CELEBRATING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH!

The Northampton VA Medical Center joined other centers across the nation in observing Women's History Month in March by recognizing and honoring women Veterans.

"Since the Revolutionary War, women have served and contributed to the military and to the nation," said Kim Adams, Northampton VAMC Women Veterans Program manager, during a recognition event Friday, March 25. "We're part of a very proud tradition." During the celebration, two Veterans described their experiences in uniform.

"Since the Revolutionary War, women have served and contributed to the military and to the nation"

The VAMC has partnered with the project to encourage Women Veterans to tell their stories through oral history. Oral history interviews are recorded on tape and sent to the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project. For more information contact Susan Tracy, the director of the Veterans History Project at the Northampton VA. "This event is a great stepping stone toward preserving the stories of women who served and to connect with more women," said Tracy.

The first Veteran to share her account was a World War II Veteran, Ellenor Rennell, who encouraged her fellow women Veterans to remind others of the special contributions and sacrifices of the ever-increasing number of women serving in the armed forces. Her daughter, a Vietnam Veteran, died five years ago from complications from exposure to Agent Orange." I am so proud to be a Veteran, and I want every one of you to know that when someone meets a Veteran, make sure you know how proud you are," said Rennell.

The second Veteran was Melissa Zanvettor, a VAMC primary care clinic registered nurse, remembers joining the Navy in 2001 because she said she was "looking for something more and a change" in her life. Assigned to the USNS Comfort, a hospital ship based in Baltimore, Zanvettor talked about her experiences as a hospital corpsman after Sept. 11, 2001 in providing medical support efforts to victims from the attack on the World Trade Center in New York.

She later participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom where she was on board when the Comfort treated hundreds of wounded U.S. service members, injured Iraqi civilians and enemy prisoners of war. "We used innovative and creative ways to provide comfort for our patients. It was a difficult time. You realize the humanity of the situation. You see it on the news, but here it is now right in front of you."

Kim Adams concluded the ceremony by reminding women Veterans of their status as Veterans and their benefits ♥

2011 WOMEN ARE VETERANS TOO! EVENT

The Women Veterans' Network hosted the sixth annual Women are Veterans Too! event in Memorial Hall at the State House on November 4, 2010. For the second year, Governor Patrick proclaimed the week of November 1 through November 7 to be Women Veterans' Week. This year, the 2010 Outstanding Woman Veteran of the Year award was given to Captain Mary Jo Majors from the United States Naval Reserve Nurse Corps and a resident of Cambridge. Captain Majors has cared for wounded warriors from Viet Nam and Desert Storm. Having dedicated over 40 years of service to the military, Captain Majors still serves in the Naval Reserve and mentors many young men and women considering the military as a career. "I never thought I would be nominated. The award, to me, was to help bring women veterans to the forefront," shared Majors. "Being in the Navy I have felt like I was a part of one of the biggest and best organizations in the world. We're all joined by the fact that we have raised our hands to the oath. If I see that uniform or I know they are a veteran we immediately have a bond – a bond that says: 'We take care of each other.' "

The all women Honor Guard from the United States Naval Support Operations Center, based in Quincy, posted the colors. Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Sandra Whitley, Air Force veteran, led the invocation. Among the speakers were United States Senator Scott Brown; State Senator Kenneth Donnelly, Co-chair of the Joint Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs; Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Judy Ann Bigby; then-Secretary of Veterans' Services Tom Kelley, and Mayor David Maher of Cambridge. Liz Thompson, a USMC Veteran, also shared her story of service and transitioning from wartime service to civilian life and the practices and relationships that have helped her along the way. "With women being a minority in the Armed Forces, it is important to have a way to connect with other women veterans," said Sergeant Thompson. "Through the Massachusetts Women Veterans Network and other advocacy organizations, women veterans are able to connect, and the contributions that women have made in the military can be recognized."

