

# The Voice of Experience VETERAN VOICE

35 cents

VOL. 1/ISSUE 37

FRIDAY, JULY 19, 2013

## Rape culture in military exposed through film

**Nicole Rodriguez**

STAFF WRITER

nrodriguez@YourVoiceWeekly.com

A cryptic conflict persists every day within each branch of the U.S. military, but the horrific details of combat are rarely documented or reported, its secrets regularly swept under the rug by higher ups in the chain of command.

In his Academy Award-nominated documentary "The Invisible War," American director Kirby Dick investigates and chronicles the rape epidemic of service members within the U.S. military as told by women and some men who have experienced military sexual trauma.

Last week, a St. Lucie West-based safe haven for sexual abuse survivors screened the 99-minute film with the hope of facilitating change in the country and military's rape culture. Mindi Fetterman, founder of Inner Truth Project, hoped attendees left the event ready to share the information about sexual violence, an act Fetterman called a "silent epidemic."



Mitch Kloorfain/chief photographer

**See WAR page 4**

Lucia D'Ancona, Patrick Dyer and Donna Carlsen spoke to the audience of 'The Invisible War' about incidents that have happened and ways to make positive changes following a screening of the film at 'The Inner Truth Project' in St. Lucie West Thursday, July 11.

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## OUR MISSION STATEMENT AND OUR OBJECTIVE

Veteran Voice is a weekly publication designed to provide information to and about veterans to veterans and to the broader community. Veterans are an integral part of their Florida communities, which currently have individual organizations of their own, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Vietnam Veterans of America and many other groups with a narrow focus, but no convenient way to connect to a wider population of veterans and to the community in general within a limited geographic area, their community.

The mission of Veteran Voice is to publish a weekly source of information that will provide, in one place, a listing of resources available to veterans, articles about changes in policies or organizations affecting veterans and events of interest to veterans as well as articles about veterans of interest to the general public.

Veteran Voice LLC is organized as a partnership of experienced newspaper executives with an interest in veterans and in the communities of Florida veterans and friends. Veteran Voice is a start-up intended to address a perceived lack of information readily available to veterans on programs and policies affecting them and objective reporting of veteran affairs to the public. To our knowledge, and based on comments from leaders of local veterans organizations, there was no media or website currently meeting this need until the launch of Veteran Voice.

We hope you agree, and will support this publication with your subscription. Without subscriptions there will be a limited number of people we can help, without which this mission will not be realized. As part of our commitment to supporting local veteran communities, we will donate 10 percent of our profits each quarter to qualified veteran charities recommended by you, our readers and subscribers. Please let us know what you think by emailing [news@veteranvoiceweekly.com](mailto:news@veteranvoiceweekly.com) or mailing your comments to us at **1919 S.W. South Macedo Blvd., Port St. Lucie, FL 34984.**

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Fax: (772) 337-5678  
[veterans@stlucieco.org](mailto:veterans@stlucieco.org)

### Dorothy J. Conrad Building

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Mon., Tues, Thurs, Fri \* 8:30 am-4:30 pm  
Wed \* 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

### St. Lucie County Community Services Bldg.

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Walk-ins  
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Fax: (321) 637-5432  
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Manager: Glenn McGuffie

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Vero Beach, FL 32960  
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### Martin County

Tony Reese, Veterans Service Office Supervisor  
Nick Ciotti, Veterans Service Officer  
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### Veterans Services Office

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435 S.E. Flagler Ave., Stuart, FL 34994  
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### VA Life Insurance Ctr., Phil., PA -

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# New gun law could help or hurt some veterans

**Patrick McCallister**

FOR VETERAN VOICE

patrick.mccallister@yahoo.com

The National Rifle Association supported it, but a lot of gun-rights advocates didn't and neither did State Representative John Tobia, R-Melbourne Beach. He stood alone in the Florida Legislature voting against the bill. No other representatives or senators did.

"The NRA was strongly in favor of this bill," he said. "There's one thing you don't do in Tallahassee: vote against the NRA."

A lingering question is whether H.B. 1355 could disproportionately deny veterans the ability to purchase firearms from gun dealers required to run background checks, or help reduce the number of veteran suicides.

