CALVET
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

NEWSLETTER

All veterans are reminded that the fastest way to learn about and secure the benefits they have earned is by visiting their local County Veterans Service Office. A listing of these offices is available at www.cacvso.org.

APRIL 2014

YOUNTVILLE VETERANS HOME UNDER NEW LEADERSHIP

Donald Veverka has been appointed by Governor Brown as the new Administrator for the Veterans Home of California, Yountville. Veverka, of Port Orchard, Washington, has been superintendent and administrator at the Washington Veterans Home since 2011. He was executive director at Oak Lane Retirement from 2008 to 2011, senior consultant and operations manager at Paradigm Senior Living from 2003 to 2006 and executive director at the Necanicum Village Retirement Community from 2002 to 2003. Veverka was administrator at the Peoples Retirement Community from 2000 to 2001, vice president of business development at Donald P. Maynes and Associates from 1998 to 2000 and a marketing representative for John Hancock from 1996 to 1998. He was administrator and consultant in private practice from 1992 to 1996 and owner and administrator at Care Centers West Inc. from 1982 to 1992. Veverka was administrator at the Torrey Pines Convalescent Hospital from 1978 to 1981 and at the TLC Convalescent Hospital from 1977 to 1978. He served as a medical corpsman in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1970.

"Don has decades of experience in long-term care and we are excited to have him join the Yountville team," said Undersecretary Diane Vanderpot. "I am confident that Don will prove himself to be invaluable to the Yountville members and will continue the home's 130-year legacy of quality care."

The Veterans Home of California, Yountville--which recently celebrated its 130th anniversary--was founded in 1884 by The Grand Army of the Republic, which included Veterans of the Mexican and Civil Wars'. Years

LEADERSHIP, page 3 >>

INSIDE

Secretary's Conference p. 3
Pearl Harbor Survivor p. 5
The Forgotten Eagles p. 7
Cloud Tech Training p. 8
Good News for Vets p. 12

Secretary's Message

This month, I want to highlight the 130th anniversary of the Yountville Veterans Home and the great work performed in caring for the veterans who reside in all of our eight California Veterans Homes.

This year marks the 130th year that the Yountville Veterans Home has been taking care of California veterans in the State's beautiful Napa Valley. The first building for this veterans home, originally intended as a retirement hospital for veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic, was completed in 1883, but the wait for funding for equipment for the facility delayed the opening until April 1, 1884. Although the veterans home was to have been opened on April 16 (to correspond with the signing of the peace at Appomattox that ended the Civil War), the date was actually moved back to April 1st to accommodate the first 13 residents who showed up early. Since then, the Yountville Veterans Home has been providing veterans with state-of-the-art medical care in independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing units.

Today, the Yountville Veterans Home is part of CalVet's Veterans Home Division, which has as a mission "to provide the state's aged or disabled veterans with rehabilitative, residential, and medical care and services in homelike environments" in all eight of its veterans homes throughout California. I am proud of this mission because it acknowledges the tremendous sacrifices California veterans have made and recognizes them for their noble service to our nation.

CalVet's eight veterans homes provide a system of live-in, residential care facilities offering a comprehensive plan of medical, dental, pharmacy, rehabilitation services and social activities within homelike, small community environments. Our residents engage in a wide range of activities, including social events, dances, patriotic programs, volunteer activities, arts and crafts, computer access, shopping trips and other off-site activities. But most importantly, our residents live in an atmosphere of dignity and respect; a true home where their families can feel comfort in knowing their loved one resides secure and happy among peers.

I invite you to share information regarding our eight CalVet veterans homes with family members and friends who may be considering retirement or long-term care facilities as an option.

Veterans wishing to join one of our veterans homes communities must be at least age 55, or younger if they have a disability – and have been discharged from active military service under honorable conditions. While deciding to leave one's family is always a difficult decision, sometimes circumstances dictate this decision is made. When that time comes for veterans, the Veterans Homes of California are an excellent option that can help make that transition just a little easier.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Gravett, Major General (Ret)
Secretary, California Department of Veterans Affairs

Brigadier General Sylvia R. Crockett receiving award from CalVet Secretary Peter J. Gravett.

CROCKETT AND METCALF-FOSTER RECOGNIZED AT WOMEN'S MILITARY HISTORY WEEK RECEPTION

By Juliene Crisostomo

Brigadier General Sylvia R. Crockett and Delphine Metcalf-Foster were both recognized with the coveted CalVet Trailblazer Award for their exemplary

AWARDS, page 4 >>

CALVET SECRETARY'S CONFERENCE TAKES PLACE MAY 2

Please join us at the CalVet Secretary's Conference taking place on Friday, May 2, 2014 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the CalOES Headquarters, 3650 Schriever Ave, Mather, CA 95655. Space is limited, so register soon at http://calvetsecretarysconferencemay2014.eventbrite.com/?s=23326083. We ask that each person register individually.

