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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Computer Class Helps Veterans to Help Themselves

Story and photos by Raymond P. Aalhue, VA New York Harbor Healthcare System Public Affairs Officer.

BROOKLYN, NY---“Many schools have certain requirements. You have to pass the SAT’s or the GMAT’s in order to be accepted. Here at the VA we all meet the requirements that are needed. All of our credentials start with the letter U...US Army, US Navy, US Marine Corps, and the US Air Corps. And most of us did the required time, overseas,” said Harold Radish.

A Former American Prisoner of War during WWII, Mr. Radish is a graduate of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System (NYHHS) Computer Application class.

About 50 Veterans, some from WWII and the Korean and Vietnam Wars, graduated with Mr. Radish from a six-month program called NO MAN IS AN ISLAND (NMIAI.)

A pilot program started in the Northport VAMC in 2002; NMIAI is a special computer assisted program that serves as an adjunct to the VHA medical treatment program to increase veteran awareness, mental alertness, socialization and interaction in the real world. The program is designed to build the veterans basic computer knowledge and enable the veterans to augment their interests and global access.

By successfully meeting the programs objectives, veterans will have gained the basic computer skills needed to communicate using the latest technologies. This will build their confidence and enable them to interact with others effectively. The goal is for the Veterans who go through the program, some with serious disabilities, to get reconnected and more involved in their recovery.

The program began in 2004 at the VA NYHHS. It is co-sponsored by Mental Health Services and the New York Regional Office Vocation Rehabilitation Services. Key personnel for the success of NMIAI include Bert Hirsch, MSW of the Day Hospital Program, Susan Chung, MS of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Daniel Umlauf, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Mr. Hirsch was doubtful at first. “I never thought the program would take off like it did.” He now believes it to be well worth the time and effort. It is one of the most gratifying parts of his work at the VA.

The inception of the program is the result of the efforts of Vietnam Veterans Gary Fiumara and Alex Hernandez who learned of the program at Northport and recognized how important it would be to bring the program to Brooklyn. Since then, both Veterans have been totally committed to the program, helping the other Veterans and maintaining the equipment with expert assistance from Information Technology Specialist Christian Camacho.

Calvin Hawkins, an Army Veteran, did not know anything about a computer. “I didn’t even know how to turn the computer on,” he said. Referring to the instructor Elaine Preto, Mr. Hawkins continued, “Elaine made it simple. I sent my first email to my son from her class.

And when he replied to me, she showed me how to reply to him.” He was then able to keep in touch daily with his son, who was serving in Iraq. “It was a relief to know he was all right while he was serving over there.”

All the graduates reaped praise on Ms. Preto, who in turn applauded the accomplishments of the Veterans involved. “I’ve been a part of the program since its inception,” she said. “I can honestly say it

is one of the most rewarding things I've done in my career. I work with heroes and see what you all have done for our country and I applaud each and every one of you." She has been the NMIAI Program Coordinator since 2002 for Western Suffolk BOCES in Northport, Manhattan & Suffolk for the NY Regional Office. They have trained over 480 veterans for the VA in all of the areas. The program runs one day per week for two hours. In order to graduate, a Veteran must complete 48 hours of instruction.

Mr. Radish spent 38 years as a teacher in the New York City school system. "I worked with tough kids in tough schools and I can honestly say Elaine has worked with tougher people, us." It's probably the reason why she was called Drill Sergeant or Drill Instructor by her students.

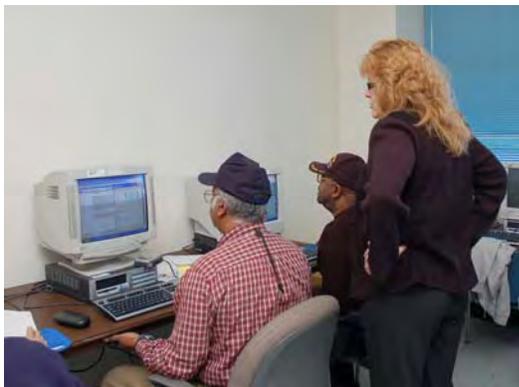
All the Veterans are thrilled with their own success and that of the program. Vietnam era Veteran Gerard Cronin told the audience which included family members, "If it wasn't for this program, I would still be in the Stone Age." And another Ex-POW, Patsy Barrese, now keeps in touch with his seven grandchildren through email.

Donald Feldman from the Korean War Veterans is an earlier graduate of the program. In his remarks, he was very complimentary, "We don't know how lucky we are to be here! Nowhere in the world can people who have our problems get this kind of help." He said the computer has added another dimension to his life.

To date, the program has helped over 200 Veterans in Brooklyn who have been instructed in the use of computer word processing applications, email, the Internet, drawing and painting software and basic academic skills. There are another 100 Veterans on a waiting list for future classes.

In order for the program to get started, Joe Geller, the Chief of Brooklyn Operations at the hospital for IRM authorized the use of computers that were no longer needed. Upon graduation, each Veteran receives a computer and a printer through a partnership with Dell Computers.

"NO MAN IS AN ISLAND..." is also the start of a well known meditation by John Donne. It means that no one is alone; we are all a part of the whole. The idea that we are not isolated from one another has been proven time and again through history. The program at the Brooklyn VA proves once again we are not alone. We are supported by those around us.



The Drill Sergeant, Elaine Preto, keeps a close eye on students who are both Vietnam War veterans, Danny Soogrin and Carlos Blackwood.

For more information call the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System Public Affairs Office at 718-630-2804.