



*From
Patrick Welch
Director*

Our emphasis in this month's issue will cover veteran's employment. Deputy Director Sergio Rodriguez will discuss the challenges facing our newest generation of warriors as they return home to resume their lives. Studies reflect that the national un-employment rate is at a 26 year high and un-employment for veterans exceeds that by 2 to 3 percent.

Updated information on the Post 911 GI Bill is also included and represents the greatest changes since World War II. State Director of Veterans Affairs, James McDonough released this information in May and when coupled with the New York State Veterans Tuition Program makes attending a public or private institution in New York virtually tuition free, see Page 3.

June 24 marks the arrival of the American Veterans Travelling Tribute exhibit to East Aurora, NY. This display honors all who have served from World War II to the current war and the public is invited to the Knox Farm State Park June 25 to 29. For more information see our web site; www.erie.gov/veterans

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

Remember my mantra: "If you do NOTHING, then someday when you need the VA, then NOTHING is just what you may get." ©

VETERANS UNEMPLOYED



*By: Sergio R. Rodriguez, Deputy Director,
Erie County Veterans Service Agency
Email: sergio.rodriquez@erie.gov*

The allure of joining the military possesses different levels of attraction for each potential recruit. Some join because it is a family tradition. Others will join because they feel it is their patriotic duty to do so. Still, others do it because of the discipline and the structure that the military provides. All of them, however, stare into the eyes of the same



monster after they leave the service: unemployment. The very thought of this, especially in today's economic climate, prompts many to re-enlist. Others plan well ahead of their discharge date in order to prevent this creature from creeping into their lives. Those who fall into the pits of unemployment sometimes face a point of no return, leading into homelessness or even suicide. But there are tools and weapons that can be utilized to combat this creature. Read on to find out what they are.

If you were to watch an average television commercial from any of the military branches, you may notice a theme centered

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HEROES SERIES**
...Part V

on the latest technical jobs available. They all carry the message of preparing for a career outside of the military. This message is further reinforced with the recent announcement of the new **Post-9/11 GI Bill** - a groundbreaking new benefit which will allow many of our veterans to go to most institutions of higher learning tuition free. The new GI Bill will also provide a reasonable living allowance that will likely eliminate the need for a student veteran to have to both work *and* go to school at the same time; thus, providing them with the opportunity to focus entirely on education.

The relatively secure financial stability that the military provides has now become one of its greatest assets in our economically beleaguered nation. I've seen first-hand an increasing number of veterans coming into our office requesting a discharge upgrade in order to enhance their hiring potential or because they feel this will increase their chances of re-enlisting. There are also more inquiries regarding re-enlistment codes and what they mean. Many seeking social service assistance are contemplating the thought of serving our country because of the guaranteed check the military provides. According to a report released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in March of 2009, "Veterans between the ages of 18 and 24 had



an unemployment rate of 14.1 percent, nearly double the rate of those ages 25 to 34 (7.3 percent), and almost three times the rate for 35 to 44 year olds (4.9 percent)." These figures are enough to scare any young veteran into staying away from the civilian work force.

IS BEING A VETERAN AN EMPLOYMENT HANDICAP?

Yes ... and no. There are both advantages and disadvantages to being a veteran when seeking employment. On the one hand, many employers seek veterans particularly because of their familiarity with taking orders and for the respect they have of the chain-of-command-like structure of an organization, which many corporate entities are similarly modeled after. Their first-hand experience with the concept of teamwork, make veterans an appealing candidate for many employers who seek motivated and pro-active individuals. These veterans also have the added value of living by a code of standards which holds integrity as its number-one priority. In fact, the Erie County Division of Fire Safety has invited the Erie County Veterans Service Agency to participate in a recruiting and marketing initiative which targets the veteran demographic, specifically for the commonalities that firefighters and former service members share.

So, with all of the exemplary qualities and the experience that most veterans embody, why is it that this group is having such a difficult time finding employment? Well, for one, most jobs in the military, such as infantrymen, artillery, food-service and the likes are either non-transferable in the civilian world or are in a low-paying and highly competitive industry. Add to that the fact the

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many of our returning soldiers have lived a key part of their intellectual growth phase in a culture which more or less views civilians as complete foreigners, and many of our veterans oftentimes end up finding themselves in an alien-like world which they can hardly comprehend, much less navigate.



