

From Patrick Welch, Director



In this month's issue we will begin to highlight those who are participating in our **"Four Pillars of Empowerment"** Program for the Erie County Veterans population. Horizon Health Care was the first agency that joined the **Not for Profit Pillar** of our program and they provide a wide variety of services to our community. This agency has stepped forward to extend their coverage and services to any veteran or veterans' family in need.

We are also starting to feature veteran owned businesses in Erie County. This month we are pleased to introduce you to Mr. Jim Cox. Jim is a U.S. Navy Veteran of World War II, a Vetpreneur and inventor. What makes this story so cool is that he started his latest business, **Emblematic Corp.** at 89 years young!!!! Today at 92, he is still inventing some really innovative products which are Made in the USA and we encourage you to support our veteran owned businesses in this community.

Next month we will feature **Trocaire College** as the first institution to join the **Educational Pillar** of our program.

Please distribute this newsletter to your email distribution list. Anyone who would like to receive this each month can email me at patrick.welch@erie.gov

Judge May Reopen PTSD Case

A federal court judge in San Francisco is considering re-opening a case after demanding that Justice Department attorneys representing the Veterans Administration (VA) explain why an email written by a top VA official who asked staffers to diagnose fewer cases of post traumatic stress disorder was not turned over to defendants who sued the VA over the agency's alleged failure to immediately treat veterans who showed signs of the disease. Two veterans advocacy groups, Veterans for Common Sense and Veterans United for Truth, sued the VA last year for allegedly failing to provide treatment to veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who suffer from PTSD. For more information, visit the [Veterans for Common Sense](http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org) website.

www.military.com
Week of June 16, 2008

Homes for Our Troops

Building or remodeling homes to accommodate the needs of severely wounded warriors returning from Iraq and Afghanistan is the way "Homes for Our Troops" has chosen to thank service members for their sacrifice. The organization caters its services specifically to troops who are double amputees, paraplegic, quadriplegic, have severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or are severely burned. In many cases, the group will build a new home, if necessary, instead of simply remodeling the existing one. **Homes for Our Troops** relies on the assistance of the community where the veteran lives or wants to live to help fund the projects with donated materials and services. For more information, visit the [Homes for Our Troops](http://www.homesforourtroops.org) website.



www.military.com
Week of June 16, 2008

Mission Statement of Erie County Veterans Services

To insure that every veteran in the county is registered in the VA System and is fully aware of all the benefits that they have earned.

To make veterans an economic force in education, employment and business development.

NY Veterans Tuition Awards

The New York State VTA program will grant up to 98 percent of tuition or \$4,287.50 for the 2008-09 academic year.

Veterans Tuition Awards (VTA) are awards for full-time study and part-time study for eligible veterans matriculated at an undergraduate or graduate degree-granting institution or in an approved vocational training program in New York State.

NOTE: Students previously approved for this award must apply for payment each year. Those students attending a vocational school or who are attending an approved undergraduate or graduate program part-time may apply for payment for the current academic year by completing the supplement.

Award Amounts

For **full-time study**, a recipient shall receive an award of up to the full cost of undergraduate tuition for New York state residents at the State University of New York, or actual tuition charged, whichever is less. Full-time study is defined as twelve or more credits per semester (or the equivalent) at a degree-granting institution, or twenty-four or more hours per week in a vocational training program.

For **part-time study**, awards will be prorated by credit hour. Part-time study is defined as at least three but fewer than twelve credits per semester (or the equivalent) at a degree-granting institution, or six to twenty-three hours per week in a vocational training program.

2008 – 2009 Awards

For the 2008-09 academic year, awards will be set at 98% of tuition or \$4,287.50, whichever is less. If a Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award is also received, the combined academic year award cannot exceed tuition. Thus, the TAP award may be reduced accordingly.

Duration

Full-time Study

Undergraduate Degree-Granting Programs - Awards are available for up to eight semesters (four years) of undergraduate study. Awards can be made available for up to semesters of undergraduate study for enrollment in an approved five-year program or for enrollment in an approved program of remedial study.

Graduate Degree-Granting Programs - Awards are available for up to six semesters (three years) of gradu-

ate study.

Vocational Training Programs - Awards are available for up to a maximum of four semesters (two years) of study in an approved vocational training program.

