

Center for Women Veterans History Project Executive Summary

The Center for Women Veterans was established in November 1994 by Public Law 103-446 in response to concerns expressed by the Congress, the GAO and the women veteran community that VA services to women veterans needed to be improved. The primary mission of the Center is to assure that women veterans receive benefits and services on a par with male veterans, ensure that VA programs are responsive to the gender-specific needs of women veterans, perform outreach to improve women veterans awareness of their eligibility for VA services and programs and assure that women veterans are treated with the respect, dignity, and understanding by VA service providers.

Since its inception the Center has worked to fulfill its mission by collaborating with Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration to improve VA services to women veterans, promote the use of VA benefits and services by women veterans, educate women veterans about VA benefits and services and the eligibility requirements associated to them, and improve the dissemination of information to the women veteran community. The Center has provided extensive educational and clinical consultation to veteran service providers both within and outside the VA as well as other federal agencies involved in the delivery of services to women. The Center has established a strong outreach component that provides women veterans an opportunity to discuss their issues and concerns with Center staff, allowing them to work closely with individual VA facilities in improving their services to women.

VA projects that by the year 2010, women veterans will make up over 10 percent of the veteran population -- more than double the current number. During the past eight years, the number of women using VA health care programs has increased by 64%. These increases underscores the importance of the Center's mission.

The Center for Women Veterans is committed to assuring that services, responsive to the needs of women veterans are maintained, and when necessary, enhanced. Our future goals reflect that commitment.

Responsible Official: Joan A. Furey, Director
Center for Women Veterans
202-273-6193

Department of Veterans Affairs
CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS
HISTORY PROJECT

- 1) **Background/History**
 - a) Women Veterans Program Office established
 - i) Purpose and structure
 - b) Center for Women Veterans established
 - i) Legislation - *Public Law 103-446*
 - (1) Purpose and structure
 - (2) Mission, Goals & Objectives
 - (3) Staff assignment & development
 - c) Briefings/Congressional Testimony/Position Papers
- 2) **Advisory Committee on Women Veterans**
 - a) Charter
 - b) Annual Reports
- 3) **Intra Agency Actions/Partnerships**
 - a) Development of Issues
 - i) Strengths & Weaknesses
 - b) Committees, Work Groups
 - i) Membership
 - ii) Outcomes
 - c) Training Programs
 - i) 00W Focus
 - ii) VBA/VHA
 - d) Staff Visits
 - e) Overview accomplishments
- 4) **Inter Agency Actions, Programs & Initiatives**
 - a) National Summit on Women Veterans – 1996
 - i) Proceedings
 - b) National Summit on Women Veterans – 2000
 - c) Federal Partnerships
 - i) Program participation/membership
 - d) Veteran-Community Partnerships
 - i) Training programs
 - ii) Consultations
 - e) Overview accomplishments
- 5) **The Future for the Center for Women Veterans**
 - a) Goals
 - b) Initiatives
 - c) Proposals



**Department of Veterans Affairs
The Center for Women Veterans
History Project**

1) BACKGROUND

- A. The 1982 General Accounting Office (GAO) report *Actions Needed to Insure That Female Veterans Have Equal Access to VA Benefits*, stated that Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities were unable to meet the healthcare needs of women veterans to the same extent as that of men veterans. In 1992, GAO returned to VA to assess the progress that had been made in responding to the problems identified in their 1982 report.

The second report, *VA Health Care for Women: Despite Progress, Improvements Needed*, determined that, although VA had made significant progress since 1982 toward ensuring women veterans' access to healthcare is equal to that of men veterans, some problems remained. Similar concerns regarding access and equity were voiced regarding Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), although no formal review had occurred.

Recognizing that these issues must be assessed, evaluated and where needed, corrected, the Honorable Jesse Brown, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, established VA's first WOMEN VETERANS' PROGRAM OFFICE (WVPO) in December 1993. The WOMEN VETERANS' PROGRAM OFFICE officially opened on February 7, 1994.

- B. In November 1994, the United States Congress enacted Public Law 103-446, which required VA to establish a CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS (hereto referred to as the Center) to oversee VA programs for women. This resulted in the reorganization of the WVPO into the CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS, with the Director reporting directly to the Secretary.
- C. The primary mission of the Center is to assure that women veterans receive benefits and services on a par with male veterans, that VA programs are responsive to the gender-specific needs of women veterans and to outreach to women veterans and service providers to educate them about VA benefits and services.
- D. The Center's goals are consistent with the functions and responsibilities outlined in Public Law 103-446, and include:
1. Serve as principal adviser to the Secretary on the adoption and implementation of policies and programs affecting veterans who are women.

