

TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

# JOURNAL

SPRING  
2011



**Recruiting Poster from World War II:**

*For your country's sake today - For your own sake tomorrow!  
Go to the nearest recruiting station of the armed service of your choice.  
1944, Color poster by Steele Savage.*

# JOURNAL

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## FIELD WORK

Lance Cpl. Sharhonda Jones, a Female Engagement Team (FET) member with Regimental Combat Team 7, sits with a local child while he waits for medical attention during a village medical outreach at Patrol Base Siapan, Marjah, Afghanistan, July 12. Jones, originally an administration clerk, volunteered to be a part of the FET program, which enables combat team to reach out to Afghan women in a way the unit's male troops cannot. Cultural norms prevent Afghan women from interacting with men, especially foreigners, in most situations. Jones, 21, is from Wills Point, Texas.

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I want to thank you for faithfully serving Texas Veterans and their families and offer this letter as a way to introduce myself. Effective Feb. 1, 2011, I became the new Director of the Fund for Veterans' Assistance program, moving from my position as Director of Veterans Employment Services at the Texas Veterans Commission.

I served in the U.S. Army on active duty from 1989-1993 as an Intelligence Analyst and Korean Linguist and then as a Counter-Intelligence Specialist in the Texas National Guard. Prior to my work at the Texas Veterans Commission, I was a Policy Advisor to three different Commissioners for nine years at the Texas Workforce Commission.

Keeping in mind our common goals, the priorities for the Fund for Veterans' Assistance program are:

1. Provide the maximum amount of services to address the needs of Texas Veterans and their families;
2. Establish consistent policies that emphasize strong fiscal and performance accountability;
3. Allow the maximum range of flexibility to both current and future Grantees; and
4. Provide a superior level of technical assistance and customer service to Grantees.

I look forward to working with all of you as we ensure that Texas Veterans and their families receive the first-class support they have earned through their service to our country. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at [grants@tvc.state.tx.us](mailto:grants@tvc.state.tx.us).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Wilson".

Bill Wilson  
Director, Fund for Veterans' Assistance



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.

*out of the*

**MILITARY**

*onto the*

**STREETS**





Story by Bonnie Fletcher, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

In 2008, U.S. Army Veteran Deborah Powell found herself in a situation her military training had not prepared her to handle: living on the streets in Austin, Texas. Due to challenges resulting from her tour of duty, she found herself without stable housing and unsure of what to do next.

### **Women Soldiers**

Since the Revolutionary War, American women have voluntarily chosen to take up arms to serve their country in its time of need. Historically, unless they hid their gender, American women were relegated to support roles with very few exceptions such as field nurses.

American attitudes toward women serving in the military have changed to such an extent that more than 230,000 women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan alone. Unlike wars past, these women often find themselves serving in the direct line of fire. As the number of women in the military continues to grow, so do the unintended consequences of that growth: the homeless rate and unemployment rate for women Veterans.

“The number of female Veterans has doubled in the last decade,” said Tammy Duckworth, the assistant secretary for public and intergovernmental affairs in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). With

this increase, female Veterans are two times more likely to become homeless than their male counterparts, she says.

### **Factors of Homelessness**

Unemployment, mental health issues ranging from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) to Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and substance abuse are the most prevalent factors contributing to a life on the streets for these women shortly after their transition from active duty military to civilian life. According to the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans 2010 report, 6.8 percent of homeless Veterans are women, and that figure does not take into account whether or not they have children.

One of the top priorities for a Veteran transitioning into the civilian world is finding a job. Female Veterans sometimes have difficulty translating their military service and experience into civilian terms in a resume. This can lead to an employer not realizing the unique and dedicated skills a female Veteran can bring to their organization, and thus female Veterans are losing out on job opportunities.

Competition can also be an issue for women Veterans. They compete against others who have not been in the military and have more identifiable job experiences. This fact places female Veterans at a disadvantage in

Right: Army Veteran Deborah Powell, a graduate of the Green Doors program, promotes Green Doors services in Austin, Texas. Powell has been living on her own since Spring of 2010 in southwest Austin. Photo courtesy of Christa Noland, Deputy Director of Green Doors

Page 2: Spc. Doris Campos, a native of Cuero Texas, prepares for weapons qualification at Camp Buehring, Kuwait. She currently serves as an MRAP driver for Delta Company, 949th Brigade Support Battalion, 553rd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 10th Sustainment Brigade in support of Multi-National Division - Baghdad. Photo courtesy of DVIDS

Page 3: Homeless person rests after walking around with a shopping cart. Photo courtesy of Corbis Images



a rough job market. It is typical for a woman to separate from the military and discover that her civilian counterparts obtained a degree and immediately entered the job market where they have been competing for years, leaving the female Veteran feeling disadvantaged and inexperienced. After long periods of unemployment, the female Veteran may become incapable of supporting herself, which can lead into homelessness.

PTSD and MST are other factors that affect female Veterans. PTSD can occur after an individual has seen or experienced a traumatic event involving threat of injury or death. The symptoms can vary from having flashbacks of the event to emotional numbness and a feeling of detachment. PTSD can seriously damage family relationships for the Veteran when they return home. These stressors can lead to withdrawal and depression, which can make families' everyday life difficult.