Part-time Study

Undergraduate Degree-Granting Programs - Awards are available for up to the equivalent of eight semesters (four years) of full-time undergraduate study in a four-year program. Awards can be made available for up to the equivalent of ten semesters (five years) of full-time study for enrollment in an approved five-year undergraduate program which normally requires five academic years of full-time study.

Graduate Degree-Granting Programs - Awards are available for up to the equivalent of six semesters (three years) of part-time graduate study.

Vocational Training Programs - Awards are available for up to a maximum of eight semesters (four years) of part-time study in an approved vocational training program.

Approved programs are defined as undergraduate degree, graduate degree, diploma, and certificate programs at degree-granting institutions, or noncredit vocational training programs of at least 320 clock hours specifically approved by the New York State Division of Veteran's Affairs' Bureau of Veterans Education.

Eligible Veterans

Eligible students are those who are New York State residents discharged under honorable conditions from the U.S. Armed forces and who are:

- Vietnam Veterans who served in Indochina between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975
- Persian Gulf Veterans who served in the Persian Gulf on or after August 2, 1990
- Afghanistan Veterans who served in Afghanistan during hostilities on or after September 11, 2001
OR
- Veterans of the armed forces of the United States who served in hostilities that occurred after February 28, 1961 as evidenced by receipt of an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Navy Expeditionary Medal or a Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal.

Continued next page

Tuition Continued:

These students must also:

- Establish eligibility by applying to HESC.
- Be New York State residents.
- Be US Citizens or eligible noncitizens.
- Be matriculated full or part-time at an undergraduate or graduate degree-granting institution in New York State or in an approved vocational training program in New York State.
- Have applied for the Tuition Assistance Program for full-time undergraduate or graduate study.

How to Establish Eligibility

Complete the [New York State Veterans Tuition Award Supplement](#) or contact HESC. Be sure to print the Web Supplement Confirmation, sign and return it along with the required documentation according to the instructions.

Questions regarding eligible service or how to document service should be directed to the HESC Scholarship Unit at 1-888-697-4372.

How to Apply for Payment

Once you have established your eligibility, you must apply for payment. While you need only establish your eligibility once, you must apply for payment each year.

Apply for payment as follows:

Undergraduate and Graduate Full-time Study - Apply for payment by doing one of the following:

1. Apply online by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — the form used by virtually all colleges, universities and vocational schools for awarding federal student aid and most state and college aid — and then linking to the TAP on the Web application, ***OR***
2. For veterans who do not anticipate filing a FAFSA, complete a Scholarship Grant Payment Application. For a copy of the application call HESC at 1-888-697-4372.

Undergraduate Part-time Study - Complete only the Veterans Tuition Award Supplement.

Graduate Part-time Study - Complete only the Veterans Tuition Award Supplement.

Vocational Training Program - Complete only the Veterans Tuition Award Supplement.



Applications must be completed by May 1, 2009 for awards for the 2008-09 academic year.

From Sergio Rodriguez
Assistant Service Officer



Pension or Compensation Benefits?

As a veteran's advocate that deals specifically with Aid and Attendance, Homebound and other VA benefits, one question that often comes up is: "What is the difference between Pension and Compensation benefits?"

That is a fair question, especially given the fact that the same form is used to file a claim for either of the two. Pension benefit, being a needs-based program, requires that a veteran meets certain income eligibility criteria which have been established by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in order to qualify. These figures are generally updated on October of each year.

Asides from the income limits, however, Pension benefits also require that a veteran serve during a "time of war" while on active duty status. Compensation benefits, however, can be filed by any veteran that incurs a "Service-connected" injury or disability while in the armed forces. In other words, the cause of the disability came about as result of having served in the military. Compensation benefits can be obtained regardless of the veteran's income situation and does not require an individual to have served on active duty.

Thus, the major differences between the two programs are income restrictions or the absence thereof and whether the disability was service-connected or not. If you have any questions regarding this or any other veteran's benefits, please feel free to contact the Erie County Veterans Service office at any time. On our next installment we will be discussing what it means to be a 'veteran'.



Horizon Health Services is one of the nonprofit affiliates of the Erie County Veterans Services

Many factors have the potential to disrupt the lives of veterans and the people around them. Physical challenges require time and treatment. Addiction and mental health disorders have the potential to skew priorities. Add the daily struggles faced by returning soldiers, and tension can escalate quickly. Family relationships, the ability to hold a job, and physical health can be jeopardized; financial or legal problems may arise.

