

‘Getting More Physical’

Student veterans at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., have been keeping active this academic year by hosting several events for the campus’s military-affiliated students

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A group of military-affiliated students in the nation’s capital have been getting more active.

They’ve been swinging hard on the driving range, lifting weights and kayaking the Potomac River.

The George Washington (GW) Veterans group, located at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., is a chapter of the Student Veterans of America (SVA). VFW and SVA have been partnering since 2013.

Much like VFW, SVA chapters host social events for its members. SVA members at George Washington say these events offer great opportunities to network in a community and help motivate chapter members.

“In the past year, we’ve been getting more physical with our events,” said Marine Corps veteran Christian Manning, an advisor for GW Veterans. “We’ve been pushing to do a lot more outdoor and wellness activities.”

Active Outdoors

Manning, a project manager for the GW Office of Military and Veteran Student Services, said a lot of the ideas for activities stem from GW Veterans members.

Manning, a Marine Corps Reserve veteran who served from 2010 to 2016, works for the university. His job is to plan community activities and establish partnerships with veteran advocates, as well as advise student veterans on campus.

“We do our best to do what the students want to do,” Manning said.

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Among the events GW Veterans has hosted this academic year were a day at a golf range in November at Top Golf in Ashburn, Va., a fishing trip in October in Chesapeake Bay and a kayaking event in September on the Potomac River in Washington, D.C.

The free kayaking event was hosted by GW Veterans and the Washington, D.C., chapter of the Sierra Club, an environmental organization. Students who participated paddled around Theodore Roosevelt Island on the Potomac. More recently, GW members tested their strength during a Valentine's Day-themed event called Swolemates. The powerlifting competition was a hit among members, said GW Veterans Vice President Ryan Welch.

Value in Being a Member

Welch, an Air Force veteran who served in the Iraq War, said he makes it a point to tell others about the value he received from VFW and SVA after he left active-duty service.

"Having that same community and support network of people you'd get in the military here at GW is something I try to tell everyone about," Welch said. "Whether someone served for four years or 10 years, I think a lot of people look for that community they had in the military. I think that's the purpose of a lot of our events."

Welch is studying mechanical engineering. He served 10 years in the Air Force as a mechanic for C-5 Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster aircrafts. As an airman, Welch served at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, Calif.; Naval Station Rota, Spain; and Joint Base Charleston, S.C. Welch also served on deployments to Iraq in October 2007-February 2008 and October 2008-February 2009 with the 521st Air Mobility Operations Group.

'Nostalgic' for Service

As a member of VFW Post 3150 in Arlington, Va., Welch said he enjoys being a part of GW Veterans and interacting with other veterans and newer students.

"It also gives me a chance to learn their story and what they did in the military," Welch said. "I think a lot of people become nostalgic for it after getting out. So, it's just good to have people to talk to. That's another value in being a part of a veterans' organization."

Welch said that GW Veterans events are often a great chance for him and other members to network.

"Some of the student veterans that are graduate students or have been around awhile have connections with other veterans' service organizations or internship opportunities," Welch said. "The overall goal that I have as GW Veterans vice president is to show the value that I got out of the organization when I started here after leaving the Air Force."

Advocating on the Hill

Tammy Barlet, a member of GW Veterans, was selected to be a part of the 2019 VFW-SVA

Legislative Fellowship. A total of 10 students are selected nationwide to be a part of the program.

Barlet, a graduate student at GW, heard about the fellowship while she was an undergraduate at Temple University in Philadelphia.

“It’s always been on my radar, but this year, it finally worked for my schedule,” Barlet said.

Barlet served in the Coast Guard from 1995 to 2003. She is a life member of VFW Post 216 in Hamburg, Pa. Barlet served as an operations specialist aboard USCGC Chase during patrols off the coasts of Alaska and Thailand, was deployed to the Persian Gulf in 1998 and earned the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal.

She also served shore duty at Sector Houston-Galveston in Texas. After she was discharged, she moved back to her home in Pennsylvania.

In 2017, she graduated from Temple University with a degree in public health. She currently is pursuing a master’s in public health with an emphasis in health policy at GW.

For the legislative fellowship, Barlet is advocating for VA dental care. She said she believes oral health and preventative care should be treated in the same manner as any other medical service veterans receive at VA facilities.

“I’ve been learning a lot,” Barlet said. “What I’m doing with my VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is falling right into my line with my school work.”

In March, as a part of the VFW-SVA Fellowship Program, Barlet met with lawmakers on Capitol Hill during the VFW Legislative Conference.

Barlet said working with VFW “has been a great experience.”

This article is featured in the May 2019 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.