2. Make recommendations to the Secretary, the Under Secretary for Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and other Department officials for the establishment or improvement of programs in the Department for which veterans who are women are eligible.
3. Promote the use of benefits authorized by this Title by veterans who are women and the conduct of outreach activities to veterans who are women.
4. Disseminate information and serve as a resource center for the exchange of information regarding innovative and successful programs that improve the services available to veterans who are women.
5. Conduct and sponsor appropriate social and demographic research on the needs of veterans who are women and the extent to which programs, authorized under this Title, meet the needs of those veterans, without regard to any law concerning the collection of information from the public.
6. Analyze and evaluate complaints made by/on behalf of veterans who are women about the adequacy and timeliness of services provided by the Department and advise the appropriate official of the Department of the results of such analysis and evaluation.
7. Consult with and provide assistance and information to officials responsible for administering Federal, state, local, and private programs that assist veterans, to encourage those officials to adopt policies which promote the use of those programs by veterans who are women.
8. Advise the Secretary when laws or policies have the effect of discouraging the use of benefits by veterans who are women.
9. Publicize the results of medical research which are of particular significance to veterans who are women.
10. Advise the Secretary and other appropriate officials of the effectiveness of the Department's efforts to accomplish the goals of section 492B of the Public Health Service Act, and of particular health conditions affecting women's health which should be studied as part of the Department's medical research program and promotes cooperation between the Department and other sponsors of medical research of potential benefit to veterans who are women.
11. Provide support and administrative services to the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.
12. Perform other duties consistent with this section, as the Secretary shall prescribe.

2. Accomplishments:

A. The Center has worked closely with organizational elements within VA, other federal and state agencies and a variety of veteran service organizations to assure that the issues and concerns of women veterans are addressed in a manner consistent with the goals of the respective organizations and, where appropriate, integrated into individual organization programs, policies and procedures. Examples of our accomplishments in this area include the following:

- Establishment of the Compensation and Pension Service Advisory Committee on Women's Issues within the Veterans Benefits Administration
- Establishment of the National Task Force on Women Veterans Health Care Issues within Veterans Health Administration
- Facilitated Funding for Veterans Health Administration's 11 VA-Community collaborative pilot programs to provide services to women veterans who are homeless
- Fostered "One VA" by facilitating joint training of Veterans Health and Benefits Administrations' women veterans coordinators
- Improved outreach focus to the women veterans community
- Fostered relationships with state and county departments of veterans affairs
- Established partnerships with national veterans service organizations to enhance and increase outreach efforts to women veterans
- Established partnerships with other Federal agencies responsible for providing services to women

B. Inter and IntraAgency Committee Membership

Center Staff are active members of the following committee's

- Compensation and Pension Service Advisory Committee on Women's Issues (VBA)
- National Task Force on Women Veterans Health Care Issues (VHA)
- Secretary's Working Group on Homelessness (VA)
- Homeless Veterans Task Force (VA)
- Homeless Women Veterans Initiative Oversight Committee (VHA)
- Committee on the Care of the Seriously Mentally Ill (VHA)

- Mammography Standards Committee (VHA)
- Interagency Committee on Women's Health and the Environment (HHS)
- President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Subcommittee on Disabled Veterans

C. Education & Training:

Since 1994, Center Staff have provided over 100 formal trainings on a wide variety of women's issues and been active in the development and presentation of educational programs designed to enhance VA staff's knowledge and increase their sensitivity of women veterans, health care needs, gender-specific concerns, and related issues. Additional educational activities have included the provision of training on women veterans' issues and VA services for women veterans to veterans service officers from the National Veterans Service Organizations, representatives of the Veterans Affairs Departments in State Governments and the National Association of County Veterans Services Officers. Center Staff have also provided educational programs on Sexual Trauma Issues in women veterans to elements within DOD, including the U.S. Army's Senior Review Panel on Sexual Harassment and Assault and the DOD Victim's Assistance Task Force.

D. Information Dissemination

Outreach: The dissemination of information to the women veteran community is a primary goal of the CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS, as such, the Center hosts open forums, town hall meetings, and meetings with representatives of national veterans' service organizations at sites across the country. These forums provide Center Staff an opportunity to discuss VA programs and services for women veterans, provide information on accessing benefits and discuss concerns regarding VA services for women in their local community. Since 1994, the Center has hosted approximately 75 such forums at various sites across the country. It is estimated that over 5000 women veterans participated in these forums.

Internet Access: The Center established and maintains a Web site within the VA Home Page to provide women veterans with information about the Center, VA health care services, and benefit programs. Veterans accessing these Web pages are afforded the opportunity to correspond with the Center's Associate Director via e-mail. The site has been accessed over 30,000 times since its inception. It can be accessed at <http://www.va.gov/womenvet/index.htm>

National Summit: In 1996, the Center sponsored the first *National Summit on Women Veterans Issues*. A second Summit: *Summit 2000*, was convened in June 2000. The purpose of these Summits was to provide veterans, veteran service providers, Federal agency representatives, legislative staffers and other interested individuals a forum in which to discuss current initiatives for women veterans, identify issues of concern to the women veteran community, and share ideas on how they might be addressed through legislative, programmatic and outreach activities. Over 450 individuals attended these events. 2000 copies of the 1996 Summit Proceedings were distributed to VA, DOD, DOL and HHS officials, as well as members and staff of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, the leadership of the National Veterans Service Organizations, Summit participants, and other interested individuals. The proceedings of *Summit 2000* will be similarly distributed.