Recognizing and wanting to gain control over a problem is the first courageous step, and making the call for help can bring support and hope. When you're ready, you're ready.

Horizon Health Services is a comprehensive outpatient provider offering a wide range of services to people with addictions, mental health problems, or traumatic head injury. It is the largest of several not-for-profit help options in the WNY area available to veterans and their families, with administrative offices at 3020 Bailey Avenue, Buffalo. Once contact is made, the staff at Horizon is prepared to start almost immediately, and stay as long as it takes. According to President and CEO Anne Constantino, there are many safe and effective treatment strategies available, "and the sooner the better!"

An initial visit is usually set up within a few days to develop a plan. Individuals are evaluated personally by professional staff, and have the opportunity to participate in decisions about treatment. All treatment is confidential. There are 12 treatment centers in Erie, Niagara and Genesee Counties, including outpatient clinics and a residential treatment facility. Medicaid, Medicare, and most other insurance plans are accepted. Constantino emphasizes that the maze of insurance (or the lack thereof) should not be a reason to delay treatment, as knowledgeable staff can help move the paperwork.



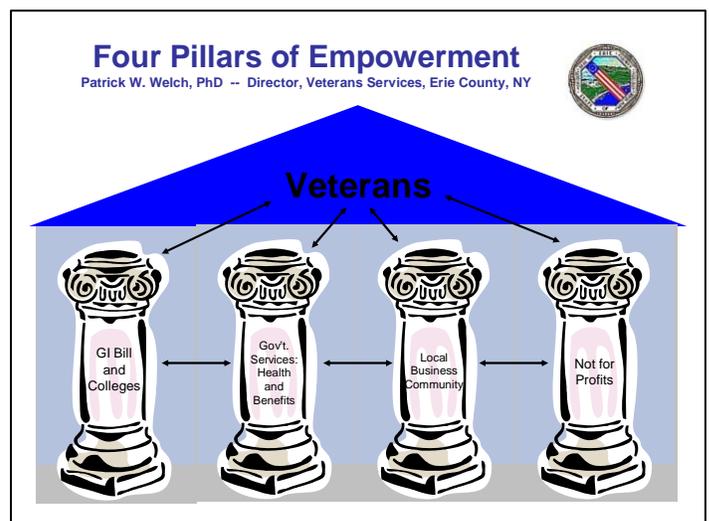
Appropriate treatment varies with individuals, and could include a combination of approaches. Counseling, in well-run groups or individually, provides support for the small but often necessary intermediate steps (and missteps) on the road to better life conditions. Medical treatment is used to fight alcoholism and addiction to opioids such as prescription painkillers and heroin. Evidence-based behavioral therapies, the best available, are used to treat addictions to stimulants. A full range of clinical services assists with mental health recovery and stabilization, including medical, psychiatric, and vocational programs.

Horizon Village is a comprehensive, individualized residential recovery program focused on intensive treatment for chemically-dependent adults over 18. The 50-bed facility provides the necessary initial step in developing an addiction-free lifestyle through holistic, person-centered treatment for some individuals.

"The best gift you can give yourself is recovery, because there is hope. There is a way out for anybody who wants it," says Sandy, a Horizon program participant.

Horizon aims to provide hope through the courage that comes in small steps.

Horizon Health Services
716.831.1800
www.horizon-health.org



Vets Group Claims Dept. of Defense Violates Severance Law

By [Kelly Kennedy](#) - Staff writer, www.ArmyTimes.com

At the end of a boisterous House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing in which lawmakers lambasted Veterans Affairs Department and Pentagon officials for not meeting various deadlines for improving care for wounded combat troops, Disabled American Veterans dropped a quiet bombshell.

The Pentagon "knowingly violated the law and ignored the intent of Congress" in implementing a provision of the 2008 Defense Authorization Act that lawmakers designed to enhance disability severance pay for wounded and injured service members, wrote Kerry Baker, associate national legislative director for DAV.

Baker argued that Congress created Section 1646 of the 2008 Defense Authorization Act with the intent that service members injured in combat, in a combat zone, or performing tasks related to combat — such as training — would not have to pay back any disability retirement severance pay they receive from the Defense Department before becoming eligible for VA disability compensation, as has been the case under long-standing policy.

