

# Veterans Service Newsletter



VSO Newsletter

March 2005

The Douglas County Veterans Service Office strives to provide excellent service to the County's veterans and their families. Staff serves as advocates for veterans. One important goal of the office is to ensure that Douglas County veterans receive the maximum amount of entitlements for which they are eligible. Making a difference in veterans lives is a program focus.

## Troops Returning Activities

In preparation to welcome home our troops, many meetings were held. Signs saying "Welcome Home Troops" in varying shapes and sizes have been placed. The signs are posted along major roads in the County, from Glendale to Drain/Yoncalla and from Diamond Lake to Reedsport. Signs were provided to each city in the County. Thank you to the Veterans Groups, Civic Groups and all the countless volunteers who met at the Fairgrounds on March 23rd to assemble signs.



The Veterans Advisory Committee members activated the veterans groups phone tree to gather volunteers to place signs in the right of way across the County. These veterans groups were assigned places to distribute signs in the city where their group is located. The remaining half of signs were provided to the cities for distribution to the public. Our County Commissioners and volunteers have distributed all these signs.

It has been suggested that these signs should remain up from March to May 1<sup>st</sup>. Following this date, the signs may be kept by the recipient or will be removed by a crew assigned by the committee.

## Commissioner Liaison

Following each election, organizational changes occur in relation to county department liaison activities. Recently, Commissioner Marilyn Kittelman became the liaison commissioner for the Veterans Service activities. This is a positive and impressive benefit for the veterans community. All of OUR commissioners will now have knowledge and experience of our program. Commissioner Kittelman will be invited to attend Veterans Advisory Committee meetings and may be available to attend some public functions where the presence of a commissioner would be appreciated or should be involved. Commissioner Van Slyke will focus on development management departments while Commissioner Kittelman is specializing on social service agencies. Commissioner Kittelman is very positive about working with the County Veterans Service staff and county veterans issues.



## “Welcome Home Soldiers”

A display has been presented at the Courthouse to celebrate veterans: present and past. The display has numerous pictures from the civil war to the current Persian Gulf Era activities. Come see the display located in the breezeway between the Courthouse and the Justice Building. For those unfamiliar with the Courthouse, it is located near the Information Booth and Snack Shop.

## Veterans Advisory Committee Activities

The members of the Advisory Committee represent the Veterans of Douglas County. The Committee is a nine member board appointed by the Board of Commissioners. Members are required to be veterans or very close relatives of veterans.



The County's Veterans Advisory Committee

Ordinance provides that voting members shall represent: World War II, Korean Conflict, Vietnam War, Desert Storm Conflict, Iraq War and Peace-Time Service. The term of appointment is two years. The committee meets three or four times a year in addition to the required quarterly meetings.

Committee participation is a vital part of the Veterans Advisory Program. Citizens interested in The Douglas County's veterans program have an opportunity for greater involvement through committee participation. The Veterans Advisory Committee was created in 2004.

## Customer Surveys

In 2004, the Veterans Service Office initiated a customer comment card program. Comment cards are available in the office to clients who schedule appointments or arrive for walk in meetings. A wide range of feedback is received, mostly positive.

During 2004, the Veterans Service Office received 23 comment cards. Many of the cards commented on the clients experience, individual staff members and related positive outcomes. For the 23 comment cards, ninety-five percent (95%), stated the office exceeded their expectations, four percent (4%) stated that the office had met their expectations and one percent (1%) stated that the office acted below their expectations.

## Special Solicited Survey

In our continuing effort to better serve the public, we polled clients and asked for their observations, comments and suggestions. From March - April, 2005, the office completed a Solicited Comment Card Survey. A letter and postage paid comment card was sent to 77 randomly picked veterans who had visited the office during the months of January and February.

Of the 77 mailed comment cards, 36 were returned to the office. Of those 36 comment cards, ninety-six percent (96%) stated the office exceeded their expectations in the categories of courtesy, timely response, knowledge, valuable information and overall impression. Four percent (4%) stated that the office met their expectations in those same categories.

In 2005, the office will integrate the customer comment card into the Veterans Service Web page. When completed, this will enable clients to log onto our web page and let us know about their experience.

The comment card system is an important ingredient of the Veterans Service Office mission. It is designed to focus our attention and energies on customer service, to obtain feedback and to assist us in strengthening our public service.

## Parade Coordination

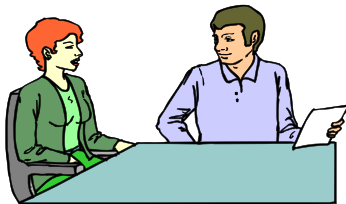
The Veterans Advisory Committee has taken on the important task of completing preparation for the 2005 Veterans Day Parade.



Last year's event was extremely successful and the goal for this year is to make our parade the largest Veterans Day Parade in the state.

