

# Creating a Home for Student Veterans



Members of the Clark College Veterans Club and Associated Students were on hand to welcome student veterans to the new Veterans Resource Center. Also pictured are Vet Corps Navigators (and VCAS advisors) Tim McPharlin, *far left*, and Josh Vance, *far right*.

Less than four months after the college announced a major grant to help create a Veterans Resource Center, that center held its first public event to welcome student veterans and other members of the college community.

"This is a major milestone for the campus community as we pull together all the resources we have for veterans for their personal, financial, and educational success," said Dean of Student Success & Retention Matthew Rygg as he greeted guests

to the center's open house, held March 11.



Clark College Bob Knight called the opening of the Veterans Resource Center “a proud day for Clark College.”

“As a vet myself, it is a proud day for Clark College to be opening a resource center for our student veterans,” said Clark College President Bob Knight, who served more than two decades in the U.S. Army. “To have a space where they can sit and meet with each other and get help and counseling is just a little of what we can do and should do for our veterans.”

Vice President of Student Affairs Bill Belden spoke in gratitude of the donors who had made the center possible. These include Jane Hagelstein, a longtime supporter of Clark's student veteran community who donated \$48,000 to help construct and furnish the center; the Community Foundation for Southwest Washington, which donated \$30,000 in November to help hire and train staff at the center; and other individual donors who wish to remain anonymous. Belden also thanked Clark College Foundation for its support in making the center a reality.

Tucked into a quiet corner of Gaiser Hall's second floor, the center is not yet complete—there is more furniture and decor in the works, and the college is still in the process of

hiring a staff person to run it. But already it offers student veterans a host of amenities. A comfortable couch sits near a bank of computers available for research and paper-writing; private offices allow student veterans to discuss their educational and personal needs in confidentiality. An American flag stands by the doorway.



Clark College Veterans Club and Associated Students president Megan O'Malley thanks Jane Hagelstein, whose donation helped make the Veterans Resource Center possible.

"For me personally, a lot of it is just having that quiet space that [veterans] can come to where they don't have to fight for a computer and where they can feel comfortable," said Megan O'Malley, who is currently serving in the Army National Guard and is president of the Clark College Veterans Club and Associated Students.

About 700 veterans enroll at Clark College every quarter, about 500 of whom use GI Bill benefits to help pay for tuition, fees, housing, books and supplies. They often face unique challenges when they enter college—everything from managing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to navigating the sometimes complex paperwork involved in accessing military benefits. And then there are the not-so-unique challenges,

like time management and financial instability. The Veterans Resource Center provides veterans with guidance and help for all of those things in one welcoming, centralized location.

“It’s our way of extending a helping hand to our vets and showing that the community they experienced while in the military is still available to them now that they’re out,” said Clark student Josh Vance. Vance, who served 10 years in the Air Force, now works as one of two Vet Corps Navigators in the center, helping veterans connect with services both inside and outside the college. Additionally, the center houses two full-time staff members who previously worked in the Office of Financial Aid; they are charged with helping veterans (as well as their qualifying dependents) access, understand, and comply with their GI Bill benefits. Six work-study employees also work in the center, supporting the staff and helping student veterans with questions. All the center’s work-study students and most of its staff are veterans or active service members themselves, helping to create a comfortable and supportive environment for student veterans.



Student veteran Killian Hough and her service dog, Chekov, visit with Veterans Affairs Program Manager Michael Gibson at the Veterans Resource Center open house.

Killian Hough, a quiet woman whose service dog bears a sergeant's stripes, came to check out the center after reading about it in her student email. She said she would return, and thought the center was a good step toward serving veterans at the college. "It shows that they're considering veterans, having a place where we can have our thoughts, separate from all the kids," said Hough, who served in the Air Force during Operation Desert Storm and currently serves in the Army National Guard. "A lot of us, both young and old, we've been through a lot, and sometimes we kind of think differently."