Another part that makes it difficult to find a job as a veteran is that, while most adolescents aged between 18 and 22 have started and then proceeded to complete their college degrees, our heroes are dodging and shooting bullets overseas in Afghanistan or

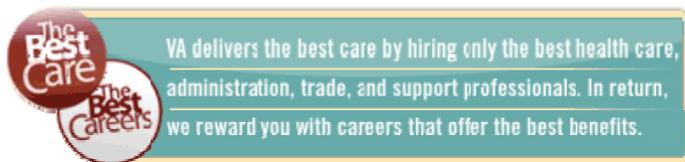
Iraq. By the time they return, getting a degree is an idea far removed from their list of priorities. Furthermore, having to focus on education in an environment that often harbors students whose priorities sometimes include binge drinking, clubbing, and yes, illicit drugs, can quickly become an unappealing option for most veterans. This reality often prompts them to enter the work force prior to ever having the opportunity to receive a formal education. Thankfully, the new GI Bill should provide more than enough of an incentive for these Vets to get their priorities back in focus.

INTERVIEW WITH KASEY STRESING

Just how does the Department of Veterans Affairs deal with the influx of veterans coming back into civilian life without a sense of direction of where to begin to look for job opportunities? Furthermore, what is the VA doing to help assist those very folks whom they are tasked to serve? The Erie County Veterans Service Agency set out to figure out just that. We paid a visit to Kasey Stresing, Human Resource Spe-

cialist, at the Buffalo VA Medical Center -- one of two VA Medical Centers that service the Western New York region. The other center is located in Batavia. A Navy veteran who served on active duty for seven years, Kasey also worked in the private sector at Kaleida Health prior to working at the VA. Kasey was a Navy recruiter for two of those seven years. While in the military, Kasey worked to obtain her Bachelor's degree, as well as her Masters. Kasey believes that her educational background coupled with her military experience were the key components in obtaining her current position assisting veterans.

Like many of us, Kasey was among the active duty military members who received very little direction to prepare her for civilian life. But now that she is in a position to assist her fellow veterans, she wants to get the word out. Some veterans may not be aware that the VA Hospital **does** take into consideration military rank and job titles in lieu of not meeting certain job qualifications. She gets the word out by promoting vacancies in trade magazines, distributing flyers and by helping people who come in looking for jobs become aware of the available positions.



For veterans interested in working for the VA, there's one place to go in order to apply: www.vacareers.va.gov. The VA requires potential candidates to go through the online application process if interested in a position. The website allows you to upload your resume and complete an online questionnaire. "Don't stop trying, don't give up applying. If you weren't successful the first time -- keep trying for the position you're interested", says Kasey. She also wants veterans who served during a period of

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war or received certain types of medals to know that they will receive a 5-point advantage on the online questionnaire. Additionally, veterans with a service-connected disability rating receive a 10-point preference towards their job application.

The question in the minds of many veterans becomes "How well is the VA doing in terms of hiring veterans?" This is a legitimate question. After all, many veterans feel more at ease dealing with someone whom they can relate with – someone who's been in "my shoes" they often say. Often, this sense of connection goes a long way towards making veterans feel more at ease with the service they receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Hiring qualified veterans is a win-win situation for both parties.

Though veterans are desired, an applicant must meet the qualification requirements for the position. From a VA standpoint, actively hiring veterans should demonstrate a commitment towards providing a complete service while meeting the different needs of the people they serve. I can attest from first-hand experience of the advantage that being a veteran provides when assisting others with obtaining the benefits that they have earned. Kasey believes the federal government to be among the fairest when it comes to hiring applicants. The VA Western New York Healthcare System currently employs 425 male veterans and over 100 female veterans. These figures are encouraging. Still, some would like to see veterans in more leadership and highly desirable positions such as Kasey's. The VA Healthcare Network, for its part, is taking many steps in the right direction towards addressing these concerns.



Honoring Military Mothers

On Friday May 8, 2009, four women who have sons or daughters serving in the military were presented with Mothers Day flowers in the names of their children.

The New York National Guard in conjunction with the Rockland County Veterans Service Agency provided our office with the names of four mothers in Erie County, and two of our local florists donated arrangements: Michler's Florist in Williamsville and Maureen's Florist in Buffalo.

We were able to get two of them to the County Executive's Office and presented the flowers to them.

For the two ladies who could not attend, the veteran's service agency staff delivered the flowers to their homes. On one of the deliveries the mother was on the phone with her daughter in Iraq when we arrived. It was priceless !!!!!



Pictured left to right:

Mrs. Ida Reitz (son Barry is a 25-year veteran of the Air National Guard based in Niagara Falls); **Patrick Welch** (Director Erie County Veterans Service Agency); **Chris Collins** (Erie County Executive); **Mrs. Bobbi Hopkins** (her daughter Stephanie is 20 years old and serves in the Air National Guard based in Niagara Falls.)



