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Date: September 3, 2007

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Women Veterans Network Welcomes Regional VA Representative**

(Bradenton, FL) Celia Szelwach, founder of the “Women Veterans Network” has invited Cheryl Ann Howard, the Regional Veterans Affairs Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC) from the St. Petersburg office to speak on Friday, September 28<sup>th</sup> from 530-700pm at the Women’s Resource Center of Manatee County (WRC). Ms. Howard will share information and answer questions regarding “General VA Benefits and Eligibility” for women veterans. Howard is a 20-year veteran of the Air Force and served in several overseas assignments including the Philippines and Panama. A Native Floridian, Howard earned her MBA from NOVA Southeastern University. As a Veterans Service Representative, Howard assists veterans who file claims for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) resulting from military sexual trauma, harassment, stalking, physical abuse and assault.

The Women Veterans Network has grown to almost 50 members with new members joining monthly. Network members include several women veterans with more than 20 years of service in the Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard as well as pioneers such as the first female Command Master Chief in the Coast Guard. 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 community events for women and veterans. Celia Szelwach, a 1990 West Point graduate, former Army Captain and paratrooper started the Network in May with the desire to create a global online community of women veterans spanning all services, experiences, war eras, ranks, and geographies. The group serves 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.

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 misunderstand us or have prejudices because we served in the Armed Forces. Some women vets hide their military service 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.

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](mailto: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.

Attached Photo: Cheryl Ann Howard, Regional VA Veterans Service Representative

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