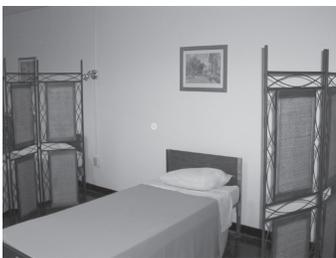




WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK

New Women's Dorm at Chelsea Soldiers' Home



The new women's dormitory

The Soldiers' Home in Massachusetts (Chelsea) is proud to announce the opening of a seven-bed dormitory ward exclusively for women. Commandant Michael Resca ordered the construction of the ward to accommodate the role women play in today's military. "With so many women serving in combat around the world, we must be prepared to meet their needs and provide them with a real home as necessary," said Commandant Resca.

The new women's dormitory currently houses two women who were living at the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans (NESHV) prior to their arrival. Gloria Strahan was the first to live in the new ward. When asked how she liked her new surroundings she said, "I like the way they gave us a little more privacy. It's a stress-free environment." Gloria was an Army medic during Vietnam and feels safe for the first time in years after escaping a troubled past of physical and mental abuse. Shelita Daniel is the Home's youngest resident and Gloria's roommate. She was living at the NESHV for a year and is thrilled to finally have a home. Shelita works full-time and looks forward to transitioning to her own apartment in the near future. She said, "this is a really nice place and I want to thank you for admitting me so quickly, I had no other place to go and my time at the shelter was up." The Home was able to admit Shelita under the recent change in the law that makes peacetime veterans eligible for state services.

Currently, the Home has dormitory beds available for the low price of \$10.00 a day (free for veterans without income). With 24-hour health care coverage and a private setting available after a short stay, the women's dormitory is an ideal setting for women veterans who can live semi-independently. *(Continued on page 3.)*

A Message from Heidi



A few members of the committee at Battleship Cove (L-R, back row) Denise Griffin, Bonnie Roessner, Heidi Kruckenberg, Jen Erbe Leggett, Pat Robinson (front row) Ethel LaSalle, Edythe Sheridan, Lillian J. Eaton

The Women Veterans' Network has a small committee consisting of women veterans from all eras, U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) representatives, local veterans' agents, active duty personnel, and representa-

tives of veterans' service organizations. This committee can be compared to the central nervous system of the Women Veterans' Network. The central nervous system of the body consists of the brain and spinal cord, which conduct and receive information and input from and send responses to the body's organs, glands, and muscles.

The committee meets bimonthly to share information about issues, benefits, and programs. The fact that diverse members come together from different parts of the "body" of veterans' services means that VA staff understands state benefits and service organizations are aware of National Guard programs to assist veterans returning from combat. Just as the brain is aware of the body's various organs, glands, and muscles, bimonthly meetings have helped create a strong network of members who are familiar with the services available to women veterans in Massachusetts. A woman entering the system of veterans' services through any committee member can take advantage of the collective knowledge of the entire committee. That veteran will be referred to the best point of contact for her needs, whether she initially calls a VA women veterans' program manager, her local veterans' agent, or the WAC (Women's Army Corps) Vets service organization. *(Continued on page 3.)*

-VA Updates -

VBA Boston Regional Office Welcomes New Women's Coordinator



Denise Griffin

In August 2004, the Boston Regional Office of the Veterans Benefits Administration hired Denise Griffin as Women's Coordinator. Though she is a new VA employee, Denise is not new to serving veterans. She was previously employed by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) as a National Service Officer in Boston.

Every VA regional office employs a Women's Coordinator, whose role, Denise explains, is to act as "a liaison for VA benefits and to provide a personal face to women veterans." She helps veterans establish claims for compensation or pension benefits; many of the veterans she helps have PTSD issues. Denise says that veterans contact her with a variety of questions and she promises that she will help "any veteran with any question, anytime." Veterans can contact Denise at her office in the JFK Federal Building, Room 1575 in Boston or by phone at 800-827-1000.

The two questions she is asked most frequently include: "Are you a veteran?" and "How long does the claim process take?" Denise answers that "yes," she is a peacetime-era veteran of the Air Force who served from 1978 to 1982. She responds to the second question by stating that "claims are processed as quickly as possible, but sometimes it can take as long as a year to receive your money." Optimism tempered by realism is Denise's trademark of compassionate service. As a disabled veteran herself, Denise knows the VA from both sides—as a client and as an employee. She testifies that "the claims process can be long, but don't give up. Remember that evidence is the key. The letters the VA sends out are long and tedious, but please read them and follow what they say." Her experience as a VA client and employee has convinced her that the Boston regional office employs a "diverse group of people who are very caring and dedicated to helping veterans."

If you have questions about VA benefits or need help with a claim, remember the name Denise Griffin and call 800-827-1000 to ask for her assistance.

Northampton VA Celebrated Red Dress Day

Mary K. Sikoski, Women Veterans' Program Manager at Northampton VA Medical Center is pleased to report that the medical center celebrated Red Dress Day on February 4, 2005. Staff and patients participated in wearing red and the day was a great success in recognition of women and heart disease. The women's program at the Northampton VA is strongly supported by the newly appointed Nurse Executive, Rosemary Westerman and the Women Veterans' Advisory Committee.

New Gynecologist at the VA Boston Healthcare System



Dr. Sally Crawford

We are very pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Sally Crawford to the Surgical Staff at VA Boston Healthcare System. Dr. Crawford will be seeing patients in the GYN clinics at Jamaica Plain, Brockton, and in the near future, the West Roxbury Campus. Dr. Crawford comes to us with extensive experience in OB/GYN care.