The Veterans Resource Center is located in Gaiser Hall room 216. Its current hours during the regular academic year are 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. on Friday. Hours are reduced during breaks in the academic year. Certifying officials are available 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday. The center's main phone line is 360-992-2073.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. For more photos from this event, visit our Flickr set.*

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## History Lesson





Readers of the Gettysburg Address were, *left to right*, Tracy Fortmann, Rowena Tchao, Claire Bauer, Rosalba Pitkin, Bill Charles, Tim Leavitt, Julie Eddings, Bill Ritchie, Pat Jollota, Lisa Gibert, and Sirius Bonner.

Four score and five people attended a recitation of the Gettysburg Address on November 19, the 150th anniversary of that famous speech's delivery by President Abraham Lincoln. The event, which was organized jointly by Clark College Mature Learning and the National Park Service's Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (FVNHS), took place in Foster Auditorium.

The event was part of the Learn the Address project, an effort by documentarian Ken Burns, along with numerous partners, to encourage Americans to video record themselves reading or reciting the address.

Eleven different presenters recited lines of the speech: Vancouver Mayor and Clark alumnus Tim Leavitt, Clark College Foundation President and CEO Lisa Gibert, Clark College Assistant Vice President of Corporate & Continuing Education Kevin Kussman, Fort Vancouver Superintendent Tracy Fortmann, Clark College Special Advisor for Diversity & Equity Sirius Bonner, Skyridge Middle School student Claire Bauer, Mature Learning student Bill Charles, Northwest Indian Veterans

Association Color Guard member Julie Eddings, Crossroads Community Church pastor Bill Ritchie, Clark College Diversity Outreach Specialist Rosalba Pitkin, Clark College Foundation Annual Fund Specialist Rowena Tchao, and Clark College Mature Learning instructor and Clark County Freeholder Pat Jollota.

The program also included period Civil War music by "Illinois" Doug Tracy; a presentation of the colors by the Northwest Indian Veterans Association Color Guard; lecture on Lincoln by Mature Learning instructor Dr. Elliott Trommald; a lecture on Fort Vancouver's role in the Civil War by Tracy Fortmann; a welcome by Clark College Vice President of Administration Bob Williamson; and the reading of a Walt Whitman poem by Clark College Trustee Royce Pollard.

"This program is one of several this year that we are doing in a partnership we have inaugurated with the National Park Service and Fort Vancouver National Historic Site," said Mature Learning Manager Tracy Reilly Kelly, who emceed the event. "Our co-programming will focus on history and archaeology."

