

Summer 2025

veteransoutreachofpa.org



Tee up for Our Veterans!

Welcome to the sizzling summer of 2025, and our hot-off-the-press summer newsletter, where we have the opportunity to celebrate our Veterans' recent victories and plan for the fun and freedoms to come! You are warmly invited to these upcoming events:

- ☐ July 19th – 4 pm to 9 pm. 11th Annual Rumble of the Night – Car, Truck and Bike Show, AACCA Museum, 161 Museum Drive, Hershey, PA
- ☐ Aug 22nd – 5th Annual Red, White & Blue Scramble Golf Outing, Manada Golf Course, 11 am Registration; 12 noon start. Hole sponsors needed at the \$100 and \$500 levels --please:))
- ☐ Aug 22nd – Langan Financial Fundraiser - Mechanicsburg Elks – Musical entertainment by the Band Velveeta

Please contact info@veteransoutreachofpa.org for more details.



Greetings from our Acting Executive Director, Deb Donahue

Sun-soaked baseball games at City Island, Eagle Scout projects, graduation celebrations, and our one-year anniversary were all part of the excitement and activity that entertained, uplifted and united our participants at Veterans Grove in the past few months.

It continues to mean so much to me to see our Veterans cultivating strong friendships, holding each other accountable, establishing meaningful goals, and laughing at shared memories of the military and their new life at the peaceful sanctuary of Veterans Grove.

Recently, I was privileged to attend the “moving up” of some of our participants into their next phase of healing. All participants and staff attended, with those “moving up” recognized with a certificate of accomplishment. The smiles

and congratulations by their fellow veterans were truly an experience I will never forget. Veterans Grove is truly changing lives.

As the interim executive director for the past six months, I have found every day to be incredibly busy, and a time of connection and improvement for us all.

But it has not been all light-hearted outings and activities. Deep internal work, focused on revealing and healing individual trauma, negative habits, repressed emotions, and unhealthy lifestyle choices, are all taking place, and positive changes are happening in slow but steady ways.

We are blessed to have had a few graduates in our first year, and several more are approaching the finish line, after which they will begin a new journey of independence in the larger community beyond the “tiny home” environment.

It has been my honor to serve our Veterans as the interim executive director – and “Grammie’s” too. Like us all, she is always searching for ways to reward our Veterans.

For those interested in getting more involved in our mission, please keep following us for our ever-changing donation needs, collected Thursdays from 10 am to noon. Please consider volunteering at an event or sponsoring a hole for \$100 in our golf outing at noon on Aug. 22. Please follow our Facebook Page or website for details at veteransoutreachofpa.org, and know how much your support continues to mean to our entire board and our family of Veterans – and always will. As we have often witnessed, while it can be difficult to change certain aspects of our life, we can always begin by changing ourselves.

With our deepest gratitude,

Deb Donahue, Esq.

Have a safe and wonderful 4th of July & summer!



Happy 1-year Anniversary to the "Village" behind Ours!

By VOPA Co-founder Tom Zimmerman

(reprinted from the BURG)

When the red, white and blue ribbon fluttered to the ground over the fresh concrete and fragile new sprouts of grass at Veterans Grove in south Harrisburg last year, it felt like Christmas, a birthday and a graduation all in one.

After more than three years of planning, fundraising, outreach, and construction, Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania (VOPA) and their “village” of supporters arrived at this moment of celebration and fresh beginnings in May 2024.

Enthusiastic supporters at our ribbon-cutting approached us to exclaim, “You did it!” But our team was always quick to answer: “We’ve only just begun.” For us, success and celebration would come later.

Yes, we partnered with the community to build a village of 15 tiny homes and a beautiful 6,500 square-foot community center when many thought our vision was an

impossible dream, but now the real work to address the root causes of veteran homelessness loomed before us.

We were all acutely aware that moving veterans from homelessness to independence, following our unique, evidence-based four-step therapeutic community model, was a daunting challenge. Erecting walls for tiny homes is not easy, but it is far easier than tearing down the walls our veterans have erected after years of trauma and suffering.

On Tuesday, June 10, we celebrated our one-year anniversary. We did so with our Veterans Grove staff and participants, and food trucks, relay races, a barbecue with our board members as grillmasters, and a shared outpouring of pride in each other. We are thrilled to report that we have several graduates already and many grateful veterans who have received a second chance.

On our anniversary, we will salute our veterans, who have shown remarkable resilience and dedication. Throughout their stay, veterans pay nothing, thanks to continuous donor support that we will continue to rely on in the years to come.

During Phase 1, our veteran-participants commit to the foundation of orientation, personal growth, stability, and recovery. They also work on nutrition, health care, sleep and other basic needs. Many get a good night's sleep and regular meals for the first time in years.

Progress will earn them a promotion to Phase 2—the Transformation Phase. Here, the clinical VOPA team creates an Individual Service Plan with the veteran, and they dig deeper into their healing journey, addressing the root causes of their struggles and working closely with their peers and staff to build a stronger, more resilient self.