But Baker said David S.C. Chu, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, sent out a "directive-type memorandum" March 13 instructing that only those injured in a combat zone in the line of duty or as a direct result of armed conflict do not have to pay back their severance money.

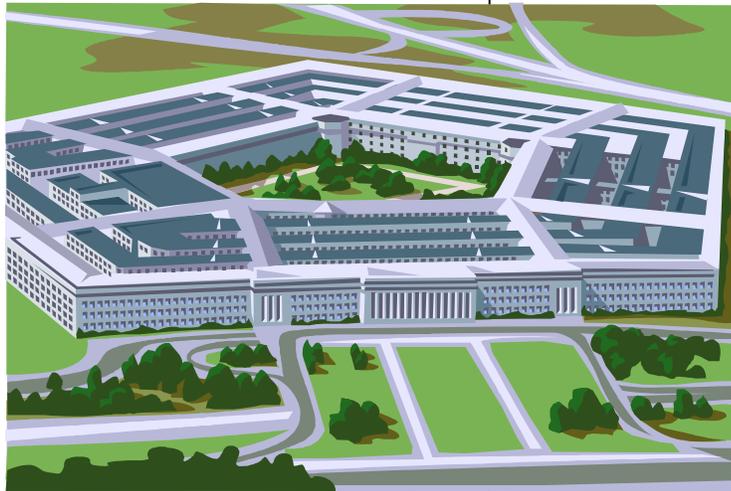
"This action has intentionally read 'hazardous service,' 'conditions simulating war,' and 'instrumentality of war' completely out of the law," Baker wrote.

Chu's action, he wrote, "forces one to question his true resolve to care for those he sends into battle, or orders to train for battle."

Baker said he believes the decision was purely monetary. "We can think of no other conceivable reason ... to

circumvent the law as he has done here," Baker wrote. "To answer the question of 'why,' Congress need only determine in whose budget the disability compensation is deposited once offset by VA. We believe the answer to that question is the [Defense Department] budget."

Defense Department spokeswoman



Eileen Lainez said that was not Chu's intent. "Rest assured that saving money was not the driver in the implementation," she said in an e-mail. "The statutory intent of [the law] clearly and appropriately focuses the 'enhanced disability severance' to those service members where the unfitting condition is a result of direct participation and performance of duty in the war effort."

But Baker said the memo intentionally leaves out people clearly included in both the law's definition of "combat-related disability" and the Defense Department's own definition of "combat-related," and that Congress had made clear its intent that anyone with a combat-related disability should be included.

The memo is important, he said, because a service member who breaks his back in a helicopter accident at Fort Bragg, N.C., while training to deploy to Iraq still must pay back his severance before qualifying for VA disability compensation.

"It can take 20 years" to pay back the severance, Baker said. "We do not view this as an oversight. We view this as an intentional effort to conserve monetary resources at the expense of disabled veterans."

The 2008 Defense Authorization Act states: "No deduction may be made under paragraph (1) in the case of disability severance pay received by a member for a disability incurred in line of duty in a combat zone or incurred during performance of duty in combat-related operations as designated by the secretary of defense."

Baker said it is the second part of that sentence — "incurred during performance of duty in combat-related operations" — that has been misconstrued.

According to the 2008 Defense Authorization Act, a "combat-related disability" occurs "as a direct result of armed conflict, while engaged in hazardous service, in the performance of duty under conditions simulating war, or through an instrumentality of war."

The Defense Department has defined "combat-related" as being "attributable to the special dangers associated with armed conflict or the preparation or training for armed conflict."

That includes hazardous service, such as flight duty, parachute duty, demolition duty, experimental stress duty and diving duty. An instrumentality of war is a weapon, a combat vehicle, or a sickness caused by fumes, gases or explosion of military ordnance.

Cont'd on next page

But Chu's memo states that "incurred during performance of duty in combat-related operations" will be defined by paragraph E3.P5.1.2 of Defense Department Instruction 1332.28 — "armed conflict."

Chu's narrower definition includes injuries "as a direct result of armed conflict," Baker wrote, or "in the line of duty in a combat zone," leading to questions of whether someone playing basketball in the Green Zone would qualify. The Defense Department had not answered that question.

Baker, who submitted written testimony but did not appear before the committee for questioning, said the memo has not affected many veterans yet, but it has the potential to affect "tens of thousands."

It applies only to service members medically retired after Jan. 28, 2008, with disability ratings of less than 30 percent from the Defense Department.

