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Retired Army general aims to lead chiropractors at Myrtle Beach convention

By Steve Jones - sjones@thesunnews.com

MYRTLE BEACH -- The S.C. Chiropractic Association will get what may be its highest-profile advocate during its convention in Myrtle Beach this week.

In return, retired U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Becky Halstead will be seeking supporters for one of her causes.

Halstead, the first American woman to command in combat at the strategic level, wants to increase the presence of chiropractic medicine on military bases and at Veterans Administration facilities, and she's hoping her speech at the association's convention will increase the number of voices urging the military to do so.



Halstead retired from the Army because of chronic fibromyalgia, a condition known for its constant pain and fatigue, and her weekly visits to a chiropractor bring her relief and peace she can't find elsewhere.

"The chiropractic community helped me get through my own battle," Halstead said in an interview last week.

She said that six years ago, she started seeing a chiropractor a couple of times a year at the suggestion of her father, and her visits became regular once she developed fibromyalgia.

"Every time I went to a chiropractor," she said, "I walked out of there feeling better."

It was a suggestion from her mother decades earlier that led Halstead to the military and a place in history.

A high school athlete and student leader, Halstead thought she was headed into a career as a gym teacher when her mother told her about a newspaper article saying the Army was looking for women to apply to West Point, the U.S. Army academy in New York state, where Halstead grew up.

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Halstead realized she had the characteristics the article said the Army wanted in applicants, and she told her mother she would apply if her mother helped her with the paperwork. The joint effort led to her appointment to the academy as a member of the second West Point class that included women.

Halstead said that during her first year at the academy, she frequently questioned her decision, particularly as she heard her high school classmates talk of the fun they were having in college while she was grinding through what is a very rigorous education path.

But she had made a commitment and she persevered, moving four years later into the world of an Army officer. She progressed through the ranks as expected until she got an early appointment to the rank of major and then an early appointment to colonel, a step she said is rare.

Her tenure as a general included a tour in Iraq where she commanded 20,000 military personnel and 5,000 civilians providing supply, maintenance, transportation and distribution to more than 250,000 personnel serving there.

She said she never felt that anyone in the U.S. Army treated her differently because she was a woman.

After she retired from the Army, Halstead founded a company called STEADFAST Leadership from which she does motivational speaking and teaches people how to become leaders.

Rule No. 1: The first person you must lead is yourself.

Rule No. 2: Discipline yourself.

Halstead said leaders who are in it for the rewards it brings them are on the wrong track. The greatest rewards she got as an Army officer was to watch those who served under her become leaders themselves.

She is convinced that chiropractic medicine has many benefits for U.S. military personnel, and that's

why she wants to see its presence increased at bases and VA facilities.

She believes, for instance, that a chiropractor can help those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress (the military drops the word "disorder" in its classification).

Conway chiropractor Daniel Faulk, who will take the reins as president of the state association at the close of this week's convention, explained that mental conditions such as PTSD can cause physical problems that a chiropractor can relieve.

In addition, Faulk said he believes that chiropractors spend more time with their patients than doctors in traditional medicine and often act as counselors for people who are ailing.

"Sometimes that's what a person needs," he said, "someone who cares."

Halstead said the military approved chiropractic medicine for payment from its insurance in 2000, but still only about 25 percent of bases and VA facilities have them available.

That's not enough, she said, and she is now a leader in the fight to increase the percentage.

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