They are focused on healing past wounds and preparing for the ultimate goal of independence in the larger community.

The third phase involves career growth and finding meaningful employment. Many of our community partners have even offered jobs to our veterans when they complete their journey here.

The fourth and final phase involves independence graduation, and a new home offsite. It is our hope that they return occasionally to mentor the veterans who follow.

Because we are dealing with the complexities of humanity, the process is not always perfect—or pretty--and the progress is sometimes one step forward, two steps back.

We see that some of our veterans are weighed down by military service, substance dependence, mental health struggles, isolation, the lack of internal support, and the trauma of homelessness. Fortunately, they are surrounded by a community of veterans who understand the unique struggles they face. They find solace and

support. The compassionate staff, many of whom are veterans themselves, help the veterans confront the emotional scars of the past.

Many veterans admit that they did not realize how much trauma they were carrying until they got here.

On our one-year anniversary, we want to share the impact our community supporters have made, and offer gratitude that defies measurement.

We protect the identity of our veterans zealously, so we share these quotes from them without attribution, but with universal application to our successes:

- “Prior to coming to Veterans Grove, I felt lost. Being around veteran brothers has helped me find myself again. I have a purpose again.”
- “No one cares about Veterans more than VOPA.”
- “It's a godsend, a life-changing program, if you take it seriously enough. VOPA has structure for veterans to do things to benefit me, to empower us and get life skills.”
- “Veterans Grove has given me a roof over my head when I really needed one. It has taught me how to get along with others.”
- “VOPA is a place which gave me a home with other veterans until I find my new permanent housing. “
- “VOPA is helping me get back on track. It is allowing me to be able to focus on my needs such as my physical health, mental health, and personal issues. “
- “For me it was a sense of preparing me to return to the outside, such as making a concrete structure, how to relate to positive people, I've been able to have free time to process what our meetings were about, and most of all the staff were sincere and showed great concern about our well being, and helping us moving forward. “

We will never stop thanking all those who have helped us thank our veterans, who can never be fully be repaid for their willingness to lay down their lives for others and a cause larger than themselves.

As we move into our second year, we ask you to please follow us on Facebook and our other social media platforms, check out our website at www.veteransoutreachofpa.org, and know that you have made a difference in the lives of those who have literally made a world of difference. Now more than ever, VOPA needs your support to help us continue raising funds for our daily operations.

With your help, those who have fought for our freedom are now reclaiming it for themselves, along the scenic banks of the Susquehanna River, in a tiny home that carries big hopes and dreams for healing. As one of our staff members said: “These veterans are my heroes. I am proud of each and every one of them. Watching their journeys unfold is one of the greatest

honors of my life...Here, when one of us laughs, we all laugh. When one of us hurts, we all feel it. And when one of us takes a step forward, we all move with them. That's the essence of brotherhood and sisterhood. That's the community our veterans have created.



Our Partners Give Priceless Time to Build a More Beautiful Home

We express our heartfelt thanks to these amazing volunteer workers, who have helped to transform our site for the better –from students to retirees--- bringing desperately needed storage, fresh flowers and vegetables, beauty, serenity and unity to our community. This village would not be thriving without YOU!

□ Dauphin County Tech School (DCTS) completed a beautiful shed by the entrance to our village. We honored them with a pizza party and are using this shed every day.

□ Troop 368 Eagle Scout Shed. Troop 368 is also building a shed to help with storage. The tone base and shed base are complete. The construction on the walls and trusses has started off-site and, when completed, will be transported to Veterans Grove and erected. This shed will be another place to store our lawn equipment and other essentials.

□ Erie and Arbor Day Foundation (ADF) Tree Planting: This project was completed April 25. Approximately 15 volunteers from Erie Insurance planted 50 cedar trees along VOPA's northern border, and five more trees were planted on the berm along Paxton Creek. What a gorgeous addition!

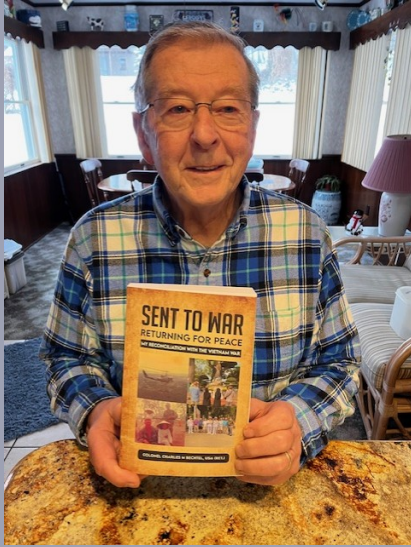
□ Pollock Foundation Raised Garden Bed: Volunteers from the Pollock Foundation sprung into action like a well-oiled machine to bring a raised garden bed to our community. The veterans love planting. The law firm of Cipraini and Werner helped in a large way, and we thank you all for your valuable time and your unselfish service to our nation's defenders!

