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Women Veterans Network Welcomes New Members

(Bradenton, FL) Celia Szelwach, organizer of the “Women Veterans Network” says the network has grown to over 37 members since mid May with new members joining monthly. For now, the network stays connected through monthly meetings at the Women’s Resource Center (WRC) of Manatee County and via an email newsletter which highlights upcoming events. Szelwach, a 1990 West Point graduate, former Army Captain and paratrooper hopes to create a global online community of women veterans spanning all services, experiences, war eras, ranks, and geographies. The group will serve not only as a support network for current women veterans but also for future veterans, particularly those from the latest conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

When asked why she started the network, Szelwach says, “Part of my role as an appointed member of the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans is to facilitate more outreach to women veterans. Our stories and transition needs are unique, and we need a safe place to share them. Women veterans from past eras continually describe the sense of isolation we feel when leaving military service. Many of us struggle when losing our identities as military officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted soldiers. Those who haven’t served often misunderstand us or have prejudices because we served in the Armed Forces. Some women vets actually hide their service experience because of past mistreatment, particularly Vietnam era vets.”

Szelwach expects the network will make the transition smoother as women vets from previous eras identify themselves and reach out to mentor a new generation of women veterans. 12 members met on Friday, July 27th at the WRC. Women veterans from the WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Shield/Desert Storm eras participated in this monthly meeting featuring speakers Mary Ellen Smith, Chief Clinical Dietician and Susan Young, Women Veterans Program Manager from Bay Pines VA Healthcare System. The speakers shared the VA MOVE program and information about the VA health programs for women veterans.

The next meeting is scheduled for 530-700pm on Friday, Aug 24th at the WRC and will focus on “Career and Job Search Techniques.” Szelwach, a former corporate Human Resources Manager and career coach, will share tips on transitioning to a new career, job search resources, networking, interviewing, and follow-up.

For additional information about the Women Veterans Network or to receive e-mail updates, contact Celia Szelwach at 941-795-0928 or email cszelwach@creative-collaborations.com.

Celia Szelwach, DBA (ABD) is the President of Creative Collaborations Consulting, Inc., specializing in organizational development, change management, leadership and career coaching, and diversity. In October 2006, she was appointed by the Secretary of the VA to serve on the 14-member Advisory Committee on Women Veterans for a two-year term. Her active duty service from 1990-1995 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina included redeploying troops and equipment from Desert Storm/Desert Shield and two humanitarian service missions—for Haitian migration to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and for Hurricane Andrew disaster relief in Miami, Florida. Her awards and decorations include the National Defense Service Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, two Army Achievement Medals, two Humanitarian Service Medals, and the Senior Parachutist Badge.