

JOURNAL

WINTER
2012

Bridging the Gap

Texas Veterans Commission connects employers with the best workforce available: Veterans.

*The Past is Behind Us
The Future is Ahead
Let us all strive to
make the future
better and brighter
than the past ever was.*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

W.B. WILSON,

Secretary of Labor



RACE TO THE FINISH

Goliad, Texas, native Sgt. Ross Woods (center), assigned to A Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, crosses the finish-line, completing the 12-mile ruck march, during the Expert Infantryman Badge event, at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Jan 27, 2012. The ruck march is the final event required to earn the Expert Infantry Badge, and Woods is one of only two soldiers from the Stallion Battalion to compete this day. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. John Couffer/Released)

TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

JOURNAL

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In March 2011, I was honored to be named as the new Director of Veterans Employment Services (VES) at the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC). In fact, I have helped Texas Veterans find jobs since leaving the U.S. Army. While in college, I served as a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) work study assisting Veteran employment counselors. I began my professional career as a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) in the Lufkin Workforce Center and served as a Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER), where I received the Disabled American Veterans' National Commander's Award. I then held the position of Regional Veterans Employment Representative (RVER) for East Texas and Employment Services Operations Manager before becoming director.

Over 175 TVC Veterans Employment Representatives (VERs) located in workforce centers in more than 75 cities throughout Texas work to make sure that every Veteran and eligible Veteran spouse have access to long term and meaningful employment. VES accomplishes this goal through programs targeted to assist the needs of all Veterans:

- **Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP):** DVOPs provide intensive services to disabled Veterans or Veterans with significant barriers to employment.
- **Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER):** LVERs provide job coaching for Veterans with an emphasis on recently-separated Veterans and outreach to businesses and community-based organizations to promote hiring Veterans.
- **The Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines):** REALifelines is a comprehensive program to provide individualized job training, counseling and re-employment services to seriously injured or wounded Veterans. Locations include: Fort Bliss, Fort Hood and Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E):** VERs receive referrals from the VA VR&E counselors to deliver vocational rehabilitation, counseling services and employment guidance to Veterans.
- **Veteran Business Representatives (VBR):** The VBR program was developed in July 2011 by enhancing the individual job duties of VER staff to focus on business outreach activities. VBRs develop hiring opportunities within the local workforce area by promoting the benefits of hiring eligible Veterans to businesses. Since September 2011, the VBRs have established relationships with over 235 employers and posted over 400 job opportunities with hired Veterans receiving an average salary of \$44,000.
- **Family Employment Assistance Counselors (FEAC):** FEACs support and assist caretakers and family members of Wounded Warriors and Veterans as well as spouses of active duty military personnel. FEAC personnel provide employment services to spouses and family members of Veterans. FEAC personnel are located in San Antonio (BAMC) and Killeen (Fort Hood).

Last year, 38,714 Veterans found work from assistance provided by VES staff. Texas accounted for 18% of Veterans entering employment after being assisted by staff, and \$1.4 billion in wages were earned by over 80 percent of those 38,714 Veterans, who still were working after six months. VES has won 14 national employment awards from both Veteran and workforce organizations since 2006. To date, TVC has won 8 Veterans service organization awards for 2011.

You have my pledge as your Director of Veteran Employment Services that TVC will continue its commitment to ensure that Texas Veterans will receive the training and assistance they deserve to find employment they need.

