

Potter County Veterans News

A quarterly publication of the
Potter County Veterans Affairs Dept.

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Welcome, Healing Waters vets! (see page 4)

Expanded Hours At Potter County VA Clinic



Potter County Commissioners and Veterans Affairs Director Will Worthington continue to work with the Bath (N.Y.) VA Medical Center for expansion of services at a VA medical clinic located at Mapleview, just off Rt. 872 in east Coudersport. The center was established to bring services close to the veterans, many of

whom had previously been forced to travel to Bath, Erie or other distant locations for basic medical care. The Potter County clinic is staffed by personnel trained to process new enrollments, update patient information, conduct screenings and deliver primary care and/or referrals, depending on each veteran's needs. Staff includes:

- **Jonathan Barber**, medical provider and nurse practitioner
- **Tina Wesneski**, registered nurse
- **Liz Dyer**, licensed practical nurse

Most recently, the clinic extended its operating hours from one to two days per week. It is open for primary care on Thursdays from 8 am to 4 pm. During the Monday shift (also 8 am to 4 pm), Tina Wesneski and Liz Dyer offer services such as medication and prescription renewals and lab work. Veterans interested in being seen at the Coudersport office should call 814-260-9342. Specialty services beyond primary care are available through the Bath center.



Honoring Our Korean War Veterans



Plans are in place for a historic event at 3 pm on Saturday, July 20, at American Legion Post 192 in Coudersport. County officials and local veterans service representatives are partnering with the U.S. Defense Department for a dinner to honor Potter County's Korean War veterans. Lt. Col. Dennis N. Snelling, operations director for the Defense Department's 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee, will be the featured speaker. A highlight will be a memorial service for the Potter County men who

lost their lives in the war. Korean War veterans from Potter County are encouraged to attend as special guests. Family members and community leaders have also been invited. For details, contact the Potter County Department of Veterans Affairs at wworthington@pottercountypa.net, or 814-274-8290, Ext. 210.

Mobile Services Van Rolls In For Veterans Outreach

Potter County Dept. of Veterans Affairs teamed with Bath (N.Y.) VA Medical Center for a veterans' service outreach in Coudersport. The VA Mobile Services Van was positioned in front of the courthouse, where counselors discussed housing needs, health care and other benefits. Veterans were able to obtain personal supplies, military surplus goods (blankets, boots, coats, sleeping bags) and other items.



Veterans Traveling Tribute Coming To Region



A committee in Jefferson County has arranged to bring the American Veterans Traveling Tribute to the county fairgrounds near Brookville from Aug. 22 to Aug. 25. It's an outgrowth of the Traveling Vietnam Wall, which is an 80-percent replica of the permanent memorial in Washington, D. C., bearing the names of more than 58,000 Vietnam War casualties. Positioned in Brookville, in addition to the Vietnam wall, will be panels portraying World War II and the Korean War, art displays and other memorials.

Several ceremonies and presentations are planned during the exhibit's four-day stay at the fairgrounds.

Local Bridges Named For Fallen Soldiers

Four Potter County bridges will be named in honor of area veterans under a bill approved by the state legislature. Ceremonies will be scheduled soon.

- A bridge carrying Rt. 49 over the Cowanesque River in Harrison Valley is designated the Specialist **Kenneth Wayne Lampman Sr.** Memorial Bridge. Lampman served the Army as an aircraft maintenance mechanic. He was killed on March 5, 1967, when his helicopter crashed in Vietnam. He was 21 years old.
- The bridge carrying Rt. 44 over the Oswayo Creek in Shinglehouse is named in memory of Army Specialist **Gerald Duane Stonemetz**. He died in a vehicle crash in Vietnam on Jan. 8, 1969, at the age of 21.
- A bridge carrying Rt. 1022 over Pine Creek in Galeton Borough is designated the Specialist **Clark Robert Douglas** Memorial Bridge. Douglas (shown), of Galeton, was an Army medic who was killed at age 21 while administering aid to a wounded soldier on Nov. 11, 1969.
- The bridge carrying Rt. 49 over the Cowanesque River in Harrison Township is named in memory of Army Private First Class **Berwyn Gaylord Cole**. A resident of Elmer, he was killed at the Battle of the Bulge during World War II on Dec. 21, 1944, at age 19.



