

UNSUNG HEROES

“We’ve Got Your Back”—Online Community Brings America’s Veterans Together

(NAPSA)—Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and the Ad Council have launched a new series of national public service advertisements (PSAs) as part of their Veteran Support campaign, which aims to ease the readjustment challenges facing Iraq and Afghanistan veterans as they transition from combat to civilian life.

The PSAs encourage new veterans to join IAVA’s online community at www.iava.org, a social network exclusively for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. In the community, veterans can connect with one another, share their experiences, receive advice and support and get access to critical resources and special offers. The campaign also includes a complementary series of ads and a Web site, www.supportyourvet.org, directed at the families and friends of these veterans.

Of the nearly 2 million veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, 20 percent have screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, and 19 percent suffer from a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Additionally, according to the U.S. Department of Defense, more than 230 active soldiers, airmen and Marines committed suicide last year, which is the highest military suicide statistic in nearly 30 years.

Research shows that many veterans avoid seeking help because of the stigma associated with treatment or fear of being diagnosed with a mental illness. By maintaining relationships and



Veterans can get advice online on returning to civilian life.

communicating regularly with others who have shared experiences, veterans are better able to reconnect with their friends, families and communities more broadly. Since its inception, the site has been visited over 700,000 times.

“This historic campaign is literally saving lives. By giving Iraq and Afghanistan veterans a community of their own, they are able to connect and support one another in a way that wasn’t possible before,” said IAVA executive director Paul Rieckhoff.

“For the longest time I felt like I was the only one going through things, but through this community I found otherwise. No matter what our deployment jobs, service or experiences were, we still share the places we went. Whether I am having a good day or a bad day, I know this is the place I can come to for encouragement and support,” said Afghanistan veteran and IAVA community member Laurie Emmer.

The ads communicate to veterans that they are not alone and that their fellow veterans “have their back.”