



# CougarNews

## Collin veterans benefits are more than financial

Rushing between advising tables, registration computers and waiting students, Shayne Brown was a busy man.

Collin College's Veterans Transition Specialist, Brown was helping coordinate one of three veterans priority registration days, one on each of the district's main campuses in late October. The registration events gathered academic and financial aid advisors together into a one-stop shop, helping to streamline the process for former and active duty service men and women, and their family members, about 1,200 of whom attend the college.

The events are just one of the measures Collin College has implemented to help veterans chart a path in higher education. The district works diligently to ensure a smooth transition from military life to college studies, from the district's Veterans Services Office and website ([www.collin.edu/studentresources/veteransresources](http://www.collin.edu/studentresources/veteransresources)) with information

on financial aid, Veterans Affairs education benefits, personal counseling and other areas of veteran interest, to organizations like the Student Veterans of America. And then there is Brown and the 2016 Veteran Priority Advising Team, who work one-on-one with veterans to make sure they are following a process that can seem foreign to people who have lived a much more regimented life.

"I think that when (student veterans) get here, they can be slightly overwhelmed," he said, standing near the door, waiting to assist the next veteran



Photo by COUGAR NEWS STAFF

**James Jackson registers for classes at a veterans priority registration event at Spring Creek Campus.**

in line. "The whole process is different, going from being told what to do, when to do it and how to do it, to all of a sudden, having to take care of every-

**See BENEFITS, p. 5**

### IN THIS EDITION

**P. 2 – Veterans "Carry The Load" and Remember the Fallen**

**P. 3 – Learn about Collin College's Student Veterans of America Chapter**

**P. 4 – An interview with Collin College Associate Dean and Army Reserve Captain Torrey West**

**P. 6 – A full list of events from Collin's Veterans Week**

## Army medic forges path for others to follow

Kayla Herrerra has spent her adult life paving the way for others. It was not easy, but that was never an issue for this driven combat veteran.

After graduating from Plano East High School, she immediately enlisted in the Army. In 2007, Herrerra deployed to Iraq, leaving her 13-month-old son back in the states. When she finally returned to America, her baby was a two-and-a-half-year-old toddler. Overseas, Herrerra served as a line medic who worked with a route clearance company — they cleared the way through treacherous terrain, rife with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), providing a safe journey for those who followed. As a medic, she helped soldiers with everything from

gunshot wounds and accidental injuries to traumas. She even treated local residents and was awarded a combat medic badge for rendering care under fire.

As a female in the military, Herrerra joined the ranks of those who paved the road of equality for women.

"It is a little harder as a woman to be taken seriously as a veteran. I've been doing this for almost half of my life. I can spot a male vet 10 miles away, but as females we don't stand out like that. I don't like the differentiation. I fought to be seen and treated as an equal, which is not an easy task in the military," she said.

After a long military career, attending  
**See HERRERRA, p. 4**

# Veterans 'Carry The Load,' remember the fallen

Kenny Munyer felt the pervasive weight of mourning as a participant in the non-profit Memorial Day Carry The Load event. It was somber and quiet as he walked the trail and looked at photo after photo of men and women who died in service—police officers, first responders and soldiers. Along the path, he saw random acts of kindness, like the man who meticulously adjusted each flag that was not in perfect alignment, a living metaphor of putting things right in the world again.

“People are naturally selfish, and I go through that as well, but when you are walking this path and seeing all these people in posters on the trail who gave up their lives to keep us safe, you realize you are alive, and you are blessed. It was mourning coupled with reflection and the existential realization of mortality. I am glad I went because it grounded me in the whole grand scheme of things. Life is more than my jobs and my grades. I would definitely do it again because it is an act of selflessness, and I am giving my time to remember. Regardless of anyone’s views of government and the military, people are still dying, and this is a way to become more aware of it,” said Munyer, a Collin College student.

With rallies across the country, Carry The Load is a Dallas-based event for those who have died in the line of duty. According to Meredith Martin, interim associate dean of academic affairs, the Collin College Carry The Load team raised approximately \$1,400 from those who pledged funds for the walk.

Munyer plans to earn a bachelor of science degree in ecology or envi-

ronmental science. He served in the Marines for five years. Currently, he is in inactive ready reserves as a Sgt. in aviation ground support. He says he walked Carry The Load because he received an email about the event from the college’s Student Veterans Association (SVA), and his roommate, a Sgt. in the Marines, was excited about it.

