



Women Veterans' Network of Massachusetts

Fall 2011



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WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK: *Viviana Cordoba Coordinator WVN stands with U.S Army Women Veterans at the 7th Annual Women Veterans' Appreciation Day event at the State House, Memorial Hall.*

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR COORDINATOR

It has been such an incredible year as the new coordinator! Over the past year, I have had the honor of meeting many women veterans and service providers across the state. I also attended the Women Veteran Summit in Washington D.C and the National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators conference in Madison, Wisconsin, as well as several other events throughout the year.

I have eagerly used the important information I gathered throughout the year and worked to develop new ideas for how to better serve the women veterans of the Commonwealth. This year's Women Veteran Conference was such an amazing experience to witness and coordinate. The true spirit of team work was present through the assistance of our WVN Steering Committee and the Massachusetts Depart-

ment of Veterans' Services. I definitely cannot wait until next year's conference in the South Shore!

This year has brought major advancements and recognition for women veteran benefits and issues. A National Women Veteran Call Center is underway along with pilot day care centers established at VA's throughout the country. Women veterans have participated on fashion runways in New York and on national television shows. It's exciting to see all this progress and recognition.

I am eagerly looking forward to seeing you all at one of our upcoming events, and please feel free to contact the WVN with your story, comments or questions. I wish you and your families a happy and healthy holiday season. ♥

3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN VETERANS

Over 250 women veterans and advocates arrived Saturday morning on June 18th to Veterans' Memorial Hall at Salem State University for the opening ceremonies of the third annual conference for women veterans. Speakers included Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray, Salem State University President Patricia Maguire-Meservey, Senator Thomas McGee, Secretary JudyAnn Bigby, M.D. and Secretary Coleman Nee, all welcomed women veterans to Salem.

Genevieve Chase, Executive director of

American Women Veterans presented a moving keynote address that included her combat and post deployment experiences that led her to found the American Women Veterans organization. "I want to talk to you about something very personal, wounds of war...those that are not so obvious". Chase shared the aftermath of her vehicle attacked by an improvised explosive device [IED] in Afghanistan which led to her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. "I began realizing that my generation was not represented

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From the left: Secretary Coleman Nee MA Dept of Veterans' Services, Viviana Cordoba WVN Coordinator, Genevieve Chase American Women Veterans, Senator Thomas McGee

3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN VETERANS

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nor were the issues that we were facing as women...I decided I'm starting a club for girls!



Salem State University Veterans Hall.

Activities of the day included panel discussions on benefits and services, women's health care options, alternative therapies for PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] and MST [Military Sexual Trauma] and discussions on experiences of reintegration from the perspective of parents and veterans. There were over 40 exhibitors with information ranging from health care, housing, education, history, providers and food displays. There was also a Wellness Room where practitio-

ners donated their time to provide massage, acupuncture, reiki and crystal singing bowl therapy. The Wounded Warrior Project donated over 12 Red Sox tickets for the raffles throughout the day.

The Women Veterans' Network would like to thank everyone who made this event a success! Next year the Women Veterans' Conference will be on the South Shore. Saturday, June 16th, 2012 at Bristol Community College, Building G, Fall River, MA 02720. Register today! ♥



Woman Veteran enjoying reflexology treatment in the Wellness Room

VA NEWS

VA Creates Women Veterans Call Center

The VA has embarked on a major initiative to reach out to women Veterans and solicit their input on ways to enhance the health care services VA provides to women Veterans. "We are taking a proactive approach to enhancing VA health care for women Veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We are seeking the input of women Veterans so the VA can continue to provide high quality health care to the growing numbers of women Veterans."

Women Veterans are one of the fastest growing segments of the Veteran population. Of the 22.7 million living Veterans, more than 1.8 million are women. Women comprise nearly 8 percent of the total Veteran population and 6 percent of all Veterans who use VA health care services.

"Through this contact center, we are placing friendly, conversational calls to women Veterans," said Patricia Hayes, chief consultant of the VA's Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group. "We want these Veterans and their caregivers to talk candidly about why they are not using VA, whether they are aware of the gender-specific services we offer, and what additional services they would like to see VA offer."

