The Bay State Patriot

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Massachusetts Department Of Veterans' Services

Deval L. Patrick
Governor

JudyAnn Bigby, M.D.
Secretary, EOHHS

Thomas G. Kelley
Secretary, DVS

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From Secretary Kelley

As 2009 draws to a close, I want to thank all of our Veterans Service Officers (VSOs), veterans' organizations and advocates who have assisted us this past year. It is the great work you do every day in the communities throughout Massachusetts that assures the continued service and dedication to our veterans and their families. As a result of this past year's efforts Massachusetts has received almost $one million in U.S. Department of Labor Grants for Massachusetts veterans for training and employment. The Web-VSMIS program will expedite the Chapter 115 benefits process for VSOs and DVS staff. There has been increased outreach to over 10,000 Veterans and family members. Among several firsts this year, we held our first webcast on benefits and services for veterans and

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their families, our first annual statewide conference for women veterans and the first annual Veterans' Day in the Park event in Gardner.

We have had an incredible year and together we have developed great programs, services, and events that will enhance the lives of Massachusetts veterans and their families. Interagency collaborations with the Department of Public Health, Department of Conservation & Recreation, as well as partnerships with community providers, the National Guard, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs have made all of this possible. On behalf of the Department of Veterans' Services staff, thank you for your hard work and continuing to offer veterans and their families the very best.

Have a Happy and Safe Holiday Season!

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VETERANS' LEGISLATION

Signed into law by Governor Patrick on November 11, 2009, Massachusetts successfully passed a comprehensive benefits bill for veterans in the Commonwealth. The bill improves upon the services and supports currently in place, including the establishment of a Massachusetts Medal of Liberty, expansion of the Welcome Home Bonus, and advantages for service members pursuing state permits, licenses and certificates.

The Massachusetts Medal of Liberty award is intended to recognize the ultimate sacrifice of Massachusetts service members and will be presented to the next of kin of service men and women killed in action.

Additionally, the bill expands the "Welcome Home Bonus" program. Under the new provision, service members who perform multiple tours of duty will receive a supplemental bonus upon theirreturn from each tour. Prior to this legislation, the bonus was only awarded upon a service member's return from his or her initial deployment.

Veterans in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and across the country have sacrificed for their nation - in return, they deserve the best we can provide. This bill will give our veterans stronger support, improved benefits and unwavering recognition. Our Commonwealth will continue its strong and historic record as the most generous state in the nation when it comes to veterans' benefits.

Senator Kenneth Donnelly, Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs; State Representative Harold P. Naughton, Jr., House Chair of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ESTABLISHES A HOMELESS VETERANS WORKING GROUP

DVS is pleased to announce that the Governor's Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) has formed a Homeless Veterans Working Group to work in collaboration with the ICHH and DVS. The group will work to facilitate ongoing communications within the housing provider community, explore new resources, collaborate on initiatives and obtain information on actions by the Patrick-Murray Administration and the Legislature to end homelessness in the Commonwealth, especially as those actions relate to rapid re-housing and "housing-first" initiatives.

Co-Chaired by Leslie Lightfoot, CEO and Founder of Veterans Homestead, Inc., and Robert Pulster, Associate Director for the Division of Housing Stabilization at the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. The group, which is comprised of government and non-profit professionals and advocates dedicated to ending homelessness among veterans, has already met and is working on developing specific recommendations and ideas in the areas of:

- Coordinating federal, state, local, and private resources and examining ways to create linkages among them.
- Identifying best practices, relevant research and work to improve delivery of services to homeless veterans.
- Researching relevant data points to understand the scope of need and to make the case for implementation of innovations identified by other subcommittees.
- Identifying ways to enhance support for special populations of veterans with particular service and/or housing needs, including post-incarcerated homeless veterans, recently returned veterans, frail and elderly, those experiencing traumatic

brain injury, women, minorities

DVS currently contracts with many non-profit organizations providing homeless and outreach services to veterans throughout the Commonwealth. The Department is constantly working to better coordinate services and increase access to resources and information for our contracted homeless service providers. Claire O'Connor at DVS, was instrumental in getting this group up and running, along with Liz Curtis, Executive Director of the ICHH.