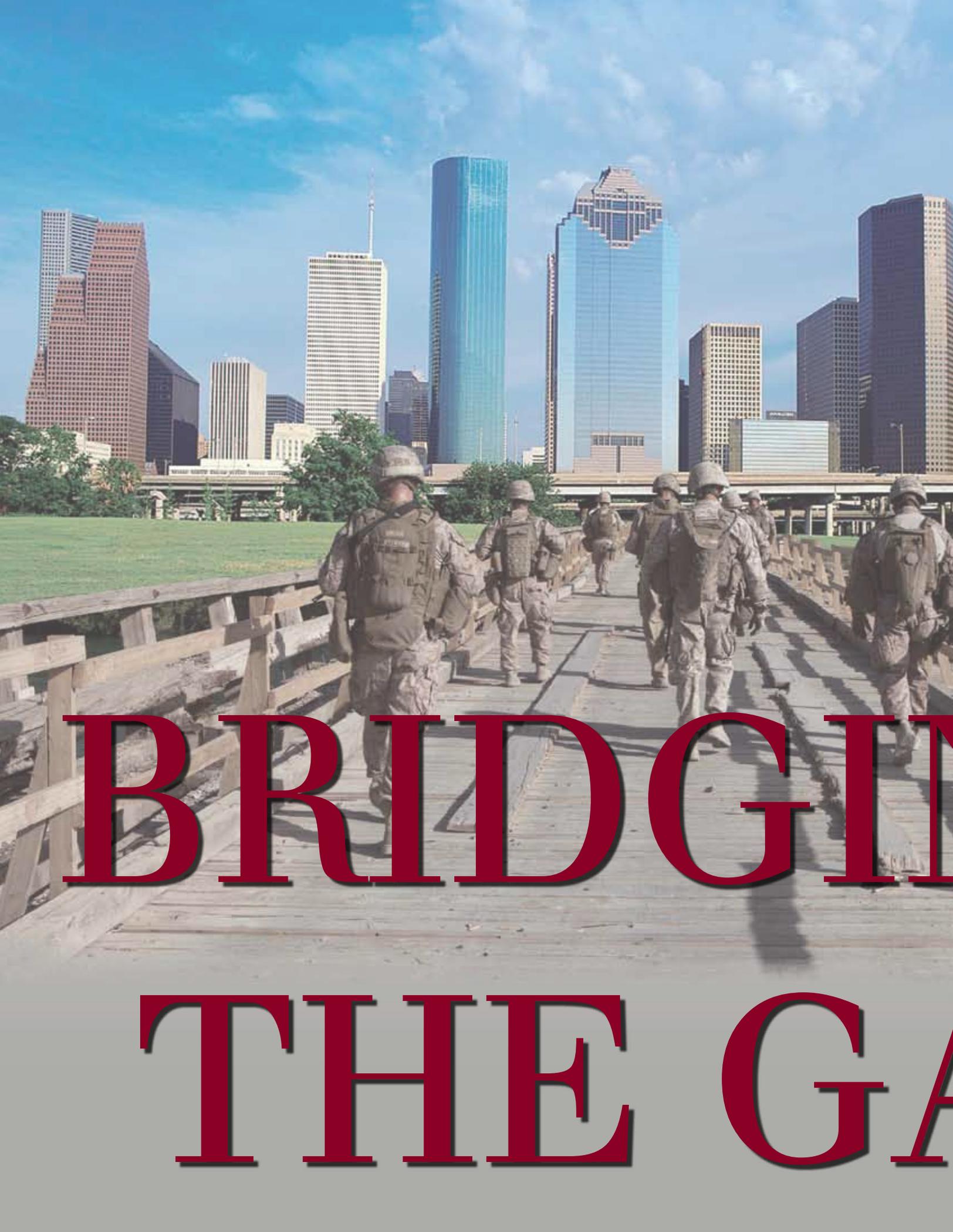
Sincerely,

Shawn Deabay
Director of Veterans Employment Services



**TEXAS VETERANS
COMMISSION**

The Texas Veterans Commission is the State agency serving the needs of our veterans and their families. Its purpose is to serve Texas veterans, their dependents or survivors in all matters pertaining to veterans' benefits and rights. The Texas Veterans Commission administers four programs: (1) Claims Representation & Counseling, (2) Veterans Employment Services, (3) Veterans Education, and (4) Fund for Veterans' Assistance. Through these programs, TVC helps obtain state and federal veterans' benefits, such as compensation, pension, death benefits, employment assistance, educational assistance, hospitalization and outpatient care, as well as numerous other benefits and privileges.



BRIDGING

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TEXAS
VETERANS
COMMISSION
CONNECTS
EMPLOYERS
WITH THE BEST
WORKFORCE
AVAILABLE:
VETERANS.

STORY AND PHOTOS PROVIDED BY
CHERI SMITH,
TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION, AUSTIN

U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. John Toolan and Regional Command Southwest (RC SW) members walk over the Kajaki dam bridge en route to a bazaar in the Helmand province, Afghanistan, May 3, 2011. Toolan is the commander of RC SW. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Mallory S. VanderSchans) Houston photo © Corbis. All Rights Reserved.

The Missing Link: Veterans Business Representatives

In 2009, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) created a Veterans Business Outreach position to promote the hiring of Veterans. Based on the enormous success of this initiative, TVC expanded the program by hiring three additional representatives, in September 2011, and designating them as Veterans Business Representatives (VBR). The VBRs are strategically located in Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, San Antonio and Austin and are vested in building relationships with large companies and influential Texas employers in an effort to promote the hiring of highly qualified Veterans. Additionally, they are in the process of establishing a network of employer organizations to include the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), Chambers of Commerce and other local employer organizations in order to provide dedicated employment resources for Texas Veterans.

Since its establishment, several newspapers, television news programs, and radio stations have featured the VBR initiative. Through media coverage and active marketing, TVC has been inundated with employer phone calls and email correspondence from across Texas and the nation, eager to hire skilled Veterans. Here are a few of the employers across Texas that answered the call to seek out and hire Texas Veterans.

Houston, TX - Spitzer Industries

In the Houston area, Spitzer Industries, Inc. has proven to be a staunch supporter in hiring Texas Veterans. Cullen Spitzer founded Spitzer Industries, Inc. in 1996 to serve the oil and gas industry and employs over 900 people.

In August 2011, Matt Medford, an Air Force Veteran, met with the CEO of Spitzer and proposed actively recruiting qualified Veterans for the company. The CEO was enthusiastic about the idea and immediately appointed Medford as Spitzer's Military Liaison Officer. Medford then contacted the Houston VBR, Kris Vasquez, who arranged a meeting with him. They established a strong working relationship to begin screening and contacting qualified Veterans for the company to meet. Medford's dedication to hiring Veterans is visible in his eagerness to interview every Veteran TVC refers to Spitzer.

"Our CEO was very pleased with the working relationship with TVC and the quality of Veteran candidates," said Medford.

Through this partnership, Spitzer Industries has hired nine Veterans and established relationships with area Veterans County Service Officers in order to reach Veterans in isolated areas.

Dallas, TX - Sterling Securities

In the Dallas area, Sterling Securities specifically has sought Veteran employees for their extensive security training and field experience. Sterling Securities, Inc. provides high quality professional security officers to numerous organizations throughout Dallas/Ft. Worth and Houston.

In their search for highly qualified candidate, Sterling Securities contacted the Dallas region VBR, Kevin Smith, with a request to find qualified Veteran candidates for a Security Supervisor position that needed to be filled immediately. Within three hours, Smith and the Denton Veteran Employment Representatives (VERs), Bill Quiett and Ted Spencer, screened and submitted two qualified candidates for the position.

