



NJDMAVA HIGHLIGHTS

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Gem Vac Veterans: Deeds Not Words

Story and photos by Tech. Sgt. Armando Vasquez, NJDMAVA Public Affairs



Members of Gem Vac Vets pose with John Hickman, center left, in front of the entrance to Veteran's Haven-North in Glenn Gardner, N.J., March 25, 2014. The veteran group donated a vehicle to be given to a resident of Vet's Haven-North. Hickman was the lucky recipient.

The military teaches its service members to never leave a battle buddy behind. It's the camaraderie within the band of brotherhood that ensures that a wounded Soldier is retrieved and brought home.

John Schembari, a former Marine who served in the 50s, never forgot that.

So when Schembari, a proprietor of Gem Vacuum Inc., in Glenn Gardner, N.J. and a couple of veteran friends started meeting on Tuesdays at a coffee shop to talk and reminisce about the old days, they never expected that their little gathering would grow and develop into a group dedicated to helping fellow veterans who have fallen on hard times.

The conversations and laughter got so loud that they were asked to move their weekly meetings somewhere else, said Schembari. Since most of his customers

were veterans who frequented his business; Schembari thought nothing of moving the meetings to his small one-room vacuum shop. And so, Gem Vac Vets was born.

John Hickman, originally from Bricktown, N.J., has fallen on hard times.

Hickman served in the U.S.S. Nimitz as an aviation boatswain mate in the 80s. Recently, the Navy veteran found himself homeless. Fortunately for Hickman, he found Veterans Haven-North.

Veterans Haven-North, located in Glenn Gardner, is a transitional housing program for veterans that have fallen on hard times. Under the direction of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Veteran's Haven-North ensures that homeless veterans are treated and cared for in a dignified, compassionate and professional manner. They assist

homeless veterans attain an optimal level of independence and aids them in re-acquiring life skills to allow them to live in the community while maintaining their self-sufficiency, dignity and honor.

Hickman, who has been in the program since August, has benefited from the services provided to him. He currently has a temporary job at the VA hospital in Lyons and is eager to get a fulltime job and his own home. He utilized the transportation service provided by Vets Haven-North to get around and to his job.

Part of the program at Vets Haven-North is to assist veterans in obtaining a job that will allowed them to sustain themselves. But without having their own vehi-

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GEM VAC VETS

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cle to search for jobs or attend interviews, it makes the task a little more difficult, said Hickman.

Gem Vac Vets, who now boasts an unofficial membership of nearly 120 veterans representing all branches of service and time frames, has two mottos: 'Every day is Tuesday' and 'Deeds Not Words'.

The reference to Tuesday is their way of telling fellow veterans that they can get together any day and not just on Tuesdays. The 'Deeds Not Words' is their reference to the group's mission to help their fellow veterans. You see, Gem Vac Vets pays for every good deed out of their own pockets. "To help any veteran we can in any way," said T.C. Landers, a Vietnam War Army veteran and one of three trustees in the group. The other two trustees are Schembari and Bob Stephenson, a Korean War Army veteran.

So pulling their resources together, Gem Vac Vets donated a 2002 Honda Accord to Veterans Haven-North. And the lucky recipient of that donation was Hickman, who won the raffle for the vehicle.

As they usually do on Tuesdays, Gem Vac Vets had their group meeting to just have "coffee, cake, brotherhood and lots of laughter," said Schembari. But the meeting on March 25 was a little different. The group, which is in the process of filing for a 501(c) (19) – veteran's organization status, met at Veterans Haven-North's cafeteria. There, they continued with their tradition of laughing and talking about family, friends and fellow veterans. This meeting



John Hickman shows the vehicle donated to him by veterans from Gem Vac Vets organization.

gave Hickman an opportunity to personally thank the group for their generosity and to tell them how it has helped him.

Hickman is not married and has no children, but he has family that he hasn't seen since Christmas because of the lack of transportation. With a smile and humble appreciation, Hickman told the group, "I finally got a chance to visit them last week."

"Nothing like giving a man his autonomy," said Sean VanLew, superintendent of Veterans Have North.