E. **Advisory Committee on Women Veterans:** The Advisory Committee on Women Veterans was established in 1983 by Public Law 98 - 160. The law authorizes the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans to:

- Assess the needs of women veterans with respect to compensation, health care, rehabilitation, outreach and other benefits and health care programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs,
- Review VA programs and activities designed to meet these needs,
- Make recommendations for appropriate action, and
- Follow-up on the recommendations made by the Committee.

Since that time, the Committee has made recommendations to the Department of Veterans Affairs' that have contributed to the improvement of VA health care services, benefit programs, and the lives of America's 1.2 million women veterans. Some of the Committee's accomplishments include:

- Recommendation to establish the VA Women Veterans Coordinators Program
- Suggested initiatives and direction for VA Women Veterans Outreach Programs
- Recommended improvements in the area of gender specific healthcare
- Formulated and suggested various legislative initiatives

Committee members maintain a strong liaison with the women veteran community, national veterans service organizations, and other special interest groups concerned about veterans issues(e.g. National Coalition for the Homeless). Additionally members periodically visit local VA facilities and arrange meetings with women veteran consumers of VA services. They are briefed annually on VA initiatives for women veterans and openly discuss concerns with VA representatives. In this way, the committee monitors changes from both the Department and consumer

perspectives. The committee prepares a biannual report for the Secretary, identifying areas of progress, and areas of concern regarding VA's services to women veterans. The report also includes specific recommendations that address unresolved issues and problems.

3) The Future of the Center

Twenty-five years ago, the face of the U.S. military was virtually all male. But that is starting to change. The number of women enlisting in the Armed Forces continues to increase and they are taking on increasingly responsible and diverse roles. This trend holds important implications for VA as it enters into the twenty-first century.

Prior to 1973, women accounted for only 2 percent of the active duty military and the military occupations open to them were limited. Today, women make up more than 15 percent of the active duty forces and 20 percent of new recruits. Women are being deployed in greater numbers throughout the world, and in a wider variety of military occupations than ever before in the history of our country.

VA projects that by the year 2010, women veterans will make up over 10 percent of the veteran population -- more than double the current number. This increase, combined with questions surrounding the impact of military service on women's health, explains why VA has designated women's health as a special emphasis program

Over the last 15 years, VA has invested considerable effort in enhancing its programs for women. For the most part, these efforts have been very successful. During the past eight years, the number of women using VA health care programs has surged by 64 percent. Yet, as the various administrations within VA reorganize their approach to the delivery of healthcare and benefits, there is concern that the progress made in delivering services to women veterans will be lost and that, once again, women veterans will find themselves treated as "one of the boys."

The Center for Women Veterans is committed to assuring that services, responsive to the needs of women veterans are maintained, and when necessary, enhanced. Our future goals reflect that commitment.

Our plans for the future include:

- Monitoring changes within VHA and VBA and assess the impact these changes may have on the delivery of services to women veterans.
- Continue to improve our outreach efforts to women veterans with increased emphasis on outreaching to minority women veterans.
- Ensure that DOD/DOL/VA Transition Assistance Programs provide active duty women access to information on the benefits and services available to them as veterans, prior to their release from Active Duty.
- Foster the implementation of "One VA" by providing joint training and networking opportunities to women veteran coordinators across VA.

- Continue to provide women veteran consumers the opportunity to share their concerns and issues with VA managers through town hall meetings, community forums and national and regional summits.
- Partner with other VA program officials to market VA as a provider of choice for women veterans.

Responsible Official: Joan A. Furey, Director
Center for Women Veterans
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Attachment List

- Center for Women Veterans Pamphlet
- Center for Women Veterans, Report to the Secretary
Period covering October 1, 1994 to September 20, 1996
- Center for Women Veterans Biennial Report
February 7, 1994 to September 30, 1995
- Center for Women Veterans Report
Period covering September 20, 1996 to September 30, 2000
- Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
 - Charter
 - 1994 Report
 - 1996 Report
 - 1998 Report
- 1996 National Summit on Women Veterans
 - Agenda
 - Proceedings
- 2000 National Summit on Women Veterans-Summit 2000
 - Agenda
 - Proceedings
- Historical documents
 - Briefing on Sexual Assault and Harassment Experiences of Women Veterans – January 1997
 - Establishment of the Center for Women Veterans - November 30, 1994 - Memorandum
 - VA Programs for Women Veterans, November 1994 - VA Fact Sheet
 - *Changing Roles* – The National AMVET - Summer 1996 - article
 - Women Veterans who are Homeless - October 1998 - speech
 - Proposal for Improved Health Care Services for Women Veterans Who are Homeless – November 1998
 - Women Veterans, A Proud Heritage – a historical perspective
 - Secretary Letter, March 12, 1999
 - Secretary Letter, June 7, 2000
 - *Women Veterans Getting What They Deserve* – American Legion Auxiliary National News, July-August 2000 - article
 - Center for Women Veterans Newsletter – August 2000