"It's a dicey situation, to be honest with you," Ben Humphries, president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Florida State

Council, said.

On June 28, Gov. Rick Scott signed the legislation that expanded existing prohibitions against people treated for mental illnesses from purchasing guns. It's long been that if a judge compelled someone to have treatment for mental illness, the person went on a no-buy list maintained by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

The new law expands that to include people who've agreed to voluntary treatment when facing the possibility of a judicial order after an involuntary evaluation. That often means police took a subject to a mental health facility when he or she was acting despondent — what's often called a "Baker Act," shorthand for the Florida Mental Health Act of 1971.

Under that law, a judge, cop, doctor or mental health professional can start an involuntary examination at a designated facility that can last up to 72 hours. The Florida Department of



Children and Families designates the so-called "receiving facilities." Judges can order more in-patient or out-patient care under the Baker Act.

Tobia said he's still not satisfied the law is specific enough to protect gun buyers.

"The problem with that is, while well-meaning folks Baker Act themselves, many times it's because they're dangerous to themselves, not others," he said in a

See GUNS page 7

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Mitch Kloorfain/chief photographer

Jennifer Jock, Serena DeFrank and Mindi Fetterman all work in varying capacities for The Inner Truth Project, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization in St. Lucie County 'focusing on the needs of women, providing an environment where survivors can bravely share the truth about their experiences and receive the help they need to find strength, hope and health ... one story at a time' according to the website. Jock is a volunteer and advocate; DeFrank is a board member and Fetterman is founder and director. The Inner Truth Project is open to women from all walks of life, veterans as well as civilians. For more information about The Inner Truth Project, go to [innertruth-project.org/contact.html](http://innertruth-project.org/contact.html).

## WAR from page 1

"I myself am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and twice as an adult and I know how difficult it has been for me to come to terms with it, to deal with it, to get people to believe me and to get services," Fetterman, a Palm City resident, said. "In the military, it is even more ridiculously difficult, because it's so insulated and it's its own little subculture and they don't talk about it. Most of the time, they don't believe people when they come forward."

The film cites U.S. government studies and statistics, estimating 500,000 male and female service members have experienced military sexual trauma. Military sexual trauma, or MST, is a term the Department of Veterans Affairs uses to refer to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred while a veteran was serving on active duty.

More than 20 percent of female veterans have been sexually assaulted, according to the 2012 film. Thirty-three percent of women don't report the assault because the commanding officer is a friend of the perpetrator. Twenty-five percent of women don't report rape because the person responsible for receiving complaints often is the rapist.

Some of the women brave enough to share their stories on camera were raped at gunpoint, drugged, contracted sexually transmitted diseases and even became pregnant. Even with eye witnesses, the assailants were never prosecuted because of their ranks or connections to higher officers, the film documented.

On April 14, 2012, then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, watched the film. Two days later, he took the decision to prosecute away from unit commanders, which hasn't been enough, according to the filmmaker.

On May 7, the Department of Defense released its annual report on sexual assault in the military during a Pentagon press briefing with Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Maj. Gen. Patton. There were a total of 3,374 reports of sexual assault involving active-duty service members as either victims or perpetrators in 2012, a 6 percent increase from the 2011 fiscal year.

During the briefing, Hagel called for reform.

"We need cultural change where every service member is treated with dignity and respect, where all allegations of inappropriate behavior are treated with seriousness, where victims' privacy is protected, where bystanders are motivated to intervene and where offenders know that they will be held accountable by strong and effective systems of justice," Hagel said, according to a Depart-

**"For me, (the film) was really eye-opening, even though I deal with it on a daily basis. I just did not know the severity of what it showed via film because what I see in my office is just a short snapshot of what people have to go through every day."**

**Donna Carlsen  
Veterans Services coordinator  
St. Lucie County**

ment of Defense transcript of the briefing.

St. Lucie County Veterans Services coordinator Donna Carlsen, a six-year Army veteran who processes and presents claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, was alarmed by the military's lack of action against its sexual predators. Carlsen said stiffer punishment must be enacted because of the cruelty of the crime and investigations must be handled properly and with better oversight.