MST is another issue that can prevent women from getting the help they deserve and from leading a normal life. MST is sexual harassment that is threatening or sexual assault and often leads to PTSD. MST is underreported for fear of looking weak in front of male counterparts. According to the VA, one in five female patients reports MST.

While more women access the VA a number of women will not seek treatment for

PTSD or MST and end up turning down VA medical care due to the lack of female-friendly programs. A large number of participants in PTSD classes and seminars are men, leaving the female Veteran feeling uncomfortable sharing her experiences, especially if she was sexually harassed or assaulted. Untreated PTSD or MST can send the female Veteran into deep depression and can lead to job loss, financial instability, and homelessness.

### Fund for Veterans' Assistance

Fortunately, there are a growing number of organizations beginning to recognize these issues and taking action. One such organization is the Texas Veterans Commission.

The Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) is a program that awards reimbursement grants to eligible charitable organizations, local government agencies, and Veterans Service Organizations that provide direct services to Texas Veterans and their families. Fund for Veterans' Assistance reimbursement grants address a broad range of needs from transportation services to housing assistance for homeless Veterans.

Green Doors, located in Austin, Texas was founded in 1990 by a formerly homeless young woman. In May of 2010, Green Doors was awarded a Fund for Veterans' Assistance grant for their Veterans Housing Stability Project.

The current project serves 110 of Austin's most vulnerable Veterans and their families and ensures everyone - children, adults, the disabled, men and women - have an opportunity to live in stable housing.

This program is dedicated to helping service members and their families through a variety of housing and supportive service programs. Green Doors seeks to address these needs by creating affordable, safe, and quality housing; providing residents with access to supportive services; and advocating for individuals and families struggling with, and at risk of, homelessness.

### Focusing on Female Veterans' Needs

The Green Doors Veterans Housing Stability project is made up of four program areas specifically designed for Veterans:

- Veterans Transitional Re-entry Housing Program
- Veterans Rental Assistance Voucher Program
- Permanent Supportive Housing Program
- Affordable Rental Housing Program

The Veterans Transitional Re-entry Housing Program provides quality housing and supportive services to 60 single, male and female, at-risk Veterans transitioning from homelessness. Veterans receive intensive case management related to self-sufficiency while they reside in

homes throughout south Austin.

The Veterans Rental Assistance Voucher Program safely houses 30 Veterans and their families in apartments, duplexes and single family homes in a neighborhood of the Veterans' choosing in the city of Austin. Each household participates in a case management program that focuses on increasing knowledge and skills related to housing and financial stability.

The Permanent Supportive Housing Program houses 10 Veterans earning less than 30 percent of Median Family Income (MFI) at its newest neighborhood revitalization project, Pecan Springs Commons (PSC). Veterans accepted into this program have long-term barriers to self-sufficiency due to a permanent disability, limited potential for increasing income, or other substantial barriers.

The Affordable Rental Housing Program houses approximately 10 Veterans and their families, who earn less than 50 percent of MFI, in sustainable, affordable rental homes at PSC.

Female Veterans, such as Powell, represent just under a quarter of the Veterans served by Green Doors Veterans Housing Stability Project and its component programs.

Currently there are five beds occupied by female Veterans in the Veterans Transitional Re-entry Housing Program. Since the Fund for Veterans' Assistance grant began in July 2010, 12 female Veterans have transitioned through this program. Currently, three female

Veterans are housed through the Permanent Supportive Housing Program, and three female Veterans and their families are receiving assistance through the Rental Assistance Voucher Program.

### Looking for Funding

Several years ago Green Doors went in search of funding and came across Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance Grant.

"It ended up to be a great fit for us in terms of serving Veterans and how we've been able to expand on how we serve Veterans," said Frank Fernandez, CEO of Green Doors. "It's been a great investment from our perspective on Texas Veterans Commission's part to help us do the work that we do."

The grant also helped Green Doors establish the Veterans Assistance Fund for providing basic needs. Veterans often do not have the basic necessities to set up a household when they enter the Green Doors program. The household set-up includes a bed, headboard, bedside table, dresser, couch, coffee table, microwave, linens, lamp, shower curtain/bath mat and kitchen accessories.

"These are the basic kinds of things that make a difference," said Fernandez. "A lot of these men and women, especially if they are coming from homelessness, do not have kitchen equipment, they don't have a bed, they don't

have a place to put a TV. The grant has helped us with this and it is a big difference maker."

### Finding Her Way

During the summer of 2008, homeless Veteran Powell found her way to Green Doors and successfully completed their program. In 2010, she graduated into her own apartment in southwest Austin. She now volunteers for Green Doors and has become a strong housing advocate for homeless Veterans.

"During her time in the Veteran's Transitional Reentry Program, Deborah accessed supportive services, worked with the VA on obtaining benefits and became so much stronger as a person," said Christa Noland, Deputy Director of Green Doors. "She went from a person that was in crisis to a woman of great strength facing life's challenges and giving to others. Deborah is a living example of how, with a little support from our community, Veterans can exit homelessness and reenter our community as productive citizens."