It was a wonderful day celebrating women Veterans and their service to the Nation and Commonwealth. If you know an outstanding woman Veteran and believe others should know about her extraordinary military and community service, please nominate her to be the 2011 Outstanding Woman Veteran. **For an official nomination form, please email dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us or call 617-210-5958. Deadline for nominations is October 14th, 2011.**

Department of Veterans' Services
Attn: Women Veterans' Network
600 Washington Street, Suite 1100
Boston, MA 02111

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON MA
PERMIT NO. 56299

If you don't wish to be on our mailing list or if your address is incorrect, please send your request for removal or address change in writing to the address in the upper-left corner of this page. The newsletter is also available via e-mail, by contacting dvswomen@vet.state.ma.us.

NEW WVN COORDINATOR *(Cont. from Pg. 1)*

and first steps, among others. Her marriage was also approaching an end, and she felt she couldn't show any form of emotion within her unit, which was made up of mostly men. She felt alone, even though she wore the same uniform and performed the same duties as her fellow infantry soldiers and marines. As we ended our conversation, she felt relieved to have shared that with a fellow woman veteran, and I, in turn, had found a teacher and a friend. One would think that, as a woman veteran myself, I would have an instant understanding of what all women experience in the military, but everyone is different. And we all have different situations, both in war and at home. Here is where I will now introduce myself, my name is Viviana Cordoba and I am a woman veteran. After serving 8 years in the Army Reserves and a 13 month tour in Iraq I am honored to be able to work for all women veterans in the Commonwealth. My hope is that I have the pleasure of meeting you and learning from your experience in order to help this network flourish and educate everyone about women veterans and your contributions to our nation. Thank you for your service. Sincerely and Respectfully, Viviana Cordoba Massachusetts Women Veterans' Network. ♥

WELCOME NEW SECRETARY *(Cont. from Pg. 1)*

to meet the needs of this growing segment of the Veteran population; and working to provide all homeless persons who have served their country with an opportunity for permanent shelter and services that will support them in becoming self-sufficient and healthy.

"I am committed to expanding the services and programs offered to Massachusetts Veterans and their families. Women are playing an increasing role in the armed forces, and our Women Veterans' Network will continue to expand and adapt in accordance with the needs of this growing population. For every man and woman who has served our country, we will work to address the issue of homelessness among Veterans, providing them with an opportunity for permanent shelter and services that will support them in becoming self-sufficient and healthy. As men and women continue to return from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, we must recognize their unique needs as well as adapt our outreach efforts to this new population of Veterans," said Secretary Nee.

Secretary Nee says that working together will help us accomplish a great deal on behalf of those that have served this Nation in uniform and their families. ♥

Department of Veterans' Services
Attn: Women Veterans' Network
600 Washington Street, Suite 1100
Boston, Massachusetts 02111

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

vcordoba@massmail.state.ma.us
www.mass.gov/womenveterans

Women Veterans' Network
of Massachusetts

Spring 2011

DVS welcomes its new Secretary of Veterans' Services for the Commonwealth, Coleman Nee.

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE...

DVS Welcomes Coleman Nee ..... pg. 1
Making Connections ..... pg. 1
New WVN Coordinator ..... pg. 1
Women Vets Ski Day ..... pg. 2
Vets Upward Bound News ..... pg. 2
Military Mom ..... pg. 3
Women are Vets Too Event ..... pg. 5
Women's History Month ..... pg. 5

On January 31, 2011, Coleman Nee was sworn in as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Services. Massachusetts remains a national leader in Veterans' Services, and Secretary Nee has expressed a deep commitment in continuing this proud tradition. "Our legacy in this area is a direct result of the hard work of many thousands of individuals in the Veterans' Service profession," said Secretary Nee. "I look forward to working with all of our partners at the federal, state, local, and private levels in order to improve service delivery to Veterans and their families."

"Women are playing an increasing role in the armed forces... we must recognize their unique needs"

Coleman Nee is a Veteran of the United States Marine Corps and Operation Desert Storm and worked as Undersecretary of Veterans' Services from 2008 until his appointment as Secretary. During that time, the Department created a number of new initiatives to increase access to services available for veterans, including the over 30,000 returning Massachusetts veterans from the Global War on Terror. Additionally, Nee oversaw the creation of the Statewide Advocacy for Veterans' Empowerment (SAVE) program, a first-in-the-nation initiative to support Veterans and their families coping with the stresses of returning from war and assist them in obtaining veterans benefits and services. As Secretary, Nee leads a Department focused on strengthening operations and service delivery to Veterans and their families; working with federal, state and municipal partners, Veteran Service Officers and organizations to increase the effective and efficiency of providing benefits to Veterans and families; expanding the Massachusetts Women's Veterans' Network

continued on page 6

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), Office on Women's Health sponsored a one-day conference in Boston on November 17, 2010 for Massachusetts women who have served in the military. In addition to keynote speakers and panels, representatives from federal, state, and local agencies and service organizations provided information and assistance to attendees. The conference was a great opportunity to connect women veterans to a wide variety of supportive services. Information was available on transitioning from military service to civilian life, addressing homelessness,PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), women's health, family issues, and more.