Col. Steven Herman, New Jersey National Guard command chaplain, promotes Chaplain Candidate Rachel Zarnke to First Lieutenant at a ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters on March 25. Zarnke, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, is assigned to the 50th Brigade Special Troops Battalion. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley)

PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR A CHAPLAIN CORPS

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Wayne Woolley, NJDMAVA Public Affairs

How do you preach the gospel of the power of military chaplains when you're in one of the most secular nations on earth?

That was the situation Capt. Shawn Found, a New Jersey Army National Guard chaplain, found himself in during a recent mission to advise the Albanian military. His solution: Show the Albanians how American chaplains help Soldiers navigate nearly aspect of their lives, assisting service members of all – and no -- religious backgrounds, without proselytizing.

“The idea was to demonstrate that a chaplain corps is not a religious corps,” Found said recently. “The model we tried to show is how chaplains engage in all areas of a Soldier’s physical and mental health as well as that of their families.”

Found and Sgt. Xochi Risco, a New Jersey Army National Guard chaplain’s assistant, spent two weeks in Albania in September as part of the State Partnership Program, which since 2001 has paired the New Jersey National Guard and the Albanian armed forces. Under the partnership, New Jersey Soldiers and Airmen have provided mentorship that helped the former communist dictatorship gain entry to NATO.

Although New Jersey has advised the Albanian military on nearly every aspect of creating a professional military, from establishing logistical support elements to growing a non-commissioned officer corps, the mission in September was the first time the topic of chaplains was broached.

Organized religion was banned in Albania from 1967 until its first democratic elections in 1990, when the laws changed to accommodate private religious practice, according to the CIA World Factbook.

“That informed everything we did on this mission,” Found said.



Capt. Shawn Found, left, a New Jersey Army National Guard chaplain, is awarded the Joint Service Achievement Medal by Col. Steven Herman, the state command chaplain, during a ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters March 25, 2014.



New Jersey Army National Guard Sgt. Xochi Risco, a chaplain’s assistant, is congratulated by Col. Steven Herman, the state command chaplain, after being awarded the Joint Service Achievement Medal at a ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters on March 25. Risco was lauded by U.S. European Command for his work with the Albanian military’s fledgling mental health profession team.

So instead of offering advice on how to grow a chaplains corps, Found, Risco and Lt. Col. Michael Klein, the deputy command chaplain of U.S. European Command, focused on assisting the Albanian military grow its fledgling mental health care profession team.

Found said that Risco, who works as a systems analyst for a Wall Street financial services firm in civilian life, made great headway helping the female members of the mental health team become stronger advocates for the service members under their care.

At a ceremony at Joint Force Headquarters on March 25, Found and Risco were awarded the Joint Service Achievement Medal for their efforts in Albania. Col. David Beauchamp, the European Command’s top chaplain, recommended the pair for the award.

Found, who is the deputy director of the New Jersey National Guard Family Programs office, said that he felt the mission was a success because Albanian military leaders developed an appreciation for the diverse skills of chaplains.

“We were able to show that 90 percent of what we do as chaplains and chaplain’s assistants has nothing to do with religious ceremonies,” he said. “Chaplains are able to help a force build resiliency and strengthen their bonds with Soldiers and their families.”

Although the focus of the mission was on the military, Found did meet with members of Albania’s religious community, which is predominantly Muslim with a minority of Roman Catholics. The aim of the meetings was for those communities to help identify chaplain candidates in the event the Albanian military ever decides to incorporate them into their force.

“Someday the Albanians may elect to create a chaplain corps, or they may end up creating something along the lines of morale officers,” Found said. “Whatever they end up doing, it will be in their time and on their terms.”

HIGHLIGHTS



AUGMENTED REALITY

Story, photo and graphics by Tech. Sgt. Matt Hecht, 177th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. -- Pilots from the 177th Fighter Wing here received recently a new tool for their arsenal.

Pilots will begin using the Helmet Mounted Integrated Targeting (HMIT) system, a modular add-on for the existing Gentex HGU-55/P Light Weight Helmet.

