In honor of Veterans Day, enjoy this special edition of Correctional Newsfront containing all the DOC stories involving veterans in 2018.

High School Honors Local Veterans

SCI Waymart officials, including CHCA Desiree Hartman, RN Supervisor and Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Eugene Carachilo, were invited to attend a Veterans Ceremony at Mid Valley High School. Present for the ceremony were students, facility, local veterans and local state representatives. The following veterans who are currently employed at SCI Waymart also were present for the event: Sgt. Mark Berkoski, COs Patrick Wilson, P.J. McHugh and John Osborne.

Lt Colonel Carachilo, as previously mentioned, who has been a registered nurse supervisor at SCI Waymart for 16 years was asked to be the guest speaker for the
event. His military career includes six years in the PA Army National Guard and 22 years in the Air Force Reserve. He currently serves with the 514th Air Mobility Operations Squadron located at McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey, as assistant director of operations and aeromedical evacuation control team chief.

Lt Colonel Carachilo presented a memorable speech on his military career, including the honorable responsibility that comes with serving our country and the enormous sacrifices made every day by veterans and their families. Veterans were seated on the auditorium stage and stood up as members of the student body presented the brief history of each veteran’s military career. The ceremony concluded with a luncheon for the veterans and their families.

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**Vet Dogs Graduate**

On January 23, SCI Dallas celebrated the graduation of two dogs from America’s VetDogs’ Prison Puppy Program.

Working with America’s VetDogs, SCI Dallas inmates raise and train service dogs that eventually will provide U.S. military veterans and first responders with the chance to live a life without boundaries. Beginning in December 2016, SCI Dallas partnered with America’s VetDogs, a Smithtown, NY, organization that provides free service dogs to veterans and first responders of all eras. This is the first graduation of dogs from the prison’s program.

Veteran James Hough and his service dog, Cleo, were at the graduation to speak about the impact his service dog has had on his life. Mr. Hough is a Vietnam Vet and suffers from several mental diagnoses, and his service dog has helped bring his life back together. The program is looking for more people interested in becoming weekend raisers. Anyone interested can apply at [www.VetDogs.org](http://www.VetDogs.org).

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Homeless Veterans’ Stand Down

The DOC had a table at the recent Homeless Veterans’ Stand Down that was held January 19-21, at the Harrisburg Armory. The annual event is coordinated by the Greater Harrisburg YWCA.

As previously reported in this newsletter:

Homeless Veterans’ Stand Down

This is the 12th year that the Greater Harrisburg YWCA has hosted the Homeless Veterans’ Stand Down, which runs January 19-21. The event provides critical services to support homeless and at-risk veterans from communities throughout south central Pennsylvania. Typical services provided at the Stand Down include: VA medical services; combat veterans’ services including the VET Center; PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs referral services; rapid re-housing; employment assistance; legal assistance; dental care; advocacy services; recovery services; mental health services; benefits counseling; connection with military service organizations; overnight shelter; and other critical supplies.

In addition to the DOC recruiting table, DOC employees also provided a variety of items that were delivered to the YWCA in support of homeless veterans. Items donated included hats, gloves, winter coats, new men’s/women’s underwear, socks, toiletries, jeans/khakis, long-sleeve work shirts and belts.

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State Officials Tour SCI Houtzdale’s Veterans Service Unit

On January 10, state military officials visited SCI Houtzdale via Blackhawk helicopter to tour the Veterans Service Unit (VSU). The high-ranking visitors included Pennsylvania’s adjutant general and head of the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Maj. Gen. Tony Carrelli, Brigadier General Michael Regan and Command Sgt. Maj. Harry Buchanan, the PA National Guard’s senior enlisted leader. Also in attendance were Pennsylvania’s Office of Administration’s Special Advisor for Veterans Programs Kory Auch, Central Office’s Regional Reentry Administrator Janeen Christ and Statewide Veterans Coordinator Ryan Yoder.

Maj. Gen. Carrelli had heard many great things about the VSU program and wanted to see it first-hand. After witnessing the daily operations and having the opportunity to speak with VSU staff and participants, Carrelli said he was very impressed.