Baker said the net result is that troops injured during training for combat — situations that Congress meant to cover with the recent change in law — will not be covered, and troops injured in those situations will still have to repay their severance money before they can get VA disability payments.

Lainez said Congress left it up to Pentagon officials to decide the definition of "combat-related operations."

"Clearly the statutory intent is to provide wounded warriors enhanced disability compensation," she wrote. "Saving money was not a policy development factor ... rather, [it was] ensuring proper compensation for those service members who are wounded, ill or injured as a result of armed conflict in the combat zone."

Baker disagreed, urging Congress to revisit the issue to prevent defense officials "from continuing such blatant disregard for the law and for the livelihood and welfare of those who stand up to defend the country."

War Casualties Under Reported?



Tom Philpott | June 12, 2008
www.military.com

Mental Wounds Said To Raise War Casualties Tenfold

Rep. [Bob Filner](#) (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, charged Bush administration officials Wednesday with continuing to downplay the mental trauma and brain injuries suffered by veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Filner said an April RAND Corp. study, "Invisible Wounds of War -- Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery," justifies a tenfold jump in the U.S. casualty count versus the figure of 33,000 American dead and wounded used by the Pentagon.

RAND researchers extrapolated from a survey they conducted of 1,965 veterans to conclude that nearly 300,000 service members and veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan wars are suffering from [post-traumatic stress](#) or major depression. Filner told the pair of researchers, who had summarized their findings for his committee, that their work probably understates the problem.

"I personally think these are low estimates, just from my own studies," Filner said. "But if you take even the 300,000, [it's] 10 times the official casualty statistics from the Pentagon. Shouldn't this 300,000 be included?"

Lisa H. Jaycox, a senior behavioral scientist and clinical psychologist who co-directed the [RAND study](#), embraced Filner's argument.

"Well, they are [suffering] an injury condition resulting from combat deployment, and so it's a different kind of casualty," Jaycox said. "But, yes, they are very important numbers."

At the same hearing, Michael L. Dominguez, principal deputy under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, said RAND had gathered solid data from its survey but then drew the wrong conclusions. The study, Dominguez said, "did not, and cannot, definitively say that there are 300,000 cases of clinically diagnosed cases" of post-traumatic stress disorder or depression among veterans who served in the two theaters of war.

Filner angrily interrupted him, telling Dominguez that RAND didn't claim to show 300,000 clinically diagnosed cases of PTSD or depression. "It was an extrapolation to the possibility" of 300,000 cases, Filner said. With over 1.6 million U.S. service members having served in Iraq or Afghanistan, Dominguez said, a finding that 300,000 veterans "have experienced some kind of mental health stress is very consistent with our data. And those people do need to be discovered [and] to get help."

But, he continued, "many of them will, with very little counseling or assistance, resolve those combat stress issues themselves. A few -- a few -- will in fact manifest a clinical diagnosis of PTSD and they'll need much more sustained intervention by medical health care professionals."

"How many is a few?" Filner snapped.

The results so far, Dominguez said, show "less than one percent will actually have clinical PTSD that will need treatment over..."

"You believe that?" said Filner, cutting him off with sarcasm. "You believe that there are less than one percent of these deployed soldiers will have PTSD as a clinical diagnosis?"

Dominguez was stunned into silence momentarily but finally managed, "So far this is the number that we are seeing."

"That shows why you don't do anything," Filner said, "because you think there's only a few."

Another purpose of the three-hour hearing, which included testimony from retired Navy Rear Adm. Patrick W. Dunne, assistant secretary for policy and planning for the Veterans Benefits Administration, was to assess progress by DoD and VA in implementing Wounded Warrior legislation passed in January in response to the Walter Reed scandal last year.

Dominguez and Dunne conceded that some congressional deadlines haven't been met, including a late April target for establishing a Wounded Warrior Resource Center to give recovering service members, their families and primary caregivers a single point of contact for assistance.

But Dr. Terri L. Tanielian, co-director of the RAND study, acknowledged to Rep. [Steve Buyer](#) (R-Ind.)

that the Wounded Warrior initiatives have set the Departments of Defense and VA "on the right track" for addressing most war-related mental health challenges. The big hurdle now to proper care for many mentally wounded veterans is clinical capacity nationwide, Tanielian said. The pipeline for training mental health-care providers in the most effective therapies for PTSD used by VA needs widening, she said, and that requires "transformation and system-level changes across the entire U.S. health care system."

