



Washington State Veteran's Employee Resource Group

# VERG Informer – April 2016

Don't Forget, the other remembrance... "Month of the Military Child"

By: Becky Boutilier, IT Manager, Washington Department of Social and Health Services, US Air Force Veteran

April is well known for the observation of Earth Day and Autism Awareness. Another lesser known, but important recognition is that April is also the "Month of the Military Child". The month of the Military Child recognizes the sacrifices and the courage of these young Americans.

This awareness month was established to underscore the important role children play in the Armed Forces community. There are approximately 2 million military children, ranging in ages from newborn to 18 years old; 1.3 million military children are school-aged. Care of military children sustains our fighting force, and strengthens the health, security, and safety of our nation's families and communities.

Military children face unique challenges, often having to learn to adapt to constantly changing circumstances at a young age. Whether their parents are deployed, transferred or training, military life impacts the entire family right down to the youngest family member.

In a statement regarding her personal experience as a military child, VERG member and Army Veteran, Ashley Harris said: *"When we moved to Washington State, it was the first time my parents had decided to move off base and that was the biggest adjustment of all. I was now attending school with kids who had grown up together and couldn't understand what it was like for someone that didn't have any real roots. I had always conformed so easily to my surroundings, and now for the first time, I didn't know where I fit in."* This is a challenge that children of Veterans regularly face.

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "The unique challenges of military family life include multiple geographic moves, parental separations, and combat deployments fraught with very real and serious risks. Within the veteran family, roles and responsibilities may shift again as the veteran parent adjust to a new civilian social and occupational life. Military life teaches service members and their families to be adaptive and resilient – attributes that persist during adjustment to civilian life. Yet, there is no shortage of obstacles, among them:

- Families may feel underappreciated by the broader community
- Families lose vital connections to the military community

Any veteran family, regardless of its structure, may come up against these and other obstacles during transition. As a consequence, they may face increased risks of depression, anxiety, marital strife, and compromised parenting." Below are some resources available to support the children of transitioning military personnel.

- [Veterans and Military Families, SAMHSA](#) offers an extensive menu of links to publications, resources, evidence based practices, training, and program grants relevant to military and veteran families.
- [National Association of Social Workers](#) offers free training for providers on issues facing military and veteran families. The training is part of the Joining Forces national initiative to support veterans and military families.
- [Military Kids Connect \(MKC\)](#) uses innovative ways to help military youth cope with the unique strains of military life. In addition to disruptions from parents deploying to assignments away from home, military children are affected by moving frequently, changing schools and making new friends. They also have to live with readjustment issues when a parent returns from deployments. These issues may include posttraumatic stress and physical disabilities. Features include Military culture videos and lesson plans for teachers, school counselors, and educators to understand the differences between military and civilian youth.

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## April Celebrating Earth Day

“Preserving our Future”

By: Paul Cruz, Project Manager, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, US Army Veteran

April is the month in which we celebrate Earth Day with the goal of protecting and sustaining our natural environment. First observed on April 22, 1970, Earth Day made it clear that we could summon the public’s support, energy, and commitment in this effort. As veterans we not only strive to protect our country’s freedom; we also strive to preserve our country’s natural environment for future generations.

The [Veterans Conservation Corps \(VCC\)](#) provides opportunities for veterans to connect with nature while restoring Washington’s natural resources. The VCC specializes in eco-therapy: healing the environment while improving the quality of life for veterans. Eco-therapy provides a pathway for veterans to take care of themselves physically and mentally.

The Veterans Farm is located at the Veterans Home in Orting Washington. It focuses on teaching veterans who are interested in agriculture how to thrive and heal through eco-therapy. There are several farming plots available for veterans to explore farming as a future and also focus on the importance of protecting our natural resources and the environment. Initiatives like the VCC provide veterans another means to honor the Earth Day tradition.

Jermain Kearse of the Seattle Seahawks and his 15 to 1 Foundation recently visited the Veterans Farm. He wanted to recognize our veterans for their hard work and sacrifice for our great nation and the environment.



Seattle Seahawks Receiver, Jermaine Kearse, members of the 15-1 foundation came together to recognize veterans’ sacrifices and to support eco-therapy at the Washington State Veterans Farm in Orting, Washington.

## Veterans Spotlight: Paul Cruz, Department of Veteran's Affairs

By: Cathrene Nichols, Program Manager, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, US Army Veteran



Paul Cruz is currently the Washington State Military Transition Council Project Manager with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). Paul was born and raised on Guam. In 1995, he enlisted in the Army as an infantryman and completed Infantry One Station Unit Training and Airborne School at Fort Benning Georgia. After deciding to take advantage of the Army Green to Gold Program, he received his degree and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Field Artillery. During that time, he held various leadership positions at the Company, Battalion, and Brigade levels. He also served on the Corps, Army staff, and did a stint as a US Liaison to the Republic of Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff. He completed multiple combat tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

When Paul joined the WDVA team, he brought with him an infectious enthusiasm and energy that quickly spread throughout the workgroup. Paul works tirelessly to ensure that every opportunity to “Serve those who have served” is seized and capitalized on.

Paul is an active member of the Veterans Employee Resource Group and regularly supports veteran transition through the NW Edge and Onward 2 Opportunity programs on Joint Base Lewis McChord.

Paul has become a tremendous asset to the WDVA and serves as an exemplary ambassador to the veterans we serve.