“Just because they’re housed here doesn’t mean they’re not entitled to their benefits,” Carrelli declared. “They’ve really built something great here.”
Dubois Vet Center Offers Counseling Services to Eligible VSU Participants

The SCI Houtzdale Veterans Services Unit (VSU) and community partner, Dubois Vet Center, have teamed up to offer readjustment counseling services to eligible VSU participants. On February 26, Scott Winters facilitated the initial group which was attended by 15 VSU participants. The group is slated to take place on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month.

During the initial session, Winters gave participants some useful information that included several pamphlets from the Dubois Vet Center, an article on PTSD (“27 Things You Should Know about PTSD”), and a pocket card with easy to follow steps for preventing an anxiety attack.

As the group progressed, Winters surveyed the participants to determine what their individual expectations for the group were. He explained that his experiences have shown him that people are challenged by different things. Because of this, he focuses on the specific needs of the group participants. Moving forward, he is more able to provide individualized readjustment counseling for the initial group of participants.

As the group came to a close, the general attitude was one of optimism on several fronts. Group participants were feeling validated that their service was being appreciated and they were not being forgotten. Additionally, participants were pleased that they would be learning skills from a trained professional who shared a common bond with them (combat veteran).

“We’re here to provide counseling services and assistance to all veterans, even those who would otherwise be looked past because of their current situation.”

-Scott Winters
Dubois Vet Center
Quarterbacks of Life

On March 15, SCI Greene hosted a “Quarterbacks of Life” program in its chapel.

Rocky Bleier and Rocco Scalzi spoke to the Quarter Back members from for an hour in the morning and to the “juvenile” lifers and inmate veterans for an hour in the afternoon.

Rocky Bleier thanked all Vietnam veterans (staff and inmates) for their years of service. He also presented a lapel pin to staff and a certificate to inmate veterans.

Staff was permitted to wear Steeler gear and attend the presentations.

Learn more about this program at https://beatingtheodds.org/quarterbacks-of-life

According to the website, “The Beating The Odds Foundation, has pooled together with a unique group of motivated individuals called the Quarterbacks of Life.

These are men and women who chose to fight through incredible setbacks in life, and, in the end, won over adversity. And this is the key point of the Beating the Odds Foundation: By never giving up, every person can design his or her own destiny. The Quarterbacks of Life® who have joined with the Beating the Odds Foundation travel around the country sharing their stories with America’s youth to inspire and motivate them to achieve success in their own lives.”
Incarcerated Veterans Facts

- The DOC has 3,215 inmate veterans (6.69 percent of the 48,046 DOC inmates) incarcerated within its facilities. Statewide Veterans Coordinator Ryan Yoder is responsible for coordinating and overseeing all veteran-related services within the department.

- Through the initial classification process, an inmate veteran is identified, entered into the DOC’s computer system and provided with an Inmate Veteran Information Packet. This packet contains pertinent information regarding benefits and services offered by the DOC that includes applications for both a Request Pertaining to Military Records-DD-214 (SF180) as well as enrollment for VA Health Benefits (10-10EZ). In addition, each packet provides information on Veterans Service Units (VSUs).

- The DOC currently has three regional VSUs designed to prepare veterans for successful transition back into the community. Currently, the VSUs are located at SCIs Dallas, Houtzdale and Mercer. Two additional VSUs are being developed at SCIs Muncy and Phoenix, both of which are expected to be operational this summer.

- These units provide veteran-specific programs, workshops and services, including how to acquire a DD214, forms of identification, reentry programming, life skills, substance abuse programs, home/employment plans, veteran-specific workshops, education/vocational programs, mental health services (including PTSD) and assistance with VA benefits and services.

- VSU staff is comprised of a unit management team, veterans’ coordinator, psychological services specialist, reentry parole agent and a social worker.

- SCI Dallas is the department’s longest running VSU having begun operation in 2014. This unit has a capacity to house 155 individuals.

- SCI Houtzdale began operation in 2016 and has quickly grown into the DOC’s largest VSU. This unit has a capacity to house 197 individuals and includes a dog-training program.

- SCI Mercer’s VSU opened in 2017 and replaced the VSU that had been operating at SCI Pittsburgh until that prison closed. This unit is nearly at full capacity and houses 126 individuals. It also includes a dog-training program.

- SCI Muncy will be the location of the DOC’s first all-female VSU. This first-of-its-kind unit will have an initial capacity of 20 inmates and will offer the same services and support offered in the male VSUs.

