



**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT
OF
VETERANS' SERVICES**



Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Thomas G. Kelley
Secretary, DVS

The Bay State Patriot

Volume 1
Issue 1
Date: September 2008

SECRETARY'S WELCOME

Hello and welcome to the first edition of the *Bay State Patriot*. Over the past year, DVS has significantly furthered its outreach and advocacy mission. We will continue to strive and share this information with you. This newsletter will be coming out on a quarterly basis, and we appreciate any feedback or information you would like to provide for future editions.

As you know, in the last year and a half we have begun holding VSO Meetings throughout the state. We have found them to be highly successful and look forward to continuing them. These sessions have provided our department an opportunity to meet with the Veterans' Service Officers throughout the Commonwealth and hear thoughts and concerns about our veterans' community.

Massachusetts continues to lead the nation in Veterans' Services due to the great work of so many people. Through the commitment of Governor Deval Patrick, Lt. Governor Timothy Murray, Secretary JudyAnn Bigby, MD, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services, Veterans Service Officers, the Veterans Administration, and all of the numerous other agencies and advocates that will assure our efforts can continue on behalf of Massachusetts' Veterans. So, thank you to all of those who assist in these efforts and to all of the veterans in the Commonwealth.

History of veterans' benefits in Massachusetts

In the 18th century, towns in the Massachusetts Bay Colony provided assistance to their needy veterans of the French and Indian War (1754-1763) fought in North America between France and Great Britain. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts began providing for its veterans immediately following the Revolutionary War. At the start of the Civil War in 1861, the state legislature formalized the assistance provided to veterans by establishing M.G.L. Chapter 115 and the Department of Veterans' Services. In every city and town in the Commonwealth, the legislature created the offices of Director of Veterans' Services, Burial Agent, and Graves Officer—in recognition of the military services and associated sacrifices by its citizens who protected and defended the United States in time of war.

It was the desire of the state and local government leaders to recognize this service in our armed forces by providing certain essential benefits to men and women (both living and deceased) who had borne the burden of military duty—and to their families—to do them honor for their services and to avoid the stigma of having to seek public assistance through welfare. Chapter 115 enables every eligible Massachusetts veteran to receive certain financial, medical, educational, employment, and other benefits. Veterans, their dependents, and surviving spouses have been singled out to receive counsel and assistance dispensed through the 351 municipal veterans' services offices.

Today, M.G.L. Chapter 115 requires every city and town to maintain a Department of

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Today, M.G.L. Chapter 115 requires every city and town to maintain a Department of Veterans' Services through which the municipality makes available to its residents the part-time or full-time services of either an exclusive or district Veteran Services Officer (VSO). It is the job of that VSO to provide the veterans and their dependents (living and deceased) access to every federal, state, and local benefit and services to which they are entitled—including assisting in their funerals and honoring them on Memorial and Veterans' Day.

Chapter 115 benefits are provided to any veteran or eligible dependent if their income is below two times the current Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Currently, a single person can make up to \$1,733 with assets less than \$3,200 and a married veteran can make up to \$2,333 with assets less than \$7,000 and be eligible for C. 115 benefits. These financial numbers are for reference only. The best way to determine if a person is eligible for C. 115 benefits is to make an appointment with their VSO in their city or town for an interview.

By Operations, Department of Veterans' Services

DIRECTORS COLUMN



(left to right) James Crosby, Joe Bykowski, Kevin Lambert, Cayenne Isaksen, Samuel Hamm, Daniel Brennan

On February 11th of this year the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services officially launched the SAVE program. SAVE, or Statewide Advocacy for Veterans' Empowerment, is tasked with the primary mission of suicide prevention. The SAVE Team consists of five Outreach Coordinators who are determined individuals, tasked with finding veterans and veterans families who may be in crisis situations. Through active outreach and extensive knowledge of various veterans' benefits, ranging from state, federal, local, non-profit, private, or any combination of these services, these mission driven individuals find a way to get services quickly to veterans and families in need. The success of the SAVE team is a result of extensive networking done by all members of the team, both here at DVS and throughout the Commonwealth.

Since the launch of the program, SAVE has outreached to over 800 veterans within Massachusetts, over 300 have required immediate services requiring members of the team to respond to calls out in the field in multiple cities and towns.

The creation of the SAVE program would not have been possible without the support of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH). DPH is leads the nation in funding specifically designated for suicide prevention. Recognizing that a disproportionate number of this population are veterans, they reached out to DVS in an effort to collaborate on behalf of Massachusetts veterans.

If you are a veteran in need of services, or know someone who is, please contact a member of the SAVE team at 1 (888)-844-2838. Additionally, if you are holding an event and you would like members of the team to attend, please do not hesitate to contact us at 617-210-5480 or via email save@massmail.state.ma.us

By James Crosby, Director of Outreach

Our Most Recent Addition — Col. Cheryl Poppe, MAARNG (Ret.)



