

Helping Veterans Back Home



A veteran makes up for lost time with his young child after arriving home from his deployment.

Non-profit group fills gap with vital needs

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Where the Veterans Affairs Administration may fail to meet all the needs of our returning soldiers, the Returning Veterans Project, headquartered in southeast Portland, is there to fill the gap.

Clinical social worker Carol Levine couldn't bear to watch the number of veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan without receiving the medical help they needed. It reminded her of Vietnam. So she took action.

In 2005, Levine opened the non-profit to holistically welcome veterans back home.

Today, Returning Veterans Project provides mental health counseling and complimentary health care to returning veterans and their families. The care is free, confidential and unlimited.

"Only about 40 percent of all vets go to Veterans Affairs, 60 percent do not," said Belle Landau, the organization's executive director. "We help to fill the gap."

In 2011, Oregon's National Guard and Reserves was tied with Minnesota's for having the highest rate of suicide, an alarming and urgent problem the local group is trying to address.

When soldiers return to civilian life there are physical and psychological challenges. The staff at the Returning Veterans Project work to de-stigmatize mental health services for active duty service personnel and returning vets, reduce wait-times for services, and provide holistic health care.

Comprised of politically unaffiliated and independent health organizations who offer free services to veterans (about 142 providers around the state), the organization can offer counseling services along with chiropractic and naturopathic care, acupuncture and massage therapy.

In the last few years, the group has seen significant increases in requests for services. In 2011, providers delivered 2,638 hours of free services to 230 Iraq and

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— Belle Landau, Returning Veterans Project Executive Director

Afghanistan guard and reserve veterans, as well as 134 spouses, children and parents.

As we go about our daily lives, many of us forget that our country is still at war and there are active duty military personnel, National Guard members and reservists awaiting deployment. Redeployment can be extremely stressful as soldiers face unknown challenges and separation from loved ones.

Having a loved one deployed for military action is one of the most difficult experiences a family can face. "The VA also rarely serves family members; parents, spouses, children, siblings," said Landau, whose

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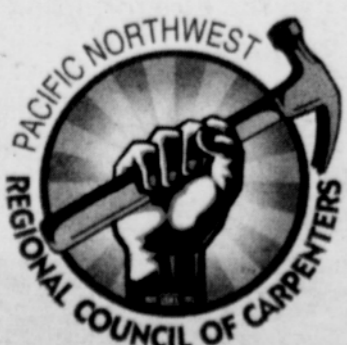
Rachell served our country building barracks in Afghanistan, now she's building a career as a Union Carpenter.

HELMETS TO HARDHATS

Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) is a national program that connects National Guard, Reserve and transitioning active-duty military members with quality career training and employment opportunities within the construction industry.

"They have given years to their country; the opportunity for a good career is the least we can do." — Dudley Light, UBC H2H National Coordinator

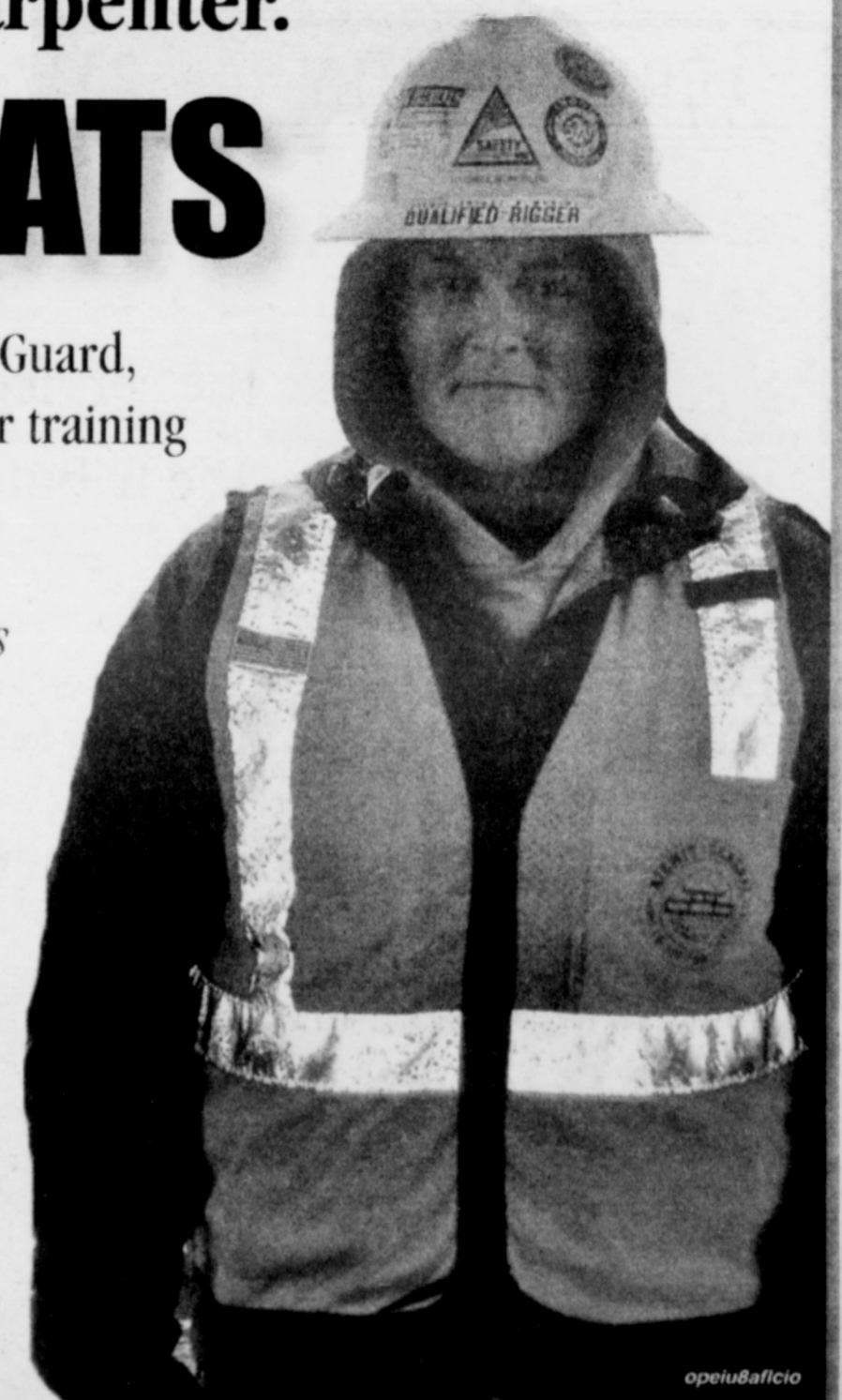
Want to know more? Contact the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters 1-800-573-8333 or via email: info@nwcarpenters.org. You can also go to our website or like us on Facebook and Twitter.



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