

Education program helps veterans prepare for future

The Veterans Education Center (VECO), sponsored by Mt. Hood Community College and funded by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, is one of the few remaining "upward bound" programs for veterans. The program provides GED training, general education, career counseling and related services to veterans.

"When young men and women join the service, they are trained to fit into a mold. They adapt to having their lives controlled, doing what they are told, and not having to make decisions," director Jose Coto explained. "When they are discharged they have to suddenly adapt to another way of life—where they have to take care of themselves and make their own decisions."

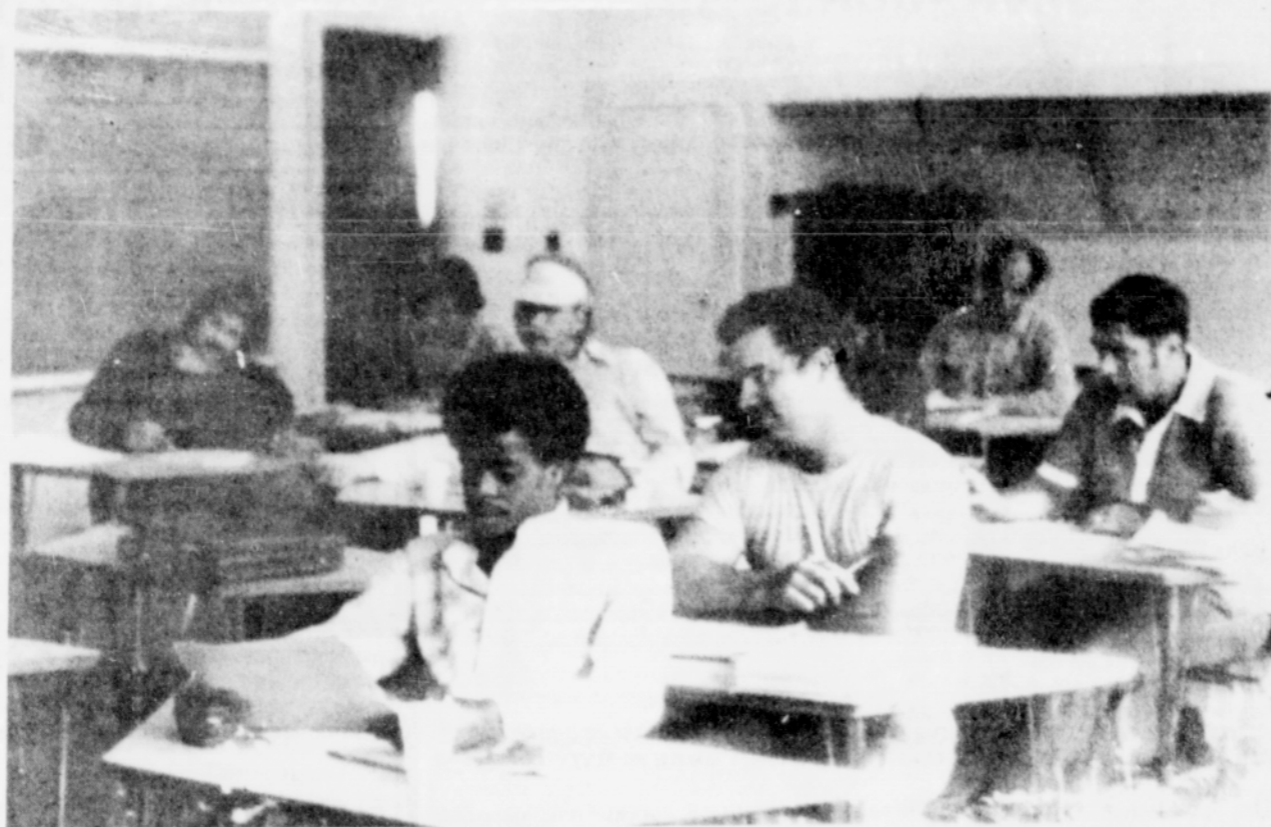
When young people are inducted into the service, they are led through the changes—taught to think military. When they are discharged they are on their own, with no one to help them adjust. Many veterans fail to adapt; their lack of education and useful training precludes their obtaining meaningful jobs. Their lack of self-confidence, family pressures, and "Vietnam Syndrome" prevent them from taking advantage of the veterans benefits available to them.