This CalVet Secretary's Conference promises to be informative and fun. We will have some dynamic presenters from the veterans community and a networking session. Bring plenty of business cards for the networking session, because there will be a prize at the end of the event.

<< LEADERSHIP

later, the mission remains the same: to provide residential care for aged or disabled veterans with the purpose of improving their health, reducing the incidence and severity of their disabilities, and increasing social interaction in an environment that promotes self-reliance and self-worth.

Since the Home's inception, it has been home to approximately 50,000 veterans. Today, it's the largest veteran's home in the United States. It has an active and therapeutic community for 1,000 veterans who come from a wide range of military ranks and civilian occupations. Current Home residents have military service, which spans from WWII to the Afghanistan/Iraq Wars. Since 1900, the Home has been owned and operated by the State of California.

For the latest news and information from the Yountville Veterans Home, go to www.facebook.com/VHCYountville and click on LIKE.

Delphine Metcalf-Foster receiving award from CalVet Secretary Peter J. Gravett.

<< AWARDS

service contributions to the women veterans' community during this year's Women's Military History Week reception.

More than 100 people gathered at the California State Library on March 19th to honor the contributions of women in the Armed Forces. Among the distinguished speakers and guests were Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez; Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva, Chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee; and Rocky Chávez, Vice-Chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee.

Brigadier General Sylvia R. Crockett, a member of the Mexican American Veterans Memorial Beautification and Enhancement Committee, began her military career in July 1982 and currently serves as the Assistant Division Commander (Support, 40th Infantry Division) and the full-time Director of Strategic Communications for the California Military Department.

General Crockett initially joined the California Air National Guard's 129th Air Rescue Wing at Moffett Federal Air Field, and in 1984, she joined the California Army National Guard and entered the California Military Academy. Crockett has blazed a substantial trail in her career, including being the first female to command the 223rd Infantry Regiment (Combat Arms), being appointed as the Joint Force Headquarters, J3, Director of Plans and Operations, and subsequently becoming the Chief of Staff of the California Military Department.

Delphine Metcalf-Foster's distinguished military serviced ended in 1996 when she retired as a First Sergeant from the United States Army Reserves. Metcalf-Foster is a combat veteran of Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield.

In 2004-2005, Metcalf-Foster the first woman to become Commander of the California Disabled American Veterans, a distinction not held by another woman in the organization's 81 year history. Currently, Metcalf-Foster serves on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. She is also an active member of Congressman George Miller's VA Committee and U.S. Military Academy Committee.

The Women's Military History Week Reception was held in partnership between CalVet, the Commission on the Status of Women and Girls and the California Research Bureau with sponsorship by Deloitte.

CALVET HONORS PEARL HARBOR SURVIVOR

Durrell Conner is one who many of us now refer to as a member of "The Greatest Generation." He is not only a World War II veteran, he is a Pearl Harbor survivor--one with a surprising connection to CalVet.

On December 7, 1941, the Pearl Harbor Naval Base in Honolulu, Hawaii was attacked by Japanese torpedo and bomber planes. At the time of the attack, eight battleships, eight cruisers, 30 destroyers, four submarines and scores of other U.S. Navy vessels and their personnel were in or very near the harbor. Conner was a 23-year-old U.S. Navy Yeoman 2nd Class on board the USS California when the bombs fell.

In the midst of the chaos that followed and while helping to fight a fire on deck, Conner noticed that the ship's flag had not been raised prior to the attack. With the help of another Sailor and to the cheers of his shipmates, Conner raised the flag, helping to restore some of the ship's dignity and the crew's morale. The badly damaged ship ultimately sank into the harbor, but Conner remembers seeing the flag being lowered by the ship's captain before it went down.

The sneak attack, which also sank or destroyed the USS Arizona, the USS Oklahoma, the USS West Virginia many other Navy vessels, killed 2,400 military personnel and 1,143 civilians. The event sparked outrage in the American people, the news media, the U.S. Government and around the world. In addressing Congress the day after the attack, President Franklin D. Roosevelt described December 7th, as "a date that will live in infamy."

Conner, who is now in his mid-90s, searched for years for the flag he raised over the ship. He'd heard that it was initially given to a Pearl Harbor Survivors group and later passed on to the California VFW or a state department.

When State Senator Mark Wyland's office called CalVet about Pearl Harbor survivor "constituent" Conner, the veteran's connection to the flag that has hung in the CalVet Medal of Honor Hall for more than 20 years seemed clear. The California VFW Post 1267 dedication plaque that is displayed next to the flag may confirm that connection.

