

Community Building Supports launching a Vibrant GI Coffee House

GI Voice is an organization that supports soldiers and their families by providing resources to help veterans and active duty soldiers dealing with health problems and other issues related to military service, including Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and suicide. *GI Voice* also provides information on counseling services and jobs for veterans.

The **GI Voice Project** has three aspects to its approach to promoting GI rights. **GIvoice.com** is the first tier of our service. It is an Internet website that provides a forum for soldiers, veterans, and their families to speak out about their experiences. It also provides a wealth of information on GI rights, as well as links to organizations that provide counseling, marital, health care and other services.

The second element is **GIradio.org**, an online radio station streaming music, information, and unfiltered news to soldiers around the globe.

The third effort is the **GI Coffee House**, which we will be opening later this Fall. The Coffee House will be a meeting place for soldiers to learn about their rights and about specific resources available to them.

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The idea of a Coffee House has sparked the energy of many groups from New York, and Texas, to Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia. Following the press conference in Seattle August 5th, we have had an outpouring of support and offers to help open the doors of the yet unnamed Coffee House. Offers include espresso machines, cash register, furniture, supplies to run a coffee cart, computers for research and information, bar stools, and offers of coffee to be sold to the public, as a way to support the business. One woman who has been through a lot with her veteran husband, has offered to assist with disability counseling, and filling out forms. Other offers have poured in with support in the area of management skills, and training of baristas. A couple of locations are under consideration, and research into initial opening costs are near completion.

All that is needed now are funds to ensure the health of the business for its first six months. To help us with donations, we need substantive amounts to pay the Health Department and local city council for necessary permits, and for rent. It's also possible for working people to make small monthly donations, which will be tremendously helpful.

There are three ways to send donations to the Coffee House. At <http://GIvoice.org> there is a button on the top left of the home page. Click there to make a direct donation using a credit card—or, if you prefer, you can mail a check to "GI Voice" and the mailing address is at the website. Alternatively, if people want their donations to be tax-deductible, they can make the check out to Seattle Draft & Military Counseling Center (or SDMCC for short). SDMCC has agreed to serve as a fiscal sponsor for the Internet cafe, and 100% of the donation will go directly to the cafe (we're not taking a fiscal sponsor fee).

A fundraiser for the Coffee House will be held at 7 PM on August 25, at the Richard Hugo House, 1634 11th Avenue, in Seattle. Hugo House is just one block east of Seattle Central Community College, directly north of Cal Anderson Park. Parking is challenging in this part of town, so please arrive early, and carpool or bus if possible. We will be joined at the fundraiser by Tod Ensign, director of Citizen Soldier, which sponsors the Different drummer Internet Café near Ft Drum in upstate New York. Tod will share what he has learned working with families and soldiers over the past two years in a setting similar to the one we are planning for the GI Coffee House at Ft Lewis.

“Soldiers need information, resources and support - more than 25,000 men and women in the military live and work near Ft Lewis... I will personally challenge my family to raise \$1,000 for this project and encourage others concerned about soldiers’ well-being to do the same. ” -Alex Bacon, Board Chair of Seattle Draft & Military Counseling Center and G.I. Rights Network Advisory Committee Member

Our goal for the GI Coffee House is to have a long-term self-sustaining project—a safe place for soldiers, family members and veterans to gather and talk.