## Upcoming Events

Provided By: The VERG

**May 4, 2016:** The VERG will be hosting a table at the Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW) on the Olympia East Plaza (on Capitol Way, opposite the Capitol). Please stop by, have a hot dog, and show your support! There will be “Swag” given out along with brochures with information on veteran and family benefits.

**May 14, 2016:** Prairie Appreciation Day at the Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve.

**May 17, 2016:** Women Veterans Health Fair 10:00am – 2:00pm at American Lake VA Hospital Auditorium-Free! Register online at WDVA.

**May 17, 2016:** Washington State Military Transition Council Quarterly Meeting, Tumwater AGs Office from 10:00-12:00.

**May 19, 2016:** 8:00am – 12:00pm VERG Career Development Workshop at the AGO Conference Room (7141 Cleanwater Ln SW Tumwater, WA 98501) for State veterans and spouses who want to learn how to write resumes and reinforce their interview skills.

**May 25, 2016:** Safeco Career Fair 10:00am – 1:00pm at Safeco Field. Register at [www.hiringourheroes.org](http://www.hiringourheroes.org)

**May 30, 2016:** Memorial Day Ceremony 11:00am – 1:00pm Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Medical Lake

**June 23, 2016:** The VERG is please to sponsor Mr. Karl Marlantes; Local Native to the Pacific Northwest, Princeton Ivy League Graduate, Rhodes Scholar (Oxford), Vietnam War Veteran (USMC), International Businessman and New Your Times Best Selling Author of the non-fiction/fiction book “Matterhorn” at the HSB/OB2 auditorium 9:30am – 12:30pm.

## Mazama Pocket Gophers say THANK YOU to Federal, State, Non-Profit Workers and Veterans

By: Angie Hong, Environmental Planner, Washington Department of Natural Resources, US Army Veteran



Scurrying through underground tunnels carrying food in their external cheek pockets, these small, furry mammals struggle to persist in Washington State. Originally native to South Sound prairies, only 10% of this population remains today, which places them on the “threatened” list under the Endangered Species Act. The gophers live off flowering plants and grasses. They especially like succulent roots, shoots, bulbs and tubers found in thriving prairie lands. They require soils of a particular type: the kind uncrowded by trees and woody shrubs like Scot’s broom.

The largest remaining prairie lands that house this species, as well as several other endangered and threatened prairie species, can be found on Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) and at the Olympia Airport. Sensitive habitats such as these require lots of love and attention. That is why an extraordinary partnership spanning several agencies and sectors are highlighted here.

**Federal Workers:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) and Department of Defense (DoD) launched the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership initiative in 2013 and designated JBLM the first ever Sentinel Landscape. This has brought much needed support to the military installation by transitioning the burden of recovery from a solely-military-base effort to a regional one.

**State Workers:** Managing valuable prairie habitat outside of JBLM, the Washington Department of Natural Resources provides educational and volunteer opportunities to the public at the Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve. Prairie Appreciation Day is an annual event that takes place on the second Saturday of May. DNR also provides opportunities for dedicated volunteers to up the ante and become Site Stewards.

**Nonprofit Workers:** The Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM), part of the Nature Conservancy, is providing prairie restoration expertise as a lead partner on JBLM prairies. A key strategy in the battle against invasive pest plants is maintaining native plant species in the prairies. CNLM cultivates native plant nurseries to produce over a ton of seed and 350,000 seedlings annually.

**Veterans** transitioning into the civilian workforce and seeking natural resource and land management experience, have found their way to VetsWork: an AmeriCorps program through the Mt. Adams Institute. Partnered with the Center for Natural Lands Management, VetsWork has employed 28 transitioning-veteran-interns in the last three years.

Conservation work is often a thankless job because the recipients of success are silent: wild flowers, healthy soils and struggling species. The motives of collaborators vary, making conservation success challenging and often frustrating, yet the commitment to the cause and perseverance, as a team will ultimately leave a legacy for future generations to enjoy.

## Tools & Resources

[Click here](#) to see all the current open jobs listings across the state enterprise.

The JBLM [jobs unlimited](#) job board was created to help transitioning service members find open positions with local employers that are actively seeking Veterans and Veterans to be. It is also a resource for employers looking for candidates that possess leadership skills, Team orientation, integrity, ability to perform under pressure, and adaptability.

[The Veterans Employment Center](#) helps connect veterans and their families with meaningful employment and career-development opportunities.

[Operation Good Jobs](#) aims to help Veterans, active members in the National Guard and Reserve, and their spouses and dependents (who live in the same house), transition from military life to a successful civilian life. Good Jobs partners with a vast network of outside agencies to provide a comprehensive program catered to the individual and his/her family.

[WorkForce Central](#) puts job seekers on a path to employment by providing career guidance, pre-employment workshops, training and educational support through a comprehensive network of public and private partnerships. It is a single point of contact for Pierce County businesses, providing a customized approach to address their talent needs.

**Licensing and Certification Opportunities:** Certification tests may be reimbursable by VA to include licensing and/or certifications. Open new doors to employment or promotion by getting licensed or certified as a mechanic, medical technician, therapist, computer network engineer, website developer, and other professional. [Apply](#) for these benefits or contact the Washington Student Achievement Council's State Approving Agency, Gary Allin, at [garya@wsac.wa.gov](mailto:garya@wsac.wa.gov).

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“A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children.” — John James

Audubon

### **Communications Sub-Committee Roster**

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DO YOU HAVE IDEAS OR INFORMATION TO DISSEMINATE? SUBMIT YOUR INFORMATION WITH A COMMUNICATIONS REQUEST AND THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM WILL TAKE ACTION!

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