For the first time in more than 70 years, Conner, accompanied by his wife, Peggy, recently came to Sacramento to see the flag he raised that fateful day. He brought with him a photograph of the USS California that was taken after the attack, which shows the battleship listing to the side with smoke billowing out. The U.S flag can be seen clearly in the photo, and Conner feels certain the partially-visible young sailor standing at the foot of the flagpole is him.

At a reception recently hosted by CalVet, Conner—tall and lean, wearing his Pearl Harbor Survivor hat and grinning from ear to ear—stood proudly in front of the floor-to-ceiling flag, now yellowed with age, while he was honored for his service to our country and his remarkable act on that terrible

CONNER, page 6 >>

<< CONNER

day. On behalf of the California Legislature, CalVet Undersecretary Diane Vanderpot read a Joint Resolution co-authored and signed by Senator Mark Wyland (who represents Conner's district) and Assemblymember Rocky Chávez, Vice-Chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee. Chávez staffer Veronica Badillo also helped honor Conner on behalf of the legislators by presenting him with a U.S. flag that had previously been flown over the California State Capitol.

Conner choked on his emotions when he told the reception audience that the crew had been ordered to abandon the burning ship, and when he admitted that he dreams about that day every night.

Conner and his wife were visibly moved by the public recognition and by the heartfelt handshakes and congratulations of members of the Gold Country Base U.S. Submarine Veterans—especially the WWII veteran—who attended the reception along with dozens of CalVet managers and staff who were there in his honor. They were equally impressed by the flawless performance of the Luther Burbank High School Jr. Naval ROTC Cadet Honor Guard.

When the reception was over and the guests and news media had gone, Conner, who had driven himself and his wife from their home in San Diego County to Clearlake and then to Sacramento, contentedly returned behind the wheel of their vehicle and headed off to the California Military Museum for a private tour before beginning the long drive home.

CENTRAL COAST VETERANS CEMETERY PROJECT MOVES FORWARD

The California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery project is moving forward, and the design phase is now 35% complete. The cemetery will be the third State Veterans Cemetery in California (others are in Yountville and Igo) and one of two to receive 100% funding by the National Cemetery Administration, State Cemeteries grant program. The cemetery will serve our central coast veteran community as a cemetery and a living shrine honoring all veterans.

The veterans cemetery is being constructed in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs under the State Cemetery Grant program. The cemetery will be opened in its first phase as a cremation-only facility and will be the first of its kind in the nation. The facility will perform all of the burials in the columbaria, allowing CalVet to serve the majority of veterans wanting to be interred at the facility. The second phase of the cemetery, not yet scheduled, will accommodate casketed burials.

SCREENING OF "THE FORGOTTEN EAGLES" A GREAT SUCCESS

More than 400 people gathered on March 20 at the Crest Theater in Sacramento to attend a special screening of "The Forgotten Eagles," a documentary that tells the true story of Mexico's 201 Squadron and their valiant efforts to fight alongside the United States in the South Pacific during WWII. This special screening was co-hosted by the California Department of Veterans Affairs and the Mexican American Veterans Memorial Beautification and Enhancement Committee.

"We are thrilled to see that the community has responded so well to this documentary, but most importantly, they have demonstrated a commitment to helping us repair and enhance the Mexican American Veterans Memorial," said Mirtha Villarreal-Younger, CalVet Deputy Secretary for Minority Veterans Affairs and event Chair. "Response to this event was phenomenal and, thanks to the attendees and our sponsors, we raised more than $10,000 which will go toward the memorial's improvements."

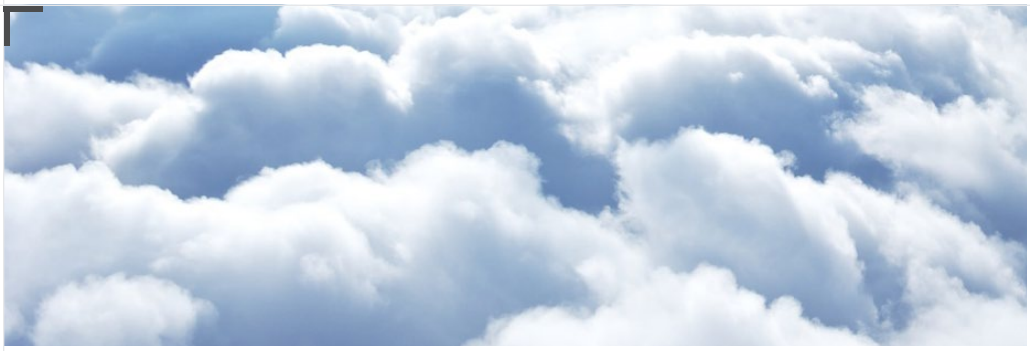
The night's keynote speech was delivered by Major Daniel J. Anderson, an Army Major with two combat tours under his belt. Anderson participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom with the 36th Medical Evacuation Battalion and as Company Commander in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan with the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade. Anderson has more than 600 MEDEVAC combat hours. Anderson's numerous awards and decorations include the Bronze Star, Air Medal for Valor, NATO Medal and many more.

