

Women Veterans' Network

of Massachusetts

Summer 2012



FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE...

- A Message from the WVN Coordinator pg. 1
- 4th Annual Women Veterans' Conference .. pg. 1
- News and Updates pg. 2
- Women in Uniform..... pg.3
- Women Veterans' Conference Cont..... pg. 4
- The New S.H.A.R.P Program..... pg. 5
- New Veterans Resource Website pg. 5

STATE NEWS & UPDATES!

Valor Act:

Thursday, May 31, 2012 – Governor Deval Patrick today signed Senate Bill 2254, "An Act Relative to Veterans' Access, Livelihood, Opportunity, and Resources", also known as the VALOR Act. The legislation creates increased supports for veteran-owned businesses, Gold Star Families, military children and higher education access in the Commonwealth. "I am proud to sign the VALOR Act to enhance our already strong supports for veterans," said Governor Patrick. "Massachusetts continues to lead the nation in providing services for veterans and their families, and this legislation will further reinforce our leadership." For more information on the VALOR ACT and its provisions please visit: www.mass.gov/veterans



A MESSAGE FROM THE WVN COORDINATOR!

"The one thing you can always count on is change," this is one of my favorite quotes that I truly believe relates to the increased attention there has been in the last couple years to the needs of Women Veterans and how our role is evolving in today's military. In recent news the Department of Defense has opened more than 14,000 combat jobs to women, new body armor for women is being designed, and the role women are playing on the battlefield and how this is affecting children and families is being discussed and addressed. Although I believe there are still many issues to address and resolve, we are not where we used to be.

In recent news the Department of Defense has opened more than 14,000 combat jobs to women,

It has been such an exciting year so far at WVN to include our 4th Annual Women Veterans Conference which took place in June and many other events that we have added throughout

the year for the women veterans of the Commonwealth. The Women Veterans' Network has now expanded its events and outreach to include documentary screenings, outdoor events and the creation of the WVN Volunteer Committee which will assist members planning to host networking events and general outreach in their own area!

The overall message I want all readers to take away from this issue of the WVN newsletter is to encourage all women to get involved! As women veterans is it imperative for us to share our stories with one another, to empower each other and know that we have one another as a support system within the sisterhood.

I look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming events and please feel free to contact us with your story or any feedback you may want to share. ♥

4TH ANNUAL WOMEN VETERANS' CONFERENCE.

Over 300 women veterans and providers arrived Saturday morning on July 16, 2012 to the scenic campus of Bristol Community College for the fourth annual women veterans' conference. Speakers included: Fall River Mayor William A. Flanagan, Representative Paul Schmid, Christine M. Griffin, Assistant Secretary for Disability Policies and Programs and a Vietnam veteran, Bristol Community College President John Sbrega, and Secretary Coleman Nee.

Colonel Susan Luz, author of *The Nightingale of Mosul*,



CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

NEW WOMEN VETERAN CLINIC AT BEDFORD VA!

Another observation of Women's History Month was made at the Bedford VA Medical Center on March 30th, 2012 with the opening of the new Women's Health Clinic. The Edith Nourse Rogers Veterans Hospital held a ribbon cutting event to highlight the new clinic and contributions of women veterans throughout history. The clinic includes a private waiting room as well as exam rooms specifically designed for female patients. Services at the clinic include gender specific primary care, mental health and specialty care. "VA strives to be a national leader in the provision of health care for women, thereby raising the standard of care for all women," said Christine Croteau, Bedford VAMC's Acting Director. "Women veterans are entitled to the same benefits male veterans receive. Clinics such as this are step in the right direction and ensure that VA continues to provide the high quality care for all those that have served, both male and female. This clinic is

what was needed, and what was delivered." ♥

For more information on the Bedford Women Veterans Clinic contact :

Denise Koutrouba,
Women Veterans Program Manager at 781-687-3021 or email denise.koutrouba@va.gov



WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATED AT VA CENTRAL WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS.

VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System joined the Nation in observing Women's History Month by honoring women Veterans for their significant historical contributions during a celebration on March 29 at the Northampton VA medical center in Leeds. There were a few presentations from women veterans who shared their experiences in the military and a brief presentation on the history of women in the military. For more information about VA programs and services in central and western Massachusetts for women Veterans, call Kim Adams, Women Veterans Program Manager, at (413) 584-4040, extension 2240. The national VA Women Veterans Program can be reached at 1-800-827-1000 or visit: www.va.gov/womenvet and www.womenshealth.va.gov. ♥



AN INTERN WRITES ON HER EXPERIENCES WORKING WITH VETERANS..... By Alexandra Smith

"Comp & Pen. HUD/VASH. DD214. VSO." For many WVN readers, these acronyms are well-known and easily recognized. For me, as one of twelve Social Work interns who started in VA Boston Healthcare System last September, they were the first sign of a steep learning curve ahead. Never having worked in a medical center before, or with veterans, I heard people around me speak the lingo and knew instantly that there was a lot for me to learn about our nation's veterans, benefits, and the culture surrounding both.

Working in the women veterans' programs at the Jamaica Plain campus, I had the pleasure of dividing my time between many dynamic programs, including the homelessness program, the Women's Health Clinic, the Women's Stress Disorder Treatment Team (WSDTT), and the TRUST House, a women's transitional residence program. With Lauren Dever, LICSW as my supervisor in the Women's Homelessness Program, I quickly became familiar

with shelters in the Boston area, housing programs, and the process of helping veterans apply for benefits. I worked with women veterans who were homeless or facing homelessness.

Looking back over the past six months at VA Boston, it is clear to me that these veterans have likely been my greatest teachers. The women veterans that I worked with shared so much with me: their personal histories, knowledge about themselves and the systems around them. They asked me to help with specific tasks, or sometimes, just to listen. They taught me to individualize my approach with each woman, and to learn from her about what she needs from me, the VA, or other providers. Above all, the women veterans illustrated for me the importance of persistence and humor in the face of frustration. They demonstrated incredible resiliency and tenacity, and I will remember these women – as well as my steadfast co-workers, and many now-familiar acronyms long after my time at the VA has finished. ♥

WWII VETERAN IRENE DAVEY TURNS 104!



A YOUNG ARMY NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIER THANKS DAVEY FOR HER TRAILBLAZING EFFORTS!

"In all my lifetime, the only thing I wanted to do was make my family proud of me,"

promotion to honorary sergeant major among many other gifts and awards at the event including a key to the city of South Attleboro.

"In all my lifetime, the only thing I wanted to do was make my family proud of me," Davey said. "Today ... I think I've made it."

Davey is Massachusetts' oldest woman veteran at 104! She joined the U.S. Army in March of 1943 on the same day her husband and served until November 1945.

She was part of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps at Fort Devens and was assigned to motor transport where she did everything that the men did. She trained other women in driving rugged trucks and taking care of vehicle maintenance.

Davey shares her longevity in age to having common sense, a good sense of humor and staying active. Davey said she lives day-to-day never thinking about dying and stays active by cleaning, cooking and going out in the yard. "The day you sit down ...well, that's when you end up doing nothing." ♥

On May 9th, 2012, a very raining Wednesday morning a huge crowd gathered under a tent behind the home of South Attleboro resident Irene Davey to celebrate her birthday. The Army National Guard as well as local, state, national and veteran officials recognized the 104-year-old woman for her service and continued support of veterans. She also received a very rare

OIF/OEF VETERAN SHARES HER STORY. "MY TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE WAS AWFUL, I FELT LOST"

"Pam Toomey joined the Air Force 2002 and joined the Security Forces (Military Police). While enlisted, she served at various bases throughout the United States including her deployments to South Korea; Iraq and Afghanistan. "I provided security for nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, aircraft and resources. I performed law enforcement duties, worked as a prison guard and worked as an alarm monitor in a JDOC [Joint Defense Operation Center]", says Toomey. "I had some excellent experiences in the military and some not so wonderful. Toomey also shares the difficulty her family faced while she was away for so long, "...in their minds my everyday life was what they saw in the news." However Toomey wasn't prepared for the difficulty she would have transitioning back into civilian life. "I separated from the military after 6 years in 2008 and I had an awful transition to civilian life. I felt lost. I left all my military family behind and I no longer had a sense of purpose". Toomey shares how eventually through a strong support system and goal building, she regained confidence. Another huge



source of therapy was her rescue pit bull, Carly. Toomey trained her pit bull to become a Certified Therapy dog, "I give her credit for speeding my successful transition and helping me to get on my feet." Toomey has since completed her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and Sociology, completed a certificate program for

Animal Assisted Therapy, and will begin her Master's Degree in Social Work. "I have a strong dedication to working with veterans. It fulfills my sense of purpose."