History Project

**Center for Women Veterans
Attachments**

Highlights

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans November 3, 1999

The weekend of October 22-25 was a busy one for the women veteran community in Massachusetts and the Director of the Center for Women Veterans. Over those four days Ms. Furey was the Keynote Speaker at three events: The Dedication and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the Women's Clinic at the VA Medical Center in Brockton, Massachusetts; the Governor's 15th Annual Luncheon for Women Veterans, and the Dedication and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony of the first VA funded Therapeutic Residence for Women Veterans at the VA Medical Center in Boston. The residence is designed to assist women veterans involved in VA's Compensated Work Therapy Program in their transition to community living. All the events were well attended by local and state dignitaries, VA staff and members of the veteran community. These events gave Ms. Furey the opportunity to talk with many of the women veterans in the area. While in Massachusetts, Ms. Furey also toured the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans with Mr. Tom Lyons, Director of the shelter. The New England Shelter has designated a wing of the shelter specifically for women veterans and hopes to do the same in their new single room occupancy units.

Alice Raatjes, The Center's Associate Director, participated in Indiana's Women Veterans' Council's Women Veterans' EXPO, *A Celebration of Women*, held on October 16, 1999. The EXPO offered a full day of information programs and services to Indiana women veterans. Indianapolis VA Medical Center staff co-sponsored a Health Fair that provided free health screenings, flu shots and counseling to women veterans. The VA Regional Office and local community based organizations also provided counseling services, benefits information and literature. Participants attended a Town Hall Meeting where a variety of topics were discussed specific to veterans' entitlements and Mrs. Raatjes addressed specific topics related to VA benefits and services for women veterans. Ms. Raatjes was also the Guest Speaker at the EXPO Dinner Banquet, which was attended by several State and community dignitaries, VA officials, and veterans' service organization representatives and women veterans.

Mrs. Raatjes also participated in the Fall Training Conference for the South Carolina County Veterans Services Officers (CVSO) on October 20-22, 1999. Mrs. Raatjes provided two training programs related to women veterans issues, including sexual trauma counseling and claims processing and women veterans who are homeless. Over 40 CVSOs, representatives from other State and community programs, and representatives from the local VA regional office and medical center attended the conference. Mrs. Raatjes and the other Conference attendees were also provided an on-site tour of the Charleston CMOP (Consolidated Mail Out Pharmacy) site and were able to view first-hand the future of VA's pharmaceutical program.

Joan Furey

Highlight

Center for Women Veterans
October 12, 1999

The Center for Women Veterans Web Page Receives Second Award

The Center for Women Veterans Web Site has been selected as one of the Net's finest informative sites and has been included in the StudyWeb listing of educational links.



StudyWeb is one of the Internet's premier sites for educational resources for students and teachers. Inclusion in StudyWeb increases our exposure and will ultimately attract new visitors to our site. StudyWeb award recipients and site reviews have been featured on Webcrawler Select, The Lycos Top 5%, Education World and others. StudyWeb updates are also provided to media and educational resources around the world.

The Center for Women Veterans developed the "Women Veterans Programs and Initiatives" portion of the VA Homepage to attract women veterans and provide information about VA benefit programs and health care services including VA's Sexual Trauma Counseling Program. The site continues to be well received by the veteran public and other veteran-focussed groups and website creators. During September 1999, over 2100 persons accessed our inter-net site. We were also included in the September 1999 Most Requested VA Site list. Since its inception, there have been over 36,000 hits on the Center for Women Veterans, Programs and Initiatives for Women Veterans sites. The site can be accessed at www.va.gov/womenvets/index.html

Joan A. Furey

Highlight
The Center for Women Veterans Web Page Receives an Award

Center for Women Veterans

July 21, 1999

The Center for Women Veterans Web Site, "Women Veterans Programs and Initiatives" was selected as the weekly feature selection by *Suite 101.com*. This web-based community is dedicated to directing Internet users to the Best of the World Wide Web. The Center was recognized as "playing a big part in getting readers to the best of the Internet -- quickly under the Internet resource, "Veterans Health Care - Women."

The Center for Women Veterans developed the "Women Veterans Programs and Initiatives" portion of the VA Homepage to attract women veterans and provide them with information about VA benefit programs and health care services including VA's Sexual Trauma Counseling Program. The site has been well received by the veteran public and other veteran-focussed websites. Since its inception, there have been over 30,000 hits on the site.