Filner, meanwhile, wants every service member and veteran who has served in Iraq or Afghanistan to receive a [mandatory examination](#), which should include at least an hour with a clinician trained to detect the symptoms of PTSD, depression and even mild cases of traumatic brain injury.

In his tirade at Dominguez and Dunne, Filner said that, between the two of them, "I think there's been a contest to see who can suck the humanity out of this issue better...I mean, we're talking about our children! We're talking about life and death! We're talking about [suicides...homelessness](#)...a lifetime of dealing with brain injuries! And you guys sit there without anything to say. This is absolutely unacceptable."

He asked Dominguez if he also disagreed with RAND that 320,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have a probable traumatic brain injury.

"Again," said Dominguez, "you don't have 320,000 brain injuries. You have 320,000 people who have been in or around a concussive event. Again, it's a spectrum of experience [versus] a spectrum of need that manifests itself. So, no, there is not 320,000 people out there with brain injuries."

That attitude, Filner charged, encourages clinicians to misdiagnose conditions so veterans are denied the care they need and the compensation they deserve. Dominguez took strong exception to those remarks.

About Tom Philpott

Tom Philpott has been breaking news for and about military people since 1977. After service in the Coast Guard, and 17 years as a reporter and senior editor with Army Times Publishing Company, Tom launched "Military Update," his syndicated weekly news column, in 1994. "Military Update" features timely news and analysis on issues affecting active duty members, reservists, retirees and their families. Tom also edits a reader reaction column, "Military Forum." The online "home" for both features is www.military.com.

Feature Story:

Vetepreneuring –Never Too Young or Too Old

Truly any veteran, especially having grown up in our blessed “Free Enterprise Socio-Economic” system, is certainly old enough and likely mature enough to become a successful entrepreneur. That much would be clear to any discerning observer. Business journals have long and often reported plenty of examples of young to very young to very very young successful entrepreneurs. So much for that end of the spectrum.

This is the first in a series of articles on Veteran-Owned Businesses.

Answering about the other end is a more intriguing issue. This “Gem” of a story about Navy Officer Veteran Jim Cox can surely be instructive as well as inspiring. As relevant background, Jim is a graduate engineer, has worked in corporate America, owns two patents plus numerous copyrights and has founded, built and sold off two successful manufacturing companies in his career. Indeed, Jim has done some things in his life.

Four years ago Jim, with a “younger” veteran partner, started a brand new business in Western New York. Jim was 89 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME; his partner was only 73. Known as the Emblematic Company, this organization focuses on creating and selling affordable yet elegant magnetic vehicle emblems which show recognition, honor and appreciation for America’s finest – our veterans and active service personnel! Every product in the growing line of emblems was created by Jim and is his copyright.

First is a family of five 12 inch emblems, one for each branch of service, which serve as Military Memorial Emblems. To date most sales have been to funeral homes nationwide, well over a thousand and counting. The emblems are mounted on hearses, metallic caskets or tastefully displayed indoors with Jim’s specially designed MagMount. This year Emblematic is introducing a 10 inch version of these same emblems. These are intended mostly for living veterans and veteran organizations to use and proudly display on their vehicles or indoors on a MagMount. However, funeral directors sometimes give these to families of deceased veterans. The family’s reaction is overwhelmingly positive.

Eighteen months ago Jim created yet another emblem which is called a “Welcome Home Troops” emblem. It is nominally 3 inches tall by 7 inches and displays a miniature modified insignia for all five branches of service. In bold font it says “Welcome Home Troops” and “We thank You!” These are available to anyone for resale at the retail level, for use in fund raising activities from scouts through VSOs or, more often, as tokens of appreciation to be given to customers, benevolent donors and possibly even blood donors.

“Regardless of our political differences, the people across this land share a deep sense of respect and admiration for the brave men and women who have served this country” says Jim. “We feel that our new emblems are a fitting tribute to former service men and women.” Not by coincidence, all three of Jim’s grown sons are veterans AND entrepreneurs. For more info about these products or Emblematic call Jim at (716) 674-5155, email info@emblematicco.com or visit the website at www.EmblematicCo.com.

Erie County Veterans Services Staff

- Patrick Welch
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Assistant Service Officer
- Alyssa Ersing
Assistant Service Officer
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Newsletter Editor