

VA LAUNCHES BLOG

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is launching its first official blog, opening a new line of communication between the department and its stakeholders. The debut marks VA's latest outreach effort aimed at improving the way VA and its clients engage online.

The blog, called *VAntage Point*, will be edited by VA's Director of New Media Brandon Friedman. The blog will launch with two primary features: a main column of articles written each day by VA staff and a section comprised of guest pieces submitted by other stakeholders including employees and the public. Readers will be able to comment and participate on all articles.

VAntage Point is just the latest expansion of the department's outreach efforts to increase transparency, participation, and collaboration via social media. Since creating an Office of New Media in late 2009, VA has launched a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube.

To view the blog, please visit <http://www.blogs.va.gov>. For more information, visit <http://www.va.gov>.

VETERANS WATCH

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A Newsletter Written FOR Veterans BY Veterans

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

By Rick Braley

Morrill Worcester of Worcester Wreaths started The Arlington Wreath Project in 1992 with the laying of 5,000 Christmas wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery for fallen soldiers. His efforts garnered national attention and soon requests for wreaths to be placed on Veteran gravesites around the country poured in. In 2005, a photograph of the wreaths on the stones covered with snow began circulating on the internet, and the demand for the wreaths grew a thousand fold. With many civic organizations wishing to do the same for their fallen heroes,

Wreaths Across America (WAA) was formed in 2007 as a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization as an extension of the Arlington Project. Additionally, Worcester

of wreaths to every state and not wanting to disappoint anyone, Worcester developed the idea of sending seven wreaths for each request. These seven wreaths represented the branches of the military and POW/MIA. In 2008, over 300 locations held wreath laying ceremonies in every state, Puerto Rico and 24 overseas cemeteries. To date, over 100,000 wreaths have been placed on Veterans graves by over 60,000 volunteers.

The second Saturday of December is known as "Wreaths Across America Day". Visit www.wreathscrossamerica.org for more information about WAA.

Mike Calenda, a social studies teacher at the Ponaganset Middle School in Foster, RI and



Wreaths Across America in Battery Park, NJ

Photo taken by Frank Zanfardino

Unable to donate thousands

wanted to ensure his mission statement to "Remember, Honor and Teach" would continue.

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VET METEOROLOGIST PREDICTS SNOW

By Natalie Burrows

The Veterans Transitional Support Program (VTSP) is a VA residential program at the Rhode Island Veterans Home in Bristol. The program provides stable and sober housing to homeless Veterans while they receive help returning to community living.

VTSP is fortunate to have many talented Veterans, one of whom is Mike Boucher. Mike is a Navy Veteran. He attended weather school at Chanute AFB, and served as a meteorologist,

PO2 aerographer's mate. While stationed at the Virginia Beach Jet Base, he prepared forecast briefings for F-14 and F-18 pilots. His hardest duty station was aboard the USS Eisenhower in the Mediterranean Sea. He says forecasting weather at sea is different and harder.

Since childhood, Boucher knew he wanted to be a weatherman. At seven years old, he would watch the local news and draw weather maps. He is currently



Veteran Mike Boucher

attending CCRI and wants to work with children and teach weather courses someday.

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WREATHS

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his 6th, 7th and 8th grade students from the Foster-Gloucester area have a vested interest in WAA as they have been involved for over four years. Calenda has been teaching his students about Veterans and what they mean to America. He has incorporated the WAA values into his class curriculum, reminding students to; "Remember, Honor, and Teach." Calenda's class is also involved in the laying of the wreaths for their communities. Each year, the class welcomes the convoy of trailer trucks and Patriot Guard Rider motorcyclists as they arrive for the annual Veterans Honor Parade in December. The 8th graders then place the wreaths on the graves of Veterans in the Foster-Gloucester area.

