



## We Need Veterans Courts Nationwide

*By Patrick W. Welch*

*Reprinted from The VVA Veteran, January/February 2010*

**W**hen my good friend and fellow Vietnam veteran Jack O'Connor explained his concept for a Veterans Court, I was on board before he even finished his pitch. Then he told me he already had a judge, Robert Russell, who would take on these duties and that the VA would be in court with a secure computer to gain access to veterans' records. When Jack told me that one of the key elements was to have veteran mentors in the court working with the troubled veterans, I knew that the Buffalo Veterans Court would be a success.

I have served as one of the volunteer veteran mentors since the Buffalo Veterans Court was started. What follows will explain from the perspective of a veteran mentor why we have been so successful in providing help to our fellow veterans. These are men and women with mental health and substance abuse problems who have been charged with nonviolent crimes. When we serve in the military, we serve with people from all races, religions, cultures, and educational and family backgrounds. Yet we all work together to complete the mission. For most who have served, that bonding never leaves. This perhaps is the critical element in why the Veterans Court is more successful than other treatment courts.

The volunteer veteran mentors are dedicated to helping those who have been less fortunate in the transition from the military to the civilian world. The mentors' presence and dedication are critical to the success of the court.

Most of the veterans who find themselves in the judicial system are not bad people; many got caught up with the wrong people in the wrong places at the wrong time. This is what Judge Russell stresses constantly to them: People places, and things can lead to trouble that you did not intend to happen.

Many of the veterans who appear before the Buffalo Veterans Court did not have good support systems before serving in the military and lacked a support system when they returned. Yet while in the military, many thrived because of a strong and structured support system. So we believe they can, for the most part, become productive citizens if provided with some support structure. The Veterans Court, with a judge who believes in the idea behind it, the VA, and the veteran mentors provide just that.

A trust develops between veterans and mentors as they meet together after the judge has discussed the status of their cases and the next

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steps. In these one-on-one meetings, we offer words of encouragement along with straight talk that includes words that are not allowed in the courtroom. These “words of wisdom” are more in line with how we spoke in the military—very frank and to the point.

We try to explain that if they don’t work to get their s\*\*t together, they will find themselves in jail. We can speak that way because the discussion is veteran to veteran, a very powerful element in the relationships that are developed.

One of the dynamics that I do not believe any of us initially considered was that a military-like command structure would develop. When you are in the military, if you have a good CO and good NCOs, you will follow them anywhere. What we have seen develop is the judge is the CO; the veteran mentors are the NCOs, and those in the court system are the troops—and they do not want to let us down or disappoint us.

These are bill before Congress—H.R. 2138 in the

House, introduced by Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.) and companion legislation, S. 902, in the Senate, introduced by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.)—that merit our support.

The Services, Education, and Rehabilitation for Veterans Act would facilitate the establishment of “veterans’ treatment courts” by empowering the Attorney General to make grants “to states, state courts, local courts, units of local government, and Indian tribal governments for the purpose of developing, implementing, or enhancing veterans’ treatment courts or expanding operational drug courts to serve veterans.” Enactment of this legislation would provide compassionate responses by the criminal justice system to many veterans who have served honorably and well in the armed forces. It also would be a boon to a system that is overwhelmed with drug-related offenses.

To date, there has been little support for these bills in Congress. We urge you to contact your Representative and Senators to get them as co-sponsors.



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## Women Veterans Advisory Committee Holds Its First Meeting

To help steer advocacy for the women veterans of Erie County, a committee of stakeholders and interested parties has been formed to work with Erie County Veterans Service Agency to both celebrate women veterans and to give voice to their needs and concerns.

The first meeting was held on January 13, and included 18 attendees that represented many groups, including VA WNY Healthcare System, WNY Veterans Housing, Common Status of Women Coalition, Inc., Horizon Health Services, Canisius College, Daemen College, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, and the National Guard.

They enthusiastically endorsed the joint work of Erie County Common Status for Women and the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library in publishing a calendar for March 2010, Women’s History Month. Check [www.erie.gov](http://www.erie.gov) or [www.buffalolib.org](http://www.buffalolib.org) for more information.



## Veterans' Program Beginning to Make an Impact

**A**fter a three-year absence from the Buffalo area, the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) has returned.