She received her medical degree at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, Farmington, Connecticut in 1989. She also has a Ph.D. in Organometallic Chemistry from the University of California. Dr. Crawford has practiced as an OB/GYN since 1991 and served as a consultant to Rabia Balkhia Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2004. She is Board Certified in Obstetrics and Gynecology and credentialed with the American Board of Gynecologists. Dr. Crawford is a member of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology and American Medical Association.

By Patricia Robinson, Women Veterans' Program Manager, VA Boston Healthcare System

New VA Identification Card

The next time you are at the VA for an appointment please see the eligibility clerk and have your new ID made. These cards will have your photo but will no longer include your social security number. The eligibility clerk will verify your information, take your photo, and transmit that information to Atlanta for further validation of eligibility. The card will be mailed to your home address or if you are without a permanent address, the card will be mailed to your VA facility.

State Veterans' Cemetery Opened in Winchendon

The Department of Veterans' Services is pleased to announce that on November 30, 2004, the second Massachusetts state veterans' cemetery opened in Winchendon. For more information, please contact Cemetery Manager James Brehio (978-297-9501) or visit the DVS website (www.mass.gov/veterans) to pre-register for interment.

New Appointments for the Governor's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans

New members were recently appointed to the Governor's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. This twenty-one-year-old Committee was formed by Governor Michael S. Dukakis with the purpose of fostering and promoting the interests of women veterans in Massachusetts.

At press time the newly appointed members had not yet met to determine their mission and goals. Look in the fall issue of this newsletter for a listing of new members as well as information about their current projects. For more information about the Governor's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, please contact President Lillian J. Eaton, 978-388-1728.

SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, June 18, 2005, 1PM

The 60th anniversary of the end of World War II celebration, hosted by the Department of Defense, will be held at the Charlestown Navy Yard on June 18, 2005. Check the DVS website for more information, www.mass.gov/veterans.

New Women's Dorm

Continued from page 1.

To be eligible for residency in the dormitory, long-term care at the hospital, or outpatient services, an individual must have served honorably and be a resident of Massachusetts at the time of application.

The Soldiers' Home is a healthcare facility approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and owned and operated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Home was officially opened on July 25, 1882, and has been serving veterans continuously since then; that's well over a century of service!

For additional information regarding utilization of the Outpatient Department or admission to the dormitory, contact Admissions at 617-887-7146.

By Scott Glucker, Chelsea Soldiers' Home

A Message from Heidi

Continued from page 1.

Bimonthly committee meetings often include a presentation by a guest speaker about a topic or program of interest. Past guest speakers have addressed the following issues: women veterans' homelessness and resources in Massachusetts, the activities of the Stoneham American Legion Post 115, a report from a member of the Massachusetts National Guard on her service in Afghanistan and her return home, military sexual trauma and resources in Massachusetts, employment and training resources, and most recently a field trip to Battleship Cove in Fall River. Committee members share their knowledge and specialties with others as well as explore an issue through questions and answers at these presentations. This information-sharing among various the "muscles," "organs," and "glands" of the "body" of agencies and organizations serving women veterans enables all committee members to better serve veterans.

In addition to transmitting information, the central nervous system initiates all physical activities of a vertebrate. In a similar way, the committee initiates the work of the Women Veterans' Network. Back in 1996-97, a committee made up of diverse members from various parts of the "body" of veterans' services and advocacy guided the Network's formation. That committee envisioned the mission and goals of the Network before funds were allocated for the Network's formation. Throughout the past eight years, the committee has helped the Network make informed choices about a variety of issues. The committee provides newsletter article suggestions and assists the Network in database outreach efforts.

Without the committee, the Women Veterans' Network would fail to meet its charge to be the central resource for women veterans in Massachusetts. I appreciate the wisdom of those who created the Women Veterans' Network based on a foundation of interagency collaboration. Just as the central nervous system is the throne of consciousness and the decree for physical action, the committee allows its members to share information and make better decisions individually and collectively as we strive to serve women veterans.

—Heidi Kruckenberg, Women's Coordinator

Submit your name or update your address on the Database of Women Veterans ONLINE at www.mass.gov/veterans.

Department of Veterans' Services
Attn: Women Veterans' Network
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Boston, MA 02111

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Update on Massachusetts Legislation

The Massachusetts' Legislature was very busy during the 2003-2004 session enacting laws that pertain to veterans. Some highlights are listed below.

A law ensures that public employees in the Army and Air National Guard and the Reserves called to active service since September 11, 2001, receive their regular base salaries as public employees. Another law prohibits employment discrimination against members of the military and National Guard. The Department of Veterans' Services is setting up a commission to study reports of discrimination against veterans in the workplace.

Under Massachusetts' law, veterans who served during "peacetime" are now eligible for all veterans' benefits.

Massachusetts has set apart September 2 as World War II Commemoration Day and recognizes June 27 and July 18 in honor of the Massachusetts' Volunteer Infantry of the Civil War.

Massachusetts will honor the following by erecting plaques or naming overpasses, streets, or intersections in their name: LT Frances Slinger, the first nurse killed in action in the European Theater during World War II; PFC

Paul W. Curran, who was killed in action in Vietnam; Charles E. Grout, the late Veteran's Service Officer in Winchendon; and LCpl Jeffery C. Burgess, USMC, who died while serving for Iraqi Freedom.

Finally, it is now a crime in Massachusetts to remove a veterans' commemorative flag holder from a grave.

By Sean Cannon, Legal Intern, Dept. of Veterans' Services

WREI Conference on Women in the Military



The Women's Research and Education Institute (WREI) held a conference in 2000 on women in uniformed services

within the changing world order. The 2005 conference will address issues specific to women in the military today. Paper and presentation proposals are currently being sought under four categories: women on the frontlines, work and family balance, health, and command climate. The conference will be held on May 19-20, 2005, at the Women in Military Service to America Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. Registration information will be available online at www.wrei.org or call 202-628-0444.