SNOW

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At VTSP, Boucher is known as "Meteorologist Mike." Before the recent snowstorm, he provided the forecast for everyone at the VTSP. He opened his laptop to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) website to explain the various forecasting models. He taught a lesson on the "Fluff Factor" (i.e. colder temperatures equal a higher snow ratio). He primarily watches NOAA for computer models but also checks websites for European and Canadian weather models. Boucher has even forecasted the weather for staff traveling to London and Florida, and his forecast is always correct!

Boucher is a great example of the quality of Veterans in VTSP.

SCIROCCO NEW VFW COMMANDER

By Martin Cappelli

Vincent A. Scirocco Jr. was sworn in at the Department of Rhode Island's 91st Veterans of Foreign Wars State Convention on June 6, 2010. A life member of the VFW, Vincent has held many positions both at the Post, district, and department levels. Comrade Scirocco holds an Associate's in Electrical Engineering from New England Institute of Technology and is currently attending Northeastern University to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Engineering.

During his term of office, he hopes to educate the newer Veterans of what the organization is all about and encourage the older Veterans to hang in there. As do many, Scirocco believes that the problems of decreasing membership and post participation is the result of decades of misinterpretations and false beliefs such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars is a retirement

club for retired military.

The benefits the newer Veterans enjoy today are the result of the efforts put forth by the Veterans of yesterday. It is the VFW's mission to: "Honor the dead by helping the living." It is accomplished



Vincent Scirocco, Commander of VFW, RI Chapter

by local VFW Posts utilizing several programs to support The VFW National Home, VA Hospitals, Transitional Veteran Shelters, etc. The VFW pro-

grams also include Citizen Education, Patriot's Pen, and Voice of Democracy that all are focused to promote patriotism amongst our countries youth.

The VFW has led the way in Washington ensuring all of our Veterans receive the best benefits and care possible. Unfortunately, too few newer Veterans are taking the time to participate in their local VFW Post. It has been estimated that allowing this trend to continue will result in the disbanding of the organization. Here in Rhode Island we have consolidated from five districts, down to three and great Posts such as VFW Post 122 in Warren are no longer meeting due to lack of participation.

Commander Scirocco believes that if the newer Veterans do not accept ownership of this organization, it will quickly cease to exist. The real tragedy is that without

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DID YOU KNOW?

By Ron Whitcomb

- Martha Raye, or Colonel Maggie as she was called, was given an honorary commission by President Johnson for her work at USO shows during WW2, Korea, and Vietnam. A special consideration was made for her upon her death so that she could be buried in the Special Forces Cemetery at Ft Bragg, NC. She is the only woman in the cemetery.
- Jimmy Stewart made the rank of Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserves

after leaving active duty in the Army Air Force.

- Ted Williams completed 39 missions as a pilot in Korea and also served in WW2.
- Nancy Kulp was a WAVE LT in electronics during WW2.
- Oliver Stone, movie director, joined the Army in 1967 and served in Vietnam. He earned a Purple Heart and Bronze Star.
- Ed McMahon, sidekick to Johnny Carson, was a Marine Fighter Pilot in WW2 and was called back to

duty during the Korean War where he flew 85 combat missions.

- Gene Autry, the "singing cowboy," was a Flight Officer from 1943 to 1945 and flew C-47 cargo planes in the China-Burma-India theater.
- James Arness, actor of "Gunsmoke" fame, was in the US Army and was wounded at Anzio.
- Retraction from Vol 1 Issue 3: Mr. Rogers did not serve in the Navy Seals or any military branch.

MEET THE STAFF!

Veterans Helping Veterans

Spotlight on:
CONNIE LUKE

By Bob Goudreau

Connie Luke is the Assistant Director's Representative for Patient Affairs. She started her employment with the Providence VA Medical Center in September 2006. Luke works systematically to ensure Veteran's health care issues are handled in a compassionate and timely manner.

