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National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission

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VA's vow to Add 23 New Vet Centers by 2009, Comes a Year Early

The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Dr. James B. Peake recently announced the expansion of VA's Vet Centers, whose mission is to provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to returning combat veterans.

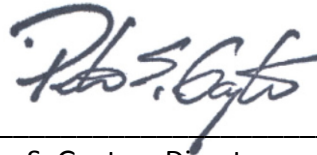
In 2007, VA announced it would open 23 new centers by 2009. Fifteen of those centers, already operational, are permanently located cities within the following states, to include, Binghamton, Middletown, and Watertown, New York; Hyannis, Connecticut; DuBois, Pennsylvania; Gainesville and Melbourne, Florida; Macon, Georgia; Manhattan, Kansas; Escanaba and Saginaw, Michigan; Grand Junction, Colorado; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Killeen, Texas; and Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Five additional Vet Centers are currently providing services in temporary spaces until their leases are finalized. Those locations are in Montgomery, Alabama; Modesto, California; Fort Myers, Florida; Toledo, Ohio; and Everett, Washington. The final three locations, which are scheduled to open for clients later this year, are in Berlin, New Hampshire, Nassau County, New York, and Fayetteville, Arkansas.

The VA is working to meet the goal of a total 232 Vet Centers by the end of 2008. To support the expansion and augment the staff at 61 current Vet Centers, General Peake reported VA will channel a 44 percent increase in funding to the Readjustment Counseling Service, which operates the Vet Centers. This increase is reported to be \$50 million more than last year's budget.

The Vet Centers recently hired 100 Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) returnees as outreach specialists. Often placed near military processing stations, their duties include meeting with and briefing returning servicemen and women leaving the military on VA benefits, working through family assistance centers, and visiting military

installations to carry the message that, “VA will be there for the troops and family members after discharge”.



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