Making Waves
The UCLA women's aquatic team is a true talent pool
Saluting Those Who Serve and Have Served

On campus and across the country, UCLA works to support veterans and their families in many different ways in a tradition that stretches back to the end of World War II.

By UCLA Chancellor Gene Block

FROM OUR INCEPTION as a public university in 1919 — nearly 100 years ago — UCLA has pursued a three-part mission: education, research and service. A strong public service ethic is a vital part of our institutional DNA. It animates everything we do — from conducting research that addresses important societal challenges, to providing an affordable, world-class educational opportunity for our students, to emphasizing the importance of volunteer service to the nation and the community.

That’s why every year on UCLA Volunteer Day, thousands of new Bruins fan out across Los Angeles to volunteer at schools, parks and other sites, giving back to the community and learning the importance of service. I’m especially proud that UCLA does so much to salute and support our nation’s veterans and members of the military. We should do everything we can to serve those who have sacrificed so much on behalf of our country.

Last year, I launched a yearlong Veterans Initiative to heighten awareness about the hurdles that veterans encounter in adjusting to civilian life and the impressive skills and experience they acquired while in uniform. The initiative was also intended to build awareness about UCLA programs, research projects and services that support veterans.

To highlight veterans’ issues, last April we co-hosted a forum on campus with Zócalo Public Square called “How Are Veterans Changing America?”

UCLA has an ongoing relationship with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) dating back nearly 70 years — since the end of World War II — and we are inextricably linked in research, teaching and patient care across nearly every medical discipline. Prior to construction of the UCLA Hospital in 1955, the VA hospital just across the 405 freeway from campus was one of our major teaching hospitals.

Today, more than 400 of our medical school faculty, as well as 350 medical school students on rotation, provide care to 3,000 individual patients each year at the VA in virtually every discipline, including neurology, ophthalmology, psychiatry and cardiology — to name just a few.

All of our health professional schools — Dentistry, Nursing and Public Health — also have relationships with the VA. Students enrolled in the Master of Social Welfare program at the Luskin School of Public Affairs also train and provide services at the VA.

One of our most well-known and singular programs is Operation Mend, through which UCLA has spent more than $11.5 million providing reconstructive surgery to active and retired U.S. military personnel who were injured and disfigured in Iraq and Afghanistan. Operation Mend was established in 2007 through a partnership between Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center Board and Executive Committee member Ronald A. Katz ’58 and his late wife, Maddie.

The Katz family has been a critical partner in our efforts to help veterans and service members, and this past fall they further enhanced that commitment. The Ronald A. Katz Center for Collaborative Military Medicine will be the first university-based military medicine center on the West Coast, thanks to a generous multimillion-dollar gift donated by Dr. Katz’s two sons to honor their father. The center provides a nexus for the numerous UCLA research projects and services designed to help our service men and women, enabling various programs and researchers to better collaborate with the military to help those wounded in combat.

The center will be led by retired U.S. Army Gen. Peter Chiarelli, who served as the 32nd Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.

The Katz Center’s work will extend across campus to such areas as the UCLA Brain Injury Research Center, whose director, Neurosurgery Professor David Hovda, received the U.S. Army’s 2011 Strength of the Nation Award for exemplary public service that makes a substantial contribution to the U.S. Army’s mission.

Hovda’s breakthrough research led to a system for diagnosing and recovering from traumatic brain injury on the battlefield, as well as establishment of a national institute dedicated to enhancing Americans’ understanding of the invisible wounds soldiers have suffered.

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that I was ready to come back.”

Stebbins — a graduate of Yale University (1996) and a former member of the Bulldog diving team — is in his 16th year as UCLA’s head coach. Along with McNamara and Guzman, his team includes sophomores Montana Monahan and Maggie Denison (whose status at publication time was uncertain), and the two promising freshmen, Danni Repper and Annika Lenz.

He describes Lenz, a former gymnast whose three sisters also dive, as “a game-time kid.”

The versatile diver is equally comfortable on springboard or platform. “It’s pretty scary when you get up [on the 10-meter platform], but it’s a mentally challenging sport,” Lenz says. “It’s cool because not very many people do it. It’s really exciting when you get the dive off and you get it right.”

With McNamara and Guzman still recovering from their injuries, Stebbins downplays the importance of UCLA’s No. 9 ranking in recruiting.

“All of that stuff is just potential, and potential is great, but it means absolutely nothing on Saturday. When the lights come on and you have to race or dive against the kid next to you, that’s your reality,” he says. “Even at No. 9 — I don’t think our goal is to be ninth in the country. That would be a nice step up from where we’ve been, but I think we have aspirations to do things at a higher level.”

RISING TO THE TOP

The women of UCLA’s swimming and diving team are extremely close-knit, which should benefit them when they travel to the NCAA Championship at the University of Minnesota in March. But no matter how they finish, it’s clear that they believe they are part of something very special.

“I love being around people who have such a passion for what they do and are committed to each other, to themselves and to their own improvement,” says senior captain Anna Senko, a mid-distance swimmer. “It’s a great environment that I feel so privileged to be a part of every day. We’re all very similar, but we’re also very different, and I’ve learned so much from everyone else on the team. Everyone brings something different, and how it all comes together is just really cool to see.”

suffered while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As much as we work to heal wounded warriors’ bodies and minds, we are also dedicated to healing their spirit and supporting their families.

The Nathanson Family Resilience Center conducts research and offers various programs for military families facing the challenges of deployment and the return home. Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS) is offered at military bases across America, helping improve the lives of families facing the loss of a parent or parental depression, medical illness and wartime exposure. The Nathanson Center also helps families strengthen and renew family relationships in National Parks through the National Military Family Association’s Operation Purple Camps.

In addition, we have a responsibility to the more than 400 UCLA students who are veterans and active-duty military on campus. That’s why our Veterans Resource Office provides support for student veterans transitioning from military service to college life, helping them navigate our campus and providing mentoring from other student veterans so that they have the tools they need to succeed personally and academically.

We also help some student veterans manage the costs of their education. Through the Yellow Ribbon Program, the UCLA Anderson School of Management and the UCLA School of Law provide eligible student veterans with tuition waivers or a grant matched by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Anderson also offers the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities, an innovative program that provides free training in small-business management for disabled veterans. It was, in fact, recognized by the Department of the Army in 2009 as a national “best practice” program for soldiers and their families.

I’m proud to say that UCLA was selected recently as a top military-friendly school by Military Advanced Education, which publishes an annual Guide to Military-Friendly Colleges and Universities.

Through all these programs, UCLA demonstrates our deep commitment to serving veterans. We have an obligation to support those who have worn the uniform and borne the battle — to use Abraham Lincoln’s apt phrase — to safeguard our nation and our precious liberties.