1940, and served as an officer during WW2. I got a Navy ROTC scholarship to attend Rice University, and planned to do the Navy's Medical Training Program. Then I decided during college that I didn't want to be a doctor. I decided to stay with the Navy, and that would give me a job and more time to figure out a career. The week of 9/11/2001. I was a senior in college and was scheduled to fly to Washington DC to interview with the 4-star admiral in charge of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program for acceptance to the program. I finally got to DC in October, and he accepted me to the program. So I was commissioned as a Navy Ensign in May 2002, as a Surface Warfare Officer (Nuclear).

I attended the surface warfare officer's school in Newport, RI for training. I served on the USS RUSSELL (DDG 59) in Pearl Harbor, HI from April 2003-September 2004. DDGs are 505 feet long and have about 350 people onboard. Russell had an all-male crew, with about 8 female officers onboard. I was the Fire Control Officer, in charge of the AEGIS weapons system. The ship was involved in Ballistic Missile Defense Testing in the Pacific. I oversaw a division of about 30 sailors, and the technical upgrades of the ship's weapons systems. In 2004 we deployed to Southeast Asia. This deployment was focused on fighting Piracy, and joint operations with allied nations. We did joint operations with the navies of: Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and the Philippines.

I left the RUSSELL in 2004 to do my nuclear power training. The Navy's Nuclear Power School is in Charleston, SC. I was in school there for 6 months (this is a very intense school). Then I did 6 months of training on an actual nuclear reactor in Charleston. I met my husband in Charleston. He was a few months ahead of me in the nuclear power school- he was training to be a submarine officer.

In November 2007, I reported to the White House Communications Agency (WHCA) as a Presidential Communications Officer. I traveled around the world with both Presidents George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. WHCA creates a communications infrastructure for the President anywhere he goes, so that he can always communicate effectively. Back in Washington, I oversaw the military switchboards, and secure encrypted communications for the White House Complex. It was an amazing, but never ending job. While I was there I was the 2008 White House Military Office Junior Officer of the Year.



In May 2010, I left active duty. It was the hardest decision I have ever made. I love being a Naval Officer. However, I married another naval officer, and if we both stayed in our navy jobs, we would never see each other, and never be able to have a family. So, we both decided to leave the Navy and go back to school, I enrolled at Boston College Law School.

I stayed in the Navy Reserves. I was in the active reserves until May 2012, and am a Lieutenant Commander. Our son William was born in February of this year. While it was hard for me to leave active duty, when I look at William, I know I would never want to leave him for another deployment.

For most of my career in the Navy I was one of very few women present. I think this empowered me. There is a perception in the military that many women get awards or honors just because they are women, not because they actually earned them. I always felt like I had to work very hard to prove to those around me that I earned everything I got. I was always ranked at the top of my peers, and I always worked hard both for those rankings, and to demonstrate that I earned those rankings.

The military taught me to take care of my people. The Navy is like a family, in addition to getting the work done, officers have to make sure the people that work for them get a chance to eat, sleep, exercise, see their families, and generally keep an eye on everyone's wellbeing. I loved learning about people's lives, their talents, and their stories. Everyone has something to contribute, and every person is unique. Good leaders bring out the best in everyone. In the civilian world, I think "our people" are the people we interact with every day - neighbors, classmates, co-workers. We all need to take care of each other.

Do things the right way - my first captain trained me to do everything with integrity, and the right way. He never allowed us to cut corners or settle for less than perfection. Whether it was navigation, ship driving, engineering, cleaning, cooking, or fire-fighting. Everything needed to be done the right way. I really try to live this way. I realize that it is necessary to prioritize, and pick your battles. However, when I take on a job, I do it the right way, and I always do the best that I can.

For now, I want to become a really good lawyer, to have a good family life, and possibly a future career in politics. We'll see!