According to the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans, it is estimated that "131,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. Approximately twice that many experience homelessness over the course of a year. Conservatively, one out of every three homeless men who is sleeping in a doorway, alley or box in our cities and rural communities has put on a uniform and served this country. According to the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Urban Institute, 1999), veterans account for 23 percent of all homeless people in America."

In 2007, Governor Deval Patrick reinstated the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) in 2007 which is chaired by Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray. The full Council is working to implement the recommendations from the Massachusetts Commission to End Homelessness ,which has called for a new statewide "housing-first" approach that will end homelessness in the Commonwealth by 2013. It is co-chaired by Second Assistant Majority Leader Byron Rushing and Department of Housing and Community Development Undersecretary Tina Brooks.

Coleman Nee, Undersecretary for Veterans' Services

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The Veterans Homestead Inc. introduces the creation of the Northeast Veteran Training and Rehabilitation Center (NVTRC). All Veterans at the NVTRC will have serious injuries, including loss of limbs, disfiguring burns, traumatic brain injuries and deeply personal psychological wounds. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is considered the "signature wound" of this war. The single or repeated impact of IED's (improvised explosive devises) on the brain will produce symptoms that can be both physical and psychological. The Center will provide these wounded veterans with both the time and the resources needed to cope and then to successfully transition into a new career and way of life, essentially making the veteran population more marketable in an ever-changing work environment. The NVTRC is the first such facility to simultaneously offer counseling (both individual and family), therapy, education and vocational skill building which are vital for the successful futures of our wounded soldiers. More specifically, the NVTRC will provide:

- Housing for the veteran and his or her family, at no cost to the veteran
- Case management and counseling to help Veterans address their economic and

physical problems
- On-site rehabilitation services
- A partnership with Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) for educational courses and vocational skill building for the veteran as well as his/her spouse
- Physical, occupational, massage, aqua, and speech therapy. The Rehabilitation Center will offer MWCC students in the allied health fields opportunities for on-site internships
- Individual and family counseling and support for Veterans suffering from PTSD and TBI

The Facility

The facility will house up to twenty (20) veterans and their families, or sixty (60) single veterans at one time. Located on 10+ acres on the MountWachusett Community College campus in Gardner, the facility will include ten duplexes, each with handicap access and amenities. The NVTRC offers an extensive state-of-the-art physical and occupational therapy facility, including an indoor swimming pool, a jogging track, a weight/exercise room, a gymnasium, a trout pond and a variety of other amenities designed to prepare residents for a life after NVTRC. Veterans and their families will be housed in 1200 sq. ft. apartments near the college campus. These apartments have two bedrooms, one bath, a kitchen and living area. This concept allows disabled veterans to practice their living skills and provides privacy and on-going support, for themselves and their families; during the rehabilitation process. The entire center has been designed to meet "Green" standards by utilizing geothermal heat and cooling and photovoltaic electricity.

Intake, Assessment, and Planning

Upon arrival, therapists and caseworkers will develop an individual treatment plan, designed to reflect each veterans' needs. All therapy, counseling, educational/vocational pursuits, and estimated length of stay will be determined and outlined within the plan. Veterans who choose to pursue a degree while obtaining new life skills will be permitted to stay in the program for up to two years. The NVTRC will also communicate with the Department of Veterans' Services, the Veterans Administration and other appropriate veteran service organizations to coordinate benefit and entitlement programs.

The NVTRC has broken ground and services will be available in January 2010.

Claire O'Connor, Director of Housing & Outreach Services

WEB-VSMIS

Web-VSMIS is the first interactive, benefit database specifically developed for use by both the Department of Veterans' Services and Veterans' Services Officer (VSO). The system was formally activated on July 23, 2009. On August 3, 2009, DVS started training the VSOs in the use of Web-VSMIS. To date, over 300 of the 351 communities in the Commonwealth are tracking their veterans' benefits using the new system.

The response from all the users is overwhelmingly positive. The comments received are that the system is accurate, fast and easy to use. As one VSO stated, " I can now dedicate my time to helping veterans and their families, instead of dedicating so much of my time to

paperwork."

Although this system has not reduced the amount of supporting documentation the VSO must maintain locally, it has reduced the need to copy every document to mail into DVS. Now the VSO need only FAX the documents to a central FAX server, and the documents are made available to the DVS Authorizer instantly. This has greatly reduced the amount of physical paper passing through DVS.