From 2003-2006, Goodwill Industries of WNY successfully administered the federally-funded grant, which helped reintegrate hundreds of veterans into the workforce. This time Goodwill joins forces with venerable agencies such as the WNY Veterans Housing Coalition and the Erie County Veterans Service Agency headed up by Ceil O'Brien and Dr. Patrick Welch respectively.

Mark LaHood, HVRP Program Manager, and his staff have managed to significantly impact the lives of several local veterans in just the past 5 months.

*"The veterans I've been privileged to work with have many skills and talents that, with the right opportunity, can become valuable additions to local firms."*

"While our ultimate goal is to put veterans to work in meaningful, well-paying jobs, we are also charged with helping them access the services and benefits to which they are entitled," says LaHood.

During the past few months, HVRP has taken veterans right off the streets; homeless, jobless, without food, transportation, or hope, and placed them in adequate permanent or transitional housing.

According to HVRP Job Developer, Steve McCrorey, "Once we are able to stabilize a veteran's living situation and address any outstanding medical issues, it is amazing how quickly they can be placed. The veterans I've been privileged to work with have many skills and talents that, with the right opportunity, can become valuable additions to local firms. In fact, I placed a plumber last week making twice my salary," Mr. McCrorey quips.

In addition to the workforce impact, HVRP may have even saved a life. After referring one of its veterans to the Buffalo VA Hospital for a routine check up, it was found that he had a heart aneurism. The next day he was undergoing major heart surgery. Fortunately, the operation was very successful.

Anyone with knowledge of a veteran in need of shelter and employment is encouraged to contact Mark LaHood at: [mark@goodwillwny.org](mailto:mark@goodwillwny.org)



# Army Strong Stories

ArmyStrongStories.com ([www.ArmstrongStories.com](http://www.ArmstrongStories.com)) is an innovative U.S. Army Accessions Command program that provides the opportunity for Soldiers – every rank, every MOS, every background – to share their unfiltered perspective on daily life in the military through blog entries, photos and video.

Everyone is invited to join the conversation by leaving a comment and sharing compelling posts with others. If you are a Soldier and interested in blogging on Army Strong Stories, [Sign up](#).



## Meet Genevieve Chase and read her blogs at



<http://www.armystrongstories.com/blogger/genevieve-chase/>

Affiliation: Army Reserve  
Rank: Staff Sergeant (SSG)  
Branch: Military Intelligence

Genevieve Chase is a Staff Sergeant in the U.S. Army Reserve assigned to the 301st Military Intelligence Battalion in Phoenix, Arizona. From February 2005 to October of 2007, Chase volunteered for active duty service to serve with the Army's 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) in Fort Drum, New York and Afghanistan. Since returning from active duty service, Chase has worked to bring to light the issues faced by today's veterans. While advocating on their behalf, she discovered a need for a focus on women veterans and their families from all eras and branches of service. From that void, Chase created American Women Veterans and began, in earnest, the 21st century women veterans movement. Chase

## Back From Combat, Women Struggle for Acceptance

*Published - Dec 14 2009 06:03PM EST  
By KIMBERLY HEFLING - Associated Press Writer*

Afghanistan veteran and founder of American Women Veterans, Genevieve Chase, 32, of Alexandria, Va., poses for a portrait in Washington, Monday, Oct. 19, 2009. A staff sergeant in the Army Reserves, Chase said that after her service the same guys she'd been close comrades with in Afghanistan didn't invite her to get drinks with them later because their significant others wouldn't approve. "One of the hardest things that I had deal with was, being a woman, was losing my best friends or my comrades to their families," Chase said.

Afghanistan veteran and founder of American Women Veterans, Genevieve Chase, 32, of Alexandria, Va., poses for a portrait in Washington, Monday, Oct. 19, 2009. A staff sergeant in the Army Reserves, Chase said that after her service the same guys she'd been close comrades with in Afghanistan didn't invite her to get drinks with them later because their significant others wouldn't approve. "One of the hardest things that I had deal with was, being a woman, was losing my best friends or my comrades to their families," Chase said.

Back home, women face many of the same issues as the men, but the personal stakes may be greater.

Female service members have much higher rates of divorce and are more likely to be a single parent. When they do seek help at VA medical centers, they are screening positive at a higher rate for military sexual trauma, meaning they indicated experiencing sexual harassment, assault or rape. Some studies have shown that female veterans are at greater risk for homelessness.

