

## **Connect-a-Vet Project and Other Veterans' Services RSVP, McLennan Community College and MCC Foundation**

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### **CONNECT-A-VET PROJECT**

Over 2.2 million veterans served in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The Department of Labor (DOL) state unemployment rates for these returning veterans is more than 2% higher than the rates from other combat eras and is 29.1% for those aged 18-24. Texas Veteran's Commission (TVC) and the VA Center for Excellence report that lack of personal support, current work experience and meaningful purpose during the first months of transition to civilian life is a contributing factor to these statistics.

Screened and referred by TVC and other organizations, veterans will be placed in volunteer positions with partner non-profit agencies. Participating agencies will sign an updated Memorandum of Understanding that not only secures proper supervision and safety, but will encourage learning opportunities and job placement for the veterans when possible. RSVP volunteers will provide training and mentor support, all while our veterans provide manpower needed to meet growing demands for social services. This project will assist veterans in adjusting to their community while they, in turn, help build the capacity of the nonprofit organizations. The concept creates a two-fold impact.

Veterans can "make a difference" while they may also be receiving treatment, counseling, attending school, seeking jobs or re-connecting with their families. Resumes will be strengthened and self-value will be increased. TVC reports veterans often face months of uncertainty, plagued with dated work experience, empty days and lack of direction. We will fill that gap with 30 new RSVP volunteers to supervise veterans.

Over 800 HOT RSVP volunteers serve in McLennan, Hill, Bosque, Falls, Freestone and Limestone counties, 15% of them veterans. With the exception of Waco itself, the area is widely rural with a total of 52,500 veterans living in our region. This RSVP is only six miles from the Waco VA Medical Center, 30 miles from the Temple VA Medical Center and 46 miles from Fort Hood's military installation. For these reasons among others, Waco has been designated by *USAA*

*Magazine* as the #1 location nationally for military retirement, providing a ready supply of new volunteers.

Some examples of how the project will work: A soldier returns from duty with an MOS in transportation. He might volunteer with our regional community action agency to maintain a fleet of buses used to transport the 1,000 Head Start children in this area. Another veteran has experience in shipping and receiving supplies, a skill that could be utilized by our local food bank in serving 6,000 clients monthly. Maybe a third veteran was in combat for so long that she lost relevant skills, or perhaps she simply has the desire to learn something new. Habitat for Humanity could teach a building trade. A veteran with new physical limitations could obtain office or management experience. The possibilities are endless. Some agencies may wish to hire our heroes and benefit from the tax credits available. At the very least, these veterans have added experience to their resume and begun the process of rejoining their community. With a proven Emotional Assessment Profile pre- and post-test given by trained professionals at MCC, RSVP will be able to document that depression is lessened, self-worth is increased, resources have become more accessible and relationships built. As an added benefit, agencies will have increased their capacity to serve this region.

Participating Agencies:

- HOT Veterans Coalition (Veterans One Stop)
- Congressman Bill Flores' District Office
- Waco Transit
- McLennan County Veterans Services
- Advocacy Center
- Waco Habitat for Humanity
- Friends for Life
- Mission Waco
- Caritas of Waco
- Area Agency on Aging/HOTCOG
- Tarleton University School of Social Work
- VA Medical Center
- MCC Mental Health Division
- MCC Adult Basic Education program
- San Saba RSVP (Ft. Hood)
- Meals and Wheels
- Helpings SNAP Outreach

Grants were provided to RSVP by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The McLennan Foundation later applied for an additional grant through the Texas Veterans Commission, which allowed the RSVP program serving veterans to be greatly expanded.

McLennan Community College sponsors RSVP in the Heart of Texas, which is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Texas Department on Aging.

### **McLENNAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE VETERANS' SERVICES**

McLennan Community College offers more than 100 certificate and degree programs which are approved for pursuit using federal and state veterans' education benefits (visit <http://www.mclennan.edu/students/admissions/aprog.html> for a list of programs). We also partner with six state universities and Baylor University to offer transfer programs which allow students to complete a variety of Bachelor, Masters, and Doctoral programs here in Waco.

Veterans are offered exceptional service through all departments of the college, as well as personalized assistance in using federal and state education benefits by the Veterans Specialist within the Office of Financial Aid. MCC is a Servicemembers' Opportunity College which has processed over 580 state and federal VA education claims so far this Fall (2013):

- **11** students using Reserve education benefits.
- **25** veterans using the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program.
- **33** students using VA Vocational Rehabilitation.
- **35** students using the Montgomery GI Bill.
- **87** dependents of deceased or 100% disabled veterans, using the Dependents Education Assistance Program.
- **196** students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- **63** veterans using Hazlewood alongside another VA benefit.
- **46** veterans using only the Hazlewood benefit.
- **24** dependents using the Hazlewood alongside their dependent benefits.
- **61** dependents using only the Hazlewood benefit.

McLennan Community College's mission is to provide access to excellent workforce and transfer programs, student services, and continuing education that promotes student success including proficiency in identified student learning outcomes, successful course completion, graduation, employment, and transfer to a senior institution. The college engages and strengthens its community through successful educational attainment, strong leadership, sustainability efforts, best practices, community service, and integrity.

MCC is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award the Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Applied Sciences, and Associate of Arts in Teaching degrees. The school was established in 1965 by the citizens of McLennan County. MCC provides equal educational opportunity for all qualified students and

does not discriminate on the basis of sex, disability, race, creed or religion, color, age, national origin or any other unlawful factors in its educational program, activities, or employment, as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 and the Age Discrimination Act of 1978.