Cheryl Poppe entered military service on 19 July 1978 after graduation from the University of Rhode Island Reserve Officers Training Corps with a Bachelor of Arts in Education. Her assignments included Personnel Management, Family Assistance, Company Command, Inspector General, Battalion Command, and Brigade level Executive Officer.

Command, and Brigade level Executive Officer.



Colonel Poppe's most recent assignment was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel. During that assignment, she was nominated as the Massachusetts National Guard Diversity Program's Mentor of the Year for 2007. She oversaw one of the largest deployments of personnel during FY 2007 and was involved with the National Yellow Ribbon Workgroup. Her last assignment was as the Reintegration Director for the Massachusetts Army National Guard.

Cheryl holds a Masters in Business Administration from Salem State College. She completed Command and General Staff College and the Reserve Component National Security Course. Her awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, and the Army Achievement Medal.

She retired from the MAARNG in July of 2008, after 30 years of service, and has taken a position as Director of Programs and Services with the Department of Veterans' Services, pursuing her love of the military and her desire to continue working on behalf of the veterans of the Commonwealth.

Cheryl resides in the birthplace of the National Guard, Salem Massachusetts near her three adult children.

LEGAL SERVICES FOR VETERANS

Legal issues often underpin various problems faced by veterans. DVS and others have long sought to improve access to legal services for our veterans' community. A partnership between the Massachusetts Bar Association (MBA) and the Department of Veterans' Services, funded by a grant from US Trust, is helping meet this goal.

Last fall, approximately fifty attorneys were trained to represent veterans in VA appeals. This training period was followed by the first Dial-a-Lawyer program which put telephoning veterans in touch with attorneys, who offer free advice on how to proceed with their issues. A second Dial-a-Lawyer night last spring helped 150 veterans access help with legal issues. Additionally, students from Suffolk University Law School will volunteer their time to answer questions from veterans about VA appeals.

The MBA announced that it has secured a grant from the Massachusetts Bar Foundation to continue the Dial-a-Lawyer program beginning in October 2008. In addition, DVS will continue to work with the MBA to make attorneys available for pro bono services to veterans at the local level. Watch for future announcements about this and other program developments.

By Lawrence Feeney, General Counsel

Nominate and Celebrate Outstanding Women Veterans



(left-right) Mary L. Anderson, Heidi Kruckenberg, Sara Payne Hayden.

Do you know an outstanding woman veteran? If you think others should know about her extraordinary military and community service, please nominate her to be this year's Outstanding Woman Veteran. The Women Veterans' Network will be celebrating the service of all Massachusetts women veterans at the State House in Boston on Friday, November 7th at 10:30 a.m. Come to Nurse's Hall to hear presentations by women veterans and their supporters, as well as special recognition of an Outstanding Woman Veteran.

Outstanding Woman Veteran Award nominees must currently or previously have served active duty in the

(left right) Mary E. Anderson, Heidi Kruckenberg,
Sara Payne Hayden.

currently or previously have served active duty in the

regular military, National Guard, or Reserve. Nominations must include: an overview of military service and awards; a summary of contributions to the military; and any personal sacrifices or hardships the woman endured in order to serve in the military. For an official nomination form, please visit www.mass.gov/veterans or call 617-210-5781.

Nominations are due no later than Wednesday, October 8, 2008, and should be mailed to the Women Veterans' Network, 600 Washington St., Suite 1100, Boston, MA 02111, or faxed to 617-210-5755, or e-mailed to DVSWomen@vet.state.ma.us

by Heidi Kruckenberg, Coordinator of the Women Veterans' Network

Marine Corp Vet Starts Chelsea School of Nursing Program

Starting in September, Marine Corps veteran Joe Foley begins LPN training at the Chelsea Soldiers' Home School of Practical Nursing. While in the Marines, Mr. Foley worked in electronic communications. As a civilian, he followed several career paths. His most-recent employment was as a supervisor at an aluminum foundry. At his One-Stop Career Center, he learned from his Veterans' Representative Paul Zauner in Norwood about the opportunity to apply for the LPN program.

This spring, the Chelsea Soldiers' Home School of Practical Nursing announced that two seats were available in the Fall 2008 program for eligible veterans. Mr. Foley submitted enrollment information, passed the admissions exam, and was accepted. He also utilized the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program (VWIP) program. VWIP will pay for his school fees, books, and uniforms.

Mr. Foley is pleased that he received the information on this opportunity, the support he has received in applying for and getting started in the program and what this means to his family. We wish them the very best in the upcoming school year and in his new career.