One of the benefits to using the Web-VSMIS is that 99% of all the calculations are completed for the VSO. The VSO is still required to verify the income and enter it into the system. Once the basic information is entered, the system completes the calculations and provides the VSO with the exact amount of benefits available to the recipient. As a further enhancement to the process, the monthly certification that is used to request reimbursement is automatically generated based on the VSO input. This removes the issue of transposition errors inherent in any system that requires copying data.

Operations Team

FROM THE WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK

On November 5, the Women Veterans' Network celebrated and honored Massachusetts women veterans at the 5th annual "Women are Veterans Too!" ceremony in Nurse's Hall at the State House. More than 100 people came out in support of women veterans. Secretary Tom Kelley provided welcoming remarks. Speakers included Representative Hank P. Naughton, Jr., Mayor Mark P. Hawke of Gardner, and a staff member from the office of Representative Robert Rice. Captain Sue Lynch, a Judge Advocate General Officer in the US Army Reserve and a Gulf War veteran, delivered the keynote address.

The "Outstanding Woman Veteran" award was presented to Michelle Wilmot, an Army veteran from Gardner. Michelle served as a medic, mental health sergeant and retention Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) in the US Army for eight years. During her deployment to Ramadi, Iraq from 2004-2005, Michelle served as a member of Team Lioness, the first team of female service members to be attached to Marine infantry units performing checkpoint operations, house searches and personal searches on women and children for weapons and explosives. The team's work was featured in the documentary "Lioness" and in the book "When the Girls Come Marching Home."

The Patrick-Murray Administration issued a proclamation recognizing the service of women in the Commonwealth, declaring November 1st-7th, 2009 to be Women Veterans Week. Women have served in every conflict since the Revolutionary War (often in disguise), and we are honored to see women's military service recognized in such a historic and memorable manner.

Panayiota Bertzikis, Women Veterans' Network

FROM THE SAVE TEAM

Since the last article by SAVE team member Holloway Marston, there have been many changes to our outreach area and staffing. To ensure that there would be equal outreach coverage across the Commonwealth, we have three new Outreach Coordinators on the SAVE team.

Chris McGurk and Victor Nunnez-Ortiz now cover Worcester County and Western Massachusetts, while Chris Maddeford is covering Middlesex County. These three new additions to the SAVE teamare recently returned combat veterans and, like the rest of the SAVE team, use their own experiences to provide peer support while making sure that all Massachusetts veterans and their families have access to the many benefits and services available to them.

Dan Brennan covers the South Shore area, Holloway Marston covers Norfolk County, and Kevin Lambert continues to cover Essex and Suffolk Counties. Kevin has also taken on the additional role of Team Coordinator, in order to assist SAVE team Director James Crosby.

We continue to attend educational and informational events with a goal of reaching out to as many veterans, family members, and the increasing number of returning OEF/OIF Veterans across the Commonwealth. On numerous occasions, we have met veterans in need while attending an event and were able to assist in obtaining the crucial services they needed at the time of their crisis. Additionally, we were able to assist family members in understanding the crisis, helping their loved one, and remain involved in the veterans' care.

Since the launch of SAVE, we have reached out to over 10,000 veterans and family members to ensure that they are aware of, and receiving, the benefits and services available to them throughout the Commonwealth, and we continue on that mission each and every day.

Kevin Lambert, SAVE team Coordinator

SAVE TRAINING FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

The SAVE team has developed a First Responder's training different than many other courses offered. Incorporated in the presentation and training are stories and personal accounts recalled from the Outreach Coordinators' own experiences in combat. It is important for first responders to understand that dealing with a veteran in crisis may be different from dealing with a person who has never served in combat. Everything a first responder does, or does not do, can have an impact on the immediate situation.

Christoper McGurk and Holly Marston, fellow SAVE Outreach Coordinators, had the privilege of conducting the SAVE team's " First Responder" training to a class of 49 student municipal police officers at the State Police Academy in New Braintree. The student officers, some of whom are veterans themselves, were very receptive. During the training, they asked questions and provided additional insight to the SAVE team as to what may help police officers interact with a veteran in crisis.