Joan A. Furey



Center for Women Veterans Highlights

Center Director Honored with Two National Awards

Joan Furey, Director, Center for Women Veterans was recently notified that she has been selected as a recipient of two National Awards recognizing her accomplishments in public service.

Joan has been selected as a recipient of the *1998 Common Cause Public Service Achievement Award*. This award program recognizes individual who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership, persistence and courage; who have identified important public needs and have worked to meet those needs; who have long and distinguished public service careers; or who in some other manner made an outstanding contribution to the public interest in the areas of government performance and integrity. This award will be presented to Joan on Friday, June 19th at a special luncheon in Washington, DC.

Additionally, Ms. Furey has been selected as a recipient of a *1998 Annual National Public Service Award*. This award is jointly sponsored by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). This award is presented annually to public service practitioners who have exhibited the highest stands of excellence, dedication and accomplishment over a sustained period of time; and provide recognition for outstanding individuals who are creative and highly skilled career managers at all levels of the public service. The awards, Steuben crystal American eagles, will be presented to Joan at the ASPA's 59th National conference to be held in Seattle, Washington on May 12, 1998.

Joan Furey, Director
Center for Women Veterans

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans

May 17, 1999

The Director for the Center for Women Veterans participated as the *Keynote Speaker* for the Department of Veterans Affairs' North Texas' Health Care System, Women Veterans' Symposium on May 12, 1999. This all-day health care and educational event was designed to address the identified needs of our women veteran population.

The theme for the Symposium was "Preparing Women Veterans for the New Millennium." *Ms. Furey presented an overview of the activities and initiatives of the Center for Women Veterans, and discussed VA's commitment to being a provider of choice for women veterans in the 21st Century.* Other issues on the Agenda included several concurrent sessions relative to issues such as healthcare, financial, legal, job and occupational and other benefit's and services. The event was well attended by the Dallas-community and Texas-State program officials, VA healthcare professionals and others interested persons.

Alice L. Raatjes

For

Joan A. Furey

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans

June 4, 1999

Joan Furey, Director for the Center for Women Veterans was the Keynote Speaker at the Dedication of the Women's Clinic at the VAMC in Cheyenne, Wyoming. During her visit to Cheyenne, Ms. Furey toured the Medical Center, and the CBOC's in Greely and Fort Collins, CO.

On Memorial Day, Ms. Furey was the Keynote Speaker at the Florida National Cemetery. The Ceremonies were attended by approximately 3000 persons.

Joan A. Furey

Center for Women Veterans
Highlights
July 2000

The Center for Women Veterans sponsored a *National Summit on Women Veterans Issues, Summit 2000*, on June 23, 24 and 25, 2000, at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington D.C. The Summit was co-sponsored by the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach and the Disabled American Veterans.

Over 350 individuals attended the Summit including Federal agency representatives, VA Women Veteran Coordinators, community partners and women veterans from across the country. The Summit provided the participants an opportunity to discuss current initiatives for women veterans, identify issues of concern to the women veteran community, and to work with agency representatives to develop suggestions on how to address them.

The Summit began with the presentation of the Colors by the Military District of Washington and the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Ms. Sarah McClendon. Ms. McClendon, a World War II veteran, is a well-known journalist and author of the book "Mr. President", a memoir of her years as a White House Correspondent. The Chief of VA's Chaplain Service, Reverend Jeni Cook gave the invocation. Deputy Secretary, Hershel Gober, was the Keynote Speaker and provided attendees clear assurances that VA is committed to women veterans and guaranteed their place in the national VA agenda for health care and the delivery of benefits.

Proceedings from the Summit will be published by the Center for Women Veterans and made available to agencies and organizations interested in veterans issues, including the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor, and Defense; the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service; the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees; State governments and national veterans service organizations.

In July 1999, the Center for Women Veterans received e-mail correspondence from Ms. Lyn Chaharyn, the granddaughter of Wynona Aldrich, asking for assistance in obtaining some type of recognition for Ms. Aldrich's military service on the occasion of her 100th birthday celebration. Ms. Aldrich was a World War II woman veteran who served in the Women's Army Corps, 194th WAC Post Headquarters, in Algiers with Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Ms. Alice Raatjes, Associate Director of the Center, designed a special recognition certificate/collage from the Center for Women Veterans and arranged for Ms. Kathleen Lyons, Women Veterans' Coordinator at the VAMC in Togus, ME, to present it to the veteran along with VA's personal gratitude for her military service.

Ms. Chaharyn recently notified us of her mother's death and in her letter stated: " You were so wonderful last year when you prepared the very special certificate of appreciation collage for "Nona's 100th birthday. I am sure Nona was thrilled with the special attention." Thank you for sending her off with such fond memories." Included with her "thank-you" note was a wonderful picture of "Nona" in military uniform, standing in rank with other WAC's and General Eisenhower marching "in review."