VETERANS' AFFAIRS DIRECTOR UNVEILS ENHANCEMENTS TO POST 9/11 GI BILL

Post 9/11 GI Bill Most-Sizeable Increase in Veterans' Education Benefits Since World War II
Eligible veterans are encouraged to apply now
New York's Schools working hard to become more "Veteran-Friendly"

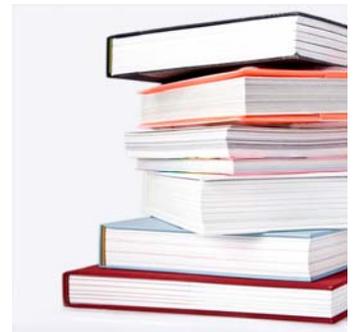
James McDonough, New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs director unveiled details of the new Post 9/11 GI Bill – the most sizeable increase in veterans' education benefits since World War II – during a meeting of the Governor's New York State Council on Returning Veterans and their Families at the State Capitol.

"The implementation of an enhanced GI Bill provides us with an opportunity to assist more than 80,000 service members from New York who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts since September 11, 2001. Their bravery and selfless commitment to our country deserves special commendation," said Governor David A. Paterson. "We need to do our best to assist these service men and women in their post-military life, and these new education benefits are a first step in helping to achieve that goal."

The Post 9/11 GI Bill will go into effect August 1 and includes a number of key enhancements over the Montgomery GI Bill, such as:

- A monthly housing allowance to allow veterans to dedicate more time and energy to studies.
- A books and supplies stipend to assist in the high cost of attending school for student Veterans.
- A program which will allow more expensive schools to enter into an agreement with the VA to assist in covering costs of remaining tuition.

"With this new benefit comes the responsibility for our schools to become more veteran-friendly, to help reduce student-veteran attrition rates and foster a welcome atmosphere on campus," said McDonough, while addressing State leaders, stakeholders, members of the Governor's Council and veterans "With more veterans returning to campus using Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, schools can expect to see their student-veterans' financial needs more closely met than at any other time in recent history. In light of reported dwindling endowments, eligible veterans will walk on campus with their own financial aid package; it just makes sense for our campuses to become more veteran-friendly, given the economic incentive to do so."



Promoting this new veterans' education benefit, the most-sizeable increase in veterans' education benefits since the end of World War II, McDonough encouraged eligible veterans to apply for this benefit immediately.

To help eligible veterans understand the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs will launch a tuition calculator on its Web site. This calculator will allow eligible veterans as well as educational institutions to calculate the approximate value of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. This

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tuition calculator will also be able to factor in New York State's Veterans Tuition Award (VTA). The State VTA may provide veterans using the Post 9/11 GI Bill with financial assistance to offset remaining tuition and fees.

According to information provided by the United State Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), schools can expect to see a twenty percent increase in the number of veterans going to school in the next two-to-three years.

In the coming weeks the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs will be hosting regional veteran-friendly campus forums with local elected officials at colleges across the state to help inform veterans and schools of changes in veterans education benefits and programs. For a complete schedule and locations, visit the Division's Web site at www.veterans.state.ny.us.

***The Post 9/11 GI Bill will help
more than 1.8 million veterans nationwide
who served since Sept. 11, 2001.***

Veterans interested in applying for the Post 9/11 GI Bill are encouraged to apply on-line at the VA's application center at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp> or contacting the Erie County Veterans Services Agency at www.erie.gov/veterans or 716.858.6363.



[VA Upstate NY Job Bank](#)

Links to Employment on our website:

<http://www.erie.gov/veterans/employment.asp>

**The Erie County Veterans Service Agency
Has Partnered with the Following Veterans-Friendly Educational Institutions:**





Please Support



Spring Fling to Benefit the Buffalo Veterans' Court Mentor Program

When: Friday, June 12, 2009; 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Where: Lafayette Tap Room
 391 Washington Street
 Buffalo, NY 14203
Cost: \$20 (\$7.00 of each ticket will directly benefit our Vets)

Did you know...

The SERV Act is a bill
to provide grants to establish veteran's treatment courts.

The event will include a two-hour open bar (draft beer and wine) with happy hour prices on bottled beer and mixed drinks. Food and live music are included.

The Services, Education, and Rehabilitation for Veterans (SERV) Act, was introduced by [Senator John Kerry \(D-MA\)](#) and [Senator Lisa Murkowski \(R-AK\)](#) in July of 2008 to create veteran drug treatment courts to support veterans combat the cycle of alcohol or drug addiction. The SERV Act is modeled on the Veterans Treatment Court in Buffalo. Visit [this OpenCongress.org](http://this.OpenCongress.org) link for the bill's progress.