Legislation To Address Backlog In VA Claims



Citizens are being encouraged to contact their elected officials in Congress in support of "VA CORE," a bipartisan measure designed to help tackle the substantial claims backlog at the Department of Veterans Affairs. VA CORE directs the Defense Department to provide complete records of veterans to the VA in an electronic format. Currently, the average

veteran waits more than 250 days for a decision on a claim. About 175 days of that time is the VA waiting for the DOD to send records, which DOD processes on paper. As of March 30, 2013, VA had 600,000 claims that have been pending for more than 125 days. Veterans are filing disability compensation claims at historically high levels -- well over 1 million a year -- and the numbers continue to grow.

'Honoring Our Veterans' Plate Available

An "Honoring Our Veterans" license plate is now available to all Pennsylvania motor vehicle owners from PennDOT. The plate features an American flag and an eagle with the words "Honoring Our Veterans." Cost is \$35, with \$15 from each sale going to a Veterans Trust Fund administered by the Pa. Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs to provide grants to veterans' service organizations and other veterans' causes.



Successful TU 'Healing Waters' Event Held



Another successful Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing Event was held by God's Country Chapter of Trout Unlimited, headquartered at the Big Moore's Run Lodge and Preserve. It provided a special experience for military personnel who have been wounded, injured, or disabled to aid in their physical and emotional recovery through fly fishing, fly tying and relaxation in a tranquil, supportive rural setting. The program provides basic fly fishing, fly casting and fly tying classes and clinics at no cost. Equipment and materials are supplied, including equipment that accommodates special needs. The sixth annual Project Healing Waters brought 15 vets from the Erie, Bath and Batavia VA hospitals. TU dedicated this year's event to World War II veterans (below), many of whom rode in the 40-mile motorcycle escort/parade through the county. High school bands on the route played patriotic songs. At the county seat, the parade was greeted by a large contingent of county employees and others waving flags and applauding. Some of those greeters are shown on the front page of this newsletter. TU expressed thanks to all those who made the event such a success.

LEEK Open House Spotlights A Special Place



An open house at the LEEK Hunting and Mountain Preserve for wounded warriors at Oswayo drew a record turnout to spotlight a special place in the mountains of Potter County. A project of the Fisher family, LEEK hosts groups of warriors who have been injured in groups in service to their country. The preserve provides hunting and fishing opportunities and camaraderie, while recognizing those who have served and memorializing war casualties from the region.

LEEK is a non-profit organization operating the 256-acre preserve. Veterans enjoy home-cooked meals and are partnered with experienced local outdoor enthusiasts, many of whom are also veterans, in activities that may require adaptive equipment or other special arrangements.

Many of the veterans come from Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Some have lost limbs. Others suffer from traumatic brain injuries. All of the services are free. Managers of LEEK have ambitious plans to expand the facility and its services. For more information, call 410-322-4610 or see the website, leekpreserve.org.



Potter County Provides Veterans Services

Potter County Director of Veterans Affairs Will Worthington is available to help veterans with a variety of services. He can be reached at the Gunzburger Building in Coudersport (814-274-8290, Ext. 210, or wworthington@pottercountypa.net). Office hours are

Tuesdays, 8 to 4:30, by appointment; and Wednesdays, 8 to 4:30, for walk-ins and follow-ups. Worthington (left) checks his voice mail and email frequently. However, in the event that a veteran or dependent requires immediate access to military records, he has established a link with the Philadelphia PMC that includes a direct line to the special services section: 215-381-3762. Any veteran or dependent using this off-hours emergency access service should be prepared to provide a social security number for the individual whose records are being sought.



Successful Debut For Local 'Patriot Weekend'

Three worthy causes shared the spotlight as "Patriot Weekend" debuted in June at Coudersport's Millstream Inn. Organizers came away from the event convinced that it's a keeper. They're expecting to build on this year's highlights for another run next June and beyond. All proceeds will be distributed equally to the Wounded Warriors Project for injured veterans, Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention and Make-a-Wish Foundation. Among the fundraisers was the Patriot Guard Riders' motorcycle dice run, which drew 70 participants.



There were children's games, drawings, vendors, information booths, live music and auctions. Several veterans attended, ranging from those serving in World War II to Persian Gulf vets, attended, including WWII vet Ernest



Matteson (above). Bath VA Medical Center sent representatives to assist veterans and give out clothing and other provisions to needy veterans. A poignant program on Saturday morning featured speakers from the three organizations who benefited from Patriot Weekend. Senior Judge John Leete (bottom right photo, at left) spoke passionately about creation of a local Yellow Ribbon organization in response to local teen suicides and other troubling signs. Deb Hamilton discussed Make-a-Wish, serving children with life-threatening conditions. U.S. Army Lt. Col. Ron Buchsen (left) described services of the Wounded Warrior Project. He pointed out the opportunities that Potter County offers to wounded veterans who seek the peace and recreation of a rural setting.

