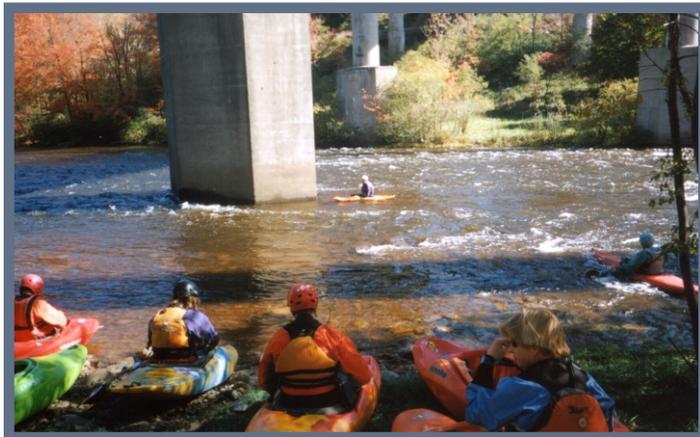


TEAM RIVER RUNNER ~ Navigates the Lehigh



Photos taken by Brad Vezina



Team River Runner headed out to Hickory Run State Park on the Lehigh River recently for their second outing of the year and their first "white water" experience. The team paddled a total of five miles which equaled an eight hour long excursion. It was an exhausting, but enjoyable trip. The team enjoyed the fall scenery as they kayaked and made new friends.



ENROLLMENT AND ELIGIBILITY

ENROLL NOW- IT ONLY TAKES A FEW MINUTES! You can inquire about your eligibility and enroll for benefits by visiting Room B10A in Building 2. You can also call 610-384-7711, extensions 5034 or 5008 if you have questions. Some of our clinics are open past 4:30pm, Monday through Friday.

OPERATION ENDURING/IRAQI FREEDOM Quarterly Focus Group

The OEF/OIF Focus Group enables returning service members and their families to openly and honestly talk about their feelings and opinions pertaining to VA's health care services. The purpose is to get your opinion, rather than give you information. We would appreciate your involvement in this forum. Our next meeting is February 18th at 5:30pm in Building 57, Room 150. Refreshments will be served. Please call Alan Reiland at 610-384-7711, extension 6820 to register or if you have questions.

Help Is Only A Telephone Call Away!

It takes the courage and strength of a warrior to ask for help...If you're in an emotional crisis call 1-800-273-TALK and Press 1 for veterans.
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

EXTENDED HOURS OF OPERATION

We have extended our hours of operation in the Mental Health Clinic. For additional information on evening hour appointments please call: 610-384-7711, extension 6833.

COATESVILLE VAMC'S OPERATION ENDURING/IRAQI FREEDOM STAFF

Stacey Castel, Acting Program Manager
610-384-7711, extension 6817
Alan Reiland, Case Manager
610-384-7711, extension 6820
Wendy Sherwin, Enrollment
610-384-7711, extension 5034
Bettye Thomas, Enrollment
610-384-7711, extension 5008

EXTENDED BENEFITS FOR COMBAT VETERANS

Currently enrolled veterans who were discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2008 are eligible for enhanced benefits for five years after discharge. If you would like more information, please call us at 610-384-7711, extension 5034 or 5008.

The Road Home

The transition from the war to home, from the extremes of combat back to civilian life, is like moving between two different worlds, each with a separate reality. Returning home, often long-anticipated with excitement and the hope of relief, can quickly shift to include the significant challenges of readjustment. For example, you might realize something isn't right when friends and family ask you about your experience. How do you begin to tell someone who hasn't been to war about how you may feel deeply changed by it? Or, that while you're physically home, your mind and body continue 'in high gear' and you feel better adapted to the demands of the war zone than day-to-day life back home?

Many people with first-hand experience of a major trauma suffer severe reactions immediately afterward. Some are able to bounce back and feel better relatively quickly. Others are deeply distraught and need professional help to experience relief. The most common example of this type of reaction is post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It can occur when a person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others. An experience like this usually causes the victim to have feelings of intense fear, helplessness or horror. After it is over, it is common for the person to re-experience the trauma through intrusive thoughts, nightmares and flashbacks. They may also avoid any reminders of the trauma and experience sleep difficulty, moodiness, problems concentrating and hyper vigilance. Experiencing PTSD can also have trickling effects including problems at work, relationship issues, rage or panic episodes and excessive use of alcohol, drugs, or over-the-counter medications.

Returning home from war is a recovery process that involves major transitions and it's normal to face challenges. While it's important to be patient and compassionate with yourself, it may also be necessary to develop additional skills for coping. This is particularly true if, over time, you continue to feel numb, withdrawn, crisis-prone, or if you're making unhealthy or dangerous choices.

Asking for help may initially make you feel uncomfortable. You must remember, however, you proudly served your country and now it is time to serve yourself. It will get easier, and there is help. For more information, please call Stacey Castel, OEF/OIF acting program manager at 610-384-7711, extension 6817.



Calling All Art Enthusiasts...

CVAMC's local Creative Arts Festival will be held February 18, 2009. This is a great opportunity to showcase your talent whether it is singing, painting, photography, or poetry. There are many categories to enter. Please contact your recreation or creative arts therapist or Jenn Koehler, Supervisor Recreation Therapy, 610-384-7711, extension 5265 with questions.



MENTAL HEALTH CORNER

Mental Health and Fitness

A good goal in life is synergy of mind, body and soul. One way to work toward this goal is exercise. Not only is vigorous exercise good for your body, it is an amazing way to develop a clear mind, which is especially important during your recovery. Exercise is a major stress reliever. It eases depression and negative thoughts and helps with coping abilities. It also keeps you alert and more powerful, intellectually.

Exercise also strengthens your body, which results in a better-looking and feeling you, contributing greatly to your general sense of well-being. It also helps you to sleep more soundly, which can help keep your emotional reactions or negative feelings in-check and manageable. Exercise ultimately helps you to feel more in control of your life, which is something that everyone strives to feel.

According to the American Heart Association, active people are more likely to "score higher on perceived ability to perform activities of daily living, physical well-being and other measures related to quality of life". It goes on to say "physically active people had higher scores for positive self-concept, more self-esteem and more positive moods and affects". When you exercise, your brain releases endorphins which normally generate a "happy" and "positive" mood.

By now, you are probably wondering how to start a fitness program. Remember to consult your doctor before you begin. Once you do that, it is important to start slowly. You have to build fitness so that it becomes a permanent part of your lifestyle. If you have never worked out before, you can start with walking for 20 minutes a day at least three times a week, and up to six times a week. Always let your body rest at least one day a week. Make sure to switch up your routine regularly and add new music to your ipod to stay motivated. Last but not least, be sure to stretch well before and after each workout.

The benefits of working out are so great, it would be a shame not to give it a try. It keeps you at your best, physically and mentally.

~ Sandy Sasse, AAI Certified Personal Trainer