

CCC offers help to returning vets

Wilsonville Spokesman

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11/12/2009 11:06:55 AM



*CCC Pres. Truesdell and Oregon National Guard Brigadier General Mike Caldwell
Photo Courtesy of CCC*

CCC President Joanne Truesdell met with Oregon National Guard Brigadier General Mike Caldwell at CCC's National Guard reintegration event in 2007. Oregon veterans returning from active duty are highly-skilled individuals who often find themselves underemployed or unable to use their skills in their daily lives.

Over the past two years, Clackamas Community College has sought to help veterans navigate the higher-education system and attempt to reintegrate seamlessly into civilian life.

Newly-announced federal grants and the opening of a Veterans Education and Training Center should provide even more tools to help veterans who want to transfer their military skills into college credits and find jobs for which they have been trained.

The college received a \$381,000 congressional award, originally sponsored by former Congresswoman Darlene Hooley (D-Oregon), as well as a \$100,000 grant. Both are designated to better serve veterans.

The training center will have a formal grand opening at 9 a.m. Nov. 18 in DeJardin Hall.

The VET Center at CCC is designed to support veterans and active military in the Portland metro area, as well as their spouses and family members, by providing information about education and training opportunities and critical community resources. College staff specializing in veterans' affairs will be available to assist veterans in the center.

Information provided by Clackamas Community College states that it has “substantially increased its services to veterans over the past few years, including job training opportunities, credit for prior learning, dedicated counselors to work with veterans, a veterans’ club and financial aid support.”

The CCC Foundation established the Military Families Scholarship Endowment, providing scholarship support to the families of service members and veterans.

With the federal award, the college will hire a veterans’ affairs coordinator who will help develop the VET Center. A major reintegration event for Oregon National Guard members returning from overseas deployment is planned for fall 2010.

“We recognize the sacrifices these men and women have made for our country,” said CCC president Joanne Truesdell. “We are honored to provide services that will help our veterans find success in civilian life.”

Clackamas Community College is one of 20 institutions across the United States to receive the \$100,000 grant to serve veterans, awarded through the American Council on Education and the Wal-Mart Foundation. The grant was announced in April. Truesdell said the grant will enable the college to expand and enhance its services to veterans.

In 2007, CCC entered a partnership with the Oregon National Guard. The partnership, Operation College Success, is aimed at helping soldiers returning from duty return to school.

“We know that nearly 37 percent of returning Guard members are unemployed or underemployed,” said Shelly Parini, dean of College Advancement at CCC. “This (\$381,000) grant aims to change that statistic by creating pathways for our returning service members to achieve success.”

More than 6,400 men and women serve in the Oregon National Guard. This spring, half of the Oregon National Guard was called to active duty in the largest such deployment since World War II. There may be as many as 37,000 veterans in Clackamas County.

The county hopes to reach out to 10,000 veterans in the next two years, making them aware of the services and programs offered through the college.

“We have hopes and dreams of providing to at least half of those a jumpstart on how to get their education started,” Truesdell said.

One of the issues, she said, is that military service does not translate into college credits. A veteran who acted as a medic on active duty would have to start over at the community college level to get credit.

“They’ve had this rigorous training, yet they’re having to go back to square one,” she said.

Both Hooley and state Rep. Martha Schrader (D-Canby) will be present at the VET Center’s grand opening.