The HMIT is a high resolution glass eyepiece that is mounted onto the front of the helmet, and displays information and symbols in what is essentially an augmented reality experience. The display technology allows pilots to quickly build a 3D picture of the battle space, with the ability to place data-linked symbols over enemy targets as well as friendly positions.

“Air to ground targeting, slewing the targeting pod to wherever you are looking on the ground, that’s a pretty big enhancer,” said Chief Master Sgt. Jason Gioconda, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the 177th Aircrew Flight Equipment shop.

Gioconda also said the system is lightweight, and completely customizable to each individual pilot.

“The pilots can choose color palettes and layouts prior to the mission,” said Gioconda. “Once we find out who’s flying, we install the modular HMIT to each pilot’s physical specifications. Sensors in the cockpit, as well as in the helmet, work together to give the pilots an interactive view of the airspace.”

Several Air National Guard A-10 Thunderbolt II and F-16 Fighting Falcon squadrons have been tapped for the HMIT upgrade. The 177th Fighter Wing received their initial HMIT shipment and maintenance training in June 2013, but recently received a second shipment and began pilot upgrade training with the system.

“The advantage of HMIT over other systems in use is that we

can see a full color display and retain the use of our NVG’s for nighttime operations,” said Maj. Tom Still, an F-16 pilot with the 177th Fighter Wing. “Other squadrons are limited to monochrome displays, or a separate helmet and NVG system for night ops. With this system, we are saving money by having only one helmet, and swapping out the HMIT based on mission requirements.”

“The HMIT is a true force multiplier,” said Still. “This technology can help with both our missions; overseas supporting ground forces, as well as our homeland security operations.”



Maj. Jason Halvorsen, a pilot with the 119th Fighter Squadron of the 177th Fighter Wing, calibrates his helmet with the Helmet Mounted Integrated Targeting system at the aircrew flight equipment March 25, 2014.

HIGHLIGHTS



VA REMOVES ANNUAL INCOME REPORTING REQUIREMENT *Eliminates Burden on Veterans, Improves Customer Service*

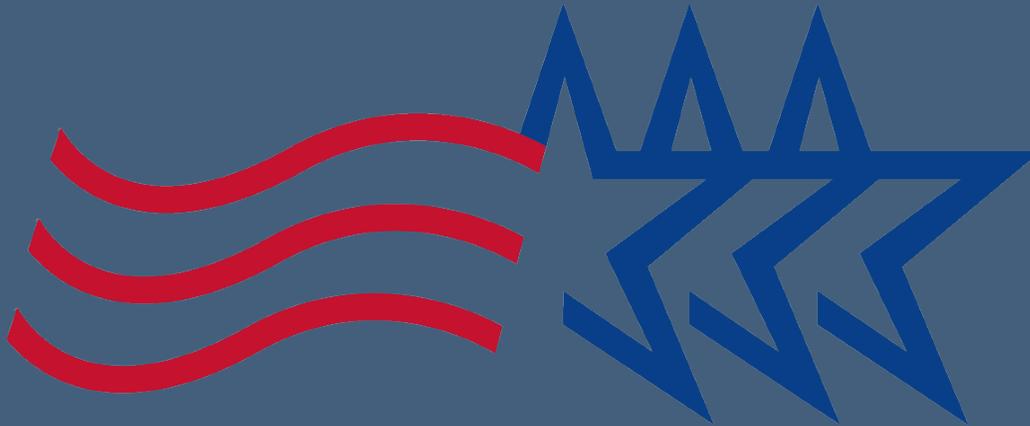
WASHINGTON –The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is eliminating the annual requirement for most Veterans enrolled in VA’s health care system to report income information beginning in March 2014. Instead, VA will automatically match income information obtained from the Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration.

“Eliminating the requirement for annual income reporting makes our health care benefits easier for Veterans to obtain,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “This change will reduce the burden on Veterans, improve customer service and make it much easier for Veterans to keep their health care eligibility up-to-date.”

Some Veterans applying for enrollment for the first time are still required to submit income information. There is no change in VA’s long-standing policy to provide no-cost care to indigent Veterans, Veterans with catastrophic medical conditions, Veterans with a disability rating of 50 percent or higher, or for conditions that are officially rated as “service-connected.”