The conference began with the Presentations of the Colors and the Pledge of Allegiance led by Cheryl Lussier Poppe, Deputy Secretary, Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services. Captain Marian Mehegan of the USDHHS Office on Women's Health welcomed over 130

continued on page 2

WELCOME NEW WVN COORDINATOR

Viviana Cordoba

It was approximately 9 months into my deployment in Iraq when I realized what it truly meant to be a woman Veteran. Being deployed with a Combat Stress Control unit was a fulfilling experience that I will never forget. Our mental health clinic saw thousands of service men and woman with a variety of issues.

It was a hot (understatement) July morning in Iraq when the clinic's double doors burst opened. A young female soldier ran inside with tears running down her face looking to speak with anyone who would listen. As we sat down, I noticed her weapon was a bit more "advanced" – to say the least – for a soldier to be carrying around the base, much less for a female. She noticed my curiosity and explained that she was attached to an infantry unit. "The thing is so heavy and annoying to carry…but it's necessary…like an accessory," she joked. She proceeded to share how devastated she felt missing her son's 2nd birthday, Christmas,

I am honored to be able to work for all women veterans in the Commonwealth.

continued on page 6

MAKING CONNECTIONS

continued from page 1

men and women to the conference. She introduced the conference by discussing the current issues confronting women veterans in New England. Jacqueline Cooke from the US Department of Labor Women's Bureau provided opening remarks, sharing that her agency is the only one within federal government that is devoted to promoting women in the workforce. The USDOL Women's Bureau is committed to promoting awareness for women veterans in the Commonwealth.

The keynote speaker was Wilma L. Vaught, Brigadier General, USAF (Ret.) and President of the Board of Directors of the Women in the Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc. General Vaught shared the history of American women in the military, from the American Revolution to the Civil War to present day. She shared her personal story of first joining the Air Force and the obstacles she faced as a woman in the military and how she overcame them. "Women do the jobs they are called upon to do but are confronted with many issues upon their return to civilian life, including brain injury, PTSD, and adjusting back into their families and community." General Vaught encouraged all women veterans to register and be part of the Women in the Military Service Memorial, located in the Arlington Cemetery. "It's a living memorial devoted to women Veterans."

The panels consisted of presenters on Medical and Mental Health, Family & Child Care, Job & Workforce Training, and a Compensation & Housing Panel. Questions from the audience created a great discussion for all of the panels. It was encouraging to see all of these organizations working together to inform veterans of the vast resources and benefits available.

WOMEN VETERANS SKI DAY

More than 24 women Veterans and 72 volunteers came out for the 2nd Annual Women Veterans Ski Appreciation Day at Mount Sunapee, NH on March 8, 2011. The event honored women veterans with a day of sisterhood, skiing, and fun. All Veterans received a complimentary lift ticket, use of equipment, lessons from certified instructors (all of whom volunteered their own time), lunch, goodie bags, and home baked goods.

Six of the Veterans in attendance had never skied before, and by the afternoon they were

off the beginner slopes taking the ski lift up the mountain. One family, three generations of women, skied together (Colleen, Heidi and Natasha). While Heidi was serving in Iraq, her mother, Colleen, purchased lessons for her granddaughter Natasha, 9 years old, so that they could ski together when Heidi returned from her deployment. On March 8th, Heidi and her daughter Natasha skied together for the first time. It was an extraordinary moment the Veterans and volunteers will never forget. Colleen told us, with tears of joy, "You have no idea how therapeutic and wonderful this day has been for us. I can't thank you enough!" Expressions of gratitude and beaming smiles from Veterans and volunteers made for a great day.