"Although Sterling originally listed only one Security Supervisor position, they were so impressed with the two submittals that they ultimately decided to hire both candidates for full time employment," said Smith. "This is a great example of TVC staff exhibiting both the desire to act quickly for our Veterans and exhibiting the teamwork needed to effectively execute the processes already in place."

Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX - J.B. Hunt

J.B. Hunt employs more than 14,500 people in 400 locations across the lower 48 states and offers a wide array of job opportunities as one of the largest transportation companies in North America. Recognized by TVC as the Texas Veterans Commission National Employer of the Year in September 2010, J.B. Hunt has hired 22 Veterans in the past year. The Dallas/Ft. Worth area VBR, Kevin Smith, has forged a strong working relationship with J.B. Hunt and has facilitated the company CEO's passion for helping Veterans.

"J.B. Hunt recognizes the sacrifices made by our military Veterans and their families, and appreciates the dedication and commitment they make to our nation," said John Roberts, President & CEO, J.B. Hunt. "They represent what is great about America and we place a high priority on supporting them, whether they

are an employee who is called to serve, or a Veteran returning to the workforce."

San Antonio, TX - Lowe's Home Improvement

Founded in 1946, Lowe's employees people in over 1,725 stores across the United States, Canada and Mexico and were ranked the 49th largest company by Fortune 500.

In October 2011, the San Antonio area VBR, Bryan Daye, facilitated a partnership between TVC and 21 human resource managers from Lowe's Home Improvement stores in the San Antonio and surrounding areas. Since that time Lowe's has hired several Veterans and is looking to fill key management positions with Veterans.

Austin, TX - Brazos County River Authority and the American Water Association

In the Central Texas area which includes Austin and surrounding areas, VBR Neil Cochran has established partnerships with employers in healthcare, manufacturing, transportation, construction, and information technology industries. Recently Cochran started working with the Brazos County River Authority and their partner, the American Water Association. Together, the two companies are improving employment opportunities for Veterans by actively recruiting and training Veterans for various employment fields, including water system plant operators and maintenance mechanics.