Julia, USN Veteran

## WVN NEWS & EVENTS

### 5th Annual Women Veterans' Conference (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)



more. It was a profound relief to be able to talk to another women knowing that they weren't looking at me differently. And second, it made me more judgmental towards women also. I knew men were judging me not as an individual but as a representation of women in general and that was a weighty burden to bear. So when I saw other women that didn't live up to the expectations, it was hard for me to be empathic towards them."

She shared her many other challenges coming home including caring for her husband, a veteran as well who was being treated for a traumatic brain injury due to an Improvised Explosive Device in Iraq. Their challenges were the same as many other veterans that come home and have to begin the difficult transition back to finding a job, regaining financial stability and a transition back to self. "I had trouble transitioning back...from soldier to civilian and from soldier to spouse as well. I became a care giver for my husband. Through all that I still felt like a woman who just happened to have gone to war."

"Even though I adore my brothers in arms, they rarely fully understand the added pressures and challenges of being a woman in the military. It wasn't until I began time with other women veterans that I truly realized what a gaping hole they filled. Women vets allowed me to be crass, vulnerable, praised my strengths, encouraged me to work on my weaknesses, called me on my B.S, and finally helped me feel home again. "

Kayla Williams left all the women veterans in the audience with an underlining important message, we are not alone. As women veterans, we have one another and we have a passionate community within our sisterhood.

Representative Linda Dean Campbell also added that the primary focus in the legislation is suicide prevention and getting veterans the care that they need in a timely manner. She urged all veterans in the audience to become personally involved in the issue regarding sexual assault. "As women veterans our voices are going to carry on to those now serving and those who will serve in the future, it is a crisis. Your voice will make a big difference!" The day consisted of six workshops by dynamic speakers on the following topics: Networking, Wellness, Benefits, Financial Education, Employment, and Legal Advice. There were over 65 vendors at the conference providing resource information. The women veterans in attendance came from all service branches and eras, making this year's conference the largest and most successful year to date! The WVN will be heading to Western Massachusetts in 2014, so keep a look out for the date and location!



### LTC MARY BERGNER SHARES HER PERSONAL STORY: "MY BATTLE HAS BEEN WON!"

I could use this space to tell you all about myself, my service, what I have done for my country, however I know that I am in the best of company with the majority of you as fellow female warriors. Yes, I have a lot that I am proud of as I've been in the service for almost 20 years, started as a private on Active Duty then into the Guard earning my commission where I served in several prominent positions, the one I'm most proud of I was deployed as a Transportation Company Commander to Iraq in OIF. I am currently still serving as a LTC in the Army Reserves. In Iraq I saw battle and had to console several soldiers and family members that had been through the worse of the worse to include the loss of one of my soldiers, unimaginable hardships and pain, but a time in my life no matter what hardship it brought I do not regret.

I choose to tell you about the battle that has been won, the battle of recovery. Recovering from combat, mistreatments, conflicted pride, things known and seen, and other hardships that serving my country as a woman has brought. These brought over almost twenty years, not only from my deployment but from my complete service. The road to recovery has been hard to say the least and the most I can say is if you are on it, continue it, if you are thinking you need to be on it, take the journey you; will not regret it! Hold on, just hold on and know that as warriors we have the strength to beat the demons, to face what is needed head on and come out on the other end stronger warriors, stronger woman and a better people. I was a runaway (avoidance) as an adult not understanding I had something I need to stay and fight, something that was not going to be pretty to look at or easy to understand, but something that needed to be faced; that was myself, the horrors I had seen and known, the guilt I felt, the decisions I doubted and the overall life I had chosen not only serving in peace time, but in a war, defining the new front line fighting that war. Three casualties of the recovery war; a loving husband, a full time career, a new six figure job, friends and family, a secure savings account and retirement fund, toxins and a damaged liver, cancer, and a doubt of oneself. The causality toll was high when I decided to fight.