- SCI Phoenix is a new, state-of-the-art facility, which will begin operation soon. The DOC’s newest prison will also house a VSU with an initial capacity of 60 veteran inmates.
On an unseasonably cold and rainy May afternoon, half a dozen people gather around the flagpole at the Flight 93 National Memorial office headquarters in Somerset County, each casting their eyes skyward.

Under the direction of Brooke Neel, development assistant with the Friends of Flight 93 National Memorial, several staff members of nearby SCI-Laurel Highlands unpack an American flag and hoist it high above their heads.

Standing nearby, ignoring the drizzle, Deborah Borza smiles.

Borza's daughter, Deora Bodley, 20, was the youngest passenger among the 40 passengers and crew members who lost their lives in the crash of United Flight 93 during the terrorists' attacks on 9/11.

Borza also serves as the Friends' vice president.

The group was participating in a Friends' flag program, in which volunteers, National Park Service ambassadors, service groups and Friends' members unbox, hoist and raise to full staff flags that briefly fly from the headquarters' flagpole.

The flags respect and honor those Flight 93 passengers and crew members and all who lost their lives in the day's terrorist attacks.

Participants can take a moment to pay their respects. Some recite the Pledge of Allegiance, sing the national anthem, or say the name of one of those aboard Flight 93, Neel says.

"We hoist them up and let people decide. ... Some people salute or say a person's name. ... I kind of leave it up to them," Neel says.

After being flown, each flag is issued a certificate of authenticity by the Friends' group.
Half of the flags are then sold in the Visitor Center's book store for $40, with proceeds benefitting the Friends' organization, Neel says.

"Last year in the Visitor Center we sold over 300," she says.

The other half are sent to the National Park Foundation, where the flags are distributed as gifts to donors contributing $93 to the memorial's direct mail campaign to help support its completion, Neel says.

"We are backed up on our fulfillment to the National Park Foundation. That's why we are giving such a big push for volunteers and for people to come fly (flags)," she says.

Volunteers can fly multiple flags during one visit, she adds.

"If anyone does fly 100 flags, they get their own flown flag," Neel says.

Peer support

Helping to raise the flag on this day are Major Benjamin Grove, a USMC veteran and member of the administrative staff at SCI-Laurel Highlands, Michelle Houser, the institution's deputy superintendent, and counselor Jason Vello.

The correctional facility recently began a staff wellness initiative, Corrections Outreach for Veterans and Employee Restoration, a peer-based program facilitated by staff.

Over the course of their careers, many people who work in the field of corrections may find themselves dealing with post-traumatic stress, Grove says.

Many veterans enlisted because of the 9/11 attacks, and some go into the field of corrections.

"We are trying to give people coping mechanisms to, one, recognize signs and symptoms of being overcome by the stress of their jobs and, two, ways to manage and live productive lives," he says.

The program is open to all staff members.

Staff participation with Flight 93 National Memorial programs began with the annual Plant a Tree reforestation event at the site.

"Deborah Borza says, 'We do this other thing and we'd be more than happy to get you involved,'" Grove says.

The flag raising will be part of the program's closure for participants and a way to give back, he says.
Grove and Houser hope to return with a larger group and fly more flags soon.

"I think once the weather breaks and we get sunny days, it will be easier to get staff out here," Houser says.

Volunteers are always welcome to fly flags, and are encouraged to come with friends or family members to share the experience together, Neel says.

Details: 814-893-6550 or flight93friends.org

Mary Pickels is a Tribune-Review staff writer. Reach her at 724-836-5401 or mpickels@tribweb.com or via Twitter @MaryPickels.

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**Statewide Veterans Coordinator Visits Waymart Inmates**

On June 15, Statewide Veterans Coordinator Ryan Yoder visited SCI Waymart and spoke with the facility’s inmate veteran population and staff from the prison’s Veterans Service Office (VSO) about the veterans service units and the new VSO at the prison. Yoder presented a PowerPoint presentation and answered questions for about 103 incarcerated veterans.
**Parole Agent Highlighted in Local Newspaper**

Parole Agent 2 Stefanie Mong, who works out of the Mercer District Office, was mentioned in the May 20, 2018, issue of the Sharon Herald.