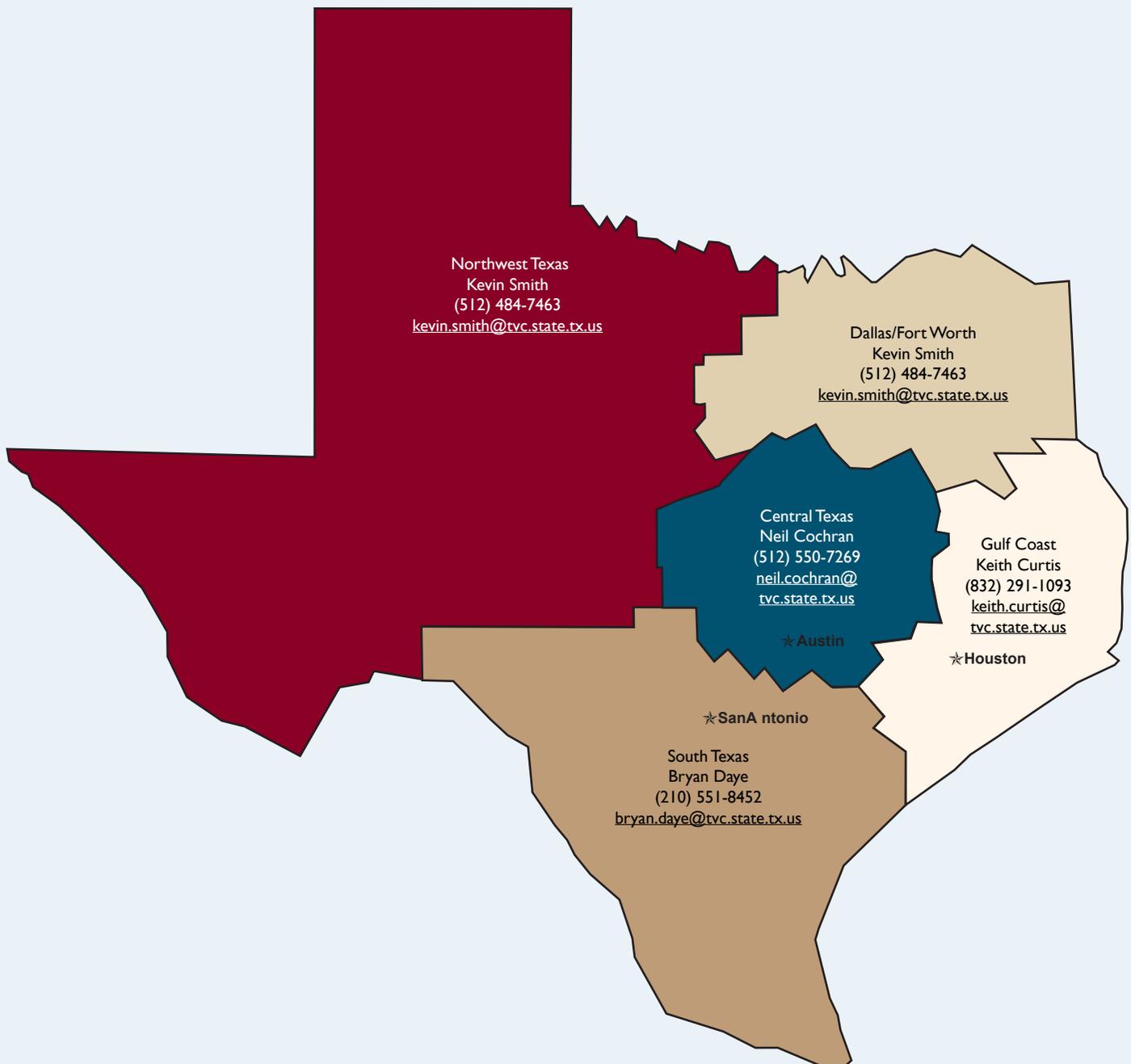
More help is needed

Since September 2011, the VBRs have established relationships with over 235 employers and posted over 400 job opportunities with hired Veterans earning an average salary of \$44,000. Currently the military is drawing down troops overseas, and many Veterans are trying to find employment in an economically challenged situation. The VBR program is bridging the gap between job-seeking Veterans and employers that are searching for skilled workers who are trained and dependable enough to meet their organizational needs. With the help of our state, local, and federal employers, the Texas Veterans Commission invites you to join our partnership as we continue making a difference in the lives of our Texas Veterans and their families. 🇺🇸



From left: Matt Medford with two recently hired veterans. J.B. Hunt honors veteran employees. HR managers from Lowe's.

Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Business Representatives Regional Structure





veterans

helping

veterans



Story by Cheri Smith, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Photos provided by Yolanda Jones



When Yolanda Jones first walked into the office of Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Veterans Employment Representative (VER) Robert Taylor in April 2011, she had recently been laid off from her job and was having difficulty attaining suitable employment. Working closely with Jones, Taylor soon discovered that Jones felt her Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was triggered by particular job conditions and that she needed a job that would not interfere with her PTSD treatment.

Jones was diagnosed with PTSD after her deployment to Iraq in 2003 through 2005, and a doctor prescribed medication that was designed to help her control the symptoms of PTSD. Unfortunately, the effects of the medication interfered with her concentration so she had refrained from using it during working hours.

During her job search, Jones found that a Veteran's PTSD can easily be triggered if the work environment is not conducive to their health or level of functionality. In her previous work experience, she realized that she lost motivation and was easily upset when the organizational procedures were inconsistent or lacked routine.

Taylor counseled Jones about her PTSD medication regimen and helped her tailor her job search for a position that would allow her to take her medication on a regularly-scheduled basis. He also helped her modify her Work-In-Texas account to select non-rotating shift positions in her field.

Jones would be an invaluable asset to any company. Well-educated with a master's degree in counseling and development, an associate and a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and publishing a book on her war experience as a single mother deployed to Iraq called, "Scarred, But Not Broken," were just some of her accomplishments. Jones worked with Eric Wright, one of TVC's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Representatives, in order to gain access to all available federal and state-funded assistance and was enrolled in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program. Based on specific requirements of the WIA program, her VER decided to focus on helping her attain suitable employment through Work In Texas (WIT) and networking.

After six months of job search and interviews, Yolanda acquired a federal position with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and remembers she didn't make that journey alone.

"I will always be appreciative to the Texas Veterans Commission, but most importantly, I want to especially thank my TVC Representatives, Robert Taylor and Eric Wright, who both worked very diligently in assisting and guiding me through the appropriate steps; in order for me to be where I am today," said Jones. "These two individuals made a huge impact on my life, as a Veteran, communicating to another Veteran. People don't often understand how important it is to have Veterans assisting other Veterans, especially when they're transitioning from deployment. But, I am an example that it was very conducive to what I needed at the time; for there were many days I became angry, irritated, and even agitated, due to several factors triggering and affecting my ability to remain focused. Yet these TVC Representatives and Veterans kept me grounded and focused, by reminding me to just take one day at a time. I will forever thank you."

Though she has faced enormous financial, personal, and physical adversity, she did not succumb to the pressure. Jones is determined to work and to be successful.

"Once a soldier, always a soldier," said Jones. "It is what has gotten me through a lot of dark days; even when the fog appears so thick."

That survival instinct, determination, and pride makes the difference in selecting a Veteran as an employee. 🇺🇸

Legal Initiative reaches out to Conroe Veterans

By Tracy Mathews,
Texas Veterans Commission, Houston

The Houston Bar Association (HBA), the Montgomery County Bar Association, and the Woodlands Bar Association recently co-sponsored a free legal clinic as part of the Veterans Legal Initiative for Veterans at the VFW Post 4709 located in Conroe, Texas. Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Regional Office Supervisor Abel Guevara and TVC Veterans Service Representative Tracy Mathews, as well as Montgomery Veterans County Service Officer Kay Lee, were available to provide claims assistance to Veterans in attendance.

The HBA's Veterans Legal Initiative was initiated in 2008 by then-president of the HBA, Travis Sales, as a part of Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans, a State Bar of Texas program. The mission of Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans is to develop and assist pro bono legal clinics throughout the state for military Veterans who otherwise cannot afford or do not have access to the legal services they need.

The Initiative works with the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program to set up legal advice clinics and refer low-income Veterans in need of legal representation to pro bono attorneys. The Initiative only refers civil cases such as family law, estate planning, probate, and landlord/tenant. More than 5,000 Veterans have been assisted through the Initiative, and more than 700 attorneys volunteer each year.

The legal clinics were initially held on a monthly basis at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Michael DeBakey Hospital, but due to the volume of requests for legal assistance, the frequency increased to weekly clinics. Now Veterans, their spouses, and spouses of deceased Veterans can receive free legal advice



Photo provided by Tara Shockley; Communications Director Houston Bar Association

A Veteran receives assistance at the Veterans Legal Initiative for Veterans in Conroe, Texas. Texas Veterans Commission Regional Office Supervisor Abel Guevara and Veterans Service Representative Tracy Mathews attended the event in order to assist Veterans with any claims questions they may have had.

every Friday from 2 p.m. -5 p.m. on the neurogeriatric wing.