For more information on applying for the 2009 class, visit the School of Practical Nursing website at www.mass.gov/che. Admission priority for next year's class is based on the date of acceptance into the program.

by Charlotte Brindley, Program Coordinator

VETERANS SUPPORTED HOUSING PROGRAM (VASH)

VASH is the VA supported Housing program and is a joint project of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In May 2008, Ten thousand VASH vouchers were released nationally. VASH provides section 8 HUD vouchers to homeless veterans with substance abuse and/or mental health issues. The goal of the program is to transition veterans from homelessness to independent subsidized housing by providing supportive, community-based case management services. Massachusetts received **235** vouchers which are currently being distributed throughout the local housing authorities across the Commonwealth.

To be eligible for referral to the VASH program, the veteran first must be eligible for VA Medical Services and he or she must go through VAMC (Veterans Administration Medical Centers) Homeless Services Programs. Priority for VASH participation will be for veterans who are chronically homeless and have substance abuse or mental illness. The definition of chronic homelessness indicates that the individual has lived continuously without housing for at least one year or has had at least four episodes of lack of housing in the past three years.

The next eligible tier (other veterans at risk of homelessness), will be considered for placement in VASH housing at the discretion of the participating VAMC.

The VASH Voucher provides a rent subsidy that generally covers rental costs in excess of 30% of the

The VASH Voucher provides a rent subsidy that generally covers rental costs in excess of 30% of the veteran's income. The local housing authority will verify the veteran's income, issue the voucher, and meet with the veteran and the VASH case manager to explain how the program works.

Veterans must agree to accept case management services over a period of time determined by their case manager.

For more information please call: *Bedford VAMC*, 781-687-2705;
Boston VAMC, 857-364-4444; *Northampton VAMC*, 413-584-4040 ext. 2135

By Claire O'Conner, Director of Housing and Outreach Services

Did you know?



Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services administers the Massachusetts State Annuity to one hundred percent service-connected disabled Massachusetts veterans, Gold Star Widows of certain deceased veterans and Gold Star Parents who have lost a child to service to the country. First time payments are pro-rated depending on what month the application is approved. Subsequent payments of \$1000.00 are disbursed bi-annually in February and August.

Eligible applicants must supply the following documents to be approved for the twice yearly payments:

Veteran's application: DD214 (Discharge documents) VA rating decision, mandatory W9 form for address verification.

Widow's application: DD214 (Discharge documents), Marriage and death certificates, widow's DIC rating decision and W9 form for address verification.

Parent's application: Both Massachusetts parents are eligible to apply but they must apply separately. Along with the application they must supply a casualty report and a birth certificate of their child, along with the W9 form.

Direct deposit is recommended but is not required.

Applications and direct deposit and W9 forms can be downloaded from our web site at www.mass.gov/veterans. Once on the homepage, click on "Annuities" and "How to apply."

You may also have applications mailed to you by calling our main number at 617-210-5480 and asking to speak to an Annuity associate.

By Jacqueline Rivera, Director of Annuities

Special Extra Earnings for Military Service

From www.socialsecurity.gov

Since 1957, if you had military service earnings for active duty (including active duty for training), you paid Social Security taxes on those earnings. As of 1988, inactive duty service in the Armed Forces reserves (such as weekend drills) has also been covered by Social Security.

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for your military service from 1957 through 2001 can be credited to your record for Social Security purposes. These extra earnings credits may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit.

Special extra earnings credits are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training, although extra earnings credits are not granted for inactive duty training.

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If your active military service occurred:

- ⇒ From 1957 through 1967, Social Security will add the extra credits to your record when you apply for Social Security benefits.
- ⇒ From 1968 through 2001, you do not need to do anything to receive these extra credits. The credits were automatically added to your record.
- ⇒ After 2001, there are no special extra earnings credits for military service.

If you have active duty earnings from 1957 through 2001, here's how the special extra earnings are credited on your record:

Service in 1957 through 1977 - You are credited with \$300 in additional earnings for each calendar quarter in which you received active duty basic pay.

Service in 1978 through 2001 - For every \$300 in active duty basic pay, you are credited with an additional \$100 in earnings up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year. If you enlisted after September 7, 1980, and didn't complete at least 24 months of active duty or your full tour, you may not be able to receive the additional earnings. Check with Social Security for details at <http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm>.

By Hazel Pryce-Bourramane,, Asst. Chief Authorizer

Stay Competitive in Today's Labor Market

July 1st marked the beginning of the third final year of funding for the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program (VWIP), which assists eligible veterans obtain employment and upgrade their work skills. The U.S. Department of Labor/Veterans' Employment and Training Services has awarded MA Department of Workforce Development/Division of Career Services funding for this program, with DVS as a partner.

Veterans who are unemployed or underemployed should contact a Massachusetts One-Stop Career Centers through the link www.mass.gov/dwd or by calling 1-877-US2-JOBS and requesting to speak with a Veterans' Representative at a local One-Stop. The Veterans' Representatives can assist with career assessments, updating or converting a resume into civilian job skills, determining whether a short-term training program may be appropriate, perfecting job search skills, improving job placement, and completing placement follow-ups.