Joan A. Furey

HIGHLIGHTS

**Center for Women Veterans
July 22, 1999**

On July 19, 1999, Ms. Joan Furey, Director of the Center, gave a presentation on VA Initiatives for Women Veterans at the VA Training Forum held in conjunction with the Federally Employed Women's National Training Program in Phoenix, Arizona.

July 19 -22, 1999 Ms. Alice Raatjes, Associate Director of the Center, was faculty at the National County Service Officer's Association annual training in Des Moines, Iowa. Ms. Raatjes provided information on VA initiatives for women veterans, sexual trauma issues in women veterans, VA homeless programs and the claims development process.

Joan A. Furey

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans

April 19, 1999

Joan Furey, Director of the Center, was the Keynote Speaker at a Women Veterans Symposium held by the VA Medical Center in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania on April 16, 1999.

On April 17, Ms. Furey was a guest speaker at the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the founding of the Black Veterans for Social Justice (BVSJ) in Brooklyn, New York. BVSJ is a community non-profit organization that provides housing, job assistance, counseling and other services to homeless veterans in the greater New York Metropolitan Area.

Joan A. Furey

CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS
HIGHLIGHTS
March 25th, 1998

Joan Furey, Director of the Center appeared on Bryant Gumbel's show: "Public Eye" on Tuesday night March 24th. Ms. Furey discussed the incidence of rape among women veterans and VA's response to this very serious problem.

The Center for Women Veterans in collaboration with VBA's Task Force on Women Veterans Issues participated in a National Satellite TV Broadcast on "Women's Issues and PTSD". This was the second in a series of educational programs designed to assist VBA staff in developing personal trauma claims for women veterans with PTSD related to personal assault.

On Monday, March 31st, Ms Furey was the keynote speaker at the Baltimore VA's celebration of Women's History Month.

Joan Furey, Director
Center for Women Veterans



Center for Women Veterans Highlights

On March 24, 1998, the Associate Director for the Center for Women Veterans participated in a meeting between VA Project Torch officials, Project Return Foundation, Inc, and JBS, Inc. representatives in Brooklyn, New York. The purpose of this meeting was to facilitate a partnership proposal to afford homeless women veterans access to community services and gender specific health care. Project Return is a community based organization specializing in providing comprehensive assistance to women with dual diagnosis of homeless and substance abuse or mental illness. The proposed services to be offered to women veterans by Project Return will be established in three levels:

- social marketing strategies and street outreach designed to identify women veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through a collaborative efforts,
- a transitional living component for women veterans in need of immediate, short term housing,
- a "the Living Room" a place where women veterans can come for safety, services and network with other veterans.

A formal proposal will be developed to encompass program services from both VA and Project Return to ensure a holistic approach to meeting the needs of homeless women veterans. Ultimately, this proposal and subsequent treatment program model can serve as a baseline for implementation in other communities.

On March 25, 1998, the Associate Director facilitated training on issues related to women veterans, sexual trauma and disability claims processing at the VBA Training Academy. The class participants were individuals selected as Military Service Coordinators (MSC) for assignments in Europe and the Far East. Following the presentation, a discussion time was allotted to address individual concerns, questions and lay groundwork for communication between MSCs and the Center.

Joan Furey, Director
Center for Women Veterans

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans

May 24, 1999

The Director for the Center for Women Veterans was the Keynote Speaker at the Pilgrim Psychiatric Center Memorial Day Ceremony, which was held on May 18. Ms. Furey, a 1967 graduate of the Pilgrim School of Nursing was honored as a Distinguished Alumni and Veteran. Jack Gilbride, veterans representative for Congressman Peter King presented Ms. Furey with an American Flag that had been flown over the United States Capitol. Other speakers included Mr. Larry DeSantos, Deputy Director New York State Department of Veterans Affairs and Mr. Robert Smith, Director Suffolk County Veterans Commission.

On May 18, Ms. Alice Raatjes, Associate Director gave a presentation on the Center for Women Veterans to the participants of VBA's Leadership Enhancement and Development Program (LEAD). The LEAD Program is for high performing VBA employees who have been identified as having leadership potential.

Joan A. Furey

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans

May 7, 1999

On April 29 and 30, Joan Furey, Director, represented the Department at Spring Meeting of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in Military Service in Herndon, VA.

On May 2, 1999, Ms. Furey, joined Mr. Pete Doughery in a panel presentation discussion on VA programs for homeless veterans at the National Coalition for Homelessness' Annual Conference in Crystal City, VA.

On May 4, Ms. Furey provided a presentation on women veterans issues at the Commonwealth of Virginia's Division of Veterans Affairs annual staff training in Virginia Beach, VA.



**Center for Women Veterans
Highlights
May 1998**

Memorial Day Ceremonies

The Director was a guest speaker at Memorial Day Ceremonies held at the Long Island National Cemetery in Farmingdale, New York on Sunday May 24, 1998 and at the Calverton National Cemetery in Calverton, New York on Monday May 25, 1998. The ceremonies were well attended by veterans and their families. Ms. Furey spoke of the importance of Memorial Day in recognizing and honoring the sacrifices of all veterans and assuring that future generations of Americans never forget the contributions these men and women have made in defense of our Nation.