Because the Initiative receives requests from outside Harris County's jurisdiction, the Texas Access to Justice Foundation provided a grant to the Houston Bar Foundation, in conjunction with the Jefferson County Bar Foundation and the Fort Bend Lawyers Care, to expand services in an effort to provide free legal clinics to a greater number of Veterans. This grant now allows the Initiative to reach and assist Veterans with their legal needs who are living

in Walker, Montgomery, Waller, Grimes, Brazoria, Galveston, Fort Bend, Jefferson, Orange, Hardin, Chambers, Liberty and San Jacinto counties.

In addition to the legal clinics held at the Michael DeBakey Hospital, there are also programs established at the residential facilities for Veterans at Midtown Terrace and DeGeorge Union Station in Houston.

For more information about upcoming clinics call 713-333-VETS (8387) or visit www.hba.org.

Increase in certain burial and funeral benefits and plot allowances for Veterans

By Dennis A. Lawrence,
Texas Veterans Commission, Houston

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced the following changes to plot and burial allowances. Effective Oct. 1, 2011, burial and plot benefits are increased from \$300 to \$700 for:

- burial reimbursement for Veterans who died while properly hospitalized by the VA, and
- plot reimbursement for Veterans who are entitled to receive compensation or pension benefits, or are otherwise eligible for a plot allowance.



The increased rate applies for deaths occurring on or after Oct. 1, 2011.

Beginning in fiscal year 2013, the burial and plot allowances may be increased annually based upon the Consumer Price Index for the

preceding 12-month period. The first opportunity for such an annual increase is Oct. 1, 2012.

The term "properly hospitalized by the VA" includes facilities in which the deceased was properly admitted for hospital, nursing home, or domiciliary care by the VA.

There is no increase in the burial allowance for indigent Veterans or Veterans who were not hospitalized by the VA at the time of death.

Program helps Veterans go back to school

By Connie Jacksits,
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) Program is a little known and under-utilized education program designed to assist Veterans in achieving their education and career goals. Many Veterans, of all ages, avoid going to college because they believe they lack the needed academic skills. VUB is a free U.S. Department of Education program designed to help Veterans refresh their academic skills and give them the confidence needed to successfully complete their college degrees.

Thanks to the Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) Program, Veterans are able to get a degree and pursue the career of their choosing.

The VUB Program services include:

- Basic skills to help Veterans successfully complete a high school equivalency program and gain admission to college education programs.
- Short-term remedial or refresher classes for high school graduates that have put off pursuing a college education.
- Assistance with applications to the college or university of choice.
- Assistance with applying for financial aid.
- Personalized counseling.

- Academic advice and assistance.
- Career counseling.
- Assistance in getting Veteran services from other available resources.
- Exposure to social events, academic programs, and other educational activities not usually available to disadvantaged people.

The VUB Program can help improve skills in:

- Mathematics.
 - Foreign Language.
 - Composition.
 - Laboratory Science.
 - Reading.
 - Literature.
 - Computer Basics.
 - Any other subjects needed for success in education beyond high school.
 - Tutorial and Study Skills Assistance.
- To be eligible for VUB Veterans must:
- Be a U.S. Military Veteran with 181 or more days active-duty service and discharged on/after Jan. 31, 1955, under conditions other than dishonorable.
 - Be either low-income (based on family income and number of dependents) or potential first generation college students (neither parent earned a four-year

degree).

In Fiscal Year 2011 (for the 2011-12 Project Year), the U. S. Department of Education awarded grants totaling \$13,180,173 to 47 institutions nationwide. Currently, the only project in Texas awarded a grant is the Veterans Upward Bound Program at The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB). This program has been providing assistance to all eligible Cameron County Veterans since 2000.

According to Mr. David F. Rivera, Program Director at UTB, “the program is a one-stop-shop geared to provide the services that Veterans need as they transition from the military to a college way of life. In the VUB program, the Veteran is the most important customer, and we strive to be the best guide in their adventure in entering and succeeding in Higher Education. We are proud to serve our nation’s heroes as honorably as they have served our nation.”

For more information regarding the program at UTB, please contact Mr. David F. Rivera at (956) 882-7127/7609 or by email at david.f.rivera@utb.edu.

Information regarding the grant application process is available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triovub/index.html>.

Congress creates new education benefit for unemployed Veterans

By Connie Jacksits,
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Congress passed, and the President has signed into law, the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. Included in this new law is the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) for unemployed Veterans.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Labor (DoL) are working together to roll out this new program on July 1, 2012. The new program will provide retraining for Veterans hardest hit by current economic conditions.

The VRAP offers 12 months of training assistance to unemployed Veterans. To qualify, a Veteran must:

- Be at least 35 but no more than 60 years old.

- Be unemployed (as determined by DoL) with special consideration given to Veterans who have been unemployed for more than 26 weeks.
- Have an other than dishonorable discharge.
- Not be eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g.: the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance).
- Not be in receipt of VA compensation due to unemployability.
- Not be enrolled in a federal or state job training program.

Nationwide, the program is limited to 45,000 participants during Fiscal Year 2012, and to 54,000 participants from Oct. 1, 2012, through March 31, 2014. Because of the restrictions, Texas may not get more than 4,500

participants.