In addition to several other veterans’ recollections, Mong’s military experience was recently discussed at the Veterans Breakfast Club. Mong, who is from Grove City, talked about her radio operator military occupational specialty and how she also assisted in Iraq with that country’s first election day searching women as they were going to cast their ballots.

The club, is led by Executive Director Todd DePastino, who is a history professor and author of “Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front.” As a result of his work on the book, DePastino began helping military veterans tell their stories at the club, which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. The club meets several times each week, and they hold two gatherings a year in Mercer county – one is on Armed Forces Day, and the other is in October. You can learn more about the Veterans Breakfast Club at veteransbreakfastclub.com

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**Inmate Veterans Hold Memorial Day Ceremony**

On May 24, 2018, the SCI Houtzdale Veterans Service Unit (VSU) hosted its annual Memorial Day Ceremony. The ceremony, although supervised by the administration and VSU staff, was planned, developed and performed by VSU participants/inmates.

This year’s ceremony paid tribute to combat journalists who have fought and died for us throughout our country’s history of war. Keynote speaker at the event was Brigadier General Michael J. Regan Jr. General Regan Jr. serves as the Pennsylvania Deputy Adjutant General for Air and is based out of Ft. Indiantown Gap, Pa. In addition to keynote speaker Regan Jr., Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel and Executive Deputy Secretary for Institutional Operations Tabb Bickell also attended this year’s ceremony.

Approximately 225 veterans housed at SCI Houtzdale, along with facility staff, attended this year's Memorial Day ceremony.

The event featured a flag-folding ceremony performed by the VSU Color Guard, as well several VSU participant/inmate speakers, music performers and a wreath presentation. Additionally, the ceremony also allowed spectators to recognize fallen family and friends with the ringing of the ceremonial bell.

The success of this year's Memorial Day ceremony reflects the efforts that VSU participants/inmates, facility staff and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections take in ensuring the SCI Houtzdale VSU continues to thrive on a state and national level.
Mercer Holds Memorial Day Ceremony

On May 25th, SCI Mercer’s Veterans Service (VSU) Unit held its first Memorial Day Ceremony on the VSU housing unit with inmate veterans participating. One of Mercer’s housing units was designated in February 2017 as a VSU, receiving its first inmate veterans in March 2017. The VSU currently houses 112 veterans.

The ceremony was coordinated by Corrections Counselor Aaron Diaz and the Activities Department. Facility Chaplaincy Program Director Rev. Joseph Kosarek led the opening prayer. VSU Social Worker Erica Lynn sang the National Anthem for the group, and Taps was played along with folding of the flag.

Inmate veterans expressed their gratitude for the time and effort put forth on the unit’s Memorial Day tribute, and another stated he felt the ceremony was professional and patriotic.
On May 24, 2018, Rocky Bleier and Rocco Scalzi were at SCI Muncy to speak to inmates in the visiting room.

Quarterbacks of Life are leaders and team players who are responsible for moving their lives forward in the direction of their dreams and goals while confronting obstacles and challenges that stand between them and success.

This exciting and dynamic program helps participants to understand the nature of success; identify and challenge imposing success stoppers; use five powerful Stepping Stones to Success to achieve their dreams and goals. The five stepping stones to success are:

* Dreams & Goals
* Self-Awareness: Resource Review & Development
* Team Support
* Decide & Plan
* Positive Mental Attitude

SCI Muncy inmates, including female veteran inmates, have been participating in this program since August 2018.

Rocky Bleier was not a very big man nor exceptionally fast on his feet, but he was an extremely determined athlete. His goal was to play professional football despite those people who persisted in their belief that he would never be drafted by a pro team. With much determination, a dream that would never die, help from others, and much hard work, Rocky Bleier was selected in the next-to-the-last round of the 1968 draft to play for the Pittsburgh Steelers.
Before he could prove himself as a rookie, he was drafted again, this time for combat duty in Vietnam. A few months later, crippled by enemy rifle fire and grenade wounds to both legs, Bleier faced his biggest challenge. His wounds were so severe that they threatened his ability to ever walk again, much less to play professional football. For more than two years, he drove himself. Little by little he overcame obstacles and fought his way back.