"For me, (the film) was really eye-opening, even though I deal with it on a daily basis. I just did not know the severity of what it showed via film because what I see in my office is just a short snapshot of what people have to go through every day," Carlsen said. "As a PTSD recipient, the sexual trauma portion is more horrific because that's something you're going to live with more so because of your spouse, whether it's male or female, your relationship with your children and the traumatic night terrors."

Lucia D'Ancona, who also attended the screening, is a therapeutic yoga instructor who uses the calming exercise as a means for transformation from a tragedy or trauma. D'Ancona frequently works with veterans who have experienced MST. She calls them her "Hero Yogis."

Her classes have four phases, D'Ancona said. She first aims to provide a safe environment where her yoga participants can feel secure. D'Ancona then teaches participants how to reconnect with their bodies, the second phase.

"The third phase is an opportunity to recover that connection with their body," she said. "The fourth is to actually experience a feeling of empowerment and being able to walk in the world, not feeling that they are so vulnerable."

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' website, about one in five women and one in 100 men have told their VA healthcare provider that they experienced sexual trauma in the military.

Military sexual trauma has

**See WAR page 6**

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# Remembering Keenan



Cody Litzenburg shared memories of his brother, Keenan, during Keenan's funeral Friday, July 12, at Treasure Coast Community Church in Jensen Beach. Keenan Litzenburg, 23, at right, served three tours with the U.S. Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan after graduating Martin County High School.



Mitch Kloorfain  
chief photographer

# The Brennity hosting day of events for veterans in July

FOR VETERAN VOICE

to attendees by volunteers  
• 1 p.m. — Bugler closes pro-

See **BRENNITY** page 9

Every Day is Veterans Day  
Friday, July 26  
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
The Brennity at Melbourne  
7300 Watersong Lane  
Melbourne, FL 32940

The keynote speaker is Norris Burkes, nationally syndicated columnist and author. Often using humor to make a serious point, columnist Norris Burkes shares stories of his experiences as a pastor and Air National Guard chaplain.

#### Tentative schedule:

- 10 a.m. — Event begins, attendees mingle
- 10-10:30 a.m. — VITAS music therapist to play patriotic music in background
- 10:30 a.m. — Bugler and Color Guard from Patrick Air Force Base to open the program
- 10:35 a.m. — Opening comments: brief overview of local veteran organizations in attendance and what they offer; announce "Veterans Benefits" seminar on Aug. 16
- 10:45 a.m. — Norris Burkes, military chaplain and keynote speaker
- 11:45 a.m. — Break
- Noon — Door prizes/sponsors at microphone
- 12:15 p.m. — Bagpiper and drummer play patriotic medley
- 12:30-1 p.m. — Food and beverages served on trays circulating

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## WAR from page 4

far-reaching effects that can last a lifetime, the department's Palm Beach-based MST coordinator Janis Hoewing said.

Some of the difficulties both female and male survivors of MST may have include strong emotions including depression and anger, feeling emotionally numb, trouble sleeping, nightmares, difficulties with attention, concentration and memory, addiction, trust issues, difficulties in relationships and chronic physical pain.

Hoewing said treating veterans who have experienced sexual trauma presents unique challenges.

"This is considered the ultimate betrayal. The unit themselves are their family. They eat, sleep and work with these people by their sides, the other soldiers. Those soldiers are supposed to have their backs," Hoewing said.

"Sometimes you have to see the perpetrator over and over again."

The involvement of weapons is another component.

"People in the past have told me they've had guns put to their heads and were threatened that way," Hoewing said.

Treatment includes cognitive

and behavioral therapy to develop better coping skills to improve daily functioning, Hoewing said.

The VA provides free, confidential counseling and treatment to eligible male and female veterans for mental and physical health conditions related to experiences of MST, according to its website. Treatment centers are located in Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin and Palm Beach counties.

VA records show 542 patients in Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast received treatment for MST in the 2012 fiscal year, public affairs officer Mary Ann Goodman said.