## 2004 Successes & Accomplishments

- The Veterans Service Office hosted thirty meetings throughout the past year for the Veterans Advisory Committee, the Parade Committee and for VetNet.
- The Veterans Day Parade obtained National site recognition from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- The newly created Veterans Advisory Committee met for nine meetings in 2004.
- The office was responsible for claims totaling \$14,680,447 in 2004. These are direct funds to County Veteran residents. Some individual claim awards totaled more than \$50,000. The grant rate was approximately 70%.
- Assisted a monthly average walk in client volume of 433 per month in 2004.
- In 2004, a staff member was added, allowing office reorganization, enabling two office staff to do claims work and administrative functions, clerical and reception duties handled by the new Department Assistant.



## Veterans Administration Hospital Liaison

To better serve the veterans of Douglas County, a liaison has been established to the County from the Veterans Administration Hospital: Sharon Carlson, Coordinator of Community and Public Affairs. To implement this relationship, our liaison will receive notices of Veterans Advisory Committee meetings, informational press releases and Veterans Advisory Committee agendas.

Coordinating the efficient and effective provisions of services is an important role for the County Veterans Service Office. This liaison appointment is an important step in that direction.

## Advisory Commission Liaisons

One of the goals for the Veterans Advisory Committee is to outreach to veterans groups in the County. At their last meeting the Commission chose liaison assignments to veterans groups.

Roger Arnold is the liaison to the Non-Commissioned Officers Association, VFW Post #4316 and VFW Post #2468

James Baird is the liaison to VFW Post #3995, American Legion Post #152

Bud Bessey is the liaison to the Fleet Reserve Association, Uniform Service Disabled Retirees, Southern Oregon War birds

Donald Isakson is the liaison to the Military Order of the Purple Heart, American Legion Post #16, American Women Veterans Association

Richard Nygaard is the liaison to the Vietnam Veterans of America, VFW Post #3970, Marine Corp League

Charles Spindel is the liaison to the VFW Post #5714, VFW Post #7752, VFW Post #9744

Rick Stewart is the liaison to the American Legion Post #62, VFW Post #9745

Jack Van Dolah is the liaison to the Disabled American Veterans, American Vets

Open Position will be the liaison to the VFW Post #3594, American Legion Post #123, Oregon Veterans Motorcycle Association

## County Veterans Service Staff Training & Certification

It will be a busy spring for Mary Newman and Michele Nelson. On April 27-29th they will attend the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs CVSO Spring 2005 training conference. On May 16-20th, they will attend their California VSO conference. Michele is working toward the goal of achieving her VSO certification. Mary will be attaining required continuing education credits.



## Veterans Service Staff

### John Boyd, Manager

John is a long term County employee. He graduated from Portland State University with a degree in Business Administration and a minor in Economics. He is a veteran with service in the Army, 1974-77. He was assigned to the 14<sup>th</sup> Military Police Unit.



Michele is working on completing her Associates Degree in Accounting at Umpqua Community College.

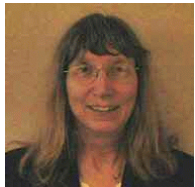
Michele noted her Dad worked with the Aids to Navigation Unit with the Coast Guard and she had the pleasure of touring all of the lighthouses in Oregon and some on the Washington and California coast. Michele has previously been a customer or program specialist with the County for four years.

### Amanda Nunley, Department Assistant.

Amanda is the latest addition to the Veterans Service Office team. Amanda is a recent graduate of Roseburg High School. She came to the County from the private sector and has strong experience in customer service and office systems. Make sure to welcome Amanda at your next visit.



### Mary Newman, Veterans Service Officer



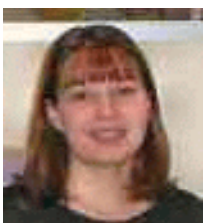
Mary Newman, Veterans Service Officer. Her father was a Navy Chief Petty Officer. Mary consider herself a Navy Brat! She graduated from Paramus (NJ) High School and attended Newark (NJ)

State College. After moving to Oregon in 1970, she worked for the U. S. Forest Service, the Department of Defense and the VA Regional Office in Portland.

Mary became a Veterans Service Officer in 1984. As a veterans' advocate, she is accredited through the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Mary believes the honor of serving as a veterans advocate is the best job anyone could have.

### Michele Nelson, Office Manager

Michele joined the office in January, 2005.



Currently, she is receiving training on processing widows claims and new claims. Mary and Michele will be attending training in May to receive training and certification for service officers.

### Veteran Service Web Page

Were you aware there is a Douglas County Veterans Service Web Page? Great things have been completed and some are still under construction. Visit us at:

[www.co.douglas.or.us/Veterans](http://www.co.douglas.or.us/Veterans).

Recent changes include County specific information on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and links to Department of Veterans Affairs on-line forms. Coming soon will be the Douglas County Veterans newsletter and minutes of the Advisory Committee meetings.

Veterans Service Office hours are Monday - Thursday from 8am to 5pm. We welcome your walk in visits Monday - Thursday 8-3:30. The office is closed each day at the lunch hour and is closed all day Friday.

### Michele Nelson, Office Manager (Continued)