- Purchase tickets from:
- Jack O'Connor 858-7345
 - Rosie Evans 858-8657
 - Lucy Ralls 858-4889

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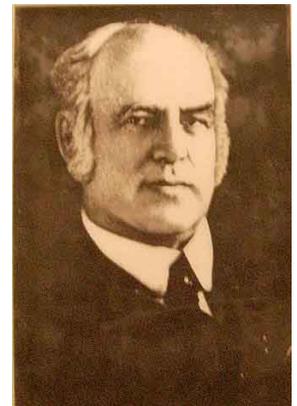


1901 Pierce chainless bicycle nameplate

George N. Pierce (1846-1911) came to Buffalo from Friendsville, Pennsylvania in 1863. He married into a well-to-do local family and in 1878 established George N. Pierce & Company, a company that produced arguably the best bicycle of the era. The earliest Pierce bicycles' nameplates used an arrow which was to become the familiar hallmark of all of Pierce's advertising and nameplates for decades to come.

In 1900 a gas-powered *Motorette* automobile was placed on

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the market. Two years later the company was making its own engines and a year after that it was selling the fifteen horsepower *Arrow* and the twenty-four horsepower *Great Arrow*. They exhibited two cars built in 1901 along with their bicycle line at the [Pan-American Exposition](#).

Pierce introduced his "Motorette" at the Pan-American Exposition in 1901 in a novel way: "On May 1, George Pierce had an especially bright idea. The Buffalo inventor cranked up his Pierce Motorette -- powered, as it were, by a one-cylinder de Dion engine -- and putt-putted to the grand opening of the Pan-American Exposition. Crowds parted, eyes popped and jaws dropped as the contraption clattered past the Machinery Building, in which several experimental automobiles produced by Pierce's rivals were on display, all shiny-new but still." - Source: "Pierce Arrows Join Pan-Am Centennial Fest," by Tom Buckam, in the March 8, 2001 (Buffalo News). By 1905, Pierce was producing some of the biggest and most expensive automobiles on the U.S. market.



Also at the Pan-Am, the Exposition's bicycle policeman rode and showcased Buffalo-made Pierce bicycles. Carl F. Burgwardt, author of *Buffalo's Bicycles* and proprietor of the Pedaling History Bicycle Museum, Orchard Park) sums up Pierce's career:

"Actually, George Pierce was probably more of a bicycle person than an automobile person. While he was the founder and principal officer in his bicycle business for more than twenty years, he was only in the automobile business for eight. Most of the greatest Pierce automobiles were actually made by the company bearing his mark and name after he had retired and died. By the time the automobiles were being produced in his bicycle plant, although he was still president of the company, other major stockholders (like George Birge) were those most involved with the automobile. Pierce's principles of quality, however, were not compromised and obviously transferred to the renowned automobile" -- Excerpt from a media release advertising the 2001 National Meet of the Wheelman in Buffalo, August 8-12, 2001.

Pierce died from a heart attack in 1910 at his home at the [Lenox residence hotel](#). He was interred in a family mausoleum, built by his wife, Louisa, in the [Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo](#), adjacent to Mirror Lake in Section 23.

Buffalo Architecture and History: <http://www.buffaloah.com/h/pierce/pierce/index.html>

Photos and Biographical Information: Chuck LaChiusa



Right: Arrow design on piece of railing from former Pierce Arrow Building on Elmwood Avenue

Left: 1901 Pierce men's Cushion Frame Chainless Bicycle



LANDMARK: THE CONNECTICUT STREET ARMORY

In 1854, the local unit of the New York State National Guard was organized as the 74th Regiment. For fourteen years this Regiment shared headquarters with the 65th Regiment. In 1868, due to overcrowding, the 74th moved to an Armory located at Virginia and North William Street, where it stayed for the next eighteen years. The 74th Regiment then moved to a newly constructed armory on Virginia Street.

Over the next several years the 74th enjoyed steady growth and in 1894, its membership exceeded five hundred. The 74th was quickly outgrowing the Virginia Street Armory and in 1894 Adjunct General Josiah Porter testified before the State Legislature on the 74th Regiment's need for more space. Porter recommended that the State of New York build a new home for the 74th Regiment. At this same time, the Old Prospect Avenue Reservoir, a fire-fighting reservoir, was being relocated to the East Side of Buffalo. The site was leveled and eventually was recognized as the ideal site for the building of a new and expansive Armory to house the 74th Regiment.