The VA has trained professionals in all aspects of women's health, including general primary care, osteoporosis management, heart disease, mental health care, menopausal services and obesity-related issues, such as diabetes. Preventive screenings for breast and cervical cancer are also areas in which the VA excels. Soon, all VA facilities will offer comprehensive primary care for women from a single provider. ♥

WVN Needs Your Help!

If you are reading this copy of the newsletter within a few feet of your computer, please consider sending us your email address and receive an electronic version instead. You can always find the current or back issues of the WVN Newsletter on our webpage at: www.mass.gov/womenveterans. Please help us save on paper and postage so that we may assist veterans in need with those funds instead.

WOMEN2WOMEN EVENT

LTC Margaret C. White describes her experience at this event for the empowerment of women around the world.

On the evening of July 28th, I was afforded an opportunity to meet with a group of remarkable young women at the Women2Women International Leadership Program event in held in Boston, Massachusetts. According to the organization’s Facebook page, the goal of the event was to “provide participants with the opportunity to learn, network and acquire leadership skills that will empower them to make a difference in their respective communities and countries.” The participants’ ages ranged from 15 to 19 years old. I expected to meet some energetic and intelligent young women from different countries who might be interested in a woman’s experience as a leader in a predominantly male organization such as the military. My experience that evening touched me far more deeply than I expected.

As the only person attending in uniform, I did benefit from having my uniform attract attention and work as a unique and positive conversation starter. The first women to approach me were two excited women from Egypt. Given everything that has occurred in their country since this spring, their enthusiasm and positive outlook for the future was contagious. Women from Algeria, Morocco and Kosovo were a little more shy as they approached but were still anxious to talk briefly and take a photo with me.

The most serious conversations and questions occurred when I spoke with women from Iraq and Afghanistan. After they detailed their struggles to accomplish goals that we take for granted – such as completing school, earning money, organizing groups of women to improve their conditions and opportunities – I was impressed by their dedication and conviction. While we may at times face



professional hardships and some social biases, they are facing threats to their lives for simply trying to make minor improvements in the lives of women in their countries. I found that I could not honestly imagine walking in their shoes and admit to feeling ill equipped to offer any meaningful advice on how to deal with the social roadblocks and personal dangers they reportedly face. As we continued to talk, it became clear that the networking with their peers and leadership skills that the women were developing at events such as this one were probably the best opportunities these young women have to learn how to deal with the extraordinary challenges they face. Their overall positive attitude toward the future came through as we were ending our conversation when one of the women smiled and said: “It will all be OK. The sun will come up each day and life will be a little better each morning.” This event was undoubtedly one of the more energizing and humbling experiences I have had in a long time. ♥

KOREAN WAR ERA VETERAN CONTINUES TO SERVE



Velma Mooney in 1952

Every morning, Velma Mooney of Hanover wakes up with a mission – to serve her country by supporting and representing women veterans in her community. SGT Mooney enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1952 where she served until 1955. She proudly shares her experiences as a Marine with others and how it changed her life, even now.

“When I first enlisted in the 50’s it wasn’t easy for a young woman to be in the military, but I learned quickly how to survive in a male dominated environment.” the marine shared how despite segregation, she still managed to make a difference serving her country as a Marine.

After her enlistment was over, she continued to serve through volunteering and writing letters to the troops throughout the past conflicts to include the present wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. “My service could not just end there. I knew I had to continue to help, even if it was through some encouraging words,” shares Mooney.

“Being a woman veteran is not the same as it used to be. I admire these young women today on the front lines fighting along side the men. We’ve come so far.”

One of those Mooney letters reached a LTC Marine in Iraq. The two have been exchanging letters for the past five years. “I continued to write her letters almost every night, hoping to give her some hope and encouragement. I wanted to let her know that no matter what she was going through there was a light at the end and that Grandma Mooney was here praying for her safe return.”