"The Forgotten Eagles" was produced by 201 Productions and Executive Producers Roger and Felicity Marrs (personal friends of Secretary Gravett) and Producer/Director Victor H. Mancilla. This documentary tells the story of the valiant service of the Escuadrón 201 which was a Mexican fighter squadron, part of the Fuerza Aérea Expedicionaria Mexicana (FAEM — Mexican Expeditionary Air Force) that aided the Allied war effort during World War II. The squadron is commonly known as the Aguilas Aztecas, or "Aztec Eagles."

Following the armistice of World War II, families were banding together across the nation to find ways to honor their loved ones who died while serving their country. In the City of Sacramento, the State Capitol of California, a group of Mexican-American women banded together to create a memorial that would honor their husbands and sons who gave their lives while serving during World War II. These ladies formed La Sociedad de Madres (The Society of Mothers). Today they are referred to as the Madres Mejicanas, the Madres, or the War Mothers. The Madres began their grassroots fundraising drive in 1948 by selling homemade tamales and holding raffle sales at their local churches and other venues to finance the construction of the Memorial.

The Mexican American Veterans Memorial, or "El Soldado" as it is commonly known, was dedicated by the American War Mothers on September 16, 1975 on State Capitol grounds. It was dedicated in memory of the Latino veterans who sacrificed their lives to protect the freedoms we enjoy. Ceremonies honoring Latino service men and women are regularly held at the Memorial on Veterans Day and on other occasions.

The screening of "The Forgotten Eagles" was part of the efforts which are underway to restore and enhance the El Soldado. Upon completion, El Soldado will be the only monument in the United States dedicated to Latino/Hispanic veterans, to be located on State Capitol grounds.



CLOUD TECHNOLOGY CERTIFICATION TRAINING FOR SAN DIEGO VETS

The term "cloud computing" is everywhere, but what does it mean?

> **cloud computing**
> ***noun***
>
> Internet-based computing in which large groups of remote servers are networked so as to allow sharing of data-processing tasks, centralized data storage, and online access to computer services or resources.

In her 2014 Best Buy Super Bowl ad, comedic actress Amy Poehler asked, "What's the cloud?" "Where is the cloud?" "Are we in the cloud now?"

It was a funny ad, but "the cloud" is no joke. According to PC Magazine, "Cloud computing is big business: McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm, claims that 80 percent of large companies in North America that it's surveyed are either looking at using cloud services—or already have. The market is on its way to generating $100 billion a year."

Vets360—a nonprofit veterans service organization serving Southern California—is helping to prepare transitioning veterans for the quickly-growing field by offering Cloud Technology Certification Training to San Diego veterans.

Training and accreditation is offered at two levels: Cloud Master Level 1, which would allow an individual to apply for jobs with an average entry level salary of $62,000; and Cloud Master Level 2 which would prepare an individual to lead a cloud team, with an average salary of $112,000, or to work as a consultant providing Cloud Services and IT training.

Day, evening and weekend classes are available. Workforce Investment Act grants are available to income-eligible San Diego veterans. Grants for Los Angeles and Orange County students hopefully will be approved soon.

To learn more about Vets360 and to register for its upcoming Cloud Technology Certification Training, to go www.Vets360.org.

$1 MILLION RECOVERED FOR VETERANS, SERVICEMEMBERS AFTER COMPLAINTS

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) recently announced that it has recovered more than one million dollars for veterans, servicemembers and their families who complained to the Bureau about financial products and services. The relief, reported in the CFPB's second snapshot of complaints from military consumers, covers more than 14,000 complaints received from that group July 21, 2011 through February 1, 2014.

By and large, the complaints submitted by the military track with those of the population at large, said the CFPB. In the last fiscal quarter, CFPB handled on average more than 250 complaints per week from veteran and military families representing every state, every rank and every branch of the armed services. According to the snapshot report, the top three categories of complaints were mortgages, debt collection and credit cards.

Not all veteran and military families who submitted complaints received money; a number of them received non-monetary relief, such as cleaning up their credit reports, stopping harassment from debt collectors, and correcting account information. Others had their complaints closed without relief.

Besides mortgages, debt collection and credit cards, the CFPB accepts complaints about bank accounts, payday loans, private student loans, consumer loans, credit reporting, and money transfers. The Bureau requests that companies respond to complaints within 15 days and describe the steps they have taken or plan to take and to close all but the most complicated complaints within 60 days.

While servicemembers have all the protections that everyday consumers have, they also have additional protections based on their military service. According to CPFB, the Bureau is particularly concerned when servicemembers are not seeing the unique protections accorded to them by federal laws.