Former Army Sgt. Kayla Williams, an Iraq veteran wrote about her experience in a book titled, "Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army." She said she was surprised by the response she and other women from the 101st Airborne Division received from people in Clarksville, Tenn., near Fort Campbell, Ky.

She said residents just assumed they were girlfriends or wives of military men.

"People didn't come up to us and thank us for our service in the same way. They didn't give us free beers in bars in the same way when we first got back," said Williams, 34, of Ashburn, Va. "Even if you're vaguely aware of it, it still colors how you see yourself in some ways."

Genevieve Chase, 32, of Alexandria, Va., a staff sergeant in the Army Reserves, said the same guys who were her buddies in Afghanistan didn't invite her for drinks later on because their wives or girlfriends wouldn't approve.

"One of the hardest things that I had to deal with was, being a woman, was losing my best friends or my comrades to their families," Chase said.

It was that sense of loss, she said, that led her to get together with some other female veterans for brunch in New York last year. The group has evolved into the American Women Veterans, which now has about 2,000 online supporters, some of whom go on camping trips and advocate for veterans' issues. About a dozen marched in this year's Veteran's Day parade in New York.

"We just want to know that when we come home, America has our back," Chase said. "That's the biggest thing. Women are over there. You want to feel like you're coming home to open

arms, rather than to a public that doesn't acknowledge you for what you've just done and what you just sacrificed."

Rachel McNeill, a gunner during hostile convoys in Iraq, said she was so affected by the way people treated her when they learned she fought overseas that she even started to question whether she was a veteran.

She described the attitudes as "Oh, you didn't do anything or you were just on base," said McNeill, who suffers from postconcussive headaches, ringing in her ears, and other health problems related to roadside bomb blasts. The 25-year-old from Hollandale, Wis., was a sergeant in the Army Reserves.

She said she seemingly even got that response when she told the VA staff in Madison, Wis., of her work. She said she was frustrated to see in her VA paperwork how what she told them had been interpreted.

"It would say like, 'the patient rode along on convoys,' like I was just a passenger in the back seat," McNeill said.

Other women have had similar complaints. The VA leadership has said it recognizes it needs to do more to improve care for these veterans, and as part of changes in the works, female coordinators are in place at each medical center to give women an advocate. The agency is also reviewing comments on a proposal to make it easier for those who served in non-infantry roles, including women, to qualify for disability benefits for PTSD.

Sen. Patty Murray, a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs committee, recently asked VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and Defense Secretary Robert Gates to ensure that service members' combat experience is included on their military discharge papers, so later they can get benefits they are entitled to.



(AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

Research has shown that a lack of validation of a soldier's service can make their homecoming more difficult.

"What worries me is that women themselves still don't see themselves as veterans, so they don't get the care they need for post-traumatic stress syndrome or traumatic brain injury or even sexual assault, which obviously is more unique to women, so we still have a long ways to go," said Murray, D-Wash.

Chase said one challenge is getting female veterans to ask for changes.

"Most of us, because we were women service members, are so used to not complaining and not voicing our issues, because in the military that's considered weak. Nobody wants to hear the girl whine," Chase said.

McNeill said that when she's been out at restaurants and bars with the guys in her unit, they make sure she gets some recognition when the free beers go around.

"They'll make a point ... usually to say, 'She was over there with us, she was right next to us,'" McNeill said.

## Female Marines, Sailors Assist Afghan Women

By Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dwight Henderson  
Special to American Forces Press Service

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan, 12/29/09 - Throughout Afghanistan's Garmsir district, Marines and sailors of 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, interact with key leaders and locals to learn the needs of local Afghan villagers.

However, there is one gap that is hard to bridge -- the interaction between Marines and Afghan women. This is an issue that female Marines and sailors of the U.S. military engagement team worked to solve as they conducted patrols through the village of Tajik Khar Dec. 16 through 20.

With help from male Marines and members of the Afghan National Army, female Marines moved from compound to compound, hoping to speak to Afghan women to ascertain their medical and humanitarian assistance requirements. "This is extremely important," said Marine 2nd Lt. Carly E. Towers, the officer in charge of the engagement team. "Our mission out here is to talk to and work with the locals to build cooperation and security."