Luke decided to follow in her father's footsteps and joined the US Navy in 1988. She completed Basic Training at the Naval Education and Training Center in Orlando, FL and Advanced Training in Yeoman's School in Meridian, MS to qualify as an Administrative Assistant. Luke's first duty station took her to Subic Bay, Philippines, where she was Secretary to both Admirals Chesbrough and Tobin. During her tour in the Philippines, Luke's unit played a

crucial communications role in support of "Operation Desert Storm." Upon her return to the US, she was stationed in



Connie Luke

Seattle, WA where she was, again, Assistant to the Admiral who commanded the Personnel Support Detachment. Finishing out her enlistment, Luke was assigned to the Naval War College in Newport, RI. After her enlistment was up, Luke decided to re-enter civilian life but before long a

call from the Navy beckoned her to reenlist for another four years.

In what she calls a "lucky break," Luke was reassigned to the Naval War College in Newport. Her job as an administrative assistant provided her with ample time to volunteer for special details. She trained with the Auxiliary Security Force (ASF), which could be called on to augment the Security Department during contingencies that required heightened levels of security on base. She performed funeral detail and marched in parades for local celebrations.

Luke was awarded a Volunteer Service Medal for contributing over 3,000 hours in volunteer service to the Special Olympics and other civic organizations.

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VETERANS WATCH IS ONLINE!

By Ron Whitcomb

The Veterans Watch is now available on-line. Find the latest editions at www.providence.va.gov/Newsletters.asp.

Issues come out quarterly in January, April, July, and October. Watch for our next issue due out the middle of April 2011. Thanks to all our readers and the positive response you have shown to the *Veterans Watch*.

WHAT IS VFAB?

By Ron Whitcomb

The Veterans Family Advisory Board (VFAB) is a mental health consumer council made up of Veterans, family members, and staff members. The mission of VFAB is to lead in building a working alliance between Veterans and VA leadership to ensure the highest quality of service and care to the Veterans. VFAB also serves to allow Veterans' voices to be heard by VA leadership.

Veteran's Watch is a quarterly publication written BY Veterans FOR Veterans. If you have suggestions for future articles or would like to join VFAB, please contact Jessica Zuehlke, Psy.D., at 401-273-7100, ext. 2629.

RI COMBAT VETS MOTO ASSO.

By Felix Gesualdo Jr.

The RI Chapter of the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (RI CVMA) formed in February 2006. While serving overseas, a group of soldiers, who were also motorcycle enthusiasts, decided to open a chapter of the CVMA in RI. Mike Dalmazzi, Andy Martel, and 13 other members got the chapter up and running. Dalmazzi became the chapter state representative that reports to National CVMA.

The goal of the RI CVMA is to help local Veterans and Veteran organizations in the



area with donations. They support the RI Veterans Home in Bristol, RI, with gifts every December. Last year, they donated a flat screen TV and other gifts. This year the home is asking for some gliding chairs for the resident Veterans, which will be donated. Some of the other donations go to NEADS, which trains service dogs for disabled Veterans and civilians.

The organization also started donating to Friends of Ward 8 at the Northampton VA Center, which has a won-

derful program for Veterans with PTSD as well as the Scholarship rides for PS3 Ron Gill Jr, and LCpl Holly Charette. The organization sends packages to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan twice a year. Other charities supported are Hasbro Children's Hospital, Children with Cancer, Juvenile Diabetes, and Autism. Finally, they are working on a project to build a Veterans Memorial in Middletown, RI.

RI CVMA has members who have served in all wars since WWII. The youngest members are 20 years old, and "The Old One," Frank Pine, is 96 years old.

SCIROCCO

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the VFW, the benefits that Veterans rely on so heavily on will not endure, and the hard work of all the men and women who have fought so hard to obtain them will be lost.

Your Posts are closing now, your older Veteran's are passing now, and they take with them the knowledge and skills that provide all Veterans the support and benefits they have come to expect. The newer Veterans need to understand that the VFW is their organization. They need to realize if they don't act now, it may not exist when they retire. They need to contact a Post and learn how they can help before it is too late.