To submit a complaint to the CFPB, consumers can:

- Go online at www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint;
- Call the toll-free number: (855) 411-2372 or TTY/TDD (855) 729-2372;
- Fax the CFPB at (855) 237-2392;
- Mail a letter to: Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, P.O. Box 4503, Iowa City, Iowa 52244.

To read the full CFPB report, go to http://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/201403_cfpb_snapshot-report_complaints-received-servicemembers.pdf.

VALLEY VETERAN SURPRISED WITH PURPLE HEART

By Rick Montanez

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- It was the surprise of a lifetime for a North Valley veteran who was pinned with a Purple Heart for an injury he received during World War II.

Martin Medellin, 88, went to his VFW post Thursday for a fundraising dinner for the Central Valley Honor Flight. He had no idea he was actually attending a ceremony to honor him with an award almost 70 years after his war injury.

Medellin finally received his Purple Heart 69 years, two months and six days after being shot by a German sniper on the French battlefield.

MEDELLIN, page 10 >>

<< MEDELLIN

"It feels great," Medellin said. "It's really amazing. I won't be around too much longer I don't think, but my son will have it."

Medellin's VFW post secretly planned the ceremony after his friend, and fellow veteran A. Michael DeCesare wrote nearly two dozen letters to lawmakers, which went nowhere. Eight months later he tracked down long-buried paperwork to keep his promise and get the Purple Heart for his friend.

"If anybody deserved it, he did," DeCesare said. "His problem was, he was treated by a field medic, not a hospital. So records are almost zero in that case. It was a worthy cause, it was a good cause." Medellin served in the army for seven years. In that time he received several awards, including the Silver Star Medal, the second highest military decoration for valor. His battle injury came as he rescued 283 soldiers trapped by machine gunfire.

"I said Pete, I'm hit," Medellin said. "So he retreat [sic] back and turned me over and my clothes were all torn. The bullet went in through [my shoulder] and came out."

Even Medellin's family had no idea this would be celebrated Thursday.

"He'd always say, well one of these days maybe before I die, I'll get my medal he got today," his daughter Toni Medellin-Walterman said. "That's the only medal he's missing."

The Madera VFW post will host an actual fundraising dinner for the Central Valley Honor Flight on March 20.

Posted on KSFN website March 6, 2014. http://abclocal.go.com/kfsn/story?id=9457701

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CALL 2-1-1 TO FIND LOCAL VETERANS SERVICES

It's an easy-to-remember telephone number that connects people with essential human services—2-1-1. Besides veteran-specific services, callers are looking for training, employment, food pantries, help for an aging parent, addiction prevention programs for teenage children, affordable housing, support groups and other important programs. Last year, 2-1-1 referred more than 300 calls to CalVet, Sacramento County Vet Service Center, Sacramento Veterans Resource Center, VA Northern CA Health Care System, Military OneSource and other veterans service organizations.

Although not every California city has 2-1-1 service, the organization serves more than 90% of the state's population. In 2012, 2-1-1 services nationwide answered more than 15.8 million calls.

Next time you are trying to find information about local veterans services,

- Go to the CalVet website: www.calvet.ca.gov. Create a profile to receive personalized and location-specific information or simply browse the site. You may also call (877) 741-8532 toll free;
- Contact your county veterans service office. To find the office nearest you, go to www.cacvso.org. Click on Contact Us and then click on your county of residence;
- Dial 2-1-1.

CENTURY-OLD EXPERIMENT HELPS RESEARCHERS UNDERSTAND PTSD

Posted by Dr. Michael Roy, Professor of Medicine at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences on February 20, 2014

Why do post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms persist in some people and not others? An experiment performed more than 100 years ago is helping us find answers.

Our team and researchers at other top universities are learning more about PTSD using Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov's famous "conditioned response" experiment. Working with service members with and without PTSD, we hope to better understand the disorder to improve diagnosis and treatment.

THE EXPERIMENT

One experiment, based on Pavlov's discovery, involves observing how someone with PTSD experiences fear. The feeling of fear is an important cue to deciding if our surroundings are safe or dangerous. It also prepares us to respond. A part of the brain known as the amygdala plays a big role in deciding whether to stay where we are or run away, the "fight or flight" response.

In this experiment, we show individuals colored shapes on a computer screen. One pattern of shapes is paired with an uncomfortable puff of air directed to their throats. We show the shapes and then measure their physiological responses, such as heart rate, blood pressure, sweating and eye blinking. Their responses indirectly measure how their brain responds to stimuli. The amygdala and other parts of the brain trigger those responses.

OBSERVATIONS

During the experiment, study participants learn that one pattern of shapes signifies danger with the puff of air, while another pattern signifies safety, or no puff of air. Participants with PTSD tend to have a greater physiologic response to the danger cues — increased heart rate, blood pressure, sweat response and eye blinking, than those who don't have PTSD. This holds true even if they've had similar traumatic experiences, such as combat.