VECO attempts to assist these veterans to select careers, meet college or apprenticeship qualifications, build good study habits, and gain the confidence they need to excel. This is accomplished through classes in English and literature, math, social service, and reading; tutoring; educational and personal counseling; group activities and recreation. The veterans come from diverse backgrounds, but their common military and post-discharge experiences enable them to relate to each other and to assist each other. They credit dedicated teachers, a relaxed non-competitive atmosphere, and common goals for their successes.

VECO is currently seeking veterans who are of low-income backgrounds, who have either not graduated from high school or who have low academic skills. Veterans must have enlisted prior to December 31, 1977 and have been out of the service for less than ten years. Veterans in the program can receive VA education benefits, but after he leaves the program he is still entitled to full educational benefits. (Call 256-3434 for information.)

Classes are held in the morning to enable students to work if necessary.

Following are veterans who are students currently in VECO, expressing their opinion.



A typical VECO class consists of veterans from varied backgrounds and goals, who are learning new subjects or relearning old skills to enable them to begin new careers or educational pursuits. (Photos: Terry Robertson)

by Chris Rhoeln

I entered the VECO program three semesters ago, under the assumption that it would be an easy way to get my GED and get paid at the same time. I learned however that not only could I achieve that, but I could also get prepared for college if I chose to further my education.

When I say I learned, I mean I really learned something. I started to realize how easy it is to learn and how satisfying it is to feel that you have really prepared yourself for the challenge of going to college.

I guess this could be because the instructors here really know what's happening and what they're doing. They're sensitive to the students' needs and communication between student and teacher are very informal and open. All the instructors here could be teaching in a much better place at a high level, but they all share the same feeling, they care about vets. And that's what it's all about, that's what makes the program work.

by Richard Holbert

VECO is a school for veterans. VECO teaches math, English, social science and reading comprehension. This curriculum is to prepare veterans for college and/or to get a GED. During the time here, you can talk to a counselor concerning per-

sonal or school related problems. VECO helps on planning futures. They, the staff, will find out information on any colleges or school grants available to veterans.

Also it's a good experience to learn to get along with others and to learn more about yourself. Students here are from different age groups, and are all vets, so it makes it easier to relate to one another.

After a time you learn you can get what you want out of VECO, how to learn and how to apply yourself. We know, as in all things, there are a few who say, "I am not getting anything from school," yet if you look at their attendance, homework and attitude, then you would see why they don't learn while being at VECO.

Throughout the school term there are field trips. This is a time for students to have some fun. It gives the students a chance to enjoy the outdoors. A chance to enjoy each other's good company and see more of Oregon.

It's a time to enjoy talking about old times and things that have happened to each of us. A lot of things, we find, happened to each of us about the same way. Vets learn that VECO is here to help vets, whereas a lot of the time, vets feel no one cares about them one way or the other.

Finishing with a word or two of thanks—thanks VECO—for your help on each of our futures, and your understanding of veterans' everyday problems.

by Susan Hepburn

The VECO program is under-advertised and yet is one of the best programs going for veterans. For the veteran who has been away from the educational environment for awhile, it gives him/her the opportunity to refresh or maybe relearn skills which are basic to survival in today's society.

I was recently discharged from the military service, at which time I wasn't sure where I wanted to be. I knew I wanted to continue my education, but the questions were when, where, and do I have the skills to tackle school? At this time I was making regular visits to the employment office, which led me to VECO. After talking with DeAnn Haggerty, the VA Specialist/Outreach Coordinator, I knew that this program was just what I was looking for. VECO has opened doors to new horizons for me. The program offers all the basic skills I needed to review in order to continue on to college. Since being enrolled in VECO, I have built my self confidence back up.

The VECO program is important

to the veteran. While in the program, the veteran has the opportunity to expand or create goals for himself/herself. They may strive for a General Education diploma or use the program for college preparation. Either way, the opportunity to learn is there.

by David Bartosch

I was unemployed and went to a work seminar held at the PP&L Building downtown. There was a speaker there from VECO who talked about the program, and what they had to offer for vets. It sounded like a good program so the next day I went and talked to them at school, the day after that I started classes.

At first I was a little reluctant about going back to school, since it's been almost ten years since I had graduated from high school. It was a little hard at first, learning how to study all over again, but the teachers were always there to help and answer any questions I might have.