Participants may receive up to 12 months of assistance at the full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill–Active Duty program (currently \$1,473 per month). The benefit will be paid directly to the Veteran for payment of expenses including tuition, fees, and books.

Applications will be submitted through DoL and benefits paid by VA. Upon completion of his/her program, DoL will provide employment assistance to every Veteran who participates in this program. Participants must be enrolled in an approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school. The program must lead to an Associate Degree, Non-College Degree, or a Certification, and train the Veteran for a high demand occupation. 🇺🇸

Family Employment Assistance Counselor (FEAC) Program assists military spouses

By Cheri Smith,
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, military spouse unemployment has reached 26 percent. Change of location and deployments cause military families to move from duty station to duty station across the United States and overseas.

In 2009, the Texas legislature funded the Family Employment Assistance Counselors (FEAC) program. Counselors are strategically located at Fort Hood and Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

The program provides a full range of employment, training, and placement services for spouses and caregivers of active duty service members. In addition to serving as an advocate for employment and training opportunities, the FEAC counselors work closely with community-based organizations to best support military families.

FEAC Rhonda Natera, located in Copperas

Cove, Texas, serves the Fort Hood area. Natera seeks out and contacts newly arriving spouses and conducts outreach targeted to priority of service spouses, Wounded Warrior soldier-spouses, and other qualified family members. She provides career and vocational guidance, labor market information, resume assistance, and other services as needed. Natera's extensive knowledge of available Veterans' services is instrumental in helping struggling military families.

FEAC Patrick Driscoll serves the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. Driscoll began his career with the Texas Veterans Commission working as a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) counselor and also spent time as a REALifelines Counselor where he focused on assisting wounded warriors, their family members, and/or caregivers' transition to employment. In addition to providing employment services as a FEAC, Driscoll provides in-depth knowledge of supporting programs such as resources for survivor benefits and

social services, just to name a few.

Through his network of Veterans' organizations in San Antonio and his well-established relationships with organizations such as Operation Homefront, Catholic Charities, San Antonio Food Bank, Family Services of San Antonio, and other Veteran service and social service organizations and agencies, Driscoll has been successful in securing employment and personal services for the families of Veterans.

In 2011, over 136 clients received assistance from the San Antonio FEAC program led by Patrick Driscoll, including spouses looking for immediate assistance. With his assistance, 38 spouses found employment, 17 participants transitioned to new locations, and four participants were enrolled in full time education programs.

To find more information about the FEAC program, please visit <http://texas-veterans.com/dependents/employment-assistance>.

Granbury Veterans Employment Representative wins Hometown Heroes Award

By Cheri Smith,
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Robin Greer, a Veteran of the U.S. Navy from Granbury, Texas, and Veterans Employment Representative (VER) for the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) was selected as a Hometown Hero by Stage Stores, Inc. this Veterans Day.

As a special tribute for Veterans Day, Stage Stores, Inc. recognized two U.S. Veterans as Hometown Heroes. The Veterans were selected from nominations made by store associates around the country and were selected to honor their military and community service. Greer and Veteran Derek Mayes of the U.S. Air Force from Indiana were surprised with a trip to San Antonio to attend the award presentation, courtesy of Stage Stores.

In addition to recognizing Greer and Mayes, Stage Stores also donated \$375,000 to Operation Homefront. The donations came from the sale of patriotic-themed, reusable shopping totes and were made possible in part by the outstanding support from customers who

purchased the totes.

During the award ceremony, Andy Hall, president and CEO of Stage Stores, Inc., presented the check to Jim Knotts, CEO of Operation Homefront, at their headquarters in San Antonio, Texas, as well as honoring Greer and Mayes with certificates.

Greer was not expecting the honor. "When a representative of Stage Stores, Inc. called to let me know I had been named their Hometown Hero I was absolutely shocked," said Greer. "I've been serving Veterans and volunteering in my community in one fashion or another since I was 16 so to be recognized for following my passion and doing what I love is a huge honor. I cannot think of anything else I would rather do in life and am blessed to have a career where I can give back to those who have given so much."

At this year's annual Texas Veterans Commission Fall Conference, Greer was recognized by her colleagues for receiving the Distinguished Service Award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). In addition to receiving the award, Greer nominated the winner



Photo provided by Cheri Smith, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Robin Greer, Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Representative, accepts the Hometown Hero Award from Andy Hall, president and CEO of Stage Stores, Inc., along with Derek Mayes on the right.

of the American Legion Department of Texas Employment Office of the Year, the Granbury Workforce Center.

Over the past year, TVC has received numerous letters and emails from Veteran clients around the state commending Greer on her customer service and helpfulness. Greer is truly making a difference in Veterans' and their families' lives.

Texas Veterans Commission awards nearly \$3 million in 'Housing4TexasHeroes' Grants

By Troy Davenport,
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Texas Veterans Commission recently awarded eight organizations nearly \$3 million in grants from "Housing4TexasHeroes," a Texas Veterans Commission program announced by Texas Governor Rick Perry in August which awards grants to organizations that provide temporary and permanent housing to Texas Veterans and their families.

The efforts of Gov. Perry and legislative leaders during the 82nd legislative session helped create the Housing4TexasHeroes program with funds provided through the current state budget from the Texas Housing Trust fund to the Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

Organizations receiving grants for temporary housing may provide transitional housing to homeless Veterans, short-term rental assistance to low-income Veterans, or assistance to families of Veterans who are undergoing long-term treatment at a medical facility in Texas. The organizations that received grant for temporary housing assistance are MHMR Tarrant County, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston – Houston, Community Action Corporation of South Texas, and Families in Crisis, Inc.