If you know a female homeless Veteran that needs help please contact Green Doors at 512-469-9130 or visit them at <http://www.austinhomless.org/>.

If you are interested in more information on the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance please visit us at [www.TexasVeteransCommission.org](http://www.TexasVeteransCommission.org).



Two homes, Meadow Crest and Plumpton, available for transitional housing through Green Doors. The Veterans Transitional Re-entry Housing Program provides quality housing and supportive services to 60 single, male and female, at-risk Veterans transitioning from homelessness.

## Transitional Housing Available for Female Veterans





Photo provided by  
James Martin

Victoria P. Martin in her  
Marine uniform during  
World War II.



# REMEMBERING OUR WOMEN

On Memorial Day, the sacrifices of both men and women in service to the United States was commemorated throughout the country. Our nation has recognized the importance of women Veterans with more than 50 monuments dedicated to women Veterans or by women Veterans organizations in U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries.

Women did not officially serve in the U.S. military until the Army and Navy Nurse Corps were established in 1901 and 1908 respectively. In those days, the roles women played were largely administrative. Around the time of World War II, the United States increased the role of women in the military.

“The call was now being made for more women to join the military service [during World War II],” recalls Victoria P. Martin, a WWII Veteran living at Clyde Cosper Texas State Veterans Home in Bonham, Texas. “October 1943 at the age of 21, I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Women’s Reserve

to relieve an able-bodied male Marine to go and defend our country against the enemy - the Japanese. The enlistment was to be for the duration of the war.”

The Marine Corps created the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve in 1943. In September 1942, the Army Air Force (AAF) created the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and appointed Nancy H. Love its commander. While WAFS was being organized, the AAF appointed Jacqueline Cochran as Director of Women’s Flying Training. Cochran’s school, which eventually moved to Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, trained 232 women before it ceased operations. Eventually, over 1000 women completed flight training. WAFS became known as the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), and they flew as civil service pilots who completed stateside missions as ferriers, test pilots and anti-aircraft artillery trainers.

Marine women, such as Martin, served stateside as clerks, cooks, mechanics, drivers, and in

a variety of other positions.

“I was in a group that was sent to Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, California,” said Martin. “I was assigned to work as a receptionist. I had to learn where all the areas of the camp were. I had to be able to direct military and civilian personnel to various areas and I had to be able to answer a million questions regarding the camp. One year later I was assigned to the Insurance Department.”

More than 60,000 Army nurses served stateside and overseas during World War II. Sixty-seven Army nurses were captured by the Japanese in the Philippines in 1942 and held as POWs for over two and a half years. The Army established the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in 1942, which was converted to the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in 1943. More than 150,000 women served as WACs during the war; thousands were sent to the European and Pacific theaters.

More than 14,000 Navy nurses served

Photo by Howard R. Hollem

Mary Josephine Farley, who at 20 is considered a top notch mechanic, works on a Wright Whirlwind airplane motor which she rebuilt at Naval Air Base. Women like Farley helped to keep the fighting ships flying. October 1942.



Photo provided by Army Surgeon General

Nurses of a field hospital who arrived in France via England and Egypt after three years service. August 12, 1944.



Story by Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

# SERVICEMEMBERS

stateside, overseas on hospital ships and as flight nurses during the war. Five Navy nurses were captured by the Japanese on the island of Guam and held as POWs for five months before being exchanged. A second group of eleven Navy nurses were captured in the Philippines and held for 37 months.

The Navy recruited women into its Navy Women's Reserve, called Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), starting in 1942. Before the war ended, more than 80,000 WAVES filled shore billets in a large variety of jobs in communications, intelligence, supply, medicine and administration. The Coast Guard established their Women's Reserve known as the SPARs (after the motto *Semper Paratus - Always Ready*) in 1942. SPARs were assigned stateside and served as storekeepers, clerks, photographers, pharmacist's mates, cooks and other jobs. In 1943, the U.S. Public Health Service established the Cadet Nurse Corps which trained some 125,000 women for

military service. More than 400,000 American military women served at home and overseas in nearly all non-combat jobs.

That was just the beginning of women breaking down the barriers in the military. Secretary of Defense, George C. Marshall, established the Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services in 1951 to provide advice and recommendations on the recruitment, retention, treatment, employment, integration, and well-being of women in the Armed Forces. The Committee is composed of civilian women and men who are appointed by the Secretary of Defense and is still active today. Historically, DACOWITS' recommendations have been very instrumental in effecting changes to laws and policies pertaining to military women. The Committee provides a report to the Department of Defense at the end of each year or upon issue resolution. Information is gathered through installation visits, business meetings, relevant reports and survey data, and input

from individual Service members. This combination of research and first-hand experiences provides a solid basis for recommendations.

Women also began advancing through the ranks of the Armed Forces in the early 1970's. Anna Mae Hays, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, became a brigadier general on June 11, 1970. Minutes later, Elizabeth P. Hoisington, Director of the Women's Army Corps, received her shoulder stars. In 1971, the Air Force promoted the director of Air Force women, Jeanne M. Holm, to brigadier general. A few months later, Ann E. Hoefly, the Chief of the Air Force Nurse Corps, became the fourth woman general. In 1972, Alene B. Duerk, Chief of the Navy Nurse Corps, received a spot promotion to become the first female rear admiral.