After study participants have learned whether danger is near or not by the pattern of shapes they see, they're shown the shape that means danger together with the one that means safety. Those with PTSD tend to pay more attention to the danger signal. Those who don't have PTSD focus on the safety signal. We know this by their physiological responses.

WHAT WE LEARNED

From this experiment we learned that individuals with PTSD find it harder to control their fear response even when danger and safety signals are present at the same time. The danger cue promotes such a fear of something bad happening that they can't believe in the safety cue. This pattern fits with studies of the brain that show that the frontal lobes, which normally control the fear centers of the brain, don't perform as well in individuals with PTSD.

To learn more about the relationship between PTSD and the brain, we look at how the brain functions in the same patients who did the shapes experiment. For this we use a special tool called functional MRI. The tool measures changes in oxygen levels in different parts of the brain. That gives us certain types of information, such as how strongly the amygdala responds to fear.

New imaging techniques, technologies such as virtual reality, and mobile applications such as smartphone apps can help us understand and treat PTSD.

Retired Army Col. (Dr.) Michael Roy is a professor of medicine and director of the Division of Military Internal Medicine at Uniformed Services University (USU), and director of recruitment for USU's Center for Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine. He's the principal investigator on multiple studies about war-related health that often use cutting edge technologies and virtual reality therapy.

For more information about psychological health and traumatic brain injury, visit the Defense Centers for Excellence website at www.dcoe.mil.

GOOD NEWS FOR VETERANS INTERESTED IN THE SKILLED TRADES

At the first-ever Veterans' Employment in Construction Symposium in Washington, D.C. late last month, First Lady Michelle Obama announced that 100+ companies in the construction industry are committing to hire more than 100,000 veterans over the next five years.

Associations like the National Association for Construction Education and Research, the Home Builder's Institute, as well as those supported by the Building Trades, Associated General Contractors of America, and firms partnered with Helmets to Hardhats are banding together to train the next generation of workers.

In her remarks, The First Lady noted that, "America's military turns out some of the highest-skilled, hardest-working employees this country has ever seen." She urged other sectors, firms and associations to view veterans as an investment in their organization and America.

In California, anyone interested in working in the construction industry needs to get licensed by the California Contractors' State Licensing Board (CSLB). CSLB, regulates and licenses the State's construction industry in 43 different licensing classifications—from acoustics to welding—and administers examinations to test prospective licensees.

The CSLB's Veterans Application Assistance Program offers help for those who are transitioning from military service to civilian employment. In many cases, veterans possess transferable skills to help meet minimum experience and training requirements for state contractor licensure. The program offers priority services to veteran applicants by evaluating transferable military experience and training, as well as education.

To learn about CSLB's licensing classifications, how your military experience will be evaluated, and about other California licensing requirements, go to www.cslb.ca.gov/applicants/veterans.

To learn more about Helmets to Hardhats, a national, nonprofit program that connects National Guard, Reserve, retired and transitioning active-duty military service members with skilled training and quality career opportunities in the construction industry, go to www.helmetstohardhats.org.

FEMALE VETERAN EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION SURVEY

Swords to Plowshares, a veteran rights organization in San Francisco, is conducting an employment and educational assessment of California women veterans in an attempt to identify gaps in services, raise public awareness, and advocate for improved services for women who have served.

If you are a woman veteran living in California, please complete the 5-minute survey found at www.surveymonkey.com/s/CAWOMENVETERANS. Once you complete the survey, you'll be entered to win a $100 prize. The deadline to respond is April 30, 2014.

For more information about Swords to Plowshares, go to www.swords-to-plowshares.org.

TRAINING DOGS FOR SERVICE: HELPING VETERANS COPE WITH DISTRESS

By Tom Cramer, VA Staff Writer

Henry Wheeler Shaw, a 19th Century American humorist, once made the following observation. "A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself."

The good folks at the Palo Alto VA's Menlo Park campus seem to agree, because for the last five years they've been using dogs to help Veterans overcome symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

GETTING OUT OF YOUR OWN HEAD

"Many of our Veterans report that the dogs help them 'get out of their own head' and be more present," reported Caroline Wyman, chief of Recreation Therapy Services at Palo Alto. "We've always been open to seeking creative and non-traditional ways to better serve our Veterans," she continued. "So when we were offered the opportunity to implement a service dog training program designed to help Veterans with PTSD, we were on board right away."

The concept is a simple one: a Veteran with PTSD is given a Labrador or Golden Retriever to pal around with for a couple of months. The Veteran's job is to teach his new companion a number of commands–commands he'll need to know when he eventually becomes a service dog for another Veteran.