-Thank you for your service Airman Toomey!

We Need Your Email Address!

Beginning this fall, our newsletter will be e-mailed electronically to those who have provided their email addresses. If you wish to receive the newsletter electronically please send your name and email address to dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us.

- OR -

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



Women Veterans' Network is going green!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

shared a moving keynote address that included her experiences in Iraq as a combat nurse, the heroes she aided before they passed, and the immense support her family has given her in her military career.

"You, my band of sisters, are truly my heroes." Colonel Luz continued to share her first-hand experience on landing in Iraq and how she first realized she was now a military nurse. "I knew I was a military nurse when on day 3 of landing in country, middle of the night, I heard the 1st crackle of the loud speaker yell out **"BUNKERS, BUNKERS!"** I was sure a

"You, my band of sisters, are truly my heroes."

mass casualty was breaking down my door and I knew I wasn't in Kansas anymore". Luz continued to share how her role transitioned from performing basic nurse duties to becoming the one who made sure our heroes were passing away in peace. "I was told who better than you to hold their hands and help them in their last hours." Captain Ortiz, a woman veteran who

"She paid the ultimate price. I will never forget..."

Colonel Luz met in Baghdad was engaged to be married in a short 3 months. Luz shared how they became close friends until Captain Ortiz was killed and became the 1st American nurse to die in Iraq. "She paid the ultimate price. I will never forget. It's these patients that I will remember always."

Christine Griffin, Assistant Secretary for Disability Policies and Programs and a Vietnam veteran in the Army also shared her experiences upon return from active duty.

"OVER 300 ATTENDEES WITNESS OPENING CEREMONY"



"When I got out of the Army in 1977, they said *"See ya! Oh, and apply for unemployment"* Back then there weren't proper transitional services as there are now." Griffin explained how Massachusetts is the leading state in the nation for veteran benefits and encourages all women veterans to pursue their benefits and actively seek more information. "Women Veterans are the fastest growing group of veterans. It doesn't matter whether you got out of the service yesterday or 10 years ago, there is always an opportunity to learn more about the benefits that are out there for you."



VETERANS ENJOYING THE WELLNESS ROOM

After the opening ceremony there were various activities to include speakers on networking, military leadership and an informative panel on an array of different benefits. Several door prizes were passed out throughout the day, a Wellness Room where attendees took advantage of massage therapy, reiki, reflexology, acupuncture, crystal singing bowl therapy and more! In the exhibitor area, there were over 53 providers distributing gifts and information on a full array of information specific to women veterans. It was truly our biggest exhibitor presentation yet!



Over all this was one of the best conferences the Women Veterans' Network has had yet... but next year will be even better! The WVN would like to thank everyone who made this event a success, especially our very own steering committee and volunteers. All of us on the network look forward to seeing you at next year's conference! Stay tuned for the next location. ♥

WOMEN VETERAN APPRECIATION DAY EVENT!

SAVE THE DATE! NOV 1ST, 2012

The Massachusetts Women Veterans' Network is hosting their 8th Annual Women Veteran Appreciation Day Event at the State House on Thursday, November 1st, 2012 from 11am-1pm. If you know an Outstanding Woman Veteran in your community please nominate her for the Deborah Sampson Award! For more information and nomination forms please visit: www.mass.gov/womenveterans or call Viviana Cordoba at 617-210-5958. ♥



THE NEW S.H.A.R.P PROGRAM:..... Addressing the need of Homelessness among Veterans.

Statewide Housing Advocacy and Reintegration and Prevention [S.H.A.R.P] is a collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the effort to end homelessness among Veterans. This program is accomplished through veteran peer support, mental health services, psychiatric evaluation and linkages to emergency shelter at a Veteran-centric facility while simultaneously initiating processes for long-term remediation of the Veteran's homelessness through enrollment in the HUD-VASH program. This initiative requires the provision of an existing network of DVS Veteran-specific service providers, all of whom are dedicated at 100% effort to the care of homeless veterans.