Well, the rest is history. Rocky not only regained the use of his legs, but went on to become a starting running back on a team that won four Super Bowls and became the greatest football team of the 20th century.

Quarterbacks of Life has visited several DOC facilities.

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**Rockview Holds 4th Annual Veteran Turkey Hunt**

On May 1 and 2, SCI Rockview held its annual Wounded Veteran Turkey Hunt. The event was kicked off with a meet and greet spaghetti dinner held at the Pleasant Gap American Legion. The local Legion has supported the event since its inception in 2015.

This year’s hunters included three hunters from Western PA who were identified by It’s About the Warrior Foundation. The fourth hunter was identified from Clinton County. Lt. Jeremy Luzier and Lt. Justin Sherman led a committee of staff members who helped put together this year’s hunt. Eight employees were teamed up in tandem to act as guides and callers for the hunters. A blind draw was held to match hunters with their respective guides.

Throughout the year, the staff at Rockview hold fund raising events in an effort to make each year’s hunt extra special. Through the generosity and support of the staff, funds raised allowed the committee to present each hunter with a Remington model 870 shotgun (with special event engraving), a Jack Paluh Veteran/Turkey canvass print, hats and knives from the National Wild Turkey Federation, custom-made calls by Ed Hall and Josh Payne, customized laser-engraved boxes by Pennsylvania Correctional Industries, various calls donated by Mark Intallura, and some custom-made Lynch box calls from Jim Lear/Kokomos Calls.

This year, two of the four hunters harvested Spring Gobblers. Both birds are set to be mounted by Matt Harris of TNT Taxidermy. The other two hunters were put in position to harvest birds but ended the day only to tell stories of the pursuit and challenge.
This year’s guides were Sgt. Ed Hall, Sgt. Clay Kuhn, CMO Matt Foster, CMF Josh Payne, CO 1 Mike Rains, CPTI Nick Dimoff, Sgt. Mark Intallura, and CSC Jess Riggle (ROC/BEN).

Rockview staff would especially like to thank the following for their on-going support of the annual event:

- Nittany Valley Longbeards (NWTF) Abe Frantz
- Pleasant Gap Legion
- Correctional Industries
- Kokomo’s Calls
- Ed Hall, Josh Payne, Mark Intallura
- Quality Inns and Suites-State College
- TNT Taxidermy

And, of course, we thank ALL of the employees at Rockview who support the fundraising efforts for the event.

Thank You, veterans, for your service and sacrifice.
Providing Info at Veterans Resource, Job Expo

SCI Cambridge Springs staff and military retirees, Lt. Murray DeForce (left) and HR Analyst Ira Doubet (right), recruit and swap war stories with event goers at the May 24th Veterans Resource and Job Expo in Erie, Pa.
Craig Petulla Receives the DOC’s Outstanding Performance Award in 2018

Unit Manager Craig Petulla (SCI Houtzdale) -- joined the Department of Corrections in 2002 as a corrections activities specialist and although his titles have changed over the years, he continues to excel in special programs.

In 2016, Petulla was chosen to lead the creation of the 197-bed Veterans Service Unit. Petulla accomplished this while simultaneously moving the prison’s dog training program to the unit and creating numerous other community partnerships to enhance programming and re-entry services to incarcerated veterans. The program has achieved positive state and national attention.

Before that, in 2014, Petulla was named SCI Houtzdale’s first unit manager for the Restricted Housing Unit. Prior to that, in 2011, also as a unit manager, Petulla provided oversight for specialized programing including Sex Offender, Courage to Change and Therapeutic Community, developing daily schedules and organizing processes.

Prior to joining the Department of Corrections, Petulla attended Slippery Rock University, but left to play baseball with the Houston Astros. After sustaining a career-ending injury, Petulla returned to finish college and then joined the Department of Corrections. In his spare time, Petulla mentors local high school baseball prospects to help them obtain college athletic scholarships.

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DOC Veterans Outreach Program

On April 16, Ryan Yoder, the DOC’s statewide veterans’ coordinator, and Chip Gilliland, chief of the DMVA’s Reintegration and Outreach Division spoke to veteran inmates about their military service benefits.