The SAVE presentation works to arm first responders with the knowledge of how to interact with Veterans who may be in crisis and helping them to understand why some veterans may act differently in certain situations. It has been rewarding to see the proactive efforts of local law enforcement and agencies. By taking the time to participate in these trainings, they are learning how to assist a very deserving portion of the Commonwealth's residents.

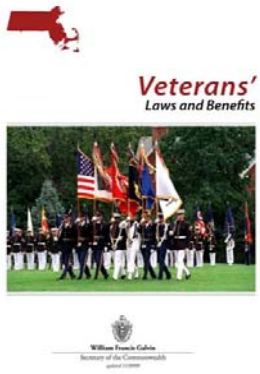
We are grateful that the State Police Academy considers our First Responder training program a valuable tool for their officers, and we thank the Academy in New Braintree for the vote of confidence in our program by inviting the SAVE team to their facility to educate and train this class of first responders, prior to their graduation.

SAVE Team

CHANGES TO THE PERSIAN GULF WAR BONUS

Under authority for Chapter 132, Acts of 2009, active duty personnel are now eligible to apply for the Persian Gulf War bonus. Previously, service members had to be discharged from Active Service in order to apply for the bonus. Active duty personnel who performed 30 days active duty in the Gulf war zone between August 2, 1990 and April 11, 1991 and are in receipt of the Southwest Asia service medal may submit the application along with a form completed and signed by their commanding officer. A W-9 form for resident verification is also required for processing. All forms will be available for downloading on our web site at www.mass.gov/veterans. Once on the home page, look under "Benefits" and click on the "Bonuses" link for further details concerning the Persian Gulf War bonus.

HOT OFF THE PRESS!



The Department of Veterans' Services and the Secretary of State's Office, Citizen Information Service just completed the 9th edition of the Veterans' Laws and Benefits book. This comprehensive publication is essential for Massachusetts Veterans. Recent legislation, suicide prevention resources, the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and green job training are some of the new content for this edition of the book. A link to the Veterans' Laws and Benefits book can be found at www.mass.gov/veterans.

To order a hard copy of this book, please call the Secretary of State's Office, Citizen Information Service. (DVS does not produce this publication and will not be distributing it to VSOs or service providers.) The books can be ordered by calling Brenda Jalbert at the Citizen Information Service, 617-727-7030/800-392-6090, or by emailing: brenda.jalbert@sec.state.ma.us.

Heidi Kruckenberg, Webmaster

LEGAL SERVICES FOR VETERANS CONTINUES

Financial Literacy and Counseling

The Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services has teamed up with the Boston Bar Association Bankruptcy Section to create a free financial literacy program for veterans and their families. This program will cover credit card debt, foreclosures, bankruptcy as an option, and other financial matters. The presenters are attorneys Don Lassman and Mark Rossi. This program is scheduled for February 3, 2010 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Franco American Hall at 535 Western Avenue in Lynn; parking will be available. Registration is required. To register for this free event please contact Gail Cavanaugh-McAuliffe at (617) 210-5782 before the day of the event to reserve your spot.

Dial-A-Lawyer Continues

We are continuing to work with the Massachusetts Bar Association. We will be having a Veterans' Dial-A-Lawyer event on April 29, 2010 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Flyers will be distributed prior to the event. MBA has also continued its call-in hours for veterans or family members that are struggling with Veterans' Administration appeals. Those call-in hours are every Monday from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at (617)338-0572. If you are an attorney and would like to participate in our Visiting Lawyer Program please contact Beth O'Neil at the Massachusetts Bar Association at (617) 338-0560. Please contact her if you wish to plan an event where volunteer lawyers will come to your community and meet with veterans on a one to one basis to discuss any legal matters.

The Department of Veterans' Services would like to thank the Massachusetts Bar Association and the Boston Bar Association for their commitment to veterans throughout the Commonwealth.

Gail Cavanaugh-McAuliffe, Paralegal

VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICERS ANNUAL TRAINING

DVS and the Massachusetts Veterans' Services Officers Association (MVSOA) have once again agreed to collaborate on combining DVS annual training and the MVSOA Mid-Winter conference for 2010. The 2010 training is scheduled for February 22-25, 2010 at the Marlboro Holiday Inn.