“My roommate lost his friends in combat. In the whole Marine Corps, suicide kept happening to people in my unit or surrounding units. I have a friend who hung himself, and his roommate broke down the door and saved him. When I got to the Carry The Load event I had my 35-pound backpack and the wrong boots. I was in pain, but that’s part of the point. I am alive, so I can feel this pain. I walked to celebrate the lives of the Marines I knew who aren’t here anymore and what they gave to this country and to our world. I did it to pay my respects and celebrate their lives.”

## A Lesson to Remember Throughout the Year

According to Collin graduate Sean Cummings, each individual participating in Carry The Load selects who they want to carry, and some people, like Munyer, carry entire lists. Cummings carried Airman First Class Elizabeth Jacobson.

“Everybody is there for somebody else. I learned about her in military training. It was a reminder to us to take stock and be vigilant. She was the first woman security forces person to die in combat since Vietnam, so it was close to home for me because I was going into a career field in the Air Force that had the majority of combat-related deaths.

She was on a convoy, and they hit an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Several were wounded, but she was that fatality,” he said.

Collin College captain for Carry The Load, Sean Cummings graduated from Collin with an associate of arts degree in May 2016. Currently working in the Veteran Services Office (VSO) at the college, he is enrolled at Texas A&M University-Commerce and taking classes at the Collin Higher Education Center. He is pursuing a bachelor of arts degree and plans to earn a master’s degree in counseling psychology.

Cummings joined the Air Force at 18 and was medically retired in 2010. A Security Forces member, similar to the Army’s military police, he was in the law enforcement branch of the Air Force. At Collin, he served as the treasurer and historian of the SVA.

Cummings said seeing the photos of those who lost their lives in the line of service to others, flanked by flags along the path, coupled with heartfelt conversations was a very moving experience.

“It is very humbling. Everyone was respectful of all of the lives that we walked. I was also encouraged because I would imagine some of the people in the photographs. I would think this is hard, but maybe this person was a Prisoner of War (POW) and he or she lasted longer than this hike will. It put my aches and pains into perspective—they are so small compared to those who served overseas or first responders’ daily lives. I encourage anybody that can make it out to at least see the displays to do this and find perspective,” he said.

## A Note from The Editor

Welcome to our Cougar News Veterans Special Edition. This newsletter was put together with the intent of honoring the student, faculty and staff who have served our country in the armed forces. The stories inside these pages are only a small glimpse into the breadth and diversity of our student veteran population and the programs

available to them, but we hope that they serve in some small measure to express the appreciation Collin College has for their service and sacrifice.

Look for more Cougar News Special Editions throughout the year, focusing on some of the other aspects of Collin College that make it a great place to learn and to work.

Until then, keep smiling toward the future.

### Cougar News contributors

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# Student Veterans of America share common bonds

Any change is easier with friends. In addition to being a pipeline for support and resources to Collin College's veteran students, the college's Student Veterans of America chapter offers a way for former and active military members to connect. The 100-plus member organization gives student veterans the opportunity to get involved in the college community while building new ties to other service members.

Cougar News spoke with Tyler Rawlinson, a Marine Corps veteran, former SVA vice president of communication and current SVA member, about the organization and its impact on his time at Collin College.

## What is Student Veterans of America (SVA)?

It is a social group to welcome veterans to the school, and we do things for veterans' awareness in the community. We also participate as a group in Carry The Load, a nationwide effort to raise money for families who have lost family members in the line of duty. It brings military veterans and active duty personnel together to hike as many miles as they can to raise money and awareness. We raised over \$1,400 for the fund last year. It's a good cause to be a part of.

## How were you introduced to the SVA?

I had (SVA advisor) Meredith Martin

as a professor in one of my history classes two semesters ago. I noticed she was very veteran friendly. She told us about a lot of activities related to veteran causes. I found out she was one of the people who ran the SVA on the faculty side and I got to know her pretty well. She asked me to volunteer for a few of these things. I did a speech for Memorial Day and I have been involved ever since.



**Tyler Rawlinson**

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## How has involvement in the SVA helped you?

Getting out of the military, you are on a kind of unknown foggy path. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. The fact is that you are so used to your

## Do you feel like you made some friendships you wouldn't have otherwise?

Oh yeah. There is always a stronger connection to people who you relate to and who have been through stuff that you've been through. Most of the student body hasn't been through those things. It's different for us.

## Did you learn about other things you wouldn't know about otherwise?

I wish I had known about the SVA before I started with my college journey. It would have saved me a lot of time and hassle getting my (veterans) benefits approved.

I suffered with my benefits when I first started school because I wasn't very knowledgeable about what the military offered veterans for school. It was a difficult transition to get them all approved. For others, the SVA is here to help them transition into college as smoothly as possible.