VA encourages Veterans to continue to use the health benefits renewal form to report changes in their personal information, such as address, phone numbers, dependents, next of kin, income and health insurance.

For more information, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/cost or call VA toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387).



TRICARE®

TRICARE’s Website Earns Top Government-Public Sector Honor

WASHINGTON – The beneficiary website for the TRICARE military health plan recently earned Best Government and Public Sector honors in an annual competition hosted by Sitecore, a global leader in customer experience management software.

The award recognizes excellence in the website’s delivery of effective, meaningful digital experiences across 23 categories.

A key feature of the website is the ability for beneficiaries to answer three questions on the home page to get tailored benefit information on the site, including their own “My Plan” page.

The new “I Want To ...” banner, also on the home page, allows more direct access to the information and features that beneficiaries want the most, such as seeing what’s covered, finding a doctor or enrolling in a plan. Additionally, beneficiaries can quickly search for plans and compare them side by side from the home page.

Two new website features empower beneficiaries to make decisions and manage their benefits online, officials said. Beneficiaries can use the new Pharmacy Home Delivery calculator to find out how much they can save by switching their prescriptions from a retail pharmacy to TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery.

The new “Go Paperless” page explains how beneficiaries can use paperless solutions to enroll, pay a bill, get proof of coverage and more.

The TRICARE.mil project is one of the largest government implementations of Sitecore, officials said, and has cut costs by reducing the time developers have to spend maintaining the website, allowing them to focus on major functional enhancements instead of daily maintenance.

Since the site’s launch, the number of technical issues reported by users has reduced dramatically, officials said

Homeless vet meets his guardian angel in a crowded subway station

Story and photo illustration by Tech. Sgt. Armando Vasquez, NJDMAVA Public Affairs

He doesn't know why she spotted him in the crowded dining concourse at Grand Central Station in New York City. But the Army veteran is grateful that she did on that cold day in February of 2013.

There were thousands of commuters in the Station as he waited for a train to go back to New Jersey after having visited his sister, said Charles Degerick. "She approached me and asked me if I was OK. She said I looked lonely and needed someone to talk to."

Degerick was homeless. But the concerned person didn't know that at that time.

Having a cup of coffee with her at the station, Degerick explained his current status and how he got there.

After Superstorm Sandy hit New Jersey, many people were left homeless. Degerick was one of them. He was living with friends when the Superstorm destroyed their home.

Degerick had always been involved with veteran organizations, helping out in any way that he could. But now he was the one that needed help.

So when she told him she knew of an organization that could help him, he said he was skeptical. But what choice did he have, so, he gave her his information and let fate take its course.

"You have to put your pride in your pocket," said Degerick.

And because of that encounter at Grand Central Station, Degerick's situation was brought to the attention of Sean VanLew, superintendent of Veteran's Haven-North.

VanLew, armed with a photo that the Good Samaritan had taken of Degerick, went looking for him at the station the next day.

VanLew found him and brought him back to the Haven's Glenn Gardner, N.J., location.

Under the direction of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Veteran's Haven-North ensures that homeless veterans are treated and cared for in a dignified, compassionate, and professional manner. They assist homeless veterans attain an optimal level of independence and aids them in re-acquiring life skills to allow them to live in the community while maintaining their self-sufficiency, dignity, and honor.

Degerick hears people complaint about things in life, but he is grateful for being at Veteran's Haven-North and all the help he receives from the staff. He wishes he could stay there for forever, but understands that Vets Haven is just a transitional stepping stone to independence.

He submitted several dozen applications for senior citizens housing and is waiting for approval. But as he tells his story about that chance encounter last year, he thanks his lucky stars for meeting her. Because if he hadn't, he might still be alone and homeless.

"She is my guardian angel," said Degerick.





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PHOTO BY
CW3 PATRICK DAUGHERTY

TRICARE Service Centers to 'Go Virtual' April 1

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – Walk-in service at TRICARE service centers in the United States is ending April 1.

