Vietnam War Veterans Welcomed Home
County of Berks Hosts Ceremony

By Pennsylvania House and Senate Resolution and Governor Tom Corbett’s Proclamation, Friday, March 30, 2012 was announced as Welcome Home Vietnam War Veterans Day in Pennsylvania. More than 100 Vietnam War veterans were feted at a ceremony held at the Vietnam War Memorial in Reading’s City Park. The ceremony was hosted by Berks County’s Board of Commissioners with the assistance of Berks County Department of Veteran Affairs staff & the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 131.

The ceremony was appreciated by nearly everyone in attendance & especially fitting was the Open Microphone segment where several veterans expressed their deep, personal thoughts about being welcomed home by their nation. This was the first official welcome home since the war ended on May 7, 1975. A welcome home wreath was presented by the Board of Commissioners representing all citizens in Berks County. Also presenting wreaths were Disabled American Veterans Chapter 10, Gold Star Mothers and VVA 131.

Special thanks was given to VVA 131 for providing its honor guard, emcee David Ciscon and chaplain for the ceremony Pastor Doug Didyoung. Marine Corps League’s Wilber Eshelman served as bugler.

“Heroes then. Heroes today. Welcome home!”
From the Editor
Dale Derr, Veteran Affairs
Program Director

I’ve learned a great many things about the condition and mindset of America’s military veterans while working at the Berks County Department of Veteran Affairs. It is clear that veterans would like our community and the nation to recognize that our service was relevant to the needs of America and Pennsylvania and that individually and collectively we would be remembered for a job well done since we were drafted or volunteered to defend our nation against all enemies. Our duties were routinely hazardous and many veterans served in hostile conditions, so we should expect too that many military veterans are coping with service-related health and/or financial conditions that none of us would wish on anyone else. The Berks County Department of Veteran Affairs is among the busiest county Veteran Affairs departments in Pennsylvania, which keeps us thinking daily about our veterans with health care and/or financial needs and how to support them. Much of the help veterans receive is provided by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs through its health care services or benefits administration. Veteran Affairs is the 2nd largest federal department and it can be intimidating to a veteran just starting out to obtain health care and/or benefits. Once engaged with USDVA, people often take on the perception that the federal government is merely waiting for the veteran or the veteran’s family member to die so that it doesn’t have to pay out benefits. While we don’t subscribe to that perception, many people do regrettably. We will remain committed to our veterans within the scope and depth of authority and funding assigned to us. We will be resourceful, help develop claims quickly, register deaths and assist the families, provide shuttles for shut-in’s, assist with special events and guide people on any topic brought to us. We will promote benefits awareness to veterans and families through our TV show, a liaison at the Berks Area Agency on Aging, a website, a Facebook page and now a newsletter. And we’ll still take time to sit down with you and a cup of coffee to talk about your needs, concerns and suggestions because you’ve earned it!

Armed Forces Day
2012 Parade May 19th

The 2012 Armed Forces Day Parade will be held along Penn Avenue in Wyomissing and West Reading on May 19th, beginning at 9:00 AM. This will be the 63rd consecutive parade, a national benchmark! Come out and march or ride in the parade or come support along the route! This year’s parade will also serve as a welcome home for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. For full information, visit the parade committee’s website @ veterans.1usa.com.

About Our Newsletter
Kutztown University Connection

Communication Design students at Kutztown University designed the format of our newsletter during their 2012 Design-a-Thon, a 24-hour marathon of work done in support of not-for-profit projects with a community spirit focus. When you see a Golden Bear, thank them for their university’s help in producing a newsletter that could become a useful communication tool between county government and our veterans and families.
We’re Moving!
Old Berks Heim Location to Be Demolished

With an anticipated move date in June 2012, Berks County’s Board of Commissioners will move its Veteran Affairs office to 726 Cherry Street in Reading. The move comes as the board members decided to demolish the Old Berks Heim, which will save more than $18 million in projected capital project renovation costs to fully restore the facility for county services. Keeping some of it for a few departments would still be cost prohibitive due to the need for a new power plant, hazards abatement and systems replacements.

The Cherry Street office will be located by the BARTA Transportation Center at 8th and Cherry Streets. The new site almost doubles the amount of space currently available to serve veterans and their families who come to the department. Drop off parking is available at no charge in front of the office and also beneath the center. Further, BARTA provides 22 bus routes that terminate and start at the center. All riders age 65 and older travel free of charge and all vehicles are special access certified for the physically challenged. While we’re moving to an urban setting, our new site tremendously improves accessibility for all.

The telephone number to the department 610-378-5601 will remain the same, but the options will improve to provide more caller control over which services officer you want to reach.

Welcome Home
Continued from Front Page

Bernie Bingham, VVA Chapter 131 President, provided the keynote address and received a long and resounding applause from the audience. He was further honored with a surprise welcome home kiss by Gold Star Mother Betty Zimmerman. The kiss and hug symbolized her welcome home to all Vietnam War veterans.

Welcome home reflections were also provided by Berks County Commissioners Christian Leinbach and Kevin Barnhardt, DAV 10 Commander Larry Cohen, Congressman Jim Gerlach’s representative Kori Walter and Veteran Affairs Director Dale Derr.

Berks County’s citizens also welcomed home Vietnam War veterans as heroes at the Commissioners’ Workshop and VVA 131 held their Red, White and Blue dinner and dance the day following the ceremony.

Global War on Terrorism
Berks County Contributions

Berks County native & Air Force Staff Sergeant Matthew Leinbach during a past Iraq tour of duty is one of many of our citizens who have and continue to serve in harm’s way. Contributions of electronic photo and bio for shout outs are accepted and appreciated.
**Memorial Day Flags**

40,951 to be distributed

Many people find it to be an honor to place flags at the graves of veterans. The 2012 Memorial Day flags project is in high gear to distribute flags at veterans’ graves in the 217 graveyards and cemeteries throughout the county. You will be notified when to stop by for flag supplies, which are provided through the courtesy of Berks County’s taxpayers. Please contact Jeffrey Lindberg, if you could be interested in helping out. 610-378-5601, press #.

Special thanks goes out to the members of Berks County’s Association for Graveyard Preservation. They have restored and maintained many of the smaller, remote and historically valued Berks County graveyards where veterans are buried and flags are placed. Well done BCAGP! **610.323.1703**

---

**Veterans ID Card**

New Berks Program Offered

The Berks County Recorder of Deeds can now authorize a Veterans ID Card as an incentive to a veteran who files his/her honorable service discharge or retirement with his office. Recorder of Deeds Frederick Sheeler’s office is located at 633 Court Street in Reading. The office is on the 3rd floor of the County Services Center. Once your military service document is recorded, Berks County Sheriff Eric Weaknecht’s team will issue you a photo ID card commemorating your action. Even if you filed in the past, you can obtain an ID card. The Sheriff’s office is down the hall from the Recorder of Deeds. He also has a field substation at the Reading Airport.

If you have ID card questions, contact Veteran Affairs at **610.378.5601**.