



Blue Ridge received a new federal grant since the last edition of this newsletter. It is part of the Trade Assistance Act and Community College Career Training Program grant series. The grant has several large initiatives with regard to new degree programs and student services. There will be new degree programs in chemical process technology and health informatics. These new fields for the college show great promise for our region and good careers for our graduates. Building career opportunities for well-educated graduates is a major focus of our college.

But one initiative that I am most proud of is our Heroes for Hire. This program will help individuals who have been displaced from employment to seek and achieve education which is aimed at gaining new employment. The portion of

the grant will also help a group of individuals to whom we all owe a great debt of gratitude: our military veterans. Most of us have no idea what the cost of our freedom really is. We live our lives and enjoy freedoms that we often take for granted. This initiative is our chance to play a part in thanking those who have sacrificed to ensure that we can live in a country that is blessed with many opportunities.

I know first-hand what it is like to re-acclimate to civilian life, and believe me the process is not easy. I hosted a small ceremony for our veteran students this week. The stories that I heard and the men and women that I met touched me deeply and made me realize what a great position we are in to help. Careers are out there for those who are interested and it all starts with education.

I served for three years in the United States Navy. I was on the USS Inchon (LPH-12) for 2-1/2 years after graduating from Navy Supply Corps School in Athens, Georgia. I cruised to the Mediterranean, Guantanamo Bay, the North Atlantic, and - the hardest part - a yearlong deployment to Viet Nam. On the Inchon we participated in Operation Endsweep and cleared Haiphong Harbor of mines so that the war could come to an end. When I returned home,

America was not very friendly to veterans. There were no homecoming parties, no celebrations, no welcoming parties for military men and women who had sacrificed and lost much in that struggle. I learned not to talk of my military service because of the stigma that was attached to it. It was shameful treatment that we received.

There is a new day in the lives of veterans today. Our country is supportive of our troops and this grant program is a significant step in the right direction for our local vets. Blue Ridge will be hiring counselors and recruiters specifically to work with veterans who are interested in coming back to school. Re-acclimation to civilian life is not easy in many cases but this initiative will help. It is incumbent upon us all to lend a hand to make that transition more achievable for our vets. The men and women who have served our country and ensured our precious freedom are owed no less than that. And most importantly, when you see a veteran, thank him or her for their service. It is because of them that we live in freedom.

Best regards,

Dr. Peter G. Checkovich
Founding President

BlueRidge

COMMUNITY AND
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