Many thanks to VA Boston Healthcare System, New England Handicapped Sports Association, Mount Sunapee Resort, Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare, Lindt Chocolate, and all the amazing volunteers for making this event possible. This experience will always be dear to our women Veterans' hearts. ♥

VETERANS UPWARD BOUND NEWS!

The Veterans Upward Bound Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston has been busy providing veterans with an opportunity to gain access to information about college and career awareness, acquire the academic skills required for entry into higher education and/or to acquire the equivalent of a high school diploma. Four satellites have been established at Chelsea Soldiers Home, Brockton VA, and the Causeway Street VA.

VUB along with the Boston VA hosted the New Year New You event on January 20th, 2011. This was a great opportunity for veterans to have their questions answered by staff members, speak with other women veterans who are also pursuing their education, and meet the instructors.

The program is also working on establishing satellites for those veterans who live in the western part of the state. **For more info on the Veterans Upward Bound program visit, www.veterans-ub.umb.edu or call 617-287-5870.** ♥

WHATS NEW AT THE VA?

The VA Boston Healthcare System has been working diligently to provide women veterans with outstanding care within the Women Health Clinics. "We at VA Boston Healthcare System are delighted to be able to serve women veterans. We offer a number of programs to meet the unique needs of female veterans of all ages," said Carolyn Mason Wholley, LICSW and Women Veterans' Program Manager. Carolyn also serves as an advocate for women veterans and works to improve the delivery of health care.

The Women's Health Clinics offer women Veterans comprehensive primary care, gynecology, mental health support and substance abuse services. The clinics also have a homelessness program for women veterans.

The Women's Health Clinic at the Jamaica Plain campus has increased its privacy for Veterans. A separate waiting room with a calling system for the women's clinic has now been constructed in order to give veterans privacy when discussing upcoming appointments and other information with reception and medical professionals.

Contact Carolyn at 857.364.5994 or email her at Carolyn.MasonWholley@va.gov. ♥

MILITARY MOM ..... *Carla's story*

Being a parent in the military is arguably one of the most difficult aspects of being in the service. For Carla Fernandez and her daughter, the separation of a deployment is a harsh reality that they already experienced once in 2005 and are preparing to endure once again.

"We respect each other and we watch out for each other, gender no longer matters"

Fernandez joined the Army Reserves in 2002 at the age of 19. "I wanted to travel and see the world. I wanted something different out of life," she says. A few years later, the birth of her first child brought concerns along with joy. "Being a military mother brings more worries than the average mom. The possibility of a deployment and thinking about who was going to watch my precious cargo while I am away is a constant worry." Her daughter, Alyssa, was only 1-year old when Fernandez deployed for the first time. Her only relief came from knowing that her daughter was safe with her family. "The military and its deployments have positive and negative aspects, just like any job in the civilian world. However it's definitely an experience in my life that I wouldn't change for the world."

Fernandez is due to report for duty to Kuwait in the near future and knows she will be one of the few females in her unit. "Yes, I am going to be one of few females on this deployment, and I am okay with that. I don't really focus on the difference between the male soldiers and myself. We respect each other and we watch out for each other. Gender no longer matters."

Fernandez shared her advice for other mothers in the service preparing to deploy, "My advice is to take as many pictures as you can with your child. Make sure you are leaving your child with people you trust. Have a strong support team back home and also on the front lines with you during your deployment." Her daughter Alyssa is seven now and will have to face another deployment. Fernandez doesn't know how her daughter will cope with this deployment at an older age. All she can do is reassure her that mommy will be home soon and remind her that, until she comes home, her family will be there with her. ♥

KATELYN ..... *USAF Veteran Profile*

From 2006 until 2010, Katelyn served in the Air Force as an F-15 Aircraft Mechanic. After being in the military for four years, she chose not to reenlist and instead focus on family and prepare for the birth of her son.

On August 31, 2010, Katelyn gave birth to a baby boy named Landon. Soon after Landon was born, Katelyn had to make a hard decision and move in with her parents. Her husband had become abusive and, with a newborn baby, she could no longer live at home.

Katelyn immediately went back to work with plans of saving enough money to eventually move out on her own. Unfortunately, her plans had to change when her father lost his job and she had to take care of her parents including her mother who is disabled.It wasn't soon after, that her entire family became homeless.

