

# Veteran Arts Showcase

November 20-22, 2015

at The FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, NY

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– FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

## Combat Vets Showcase Their Art

When Special Operations helicopter rescue team member Justin Otis faced a divorce and wanted custody of his son, he soon learned he would not be able to keep his Special Ops job and be a single dad; it was against military policy. Thus began a whole new chapter in the decorated SSgt's life, bouncing him out of the military and back into a now foreign civilian life, with a head and body chock-full of unshakeable memories, some that he's not even allowed to talk about. Alcohol, drugs, self-destructive patterns, self-medicating, failed relationships, anger, arrests, are just some of the dead-end streets many veterans like Justin ran down. Randomly picking up a paint brush and canvas he bought for his son forever changed the Hudson Valley resident's life, again.

WWII Army Infantryman Jay Wenk tells us: "I saw the 'tail end' of the Bulge, not the whole thing. We fought the war and we were in Czechoslovakia when WW2 ended." Jay Wenk made it back home to the U.S., when many of his comrades did not. Now a Councilman for Woodstock, this master cabinet maker and woodworker turned to writing just two years ago: "I want to leave a memoir for my children and grandchildren," Jay reveals; "I want them to know what went on in WWII. It could have been avoided."

When NYC's Twin Trade Towers were hit on 9-11, Newburgh Free Academy graduate Wolf Critton signed up for the Army Reserves. Four months before his 4 years were up, his squadron was deployed to Iraq. The rigors and realities of war were all around him, always; the mental cost of always being vigilant as Infantrymen always on alert began to take its toll. A friend in the war zone with Wolf just happened to hand the young man a guitar, thinking it might give him something else to think about. Wolf Critton frankly states: "The guitar continues to save my life."

Jay Wenk, Justin Otis, and Wolf Critton are only three of the over 45 Hudson Valley and NYS veteran artists presenting their works at the Veteran Arts Showcase at FDR's Presidential Library & Museum in Hyde Park, NY, the weekend of Nov 20-22, 2015. All Showcase events are free and open to the public.

Now in its third year, the Showcase is a celebration of veterans and the arts and how arts heal, communicate emotions, and compel people to interact with each other. Featuring visual artists, crafters, writers, poets, musicians, and performers who are veterans, family members of veterans, or military connected. Arts and veterans featured in the Showcase range from: NYS Veteran Hall of Fame 2015 Inductee, Needlepointer, and Enigma Machine operator with Top Secret Security Clearance, Kathie Freston (USMCR, '53-'64) from Kent Lakes; Mary Alden (Air Force, 1976-2007) a Knitter from Staatsburg who graduated FDR High School, Hyde Park, NY in 1976, entered the Air Force October of that year and 1982-2007 served as First Sargent and

Command Chief in the 514<sup>th</sup> Air Mobility Wing, McGuire AFB NJ; George Wayne Laws (Navy, Cold War) an Underwater Photographer and “Shark Protector” from Mahopac; Ron Ymbras (Air Force, Viet Nam) a Paratrooper in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne 1967-1968 including the Tet Offensive, now turned “Activist for Traveling” and Photographer/Editor from Poughkeepsie; Kim Soper (Army, 1977-80, The Cold War), 22 year Army wife and pencil and acrylics artist living in Montgomery, NY; Bob Bruer (Navy, Cold War: USS Boxer LPH 4 (IC Electrician PO 2<sup>nd</sup> Class) and USS Holland AS3 (Polaris Missile Technician), now an accomplished sculptor from Highland Mills who volunteers consistently at the Montrose VA Health Center; and Gil Tarbox who served in Vietnam as Specialist E5 heavy equipment operator, building roads and air fields with 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Plakuo, 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Long Ben, a survivor of 1968 Tet Offensive, a Passamaquoddy, Mic Mac, and Scot, Army Corps of Engineers veteran who with the Nimham Mountain Singers founded one Putnam County, NY’s largest attractions - the (now 16<sup>th</sup> annual) Chief Daniel Nimham Intertribal Powwow honoring the Wappingers and Hudson Valley Native American veterans in service to the American Revolution.

The Outpatient Art Therapy Program at the VA Hudson Valley Montrose Campus has recruited significant numbers of artists participating in the 2015 Veteran Arts Showcase. This local VA program has a long-standing reputation for providing a safe space for veterans to engage in the creative process of art making as a means for relaxation and/or to help them to understand and heal from difficult military experiences where words are hard to find. There will be a hospitality room with refreshments, a video corner, information on effective therapies for PTSD, and a chance for the audience to speak with artists, organizers, local professionals, and each other.

The Veteran Arts Showcase 2015 free Opening Reception and Ceremony is on Friday Nov. 20th from 5:30-8:30pm and includes refreshments, a Presentation of Colors, opening remarks, and a performance by Infantryman turned musician Wolf Critton (Army, Iraq). The Veterans’ Theater Project: Leaving Theater, a civilian and veteran theatrical troop, performs an interactive play with the audience that focuses on veteran reintegration to close out Friday evening.

The first 20 high school or college students (w/school ID) to attend Sat. or Sun. afternoon performances win free meal or movie tickets. Twenty students Sat. or Sun. signing in from one school enters chances for three school’s student veteran associations, ROTCs, or arts or service-oriented clubs to win \$250 each.

Saturday, Nov 21<sup>st</sup> is a free Writers Workshop 11am-2pm for veterans and military families, with preregistration required due to limited seating. All community members are encouraged to attend Warriors’ Voices and The Long Road Home from 2:30-4pm Saturday consisting of original poetry and essays, songs, and open discussions with artists about their work. Saturday 4-5pm everyone is invited to bring their instruments and join with veteran musicians, including Newburgh Free Academy’s own Wolf Critton, in an “Open Jam.”

Preregistration is encouraged for Sunday November 22<sup>nd</sup>’s free (2-4pm) CORE STORIES - a civilian-veteran dialogue on the aftereffects of war, which includes poetry and a community drum circle. This third Veteran Arts Showcase closes with a special performance (4-4:30pm) by the Nimham Mountain Singers (the Founders of the Chief Daniel Nimham Intertribal Veterans Memorial Powwow), with Native American veteran Gil Tarbox (Army Corps of Engineers, VietNam).

The Showcase is the result of a unique collaboration between the host, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, and three Mid-Hudson Valley organizations: the Veteran Family Support Alliance (VETFAMSA), the Orange County Arts Council, and H.G. Fairfield Arts Center for the Environment, with a grant from The Seriti Foundation. Founded on the understanding that the arts are vital to veteran reintegration – for self-expression, recovery from the aftereffects of war, to reconnect with the civilian-veteran community - the civilian community is especially encouraged to attend this celebration and get to know our veterans and Hudson Valley families in a whole new way.

For artist bios, program details, ads, donations, or pre-register for free for Saturday's Writer's Workshop or Sunday's CORE STORIES, contact: Dr. Lori Arella 845-226-4218  
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