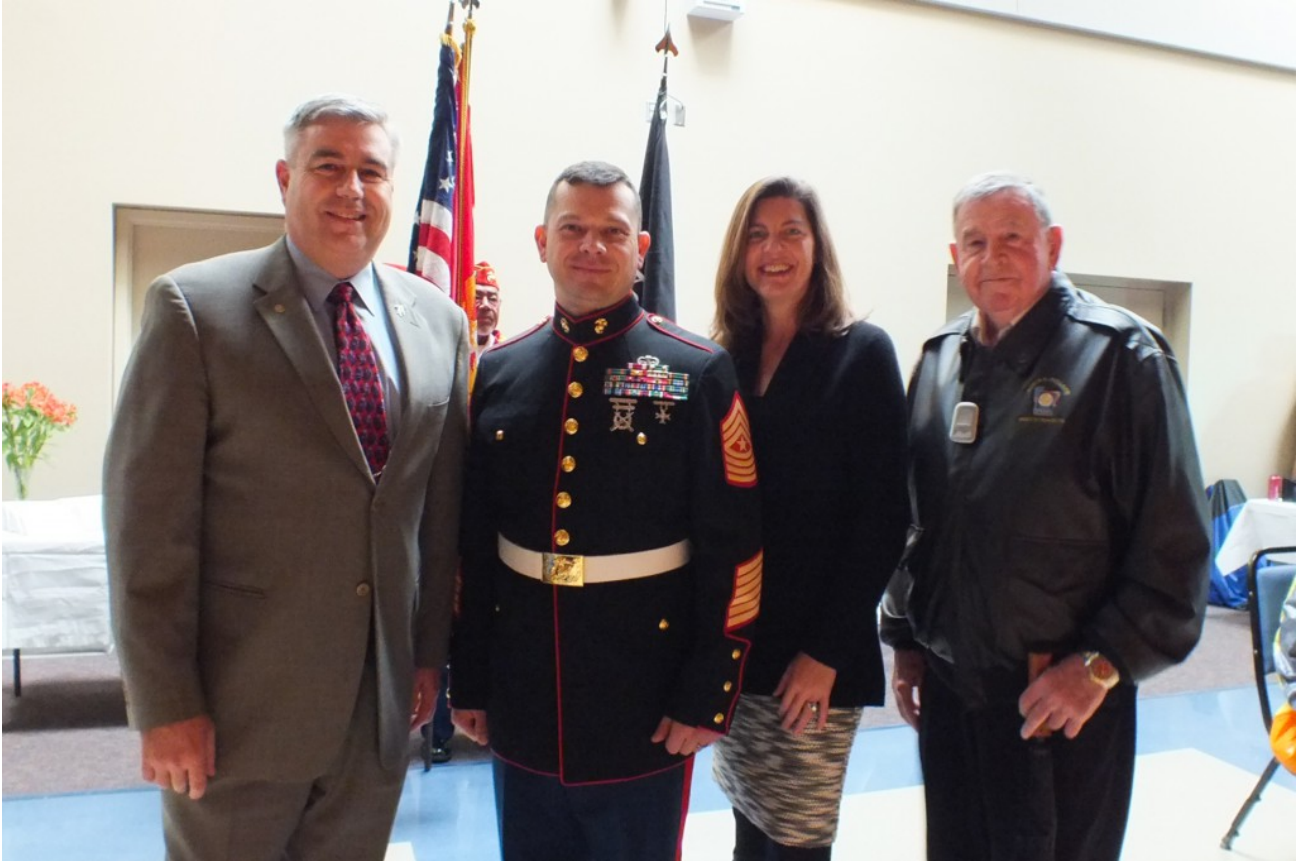
Reilly Kelly added that FVNHS staff had told her that they appreciated that Clark College President Bob Knight made it back from China just in time to attend that evening's launch of the Fort's new exhibit, "The Civil War in the West: A New Birth of Freedom."

*Story submitted by Tracy Reilly Kelly*

*Photo: Clark College Mature Learning/Don Gardener*

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# Gratitude for Those Who Served



Clark College President Bob Knight, U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Eric Sheline, Community Foundation for Southwest Washington President Jennifer Rhoads, and Clark College Trustee Royce Pollard attended the college's Veterans Celebration.

This November, Clark College began a new tradition: a college-sponsored celebration honoring veterans. The event was held the Thursday before Veterans Day in Gaiser Student Center.

"We need to make sure that our veterans are taken care of," said Clark College President Bob Knight in his welcoming address to the event participants. "We're going to have an annual Veterans Day celebration and, one day soon, a Veterans Resource Center here at the college."





Veterans salute the flag during the Posting of the Colors.

That center could become a reality sooner than expected, thanks to an announcement made during the celebration by Community Foundation for Southwest Washington President Jennifer Rhoads. Rhoads announced that, in honor of CFSWW's 30th anniversary, the foundation would be donating six grants of \$30,000 each to different organizations in the region helping to alleviate poverty, and that the first grant would be going to Clark College to create its new Veterans Resource Center. She offered a quote by the writer Cynthia Ozicks: "'We often take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude.'

"Our veterans most deserve our gratitude, today and every day," Rhoads concluded.

Once complete, the center will support veteran students with quality academic and career advising, resource referrals and information regarding military tuition benefits. The center will help expand the services already provided by Clark's Veterans Programs office—services that have led to Clark being named a Military-Friendly School by Victory Media for three years in a row. About 700 veterans enroll at Clark College every quarter; about 500 of them use GI Bill benefits to help pay for tuition, fees, housing, books and supplies.



Clark's Veterans Celebration was a community event, honoring members of every branch of service.

The event was originally planned to begin with a Changing of the Colors at the flagpole outside the Penguin Union Building. However, bad weather canceled that portion of the program. Instead, it began with a Posting of the Colors ceremony inside Gaiser Student Center, after which Clark student Petya Grozeva sang the National Anthem. Guests were also invited to write and sign cards thanking veterans for their service; the cards were delivered to retired and disabled veterans at the Vancouver Veterans Administration Medical Center by members of the Clark College Veterans Club.