Topics discussed included services available through the DOC Veterans Services, VA benefits and Veteran Services Unit (VSU) availability.
Yoder gave a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted statistics on incarcerated veterans and provided an overview of paperwork they can fill out to receive benefits during their incarceration and upon their release. The services available through the VSU program were discussed at length. The inmates were encouraged to participate in one of the DOC’s three VSU’s. A fourth one for male inmates will open when SCI Phoenix becomes operational.

Also discussed was a potential program like the Reentry Services Office (RSO) but will be geared toward veterans. This new unit will be called the Veterans Services Office and will be placed at DOC facilities that do not have VSU’s. This program will be geared toward incarcerated veterans and will assist them in getting copies of their DD214 (military discharge documentation), enroll them in the VA system and allow them to receive a VA identification card.

A question-and-answer session concluded the event.

Facility staff thank Yoder and Gilliland for providing this information to inmates. The program was coordinated by Corrections Counselor 2 Mary Suchevits.

Yoder and Gilliland also visited SCI Camp Hill on April 3 to provide inmates there with the same information. Visits to all facilities are underway.

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**Bleier Takes “Quarterbacks of Life” Program to Pine Grove**

On April 11, Rocky Bleier was at SCI Pine Grove in conjunction with the Quarterbacks of Life Program. Quarterbacks of Life is a component of the Beating the Odds Foundation. This group is comprised of men and women who chose to fight through incredible setbacks in life, and in the end, won over adversity. They travel around the country sharing their stories with America’s youth to inspire and motivate them to achieve success in their own lives. Through their stories, they spread the key point of the Beating the Odds Foundation: By never giving up, every person can design his or her own destiny.
At SCI Pine Grove, Bleier and his group spoke to inmates and employee veterans who served during the Vietnam era.

He autographed pictures for staff and inmates and presented a Vietnam Era pin to staff member William Olp who also served in Vietnam.

Bleier presents pin to SCI Pine Grove employee William Olp.

Bleier and his group visited SCI Greene on March 15.

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Huntingdon Opens VSO

On August 1, SCI Huntingdon hosted an opening ceremony for the new Veterans’ Service Office. In attendance were representatives from the Altoona Veterans’ Hospital, Veteran’s Leadership Program, Tomorrow’s Hope and the DOC’s Statewide Veterans’ Coordinator Ryan Yoder. There were 30 incarcerated veterans in attendance in addition to numerous staff members, including Superintendent Kevin Kauffman. The attendees were privileged to hear a moving dedication speech from Sgt. Matt Gibbons (retired), of the United States Army. The SCI Huntingdon inmate color guard presented the Colors prior to the ceremony. Following the ceremony, the incarcerated veterans networked with the outside agencies and staff members. The SCI Huntingdon’s Veterans’ Service Office was formally dedicated to all veterans who are incarcerated or employed at SCI Huntingdon.
One Hundred Nights of Taps

From www.destinationgettysburg.com:

The notes of Taps have been filling the air in Gettysburg every evening this summer as the famous 24-note call is sounded in honor of those who have served our nation. The Lincoln Fellowship of Pennsylvania, in partnership with Gettysburg National Military Park and Taps For Veterans, invite the public to attend One Hundred Nights of Taps between Memorial Day and Labor Day at the Soldiers’ National Monument in the Gettysburg National Cemetery.

Performers have been assembled to sound the iconic bugle call each evening at 7 p.m. Among the buglers signed up to perform are military veterans, Civil War re-enactor buglers, community band members, high school and college students and music teachers.

Our very own Corrections Officer 1 Damon Morris, from SCI Coal Township, played Taps on July 28:

Officer Morris often performs Taps at DOC employee recognition ceremonies.

The public is cordially invited to attend any evening performance and recommended parking is at the Gettysburg National Cemetery Lot on Taneytown Road. For more information and to sign up to perform on an evening please visit: www.tapsbugler.com/100-nights-of-taps/

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Successful Partnership Involves Successful Reentrants

Recently, Harrisburg City officials held a ribbon cutting for Harrisburg Uptown Building (HUB) and Veteran’s Housing (HUB VH). The HUB campus is the result of an innovative and much needed collaboration and partnership of people and organizations throughout the City of Harrisburg. The HUB, the building that formerly housed Hamilton Health Center, will be home to various for profit and non-profit organizations that provide services to Harrisburg residents with a focus on community services. The HUB VH, which is new construction, is the result of an awarded tax credit awarded by Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and financed through a local bank, to build a 20 one-bedroom apartment facility for veterans. With the partnership of his aunt, Juanita Edrington-Grant, and her non-profit, Christian Recovery Aftercare Ministry, Inc. (CRAM), Tarik Casteel, a local entrepreneur and reentrant, participated as a co-developer, project manager and general contractor, and was able to successfully bring to life their vision which is now known as The HUB Campus, primarily using local residents and contractors.

