Manchester, N.H. – VA in partnership with NEHSA and MSR held the 8th Annual Women Veterans Ski Appreciation Day for women Veterans of all ages and abilities on March 7th.

Misty rain did not stop dampen the spirits of the women Veteran who bravely served this country. They enjoyed sloop-side comradery, shared laughs and gave one another a hand. Lift attendants, ski patrol, guests and volunteers showed their appreciation by wearing ribbons. For some participants, skiing was a first-time experience, others were well versed and some enjoyed the day with the support of adaptive equipment and helping hands.

Women Veterans who receive their care at a VA New England Healthcare Systems facility were appreciated and saluted on the slopes of MSR. The all-female volunteers from NEHSA and VA medical center staff were on hand to support special needs at the 8th annual event attended by 23 women Veteran participants.

“What a difference…they [women Veteran participants] come in to register in the morning a bit like deer in the headlights not knowing what to expect,” said Kathy Muller, NEHSA Volunteer. “When they come in after skiing they are bright-faced, with messed hair and all smiles!” For many years, NEHSA has held a Veterans Winter Ski Clinic in January. Eight years ago, NEHSA designated Women Veterans Ski Appreciation Day as a way of offering a safe place for women who may enjoy the comfort of a female only atmosphere, or who may have Post-traumatic Stress Disorder or experienced Military Sexual Trauma.
“Last year I participated and it is so good to see new women Veterans enjoying physical activities and making new friendships,” said Pauline Nadeau, USAF, Chief Master Sergeant. Pauline gets her care at Manchester VA and was happy to introduce everyone as a returning program participant. She partnered with Deborah Doucette, also an Air Force Veteran who shared, “being out in the fresh air with friends and familiar faces means so much, it is an honor to be recognized as a woman Veteran.”

“Oh it is amazing despite the rain. I would come under any circumstances,” said Lauren Harcarik, US Navy Veteran. “It is something special to have this first-time experience with women Veterans and Instructors.”

“Program growth over the years has been truly amazing,” said Angela Neilson, business manager, NEHSA. “As a result of our robust volunteer team and partnership with the VA, NEHSA is equipped to support all abilities in a range of varied physical activities. I would invite everyone to explore what our participants and volunteers get to be part of; the opportunity to Witness the Triumph of the Human Spirit.”

Tony Santilli, also known as “Two-turn Tony”, was one of the Vietnam Veteran NEHSA Founders. NEHSA was originally founded with Veteran partners in Vermont and a year later, in 1973, relocated to MSR, Sunaape, New Hampshire. Like many Veterans the founders wanted to create a safe and accepting place for Veterans to heal through activities that support wellness, like skiing and water sports. Mr. Santilli is no longer with us, but his dreams of Veteran value, wellness, respect, and enjoyed comradery are alive and well.

For more information about programs at NEHSA go to: www.NEHSA.org. Veterans learn more about healthcare and services that await you at: www.Manchester.VA.gov

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