

SDSU aims to accommodate influx of student veterans

By Michelle Fletcher
THE EAST COUNTY CALIFORNIAN

For decades, the city of San Diego has been known as a "military town." Bordered by MCRD to the West, Pt. Loma to the South, Miramar to the East, and Camp Pendleton to the North, San Diego's population has always included a great deal of active and retired military.

According to Gov. Schwarzenegger, more than 160,000 active duty men and women in the military live in California. Of these, a great number are still in the process of pursuing a college education and obtaining a degree.

The California State University system expects 2,800 to 4,700 veterans in the 2007-2008 school year. Many of these students are weeks from completing a two-year tour in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"San Diego State University is the third largest veterans' certified office of all California colleges — CSUs, UCs and community col-

"Life was so much different from where he had come — war, death, survival — what it means to be an active duty member of the United States Military."

— Joan Putnam, Veterans Coordinator at San Diego State University, on a student veteran's transition

leges," said Joan Putnam, veteran's affairs coordinator at San Diego State University. "We have roughly 600 veterans registered on our campus."

With the large number of student veterans, SDSU makes an extra effort to serving the men and

women and ease their transition from military to civilian life.

This is the most challenging task for veterans coming back to school — adjusting to an entirely different culture and new people.

"Many veterans have a difficult time adjusting," said Putnam. "One man, who has been with Veteran's Affairs for a few years now, has remarked about this transition. He said it was difficult to relate to the younger students, where their whole life was so much different from where he had come from — war, death, survival — what it means to be an active duty member of the United States military. It was so different."

Many students coming off active duty service in the military feel the struggle.

Recently highlighted in SDSU's magazine, 360, Paul Volpe of the USMC has battled in the field and in the classroom.

Volpe was seriously injured during his tour and earned a purple heart for his bravery and service.

SEE VETERANS, PAGE 6

VETERANS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Now, Volpe lives in University Towers, on-campus housing, and applies his perseverance to his studies and adjusting to civilian life.

"I am confident, with what I have gone through, I can overcome whatever comes my way," Volpe said.

Daniel St. Pierre of the U.S. NAVY enrolled at SDSU to pursue graduate studies.

"Coming back for grad school, it is definitely a different experience," St. Pierre said. "There's a big age difference that you have to deal with, but all you have to do is actively talk to others. My classmates have a lot of their own things going on, so I don't hang out with them as much as other people."

St. Pierre also works in the Veteran's Affairs office, and has considerable contact with incoming vets.

"We're to help them adjust to life at State," said St. Pierre. "The younger guys who have seen considerable battle need a little extra assistance, but nothing great. How you handle life in college depends upon how you are psychologically. There are a lot of support groups which have helped many of our vets."

In Sacramento, many leaps have been made for California veterans pursuing college education over the past few months. Drafted by Gov. Schwarzenegger, the "Troops to College" initiative was implemented to help provide a better education for veterans in the CSU system and all public education.

"The governor is also working to increase educational and economic opportunities for the brave California men and women who defend our freedoms in the armed forces — showing our state's gratitude for their service to this country and bringing smart, hard-working individuals with real leadership

experience into our workforce," said Sean Walsh, Director of the Governor's Office of Planning and Research.

"California sees the benefits veterans bring to the economy every day — building small businesses, running multi-national corporations, and providing valuable service in every industry in the state."

In response, SDSU is taking the lead in aiding its veterans.

"Today's veteran is fast-paced, direction-driven, and purpose-driven; they're coming back into the schools to get their education in California. They will then open businesses in California, buy property in California — it's good for everybody," Putnam said. "The bottom line is that it's designed to implement California's vision to become the first state to declare itself 'veteran-friendly' for college and university education."

The "Troops to College" initiative aims to help veterans get into the schools, let them know what is available, and put support systems in place — especially since many are coming back with post-traumatic stress disorder, and must adjust to college life.

"We want these support systems in place to not only recruit them, but to help them all the way through," Putnam said.

The Veteran's Support Committee at San Diego State aims specifically to find ways to offer services to these students on campus.

"They look for programs to implement that ultimately help them in their transition from combat to student life," Putnam said.

This combination of excellent support services, counseling, and the chance to meet with other veterans has made SDSU a welcome stop on the roadmap of life for members of the armed forces.

St. Pierre said, "The military was great, but it is nice being a civilian."