Successful reentrants who previously had been supervised out of the Harrisburg District Office have given back to the community through their many skills and experiences.

Shown in the photos are: Mayor Eric Papenfuse of the City of Harrisburg; The HUB; and Parole Supervisor Ebony Anderson with builder Tarik Casteel (reentrant).

Casteel and others, including additional reentrants, spent countless hours building programs designed to help other convicted felons to become productive members of society. Their programs offer housing for homeless veterans, computer literacy, GED classes, work-based training programs, mentoring, family reunification and the list goes on.

It was 10 years ago that Mr. Casteel was incarcerated in a state prison. He wrote his business plan while incarcerated, and immediately upon his release from prison, he put together a team of individuals to help him move forward with his plans. The HUB Veteran House was built in less a year after breaking ground August 2017.

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C.O.V.E.R. Teams March for Fallen, Homeless Vets

C.O.V.E.R. teams from SCI Albion, SCI Cambridge Springs and SCI Mercer came together to participate in the EUMA Liberty House 10K Ruck March/Walk to honor local fallen heroes and end veteran homelessness.

More than a dozen members marched rucks full of donations provided by the generous staff at each institution. The team consisted of correction officers, lieutenants, captains, treatment specialists, activity specialists, psychology staff, social workers, clerk typists, electrical trade instructors, licensed practical nurses, prior/current veteran service members from many branches and family members.

Some donation items included boots, hats, bags, backpacks, personal hygiene items, books, towels, sheets, pillows, socks and much more. All items will be donated to the Erie United Methodist Alliance’s Liberty House, the only transitional housing program in Erie County for homeless veterans.

Thanks to everyone for all your support!

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Houtzdale Memorial Wall Dedicated

The SCI Houtzdale Memorial Wall was dedicated to staff and community on October 10.

The Memorial Wall Park is officially opened for staff members and visiting guests to pay tribute to those individuals who have passed away and worked in law enforcement, served our country and worked at SCI Houtzdale in corrections.

The three stone paneled walls represent the three branches of departments to which the Memorial Wall honors. The first panel features veterans service featuring all five branches. The second panel features law enforcement paying tribute to those who serve in this field. The final panel is for SCI Houtzdale corrections staff members who have worked and served in the field of corrections.

Each panel is designed with SCI Houtzdale’s staff members contributing to the art and wording on each panel. The panels were commissioned by JDH Designs from the hit reality television show Fixer Upper. The spirit of the memorial park’s mission is to bring peace to those individuals who have passed away.

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PA Media Group Visits Mercer’s Veterans Service Unit

Videographers from PA Media Group out of Mechanicsburg visited SCI Mercer’s Veterans Service Unit (VSU) to film and take photos for their upcoming documentary, “100 Years of Heroes.” The final product will be aired on PennLive on Veterans Day this November. This project will commemorate the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day (Veterans Day) and highlight stories as told by Pennsylvania veterans.

As part of the documentary, this project will feature DOC’s Statewide Veterans Coordinator Ryan Yoder and his work with incarcerated veterans in the PA Department of Corrections. Yoder selected Mercer’s VSU to highlight the successful veterans program at this facility.

Salim Michel Makhlouf, Emmy Award-winning director at PA Media Group, and Mark Pynes, videographer/photographer, took photos and video of Yoder speaking to the veterans. Also interviewed as part of the project was Aaron Diaz, VSU counselor and Army veteran.

Several inmate veterans were interviewed as well. They were asked what the veterans program means to them, how the program has helped them adapt while incarcerated, and how it will help them to prepare for reentry to their communities upon release.

The VSU’s Honor Guard presented and retired the colors.

Makhlouf stated that the documentary includes interviews with veterans from all over Pennsylvania, including a couple of veterans in their 90’s.

Watch for the final product on Veterans Day on PennLive.com.

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