

BEYOND JUST ONE DAY

WSUV, Clark College make sure veterans get all the assistance they need

Often the exhortation is delivered with a blended sense of passion and urgency: "Americans should honor military veterans every day, not just on Veterans Day."

That's why we were encouraged by a ceremony that occurred at Washington State University Vancouver on Tuesday. To be sure, it wasn't Veterans Day; that was about three weeks ago. But by announcing WSUV had been recognized by the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs as a "veteran-friendly" institution, the local university showed how every day can be Veterans Day.

What happened on the Salmon Creek campus would not qualify as blockbuster news. Indeed, WSUV already has a Veterans Affairs office (go to <http://studentaffairs.vancouver.wsu.edu/> and click on veteran's affairs). Diane Binder is the veterans representative at WSUV, and she's getting great help from many people in the community. One of those helpers is Christian Latham, a Navy veteran who is majoring in biology and is president of the school's Veterans Education Interest Group. Another is Nick Ortiz, an education student who has three tours in Iraq under his belt and still serves as a sergeant in the Washington Army National Guard. Ortiz is campus representative for Veterans Corps, a service program similar to AmeriCorps.

Those three people on Tuesday welcomed two keynote visitors to the campus to announce the "veteran-friendly" designation and showcase WSUV's partnership with the state Department of Veterans Affairs. Mike Gregoire, husband of Gov. Chris Gregoire, served as a platoon leader during the Vietnam War. John Lee, a 22-year-Army veteran, is director of the state VA. The collective purpose of these five people was to make sure veterans and veterans' families — for that matter, the entire public — know about the financial and other assistance

available on campus. Beyond that campus, the university will help veterans who are students connect with state and national assistance groups.

As we noted, Tuesday's event, more than breaking news, was a statement, a reminder that veterans will not be forgotten. How necessary is that reminder? "There are 170 veterans on campus, and you'd be surprised at the number who don't know what benefits are available," Ortiz said in a Wednesday Columbian story by Tom Vogt. Often veterans are simply too busy living their post-military lives to keep up with benefits programs that are available. Latham explained: "Compared to the average student, they are less likely to be involved on campus socially and academically, and more likely to be juggling family, jobs and school."

And because those lives are so busy, it's great to have Veterans Affairs departments working so hard with outreach programs on higher-education campuses. Clark College also is working admirably to help veterans (http://www.clark.edu/admissions_fin_aid/fin_aid/ and click on veterans affairs).

Local and area veterans can rest assured that Clark College and WSUV stand ready to help in many ways. First, of course, is in the pursuit of higher education. That assistance is codified in the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. Provisions of the law include up to 100 percent funding of a public four-year undergraduate education to any veteran who has served three years on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001. This new GI Bill also helps veterans who have served 10 years transfer those benefits to spouses or children.

These benefits are life-changing. They should be, because they properly reward freedom-preserving service that benefits all Americans. Southwest Washingtonians should be proud of the strong relationships that WSUV and Clark College are building with military veterans.