

News Release

For immediate release

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Bringing Worlds Together: Free Conference for Veterans, Family Members, and Community

Farmington- There will be a free conference for veterans, their families, and health professionals at the University of Maine Farmington Campus on Saturday, September 15, from 9am – 4:30pm. Hosted by Tri-County Mental Health Services with support from the United Way of the Tri-Valley Area, Americorps Vista, and many community volunteers, the Conference will offer 20 different workshops on topics ranging from legal issues and re-integrating into family and community life to traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress, as well as two dynamic Keynote speakers.

“The conference is all about community, as far as I’m concerned. Whether we support the wars or not, we have to realize that the soldiers returning from them are not just going to slip comfortably back into their old lives without some assistance from their fellow citizens. They have been changed in ways that defy understanding for those who have not gone through the same passage themselves,” says Doug Rawlings of Chesterville, a Vietnam Veteran, Tri-County Board Member, and one of the conference organizers. The most important aspect, Rawlings says, is the community outreach. “It will be a forum for a community to gather and to show that we all care about one another and that we all must work together to heal from these wars.”

For the past year, Tri-County Mental Health Services has expanded its efforts beyond simply providing treatment services to veterans by doing active outreach and building connections among veteran serving organizations. “Our goal is to remove barriers and strengthen the supports available to vets and family members across Maine,” says TCMHS Executive Director Catherine Ryder.

The agency is host to Jerry DeWitt, another Vietnam Era Veteran working as a Vista Volunteer, who is a driving force in the outreach and conference planning. “This conference will show the many paths each of us might take to find our way back home from service life to civilian life,” he says.

For more information and to register for this free conference, visit www.tcmhs.org or call Jerry DeWitt at 783-9141 x 228. Travel expense scholarships are available through Veterans For Peace. Contact Doug Rawlings at 778-7292 or rawlings@maine.edu.

About the Keynotes:

ANNE FREUND, PH.D, AUTHOR OF “TAMING THE FIRE WITHIN: LIFE AFTER WAR”

Anne Freund, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist who has been practicing since 1989. She graduated from Duke University with a Bachelor’s in Psychology and from the University of Florida with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. Dr. Freund completed her internship at the VA in Bay Pines, FL. She has been with the Department of Veterans Affairs since 2005. Prior to that she worked with law enforcement and first responders as part of a Critical Incidence Stress Debriefing Team. Dr. Freund began conducting PTSD

support groups in 2005, shortly after arriving at the VA. The book is written for all generations of warriors in a down-to-earth, straightforward style. It discusses and explains the natural reactions virtually all war veterans experience after they return from the war zone.

MATTHEW PENNINGTON– SOLDIER, SPEAKER, FILMMAKER

Raised along the coast of Maine and in the north central plains of Texas, Matthew Pennington joined the Army at 17, where he served for six years with three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. While serving he worked his way up to be a team leader for a communications switch with 51st signal battalion and performed various mission-essential courier duties. At the age of 23, Matthew’s humvee was hit by IED in Iraq. He was honorably discharged as a Sergeant and received both the State of Maine Silver Star and the Purple Heart, among various other medals. Now living in Maine, Matthew recently made his acting debut starring in the short film “A Marine’s Guide to Fishing”. The film portrays an injured veteran’s transition back into the workplace while coping with his loss one year later on his ‘alive day’.

Tri-County Mental Health Services is Maine’s most comprehensive agency dealing with the psychological and social well-being of children, adults, and elders, serving more than 11,000 people each year. This year the agency marks its 60th year of providing innovative programs and services addressing mental health, substance abuse, mental retardation/developmental disabilities, autism, and more. Its philosophy of building toward recovery and sensitivity to traumatic experiences of consumers gives hope to individuals, families, and communities in Androscoggin, Northern Cumberland, Franklin, Oxford and York counties. For more information, visit www.tcmhs.org or call 1-888-304-HOPE(4673).

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