In about a week things were going a lot easier and I was learning something new every day. I'll be going to VECO until September, and then in September I'll be going to MHCC, where I've been accepted into the welding program.

I feel this program is good for vets because of what it did for me. It was only about six months ago that I didn't even know what I wanted to do. I always wanted to go to college but was afraid; I didn't think I was smart enough. This program gave me back the confidence in myself to go on, after only two terms, and be accepted into MHCC's welding program. I know I'll do real good in September because VECO taught me good study habits and to say "I'll try my best," instead of "I can't." I think there are a lot of vets out there who could benefit from this program if only they knew about it.

by Victor Miller

I am a Black, 22-year-old male, with a wife and two kids; with a future.

My particular experience began when it was not worth it for me to work because I was not able to make enough money. I felt the type of work I was doing was worth the amount I made and my future would be in jeopardy unless I prepared myself for a better-paying job and a more meaningful future. It is up to me.

I came into the building at 10100 N.E. Prescott, which is MHCC annex, and asked for information about how to get into school. The secretary directed me to Carl Parker who is a vet counselor at MHCC annex. Parker in turn arranged for me



Victor Miller discusses sentence structure, career plans and school desegregation with his reading teacher.

to be tested, to have some idea of my abilities and to insure that I would receive help in the areas I needed to do better in, and eventually to be used to see just how much I had progressed from term to term.

This is my second term and I feel I am a two or three termer not a lifer (smile). I see myself now in a more positive manner, and am able to deal better with myself because of this new awareness about myself, my ability, and the world around me.

Study here has been positive and liberally structured to meet my needs by providing me a basic education and preparation to continue my education.

To sum it all up, I feel this is the

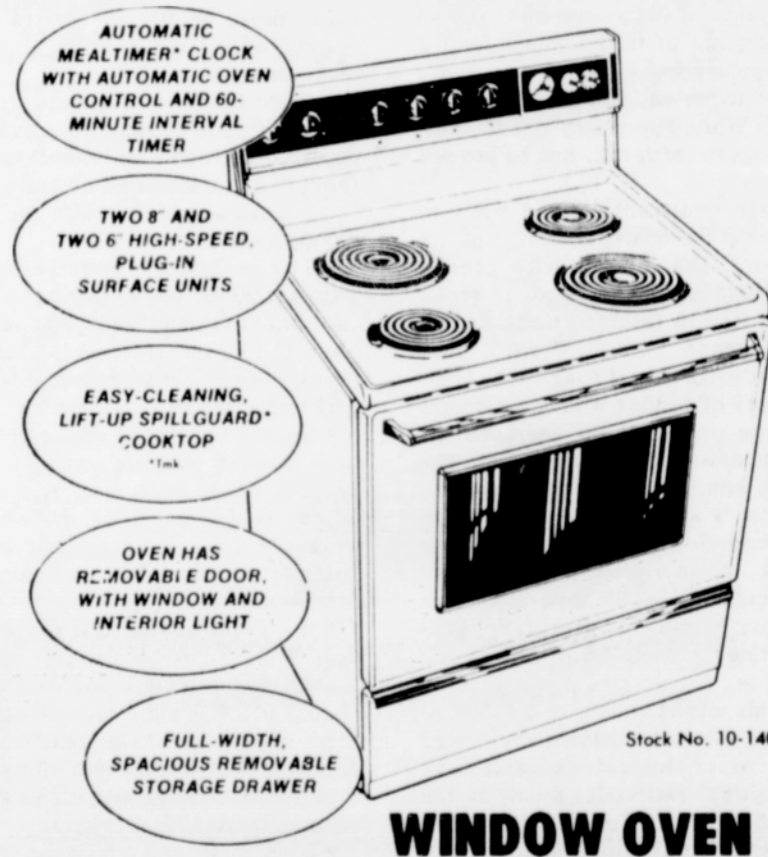
best place for a person who is out of work, school, or would just like a better future and get an education. Here you meet new people, see how much you can learn and how easy it is to learn. There are Work Study jobs, counseling, transportation assistance, job assistance grants of \$317 a month or more, depending on your dependents. This also does not affect your 45 month VA education entitlement. Also, you receive college credit. Class is from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Study areas are math, English, social science, literature and study skills.

Remember, you owe it to yourself, and you can do it.

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