



Potter County welcomes new veterans affairs director



Potter County's new director of veterans affairs is Bill Simpson. A Potter County native and resident of Oswayo Borough, he succeeds Will Worthington, who has retired.

After graduating from Oswayo Valley High School, Simpson enlisted with the U.S Navy, where he served for more than 23 years in the Seabees. His career included multiple deployments to the Middle East and leadership roles. He recently retired after 30-plus years of service as a communications technician with Frontier Communications.

Simpson was recently certified with distinction as a county veterans affairs director by the Pa. Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) following a weeklong training and testing regimen. This allows him to file claims with the VA for benefits and services on behalf of local military veterans and otherwise assist local veterans and their families.

He intends to develop close working relationships with veterans service organizations in Potter County, following in the footsteps of his predecessors. The position has been held over the years by F. W. Gunzburger, Joe Becker, Lenny Kalkbrenner and Byron Sutton prior to Worthington's service.

"Potter County has received multiple excellence awards for its veterans' services," Simpson said. "I hope to be able to maintain the current high level of service and build on it. One area that will be a high priority is an ongoing outreach effort."

"We've learned from the DMVA that Potter County has a higher proportion of military veterans than almost every other county in the state," he continued. "I intend to reach out and inform our veterans of the benefits or services they're entitled to and then, if they're interested, help them in any way to apply."

Simpson will be working closely with Commissioner Paul Heimel, who continues to serve on veterans' advocacy organizations at the state and federal levels.

The director's office is located on the first floor of the F. W. Gunzburger County Office Building at 1 North Main Street in Coudersport. Office hours for appointments and walk-ins are being reviewed. Simpson can be reached at 814-274-8290, extension 210, or wsimpson@pottercountypa.net.

How are YOU observing Veterans Day?

By Bill Simpson, Potter County Director of Veterans Affairs

As you'll see on your calendar, Nov. 11 falls on a Friday this year. That makes it convenient for many government workers and others to enjoy a coveted three-day weekend.

Sadly, that's what Veterans Day has become to a growing number of Americans. Many will take little, if any, time to reflect on the service of our military veterans.

They may not inconvenience themselves to consider how our service members' sacrifices have allowed us to enjoy the blessings of liberty that include a three-day weekend.

Fewer still will take the time to seek out a veteran and share a simple, "Thank you for your service." It may surprise many of you to learn that a significant number of our military veterans never hear that expression or otherwise have their service acknowledged.

Let's resolve to make Veterans Day 2016 different. This could involve not only our American Legion and VFW posts, but also our schools, our churches and other community organizations. Parents can help, too. There are many local examples we could follow. For instance, Oswayo Valley and Northern Potter school districts go out of their way to welcome and honor area military service personnel each Veterans Day. Many of these are grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles or aunts of today's students (many dressed in uniform) who visit the schools and share their experiences. Teachers use the occasion to educate the students on not only military history, but the core American values of patriotism and service.

At American Legion Post 192, members of the Legion Auxiliary are collecting names and addresses of active -duty military service members serving overseas or in the U.S. as part of local outreach to express unfailing community support.

These and countless other examples remind us that even though social trends have changed, the fundamental values that made our nation great endure because of the men and women who have answered the high calling of military service.

This year's Pennsylvania Governor's Proclamation for Veterans Day provides us with plenty of food for thought as we honor those who have served, whether we're involved in a public event or engaged on a more personal moment in prayer and reflection:

"Carefully preserved within the pages of American history lie the valiant stories of the men and women who fought with valor and fortitude to defend the ideals upon which our great nation was founded – liberty, freedom and justice.

"These dedicated men and women reinforce the truth that heroism is not a gift or a goal, but often a moment, and sometimes a lifetime, of pure selflessness. Our veterans disregard personal well-being and act with incredible honor to preserve for us a gift of unapproachable magnitude – our freedom.

"As citizens, we owe an inexpressible debt to our veterans, and we ask with humility and gratitude that their spirit never be forgotten."



Military outreach underway

Volunteers with the American Legion Post 192 Auxiliary are seeking the names and addresses of local military members serving overseas or in the U.S. as part of a community service project.

For more information, contact Kathy Kinard at 331-1048.