## Is there anything about the SVA you would like for people to know that you think they don't currently?

I think every veteran who is thinking about school should know about the SVA program. It's basically an organization of like-minded people. The SVA points them in the right direction with whatever their needs are. If you are having trouble transitioning into the civilian life, SVA will have the answers you need. People should know that we are here to help if you are kind of lost.

*Tyler Rawlinson is on track to graduate with an associate of science degree in December, at which point he will transfer to The University of Texas at Dallas to pursue a bachelor's degree in biology. He plans to attend medical school and then become a flight surgeon in the Navy.*

# McCrary continues life of public service

Eric McCrary is eager to give back.

It would be easy to make an argument that the 25-year U.S. Army veteran, now working as an audiovisual archives technician at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum has already given a lot to his country, but McCrary says he can do more.

"I am very happy where I am," he said. "I enjoy doing what I do, but my ultimate goal is to take whatever I have learned in the military and at Collin College and be able to give that back to my community."

As a student at Collin College, McCrary has continued to demonstrate his commitment to service by becoming involved with Student Veterans of America. He has served as the communica-

tions officer for Collin SVA, a role which dovetails into his studies at Collin.

"It was a great conduit, having the veterans group there, because it allowed me to talk to other people and say, 'Hey, it isn't just me,'" he said, pointing out the ways the SVA has helped him as well.

You can read more about McCrary's life in the November edition of *Allen Image*. The profile looks at a career which has carried him through Europe, into Afghanistan and into the White House, where he served as an audiovisual director/supervisor for the White House Communications Agency before leaving the Army for civilian life and his current position at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum.

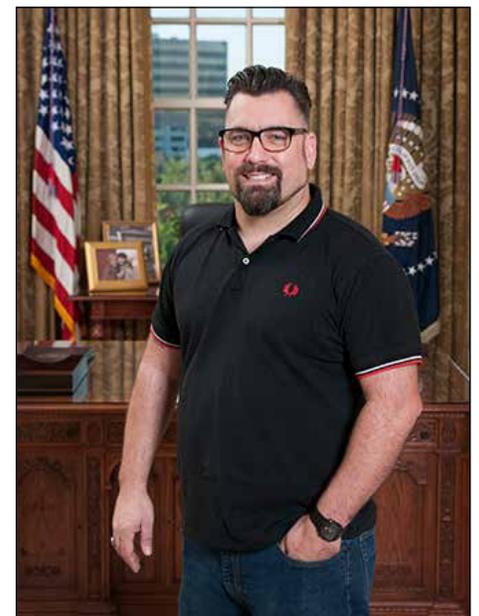


Photo by NICK YOUNG, COLLIN COLLEGE  
**Eric McCrary stands in the George W. Bush Presidential Library.**

# An interview with Associate Dean Torrey West

Torrey West, a captain in the Army Reserves and associate dean of Student and Enrollment Services at Spring Creek Campus (SCC), knows what it is like to serve others. A former community college student, he is simultaneously serving his country and Collin College students. In his role at the college, he oversees intramurals (this is coming soon to Collin College), fitness centers, athletic compliance and student life at SCC.

## What is your educational and military background?

Civilian Education: 1997-99 Hill Community College, 1999-2002 Arkansas Monticello, Bachelor of Arts degree in Physical Education, 2003-06 Texas Woman's University, Master of Arts degree in Arts & Teaching

Civilian Career at Collin College: 2003-06 assistant fitness center coordi-

nator, 2006-13 advisor, 2013-16 director of advising, associate dean of Student and Enrollment Services.

Military Education: 2010 Basic Training, 2010-11 Officer Candidate School (Commissioned January 19, 2011; 2011 Military Police school)

Military Career: 300 Sustainment Brigade: 2010 Operations officer, 2012 Movement Control officer 607th Military Police Battalion: 2013 Operations/Plans officer, 2015 Company Commander Headquarters Detachment

Current Rank: Captain

## What should everyone know about student services?

Our number one goal is to help each and every student reach his/her goals.

## Why did you join the military?

To serve.

## Why are you in the Reserves?

I get to serve my country as well

as work at Collin; it's the best of both worlds—"Twice the Citizen."



Torrey West

## Tell us about the Military Appreciation Ball and why you support it.

It is a chance for Collin College to show how much we appreciate those who serve and have served and to thank them for

their sacrifices.

## Why do you encourage student involvement on campus?

College is a place to learn, but it should also be fun. The more students get involved, the more fun they will have.

