

Bracing for Returning Veterans

continued ▲ from Front

and largely cost-free government health care, it would not be surprising if two-thirds of the returning veterans do not seek any VA services, said Jim Sardo, a doctor that specializes in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder at the VA.

Reason number one for this phenomenon is a "warrior mentality" that encourages service men and women to endure hardship alone, according to Portland therapist Carole Levine. In addition, she says, "There are some veterans who just don't want to go to the VA, because they're sick of the military."

Other military people don't want doctor's visits going on their record and preventing reentry, so Levine organizes ReturningVeterans.com to showcase 45 local practitioners who offer free and confidential services for recent vets.

Even Washington admitted to his own "warrior mentality" streak. "Once you get the proper educational exposure, you can take care of your own problems," he says.

But 21st-century Portland will no longer accept the status quo when it comes to vet health. City officials, weary of dealing with

sick and homeless Vietnam veterans, organized a forum last week to support reintegration efforts.

The forum began with a tearful account by Kimberly Mark-Villela, who completed an Iraq tour in 2003. "I came home with problems, but I didn't tell anyone," she said. "The military is not an organization that promotes reporting personal problems."

Levine explained the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in vets, saying it is a "normal reaction to a very abnormal situation." Since government benefits expire after two years without a diagnosis, she sees the veterans' reluctance to seek help as a major, nearly unrecognized problem that disintegrates families through festering anger and depression.

As part of a growing concern about law enforcement response to mental illness, a representative of the city's police spoke about the attention to post traumatic stress in crisis-intervention training.

More than a few panelists mentioned how much more it would cost in the long run to ignore vet health.

Attention to the health of veterans is important "no matter what one thinks of the war," said Levine.



Ghost bikes, roadside memorials painted stark white and affixed to a particular spot like this one at Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Wygant, remind passersby of cyclists who have been struck and killed by drivers.

PHOTOS BY SARAH BLOUNT/ THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Ghost Bikes Offer Lingering Reminder

Roadside memorial send message to slow down

BY SARAH BLOUNT THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The stretch of Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard that crosses Wygant Street is mostly a blur of cars day and night, but if you look closely you'll notice a roadside memorial reminding drivers to be safe and slow down.

But rather than flowers, a photograph or a cross, this memorial is a bike. A nondescript junker model, painted stark white and speaking volumes about a particular death that happened nearly three years ago.

It's called a ghost bike — one of many bright white bicycles planted around town where cyclists have died in crashes involving vehicles.

Ghost bikes remind drivers to pay attention to two-wheeled commuters, so it's no surprise that they highlight MLK Blvd., a particularly dangerous road for accidents involving any combination of bikes and vehicles.

The Ghost Bike concept originated in Pittsburgh in 2004, with the movement making its way across the country in major cities, including Portland one year later.

Summer 2005 was a brutal one for Portland cyclists, with multiple deadly accidents happening throughout the city. As that dangerous summer came to an end, 21-year-old cyclist Chris Burris was struck and killed by a speeding driver while riding with his girlfriend and her daughter down MLK near Wygant Street.

Before Burris' death, people within Portland's bike community had talked about how the ghost bikes movement in Pittsburgh, and one created in Seattle earlier that summer, had inspired them. Among them was Michael Jones, now 31, who was searching for a way to help out the movement.

Jones connected with Burris' brother, Forrest, that summer through the local non-profit SHIFT,



Michael Jones

and with others they were able to secure a bike, spray paint and a cable to tether their first ghost bike where a cyclist had died at Southeast 39th Avenue and Belmont.

The memorial led to several other ghost bikes throughout town, including routes along Northeast Sandy Boulevard and Northeast Killingsworth Avenue and the memorial for Burris on MLK.

Jones says he receives emails from people praising the bikes, but some think they're trashy. There has also been some backlash from cyclists who think ghost bikes

discourage people from riding their bikes.

"It's interesting there's not total support," Jones said.

But the City of Portland has granted ghost bikes enough support to leave them cabled where they are, although the bikes have legally been abandoned.

City Commissioner Sam Adams, who runs the Department of Transportation, said ghost bikes serve as a sobering reminder that these injuries and deaths are real people, not just statistics, and that our transportation system is "woefully under funded."

"I've told my folks to leave them alone," Adams said.

Adams' office will receive \$11 million next month to launch the Safe Streets Initiative, a project that in part will reduce traffic injuries and fatalities at some of Portland's most dangerous spots.

Cyclists with traffic safety concerns can call transportation officials at 503-823-SAFE or email safe@pdtrans.org. Other safety, legal and advocacy resources can be found at the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, a statewide advocacy group, at www.bta4bikes.org.

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Schools Foundation Hires Leader

To promote equity, excellence

Connie Van Brunt, a nationally recognized education leader from Chicago, will lead the Portland Schools Foundation, an advocacy and research organization for Portland Public Schools.

Van Brunt was hired last week after a national search and will begin her work in Portland on July 9.

"Connie is a strategic leader passionate about children, public education and a strong community voice in ensuring all young people in Portland are prepared for college, work and community," said Jill Kirk, president of the foundation.

Van Brunt is currently chief education officer at the Chicago Charter School Foundation, where she is responsible for academic strategies, assessment, and partnerships for more than 7,000 low-income students. Van Brunt previously led

Illinois' oldest independent after-school program, serving the inner city communities of Cabrini Green, Englewood and Near North Chicago. There she developed award winning mathematics and reading programs recognized nationally for accelerating achievement for low-income students.

In addition to Van Brunt's extensive experience in fundraising, communications and management, she was founding editor of Ebony Jr! magazine.

She received her Master of Arts in Teaching from Harvard University Graduate School of Education, and has completed her doctoral coursework in applied research in child/youth development and educational research methods at Loyola

University/Erickson Institute.

In accepting the position Van Brunt noted, "I'm excited to be part of the great work of the Schools Foundation and the incredible vitality and civic spirit of this city. I'm deeply committed to connecting the diverse cultures and neighborhoods of Portland in our work to achieve equity and excellence for all students."

Nichole Maher, executive director of the Native American Family Center and member of the PSF executive search committee, summed it up, "Connie brings the academic smarts, practical experience and track record working with communities of color to help this city create great schools for all of its students."



Connie Van Brunt

Help Clean Your 'Hood

People of Purpose and Associates are recruiting help and donations for a Re-tilling of the Soil neighborhood cleanup on Saturday, July 7.

The group urges north and northeast Portland residents to stop pointing a finger and lend a hand in an effort to show pride by rejuvenating the neglected soil in their neighborhoods.

The day will begin with breakfast and the clean up begins at 9 a.m. At noon a celebration will follow at Irving Park with live music and food.

Clean up locations include Maple Mallory Apartments, Jefferson High School and Cornerstone Community Church. To find out how you can be a part of this event, call Larry Collins at 503-752-8356.



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Women's Revival 2007

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7 PM



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Evangelist Melanie Pichon-Smith

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