VWIP eligible veterans include: disabled veterans, recently discharged veterans, veterans with barriers to employment, or veterans who served on active duty in the armed forces during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge is authorized.

VWIP is a great opportunity for Massachusetts veterans to upgrade their occupational skills through short-term training at an approved educational or training facility. For eligible veterans some of the training paths have included Commercial Drivers' License training, HazMat training, computer skills, EMT programs, LPN programs, and many others.

The first step to finding a new job or advancing your career path is to speak with a One-Stop Veterans' Representative and ask about VWIP.

By Charlotte Brindley, Program Coordinator

Home for the Brave

Home for the Brave

Mass Housing, recently along with the Governor and the Lt. Governor, announced the Home for the Brave home loan program. This program provides affordable, no-down-payment mortgages for Massachusetts veterans. Home for the Brave offers 100% financing with a discounted interest rate fixed for a minimum of 10 years. Loans can be used to purchase or refinance on an existing mortgage. Loans through Home for the Brave come with MI Plus insurance, which helps pay the mortgage in case of job loss or deployment. To be eligible for the program you must be a veteran as described by Mass. General Laws chapter 4 § 7 clause 43rd. Borrowers may earn up to 135% of the median income of the city or town in which they wish to purchase. In order to borrow, individuals must have good credit. There are approximately 50 Commonwealth banks that are participating in this program. To find out more go to www.masshousing.com/homebuyer or call 888-627-7562

Post 9/11 GI Bill (GI Bill for the 21st Century)

The Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) was signed by President Bush on June 30, 2008. This new GI bill offers increased educational benefits for veterans that served after September 11, 2001. However these benefits do not become effective until August of 2009. **To receive 100% of these benefits you must have served a total of 36 months or have been discharged due to service connected disability.** Otherwise your benefits will be calculated by the number of months in which you served. The tuition portion of this bill will cover 100% of the highest undergraduate tuition at a public institution in the state in which you are enrolled and be paid directly to the school. This new bill offers a housing allowance and a book stipend as well. The cost of licensing or certification test up to \$2000 is also covered. These benefits can now also be transferred to a spouse or dependent. The benefits are available to the veteran for 15 years after their service ends. If you are currently receiving benefits under the Montgomery GI bill but meet the eligibility requirements for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, you have the option to transfer your remaining MGIB benefits to the new program. Please see the website <http://www.gibill.va.gov/> or call 1-888-442-4551 if you have questions.

By Gail Eldridge, paralegal

Veterans High-Tech Job Training Program receives Governor's Citation



(Left to right) Dang Tran (Mrs. Nguyen), Dean Nguyen, Paul Reynolds, Massachusetts One Stop Career Center, Woburn, Secretary JudyAnn Bigby MD, and Secretary Tom Kelley

June traditionally marks a time of graduations and commencement speeches that acknowledge the difficult journey toward achieving one's educational goals.

This was the case for twelve veterans who completed the Integrated Circuit (IC) Layout and Verification Course, led by Dean Nguyen on June 3rd at Shawsheen Valley Technical High School in Billerica. Each veteran guided the attendees through the personal journeys of these experienced by these non-traditional students as well as their instructor.

Mr. Nguyen, an employee of Mentor Graphics, started the IC Layout and Verification class last September, offering free tuition to interested veterans. His enrollees received donated laptops, books and course materials. Mr. Nguyen asked only to be paid back with his students' success.

Mr. Nguyen's story is of expressing gratitude. He is motivated to give back to the U.S. and to veterans for assisting his family. As a child, he arrived in the U.S. in 1981, as a Vietnamese "boat" person. He is appreciative for the help that U.S. extended to his family through public assistance and opportunities. Mr. Nguyen is truly a success story himself and a role model for other Americans.

person. He is appreciative for the help that G.S. extended to his family through public assistance and opportunities. Mr. Nguyen is truly a success story himself and a role model for other Americans.

JudyAnn Bigby MD, Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services presented a Citation to Mr. Nguyen from Governor Deval Patrick for his outstanding efforts.

Department of Veterans' Services
600 Washington St.
Boston, Ma, 02111
Phone # 617-210-5480
Fax # 617-210-5755
Website
www.mass.gov/veterans

The Department of Veterans' Services publication ***Veterans' Laws and Benefits*** is a compilation of resources regarding state benefits in the areas of education, employment, medical assistance, and motor vehicles and property taxes. The booklet is available online and can be accessed at the Secretary of State website at the following link <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cisvet/vetidx.htm>

SAVE
Phone # 888-844-2838
Fax # 617-210-5755
E-Mail
Save@massmail.state.ma.us

To remove your name from our mailing list, or have
Questions or comments?
E-mail us at MDVS@massmail.state.ma.us