

VETERANS UPWARD BOUND

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Disney offering Free Park Passes to U.S. Military

This year Walt Disney World Resort is offering a special discount to Active and Retired U.S. Military personnel (which includes Coast Guard, National Guard, and Reserve Units). They are offering a free five day pass which is good between January 4 and December 18 of this year.

They are also offering a special discount of 40% off rooms at Walt

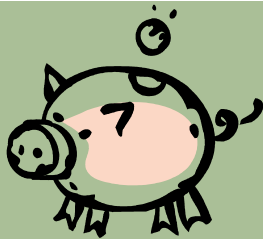
Disney World Moderate Resort Hotels.

Active and retired military personnel are also able to buy up to five 5-day companion tickets starting at \$99 per ticket. All tickets can be obtained at your local military base ticket office.

Some restrictions apply to the discounted room rates. For more information visit



www.disneyworld.com/military or your local military travel agency.



Each month, veterans and their families await the arrival of their compensation, pension, or educational assistance payments in the mail. For the most part, their checks arrive on time. However sometimes they can be delayed or stolen, which might result in

Receive your VA checks easier and safer

identity theft.

These problems, or potential problems, are what spurred the VA to encourage veterans or their survivors into a bank account to set up a direct deposit for their financial support. Doing so will ensure that the money is received on time and without the threat of theft.

"VA is teaming up with the Treasury Department in a new cam-

paign to protect government beneficiaries against the theft of funds and of their identities," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "Veterans earned -- and rely on -- the financial support we send them every month. I urge them to help VA ensure they get those funds reliably and safely by signing up for direct deposit."

There are several ways to set up your di-

rect deposit account by either calling the VA toll-free at (800) 333-1795 or enrolling online at www.GoDirect.org. Veterans, and family members who receive VA payments, also can sign up by contacting a VA regional benefits office or their financial institution. Information about direct deposits will be included in VA's monthly compensation and pension envelopes throughout 2009.

Lawton office adds new counselor, Dyan Wright, to ranks

Lawton welcomes new counselor, Dyan Wright, to the VUB team. Dyan will replace former counselor Rochelle Kamont, who was offered a job working for ACAP, also in Lawton.

Dyan graduated from Denison Senior High School in 1992. In November 1994, she joined the army, following in her grandfather's footsteps.

Dyan spent three years in Fort Stewart, Georgia, where she deployed to Egypt for three months, in support of Bright Star '95 and also supported the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. From there, she was relocated to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where she served as a communications NCO at 17th Field Artillery Brigade and then as a PAC NCO at the Personnel Service Battalion. In April

2003, Dyan was moved to Massachusetts where she served as the Administrative Specialist for Boston University's ROTC program. She served a total of eleven years before discharging in November 2005.

After leaving the military, Dyan and her husband decided that Lawton would be their permanent home. In January 2006, she began her academic endeavors at Cameron University, studying Criminal Justice. She graduated from Cameron in May 2008 with an Associate's as well as a Bachelor's Degree. She is currently in a

Master's program studying Business Administration. Dyan plans to have her degree by 2011.

Even though she has only been with Veteran's Upward Bound for a few weeks, she is thoroughly enjoying her job. Dyan says, "As a veteran, it does my heart good to provide a helping hand to other veterans traveling down the educational road I am on."



Recognizing Student Veterans with Scholarships and Awards

We have a few past participants who have been honored with awards this year as well as scholarship opportunities available to student veterans.

This year at TRiO Day at the State Capital Sherea Reeves was honored in the TRiO Hall of Fame for her academic achievements. Sherea Reeves is also being honored by the Division of Student Development Awards Banquet at ECU.

Marion Washington, another VUB participant, was nominated for an award at this event. He is on the Board of Tiger Command, a Student Veteran Organization at ECU.

There are many scholarships which VUB participants are eligible to apply for:

- Oklahoma Veterans Council– A cash award for a full academic year to an Oklahoma accredited

institution. For a scholarship form stop by the Ada VUB office or email:

Jill at jwilliam@ecok.edu or

Charlotte at chaefre@ecok.edu.