Another highlight of Saturday's program was the presentation of a \$1,000 donation by Walt Sipe and Gary Foust to the Patriot Weekend committee, on behalf of the estate of their motorcycle organization brother, Ray Preston. "We learned a lot this year and we're already looking ahead, thanks in large part to the fact that so many people have already stepped up and volunteered to help," said local businessman Gary Buchsen (bottom right), who spearheaded Patriot Weekend. He expressed thanks to a long list of people, businesses and organizations donating time, money, equipment and other resources to launch the event.



A Memorial Day Challenge: 'No One Left Behind'

(Potter County Commissioner Paul W. Heimel, a member of the National Military Service and Veterans Affairs Committee, presented the Memorial Day address at the courthouse square this year. He called on citizens to honor those who sacrificed their lives in military service by supporting effective care for veterans. Excerpts follow.)



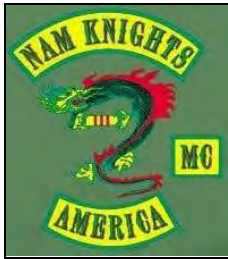
Some of you may be familiar with the last line of the Soldier's Creed – "I will never leave a fallen comrade." Perhaps that is the answer to the timeless question that has dogged so many of us as we grasp for some way to repay those who have sacrificed for their country. Just as they had a mission, we as a country should accept a most difficult, but most important, mission. Right now we are facing the stark reality of tens of thousands of "fallen comrades." They're not fallen on the battlefield, in the traditional sense, but they've been physically wounded, psychiatrically "shell-shocked," as they used to say, or both. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a serious thing. So are traumatic brain injury, alcoholism and other addictions, and, of course, the physical wounds of battle that will never heal.

And as difficult as it may be for some of us to admit this, thousands of our service members have been left behind. We have created a system of hurdles and gaps, of hard brick walls and even social pressures that have made it far too hard for many of our veterans to gain access to the services and benefits to which they're entitled. Our politicians in Washington talk a good line, but many of them have turned their backs on our veterans. On a brighter note, to some extent the VA has owned up to its shortcomings – long, unconscionable delays for veterans seeking their rightful benefits; medical misdiagnosis and bureaucratic bungling. But it won't be easy. Demand for services and benefits far exceeds supply, in terms of personnel, in terms of facilities, in terms of money, and in terms of sheer will. I encourage you to commit yourself to the mission of leaving no comrade behind. We **MUST** do better.



Photos, courtesy of Kimberley Hoak/Potter Leader-Enterprise, show speaker Paul W. Heimel (above), the American Legion Post 192 Honor Guard in the parade, and World War II veteran Tom Leete, shown with his daughter June, who celebrated his 9^{1st} birthday on Memorial Day.

News & Notes Of Interest To Veterans



Motorcycle Poker Run For LEEK: Allegheny Chapter of the Nam Nights of America Motorcycle Club will hold a Poker Run to benefit the LEEK Hunting and Mountain Preserve in Oswayo and Camp Cadet. The 75-mile ride on Saturday, Aug. 3, will be centered at 439 East Third Street in Emporium, with registration from 11 am to 12:30 pm. Cost is \$20 per vehicle, which covers a meal at the end of the ride. Prizes will be awarded.

Military OneSource Helps Veterans. The Defense Department has revitalized the Military OneSource website to better assist service members and their families. It's part of a broader effort toward an overall reduction of government websites. Military OneSource (militaryonesource.com, or 1-800-342-9647) provides round-the-clock consultants to assist with topics such as non-medical counseling, anger management and communication skills at no cost.



Transition Support For Vets. Two organizations are reaching out to veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. *National Veterans Foundation* operates a toll-free hotline for veterans facing transition issues. The line at

1-888-777-4443 is staffed from noon to midnight daily. Veterans can also make queries via the website, www.nvf.org. *Vets4Vets* is a free support group available to launch and guide local chapters. Veterans can tell their stories, expressing their feelings, thoughts and concerns in ways that family members or friends may not understand. For more information, visit www.vets4vets.us or call 520-319-5500.



Potter County Veterans News is a publication of the Potter County Department of Veterans Affairs. Copies are available for free download from the county's website, pottercountypa.net (click on Veterans Affairs). Local veterans service organizations are encouraged to submit material for inclusion in the newsletter through email to pheimel@pottercountypa.net.