Once my strategy was built, my weapons chosen and armor secured (which is actually removing all that armor), I am proud to say the battle has been won. I'm not here to say the total war is won as it is not a continuous fight, however choosing the correct allies and understanding what the actual enemy is the war against PTSD, substance abuse, anxiety, chronic pain and so much more is won on a daily basis. My days now consist of a loving and supportive boyfriend (who attends therapy with me), supportive and understanding friends and family, a new career I love, tons of travel and a constant focus on my health and wellness! Hang in there, get a good team (VA, healthy friends, supporting family, healthy eating, regular exercise, and use of the multiple programs that have been established to help. With this you can and will feel better!! Thanks for your service and/or support! Be Healthy, Be Kind and Be Well!!!

## WOMEN VETERAN STORIES

### AIR FORCE OIF VETERAN FINDS HEALING IN SHELTER DOGS

Faith Harris was in college when she decided she needed a change and felt the military was the opportunity she was looking for. She joined the security forces and became a military police officer in the Air Force. "I just wanted something different. My family was happy for me but they were really worried. We were in the middle of the war when I joined."

In 2005 Airman Harris received orders to report to Iraq after only 3 months after giving birth to her son. "I was a single mom so my parents took him. It was extremely difficult leaving him; it was honestly the most difficult part of the deployment." Harris described the difficulty that many women veterans face upon returning home from war. She began transitioning back to her life again as a mother and caregiver although also found herself desensitized to her surroundings. "It's hard to feel sympathetic towards him sometimes. I compare his small complaints to what I saw in Iraq and the children who truly had nothing and many in body bags. Coming back from that is difficult. I wasn't the same mom." Harris also shared the effects the war had on her son that many military children face. Her son found himself feeling separation anxiety and always feeling the need to be vigilant of where his mother was or if she was going to leave again. "He never wanted me going anywhere. Even now, years later, he's still always paranoid."

Despite the constant debate in society and the media, as a woman you will always have negative experiences that our male counterparts will never understand. "I don't think there's enough time to transition back into a mom...I was forced into being a mom in 2 weeks. I even slept on the floor for a while because I just didn't want to be in the range of bullets. My son didn't understand and was confused."

She describes finally finding healing through an organization recommended by a fellow Air Force veteran. Stiggys Dogs rescues and trains shelter dogs to become service dogs. "Not only were we vets that were used and thrown away, these shelter dogs were also thrown away." After adopting a shelter service dog and becoming more involved in the Stiggy's Dogs mission, she was asked to be assistant director. "I spread the word in the community about Stiggy's Dogs and where I was in my mental health before I had a service dog." Faith Harris has now been working with the organization for 2 years and plans on returning to college to pursue her degree in psychology. "My dogs Honor and Fubar have helped me reconnect with my life again." For more information visit: [www.stiggysdogs.org](http://www.stiggysdogs.org)



### SAUGUS WOMEN VETERANS' TREE DEDICATION

On a rainy afternoon, the city of Saugus celebrated the planting of their women's veteran memorial tree in Veterans Park. Many women veterans were in attendance including Lauren Alukonis, a retired Army nurse who served in Iraq. "Women were never recognized in the past for their accomplishments. [This dedication is long] overdue and especially meaningful for me."

The event was organized by Navy Vietnam veteran Chet Stentiford, who shared his father's experience during WWII. "Women have served their time, we enjoyed our freedom on their time, and now it's time to say thank you."

Also in attendance was the Women Veterans' Network 2012 Deborah Sampson winner COL Andrea Gayle Bennett, who introduced the WVN coordinator Viviana Marcotte. "It's truly fitting that you're dedicating a tree to women veterans, considering women are the fastest growing segment of our military."



Women Veterans' Network is GOING GREEN!

### We Need Your Email Address!

The WVN Newsletter is e-mailed twice a year! But if we don't have your email address you're missing out on everything else in between that is going on! If you wish to receive the newsletter and e-mail updates - OR - on upcoming events, benefits, program information, etc. Please send your name and email address to [dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us](mailto:dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us)

Send a written request to: Department of Veterans' Services Attn: Women Veterans' Network 600 Washington Street, 7th Floor Boston, MA 02111

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