## HERRERRA

college took courage for this female veteran, but she took it step by step with Collin College's veteran-centered classes and assistance from her professors.

"The military was everything I knew. I had to learn how to adjust. My first semester was very difficult—just dealing with other students and the way they talked and treated people, the lack of respect issue. I struggled a lot in the beginning. For almost everybody, the first year out of the military all you want to do is go back," she said.

When Herrerra came to Collin College the institution did not have a student organization, so she and other veterans founded one, paving the way for future veterans.

"I took every veteran-only class I could get into. I loved them. The opportunity to know you are walking into a familiar environment of like-minded people is what led to building the Student Veteran Association," Herrerra said.

Today, Herrerra is a Collin County Health Department Outreach Worker who also serves in the National Guard. She helps patients with infectious diseases like tuberculosis.

"I like public health. In the military, everything we do is public health. We travel to third world countries. I learned at an early age that is the type of medicine that I like doing. Today, I do outreach work, and I work with a lot of immigrants. I am face to face with these people on a daily basis. They invite me into their homes and feed me breakfast. I have a very strong relationship with my patients."

Herrerra says her biology and biotech classes are invaluable because she has a greater understanding of how things work on a cellular and molecular level. She learned epidemiology and the life cycle of organisms, which is the foundation for her profession. But college classes have additional benefits for those who are serving in the military. They paved the way to a brighter future for those who have spent their lives in



Photo by NICK YOUNG, COLLIN COLLEGE

## Former Army medic Kayla Herrerra views college as a way to open doors to the future.

service to their country.

"College also helps me advance in my military career. Just moving through the enlisted ranks you need college. Even in the reserves of the National Guard, college can count towards your retirement. I had awesome professors and amazing classes I loved. I constantly recommend Collin College. I get approached a lot because people know what I used to do. I always tell them to start at Collin. There's no reason not to," Herrerra said.

From p. 1

# BENEFITS

From p. 1

thing yourself. Our goal here is to get them through the front door, show them how to do everything and, maybe on the next go round, they will be able to do everything for themselves.”

He said that the attention being paid to the beginning steps at Collin will pay off later if the students choose to go to a four-year university where programs like this one may not be as accessible.

That the one-on-one advising is coming from someone who has been in a similar situation means a lot, according to James Jackson, a business administration/management student registering at the Spring Creek Campus event and starting in the spring.

“I think it is very beneficial to veterans, especially if they haven’t been in school before,” Jackson said. “If they don’t have that experience, it is good to have someone here who knows about it and can relate to us being veterans. Being able to cross those lines is crucial. It makes the process simpler.”

That attention to veterans’ needs doesn’t end when they are registered for classes, however. The district’s efforts also extend into the classroom, with veteran-centered courses offered each semester. The classes are “military-friendly” with professors who are aware of special circumstances such as impending deployment of students, IRR status, VA regulations and GI Bill education benefits.

Students are also encouraged to use the Veterans Resource Center and its web page to access external resources and community partners, as well as connecting with the Student Veterans of America.

A veteran student who only wanted to be identified as April E. said she was glad that the staff and faculty work to make veterans feel comfortable.

“Welcoming, I guess would be a good word to use,” April said. “The people I’ve spoken to were very knowledgeable and I like that they honor veterans and think of veterans first.”

She said she was even approached

out of the blue to take part in Student Veterans of America’s Collin chapter.

“This woman saw my book bag on the floor and asked me if I was a veteran,” April said. “She’s emailed information, but I haven’t been able to make those meetings yet. I do like the fact that they seek out people.”

Meredith Martin, faculty advisor for the SVA, said the student organization can be a great resource for student veterans to find one another.

“There is camaraderie, a connection,” she said. “When you are on campus, there is someone who had the same type of experience.”

The SVA also offers its members a way to learn about events on campus that are relevant to veterans, including



Photo by COUGAR NEWS STAFF

**Col. William Duggins (USMC, ret.) was the guest speaker at Collin College’s 2015 Military Appreciation Ball. The ball is one way the college shows its regard for veterans and current service members.**

to our college and community resources, completing your core or your associate degree and going on to complete a bachelor’s degree. We want them to utilize GI Bill benefits to their maximum.”

Collin College’s commitment to military service members hasn’t gone unnoticed. The college was recently chosen as a “Top School” in the 2017 Military Advanced Education & Transition (MAE&T) Guide to Colleges and Universities research study. This is the fifth consecutive year that Collin College has received the honor. The guide is a research tool for service members, education services officers and

transition officers. Schools are evaluated by their achievement in military culture, financial aid, flexibility, general support services, on-campus support and online support services.