The Associate Director was the Guest Speaker at the Memorial Day Ceremonies held at the VA Ft. Custer National Cemetery in Augusta, Michigan. The Ceremony was attended by almost 1,300 veterans and their families. Congressman Nick Smith read the Presidential Proclamation. Several veterans groups were represented and many laid wreaths honoring deceased veterans. Two new monuments were dedicated and will be permanently placed in the Cemetery. The Associate Director spoke of the importance of remembering veterans living and deceased. She encouraged all who attended to remember women veterans who have contributed significantly to the Nation's defense and our sense of freedom. Her presentation was well received.

The United War Veterans Council of Battle Creek, Michigan, held a dinner for the Associate Director on May 23, 1998. The dinner was attended by approximately 90 veterans. Many World War II women veterans were in attendance and generally, expressed satisfaction with VA programs and services they have accessed over the years. Others in attendance included: Brigadier General Michael Rice, the Michigan Director of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Peter M. Bilbia, Deputy Mayor for the City of Battle Creek, the Chief of Staff from the Battle Creek VAMC, and Mr. Robert Poe, Director Ft. Custer National Cemetery. The Associate Director responded to questions and comments from the group after dinner.

The Director and Associate Director participated as faculty at the 8th Annual National County Veterans Services Officers Training Conference held May 16-22, 1998. The Director presented an overview of topics including a thorough presentation and discussion of the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in women veterans. The Associate Director presented classes including Persian Gulf and Women Veterans, and Sexual Trauma Counseling and Claims Assistance. Forums were also held with the Service Officers where concerns and issues related to and affecting women veterans were discussed.

Joan A. Furey

Highlights Center for Women Veterans November 18, 1999

On November 3, Joan Furey, Director of the Center, was a special guest at the 1999 Awards Dinner of the National Women's Law Center honoring Distinguished Women in the Military. Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy, Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, United States Army, was the guest of honor. General Kennedy, the first woman to attain the rank of three-star general in Army was recognized for her accomplishments in the Military and her efforts to improve opportunities for women in the Armed Services. During the program 36 women were individually recognized for their accomplishments in improving opportunities for women in the military. Ms. Furey was recognized for her work on behalf of women veterans.

On November 6, Alice Raatjes, Associate Director was a guest speaker at the 14th Annual Oklahoma Women Veterans Recognition Day held in Norman, Oklahoma. Approximately 150 women veterans, State legislators, members of the Oklahoma State Air Guard, and other State and federal agency representatives participated in this event. Mrs. Raatjes provided the audience with a perspective of women veterans' contributions both in military service and as citizens of local communities and discussed VA's commitment to serving women veterans. Among the participants were several Native American women veterans who are working with local tribe leaders on veterans' issues. The organizers of this event are planning a national "POW WOW" for next year to honor the "Heroine Warriors of Oklahoma."

On November 6, 1999, Ms. Furey was the Keynote Speaker at the Bay Area Waves "All Women Veterans Luncheon." Over 350 women veterans attended the luncheon. During her remarks Ms. Furey discussed the activities of the Center for Women Veterans and specific initiatives for women veterans within VA.

While in Northern California Ms. Furey also visited the VA Medical Centers at Palo Alto and San Francisco and the VA Regional Office in Oakland. During these visits she was provided an opportunity to meet with both VA staff and veteran consumers to discuss their perceptions of VA programs and services for women. During her visit at the RO, Ms. Furey gave a training on "Sexual Trauma and Women in the Military."

On November 11, 1999 Ms. Furey traveled to Olympia, Washington to address the participants of the "Vietnam Women Veterans First Homecoming Reunion." This event was specifically designed to honor and recognize the non-nurse women veterans who served in Vietnam during the war. Over 150 women,

representing four branches of the military (Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines), attended the Reunion.

The week was filled with recognition and remembrance activities, including a Veteran's Day candlelight ceremony and wreath lying at the state capitol honoring the women who have died since returning from the war. On Friday November 12th, Ms. Furey provided four educational seminars for the participants. The presentations were: An Overview of VA Initiatives for Women Veterans, PostTraumatic Stress Disorder in Women Veterans of Vietnam, Sexual Trauma Issues in Military Women and Women Veterans and Homelessness. The information was well-received by the participants.

Joan A. Furey

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans November 22, 1999

Oklahoma Recognizes Women Veterans. The Associate Director participated in several program events developed to honor Oklahoma women veterans and their contributions.

