



***Sound Off* is a newsletter dedicated to the coverage of issues pertinent to the veterans of the City of Newton**

Veterans Service Officers: What Do They Do and Why Do We Need Them?

From the Editor

Welcome to the first edition of ***Sound Off!*** which is the official newsletter of the Department of Veterans Services for the City of Newton. The purpose of the newsletter is to bring pertinent, useful, and timely information to all those who are concerned about the welfare of veterans and their dependents. As this newsletter evolves we hope to cover a wide range of topics that will prove to be both informative and useful to all concerned.

We intend to publish this newsletter on a monthly basis. It is our hope to have the best and most informative newsletter about veterans and their families. To that end we need your input and feedback. Please contact us with any questions you may have; story ideas; events; issues; legislation; etc. We look forward to hearing from you.

John M. MacGillivray
VSO, City of Newton
617-796-1090

jmacgillivray@newtonma.gov

Veterans Service Officers are indispensable public servants in your community. For almost 150 years a Veterans Service Officer has been available in every Massachusetts city and town to provide an array of services to America's veterans and their dependents. Veterans Service Officers offer a helping hand to anyone in their community in need of guidance or assistance in matters relating to military service. Their Departments serve every citizen by providing information and direction concerning:

Annuities * Awards and Medals * Burial Information and Assistance * Chapter 115 Benefits * Clothing * Education * Elder Services * Employment * Flags and Markers * Financial Assistance * Food * Graves Care * Housing * License Plates * Medical Assistance * Pensions * Pharmaceuticals * Real Estate Tax Abatements * Sales Tax Exemptions * Shelter * Veterans Services

Veterans Service Officers are veterans who help other veterans and their families. The VSO is appointed by municipal officials as required by state law. As the local representative for veterans a VSO is familiar with the community and can help a veteran and his/her family to obtain various forms of assistance. It is extremely important that the VSO be familiar with not just veterans' issues but the local landscape (physical, economic, social, etc) in which the veteran resides. The Legislators who developed MGL, Chapter 115 were aware of the importance of this local connection. However, they did allow for the formation of districts to provide these services as long as the municipalities were contiguous – thus, providing the important local connection for veterans. Veterans Service Officers act as advocates for veterans and their families to obtain many federal benefits, e.g., VA, Social Security, SSD, SSI, etc.

(Continued on next page...)

(Continued from the front page...)

Throughout the Commonwealth the Veterans Service Officers have helped veterans to obtain over \$450,000,000 annually in federal benefits. This money not only helps our veterans and their families but it also helps to stimulate our economy (the money is spent on the local level and a multiplier effect occurs). Imagine what would happen not just to our veterans but to the economy if \$450,000,000 was removed each year from the Commonwealth? Without the work of the VSO that is exactly what could happen. It is also estimated that the VA annually spends \$1.2 billion for medical and hospital cases in Massachusetts. The VSO is instrumental in ensuring that veterans have access to this care. As you can see, a Veterans Service Officer must be highly trained and skilled to effectively provide a plethora of services to those men and women who honorably served their Country and Commonwealth. Our veterans deserve the best. And the best is the Veterans Service Officer.

History and Rationale of Veterans Benefits

Caring for veterans and their dependents dates back to ancient times. The ancient Greeks and Romans rewarded their military personnel and their families with both land and money. Caring for veterans and their families has always been considered to be as much of the cost of war as bombs and bullets.

In Massachusetts we can trace our program of assistance back to the Massachusetts Bay Colony when assistance was rendered to veterans of the French and Indian War. This assistance was continued through the Revolutionary War. In 1861 the Civil War began. At that time there was no federal Department of Veterans Affairs, therefore, it was incumbent upon individual states to provide care for their veterans. Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 115 governs this program of assistance for veterans and their dependents. It requires that each of the 351 municipalities in Massachusetts should have a Veterans Service Officer to help veterans to obtain their benefits.