DVS and the MVSOA combined the two functions for the first time in January 2009 with resounding success. This was helpful to those VSOs who could only attend one session a year due to fiscal constraints. Both the annual training and the conference offer opportunities for the VSO community to learn about benefits available to the Veterans and dependents. Benefit training seminars cover local, state and federal benefits.

DVS Secretary, Tom Kelley noted, "In today's fiscal climate, it is imperative that the VSO learn about all the available benefits available to veterans. Ensuring that each veteran receives all the benefits available to them not only enhances the lifestyle of the veteran but also reduces the benefit expense on the community. In addition, DVS is dedicated to getting the full 75% reimbursement back to the community, and training is the best method to ensure the VSO receives every dollar owed to the community."

In addition, this will be the first time the entire VSO community can get instruction on the

newly released Web-VSMIS benefit-tracking program. The Web-VSMIS is an interactive web-based application developed to track benefit requests and reimbursements. It is important to teach each VSO the full capabilities available to them by using this new system. Rich Girard, MVSOA President said, "I think implementing this system has brought Veterans' Services to the modern era. It has streamlined a lot of paperwork into a quick and easy process. We look forward to this important training conference."

Bill Leamy, Operations and Training

LATE SUMMER/FALL HAPPENINGS

Stand Downs
DVS participated in several Stand Downs for Homeless Veterans throughout the year. Stand Downs provide opportunities for homeless veterans to get assistance with medical care, housing, RMV issues, clothing, education benefits, counseling services and some personal care needs. At each of the events, DVS was able to reach out to many veterans, letting them know about the benefits they are entitled to and linking them with their Veterans' Services Officers and other providers.

Pow-Wow
Our counterparts in New York invited us to join them in outreach efforts on the Massachusetts - New York Border at the Rock Rattle and Drum Pow-Wow. We met many Massachusetts Veterans and had the opportunity to witness and participate in special ceremonies. These ceremonies were moving experiences, rich in Native American cultural heritage. Cultural events such as these provide a setting for Veterans and their families to learn about benefits and services in their own areas. Members of the SAVE team participated in the Pow-Wow, and have been working with several veterans they met there, linking them with vital resources in their community. We plan to participate in more cultural events like this in the coming year.

Jail Diversion
DVS is involved with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) Veterans' Jail Diversion Grant initiative, providing information to the program on state resources for veterans. This collaboration between the VA, UMass Medical and the Worcester Courts is piloting a program in the Worcester Court system. The intent of this program is to divert veterans to counseling and treatment programs in lieu of incarceration. The program, called "Mission Direct Vet," hopes to also provide evidence-based research showing that there are alternatives to incarceration for veterans who may have problems with law enforcement as a result of symptoms related to their combat experience.

The Northeast Consortium for Veterans with TBI ends while the New England Collaborative begins
The Northeast Consortium for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) grant concluded on March 31, 2009. The Consortium focused on outreach to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who had sustained a traumatic brain injury while also working with and

their families. Collaboration between the National Guard, Statewide Head Injury Program at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the U.S.Veterans Administration Healthcare System, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Massachusetts Brain Injury Association resulted in several initiatives to raise awareness, while also providing services and support. A toll free number (1-888-Vet-1-TBI) was put in place for inquiries. A second, four-year, grant was awarded to the Statewide Head Injury Program on April 1, 2009. A major initiative will be the establishment of a New England Collaborative. This collaboration will bring six states together on a quarterly basis to share best practices, services, and support for assisting veterans with TBI and their families across the region.Outreach to women and minority veterans with TBI will be a priority. As with the previous grant, DVS will continue to be an active participant, along with military and civilian TBI representatives from across New England. For more information, contact the Project Director, Debra Kamen, (617) 204-3852, debra.kamen@mrc.state.ma.us.

The Women Veterans' Network
The network participated in several events for women veterans including the VA Women Veterans' Expo, the Governors' Advisory Council on Women Veterans Annual Luncheon, Vet Center Hikes, the Money Conference, and our own Women Are Veterans Too! event. (See separate article.) Since July, we have added over 400 new women veterans to our database as a result of outreach at these events and mailings.