Wyman said the training process benefits not only the dog, but the Veteran who is doing the training.

"It's an anxiety-reliever—a form of therapy," she explained. "The dog helps the Veteran relax, de-stress and focus on something other than his symptoms.

"Training the future service dog is an end in itself," Wyman observed, "but it's also just one small aspect of our PTSD treatment program here. It's a positive experience that helps the Veteran 'open up' and hopefully become more receptive to other forms of PTSD therapy. The dog is an avenue for getting the Veteran engaged in his treatment program."

"If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went."
-Will Rogers

IT'S ABOUT THE DOG

The canines are supplied to VA by Bergin University of Canine Studies. Their training at VA's Menlo Park campus is overseen by Sandra Carson, a therapeutic instructor with Paws for Purple Hearts, a non-profit.

"A lot of Veterans with PTSD tend to isolate," Carson said. "They don't engage. They build a defensive wall around themselves so they can feel safe. But dogs have an ability to shatter that wall. They're friendly and non-judgmental. They invite interaction.

"For example," she continued, "when you're out in public with the dog, people come up to you and start conversations with you, because you have the dog. So now you're

DOGS, page 14 >>

<< DOGS

suddenly talking to people. And it's easier, because the conversation isn't about you; it's about the dog. It takes some pressure off you."

"When you're training a dog, you're communicating with another living creature," she said. "You're engaging. And if you can learn to interact successfully with a dog, maybe that's a first step in learning how to interact successfully with people, again … with your kids, your spouse, even strangers."

A FRIEND IN NEED

When the future service dogs complete their training at Menlo Park, they're sent back to Bergin University for more advanced training. Once a canine becomes a fully certified service dog, he's paired with a disabled Veteran who needs a little help with life's logistical challenges, like opening doors, turning on a light switch, or picking up items that have dropped to the floor. An added bonus: the dog also becomes your devoted friend for life.

"These dogs can really sense your mood. They know when you're having a bad day," said John Crofut, a 71-year-old Vietnam Veteran who is training a male Lab named Ibarra. "They give you companionship without judgment. Ibarra doesn't need to know why I have the symptoms I have. He just wants to be with me."

Crofut said he volunteered for Palo Alto's service dog training program because he wants to help his fellow

Veteran John Crofut poses with his canine pal, Ibarra, who has since graduated fr om his service dog training at VA's Menlo Park campus. Crofut now has a new furry friend to train, a four-week-old pup named "Puckett."

Veterans who went to war but, in his words, "didn't come back whole."

"It's very rewarding for me to train a service dog for another Veteran," he said. "It's a good way for me to give something back."

"Plus," he added, "I just like dogs."

"He's a really smart dog," Crofut said. "He knows a ton of commands. If you tell him to go pick up his leash from the floor, he'll pick up the leash and bring it to you. He has a wonderful temperament."

SOME COMFORT HERE

The Veteran said he and Ibarra go everywhere together.

"On Thursday mornings I cook for a bunch of World War II vets at another part of the complex here at the Menlo Park VA," he said.

"So Ibarra goes there with me. He even sleeps in my room at night. Right now I'm not sleeping so well, so sometimes he'll come over and rest his head on my bed. He'll try and comfort me in some way."

"The dogs can help relieve symptoms of hyper vigilance," explained Melissa Puckett, a recreation therapist at Menlo Park. "They allow you to disarm, to let your guard down so you can get a better night's sleep.

Puckett said the future service dogs also serve another major role in a Veteran's recovery process.

"Once you're out of the military, you can sometimes start to question who you are and if you still have a purpose in life," she said. "Training a service dog gives you purpose, focus and a sense of accomplishment. It reminds you that you have value, which you can still contribute, that you have something to give."

To learn more about how VA is helping Veterans with PTSD, visit www.ptsd.va.gov.

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

VET COURT MENTOR CORPS BOOTCAMP

Justice for Vets--a professional services division of the National Association of Drug Court professionals, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in Alexandria, VA, will host its second annual Vet Court Mentor Corps Bootcamp, May 28-31, 2014 in Anaheim. This one-of-a-kind, three-day training is designed specifically for volunteer veteran mentors in Veterans Treatment Court. The Bootcamp is for any veteran who wishes to volunteer in an existing Veterans Treatment Court as a mentor and will give veteran mentors the opportunity to:

- Learn best practices to the make their VTC Veteran Mentor program the best it can be;
- Learn how to effectively work with Veteran Participants in a VTC;
- Learn their roles and responsibilities as Veteran Mentors;
- Understand the issues facing justice-involved veterans;
- Connect Veteran Participants to the local, state and national benefits they have earned;
- Interact, connect with and learn from fellow Veteran Mentors from across the nation; and much more!

To learn more about Justice for Vets, go to http://justiceforvets.org/about.