Captain Williams Lansing, Commanding Officer of Company F - 74th Regiment of the New York National Guard, was designated Superintendent of Construction for the new Armory. As an architect, Captain Lansing had designed some of Buffalo's most beautiful structures including Lafayette Presbyterian Church, Central Presbyterian Church and Canisius College. Mr. Lansing had also served as supervising architect for the Pan-American Exposition.



The Connecticut Street Armory, located at 184 Connecticut Street, was built between 1898-1900. The exterior of this giant fortress showcases an impressive use of native Medina sandstone. The oversized entrance arch features mammoth voussoirs and deep reveals. When the Armory opened, the drill hall was touted as one of the largest unobstructed floors in the world. The building also features beautifully carved oak staircases and woodwork.

The Connecticut Street Armory is still active and continues to serve the New York State National Guard. In addition, during peacetime this grand fortress serves as a beautiful backdrop for weddings, corporate functions and special events

—from *Buffalo Place* e-report
www.buffaloplace.com



Coming this month to East Aurora!
American Veterans Traveling Tribute

June 25-29, 2009

Go to www.avtt.org for more details

VETERANS ADVOCATE OF THE MONTH

JENNIFER JOWSEY



Left to Right: Sergio Rodriguez, Jennifer Jowsey, Patrick Welch, Mary Cameron, and Alyssa Gingerich

The Erie County Veterans Service Agency would like to recognize Jennifer Jowsey as the **June 2009 Veterans Advocate of the Month**. Jennifer is an Information Systems Specialist for Erie County and has been working in the Department of Information and Support Services for the past ten and a half years.

Jennifer designs websites for every department in Erie County, specializing in web design and programming. She has given our department 110% in terms of creating our website. We work with her on a daily basis to update our website with new information regarding veteran's benefits (www.erie.gov/veterans). Our goal is to create the Erie County Veteran's Virtual Resource Center and we believe that we are well on our way.

Jennifer has played a big role in helping us reach out to veterans, not only in our community, but throughout our nation. Thank you Jennifer, for you have been instrumental in making this Veteran's Virtual Resource Center a reality!

**"Struggling for Peace on Lake Ontario"
and
"Rush-Bagot, Boundary Waters
and the Great Lakes Boundary Quality Agreement"**



HMS St. Lawrence (1814)

2009 is the Centennial of the Boundary Waters Treaty by which Canada and the United States jointly manage their shared waters including the Great Lakes. As part of the Centennial celebrations, the Niagara 1812 Legacy Council and Old Fort Niagara hosted a special lecture by Prof. Wesley Turner of Brock University on warships on Lake Ontario Sunday, June 7, at Old Fort Niagara. Mr. Terry Yonkers also spoke on the



Sir James Lucas Yeo

Rush-Bagot, Boundary Waters and the Great Lakes Boundary Quality Agreement.

In the fall of 1814, Lake Ontario was the unlikely site of the largest naval arms race of the age as both British and American navies vied for dominance of

the Lake. On October 15 that year, Sir James Lucas Yeo, commander of British Naval forces launched the 112 gun battleship, the St. Lawrence, from Kingston. Not to be outdone, Commodore Isaac Chauncey started the construction of two battleships, the New Orleans and the Chippewa, both 130 guns during the winter of 1814-15 at Sackett's Harbour. The British, matching battleship for battleship, started building the MHS Wolfe (II) and the HMS Canada, each 112 guns. None of the four were ever completed before the War came to an end in February 1815.

In 1817, Britain and the US signed the Rush-Bagot Treaty, which limited the number and

strength of warships which could be maintained on the Lakes. That Treaty provided that on Lake Ontario, Britain and America could keep in commission one vessel each, of no more than 100 tons, and armed with one 18-pounder gun. No other armed ships could be built and those already built had to be dismantled.

In the Treaty of Washington, 1871, other maritime issues between the two countries which had arisen in the Civil War were resolved. That and the industrialization of the Great Lakes region laid the foundation of the 'Great Rapprochement' between United States, Canada and Britain which continues to this day.



Commodore Isaac Chauncey

Prof. Wesley Turner of Brock University, author of [The War of 1812: The War That Both Sides Won](#), traced how the Great Lakes, the scene of the largest naval arms race of its day, through gradual demilitarization and diplomacy became part of the longest undefended border in the world.

The Lecture was given at the Rush-Bagot Treaty Memorial in Old Fort Niagara (Youngstown, NY) with the Toronto skyline in the background across Lake Ontario.

A reception hosted by Magavern, Magavern Grimm LLP of Buffalo followed.

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.



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IT TAKES THE COURAGE AND
STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR TO
ASK FOR HELP...

If you're in an emotional crisis,
call 1-800-273-TALK (Press "1" for Veterans)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org