Community Education
DVS has participated in several seminars geared toward educating clinicians, law enforcement officials, and other providers about benefits and services for returning veterans and their families. With the Operation Total Warrior program, we co-hosted a visit by CSM (Ret.) Sam Rhodes who tours the country speaking out about the risk of suicide. Secretary Kelley gave opening comments at the "Another Kind of Valor" Training series and at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology "Educating and Caring for the Mental Health Needs of OIF/OEF Veterans and their Families." DVS personnel were on hand at these events to present updates and workshops in the interest of educating communities about benefits and services for veterans and their families.

Upcoming Events

Operation Total Warrior Reintegration Event: January 9th and 10th, 8 am - 4pm, Holiday Inn, Mansfield (DVS will present on benefits and have information table)

Veterans' Benefits Open House: January 20th, 7-9 PM, Military and Family Support Center, 14 Minuteman Lane, Wellesley. (Discussion will be on the GI Bill and other Massachusetts Education Programs for veterans. DVS is a partner in these events.)

Operation Total Warrior Pre-Mobilization Event: February 7th, Worcester DCU.

VSO Training: February 22nd - 25th, Holiday Inn, Marlborough

Coming this spring: 2nd Annual Women Veterans' Conference (Date, Location TBD)

VETERANS' APPRECIATION DAY IN THE PARK

Dunn State Park in Gardner provided a pastoral backdrop for the first annual "Veterans' Appreciation Day in the Park" on September 26th. This outdoor recreational event was planned to provide veterans of all abilities and their families the opportunity to enjoy the amenities of the Massachusetts State Park system. The event was the result of collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services (DVS), the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Massachusetts National Guard "Operation Total Warrior" (OTW) reintegration program.

As the morning mist lifted off the pond at Dunn State Park, the National Guard set up tents for all of the events and services, as veterans and volunteers started arriving on shuttles provided by the MBTA. The Gardner Fire Department set up a safety demonstration, and many representatives came for the opening ceremony.

We were honored to have so many people come out to the event to show appreciation to our veterans. Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray, Senator Jennifer Flanagan, and Representative Robert Ride offered remarks at the opening ceremony and welcomed veterans as they arrived. Also in attendance were Undersecretary of Veterans' Services Coleman Nee, Deputy Commissioner of DCR Jack Murray, Colonel Paul G. Smith of the Massachusetts National Guard, and the Director of the Universal Access Program, Tom McCarthy.

Throughout the day, over 100 veterans and their families enjoyed refreshments, kayaking, hiking, and geo-caching, letterboxing, and fly-fishing and participated in a golf demonstration. Some veterans tried adaptive equipment for the first time through the DCR's Universal Access Program (UAP). Dunn State Park has an accessible nature trail, and one of the outdoor adventure providers brought terra-trek chairs to facilitate hiking on more rugged terrain. The park was full of veterans and their families enjoying the trails; people were in kayaks padding along the glistening pond the entire day. Children enjoyed the activities at the playground and got their faces painted. Smiles were everywhere!

In addition to the outdoor adventures, many veterans' support agencies were on hand to provide information about benefits and services. The Vet Center mobile van was on site with counselors, and Radio 92.9 provided music alongside the Pond House. The SAVE team was in attendance and assisted veterans with information and activities. As the day's events ended, there were resounding echoes of "Thank You!' and "See you next year!"

Our first Veterans' Appreciation Day event was a tremendous success, due to the hard work of so many people and organizations. Once again, we are thankful for the partnership of the DCR, the National Guard, our Veterans' Support Agencies, and the MBTA, which provided free transportation for veterans traveling to the event, and the many, many volunteers. We look forward to planning for next year's event

Cheryl Lussier Poppe, Director of Veterans' Programs and Services

VETERANS' DAY AT THE STATE HOUSE 2009

Governor Deval Patrick, Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray and Secretary of Veterans' Services Tom Kelley celebrated the service of Massachusetts veterans and active duty service members while attending Commonwealth's official Veterans' Day Ceremony at the State House.

This year, the Commonwealth honored the Patriot Guard Riders (PGR) for their continued dedication and support of all veterans' and Gold Star Families nationwide. The Patriot Guard Riders are a group of riders from across the nation. They have an unwavering respect for those who risk their very lives for America's freedom and security. Their mission is to participate in funeral services of fallen American heroes as invited guests. Additionally, they are present to show their sincere respect for our fallen heroes, their families and their communities. The PGR is an all volunteer organization, and at present there are 1,100 Massachusetts riders, with 178,000 riders across the United States.