Organizations receiving grants for permanent housing may provide new home construction or home renovation or modification for disabled Veterans with a physical disability or severe injury. Green Doors, Meals on Wheels and More, Inc., Alamo Area Development Corporation, and Houston Habitat for Humanity, Inc. were awarded grants for permanent hous-

ing assistance.

MHMR Tarrant County received a grant for \$400,000. The goal of the Soldier Support Housing Assistance Program at Tarrant County MHMR is to prevent homelessness among Veterans and their families in Tarrant County by providing housing assistance for up to six months along with referrals to other supportive services.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston – Houston received a grant for \$500,000. Catholic Charities will provide rapid re-housing or homeless prevention services to Veterans and their dependents that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless through financial assistance for deposits for rent and/or utilities, childcare, moving expenses, food, emergency supplies, and transportation assistance in the form of bus passes or gas cards. Rent and/or utility assistance will be on a gradually decreasing scale over a period of six months at 100% for the first three months and 50% for the second three months.

Community Action Corporation of South Texas received a grant for \$200,000. The project will provide a rental assistance program to Veterans in San Patricio County. The program will target low-income Veterans in need of temporary rental assistance, with priority going to disabled Veterans and those with children under the age of 5.

Families in Crisis, Inc. received a grant for \$300,000 to provide shelter, a 24-hour crisis hotline, crisis intervention, case management, housing search and rental assistance, transportation and supportive services. The project will provide homeless and at-risk for homelessness Veterans and their families with housing search assistance, deposit assistance, and up to 12 months rental assistance. Services include case management, life skills classes, support groups, and information and referral. Assistance will also be provided for Veterans and spouses fleeing domestic violence.

Green Doors received a grant of \$600,000. Green Doors' mission is to prevent homelessness and poverty



Photo provided by Green Doors

Meadow Crest, transitional housing, available through Green Doors.

housing. The goal of the Green Doors Veterans Housing Stability Project is to ensure that vulnerable Veterans and their families are stably housed and moving toward self-sufficiency by providing rental assistance; acquire rehabilitative apartments for disabled homeless Veterans; and provide permanent supportive and affordable housing.

Meals on Wheels and More, Inc. was awarded \$400,000. The project will repair homes with safety issues, remove accessibility and architectural barriers and renovate homes to provide safe, clean and secure environments for Veterans and their families.

Alamo Area Development Corporation was awarded \$400,000. The project will provide eligible disabled and/or low-income Veterans with the ability to make repairs to their homes or provide rental assistance and other assistance to ameliorate housing issues and encourage stability for Veterans and their families.

Houston Habitat for Humanity, Inc was awarded \$160,500. The organization's Home Assistance Program for Veterans will address the housing needs of Veterans and their families by making modifications to an existing home or construction of a new home.

"Housing4TexasHeroes is another example of the commitment that Governor Perry and the Texas Legislature have made to our Texas Veterans and their families," said Executive Director of the Texas Veterans Commission Thomas Palladino. "With 44 organizations requesting more than 18 million dollars, it is clear that there is a significant need for these services within the Veterans' community." 🇺🇸



Photo provided by Green Doors

Plumpton, transitional housing, available through Green Doors.

Message from the Vice President of the Veterans County Service Officers Association of Texas

Hello again from the front lines of the Veterans County Service Officers Association (VCSOAT). I hope everyone's having a pleasant and safe winter. Like you, I love the sunshine but I truly appreciate the rain—the local lakes are looking much better and that's good news for you lakers.

If you were able to attend the 14th Annual Veterans Summit, I don't need to remind you of the great time that we had. If you missed it--you should plan to attend next year. There were 400-500+ people in attendance which made for some great networking opportunities. There were vendors, and the hotel hospitality was generous.

Some of the highlights included grant writing and grant reporting breakout sessions. Col. David Sutherland was the keynote speaker, and his presentation was memorable. During the Summit, we received updates on Veterans' initiatives such as the 100% tax benefit for surviving spouses and the Veterans' designation on the Texas driver's license.

We also had a chance to meet the new Women Veterans Coordinator for the Texas Veterans Commission, Angela Shinn. Tracy Little, VCSOAT President, and Yolanda Williams, VCSOAT Assistant Regional Director for North Texas, have attended a women's Veterans meeting

in Austin, Texas, with Shinn. They reported that the meeting went extremely well.



Our quarterly VCSOAT meeting also went well, and our treasurer made a surprise announcement that he had discovered non-profit status documents while researching our historical files. Yes, we already have our non-profit status as a Veterans service organization, and that means that we can apply for grants such as the Fund for Veterans' Assistance. Special thanks to our treasurer, Mr. James Henderson for his attention-to-detail. Yes, it's spring training time again.

This year we will travel to the shores of Corpus Christi to renew our commitment, strengthen our tenacity and pray for patience. Please bring your best practices/ideas to share with others during social time. The details for the spring training will be forthcoming as soon as they are finalized. I hope to see you there.

Thanks for your support,
Les Cooks
Vice President, VCSOAT

Voices of Veterans “Every Veteran Has a Story to Tell” Exhibit on Display at the Capitol Visitors Center



Photo by Al Puga, Bee County Veterans County Service Officer

The entrance to the Voices of Veterans “Every Veteran Has a Story to Tell” at the Capitol Visitors Center in Austin, Texas.

From: *Texas Veterans Voice*,
A publication of the
Texas Veterans Land Board

The Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans program was created to capture oral histories of Texas veterans from all eras of combat, from World War II to Afghanistan. Free to any Texas veteran, the Voices of Veterans program provides a lasting legacy for historians, friends and family members, and helps us honor and remember the sacrifices of all Texas veterans.