As a result of the determination of Martin and other pioneers, women are now included in all but nine percent of Army roles, and about 10 percent of the U.S. Forces currently serving in Afghanistan and Iraq are women.

# Counselor helps female Veteran receive VA Benefits

By Duncan McGhee & David Cantu,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin & Houston

As a Claims Counselor for the Texas Veterans Commission, David Cantu feels privileged to assist Veterans, some of whom think they are out of options. Such was the case when Cantu met Tara Thornton, a veteran who served in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom with the 228th Combat Support Hospital Expectant Team based out of Fort Sam Houston.

When Cantu first met Thornton, she was employed as a nurse whose work was suffering as a result of the daily reminders of her experiences in Iraq. Thornton and her husband, along with their infant son, came to Cantu's office in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Regional Office in Houston in search of information regarding education benefits from the state of Texas.

Regardless of the initial reason a Veteran may visit his office, Cantu asks multiple questions of the Veteran to make sure they are receiving all the benefits to which they may be entitled. This includes asking if the Veteran is receiving VA disability compensation.

Cantu advised Thornton and her husband that if they were receiving VA disability compensation at 10 percent, they could both be

entitled to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, which provides educational and vocational counseling to servicemembers, veterans and certain dependents at no charge. Through the conversation, Cantu learned both had served in Iraq as medical personnel.

"What, if anything, you saw or experienced in Iraq still bothers you?" Cantu asked.

Tears began to well up in Thornton's and her husband's eyes as they looked at one another and then back to Cantu before responding.

"Are you going to take my baby away from me?" Thornton asked.

Cantu reassured them that he had no intention of doing that and began to focus on Thornton's mental well being.

Cantu learned that she was not currently receiving treatment for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but Thornton thought it might be helpful. Cantu gave her information for an OIF/OEF psychologist located at the Houston VA Medical Center and proceeded to file a VA disability compensation claim for PTSD on Thornton's behalf.

At that time, the VA required documentation of a stressor to qualify for compensation associated with PTSD. To satisfy this requirement Cantu asked Thornton to share with him some of the events she witnessed and experienced as

part the Expectant Team in Iraq.

A member of the Expectant Team can be the last medical personnel a combat Veteran will ever see or hear and may find themselves in the position of being the person who informs a wounded Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine they will not survive. Such was the case for Thornton during her tour of duty in Iraq.

Cantu also called the Employment Coordinator with Vocational Rehabilitation and asked if there was any way he could help her. Cantu explained the situation Thornton was experiencing, and the Employment Coordinator said he would do whatever was necessary for her. Currently, Thornton is in the Vocational Rehabilitation program so she can get back into the workforce and be gainfully employed.

Thornton's original claim was established on June 10, 2009, and her rating decision was completed on Aug. 6, 2009 granting compensation for PTSD. Thornton's claim was expedited due to the severe nature of her disability.

After she was notified of her decision, Thornton came to see Cantu. At the meeting Thornton presented Cantu with a Marine Corps eagle, globe and anchor. A Marine in Iraq had given it to her for saving the Marine's life, and she wanted to pass it forward as she felt certain Cantu had saved hers.

## In Memory: Bobby C. Farmer

By Jerry Goode,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Waco

Texas Veterans Commission Claims Counselor, Bobby C. Farmer, passed on Feb. 2, 2011. Mr. Farmer, a counselor at the Texas Veterans Commission office in Lubbock, began his service for our country in the U.S. Navy. He enlisted on Oct. 22, 1969, and was discharged on Aug. 31, 1971.

Mr. Farmer transferred from the Texas Employment Commission to the Texas Veterans Commission on Jan. 24, 1994. As a Claims Counselor, his Veteran clients gave him the nickname "Bulldog" because he would go to bat for them if they were treated poorly or not given the medical treatment or respect they deserved. According to Mrs. Sandra Lucero who worked for him, he was a friend to his clients and always had a listening ear to their concerns. She said Mr. Farmer's 22 years of service for Veterans would be a living memory.

When clients would ask him about retirement, he would answer "I'll retire when I've helped all of my WWII Veterans and their widows."

He was an accredited representative with the Texas Veterans Commission, American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

Mr. Farmer's wife, Cindy Farmer, characterized him as a man of few words and "the love of my life." To him, helping Veterans was not a job, but a blessing to be there for the men and women who served our country. Often, his clients would drop by just to say hello, and when he became ill, they were constantly checking on him through Mrs. Lucero.

Bobby loved 60's music, working outdoors and spending time with his family. Survivors include his wife and their son Bobby Jr.

## In Memory: Jim Smith

By Charles Buerschinger,  
Former Texas Veterans Commission Deputy Executive Director

When I started with the Texas Veterans Commission, Jim Smith was the editor of the Texas Veterans Commission *Bulletin*, the predecessor to the *Journal*. On occasion Mr. Smith would note the death of one of our colleagues, with the statement that they had "passed." I asked Mr. Smith why he used that phrase instead of "died." He told me that in most cases that these were men or women that he worked with and that he felt that it was more respectful and indicative of the esteem he held for them. On Dec. 18, 2010, Mr. Smith passed.

