

## RIVIER SALUTES VETERANS

Brad Wuorinen '06G\*  
(From: *Rivier Today*, Spring 2010)

Veterans choose Rivier to further their education and build community



Former military police and current elementary education major Patience McStravick has found the Rivier College campus a comfortable fit. (PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH)

“Rivier has that same family feel that the military does.” — Patience McStravick '11

It may have taken her five years of active duty serving as military police in the Army, but Rivier elementary education major **Patience McStravick '11** knows now that she wants to be a teacher. “I learned that this is how to fix things,” she explains. “It starts with the children.”

McStravick spent a year of her service patrolling the streets, schools, and orphanages of Faluja, Iraq, and will never forget the faces of the children she met there. “The kids were initially scared of us,” she says. “And for a while they thought I was a male soldier with long hair.”

After building trust with the children of Iraq and witnessing the stressful conditions they lived in, McStravick saw that despite mimicking the anti-American beliefs the adults around them held, these children truly had nothing to do with the war. Instead, she saw them as the unfortunate victims. “There is no doubt that my military experience will shape the way I will be as a teacher,” McStravick says.

After completing her active duty, McStravick moved to Litchfield, New Hampshire with her husband, also a U.S. Army veteran, and began researching the next stage of her life. Taking advantage of the U.S. government’s vocational-rehabilitation program, she explored going to college to become a teacher. After a dissatisfying experience at another institution, McStravick was recommended to Rivier by her voc-rehab case worker and Rivier alum, George Kimball '95G. With Kimball’s guidance, McStravick found her enrollment at Rivier an immediate fit. “Rivier is a great school and everyone is concerned with the bigger picture. I can really see how my degree from Rivier can impact the world.”

McStravick’s transition to college life has been virtually seamless at Rivier. Through working with the Veterans Association and the Rivier Business Office, McStravick explains that “everything just works here.” She is delighted that staff knows who she is when she arrives and know exactly what she needs for her veteran’s assistance program. She cites the support of every staff person and faculty member she has met at Rivier in allowing her transition to be completely successful.



Air Force veteran Joseph Cusson is greeted by Sr. Jeanne Perreault, p.m. during a veterans prayer service.

Like McStravick, **Joseph Cusson '10** arrived at Rivier after many years of military service around the world. Cusson served 20 years in the Air Force before finding himself pursuing a degree in business administration as a veteran. While attending an information session at Rivier, Cusson spoke with Assistant Director of Graduate and Undergraduate Evening Admissions Claudia Zent who put him at ease by explaining that he would have his degree before he knew it. “I’m still working on it,” says Cusson, “but I’m not that far away.” Cusson applauds Zent’s efforts in helping him collect and submit the proper paperwork, including military and college transcripts, to jump start his transition to Rivier. Cusson also credits Financial Aid Coordinator Kathy Phillbotte and Director of Financial Aid Valerie Patnaude for providing exceptional assistance in his experience at the College. “They helped me obtain the new G.I. Bill benefits that I use to pay for my tuition and books,” Cusson explains. “I did not feel any other school was right for me, until I got to Rivier.”

Anticipating the August 2009 implementation of the new post 9/11 G.I. Bill, Rivier prepared for an influx of veterans returning to the region looking to attend college at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In 2008, President

William Farrell commissioned a committee to initiate a campus-wide discussion on how to best serve this population. The committee, chaired by Vice President for Enrollment Management David Boisvert and vice chair and Veterans Coordinator Sister Joan Joyal, evaluated the need to create an environment that would allow veteran students to meet their educational goals.

In addition to workshops for faculty and staff, the College organized a Veterans Transition Team to aid veterans in pursuing degrees at Rivier. Headed by Chief Information Officer Bill Schleifer (USMC retired), the team aims to simplify processes for incoming veteran students, including admissions, financial aid, course enrollment, advising, and disability services.

As well as working with all G.I. Bill-qualified students, the College is also a member of the Yellow Ribbon Program which covers all additional costs outside of the standard G.I. Bill. Such offerings make Rivier a true military-friendly college, as officially recognized this past Fall by *G.I. Jobs* magazine (an acknowledgment bestowed upon the top 15% of American colleges, universities, and technical schools).

As the number of veterans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan increases in the years ahead, Rivier is poised to welcome them to campus and provide them with the easiest transition possible from military service to college life. In addition to embracing the new G.I. Bill and vocational rehabilitation services through the U.S. military, the College can offer veterans an academic and social experience many larger schools cannot. “Being in the military is very much like being a part of a family. Rivier has that same family feel that the military does,” McStravick says. “Just like during my time in the service, I feel a deep-seeded sense of community here.” ■

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\* **BRAD WUORINEN '06G** is a Graphic Designer in the Office of Marketing & Communications at Rivier College.