In addition to honoring the Patriot Guard Riders, the program included a special tribute to women veterans by Lieutenant Colonel Margaret White, of the Massachusetts National Guard. There was a solemn POW/MIA remembrance ceremony which was concluded with a candle lighting ceremony lead by Tim Sullivan, Cdr. USN (Ret.) former POW, and Maureen Dunn, National League of Families of POW/MIA. Gold Star Families were paid tribute with a rose presentation. Another very special guest was Medal of Honor recipient John Finn, a 100 year-old Pearl Harbor survivor from San Diego, California.

The ceremony concluded with a 21-gun salute by the Massachusetts Army National Guard, followed by Taps played by the U.S. Air Force Band of Liberty, Hanscom Air Force Base.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

DVS continues to work with other local, state, federal, and community providers to ensure that veterans receive proper and efficient care. This month, we are highlighting the National Guard Yellow Ribbon "Operation Total Warrior Program" and Massachusetts General Hospital and the Red Sox Foundation's recently launched "Home Base Program." We encourage you to learn more and get involved.

Operation Total Warrior (OTW)
OTW is a U.S. Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Support Services Program. Operation Total Warrior strives to link Massachusetts National Guard, Air National Guard, and Reserve Component service members and families with critical support services and veterans benefits support agencies. It is OTW's goal to assist those who wear the uniform of the United States military and the families that support them in finding the path of least resistance towards realizing the full entitlement, supportive services, and benefits experience. While they work to provide veterans with state-of-the-art informational resource, veterans are invited to contact the OTW team with any questions or needs arising from deployment

or military service.

Contact Information
Operation Total Warrior / YRSS
Service Member and Family Support Center
Massachusetts National Guard
14 Minuteman Lane
Wellesley, MA 02481
1-800-772-1237 (24 Hour Access to Assistance)

Home Base Program
The Home Base Program, a partnership between the Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital, is dedicated to improving the lives of veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars who are suffering from deployment-related traumatic brain injury and/or post-traumatic stress disorder through clinical care, innovative research, education, support of families and community outreach. The Home Base Program coordinates its efforts with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Center for the Integration of Medicine and Innovative Technologies (CIMIT) and other community partners to provide the best care and hope for veterans.

A wide range of research and educational programs in PTSD and TBI at Massachusetts General Hospital are a vital part of the Home Base Program. Other components of the Home Base Program include coordinated clinical initiatives involving the MGH and the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as the outreach and support programs for families.

Contact Information
(617) 724-5202
homebaseprogram@partners.org

BECOME A FAN AND FOLLOW US!

As many of you may know, social networks have become the fastest growing means to communicate. With this in mind, the Department of Veterans' Services maintains both Twitter and Facebook accounts. While the Department has its own account with Twitter and Facebook, the SAVE team and the Women Veterans' Network also maintain accounts to communicate with their followers. Utilizing these networks, we have been able to spread the word about events, meetings, news of interest, or Department updates faster and more often.

Our most recent group of returning veterans access social media networks both here and abroad. Many used the internet while overseas, communicating with families occasionally through webcams and email. The ability to get information 24/7 on the web helped them get information faster and stay in touch back home. Continuing this capability upon return helps veterans and their families find out what is going on in Massachusetts at their convenience. Not only do these outlets provide the opportunity for us to educate citizens on our benefits, services, news, and events - they also allow us to interact with one another, ask questions, and offer thoughts and opinions through blogs, groups and online surveys. We

invite all of you to find us on Facebook and Twitter, as well as develop your own pages and accounts. Reaching out to veterans, families, and citizens of the Commonwealth is a priority for us to ensure that veterans are aware and have access to their benefits; these new web-based tools enhance those efforts.

Follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/MassDVS
Become a Fan on Facebook: www.facebook.com/MassDVS

Cayenne Isaksen, Media and Public Affairs

The Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) advocates on behalf of the nearly half-million veterans in Massachusetts, their families, and survivors. DVS works to secure federal compensation and other benefits for which veterans may be eligible. The Department also administers needs-based benefits program through Veterans' Service Officers throughout Massachusetts and provides state funding to organizations offering homeless shelter, transitional housing and outreach services to veterans.

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