Sgt. Maj. Eric Sheline, U.S. Marine Corps, 6th Engineer Support Battalion, gave the keynote speech. Since joining the Marines in 1987, Sheline has participated in operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield; was squad leader of an anti-terrorism team in Mogadishu, Somalia; and was deployed twice to Kuwait in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sheline noted that as the U.S. military continues to draw down forces, more and more veterans will be entering higher education in the coming years. He urged all veterans to continue to be role models, even after they leave the service.

"When we leave [to serve overseas], we do great things," he said. "When we come back, we continue to do great things."

Student Success & Retention Administrative Assistant Susan Muir, who served on the committee that helped organize the event, said the college plans to make the Veterans Celebration an annual tradition. She added that there will be another event on May 22 in recognition of Memorial Day.

*Photos: Clark College/Elizabeth Christopher*

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## Everyone's Involved



Phi Theta Kappa advisor Melissa Sinclair, *far right in yellow shirt*, gives students information about the program.

Gaiser Student Center was bustling with activity on October 2 as students attended the college's first-ever Involvement Fair. In previous years, the college has hosted a quarterly Student Club Fair, but this year the event expanded to include tables for not just clubs, but also departments and programs like Financial Aid, CollegeFish.org, and the Bookstore.

"We wanted to expand on the engagement opportunities we were highlighting for students," explained Director of Student Life Sarah Gruhler.



Brandon Nimmo

Clark student Brandon Nimmo was manning a table representing the college's Penguin Help Desk, a free service staffed by Computer Support Specialist students that provides computer assistance and repair to students, faculty, and anyone in the community. Nimmo said he'd received a lot of visitors at his table interested in the Help Desk's services—though, he added, they might have to wait a bit to access them. "We have a lot of computers there waiting to be fixed right now," he said. "We stay very busy."

Nimmo wasn't interested in signing up for any clubs himself. "I honestly don't have time," he said. The Air Force veteran is currently juggling working 30-to-40 hours per week at the



Veterans Administration with a full-time class load and helping to care for his daughter, 2, and stepdaughter, 13.



Chess fans get a game in at the Chess Club table.

This is the challenge facing many Clark students—they're too busy balancing jobs and family and homework to participate in extracurricular activities. But, Gruhler said, it can be helpful to their long-term success if they do.

"In Student Life we emphasize out-of-class learning opportunities," she said. "Clubs are a great way for students to pursue their interests and try new things while gaining experience, learning new skills and connecting with other students. Future schools and employers are not just interested in your degree, but in all the other experiences that set students apart as individuals. Clubs help students connect, network and ultimately provide support to help them achieve their goals."





Saudi Students Club members Majed Alhumaidani and Ahmed Biladi share dates and culture with their fellow students.

For first-year student Ahmed Biladi, a student club is also a way to promote understanding about his culture. Biladi, 18, is one of a growing number of Clark international students from Saudi Arabia—in fact, fall 2013 marks the first quarter that Saudi Arabia is the most common country of origin for Clark international students, the result of new partnerships between Clark College International Programs and educational organizations in the Middle East including the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission.

When Biladi first came to the United States, he encountered some disheartening preconceptions about his homeland. “Some of the most bizarre questions I’ve gotten have been: ‘Do you guys still ride camels? Is the country covered in sand? Do you still live in tents?’” he said with a laugh. “There’s a lot of misinformation about Saudis, so we decided to start a club to share our culture with the Clark community.”

The newly formed Saudi Students Club hopes to combat myths and promote understanding between American and Saudi cultures.

“There’s an ignorance of culture on both ends that leads to a lack of communication,” Biladi said, offering a plate of imported dates to passersby.

According to the Office of Student Life, more than 400 people attended the Involvement Fair.



A total of 59 clubs, programs, services, and departments had tables at the Involvement Fair, which was attended by more than 400 people.

*Photos: Jenny Shadley/Clark College*