New VS Partnership

By Allen Grundy

As I reviewed the UH Human Resources employment application process, I noticed there was no place on the application for veterans to mark their status. I sent an e-mail to Ann Pino, Human Resources Manager, with my concerns. She gave me the right answers but not what I needed. However, the last thing Ann Pino said was, “It’s been my observation that hiring departments look favorably upon military experience, especially if it is directly relevant to the job.” I knew the unemployment rate for military veterans was 12.1 percent in October, and we anticipate a rise in unemployment because of the ending of the wars. The new legislation signed by President Obama allows companies to receive a credit up to $5,600 against taxes owed for hiring veterans and up to $9,600 for hiring veterans with service-connected disabilities. The law could be a means to get quality employees and help the UH community of degree seeking students and graduates.

With this in mind, concerned staff members from several departments are pulling together a comprehensive program to market UH as a “one stop shop for education, training, and employment.” Departments involved are UH Human Resources, Veterans Services, University Career Services, Center for Students with DisABILITIES, and the Office of Equal Opportunity/AA.

The goal is to create opportunities for internships and training programs that could lead to employment at the University of Houston as a way to give back to our UH veteran community. The UH initiative will include ties to the Texas Medical Center’s veteran recruitment initiative. This will lead to even more opportunities for serving our veterans and promoting our education and employment at UH.

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USS Houston & UH Library

By Allen Grundy

Every year the Special Collections at the UH M.D. Anderson Library has exhibits and lecturers on the heavy cruiser USS Houston, flagship of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet during WWII. On March 1, 1942, Japanese sank The Houston, and her surviving crew members were made prisoners of war. Otto Schwarz, founder of the USS Survivors Association, told the story of The Houston until his wife made a simple challenge and asked, “Why don’t you do something about that?” This was the beginning of the association in memory of the ship and to honor the lives of her crew. The members collected historically valuable documents and memorabilia about The Houston and donated them to the University of Houston Libraries. For more information on the USS Houston and survivors, go to the following link.

http://usshouston.org

Allen Grundy and John Schwarz, son of Otto Schwarz
The Coming Home Project is a non-profit organization of psychotherapists, veterans, and religious leaders of various faiths, dedicated to helping veterans recover from the psychological effects of war. Since 2006, they've provided “expert, compassionate care, support, education, and stress management tools for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, service members, their families, and their service providers,” according to their website.

Among the services provided by the Coming Home Project are psychological counseling, training and self-care for service providers, and community education and consultation. A signature event of the Coming Home Project is the retreat for student veterans. It is a time to renew the mind and body in a beautiful setting. Lodging and meals are free, but transportation costs are not covered. This year’s retreat was near Yosemite National Park. If you are interested in the retreat or want more information about the Coming Home Project, go to the following web site.
http://www.cominghomeproject.net/event/retreat_student_veterans

In 2005, the University of Houston Veterans Services embarked upon a partnership with the Veterans History Project. “Delicate Memories,” the Veterans Services Oral History Project in conjunction with the Jack Javits School of Communication, was born. The project was in suspension for the past year and a half due to the renovation of the School of Communication. This summer, Veterans Services begins interviewing student, staff, and faculty veterans, as well as veterans in the Houston community for the project. This year we will partner with a new digital media technology company developed by Mr. Glenn Outerbridge called “eyeMe” to create and share the memories of the veterans’ lives.

The Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center collects, preserves, and makes accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war. The Project collects first-hand accounts of U.S. Veterans from WWII through Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts.

To make arrangements for your interview, please call (832) 842-5490. To take a look at eyeMe, the digital media company, go to www.eyeMe.Us.
Congress passed, and the President signed into law, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. Included in this new law is the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) for unemployed veterans. The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) and the Department of Labor (DoL) are working together to roll out this new program on July 1, 2012. The new program provides retraining for veterans hardest hit by current economic conditions.

The VRAP offers 12 months of training assistance to unemployed veterans. To be eligible, a veteran must meet the following qualifications:

- At least 35 years of age but no more than 60 years of age
- Unemployed (as determined by DoL)
- Discharge other than dishonorable
- Not eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g.: the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance)
- Not in receipt of VA compensation due to unemployability
- Not enrolled in a federal or state job training program

The program is limited to 45,000 participants during fiscal year 2012 and 54,000 participants from October 1, 2012 through March 31, 2014. Participants may receive up to 12 months of assistance at the full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill –Active Duty program (currently $1,473 per month). This benefit will be paid directly to the veteran.

In speaking with a representative from the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center Vocational Rehabilitation department, there is concern for veterans who receive public aid for housing and other needs. The current full-time payment rate is at 158.25% of the Federal Poverty Level (one member household), which most often determines eligibility for aid. According to Michael Lewis, Employment Specialist for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program at Career and Recovery Resources, homeless veterans may have a conflict between their public assistance income limits and the VRAP stipend.

For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program provides housing assistance for veterans who meet eligibility criteria, one of which is income for family size. If VRAP places the family income above the limit, based on the most recently published income limits for family size, the family will be ineligible for HUD-VASH. However, if already enrolled in HUD-VASH, income limits for VRAP may not apply.

Applications will be submitted through DoL, and benefits will be paid by VA. Participants must enroll in a VA approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school. The program must lead to an Associate Degree, Non-College Degree or Certification, and train the veteran for a high demand occupation. Upon completion of the program, DoL provides employment assistance to every veteran who participates.

Although the program begins July 1, 2012, there is no word on when, where, and how to apply. VA will post this information on the GI Bill website.

For more information detailing all the facets of the VOW program, go to http://gibill.va.gov/documents/factsheets/VOW_Factsheet.pdf

To see Frequently Asked Questions about the VRAP program, go to http://gibill.va.gov/documents/factsheets/VOW_FAQ.pdf
WHAT WE OFFER
OUR UH VETERANS

- Referrals for credit evaluation of military training
- Referrals for VA health benefits.
- Assistance with transition and adjustment to civilian life
- Unlimited, free access to computers, local telephone calls, and facsimile transmittals
- 200 photocopies or computer print-outs per month
- A quiet study room

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This message is for UH student veterans, veteran dependents, and alumni who are veterans and dependents. If you recently graduated or will graduate in May, and you would like your graduation announced in The Reveille, don't forget to send us your name, major, minor (if you have one), degree, and date of graduation. Use the above e-mail address.