□ Spencer Hersh chose Veterans Grove for his Eagle Scout project. He and his team rehabilitated a very worn-out bench where our veterans enjoy sitting and reflecting, and south point, and he constructed a dog park for the veterans' pets.

□ Braedon Mitchell Eagle Scout Raised Garden Bed project: It will be located along the sidewalk leading from the star memorial to the emergency access road.

And a heartfelt round of applause and appreciation to the Mechanicsburg Elks for the donated picnic tables!

Vietnam Vet-Author Col. Bechtel



(Ret.) Continues to Fight for Veterans

Our VOPA Ambassador extraordinaire Col. Chuck Bechtel (Ret.) is continuing to sell his inspirational book about both his harrowing and his healing experiences in Vietnam. His memoir, entitled "Sent to Vietnam, Returning for Peace: My Reconciliation with the Vietnam War" is available on Amazon, and Chuck is donating a percentage of the profits to VOPA. We are blessed to have a national treasure who continues to give of himself to his nation and his fellow veterans. Immerse yourself in his journey and help our Veterans in their journey of healing!



HACC Culinary Students Donate Time, Talent and Good Taste

A handful of HACC's finest culinary arts school students, led by Autumn Patti, prepared three days' worth of healthy meals for our veterans recently, from blueberry muffins to Reubens and more. The students were even featured as Hometown Heroes on WHTM-TV 27. The hands-on learning was invaluable, and the food was delicious, devoured and appreciated.



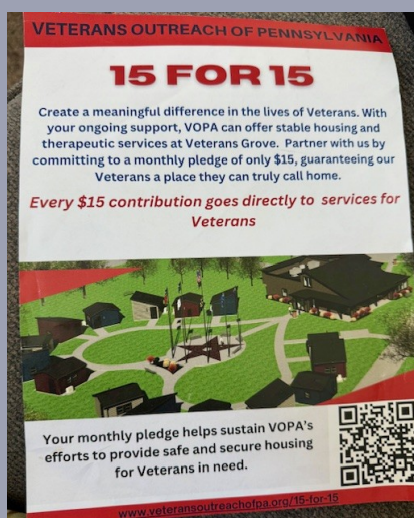
Once a Marine, Always a Marine

We were deeply saddened by the passing of Bill Habacivch, our former executive director. Bill was a Marine through and through, who fought his final battle with a fierce will until the very end. He was all about faith and family, and his devotion to veterans was unwavering. He was also a college professor with a broad education and a lifetime of extraordinary achievements. His impact endures at VOPA.

Rest in Peace, Bill.

Thank you, Deb!

VOPA extends a heartfelt thank you to Deb Donahue, our former board member who took a temporary leave to volunteer as our acting executive director. Deb is all heart and has gone above and beyond to keep our program flowing smoothly -- including crawling into a dunk tank for the cause!



Join the \$15 for 15 Team

Do you have it in your heart and your budget to thank local veterans and keep them in a safe place and on the pathway to the dignity they deserve? Please consider donating \$1 a month for each of our 15 tiny homes, for a total of \$15 a month. It's easy to give....visit www.veteransoutreachofpa.org so we can reach our goal and meet our budget. Thank you for considering!



Greystone Derby Day: Fine Food, Friends, Fun and Fundraising

The Kentucky Derby always inspires a local offshoot celebration in central PA, attracting a veritable "who's who" of caring business and community leaders. It is a day of food, fashion and fundraising for our Veteran community.

In late May, we learned that the signature Greystone Derby Day event raised \$77,500 at Range and Rye in Dillsburg (formerly Greystone). The day entailed months and months of coordination and planning, and that investment in time and ingenuity led to an unforgettable day of pastel suits and flouncy dresses. Although the winner of the

Kentucky Derby this year was Sovereignty, as always, our veterans emerged the winners!

We could never have pulled off this remarkable party without our generous sponsors , who included Faulkner Family of Dealerships, Members First Federal Credit Union, UPMC, Renewal by Andersen, and Americhoice. We thank everyone who joined us or helped us host another first-class pastel-colored party.



Can You Give a Little Bit?

Our newest donation needs include sunscreen and bug spray. We collect Thursdays between 10 am and noon onsite, or please feel free to contact a volunteer for a pick-up. We are so grateful to the many community rock stars who pull into our community faithfully with vans full of water bottles, paper towels, clothing and more. YOU ARE REMARKABLE and our veterans THANK YOU!



Deloitte Transforms a Wall with Paint and Perseverance

Veterans Grove has been transformed by the Deloitte ERG Wall Painting Project: Deloitte volunteers cleared weeds and vines from the wall facing the Community Center and tiny homes, then primed and painted it on June 6. They helped to eliminate an eyesore and make an enormous difference in our look . Our gratitude wraps around the whole Village!

Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania | 1105 South Front Street | Harrisburg, PA 17104 US

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