Potter County Veterans Discount Program

Military veterans continue to sign up for discounts on local products and services through the Potter County Veterans Discount Program. A growing number of area businesses are also registering to provide discounts to vets. To be eligible, veterans need to obtain a card from the Potter County Office of Veterans Affairs. There are three ways to apply: 1. send required information (name, mailing address, and contact information, both telephone and email if possible) by email to Veterans Affairs Director Bill Simpson at wsimpson@pottercountypa.net; 2. send regular mail to Veterans Affairs, Gunzburger Building, 1 N. Main St., Coudersport PA 16915; 3. call Director Simpson at 814-274-8290, extension 210, to schedule an appointment or obtain additional information.

Each veteran who registers for the program receives a membership card that must be shown at participating businesses to qualify for a discount. Veterans will also receive a brochure that identifies participating businesses by name and address, along with the particulars of their discount offer. Under the program, merchants and professional service providers extend discounts – typically 10 percent or more – to Potter County veterans. Certain restrictions may apply. Businesses wishing to sign up or learn more about the program should call 814-274-8290, extension 207 or 210. The program is being administered by the Potter County Veterans Service Committee. Members are Veterans Affairs Director Bill Simpson, Commissioner Paul Heimel, and Executive Secretary Dawn Wooster.

These businesses are currently participating in the Veterans Discount Program:

Coudersport: Always In Bloom, Cheryl A. Beichner CPA, Buchanan Brothers Pharmacy, E&G Auto Plus, Fox's Pizza Den, Hauber's Jewelry, Jackson's Gift Shop, Jenigen's Auto Body, Kaytee's Family Restaurant, Laurelwood Inn & Steakhouse, Mitchell's Bookkeeping & Tax Service, Mosch's Country Tavern, Olson Tenglund NAPA Auto Parts, Potter County Outfitters and Wagner Ace Hardware

Galeton: Heart's Desire

Shinglehouse: Howard's Home Furnishings & Sporting Supplies

Austin: Big Mike's Dairy Dine, Goodwin's Garage

Costello: The Costello Inn

Ulysses: Carrine's Custom Apparel, Corner Café, Creative Style Salon, Nostalgia

Brookland: Oak Hall Bed & Breakfast



Donation recalls Army veteran

A former Coudersport woman has made a monetary donation to the Potter County Department of Veterans Affairs to support services or special causes that go beyond the traditional scope of the office. Pam Fickinger Szkodzinski of Lodi, Calif., donated the money in memory of her husband, Mike Szkodzinski, who died on Oct. 2, 2016, at age 51 after a short battle with cancer.

Mike joined the Army in 1983. He worked with Joint Task Force Full Accounting and made seven trips to Vietnam. During his service, he brought home the remains of two soldiers lost during the war. Mike was honorably discharged from the Army in 1999. Pam, a 1978 graduate of Coudersport Area High School, is the daughter of Barbara Fickinger and the late Thomas Fickinger, a World War II veteran. She met Mike when they were both living in Maryland. They were married in 2001.



Szkodzinski

Several years ago, a donation for the Potter County Veterans Affairs Department was included in the estate of Emma Jane Vassell. A portion of that was used to support the Potter County Honor Guard and for a dinner to honor and memorialize the county's Korean War veterans.

News & Notes

Auxiliary holding senior citizens dinner

American Legion Post 192 Auxiliary in Coudersport will be hosting a senior citizens' Thanksgiving dinner on Sunday, Nov. 13, from 1-4 pm. There is no charge. Donations will be accepted. The club will also be holding a food drive that day with donations going to local food banks. Each guest is asked to bring a canned good or other non-perishable item to donate.



Con artists targeting veterans



Federal officials report that there has been an uptick in fraudulent and deceptive fundraising practices by operators who are capitalizing on the public's support for veterans. In Pennsylvania, shady operators are increasingly using telephone and mail solicitations, and even appearing at malls and other public settings, to collect donations for seemingly legitimate veterans' causes and then pocket the money.

One group, billing itself by the lofty name Veterans Support Organization, or VSO, took in more than \$8.5 million on behalf of veterans in a year's time, according to the IRS, and expended a mere \$300,000 for services.

Meanwhile "pension poachers" have been on the prowl to exploit unsuspecting military veterans with loan scams and other cons. Resources on pension benefits, unfair business practices, consumer protection organizations and related topics are available from the VA and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (online at consumerfinance.gov).

Military OneSource helps veterans

The Defense Department has revitalized the Military OneSource website to better assist service members and their families. Military OneSource (militaryonesource.mil, 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



An organization is 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.

Potter County Veterans News is a publication of the Potter County Veterans Affairs Department. Copies are available for download from the county's website, pottercountypa.net. For more information, contact Paul Heimel at 814.274.8290, Ext. 203.