TRICARE officials said the change reflects “the always growing number of TRICARE beneficiaries who most often now turn to a laptop or cell phone when they have questions about their health care.”

TRICARE patients have a wide variety of secure, electronic customer service options available through the TRICARE website at <http://www.tricare.mil>, officials said. The “I want to ...” feature puts everything beneficiaries want to do online right on the website’s front page, they added.

“For many years now, TRICARE beneficiaries have been taking advantage of our convenient, 24/7 online customer service options,” said Army Maj. Gen. (Dr.) Richard Thomas, director of the Defense Health Agency’s health care operations directorate. “All of the services they received at their local [TRICARE service center] are available either online or through our toll-free call centers in the convenience of their own homes. We are committed to

providing the highest level of support to all of our beneficiaries.”

With the end of walk-in service on April 1, beneficiaries who want get personal assistance can call their regional health care contractor for enrollment and benefit help, officials said. All health care, pharmacy, dental and claims contact information is located at <http://www.tricare.mil/contactus>. Beneficiaries can get 24/7 TRICARE benefit information at the TRICARE website, and they can make enrollment, primary care manager and other changes at <http://www.tricare.mil/enrollment>.

Rather than driving to an installation service center, TRICARE beneficiaries can even combine high-tech with low-tech by downloading health care forms online and sending them through the mail, officials noted.

Pointing out that walk-in service is the most expensive customer-service option; officials said eliminating walk-in service at the centers will save the Defense Department an estimated \$250 million over five years. The change does not affect TRICARE benefits or health care delivery, they emphasized.

HIGHLIGHTS



US Family Health Care, a Tricare Prime option providing a civilian based managed care network, will be holding Question and Answer sessions to provide information for servicemembers and families.

USFHP pushes forward effective Jan. 1, 2014, and they are adding an extra benefit to their already robust benefit package! Eye glasses for \$0 to low cost. To hear more about USFHP and this added benefit, come to one of their upcoming information sessions listed below:

Fort Dix Housing Community Center

Bldg. 1134 Hemlock Street, JB-MDL
April 7, May 12, and June 2 & 23
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

JB-MDL McGuire Library

2603 Tuskegee Airmen Ave, JB-MDL
April 28, May 12, and June 16
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

JB-MDL McGuire Housing

Jim Saxton Community Center
3811 South Boiling Street, JBMDL
April 8, May 6, and June 10
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

108th Wing Airmen & Family Readiness Office

3327 Charles Blvd, JB-MDL
April 16, May 21, and June 25
1 to 4 p.m.

Bordentown Library

18 East Union Street, Bordentown, NJ
April 17
12 to 4 p.m.

Picatunny Arsenal Army Community Service

Bldg. 119, Dover, NJ
April 15 and 29
May 13 and 30
June 10

Contact Darrel Hutchinson at 646-354-0126

Pemberton Community Library

16 Broadway Street, Brownmills, NJ
April 14, May 19, and June 30
12 to 4 p.m.

Mount Laurel Library

100 Walt Whitman Ave, Mount Laurel, NJ
April 11, May 15, and June 18
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Camden County Veterans Affairs

3 Collier Dr., Lakeland Complex, Blackwood, NJ
March 31
April 7, 14, 21 and 28
May 5, 12 and 19
June 2, 9, 16 and 23
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

NJDMAVA Bldg

IASD Section,
101 Eggerts Crossing Road, Lawrenceville, NJ
April 2, May 7, and June 16
11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

177th Fighter Wing

Bldg. 229, 400 Langley Rd., Egg Harbor Twp, NJ
April 3, May 8, and June 5
12 - 4 p.m.

NJNG Jersey City Armory

678 Montgomery Street, Jersey City, NJ
May 1, 8, 15 and 22
June 5, 12, 19 and 26
1 to 6 p.m.

NJNG Toms River Armory

1200 Whitesville Road, Toms River, NJ
April 10, May 15, and June 5
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

NWS Earle

Bldg. C29, 201 Highway 34 South, Colts Neck, NJ
April 23, May 14, and June 18
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Call 1-800-241-4848 option 3 or visit www.usfhp.net for more information.

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