Last year, the college was named a “Military Friendly® School” by Victory Media and was honored as a “2016 Best for Vets College” for the second year in a row by *Military Times*.

## Veteran Publication Honors



\* MAE&T Top Schools 2017 Logo unavailable at press time

tutoring sessions and monthly SVA meetings, which Martin described as “coffee and donut and shop talk.” The organization’s efforts are all in service of a greater purpose, according to Martin.

“The goal here is ‘To, Through and Beyond,’” she said, echoing the focus from the American Council on Education Veterans Advising Symposium in 2016. “What we promote with the SVA is coming to Collin, getting connected

# Collin College celebrates with Veterans Week events

Free and open to the public, Collin College is celebrating Veterans Day with a week of activities Nov. 7 – 11 at campuses in Frisco, Plano and McKinney.

## District-Wide events

The following events will be held at the Preston Ridge Campus, 9700 Wade Boulevard in Frisco, Spring Creek Campus, 2800 E. Spring Creek Parkway in Plano and at the Central Park Campus, 2200 W. University Drive in McKinney.

### Blue Star Mother's Drive

*This organization collects backpacks and full-size toiletries for area veterans.* Monday-Friday, Nov. 7-11

### Photo Collage: Boots to Books

*View veteran-related submitted photos from Collin College students, faculty and staff.*

Monday-Friday, Nov. 7-11

Campus locations: Central Park

Campus Student Center, Preston Ridge Campus Founder's Hall Atrium and the Spring Creek Campus Veterans Services Office, Room D154

### Letters to Vets

*Write a letter to a veteran with stationery, stamps and mailing provided by Student Life.*

9 a.m.- 3 p.m., Monday, Nov. 7 Cen-

tral Park Campus Student Center

9 a.m.- 3 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 8 Preston Ridge Campus Founder's Hall

9 a.m.- 3 p.m., Wednesday, Nov. 9, Spring Creek Campus Atrium

### Film Screenings

"Citizen Soldier" at 6 p.m., Monday, Nov. 7, Preston Ridge Campus Conference Center

"Unmanned: America's Drone Wars" at 11:30 a.m., Tuesday, Nov. 8, Central Park Campus Conference Center B/C

"Citizen Soldier" at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Nov. 9, Spring Creek Campus, Room C103

### Veterans Day Barbecue

11:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Wednesday, Nov. 9 Central Park Campus atrium Preston Ridge Campus Conf. Center Spring Creek Campus atrium

### Preston Ridge Campus Events

"We Thank You for Your Service and Sacrifice" **Flags of Honor**, Monday-Friday, Nov. 7-11, Quad

"Tango Bravo: A Veterans' Photographic Exhibition" by Dr. Lupita Tinnen and Collin College Digital Photography Students, Monday-Friday, Nov.

7-11, PRC Library

"Honoring Those Who Served" **library display**, Monday-Friday, Nov. 7-11, PRC Library

"Thanking Those Who Served," **Bagels and Coffee** sponsored by the Global Diplomatic Society/Honors Institute, 9 a.m.-Noon., Monday, Nov. 7, Room F135

"Best Practices for Working with Disabled Veterans in the Classroom," **Lunch and Learn** presented by Amy Myrick, 2:30-3:30 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 8, Room F172

"The Significance of Service – Commemorating Veterans Day" presented by Zack Migura, Collin County Veterans Service Officer, 11:30 a.m.–Noon, Wednesday, Nov. 9, PRC Conference Center

"Veterans History Project" **Lunch and Learn** presented by Kim Nyman, 1-2 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 10, Room LH 129

### Central Park Campus Events

"Service Animals on Campus: My Life with Samba" presented by Professor Shawn Thomas, 1-2 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 9, Pike Hall





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Don't miss the  
Veterans Resource Fair!

Representatives from numerous college and community resources will be available in one locale for the convenience and ease of veterans and military-connected students.

**10 a.m. – 2 p.m.**  
**Tuesday, Nov. 15**  
**Spring Creek Campus atrium**  
**Free admittance and parking**

A few of the service providers that will be in attendance include:

- The Texas Veterans Commission
- The Veterans Center of North Texas
- Frisco VFW Post 8273
- Collin College Career Services
- United Parcel Service
- The Collin College Chapter of Student Veterans of America



Veterans Services Office  
VSO  
Collin College

To see a complete list of service providers, visit  
[www.collin.edu/gettingstarted/veterans/newsandupdates.html](http://www.collin.edu/gettingstarted/veterans/newsandupdates.html)