*For more information, veterans can speak with their existing VA health care provider, contact the MST Coordinator at their nearest VA Medical Center, or contact their local Vet Center. A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) and [www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov).*

*Veterans can also learn more about VA's MST-related services online at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp) and see video clips with the recovery stories of veterans who have experienced MST at <http://maketheconnection.net/stories-of-connection/military-sexual-trauma>.*

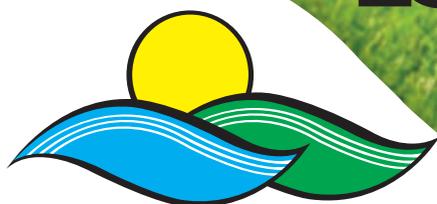
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**GUNS from page 3**

telephone interview. "That could be an eating disorder."

He said those with eating disorders, for example, aren't a hazard to themselves, or others, except for having an unhealthy relationship with food. Tobia is concerned that the new law might net too many who are completely safe with guns.

Additionally, Tobia said oftentimes folks sometimes visit mental-health facilities because they're feeling despondent over situations and decide that they're not really self-injurious or suicidal and wish to leave. Sometimes, he said, facility staff will believe treatment is needed and start procedures for judicial involvement.

But, how could that affect veterans?

In a word, combat trauma.

That's what raises Humphries' worries.

"I'm concerned about the person reaching out for help," he said.

"I've been there and done that. I had no thoughts of suicide, but I threatened it."

Humphries said that was an incident about 30 years ago. He was feeling despondent and was drinking, too.

"At that time, I didn't even know

which way to go," he said. "I didn't even realize I was looking for help. I was just in that state."

In a written response to queries, Dr. Jeannine Kubiak, supervisory psychologist at the Orlando Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, said it's true that post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, is more common among veterans than the general population.

"Research indicates that combat veterans have a higher rate of PTSD than do non-combat veterans and civilians," she wrote. "PTSD in the general population occurs in about 6 percent. Veteran population rates are as high as 12 percent for all veterans, not just combat veterans."

But, the VA emphasizes that PTSD rarely produces extreme episodes involving violence, said Mike Strickler, public affairs officer at the Orlando VA.

According to a report at *va.gov*, suicides might be more prevalent among veterans than others.

"In 2005, the suicide rate among male U.S. citizens was 23.19 per 100,000, compared to 5.65 in females," the report reads. "In 2005, the suicide rate among male veteran VA users was 37.19 per 100,000, compared to 13.59

**See GUNS page 11**



It's long been part of the process that if a judge compelled someone to have treatment for mental illness, the person went on a no-buy list maintained by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The new law expands that to include people who've agreed to voluntary treatment when facing the possibility of a judicial order after an involuntary evaluation. That often means police took a subject to a mental health facility when he or she was acting despondent — what's often called a "Baker Act," shorthand for the Florida Mental Health Act of 1971.

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Staff photo by Patrick McCallister

Navy veteran Matthew Kleemann, 20, headed to Tampa for the 33<sup>rd</sup> annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games, July 13 to 18. Kleemann got a spinal-cord injury in December. The Palm City man graduated from Martin County High School, and played on the school's lacrosse team.

# Local vet gets back in the game

**Patrick McCallister**  
FOR VETERAN VOICE  
[patrick.mccallister@yahoo.com](mailto:patrick.mccallister@yahoo.com)

PALM CITY — Matthew Kleemann's like most 20-year-olds. He enjoys a good game of basketball with friends. He likes water skiing, and cycling, too. He likes just about anything athletic.

And at press time he's heading to his first National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

The games were July 13-18 in Tampa.

The former Navy diver is now a wheelchair user after getting a spinal-cord injury in a car accident. That was in December. Kleemann was injured in Connecticut, and went through rehabilitation at the Department of Veterans Affairs' Miami Healthcare Systems. That's where he

See GAME page 11

# Florida Department of Veterans Affairs hiring women's veterans coordinator

**Patrick McCallister**  
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Women are different from men, and many more of today's veterans are women. Now they'll have a full-time advocate at the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, a statewide women's veterans coordinator.

During the last legislative session, the Florida Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott funded nine new claims examiners for the FDVA. Claims examiners help veterans navigate the federal Department of Veterans Affairs to file, and appeal declined, claims. They're similar to veterans service officers who work for counties and many veterans service organizations, such as AMVETS.

The FDVA elected to use the newly funded positions to hire a full-time claims examiner specializing in women's issues.