She facilitated training at the First National *State Women Veterans Coordinators Conference* held in Lawton, Oklahoma, on November 4-5, 1999. Mrs. Raatjes presented programs on, Women Veterans, a historical perspective, Post Traumatic Stress and Sexual Trauma, and an Introduction to and Overview of VA Health Care Services and Benefit Programs. Over 30 state and county women veterans' representatives from Maine, Utah, Kentucky, Texas, Oklahoma and other states shared ideas and concerns about women veteran's issues. Assistant Secretary, A. Borego, Department of Labor also participated in the training program.

Mrs. Raatjes was the "Guest Speaker" at the *Oklahoma Women Veterans Appreciation Day* on November 6, 1999. Women veterans, community advocates and State and local community officials attended the event. State Representatives Ron Kirby and State Senator Sam Helton presented Mrs. Raatjes with Honor Citations, on behalf of the State of Oklahoma. The event was followed by a luncheon and provided an opportunity to talk one-on-one with Oklahoma women veterans.

Mrs. Raatjes was honored as a "Grand Marshal" at the National Veterans Honor Pow Wow held in Lawton, Oklahoma, on November 5 - 7, 1999. The Associate Director and Ms. Diane Evans-Carlson, lead over 100 Native Americans into the Lawton-Ft. Sill Coliseum during the Grand Entrance Parade. Mrs. Raatjes also participated in several special "dances" and Pow Wow events to honor veterans and Native American warriors and had the opportunity to discuss VA entitlements with several attendees. This was the first National Pow Wow event that included special recognition for women veterans and their contributions to America. Hundreds of Native Americans from various tribes such as Comanche Nation, Kiowa Nation, Pawnee and Euchee tribes and others participated in the Pow Wow.

Joan Furey

Highlights
February 9-19, 1999
Center for Women Veterans

On February 9, 1999, The Director and Associate Director attended a forum with community providers of services to homeless women in the Sand Diego area at the Vietnam Veterans of San Diego Transitional Homeless Program. The forum was held in an effort to obtain more information about the difficulties associated with providing healthcare and rehabilitation services to women veterans who are homeless. Twenty-five community service providers participated in the forum. Following the meeting, they visited "Rachel's House," a daytime drop-in-shelter for women.

On February 10, 1999 Ms. Furey visited the VA Medical Center at San Diego, the VA Regional Office, and the Mission Valley Outpatient Clinic.

On February 10 and 11, 1999, Mrs. Raatjes, represented the Center at the President's Committee for Employing People with Disabilities'-Sub-committee on Disabled Veterans. As part of the committee, Mrs. Raatjes joined representatives from DAV, HHS, Military Order of the Purple Hearts, California State Employment and Development Department and the President's Committee in several planned events that occurred over a 2-day period including: observation of a Transition Assistance Program Briefing at the 32nd Street Naval Facility, an all day public forum where Committee members heard from over 15 agencies and organizations about concerns related to the employment of disabled veterans.

On February 19, 1999, Ms. Furey was awarded the 1999 "Breaking the Glass Ceiling Award", (Public Sector category), by the Women Executives in State Government. Given annually, the award honors individuals in State Government, in Public Service, in the Private Sector and a Governor, for their achievements and for assisting women to break through the glass ceiling.

Joan A. Furey,
Director

Highlights

Center for Women Veterans
March 17, 2000

March 7 – 10, Center Director Joan Furey visited the VA Domiciliary at White City, Oregon. On March 7, Ms. Furey toured the Domiciliary, met with VA staff and managers and held a forum with women veterans receiving care at the facility. On March 8 & 9, Ms. Furey attended and presented at a VISN 20 conference on "Clinical Issues in the Treatment of Women Veterans." This two-day conference focused on the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of PTSD, Substance Abuse, and other Psychiatric Illnesses in women veterans, and the challenges this population presents to VA. Over 200 clinicians from the VISN attended the conference.

Alice Raatjes, Associate Director, participated in the first Women Veterans Workshop, hosted by the Regional Office in Waco, Texas, on March 9, 2000. This all-day event included formal presentations by members of the local VA regional office, medical center and community advocates for women veterans. In addition to the formal presentations, an Information Fair with additional staff providing information relative to local VA and non-VA community programs, was available. Mrs. Raatjes' presentation included an overview of the mission and goals of the Center for Women Veterans and addressed specific concerns regarding women veterans with special emphasis on women veterans who are homeless. Approximately 45 persons attended this event. Mrs. Raatjes was also provided an opportunity to talk one-on-one with a number of the attendees and women veterans from the local community as well as participate in a round-table luncheon discussion. The Associate Director also was included in a brief interview with Waco's local TV *Station 25*, with the segment appearing on the evening news.

On March 15, Ms. Furey traveled to the VAMC in West Haven, Connecticut to meet with the staff of the Northeast Program Evaluation Center, and VHA's Homeless Veterans Program Office. The meeting was held to discuss implementation of VA's Homeless Women Veterans Initiative Grant and the design of a training program for the recipients of grants. While in West Haven Ms. Furey also gave a presentation on Women Veterans Issues for the staff of the VAMC's Community Care Center.

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