



Colchester Coffee House Summary

March 16, 2024

Cragin Memorial Library: Norton Room A

The meeting was attended by thirteen community members who represented the U.S. Army, Navy, Marines and CT National Guard branches of service. Also in attendance were sitting State Representatives, Colchester's First Selectman, and candidates for State Rep Offices. The meeting was opened by E. Lyme Vet Rep, Brian Burrridge, with the Pledge of Allegiance and invocation.

Colchester Vet Rep and U.S. Army Veteran, Mary Emerling, provided opening remarks thanking the veterans for their attendance as well as service to our country. Mary also encouraged attendees to inform their veteran peers of future Coffee House events and stressed the desire to see more females and younger veterans, who may be missing out on important benefits, in attendance.

Colchester Selectman, Bernie Dennler, welcomed the attendees to the coffee house, thanked them for their service and invited members to contact him with inquiries regarding Colchester and Veteran matters.

Brian Burrridge, U.S. Navy/National Guard Veteran, provided an overview of [Ten Things You Can Do for Veterans](#) which provides a variety of things one can do to support and/or advocate for military veterans. Topics included, but were not limited to: health care, trained dogs for support with PTSD, veteran caregiver support, tax exemptions, and legislative work around

veteran issues. Burrridge's biggest takeaway was getting the word out about all the benefits veterans may be missing out on.

Emerson Goodrich, a Veterans Affairs employee out of Willimantic, also spoke about the importance of enrolling in the VA health care system. Enrollment opens up a variety of possible benefits from primary care providers, treatment options, and more. Click here for online access to the application: [VA Health Care Enrollment form](#)

State Representative and U.S. Navy Veteran, Mark DeCaprio also spoke about working on 20+ items of legislation he is currently working on that are veterans issues. Click on #9 of [Ten Things You Can Do for Veterans](#) to read more about just a few.

State Senate Candidate, Jeffery Duigou, also spoke about his family history with the military and how profoundly it was impacted by the adverse effects of PTSD. He moves to continue working on matters around mental health support and advocacy.

The online Warriors for Warriors site can provide more information around the topic of PTSD, suicide, pain and addiction. Click here for access: <https://warriorsforwarriors.us/>

(The June 15th Coffee House will be dedicated to providing our Veteran attendees training in QPR. QPR is a 90 minute educational program designed to teach lay persons the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to respond).

The meeting also included a good deal of humor and camaraderie as veterans poked at branches of service other than their own and told stories of their own military experiences. All in all it was a great start for what we hope will be an enjoyable and informative event for our Veterans in the future.