Governor Deval Patrick and Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murry join the Obama Administration to end homelessness among veterans. Statewide Housing Reintegration and Preventions [S.H.A.R.P] is a collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the effort to end

homelessness among Veterans. This program is accomplished through veteran peer support, mental health services, psychiatric evaluation and linkages to emergency shelter at a Veteran-centric facility while simultaneously initiating processes for long-term remediation of the Veteran's homelessness through enrollment in the HUD-VASH program. This initiative requires the provision of an existing network of DVS Veteran-specific service providers, all of whom are dedicated at 100% effort to the care of homeless veterans.

The Patrick-Murray Administration is making it a priority along with the Obama Administration to end homelessness among veterans by 2015.

\$100 Million has been dedicated to expand a homeless prevention plan nationally.



A national report shows that the reduction of veterans' homelessness has been reduced nationally by 12% and Massachusetts by 18% compared with last year's total. Secretary Nee of the Department of Veterans Services has been making this a top priority in Massachusetts. With a commitment from the Obama Administration, \$100 Million has been dedicated to expand a homeless prevention plan nationally.

SUCCESS STORY:

Lina Pineda, peer specialist and former homeless woman veteran shares a success story on how S.H.A.R.P assisted a homeless woman veteran. "We met the veteran on one of our many shelter visits. The veteran had been living in the street and shelters for four years. When we began working with the veteran we explained how we could help with housing and also with any other issues the veteran had. At first the veteran didn't want the help. She didn't trust the system which up to that date had not been able to help. After meeting with the veteran for the fourth time we managed to make and keep an appointment.

We were able to track down all the paperwork necessary for BHA (Boston Housing Authority) and we were able to help with current addictions which had been major barriers on her path to recovery. The veteran is now housed and currently receiving all medical care at the Jamaica Plain VA. The veteran meets on a regular basis with a caseworker, peer specialists, and has been able to go back to school to finish a bachelor's degree in Business Management. She is now very involved in aiding other women veterans." - Lina ♥

VETERANS UPWARD BOUND

Veterans Upward Bound Program at the University of Massachusetts provides a unique opportunity for men and women veterans of all ages to gain access to information about college and career awareness, acquire skills required for entry into higher education and/or to acquire the equivalent of a high school diploma. Classes are offered over three different cycles. Two cycles consist of 16 weeks of classes bringing February and September. Academic instruction includes: Mathematic, English, Foreign Language, Literature and Composition, Laboratory Science, Study Skills, and Computer Skills. Veterans attend "veteran only" classrooms and can expect skilled, experienced instructors, some of whom are veterans themselves. Career counseling, academic advice, tutorial assistance in all subjects, and exposure to cultural events, academic programs and other educational activities outside the classroom are all part of the V.U.B experience. For more information please visit www.veterans-ub.umb.edu or call 617-287-5873.



NEW Veteran Resource Website!! Services and support for veterans just a click away with new web portal www.MassVetsAdvisor.org is 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. 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: Women Veterans' Network
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Boston, MA 02111

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This is a publication by: The Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Department of Veterans' Services.

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Please complete the registration form and return with your check or money order to:

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stephanie.landry@verizon.net

– OR –

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THE MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN VETERANS AND THE WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO THE 25TH ANNUAL LUNCHEON

A TRIBUTE TO OUR GREATEST GENERATION THE WOMEN OF WWII

Saturday, October 13th, 2012 from 11am-2pm – Luncheon served at 12noon.

Lombardo's, 6 Billings St, Randolph MA – Tickets: \$25.00 per person

New England Roasted Turkey Dinner – Jewelry Sale and Door Prizes

Make checks payable to "Women Veterans Committee." Your cancelled check will be your receipt.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Town: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Home Phone: _____ **Cell Phone:** _____

Email: _____ **Number of Tickets:** _____ **x 25.00 each = \$** _____

(Please indicate choices by number, not a check mark if ordering more than one ticket)

***** NO TICKETS WILL BE SOLD AT THE DOOR RESERVATION DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 5th*****