"We have had a women's veterans coordinator since I got here in 1999," Alene Tarter, director of benefits and assistance, said in a phone interview. She went on to say, "It's been rotated among different female veterans in the department. What's new is it will be a full-time position. In the past we had a coordinator, but it was an additional duty."

According to the department, Florida has the third largest population of women veterans, about 160,000. There are about 1.6 million veterans in the Sunshine State. Nationally there are about 22 million veterans, and about 1.9 million are women.

Tarter said that military sexual trauma, MST, is a big reason a statewide women's veterans coordinator is needed. She said that the experience isn't unique to women, and many men making MST claims to the VA prefer to have women veteran service

**"Very often the female is not removed from that work situation and the sexual assault came from the supervisory levels. Oftentimes the female knows that there won't be any assistance, so they don't bring it to anyone's attention. You can't always count on a paper trail that the assault happened."**

**Alene Tarter**  
**director of benefits and assistance**

officers representing them.

The Florida Department of Veterans Affairs is a state agency not related to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. It does several things, such as running the state's veteran nursing homes, along with helping veterans file claims with the VA.

Tarter said among both genders there remains in the military a great reluctance to report repeated sexual harassment, unwanted sexual advances and forced sex, the things the VA defines as military sexual trauma. Much of that reluctance, she said, is because of the military's poor procedures to address sexual trauma.

"Very often the female is not removed from that work situation and the sexual assault came from the supervisory levels," she said. "Oftentimes the female knows that there won't be any assistance, so they don't bring it to anyone's attention. You can't always count on a paper trail that the assault happened."

And paper trails are all important to filing VA claims. It wants documentation to demonstrate that an existing psychological or medical problem is directly related to one or more events that happened when in the military.

Nevertheless, Tarter said those involved with helping veterans file VA claims have learned to look for and show "markers" in service records indicating sexual trauma. For example, model service members suddenly becoming poor performers, having sudden weight

gains or losses. Additionally, she said service officers have learned to look for indications of sudden personality changes, or sudden sexual promiscuity.

"Or people who go AWOL," Tarter said. "One of the ways to get away (from military sexual trauma) is to go AWOL."

Tarter said she's represented dozens making MST claims.

"I would say, over the years probably 200," she said. "I know there are a lot of women who don't come forward. We can tell

See COORDINATOR page 10

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## BRENNITY from page 5

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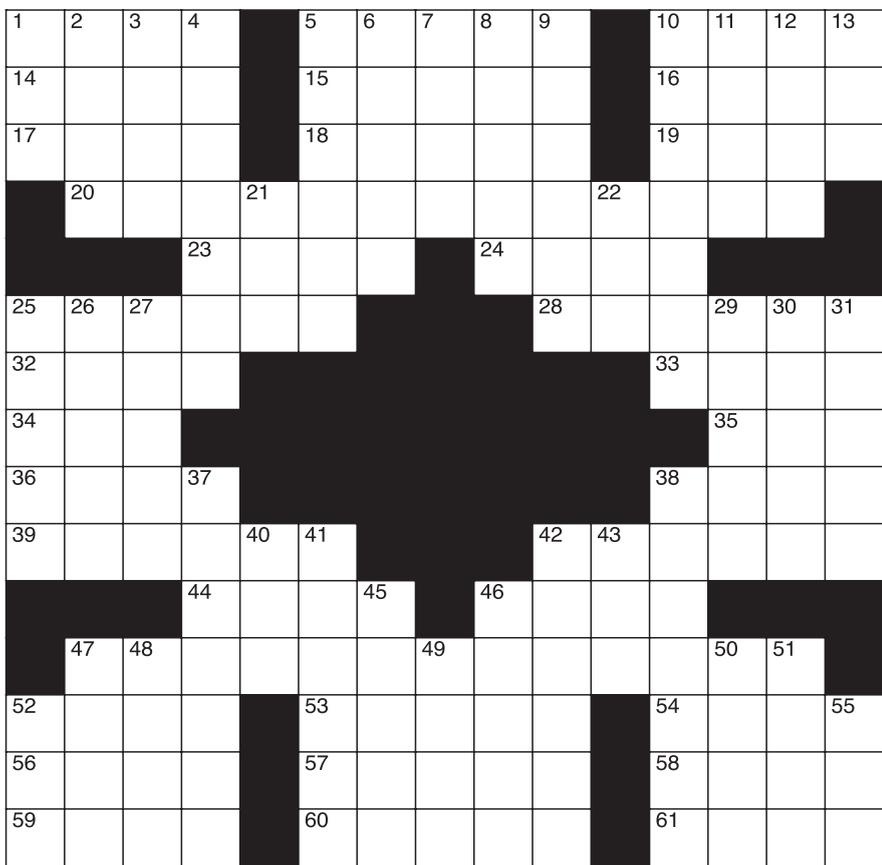
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**CLUES ACROSS**