To find a veteran treatment court in your area, go to http://justiceforvets.org/veterans-treatment-court-locations.

To register for the Vet Court Mentor Corps Bootcamp, go to https://members.nadcp.org/conference-registration.

USDVA BRIEFS

VA MAKES SPECIALLY ADAPTIVE HOUSING GRANT ELIGIBILITY AUTOMATIC FOR VETERANS AND SERVICEMEMBERS LIVING WITH ALS

The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced that veterans and active-duty military personnel with service-connected amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, are now presumed medically eligible for grants up to almost $68,000 to adapt their homes. http://goo.gl/ufEklu

VA INITIATIVE SHOWS EARLY PROMISE IN REDUCING USE OF OPIOIDS FOR CHRONIC PAIN

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has initiated a multi-faceted approach to reduce the use of opioids among America's Veterans using VA health care. The Opioid Safety Initiative (OSI) is a comprehensive effort to improve the quality of life for the hundreds of thousands of Veterans suffering from chronic pain. http://goo.gl/flEyod

CARE AND BENEFITS FOR VETERANS STRENGTHENED BY $164 BILLION VA BUDGET

The President has proposed a $163.9 billion budget, a 6.5 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2014 that will support VA's goals to expand access to health care and other benefits, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and end homelessness among Veterans. http://goo.gl/z0A0qv

VA MAIL-ORDER PHARMACY RECEIVES HIGH SCORE IN STUDY

For the fourth consecutive year, the Department of Veterans Affairs Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy receives the highest customer satisfaction score among the nation's public and private mail-order pharmacies, according to a respected, independent study. http://goo.gl/TUlJNt

VA ROLLOUT OF SECURE VETERAN HEALTH IDENTIFICATION CARDS

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced the phased roll out of newly designed, more secure Veteran Health Identification Cards. The new cards are distinguished by additional security features and will have a different look and feel. http://goo.gl/s3vo7H

VA PARTNERS WITH KAISER PERMANENTE

The Department of Veterans Affairs is collaborating with Kaiser Permanente, a leading member of the health care industry, to pool resources and ideas to solve some of the largest and most complex challenges in VA health care. http://goo.gl/xoqBZY

NATIONAL EFFORT TO COLLECT VIETNAM VETERAN PHOTOS

The Education Center at the Wall has launched a national effort to collect photos of each of the more than 58,000 service members whose names are on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Family members, friends, neighbors and fellow service members are invited to contribute in one of the following ways:

ONLINE

- Scan the photograph with the highest quality setting possible. (This can be done where photo developing/printing services are available.)
- Go to www.vvmf.org. Click on the "Virtual Wall" tab and then search for the service member's name. Once you locate the individual, click on their profile and then "post a remembrance."
- Fill out the necessary information and then select "Attach an Image from my computer." Locate the scanned file on your computer and submit the remembrance. If you chose the option, an e-mail will be sent to notify you when the image has been posted on the individual's profile.

BY MAIL

- Make a copy of your photo. (Please don't send original photo as it will not be returned.)
- When copying the photo:
  -Make the highest quality possible
  -Use a glossy finish paper
  -Reproduce the photo at 8x10 size, if possible
- Fill out the photo submission form and mail with a copy of your photo.
- Indicate "**PHOTO ENCLOSED**" on the mailing envelope.
- Mail to:
  Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
  Attn: Call for Photos
  2600 Virginia Avenue, NW
  Suite 104
  Washington, D.C. 20037

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** Not all buyers will qualify.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

APRIL 5

APRIL 6
Gold Star Wives Event
American Legion Post 419, Santa Clara
Contact: (408) 244-3050

APRIL 8
U.S. Departments of Veterans Affairs & Defense
Survivors Forum TeleConference
6:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. PST
RSVP by Mach 28 to craig.zaroff@va.gov

APRIL 10
Kings County Job and Resource Fair
West Hills College, Lemoore

Veterans Collaborative – Amador County
Elk Lodge, Jackson
Contact: Nichole Mulford (209) 223-2286

APRIL 12
Swords to Plowshares
Women Veteran Professional NetWork
ConneXion@JLP, Oakland
Contact: (415) 655-7253

APRIL 15
Santa Clara County Collaborative for Military & their Families
Probation Dept. Office, San Jose
Contact: (408) 313-5391

APRIL 17
Hiring Our Heroes
Employment Workshop/Job Fair
American Legion Post 43
N. Highland Ave., Los Angeles
Contact: hiringourheroes@uschamber.com

APRIL 23
Veterans Town Hall/Collaborative
Federal Building, San Francisco
Contact: Eddie Ramirez (415) 740-4399

APRIL 30
American Legion
Capitol Legislative Day
Capitol Basement, Eureka Room, Sacramento

Note: To view full calendar, visit www.calvet.ca.gov/Files/Events_Calendar.pdf

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