- American Legion Tiger Command– See page 7 for more information.
- National Association of Veterans Upward Bound Project Personnel– Five scholarships are awarded to VUB participants. To fill out an application, visit the NAVUB website at <http://www.navub.org/index.php>.
- Oklahoma Division of Student Assistance– Offers numerous scholarships, information can be found at www.odsa.org under the students and alumni tab.

Free Education Opportunity for Wounded Warriors and their Spouses

A new and exciting opportunity is now available to select Wounded Warriors and their spouses who are interested in a computer technology field of learning. The Computer Technology Industry Association has announced an education program to help eligible veterans, free of charge.

The Computer Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) is an association of all the major computer manufacturers, software developers and companies that install and maintain computer systems for large and small companies all over the country.

CompTIA has an Educational Foundation that runs a program called "Creating Futures." The Creating Futures program was developed to provide veterans with the opportunity to obtain employable skills to achieve rewarding careers. Participants in the Creating Futures program have the opportunity to train towards four IT certifications, which, if you had to pay for, would cost up to \$10,000. In addition, the training is online and accessible via the internet 24/7 and can be accessed throughout the world.

The program provides instructor-led training and online training depending upon geographical location. Participants enrolled in the online training have access to:

- 24x7 Online Training
- Mentoring Services
- Practice Exams, and
- Certification Vouchers

The Program is made possible through affiliations with member companies and not-for-profit partners to help individuals gain the skills for permanent employment.

In November, NAUS (National Association for Uniformed Services) joined the Washington branch of the Foundation, which was just starting up. Veterans Benefits Advisor Mike Plumer has attended two meetings and is enthusiastic about the opportunities



the program offers, free of cost, to veterans and their family members.

The program costs nothing for those wounded warriors or their spouses who are chosen to participate. If chosen, you may have the opportunity to gain certification in up to four areas, which, if you had to pay for, would cost up to \$10,000.

If you are a veteran or spouse and have an interest in the IT field, please check the information on the NAUS website at: http://www.naus.org/news/news_veterans.html. Also to read more about the program go to the CompTIA Creating Futures website at: http://www.comptiaeducationalfoundation.org/creating_futures.aspx.

Please share this information with anyone you know who might be eligible or interested.

If you're interested in computers, this might be the perfect opportunity to get into the career field you want.



What We've Been Doing

Each day, the staff at Veterans Upward Bound does their best to find new and improved ways to help veterans get into college or a vocational program. And they've been very busy lately:

- Mike and Dyan attended the OAVCC Spring Conference where they learned the latest news on the new 9/11 GI Bill
- Jill attended the Oklahoma Partner's Conference and networked with other veteran supporters
- The whole staff got a briefing on suicide prevention from the ECU on-campus counselor, Bea Waller
- Mary attended the COE Policy Seminar/ Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C.
- The Ada staff attended a Financial Aid Luncheon hosted by the Education Opportunity Center to learn the changes made to the financial aid application process
- Jill was named to the American Legion Scholarship Board (info on the scholarship can be found on page 7)
- Staff attended the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program for returning OK National Guard members throughout the month of February
- Mary attended a presentation by Dave Roeber at UCO. He's an inspirational speaker who is a Vietnam War Veteran
- Mary participated in an audio conference, "How Veteran Friendly is Your Campus" which focused on SERV-Supporting Education for Returning Veterans
- Lamar Wilson, OK National Guard Transition Assistant Officer, met with ECU staff to discussion preparation for guard members returning to school



Pictured left to right, from the COE Conference in Washington, D.C.: Evelyn Martin, EOC Director; Sheila Rieser, Program Officer; Mary Meeks, VUB Director; Dr. Linda Byrd-Johnson, Director of TRiO Programs

Emergency Alert System for Comanche County Residents

The Lawton Fort Sill Chamber of Commerce joins with the City of Lawton and Comanche County in encouraging all residents of Comanche County to register for CodeRED. This is a warning system that can be used to notify residents of weather emergencies such as tornadoes and snow.

The address-based alert system can also be used to warn the county of flooding, hazardous leaks or spills, fire, bomb threats, water contamination, missing persons, or any other public safety emergency. Only those residing in the affected area will be notified.

The service is being offered free of charge. You can register at

www.cityof.lawton.ok.us or www.comanchecounty.us (click on the CodeRED logo). You can sign up two phone numbers at a time, such as a home phone number and a cell phone number.