Mr. Smith began work with the Texas Veterans Commission as a Veterans County Service Officer (VCSO) on Oct. 27, 1952. From 1961 until 1987, when he retired, every VCSO and Texas Veterans Commission counselor was trained by Mr. Smith. He developed the curriculum and conducted the first initial training class. He was the last editor for the *Bulletin* and the first editor of the Texas Veterans Commission *Journal*. He was proud to be a Texas Veterans Commission employee, and because of his efforts, untold numbers of Veterans and their families have had a better life.

After retiring, Jim moved out to what he called the "short grass country" in Tahoka, continued to work for the benefit of Veterans and contributed his wisdom to the Texas Public Employees Association.

Jim Smith was a World War II Veteran, an outstanding Veterans advocate and a credit to, if not the personification of the "Greatest Generation."

Jim is survived by his wife, Dorothy, five children, 11 grandchildren and numerous friends.

# Veteran follows her dream to become a chef

By Rufus Coburn,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Army Veteran Mary Davis' first recollection of interest in cooking occurred when she was eight years old and made a "bubblegum" cake. She announced to her mother that she was going to be a chef when she grew up.

Of course, this was only one of the many professions, including superhero, astronaut, and movie star, which Davis considered as a child. Childhood, teenage years, high school graduation and enlistment in the U.S. Army passed rapidly until Davis found herself in Germany in 1998. She became fascinated with the sights, sounds, and smells of German cooking. This casual interest soon blossomed into Davis becoming the "go to guy" for organizing, planning, and preparation of unit pot-luck get-togethers.

Davis' career as a logistics specialist in the Army took her far and wide throughout the world, and Davis retired after 20 years of honorable service. As Davis was nearing the end of her Army career, she learned of the GI Bill educational benefits from the transition counselor at Fort Hood, Texas. The Post-9/11 GI Bill would pay for the cost of tuition and fees, provide a housing/cost of living allowance, and also provide a book stipend of \$1,000 per year while Davis was enrolled at an accredited,

degree-granting college or university. She enrolled in Central Texas College to prepare for civilian life.

Davis began to settle into the routine of homemaker, student, and mother, and had all but forgotten about her eight-year-old self's dream to be a chef. While she was visiting Central Market, an upscale gourmet grocery store in Austin, Texas, her passion for food was reignited, and Davis decided to visit Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Austin.

"This is the place; I can become a chef." Davis thought to herself after talking with the admission representative and taking a tour of the facilities.

Davis enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu and immersed herself in studying the technical courses in sanitation, restaurant marketing and supervision, and culinary arts (cooking and food preparation), in addition to English composition, maths, and public speaking. Davis believes the skills she learned in the Army



Photo by Rufus Coburn, Texas Veterans Commission, Tyler

Army Veteran Mary Davis chops an onion as part of her training at the Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Academy. Davis is using her Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to receive a degree in Hospitality and Restaurant Management through the Austin school.

- discipline, willingness to tackle any task, and the ability to work within a team - directly translated to her success in the classroom. She found support and friendship among the other Veteran students there - approximately 10 percent of the 800 students enrolled are Veterans.

"Always remain confident in the midst of a storm and have a passion and a purpose," Davis advises other Veteran students at Le Cordon Bleu.

In May 2011, Davis will receive her Associate of Applied Sciences Degree in Hospitality and Restaurant Management. Davis' next goal is to earn a Bachelor's degree, and, at some time in the future, open a culinary school for underprivileged females.

"Cooking enables me to take people back to wonderful memories of childhood when they remember a special piece of apple pie, or the aroma of French toast coming out of their Mama's kitchen," said Davis.

To find a list of state approved schools to use education benefits, please visit <http://texas-veterans.com/education/overview>.

## The Post-9/11 GI Bill will pay eligible individuals:

- Tuition & fees directly to the school not to exceed the maximum in-state tuition & fees at public institutions of higher learning.
- For more expensive tuition, a program exists which may help to reimburse the difference. This program is called the "Yellow Ribbon Program," which allows institutions of higher learning to fund tuition expenses that exceed the highest public in-state undergraduate tuition rate.
- A monthly housing allowance based on the Basic Allowance for Housing for an E-5 with dependents at the location of the school.
- For those attending foreign schools (schools without a main campus in the U.S.) the Basic Allowance for Housing rate is fixed at \$1,347.00 for 2011 and \$1,348.00 for 2010.
- An annual books & supplies stipend of \$1,000 paid proportionately based on enrollment.
- A one-time rural benefit payment for eligible individuals.

# Lufkin Veteran Employment Representative charting a course for Veterans' success

By Paul E. Kendrick,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Houston

During the program year of 2009-2010, Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Representative (VER) Teresa Maryska was recognized as Local Veteran Employment Representative (LVER) of the Year by both the American Legion and Disabled American Veterans service organizations. Her leadership and initiative resulted in her receiving a 2010 Veteran Incentive Award for excellent service to Veterans by the Texas Veterans Commission.

As a VER, Maryska understands the hardships experienced by recently separated Veterans seeking employment. She has shown a willingness to accept any and all assignments necessary to procure jobs for Texas Veterans including assisting them with a smooth assimilation into the civilian sector. Maryska has assumed additional responsibilities as the only VER in a 12 county rural area around Lufkin, Texas.