CONNIE

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In an ever increasing drive to improve personally, Luke continued her education at Roger Williams University majoring in Criminal Justice with a minor in Sociology. She graduated with a Bachelor's Degree. Luke's ideals on volunteering didn't cease when she left the Navy. She is enrolled in the VA's Mentoring Program which assists VA employees reach their desired employment goals and is very active on issues relating to female Veterans.

If you have a problem regarding health care issues, stop in and discuss them with Luke. Her office is located across the hall from the Emergency Department, and she can be reached by telephone at (401) 457-3093 during normal business hours.

JOE SOX SOCKS IT TO VETS

By Bob Goudreau

In 1989, Joe Harris, a Vietnam Veteran, was working as a clerk in a Boston law office. One of the lawyers with whom he worked was asked to do some pro bono work for a new Veterans Homeless Shelter located a few blocks away. Joe was given the task of typing the legal documents for the newly organized safe haven for homeless Veterans. At the grand opening of the shelter, Joe asked the shelter director what the Veterans needed most. The reply was, "Socks!"

When Joe returned to the office, he was discussing the matter with his co-workers when someone handed him a ten dollar bill and said, "Get those Vets some socks."

Thus began Joe's efforts to provide socks to homeless Veterans.

Early on, Joe would ask his fellow passengers on a Boston

commuter train if they would contribute a few dollars to help buy new clean socks for homeless Veterans. His first year in operation, "Joe Sox" as he came to be known, was able to supply two pairs of new socks to over 150 homeless Veter-



ans. Over the years, Joe has fine-tuned his efforts by receiving a grant from Wal-Mart, individual donations, and sponsoring an annual dinner dance to raise funds.

This year, with the help of

his wife and three daughters, Joe was able to wrap over 600 packs of new socks. Each package carried a tag stating, "To a Veteran, Merry Christmas! From someone who cares." Joe called all the Veteran Homeless Shelters within driving distance of his home to see how many clients they had on hand. He then personally delivered the required number of Christmas presents to each organization. Joe's motivation is to show these less fortunate Veterans that they are not forgotten by a society that enjoys freedom because of their sacrifices. It may seem like a small gesture by some but for over 600 Veterans, opening a present at Christmas delivered a message of hope.

As Joe moves on to his second decade of providing for his fellow Veterans, he keeps alive the notion that it is better to give than receive.

SHAKE N' BAKES

By Ron Whitcomb

The Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course started in late 1967. These "instant NCO's" where also known as "Shake n' Bakes." This nickname came from the speed in which we made rank. I was in Class 5, beginning just four weeks into this new innovative program at Fort Benning, GA at the Infantry School. The necessity for the program materialized because the Vietnam War was mostly a "junior leaders" war with the brunt of fighting lead by Junior Officers and NCO's. The highly decorated and respected Lt. Col David Hackworth was one of the men responsible for the idea as well

as the planning and implementation of the program.

Once qualified for the schooling by virtue of test scores and leadership ability, we held the rank of Corporal/E4 and were trained by Vietnam Vets between tours, most of whom were special forces. Our average age was 20½ years with one year of college, and most of us were drafted for the training. After graduating as a Sergeant/E5, we qualified for Officer Candidate School, but most opted to get on with our obligation. Some went on to West Point, OCS, and other training and retired as Senior NCO's or Staff Officers. We all received a security clearance of "Confidential."

The training began with practical field training and jungle warfare. After classes, Phase One, which consisted of obtaining our rank of SGT, included a stint with an AIT company as cadre. I spent one year in the states before going to Vietnam, where we were combat squad leaders.

There were a total of 187 classes between 1967 and 1972 with 41 Infantry classes graduating in the first fiscal year. There were a total of 26,078 graduates and 1118 KIA's. Most of the graduates were Infantry (11B40), but in the second year they included Indirect Fire Crewmen (11C) and Infantry Operation and Intelligence (11F).