From 1861 to 1888 when the Soldiers' Relief Act was enacted, which gave cities and towns the right and obligation to support honorably discharged veterans, their spouses, their widows, and minor children, to that date in 1945 when the Office of the Commissioner of Veterans Services was created and to that date in 1946 when Chapter 115 (Veterans Services) of the Massachusetts General Court was reorganized to form the basis of today's benefits and services program, the veterans within the Commonwealth have not been forgotten. With Chapter 599 Acts of 1946, mandating "...municipal and district Departments of Veterans Services..." Veterans Service Officers have become the first individuals that an ill, disabled, indigent, unemployed, or injured veteran has turned to for assistance. It is the job of the VSO to provide the veterans (living and deceased) and their dependents access to every federal, state, and local benefit and service to which they are entitled. Today, with the continued support of the Massachusetts Executive Office and the Massachusetts House and Senate, Veterans Service Officers throughout the Commonwealth stand ready to meet the needs of our former military personnel and their families.

Mayor Setti Warren and Veterans Benefits

Setti Warren is a native of Newton and a committed public servant. He was born and raised in Newton. He attended Newton public schools and graduated from Newton North High School. Mayor Warren then attended Boston College and became only the second African American to be elected student body president in the college's history. Setti's family taught him the value of making a difference in one's community and country. As a result, public service has been at the core of the Mayor's career. Also, part of the Mayor's core is military service. Setti comes from a long line of veterans. His grandfather fought in the Battle of the Bulge during WWII and his father fought in Korea. The Mayor himself served in Iraq as an intelligence specialist for the Navy. This blend of military and public service has given the Mayor a unique outlook on the delivery of benefits to veterans and their families. Mayor Warren strongly believes that veterans are special people who – due to the sacrifices that they and their families have made – need to be treated with dignity and respect. He feels that anything that we can do to help them, we should do. Recently, Mayor Warren convened a meeting to bring together federal, state, and local officials to explore better ways of providing services to veterans and their families. This is an innovative approach that will become a role model for the rest of the Commonwealth. As Mayor Warren said "... I believe that we have a responsibility to care for our veterans and their families. We need to do so by providing a seamless continuum of care for them in the most cost effective and efficient manner possible..." The Mayor is proud of being a veteran. Whenever possible he would like to meet his fellow veterans and encourages them to stop by his office to say hello. Conversely, the Mayor would like to be able to reach out to veterans and their families. Please send contact information to his office and/or to John M. MacGillivray, Veterans Service Officer, at Newton City Hall.



Mayor Reaches Out to Veterans

Sound Off! – The TV Show

Sound Off! can now be seen on your local cable TV station.

Sound Off! is taped in the NewTV studios in Newton. It is produced by veterans, for veterans, and about veterans. It is an interesting and informative show. The show is produced on a monthly basis. The show will be broadcast on NewTV on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 3 PM. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays it will be broadcast at 6:30 PM. The first half of the show will have an expert who is familiar with issues, events, and benefits that pertain to veterans and their dependents. The second half of the program will showcase a veteran and/or an individual who helps veterans. The show will use the Sound Off! newsletter as a script. As a result, topics in the newsletter may be covered in greater detail on the TV show.

It is our hope that as both the newsletter and TV show evolve, that we will provide you with more pertinent and useful information in a timely manner. To do so, we will need your feedback and input. Please make sure that you contact us.

You may contact John M. MacGillivray at 617-796-1090/1092 or via email at jmacgillivray@newtonma.gov.



From Left to Right:
John MacGillivray
(VSO, City of Newton),
Ted Mulvehill
(VSO, City of Norwood),
Mike Sweeney
(VSO, City of Lynn)

Taping of the first episode of *Sound Off!* at NewTV

Please visit www.newtonma.gov and check out the newly revamped veterans department website, now full of helpful information concerning veterans services. A contact form is also available on the website where you may voice your questions or comments to the Veterans Service Officer. Whether you are a veteran, an active duty servicemember, or a family member or friend of a veteran, we would like to hear from you! You may also call John MacGillivray at (617) 796-1090 or e-mail him at jmacgillivray@newtonma.gov.