- 1. Part of a deck
- 5. Georges, French philosopher 1847-1922
- 10. Winglike structures
- 14. Swift Malay boat (var. sp.)
- 15. White poplar
- 16. Ripped
- 17. Dog: \_\_\_ best friend
- 18. Grimes
- 19. Goods carried by a vehicle
- 20. Freestanding cooking counter
- 23. Apiary residents
- 24. Mains
- 25. Paved outdoor space
- 28. Colonic irrigations
- 32. \_\_\_ Ladd, actor
- 33. Point that is one point E of SE
- 34. Fixed boring routine
- 35. Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)
- 36. Burrowing marine mollusk
- 38. Walk heavily
- 39. Capital of Zimbabwe
- 42. Levity
- 44. Hoover and Aswan
- 46. Administrative division of a county
- 47. Klum reality show
- 52. Doyen
- 53. One who converts skins into white leather
- 54. Iridescent silica gem
- 56. Longest river in Albania
- 57. Homer's epic poem
- 58. White, brown or wild
- 59. Booby bird genus
- 60. Pennies

61. Create

**CLUES DOWN**

- 1. Cycles per minute
- 2. Traditional Iraq liquor
- 3. Wife of a rajah
- 4. Holds rubbish
- 5. Ribbon belts
- 6. Double-reed instruments
- 7. Strap used to control a horse
- 8. Schenectady, NY, hospital
- 9. Leaseholder
- 10. Books of maps
- 11. Bird with a laughlike cry
- 12. Little Vienna on the Mures
- 13. The termination of a story
- 21. Executive responsible for operations
- 22. Local area network
- 25. Make thirsty
- 26. Spurious wing
- 27. Invader of 13th-C Russia
- 29. Country legend Haggard
- 30. Superior of an abbey of monks
- 31. Worn and shabby
- 37. Louise Ciccone
- 38. AKA threadworm
- 40. British rule over India
- 41. Induces vomiting
- 42. Hard rind vine fruits
- 43. Grass bristle
- 45. Instrument for weighing
- 46. Source of a special delight
- 47. South American country
- 48. Track for rolling vehicles
- 49. One of two born at the same time
- 50. Samoan capital
- 51. Noisy talk
- 52. Tooth caregiver
- 55. Side sheltered from the wind

**SUDOKU**

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**COORDINATOR from page 9**

that by the number who wait years to come forward. Sometimes you're working with a 20-year-old issue."

She said that in the last decade, the VA has become much more responsive to the existence of MST and the need for treatment. "Most of the VA medical centers have special programs developed for females who've had sexual trauma," she said.

According to the VA's website, it has programs for treating men and women who've been the victims of sexual trauma.

According to the site, about one in five women and one in 100 men have told their VA health-care provider that they experienced sexual trauma in the military.

There are other reasons for having a statewide women's veterans coordinator.

"There are certain issues, such as reproduction," Tarter said. "We're not entirely sure of the effects of the burn pits and that sort of thing. That's probably on the horizon as the next big disability issue for the VA, the burn pits."

The military has operated open-air burn pits for garbage disposal in Iraq and Afghanistan, which raised health concerns among many service members. The VA asked the National Acad-

emy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine to investigate whether the pits posed a health risk. In 2011 the institute released a report that focused largely on a pit operated in Balad, Iraq.