Maryska is constantly sought out by coworkers to provide advanced training on information concerning Veteran benefits and referrals. In appreciation for that, she was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation from Workforce Solutions Deep East Texas for invaluable service and outstanding contributions to the success of the office's Texas Workforce Commission and Houston-Galveston Area Council objectives.

Maryska continues to build rapport with numerous local employers and outreach resources. She is actively involved with City of Lufkin Chamber of Commerce employer networking and local statistical economic development meetings. Her reputation as a staunch advocate for Veterans earned her an invitation to be a presenter at the 2010 Deep East Texas Contracting Opportunities Conference where she spoke about

Veteran benefit information. She was able to promote Veterans as a viable employment resource to small business owners and human relations personnel.

During the program year of 2009-2010, Maryska led Texas Veterans Commission Region IV in placement of Veterans with 208 hired and 84 referred to training.

Maryska has assisted many Veterans with overcoming barriers to employment: from acquiring bicycles to assisting the homeless with transportation and funding for basic nutrition. In particular, she recalls

one such Veteran who, because of his age, had all but given up hope of finding a job. He displayed symptoms of depression that could very well have led to a more life-threatening situation.

"An immediate job placement was the first step in resolving the emotional distress and hopelessness brought on by unemployment," Maryska said. "With a few phone calls, I immediately found him a job working as a security officer on a part-time basis. Several months later, a correctional guard position became available, and with much advocacy intervention by me, the Veteran was hired with an increase in pay and benefits."

Before Maryska began her career with the Texas Veterans Commission, she held a secretarial position for over 12 years. She decided she was missing something and enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

Maryska manufactured and machined repair parts using manual lathes and vertical mills. After riding ships for over five years, Maryska was transferred to Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in Boston, Mass. Through hard work and leadership, she was promoted to Petty Officer 1st Class (E-6). Maryska provided career advice to young recruits at MEPS, which would later play a key role in her decision to work for the Texas Veterans Commission.

In June 2006, Maryska was discharged from the Navy and relocated to Lufkin, Texas, where she began working with a state contractor at Workforce Solutions. She came to know the Texas Veterans Commission staff and realized that she was in the right place but the wrong department; she felt the need to support and assist fellow Veterans. When a position for the Texas Veterans Commission as a Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist opened, she applied. She started as a DVOP in January 2008 and transitioned to LVER in March 2010.

Throughout history, serving one's country has been the mark of distinction representing true honor and dignity among patriots. In keeping with these proud traditions of the Navy, it is this hallmark of military training and camaraderie that have fashioned Maryska with a genuine concern for her fellow Veteran.



Photo provided by Teresa Maryska, Texas Veterans Commission, Lufkin

Teresa Maryska helps out her fellow Veterans at a Christmas event for the homeless held at the Godtel Ministries. Maryska's passion for helping Veterans extends to spending her free time volunteering.



Photo provided by Teresa Maryska, Texas Veterans Commission, Lufkin

Veteran Employment Representative Teresa Maryska enlisted in the U.S. Navy after 12 years of working in a secretarial position. After serving her country, she has found work that allows her to follow her passion for serving the Veterans of Texas.

# Women Veterans program receives grant from Fund for Veterans' Assistance

By Sarah Tillman,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On Jan. 25, 2011, the Texas Veterans Commission awarded a new round of Fund for Veterans' Assistance grants. Santa Maria Hostel in Houston is one of those new recipients.

Santa Maria Hostel is a non-profit organization with over 50 years experience in serving women in crisis, with the mission of empowering women and their children to become alcohol and drug free.

They will be using the grant to fund their New VIEWS<sup>3</sup> (Veteran Initiative Empowering Women's Stability, Skills and Self-Determination) program – a project that will provide transitional housing and supportive services to women Veterans.

“Through New VIEWS<sup>3</sup>, Veterans will obtain permanent housing, develop job readiness skills, set/attain educational and employment goals, gain critical life skills, acquire parenting skills, access resources and complete substance abuse treatment,” said Jennifer Helley, Executive Director of Development for Santa Maria Hostel.

The opening date for receiving clients was



Photo by Barbara Page, Santa Maria Hostel

The Jacquelyn House will provide transitional housing to 24 female Veterans as part of the New VIEWS<sup>3</sup> (Veteran Initiative Empowering Women's Stability, Skills and Self-Determination) program in Houston, Texas.

April 1, 2011, and, when at full capacity, will place up to 24 female Veterans in transitional housing for one year at Santa Maria Hostel's Jacquelyn House. The program also offers a comprehensive menu of supportive services including educational and vocational services, transportation assistance, integrated mental health services, and residential and/or outpatient substance abuse treatments.

Helley cites from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Women Veterans (ACWV) 2010 report that 6.8 percent of homeless Veterans are female,

which translates to about 150 homeless Veteran women in the Houston area. Noting several other reports from organizations like ACWV, VetPop2007 and the Center for Women Veterans, Helley states this percentage is projected to rise.

