



Stockton Veterans Told that Education Is Key At Veterans Day Ceremonies

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Galloway Township, NJ -Today's veterans face many challenges - from wartime physical injuries and mental health issues, to a tough economy when trying to re-enter civilian life. But going to college is one of the best ways to improve one's life and serve the country in other ways, student veterans were told at Veterans Day ceremonies today at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

"Nothing is more important in the life of the country than what is being offered here at Stockton," said keynote speaker Noel Koch, former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for the Office of Wounded Warrior Care.

He noted that Janet Yellen, the chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, recently said that the median annual earnings of a full-time worker with a four-year bachelor's degree are 79 percent higher than the earnings for someone with a high school diploma. - and the wage premium for a graduate degree is even higher.

He added that after World War II, the G.I. Bill® enabled many veterans whose families were not wealthy to go to college - and when they graduated, "the American economy exploded."

He urged the student veterans to bring more of their buddies back to school, so this generation can be prosperous, too. Stockton is "a haven of hope" for veterans, he said.

"Going to school and making a living is hard - but you can do it," he said. "It's not the hardest thing you've ever done."

Stockton President Herman Saatkamp told the gathering, "Today is of genuine significance," and he went on to say, "it's important that we honor our veterans every day."

He noted that during the recession, the only area in which jobs increased was for those with

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bachelor's degrees. Stockton's Veteran Affairs program began in 2008 and has grown to serve over 400 veterans and active-duty service people who are furthering their educations in preparation for the workforce.

"Stockton is very proud and it's an honor for us to be listed each year as one of the most veteran-friendly institutions in the nation," President Saatkamp said.

Stockton on Monday was named to the "Best for Vets: Colleges 2015" listing by *Military Times*, an organization comprised of the *Army Times*, *Navy Times*, *Air Force Times* and *Marine Corps Times*. "We're one of the smaller institutions on the top list," President Saatkamp noted.

He also read a proclamation about Veterans Day from Gov. Chris Christie, who urged residents of the Garden State to express their gratitude to those who risked their lives "for the sacred principles of liberty and freedom."

Tom O'Donnell, Assistant Dean of Students/Veteran Affairs at Stockton, said, "Today's veterans are young, old, from all cultures, gay/straight, immigrants and citizens. All veterans are committed to serving this country in every way" - in battle or dealing with other threats.

He credited Stockton's student veterans with helping make the program here so successful, and introduced Nelson Gonzalez, president of the Stockton Student Veterans Organization (SVO). Gonzalez urged those gathered to think of veterans' sacrifices on more than just one day of the year.

Dr. Anthony Macchiavelli, West Point graduate and medical director of the Hospitalist Program at AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center, spoke of the thousands who have died in battle and the many living with horrific injuries. He quoted President Obama as saying that "we're losing more troops to suicide than to combat," and said there is a military suicide every 18 hours.

Mental health and family support are big issues that must be addressed, along with homelessness among returning veterans, Macchiavelli said. He is active with AtlantiCare's Military Employee Resource Group HONORS, which address the needs of the military and veteran communities.

"Fifty-seven thousand, eight hundred and forty-nine veterans are homeless on any given night," Macchiavelli said.

"If America is the home of the brave, why are so many of the brave homeless?"

The day's events included ceremonies in front of the Campus Center, at Independence Plaza and in Veterans Park. Stockapella, a student a cappella singing group, sang and student Brielle Lord played Taps.

Other speakers included Major Glen T. Battschinger of the U.S. Army and Stockton alumni serving in the military.

Steve Gilroy, an alumnus, Navy veteran and former president of the SVO, said it's important to have perspective in today's society, when the media seems to over-emphasize the threat to the average person of things such as ebola.

"No free society can stop every bad action from occurring. If it can, it's not free," he said. Gilroy cited the British World War II saying: "Keep Calm and Carry On," noting that today's American mantra should be: "Keep Calm and Be Free."

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Paulo Henrique, who joined the military after graduating from Stockton, is with the National Guard in West Orange, NJ and also works for the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office.

He said a leadership class taught by Assistant Dean O'Donnell "took me out of my shell" and inspired him to become a contributor on campus and beyond. He urged the students present to take advantage of Stockton, saying, "It's OK to ask questions here."

Carl Luis Blas was one of two participants to read an inspirational poem.

"It Takes Courage," which Blas said was by an anonymous author, includes these lines:

"It takes strength to endure abuse.

It takes courage to stop it....

It takes strength to survive.

It takes courage to live."

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