The mission of the program is to remind future Texans that ordinary men and women, when faced with overwhelming adversity, can accomplish extraordinary things.

Since Veterans Day, November 11th, 2011, (11.11.11), the Voices of Veterans oral history program has been highlighted in a new multimedia exhibit at the Capitol Visitors Center in the historic Old Land Office on the Capitol grounds.

Entitled “Every Veteran Has a Story to Tell,” the exhibit features a short video on the program, multimedia iPad kiosks with actual selections from the veterans’ interviews from the program, as well as personal memorabilia. The exhibit runs through September 2012.

The “Every Veteran has a Story to Tell” exhibit was made possible by the State Preservation Board and the Texas Capitol Visitors Center. 🇺🇸

Women Veterans Coordinator begins work

By Angela Shinn & Rachel Howell,
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Through the House Appropriations Committee approving the addition of \$159,424 in House Bill 1, the state budget bill, the Texas Veterans Commission hired a Women Veterans Coordinator for the 2012-2013 biennium. The new coordinator, Angela Shinn, is establishing the Texas Women Veterans Program to assist women Veterans in the state to attain equitable access to federal and state Veterans' benefits and services.

Since the 1700's, women have played an increasing role in the U.S. Armed Forces. About 10 percent of the U.S. Forces currently serving in Afghanistan and Iraq are women. The higher number of women serving translates to a higher number of women Veterans coming home to Texas. The population of female Veterans in Texas is expected to grow by over 26 percent by the end of the 2012-2013 biennium. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), female Veterans access Veterans' services at a higher rate than men.

Many women have deployed abroad and have fought, or are currently fighting, in

combat and non-combat units in the Gulf War Era. Women engage in combat, incur combat related injuries and illnesses, and return home as disabled combat Veterans.

The Texas Veterans Commission Women Veterans Program will ensure that Texas women Veterans have equitable access to federal and state Veterans' services and benefits; perform outreach to improve women Veterans' awareness of eligibility for federal and state Veterans' services and benefits; make recommendations to the Texas Veterans Commission to improve benefits and services; review programs, research projects and start initiatives designed to address or meet the needs of women Veterans; incorporate women Veterans' issues in the Texas Veterans Commission strategic plan; and participate in national forums and committees for women Veterans.

With the addition of Shinn, the Texas Veterans Commission will be better able to address all needs of women Veterans and continue to bring the best services to Veterans in Texas.

Shinn comes to TVC with military, corporate, and state government experience. She is the daughter of a career Army Non-Commissioned Officer, and was commissioned in the

U.S. Army in Ordinance after graduation from the United States Military Academy – West Point.

She served in III Corps at Fort Hood, Texas, and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Shinn holds a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Engineering Management from the United States Military Academy, a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) from Arizona State University, and a Masters of International Management (MIM) from the American Graduate School of International Business – Thunderbird.

“At TVC, we strive to raise awareness of women Veteran contributions and services to our country and state, as well as inform and educate women Veterans about the benefits and services available to them,” Shinn said. “We assist Veterans and their survivors with obtaining the benefits they have earned. By partnering with federal, state, local, and non-profit organizations, TVC aims to provide well-rounded options for serving Texas Women Veterans.”

Shinn may be reached at angela.shinn@tvc.state.tx.us.

Texas Veterans Commission Summit brings Veterans service providers together

By Rachel Howell,
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

The Texas Veterans Commission held the 14th Annual Veterans Summit at the Crowne Plaza Austin on January 31 and February 1, 2012.

The theme, *Helping Veterans Starts with Collaboration and Coordination*, echoed throughout the Summit as 500 attendees came to discuss and learn about Veterans' issues in Texas. Veteran service providers met and networked, and the new two-day format was deemed a success by those who attended.

“The TVC Veterans Summit was an incredible opportunity to connect with organizations focused on serving Texas Veterans,” said Serena Hayden, Community Partnership Manager for Warrior Gateway, one of the vendors with a booth in the Exhibit Hall. “Partnership is vital to successfully serving our Veterans, and the Veterans Summit provided the perfect platform for building those relationships.”

Seventy-three groups set up booths in the

Exhibit Hall and had the opportunity to share what they do to help Texas Veterans and their families with those in attendance and to find new ways to work together.

During the opening session and the breakout sessions, attendees heard from leaders of the Texas Legislature and the Veterans' community such as Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, Rep. Joe Pickett, Rep. Jim Pitts, Sen. Tommy Williams, Jerry Patterson, General Land Office Commissioner, and Pritz Navaratnasingam, Director of the Houston VA Regional Office.

Breakout sessions included: From House to Home: Veteran Housing Issues in Texas, Veterans and the 83rd Session: Looking Ahead to the Prospects and Challenges for Veterans in the Legislature, Where Do We Go From “Peer?” Veterans' Mental Health Initiatives in Texas, and How Support Organizations Help Women Veterans Maximize their Opportunities.

The conference concluded with a keynote during the closing session by Col. David Sutherland, Special Assistant to the Chairman

of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

“It takes individuals like you,” said Col. Sutherland. “As you leave today, the call to action is build public awareness, increase community involvement, and promote community based services.”

Warrior Gateway has taken Col. Sutherland's advice already.

“Since the conference, I have met with several of the organizations I was introduced to, and am excited about working together to better serve Veterans and their families,” said Hayden.

To view pictures and videos, please visit www.facebook.com/texasveteranscommission.



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