“Texas is one of nine states estimated to account for nearly one-half of women Veterans,” said Helley, “with one of the highest proportions of women Veterans (7.9 percent) to the total general population, and the largest share of women Veterans, second only to California.”

With New VIEWS<sup>3</sup>, Santa Maria Hostel is attempting to help these women achieve economic stability and build a foundation for self-sufficiency and continued abstinence.

“Santa Maria is proud of its history in providing services which have a long-term impact,” said Helley.

For information on admissions to or questions about New VIEWS<sup>3</sup>, please call (713) 957-2413.

For information on the Fund for Veterans' Assistance grant program, please call (512) 463-1157 or visit [www.TexasVeteransCommission.org](http://www.TexasVeteransCommission.org).

## Fund for Veterans' Assistance expands program to include grant monitoring

By Aly Taylor,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Nonprofit organizations and local government agencies can apply for Fund for Veterans' Assistance grants to pay for counseling services, emergency assistance, employment and reintegration assistance, and other new and innovative services that help Veterans who have done so much to help keep Texans and America safe. As the number of Veterans with unmet needs continues to increase, it is important the funds designated to meet those needs are protected from fraud, waste, and abuse.

The Fund for Veterans' Assistance grant monitoring program was created to ensure the Fund for Veterans' Assistance dollars that have been awarded are used most effectively to assist Texas Veterans. The amount of money in the fund is not unlimited, and the Texas Veterans Commission wants to make sure every dollar is working effectively for Texas Veterans and their

families.

Every grantee who receives Fund for Veterans' Assistance funds will be monitored, which includes announced and unannounced site visits, desk reviews, and technical assistance follow-up for submitted monthly and quarterly reports.

- **Site visits.** Each grantee will be visited at least one time per contract period by Fund for Veterans' Assistance grant monitors. The monitors will visit the grantee to observe the work the grantee performs using Fund for Veterans' Assistance funds, and review processes to make sure the grantee is performing as reported.
- **Desk reviews.** Grantees will be asked to submit documentation supporting their reported performance and monetary reimbursement requests. Each desk review will focus on a particular subject, and every grantee will be asked to submit documentation for at least three desk reviews per

year.

- **Technical assistance.** Grantees that appear to require additional assistance with submitting accurate fiscal and programmatic reports will receive additional technical assistance from the grant monitors. This assistance is provided with the objective of improving reporting. Reports submitted by grantees not only help the Texas Veterans Commission in determining the number of Veterans and families who have received assistance, but also help the Texas Veterans Commission in reporting accurate information to the Texas Legislature so policymakers are aware of the need for the Fund for Veterans' Assistance.

# County Service Officer receives award from the Veterans County Service Officers of Texas

By Rachel Howell,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On March 3, Emilio De Los Santos III was honored in Texas House Resolution 381 for receiving the 2010 Dan Garcia Memorial Achievement Award presented by the Veterans County Service Officers Association of Texas (VCISOAT).

This annual honor recognizes the accomplishments of a Veterans County Service Officer (VCSO) or Assistant Officer who has performed above and beyond the call of duty. One award is given each year to a VCSO actively involved in community affairs and works to improve the quality of life for Veterans.

Since 2002, De Los Santos has been a steadfast supporter of Veterans' issues through his role as the Hidalgo Veterans County Service Office Director. He has been a vocal advocate for the Rio Grande Valley's first U.S. Depart-

ment of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital, and he worked to generate local support for Proposition 8, a Texas constitutional amendment passed in 2009 to authorize funding for the construction and operation of VA hospitals.

As the Hidalgo Veterans County Service Office Director, De Los Santos has helped Veterans and their family members in preparing claims for compensation, insurance, pensions, educational benefits, and medical care, and he helps them with appearances at Board of Veterans' Appeals hearings. He has also increased awareness about programs and benefits available for Veterans through public speaking engagements and organizes outreach initiatives such as Veteran Benefit Fairs and Welcome Home Events for returning military personnel. De Los Santos has testified before the Texas Legislature and the U.S. Congress and promoted state legislation related to a property tax exemption for disabled Veterans.

De Los Santos is a member of the Regional Board of Directors of VCISOAT for the San Antonio Region and received the Outstanding Service Officer of the Year award in 2007. In addition, he was recently appointed by President Barack Obama to the Selective Service System Local Board and, in 2010, was chosen to be on the VISN 17: VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network Veterans Advisory Board.

De Los Santos, a U.S. Army Veteran who served during the Vietnam War era, was employed for three decades by the Weslaco Independent School District. He holds a master's degree in education and has also worked as Region One Adult Basic Education Service Center director. He has further distinguished himself as president of the Weslaco Mid Valley Lions Club, as commander of VFW Post 10464 in Weslaco, and through his involvement in Weslaco youth sports leagues.

## Spring Training Conference a success

By Rachel Howell,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

April 12 through April 14, the Texas Veterans Commission and the Veteran County Service Officers Association of Texas (VCISO-AT) hosted a Spring Training Conference at the Doubletree Hotel in Austin, Texas.

"Training is one of the most important functions the Texas Veterans Commission performs," said Thomas Palladino, Executive

Director for the Texas Veterans Commission. "By training the Veteran County Service Officers, we are helping Texas Veterans get the benefits they deserve."