Velma Mooney now volunteers at the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center at the Boston VA. The PRRC is an outpatient treatment program for veterans with serious mental illness and PTSD. “I look forward to every group meeting, and I’ve made some life long friends along the way. It’s so humbling to hear every veteran’s story and struggle.” Velma who is now in her 80’s shares that, no matter how old she is on paper, she will always be resilient and strong enough to help her fellow veterans every chance she can. She will always be a Marine. ♥



Always a Marine!

NEW NAME! VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System

The Northampton VA, which includes the medical center in Northampton and outpatient clinics in Springfield, Pittsfield, and Greenfield, Worcester and Fitchburg, will now be known as VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System.

The combined population of the counties of central and western Massachusetts justified the creation of a health care system on par with similar size regions in other parts of New England and the nation, said Roger Johnson, director of the newly named system.

“The name change reflects the VA’s regional health care approach and emphasizes the VA’s focus on the needs of Veterans of central and western Massachusetts under one leadership,” he said.

The population of Veterans served in central and western Massachusetts combined totals more than 100,000 Veterans.

“Despite the sizeable Veteran population in central and western Massachusetts, the VA facilities in the region have, for many years, fallen under three different leaderships – Boston, Bedford and Northampton,” said Johnson. “Our new name is about our emphasis in creating a greater concentration of services for Veterans living in this part of the state.”

The realignment will not result in an increase or decrease in the number of employees in Northampton, and it’s expected that

people will still refer to the hospital and administrative buildings in Northampton as the “Northampton Campus.”

The total number of VA employees in Northampton is not expected to increase, although Johnson said he anticipates there will be an expansion at some of the clinics, particularly in Worcester and Springfield, where the largest population of Veterans exists.

Although the new name for the Northampton center is now taking effect, the realignment is currently programmed for October 1st for administrative transfer of responsibilities with a transfer of medical supervision of patients who access the Worcester and Fitchburg clinics expected to follow in early 2012.

Regardless of the realignment actions, Veterans will be able to keep their current providers and can choose where they travel for services, although the realignment is expected to improve access to care providers by making more services available where Veterans reside.

“Instead of traveling into Boston for appointments, our goal is that Veterans will be able to visit clinics in central and western Massachusetts when and where it makes practical sense,” said Johnson. ♥

WOMEN VETERAN APPRECIATION DAY EVENT! Thursday, November 3rd, 2011

The Women Veterans’ Network and the Massachusetts Department of Veterans’ Services hosted its newly re-named 7th Annual Women Veteran Appreciation Day event at the State House’s Memorial Hall from 11am-1pm. This year’s winner of the Deborah Sampson award was presented to LTC Andrea Gayle-Bennett, a member of the Massachusetts National Guard Medical Command and a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Speakers included Attorney General Martha Coakley who shared how she is consistently encouraging women to seek positions that are not traditionally held by women and to “continue paving the way for our future female leaders”. Senator Thomas McGee and Representative Linda Dean Campbell also spoke about the impact our women veterans are having on our military and the importance it is to continue to serve our veterans and provide the necessary benefits and resources for success outside military service.

The event’s keynote speaker was Sergeant Jaquelynn Palazola, an Air Force Veteran of the Iraq War. Jaquelynn trained as an Air Force firefighter and graduated

the only woman in her class. Two months later she was deployed to Iraq leaving behind her husband and son. Jaquelynn also shared how the separation from her family affected her morale and wellbeing. After her deployment she returned home to continue her education and regain her life again. She will be deploying to Afghanistan in the near future and is expecting her second son.

The Women Veterans’ Network also displayed a memorial in Nurses’ Hall to pay tribute to the fallen women veterans of Massachusetts. One Vietnam era woman veteran shared, “What a lovely event, I networked with so many sister veterans and I am proud to be part of a state where women veterans are acknowledged and appreciated. I’m looking forward to next year’s event!” ♥



Winners of the Deborah Sampson Award for 2011 & 2010: LTC Andrea Gayle-Bennett (2011) CAPT MaryJo Majors (2010)

Upcoming Events! Join us again for the 4th Annual Women Veterans’ Conference hosted by the Massachusetts Women Veterans’ Network and the Department of Veteran Services’. This year we will be headed to the South Shore! Register Today! Bristol Community College, Building G, 777 Elsbree Street, Fall River MA 02720