

# Blindness Soars with Two Ongoing Wars

## Vets group assists returning soldiers

BY JAKE THOMAS  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Rae Hail, who served in the U.S. Marine Corp during the Vietnam War, has heard the laments of veterans and their families as more soldiers than ever come home blinded from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

They worry that they'll never be able to find work and are daunted by the dizzying bureaucratic labyrinth they must navigate to get medical attention.

The Blind Veterans Association has extended a helping hand to veterans grappling with the sometimes-difficult return to civilian life in addition to the hardship of losing their sight.

The 61-year-old organization is holding its annual convention in Portland this week. Members are rubbing shoulders with government officials

and kayaking the Willamette River. But they're also tackling an issue that has given it additional salience: soldiers losing their sight in the Iraq and Afghanistan.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, there are 160,000 visually-impaired veterans, a number the BVA expects to rise because of the two conflicts.

Compared to previous wars, the tactics of the adversary are particularly hazardous to the eyes of soldiers, explained Thomas Zampieri, director of government relations for the BVA who has testified before Congress on the issue. Zampieri said that nearly 14 percent

of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from a traumatic eye injury, which are often attributed to improvised explosive devices,

Also, the eyes are typically the most difficult part of the body to put armor on, he added.

"In World War Two, we knew who the enemy was," said the Frank Armstrong, the president of the association and a World War II veteran.

According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, more than 1,000 soldiers with combat related eye trauma were evacuated from overseas between October 2001 and June 2006.

The BVA has helped shine light on the issue, and successfully goaded Congress into establishing a special center to help soldiers suffering from eye injuries. But visually-impaired veterans still

face difficulties. Navigating the complex bureaucracy and mounds of paperwork to get care from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs can be a daunting task, as can getting the proper benefits veterans are entitled to, said Zampieri.

There's also the issue of adjusting to life once home from overseas.

"They have to pick up their lives one piece at a time," said Hail, who often hears the wives of servicemen wonder aloud, "will my husband be able to do anything?"

Although the BVA assists its members in job training and has successfully landed them in occupations ranging from carpentry to law, blind veterans still have a hard time getting employed.

However, Armstrong remains optimistic.

"You have more power in groups than as individuals," he said.



Rae Hail



Frank Armstrong

## Carter Successor Unclear

continued from Front

executive officer of the Urban League of Portland while serving in the Senate.

Her past legislative accomplishments included work on the Human Services budget subcommittee. She also played a role in passing legislation that withdrew state controlled investments in South Africa during apartheid, and helped get Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday observed as a holiday in Oregon.

Her new position will pay \$121,872.

Because Carter resigned midway through her 4-year term, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners will be responsible for appointing a replacement from a list of

candidates submitted by the local Democratic Party.

So far Rep. Chip Shields, D-Portland, is the only person to openly express interest in the position.

In a statement Shields praised Carter for her accomplishments, and said that he was a good fit for her seat since the districts of the two legislators overlap. Shields also stressed that he has been on the forefront of many of the same issues Carter has championed throughout her legislative career.

Rep. Tina Kotek, D-Portland, who also represents part of Carter's district, said she will continue her work in the House where she serves as a member of the House leadership and as co-chair of a crucial budget

subcommittee working to protect public services.

"Senator Carter is a remarkable leader," Kotek said. "Through her many years of public service to north and northeast Portland and the entire state, she has had an unfailing commitment to strong human services programs and making sure the most vulnerable Oregonians were never left out of state budget conversations."

Sue Hagmeier, spokesperson for the Multnomah Democratic Party, said that no one besides Shields has expressed interest for Carter's seat.

"I've heard noises," she said. "But I wouldn't say they're even at the level of rumor."

## Amtrak Expanding Service

A long awaited second daily Amtrak Cascades train between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. will begin service on Wednesday, Aug. 19. With the addition, travelers from Oregon will now have direct round-trip service between Portland and Vancouver, B.C.

The second Cascades train service will begin with a northbound arrival from Portland into Vancouver, B.C. at approximately 10:45 p.m. The next morning, the southbound Cascades train will depart Vancouver, B.C. at 6:40 a.m. arriving in Portland at 2:45 p.m.

The current daily Seattle to Vancouver, B.C. route has also seen the return of Amtrak's Cascades Talgo trains that have been missing from this leg of the route for the past year.

The Talgo trains were substituted with Amtrak Superliner trains while the Washington State Department of Transportation and Amtrak completed a refurbishment of the train interiors.

Amtrak Cascades consists of four daily



An Amtrak Cascades train carries passengers between Portland and Vancouver, B.C.

round-trips between Portland and Seattle, with service between Bellingham and Portland, via Seattle; between Eugene and Seattle, via Portland; and between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.

For Amtrak Cascades fares and schedules, visit [amtrakcascades.com](http://amtrakcascades.com).

## Our legacy is healthy kids.

Kids have it right. They live life full of joy, hope and vigor.

Our job as a community is to give them the best chance at this life—the opportunity to chase their passions, to follow their whims.

The Children's Hospital at Legacy Emanuel helps—with the finest in care and a mission to improve the world around us, creating a legacy of health that truly lives on.

It's a legacy of caring and community. Of health and hope. Of families and children. It's the legacy we create every day at The Children's Hospital. And it's yours.

OUR LEGACY IS YOURS.



THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL  
LEGACY EMANUEL



[www.legacyhealth.org](http://www.legacyhealth.org)

LEGACY EMANUEL Medical Center GOOD SAMARITAN Medical Center MERIDIAN PARK Medical Center MOUNT HOOD Medical Center SALMON CREEK Medical Center  
THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL LEGACY MEDICAL GROUP LEGACY LABORATORY LEGACY HOSPICE