The Spring Training Conference has traditionally been hosted by the Texas Veterans Commission to train new Texas Veterans Commission Claims Counselors and Veteran County Service Officers (VCSOs). Due to budget cuts, the Texas Veterans Commission was forced to consider canceling the training. However, the VCISOAT came up with a plan to hold the training in Austin with the Texas Veterans Commission providing the instructors. Despite some having to travel at their own expense, the turnout was overwhelming with more than 125 attendees.

"VCISOAT quickly began working with the Texas Veterans Commission to seek an avenue to provide a Spring Training Conference," said Tim Vasquez, President of the VCISOAT. "None of this would have been possible without the partnership between Texas Veterans Commission and VCISOAT. Training is and continues to be a priority for both and all efforts to continue training in the next

budget year are being pursued."

The Spring Training Conference offered three types of training for Claims Counselors and VCSOs: Initial, Certification, and Accreditation.

New hires must first attend Initial Training and receive a Certificate of Training from the Texas Veterans Commission upon completion of the course. Maintaining this certification requires the officer to complete continuing training at subsequent training conferences.

Sixteen new VCSO' and two new Texas Veterans Commission Claims Counselors were certified, and 57 VCSOs were recertified during the conference. Additionally, the conference provided training and testing for 45 VCSO's who are accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to work Texas Veterans Commission cases.

Accreditation is available to VCSOs who: are paid employees of the county and working for it not less than 1,000 hours annually; have successfully completed a course of training and an examination approved by the VA district counsel within the state; and will receive annual training to assure continued qualification as a representative in the claims process.



Photo by Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Texas Veterans Commission Claims Counselors and County Service Officers listen to the first morning training session, Fully Developed Claims, led by Victor Polanco, Office Supervisor of Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Austin, Texas.

# Combat-Decorated Veteran appointed to Texas Veterans Commission

By Lisa Waddell,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

On March 16, Gov. Rick Perry announced the appointment of the Texas Veterans Commission newest commissioner, retired Marine Capt. Dan Moran.

Capt. Moran is a combat-decorated Veteran who served in the Global War on Terror as an Infantry Officer in the United States Marine Corps.

Capt. Moran served two tours of duty to Iraq. During his second tour of duty, he was wounded in action when an improvised explosive device exploded, resulting in a level 2 concussion. Twelve days later, his platoon was ambushed and three members of his platoon were killed instantly.

As a result of the ambush, Capt. Moran sustained 3rd degree burns over 50 percent of his body and injuries including a compression fracture to his T-8 vertebrae, herniated disks, and a mild Traumatic Brain Injury. He underwent more than 30 surgeries and spent two-and-a-half years at the Brooke Army Medical Center burn center recovering from his injuries. He medically retired from the U.S. Marine Corps

in 2009.

For his exemplary service, Capt. Moran received the Purple Heart, the Navy Commendation Medal with Valor, the Navy Achievement Medal with Valor, and the Combat Action Ribbon.

Capt. Moran will join four other commissioners who provide strategic guidance to the Texas Veterans Commission. The Texas Veterans Commission is the state agency that advocates for Veterans and their families in the areas of disability claims assistance, employment services, education benefits and grant funding. Over 225 skilled counselors in 75 cities provide one-on-one guidance to Veterans and their families to ensure they receive all the benefits to which they are entitled.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Texas A&M University and a Graduate Certificate in Advanced International Affairs at the George Bush School of Government and Public Service. He has also participated in the Executive Business Education



Photo by Rachel Howell, Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

New Texas Veterans Commission Commissioner, Daniel Moran, is sworn in by Judge David Phillips, Travis County Court at Law Pct. 1. Moran is a retired Marine Veteran who served in Iraq.

Program at Harvard Business School.

Capt. Moran founded Moran Enterprises Incorporated on Nov. 10, 2008, and serves as Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer. He currently lives in Houston with his wife, Teal, and their three children.



## Budget outcome still not clear

By Rick Svatora,  
Texas Veterans Commission, Austin

Since January, the Texas Veterans Commission has worked with state legislators to come up with a budget that will ensure that Texas Veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

When the Texas legislative session began, the Texas Veterans Commission faced a 20 percent budget cut in state funding. That reduction could impact nearly 50,000 claims for monetary compensation in the next two years and reduce U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits to Texas Veterans by approximately \$760 million.

On March 15, the House Appropriations Committee voted to restore \$800,000 of the \$1.8 million cut proposed for Texas Veterans Commission's Claims Representation and Counseling program for the 2012-2013 biennium. The committee also chose to fund

the position of a Woman Veterans Coordinator at the Texas Veterans Commission. The coordinator position, which would be created by legislation sponsored by Sen. Judith Zaffirini and Rep. Ana Hernandez Luna, would provide valuable outreach to an increasing number of Texas woman Veterans.

In April, the Texas Senate restored funding for Veterans services to fiscal year 2010-2011 levels.

Five members from each chamber must now hammer out differences in a budget conference committee. The response from leaders during Texas Veterans Commission testimony before the Senate Finance Committee has been positive. Nevertheless, resources are scarce for anyone seeking funding this session.



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