Katelyn and her 5 month old son Landon are currently the newest residents at the Veterans Inc. Women and Children's Housing program in Worcester, MA. "The transition to Veterans Inc. has been a lot easier than I initially anticipated, the staff and residents have been very helpful and supportive," Katelyn said.

Although she worries about her family, they have received emergency housing, and most recently, her sister has received Training & Employment services through Veterans Inc., which helps the Veteran and their families.

Veterans Inc. is currently in the process of obtaining an infant license for their Little Patriots Early Learning Center, which they opened in partnership with an established licensed childcare provider. The center provides parenting support and child care for ages 16 months to seven years. The provision of childcare for Landon will allow Katelyn to move forward with her Training and Employment goals. Katelyn has also received assistance from Veterans Inc. to access support services to include chapter 115 benefits, food stamps and counseling for post traumatic stress disorder.

Katelyn's plans are to take a Law Enforcement class at Quinsigamond Community College, join the National Guard, and work for the TSA. Katelyn is feeling very optimistic about her future and is very grateful for the support and assistance provided by Veterans Inc. staff.

For more info on Veterans Inc. and their programs to help Female Veterans and their families visit www.veteransinc.org ♥

Women Veterans' Network is going green!

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, Suite 1100
Boston, MA 02111

There & Back Again

navigating life after war

There & Back Again (TABA) is a non-profit reintegration program offering free services to Veterans of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. TABA offers a structured program of yoga, meditation, and alternative approaches to healing the whole body to assist veterans transitioning from service back to their lives stateside.

Combat service can lead to many emotional issues upon returning home. TABA strives to teach veterans how to use breath awareness, meditation and yoga to manage symptoms of PTSD, improve relationships with loved ones, begin fully participating in their lives, and to give back to fellow veterans through TABA's Train the Trainer program. The training program provides the opportunity to become a certified yoga instructor.

It is truly amazing what this program has accomplished with men and women veterans of all ages. TABA's outreach efforts continue to expand, including collaborations with the VA hospitals and the Reserve/National Guard Yellow Ribbon Program. A new Veteran yoga group has been started at Bunker Hill Community College, and a yoga study will also be conducted by the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

There & Back Again Hosts its FREE monthly acupuncture clinic for Veterans & families every third Saturday of each month from 2:30-4:30pm!

Located at the Charlestown Yoga, 191 Main St, Charlestown MA

Do you experience?

- **Pain and stress can diminish our enjoyment of life.**
- **Do you frequently experience joint and muscle pain?**
- **Are you having trouble sleeping?**
- **Do you have headaches?**
- **Are you talking less and feeling alone or disconnected?**
- **Do you feel irritable or anxious?**

HOW ACUPUNCTURE WILL HELP:

A simple 5 point ear acupuncture treatment is effective in decreasing pain, soothing the nervous system, helping people sleep easier and feel calmer. Experience relief at this FREE community-style acupuncture clinic for Veterans.

The second annual Wellness Conference is scheduled for November 19th to the 21st, 2011 at the Boston Hilton. All veterans are encouraged to attend. **For more information on TABA events or the Train the Trainer program, go to: www.thereandback-again.org or call 800-311-0187.**

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

Stephanie Landry
290 Newport Road
Hull, MA 02045
Stephanie.landry@hou.state.ma.us

– OR –

Regina B. Jackson,
Veterans Agent, Town Offices
50 Billerica Road
Chelmsford, MA 01824
rjackson@townofchelmsford.us

THE MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN VETERANS INVITES YOU TO:

JOIN US THIS YEAR FOR THE 24TH ANNUAL LUNCHEON!

Saturday, October 15th, 2011 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 Raffle

Last year our 23rd annual luncheon was held on October 16th, 2010. Former Governor Michael Dukakis joined the committee and women veterans throughout the state for this special event as the guest of honor. The Advisory Committee on Women Veterans was established and appointed by Governor Michael S. Dukakis in 1984, under the direction of the Commissioner of Veterans' Services. The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to foster and promote the interests of women veterans in Massachusetts. The luncheon is held every fall to recognize women veterans.

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 10 ***