If nobody answers the CodeRED call then a detailed message describing the emergency will be left. Phone numbers for businesses can also be added to the call database.

Up to 60,000 numbers can be called simultaneously per hour during an emergency. The service also tries each number 3 times during the first round of calling to ensure the message is received.



The deaf and hard-of-hearing can also sign up for this service by checking the TDD/TTY box on the sign-up page.

This service only takes a few minutes to sign up for and can save precious time during an emergency situation.

New Rule Means Health Care for More Veterans

On June 30, 2009, a new rule from the Department of Veterans Affairs will go into effect that will allow more veterans to receive enrollment into the healthcare system. About 265,000 veterans who were previously ineligible to be enrolled will now have the opportunity.

The change affects veterans whose incomes exceed the current VA means test and geographic means test income thresholds by 10 percent or less. Congress provided funds in VA's fiscal year 2009 budget to support the new enrollment.

A priority-based enrollment system was established by Congress in 1996 to determine a uniform package of medical benefits for all enrollees. The legislation opened enrollment in

VA's health care system to all eligible veterans and required that each year the Secretary of Veterans Affairs assess veterans' demand for services and determine if the necessary resources are available to provide timely, quality care to all enrollees.

VA's computer systems are being modified to accommodate the changes, and the Department is preparing communication and education materials to ensure that Congress, veterans' service organizations, and the public are aware of the coming changes. The VA will also monitor quality of service and wait times to ensure that all veterans are properly served.

"We're pleased to be able to offer what has been called 'the best care anywhere' to many more new veterans."

~Dr. James B. Peake
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

VA Benefits from Stimulus Package

Some provisions include:

- Working employees will see a reduction in federal income tax withholding and liability of up to \$400 (single) or \$800 (married filing joint return).
- Social Security annuitants, disabled veterans, and certain others would be eligible for a one-time \$250 payment.
- College education expenses tax credit of up to \$2,500 during 2009 and 2010.
- 2009 homebuyers will receive a credit of 10% of the purchase price, up to a maximum of \$8,000.
- 2009 vehicle purchasers will be able to deduct state and local sales and excise taxes paid on the vehicle.
- Businesses would get a tax credit of 40% of the first \$6,000 in wages for hiring unemployed veterans.

Widows of War Veterans Owed Benefits Compensation

Over the past 12 years, the Department of Veterans Affairs has failed to pay money to almost 11,000 surviving spouses of deceased veterans. In 1996 Congress passed a law directing that the VA provide a deceased veteran's full compensation benefit to the spouse on the month of the veteran's death, but due to an error, the department has continued to demand money back from the

survivors.

The pension and disability checks range from \$100 to more than \$2,500, which the VA promises to pay back. They have worked to correct the glitches in their computer program and retroactive checks have been issued. The VA hoped for the problem to be corrected and the checks delivered by the end of 2008.

A special Survivors' Call Center, open Monday thru Friday from 7:00 -7:00 CST, has been established for spouses who believe they may be entitled to this retroactive month-of-death benefit. Surviving spouses are encouraged to contact the Call Center (toll-free) at **(800) 749-8387**. Center agents will assist surviving spouses in providing VA with the information needed to determine their eligibility.

VA Offers Special Programs for Many Different Groups of Veterans



The VA has special programs for the following groups of veterans

and their survivors. For information on each, refer to the website indicated:

- Operation Enduring Freedom / Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans — Information for returning Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve service members of Operations En-



during Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF). www.oefoif.va.gov

- Disabled Veterans — Information for veterans, employers and the general public about benefits administered by VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service. www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/index.htm

- Homeless Veterans — Information on programs and initiatives designed to help homeless veterans live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible. <http://www1.va.gov/homeless>

- Military Services — Information for separating service members as well as veterans. www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/milsvc

- Minority Veterans — Information on VA programs, benefits and services for minority veterans. <http://www1.va.gov/>

centerforminorityveterans

- Survivor Benefits — Information on VA programs, benefits and services for surviving spouses and dependents of military personnel who died while in active military service and for survivors of veterans who died after active service. <http://www1.va.gov/>

centerforminorityveterans

- Women Veterans — Information on VA benefits, services and health care specifically for women veterans. <http://www1.va.gov/womenvet>

- Veterans in Business — Information on business ownership and expansion opportunities, programs and resources for veterans, including service-connected disabled veterans. www.vetbiz.gov

- Accessibility — Information on accessibility issues, programs and resources. www.section508.va.gov

Oklahoma Tuition Bill Passed for Survivors' Benefit

A legislative committee has approved a bill that would grant free college tuition to the families of fallen Oklahoma soldiers.