Because of local culture, male Marines are not allowed to look at, let alone talk to, any Afghan women. Even Afghan soldiers are not supposed to talk to the women of any compound, so the female Marines' efforts not only benefit other Marines, but the local Afghan military, as well. "It is good news for us," said Sgt. Shokorunnah, an Afghan soldier. "The female Marines came and talked to the women and found out their problems. I am very happy."

Before the all-female Marine team can enter a compound, they must first talk to the owner, generally a male who is not used to interacting with Marine females. "The general perception has been ranging from positive to dumbfounded," said Towers, who hails from Modesto,



*Marine Corps 2nd Lt. Carly E. Towers and Sahima Sheren, an interpreter, interact with local Afghan children during a patrol through Tajik Khar in Garmsir, Afghanistan, Dec. 18, 2009. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Dwight Henderson*

Calif. "We've had a lot of success in the past few days."

The key to her unit's mission success is to establish a connection with the Afghan women, Towers said. "We just try to sit down, talk to them, and get to know them a bit," said Towers, a Naval Academy graduate. "We ask them if they have any questions for us. We're trying to build rapport."

In deference to Afghan culture, Tower and her team members remove their helmets and don head scarves to cover their hair whenever they enter a compound. Through their interactions, Towers said, the female Marines have encountered many Afghan females who claim to have never left their compounds for fear of firefights and homemade bombs.

"We hear a lot of things from the women that we wouldn't hear from the men, or that would be said in a different way," Towers said. Towers' team has a female corpsman that can provide medical care to the Afghans if they so desire.

Relationships established through these interactions, Towers said, help to build bonds of trust between the Afghans and the Marines. (Marine Lance Cpl. Dwight Henderson serves with 1st Marine Division's Regimental Combat Team 7 public affairs.)

*Tue, 29 Dec 2009 12:46:00 -0600*

*US Dept of Defense*

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=57295>

## Are You Interested in Operating a Franchise?

To honor those men and women who have served in the U.S. military, the Veterans Transition Franchise Initiative, known as "**VetFran**," was developed to help them transition to civilian life.

**VetFran**, the idea of the late Don Dwyer Sr., founder of The Dwyer Group, is a voluntary effort of International Franchise Association member-companies that is designed to encourage franchise ownership by offering financial incentives to honorably discharged veterans. To date, nearly 400 franchise companies participate in the program and it has helped over 1400 veterans realize their entrepreneurial dream.

**Dean LoBrutto** is a veteran in business for himself. His business, The Entrepreneur Authority Consulting Group (TEACG), helps people explore their options in the franchise industry. When it comes to veterans, he is quick to bring the **VetFran** program to their attention.

Dean explains there are several reasons a franchisor would want to be in this program. "First of all it's a noble and honorable thing to do. Every freedom, liberty and opportunity we have can be traced back to the brave service provided by our men and women in the military. Secondly, honorably discharged veterans have

demonstrated their ability to successfully function within a system, and that's essentially what a franchise is. Some franchisors are quick to point out they enjoy better unit level performance from their veteran owned franchises. Given a franchisor enjoys a higher level success when this occurs, it makes this a sound business decision. Who would not trade an upfront discount for much more long term success? That's why this is such a great program for both parties".

Prior to jumping into an opportunity without much forethought and analysis, Dean suggests one take inventory of their "buyer values," regardless of the **VetFran** program benefits.

TEACG has a proprietary process and tool set that does just that. He says, "the smart buyers have a deep understanding of their skill set, passions, goals, the business models attributes and industries they find attractive, or not, and of course their financial comfort level. Our services, which are free to the buyer, help people approach this in a very structured manner. We save them time, money and reduce the risk of a bad fit."

For more information, you can contact Dean at:

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# VET★FRAN

Veterans Transition Franchise Initiative

## 'Fly the Flag' Program Reaches Milestone in Iraq

By Army Spc. Stephanie Cassinos  
Special to American Forces Press Service

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE BASRA, Iraq, Dec. 30, 2009 - Soldiers in Iraq fly dozens of donated U.S. flags each day outside of Multinational Division South's headquarters here as part of the "Fly the Flag" program.

"When I took on this program, I never thought it would be this popular," said Army 2nd Lt. Kenneth Toole, assigned to the division's visitors' bureau. "But when I am out there flying flags," Toole said, "it's not just an American flag that I am flying. I am doing something for someone else."