It concluded that there wasn't sufficient evidence to say that the pits emitted toxins in sufficient quantities to pose any health risks. The finding remains controversial among many veterans who served in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Many Vietnam-era veterans have also been vocal about the issue, noting that there were similar studies and findings early on about the defoliant Agent Orange, long linked to many health-related problems from birth defects to cancer.

Donna Carlsen, St. Lucie County's veterans services coordinator, said she's glad to see the FDVA create the position.

"There're a lot of issues for female veterans," she said. "It is a full-time job."

The state department has 71 veterans claims examiners. Most, 55, work at VA facilities around the state. The Florida Legislature approved adding the nine new ones in its \$74.5 billion 2013-2014 budget.

At press time, claims examiner Cynthia T. Brown is serving as the part-time statewide women veterans' coordinator at the FDVA.

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**GAME from page 8**

learned about the growing field of adaptive sports, athletics designed for people with disabilities. "When I got to the Miami VA, it opened my eyes," he said. "You can do the same things, just in a different way."

Among events the Martin County High School grad and former lacrosse player planned to compete in were swimming, water skiing, basketball, archery, and handcycling. Handcycles are recumbent tricycles propelled with the arms. That doesn't sound like it'd be fast, but handcyclers get to speeds matching their two-wheeled competitors due to aerodynamics. Kleeman was looking forward to going to the Veterans Wheelchair Games.

"It lets you be competitive again," he said. "I love sports and never thought I'd be competitive again."

His mother, Gail Kleemann, said she, too, was looking forward to Matthew competing at the wheelchair games.

"He has amazed all of us in how well he's handled all this," she said. "Better than I could. He has some bad days here and there, but keeps plugging along. He looks at what he can do, not what he can't do."

This was the 33<sup>rd</sup> annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games, and the second time they've been in the Sunshine State. The last time was 1991, Miami. The games has helped produce several Paralympians, Tom Brown, organizer, said in a previous interview with *Your Voice News & Views'* sister publication *Veteran Voice*.

"In the neighborhood of a dozen of them," he said. "It's the nature of the Olympics and Paralympics; many try but few make it."

Brown is a consultant working for the Paralyzed Veterans of America. He worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs and helped organize the first Veterans Wheelchair Games in 1981.

**His mother, Gail Kleemann, said she, too, was looking forward to Matthew competing at the wheelchair games.**

**"He has amazed all of us in how well he's handled all this," she said. "Better than I could. He has some bad days here and there, but keeps plugging along. He looks at what he can do, not what he can't do."**

Those games were at the Richmond, Va., VA medical center and gave veterans with amputations and spinal-cord injuries an unusual opportunity to compete in a wide range of sporting events against others.

"We wanted to do something to commemorate the International Year of Disabled Persons," Brown said. "We had 74 veterans come to the first games — mostly from the East Coast, There was a smattering from the Midwest and West Coast who'd heard about the games."

Today more than 500 adaptive athletes a year from throughout the United States attend the games. The events range from bowling, trap shooting and table tennis to track and field events, basketball and quad rugby. The latter is often called "murderball." It requires specially-made wheelchairs that can take repeated hard strikes the players thrill to give one another.

Kleeman joined about 600 adaptive athletes in Tampa this year. Now he aims to get back to another goal: college.

"I want to go back to school in the spring," he said. "I want to be an occupational therapist."

Kleeman is eyeing classes at Florida Gulf Coast University to be closer to Tampa permanently.

"I'm hearing Tampa has awesome adaptive sports," he said.

**GUNS from page 7**

in females."

The report notes that many of those suicides are among older veterans suffering from protracted and terminal illnesses.

Tobia said if folks realize that they could lose the opportunity to purchase guns from dealers performing background checks, they might reconsider looking for help when needed.

"Now you have individuals who are gun owners, or potential gun owners, with real concerns and need to seek treatment, and are hesitant to do so," he said.

Humphries wasn't so sure about that.

"Usually the people at that point are not concerned about (the ability to buy guns)," he said. "On the whole, that's the last thing on their mind."

Humphries said that the VVA will watch to see if the new law disproportionately affects veterans.

"I think the intent of the law is right," he said. "I'm concerned about the misapplication. Is there enough protection in that law to make sure it's properly implemented?"

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