

News Release

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Regional directors join Virginia Wounded Warrior Program

RICHMOND— Three regional directors will join the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program on December 1. James Thur will serve the northern area of the state; Leslie Allgood Smith will serve southwest Virginia; and Kenneth Rich will cover Tidewater and the southeast. “These individuals bring with them a range of experience and expertise, and all have strong ties within the community,” said Cathy Wilson, Executive Director of the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. In addition, Barbara Vonada joined the program in October as Wilson’s executive assistant.

Legislation creating the Virginia Wounded Warrior program was passed unanimously by the 2008 General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Kaine. The program will coordinate support services for veterans and members of the National Guard and Reserves who have stress-related and traumatic brain injuries resulting from service in a combat area. It will ensure that these veterans and their families receive timely assessment, treatment, and support.

Each regional director will monitor and coordinate services in his or her region to help veterans and their families receive behavioral healthcare and other types of support. The program will draw on services already available through federal resources such as the Veterans Administration and military treatment facilities and through state and local services, including Community Services Boards and brain injury service providers. Other services, such as financial assistance, housing, and transportation may become available as the regional directors identify partners in their areas. Using outreach activities, the regional directors will identify veterans who need assistance and connect them with the agencies that can give them the help they need.

“Left untreated, post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries may lead to substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, and homelessness,” explained Wilson. “We want to be

known as a safety net for veterans and their families. Our regional directors will be the link between veterans, caregivers, and community resources,” Wilson added.

James Thur recently retired as the Executive Director of the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board after 27 years of service. He has extensive professional experience in human services with an emphasis on integration of services. He is a retired Navy Captain and surface warfare officer who served in Vietnam and is active in several veterans services organizations including Vietnam Veterans of America. He holds a Master of Social Work from the State University of New York at Buffalo and a Master of Public Health from the University of Michigan.

Leslie Allgood Smith, a native Virginian, is a licensed and active long-term care administrator who has worked as an employment consultant. She has worked with a variety of clients in community-based settings, including people with mild to severe disabilities, economically challenged individuals and their families, and people with medical complexities. Her professional research and presentations include a paper on the complexities that exist between public and private partnerships in Virginia’s Workforce Centers. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Hollins University and a Master of Public Administration from Virginia Tech.

Retired Sergeant Major Kenneth Rich joins the Wounded Warrior Program after working for General Dynamics as a senior operations analyst. He retired from the U. S. Army in June 2006 after 30 years in Army Aviation. In his last position, he served as School Sergeant Major for the U. S. Army Aviation Logistics School. Rich has extensive experience as a community volunteer and has received commendations from organizations such as Army Community Service, Army Emergency Relief, the American Red Cross, and the March of Dimes. In 1994, he was named Hampton Roads Big Brother of the year for his work with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program. He holds a Bachelor of Science from Touro University and is pursuing dual master’s degrees in aeronautical science in aviation/aerospace education technology and aviation/aerospace safety systems.

Barbara Vonada has served on active duty with the U. S. Army. In 1991, she transferred to the U. S. Army Reserves, and in 2007 she transferred to the Army National Guard. She was deployed to Iraq in 2005. Vonada served as a musician, personnel specialist, and human resources officer. She holds a Bachelor of Science with a double major in psychology and English from the University of Maryland.

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