The visitors' bureau flew its 3,000th flag here Dec. 18. One of the flown flags was presented to members of "Serving Our Troops," an organization that has hosted steak dinners in St. Paul, Minn., Kuwait and Basra for soldiers and their families.

Toole and other members of the bureau daily tote dozens of donated U.S. flags to the flag-pole at the entrance of the division's headquarters building. There, they diligently raise, properly salute, lower and carefully fold each and every flag, while passers-by come to attention to pay tribute to the Stars and Stripes.



*Multinational Division South's commander, Army Maj. Gen. Rick Nash, Command Sgt. Maj. Doug Julin, and members of "Serving our Troops" observe Army 2nd Lt. Kenneth Toole flying the 3,000th flag over Contingency Operating Base Basra, Iraq, as part of the "Fly the Flag" program Dec. 18, 2009.*

Soldiers who volunteer their time to fly the flags find the experience a meaningful one, Toole said.

The donated flags, he said, represent "a true gift from the heart." The program "isn't just about the flags," Toole pointed out, adding it "is about doing something for someone else and being part of something bigger."

The U.S. flags that have been unfurled in Iraq, Toole said, will be displayed in American homes and offices in honor of service-members' accomplishments and sacrifices in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"The program has been a great success and it has been an honor to fly the flags over Basra," Toole said.

The last day flags will be flown for the program is Jan 2, 2010. It is estimated that by that time the visitor's bureau will have flown more than 3,500 flags, a number that exceeds Toole's goal of 1,000.

*(Army Spc. Stephanie Cassinos serves with Multinational Division South public affairs.)  
US Dept of Defense*

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=57299>

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## New York State Women Veterans Memorial

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The New York State Women Veterans Memorial honors women in military service over the past two hundred years. The memorial is in Albany on Madison Avenue near the New York State Museum and is entered through a grove of Japanese zelkova trees. Dedicated in December 1998, the memorial serves to educate the public on the role of New York State women in the armed forces—past, present, and future. Currently, women make up fourteen percent of the active-duty military force. Of the more than 1.2 million women veterans, over 61,000 reside in New York State.



Photo by: Michael Fredericks

An eight-foot-high bronze statue by Albany artist Hy Rosen depicts Liberty standing on the crown of England (as in the New York State flag), breaking free from the bonds of colonization. The right arm is raised and carrying the state flag. The statue is meant to symbolize the spirit, strength, and commitment of the women who defended our nation and its principles, from the Revolutionary War to the present. It was cast at the Tallix Foundry in Beacon, New York.

Two cast bronze bas-relief sculptures with images of women veterans from all eras of service flank the figure of Liberty. Also included are several engraved historical plaques constructed in bronze.

At the ground-breaking ceremony for the memorial in June 1998, Governor George E. Pataki said,

***"Throughout history, women have made tremendous sacrifices serving our nation with distinction. We have a duty and an obligation to acknowledge New York State women veterans' service in the name of freedom, and give family and friends a place to quietly remember their loved ones."***

<http://www.ogs.state.ny.us/visiting/cultural/tours/memorials/womenvet.html>



## Vietnam Women’s Memorial

On the grounds of the [Vietnam Veterans Memorial](#) is the first memorial placed in the nation's capital honoring women's military service. This emotional sculpture depicts three women, one caring for a soldier. The monument was designed by Glenna Goodacre, and was unveiled on Veterans Day, November 11, 1993. This monument is the culmination of a ten year grass roots effort honoring the 265,500 American women who served around the world during the Vietnam war.

**WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE**

Nearly **one-third**  
of the adult  
**homeless**  
population has  
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**SHE SERVED**  
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Department of Veterans Affairs | www.va.gov/health | Women Veterans Health Strategy, Health Care Group, WCOI 10/2009

## *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.

### Contact us at:

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and Newsletter Editor

*Originated in 1926, The Erie County Veterans Service Agency was the first of its kind in the State of New York. Due to the increased demand for such services, and accelerated by World War II, the Agency became a part of the County Government on January 1, 1945.*

*Since that time, this office has provided service to many thousands of veterans and their dependents, residing in Erie County.*

#### *Our Mission is*

*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.*



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](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)