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## *Around Annapolis:* Eastport resident honored for never-stop attitude

By DIANE M. REY

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Some people just keep going and going ... like Laura Copland of Eastport.

Her never-quit spirit earned her the top civilian award bestowed by the Maryland National Guard earlier this year and, more recently, it landed her among 100 semifinalists in the Energizer Keep Going Hall of Fame.

Already busy as the director of Behavioral Health Disaster Services and Veteran's Initiative for the state of Maryland, Laura took on additional responsibilities for providing mental health support services to members of the Maryland Army and Air National Guard and their families.

She developed the mental health curriculum used in the Guard's Reintegration Academies. The program is modeled after one in Minnesota called "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon."

Between 1,300 and 1,500 combat veterans from Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Kuwait have worked their way through the academies since they began late last year, Laura



Courtesy photo

Laura Copland of Eastport receives the Maryland Army and Air National Guard's Maryland Meritorious Civilian Service Medal. Presenting the award are Col. David Carey, left, and Brig. Gen. Alberto Jiminez.

said.

To meet that kind of workload, Laura worked with a small group to recruit and train a team of 100 licensed therapists - psychologists, social workers and counselors - to work directly with returning troops and their families.

The program provides information and support at every step of the way: before and during deployment, and at 30- and 60-day intervals following the soldiers' return. The final step, at 90 days, is a health assessment at the Baltimore Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

On June 28, at the Baltimore Convention Center, 640 soldiers and their guests will gather for their 60-day presentation.

Lt. Col. Michael Gafney, the reintegration officer in charge for the Maryland National Guard, said the 30- and 60-day presentations by the counseling staff are the "meat and potatoes" of the Reintegration Academies program.

"We're the only state that gets professional people to do the presentations," he said.

Without help and intervention, mental health problems can manifest themselves in a number of ways, from road rage and domestic violence to suicide, Laura said. After the intensity of combat and close quarters of military service, feelings of isolation are commonplace, she said.

"You're not around your buddies. You're not around the people who went through this experience with you," she said. "You're at risk."

She said the Maryland National Guard is at the forefront nationally in helping combat veterans readjust to civilian life.

"They really made mental health a priority," she said.

Laura works for the State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, where her primary job is helping Maryland families deal with the trauma that follows natural disasters. She commutes from Annapolis to her office at the Clifton T. Perkins Hospital Center in Jessup.

Dr. Stephen Curran, a police psychologist in Towson with an office in Crofton, served

on the training staff for the National Guard outreach project and nominated Laura for the Energizer award.

He said her success in pushing the project forward, and pulling in practicing therapists to help, was inspiring.

"It's not an easy task to get people to work toward the same goal," he said. "What she's doing for Maryland is a huge effort."

For her contributions, the Maryland National Guard in April presented her with the State of Maryland Meritorious Civilian Service Medal at a ceremony in Annapolis.

A native of Long Island, Laura worked in New Hampshire before settling here three years ago. She holds a master's degree in counseling psychology from Antioch University.

Although she doesn't consider herself a Type A personality, when she has a passion for something, "I go, go, go," she said.

Although she's trim and active at age 58, she was forced to slow down following a heart attack in March. The experience highlighted for her the importance of finding a good work-life balance, she said.

For stress relief, she heads to the water.

"I have a kayak and I throw it over the (Naval Academy) seawall when I get home from work," she said. She also enjoys camping with her family, going out to dinner with friends and singing popular, blues and jazz music. "I am looking for a guitar or piano player who would like to get together for jam sessions," she said.

Although she didn't make it into the group of Top 10 finalists for the Energizer award, Laura said being recognized for her work on a national stage was still a thrill. Seven residents of the Baltimore area made it to the semifinal round, the most of any city, organizers said.

The winner, who will receive a \$10,000 cash prize, will be determined by public vote at [www.energizer.com/halloffame](http://www.energizer.com/halloffame). Voting ends July 25.

Determination and perseverance also are paying off for Annapolis Cove resident

Suzanne Cary - and for poor children half a world away.

Suzanne is trying to raise \$20,000 by the end of the year to help improve the lives of Cambodia orphans through an organization called "Off the Mat, Into the World," which was started by nationally known yoga teacher Seane Corn. The organization is working with the Cambodian Children's Fund to rescue children from a garbage dump in Phnom Penh and bring in clean water.

Suzanne must raise the money by the end of the year to qualify for a two-week work trip to the area in February.

When Suzanne was profiled in this column in March, she had raised about \$2,500. Now that the year is half gone, she is thrilled to report that she's just about at the halfway mark of meeting her goal. Her current fundraising level stands at \$9,500.

She hopes to sprint toward the finish line by holding a Wellness Day for the public from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 29 at Ridgely Retreat, 203 Ridgely Ave. in West Annapolis.

Local yoga and reiki instructor Julie Seaman is helping coordinate the day's activities, which will include 30-minute classes in vinyasa flow yoga, shaman healing and energy work, Hawaiian dance, pilates, meditation and more. Seated massage, private reiki sessions and a silent auction are also planned. Complimentary healthy food and drinks will be available.

Advance registration is not required; just drop in.

At \$5 per class, it's a great way to get an introduction to some of these techniques for health and relaxation.

Organizers are asking for payment in cash or check, no credit cards, in order for Bank of America to match the funds raised. Ridgely Retreat owner Andie Lichtenstein is donating 100 percent of the proceeds from the day to the Cambodian Children's Fund.

For more information, visit Suzanne's Web site at [www.offthematintocambodia.org](http://www.offthematintocambodia.org).

While we're on the subjects of health and good causes, Quiet Waters Park is hosting the first Deer Park Water Brent Kegley Memorial 5K (3.1-mile) Run/Walk on July 12. The race begins at 10 a.m.

Brent, an employee of the bottled water distributor in Virginia, was killed in November at age 29 in a car accident on his way to work. The event will benefit one of his favorite charities, Children Incorporated, which helps needy children all over the world, and Earth Share, a national environmental and conservation organization.

The entry fee is \$30 in advance and \$35 on race day. A variety of prizes will be given away and a free family picnic will follow the race. Crafts and games for kids also will be offered.

Register online before July 5 at [www.Active.com](http://www.Active.com). For the keyword, use: Deer Park Water 5k MD.

For more information, call 443-829-2148 or send an e-mail to [Dawn.miller@waters.nestle.com](mailto:Dawn.miller@waters.nestle.com).

Got news? Send it to [aroundannapolis@comcast.net](mailto:aroundannapolis@comcast.net).

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