The "Hero's Promise Act" by Rep. Eric Proctor of Tulsa would provide in-state tuition waivers to the dependents of Oklahoma military servicemen and women killed in the line of duty for up to four years.

Currently, as many as 249 Oklahoma students could benefit from the bill. They would save about

\$2,612 in annual tuition based on the average cost at all state colleges and universities.

Proctor says the bill is the least Oklahomans can do for the dependents of troops who give their lives for their country.

The House Appropriations and Budget Committee passed the bill February 23, 2009, and sent it on the House floor for a vote. The House also voted in favor of the bill on March 10, 2009





American Legion Offers ECU Book Scholarship

The American Legion Post #72 in Ada has formed a Scholar—Veteran Program to offer two \$500 scholarships each semester. One scholarship will be awarded to a veteran student and the other will be awarded to a non-veteran student. The scholarships will be applied towards the purchase of books at the East Central University bookstore.

Applicants must be enrolled at ECU and in good

standing. The deadline for application is June 15th for the fall semester and November 30th for the Spring semester. Applications can be picked up in the Ada Veterans Upward Bound office.

Each applicant must submit a short essay, college and/or high school transcripts, references, and proof of matriculation at East Central University along with their application. Applications can be left with Jill Williamson in the Ada VUB office or sent directly to the American Legion.

For more information call or visit the VUB office.

TRiO Day, February 25th, at the State Capital Building

At TRiO Day, VUB staff had the opportunity to meet with state representatives as well as staff from various programs from the ECU campus.

Veterans Upward Bound Director, Mary Huckleberry Meeks is pictured at the top far left in the black shirt. Academic Counselor Clint Fisher is pictured at the top far right. Counselor Michael Myers is right below Clint and new counselor Dyan Wright is to Mike's left. State Representative Todd Thomson is pictured at the bottom far left. Senator Susan Paddock is pictured at the bottom middle (wearing the suit).

Also featured in this picture is Dr. Diane Berty, Vice President for Student Development at ECU; Dr. Bill

Cole, former President for ECU; Lisa Billy, State Representative; Pat Sutton, from the McNair Scholars Program; and Evelyn Martin, Director of Education Opportunity Center at ECU, along with her staff and students.





Receive your newsletter electronically

Due to demand, VUB is now offering our newsletter via email. If you would prefer to have our quarterly newsletter sent via email, write to Charlotte Freeman at: chaefre@ecok.edu.

Make "Newsletter" the subject and give you name and email address in the body of the letter so we can add you to the mailing list. If you choose this option we will no longer send a hard copy in the U.S. mail.

Upcoming VUB Events:

- All year ECU will be celebrating it's centennial anniversary. There will be lots of special events and activities throughout the year. Including the Centennial Graduation Ceremony on May 9th. Check the ECU website for additional information on Centennial programs.
- Armed Forces Day is Saturday, May 16th.
- Memorial Day is May 25- All offices will be closed will be closed.
- The Ada VUB Office will be hosting Veterans Appreciation Day on Friday, June 12th on the ECU Campus. A new GI Bill workshop is scheduled along with other veteran speakers. More information will follow in June.
- Flag Day is June 14th.
- Veterans Appreciation Day at the Cameron University campus will be sometime in late June, more information will follow closer to the date.

Veterans Upward Bound Mission Statement

The mission of East Central University Veterans Upward Bound Program, in support of the University and the Division of Student Development, is to provide U.S. military veterans the opportunity to refresh their academic skills and provide them support which will enable them to enter and graduate from a post-secondary institution.

To accomplish this mission, the program will identify eligible veterans and provide:

- Academic remediation tailored to the educational needs of the individual veteran;
- Support services that will improve the chances of success and academic achievement, and;
- Encouragement and track progress through graduation.



In compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1967, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other Federal laws and Regulations, East Central University (ECU) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, handicap, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes, but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and education services.

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