


The Veteran Advocate

NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM THE NATION'S OLDEST COMMUNITY-BASED NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION SERVING VETERANS | FALL/WINTER 2021



VETERANS 
OUTREACH CENTER Inc.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

You can chase a dream / that might seem so out of reach / and you know it might not never come your way... Dream it anyway.” – Anyway, by Martina McBride

If you know me, then you know music has always been a huge part of my life. I spent eight years on active duty as a military musician touring many parts of the world. So as I navigate through life, there’s always a song in my head and heart... which one, you ask? Well, that just depends on the challenges or gifts life has cast my way. :)

The lyrics from this Martina McBride song were running through my head as I thought about this last year at VOC. Because we chased a LOT of dreams. Many of them seemed out of reach, but we dreamed them anyway. **And now as a result, we are just about to break ground on the largest capital project in our agency’s nearly 50-year history!**

We’re calling this project, “*Operation Safe Haven.*” Richards House, our emergency shelter, has served thousands of veterans since its opening in 2000. Daily wear and tear on the building demands comprehensive renovations including a new roof, kitchen, bathrooms, mechanicals, and so much more. Our veteran residents will have additional laundry space, added common space, and an elevator. They will gain privacy through single or double dormitories, as opposed to the current structure of 4 - 6 man bays. And the addition of 16 beds will allow us to significantly close the gap between the number of homeless veterans on any given night in this community and the number of shelter beds available to them. New space for confidential counseling meetings and therapy programs will also be an integral component of the new design, supporting the full well-being of our residents.

This has been a dream for years at VOC. But in 2021, we decided to go after it with nothing less than a full-court press. And because of the support of generous people in our community, we have raised more than \$5 million to make this dream a reality! Construction will begin in the next few months and is projected to be completed in 2022.

And if that dream wasn’t big enough, we decided to chase a few more in 2021...

- We earned the National “Hire Vets Medallion” for the second year in a row! This is the only federal-level employment award that recognizes an organization’s commitment to veteran hiring and retention.
- We helped approximately 70 vets get vaccinated by hosting vaccination clinics onsite at VOC in partnership with the VA Medical Center.
- We reformatted the annual veteran “Stand Down” to follow COVID guidelines while still pulling together more than 40 service providers and hundreds of veterans in need.
- We hosted our first suicide prevention conference for families and community partners, as well as several other events throughout the first week of September to honor those impacted by the suicide epidemic in the veteran community.
- We started our first ecotherapy program in collaboration with Trybe, LLC to connect veterans back to nature in a way that will conjure positive emotions and elicit a sense of confidence when reintegrating into the civilian world. The vets who have participated so far are loving it!
- Through a grant from Monroe County, we’re helping vets impacted by COVID to pay rental arrears so as to avoid eviction.
- We’ve provided food and clothing to veterans more than one thousand times in 2021.

We know we can’t do it alone; but through strong community partnerships and support, we will continue to chase new dreams and celebrate new achievements. We have high hopes for 2022, and we can’t wait to share in more success with you.

“You can pour your soul out singing / a song you believe in / that tomorrow they’ll forget you ever sang... Sing it anyway!”

Sincerely,

Laura Stradley
Executive Director
U.S. Army Veteran



OPERATION SAFE HAVEN

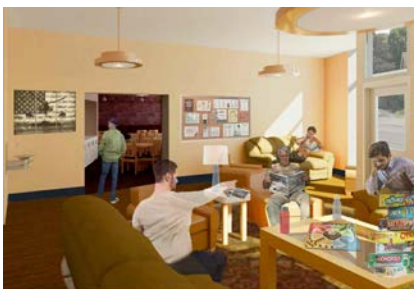
Providing Safe, Quality Housing for Our Nation's Heroes

In 2019, we undertook the task of renovating Otto House, our transitional home for veterans, to make sure that our nation's heroes were proud of the place they called home while they got back on their feet. After all, secure and stable housing is a critical foundation of the success of a struggling veteran. With a place to rest every night, veterans are better able to focus on improving other aspects of their lives.

Now, we have been working hard with our community partners and other funding sources so that today we have raised approximately \$5 million toward renovating Richards House, our emergency shelter. With about \$1 million left to raise, your help is needed now to turn our vision into reality.

Your gift supports a comprehensive renovation plan which will ensure that Richards House will be more functional and welcoming. New space for confidential counseling meetings and therapy programs will be an integral component of the new design, supporting the full well-being of our veterans.

To learn more, please visit www.vocsafehaven.org or call Joan Brandenburg, VOC Director of Advancement, at 585.295.7821.



40 YEARS LATER

HOW A VIETNAM MARINE CORPS VETERAN FOUND VOC AND CHANGED HIS LIFE

One day in 1973, Emil Anderson, recently discharged from the Marines after serving in Vietnam, was standing on Main Street in Rochester looking and feeling lost.

A young man approached him and asked if he was a vet. Emil said he was and that he was looking for a job, and the man directed him to “a little house on South Avenue,” the recently opened Veterans Outreach Center.

That man was Tom Cray, the founder of VOC, who helped Emil land his first job at Gleason Works.

“When I got out”—Emil was 21—“I knew nothing about being an adult. I didn’t know how to pay rent, I didn’t know how to pay RG&E. I also came home with an addiction. I managed to work and maintained a job, even though I struggled with my addiction. The VOC had to keep helping me because I would lose apartments. That’s how Tom Cray became important in my life and the lives of other vets.”

“Over the years I’ve kept in touch with the VOC for help,” Emil says. “They’ve always been there, they’ve always helped.”

“They’ll help you with food, they’ll help you with housing, they’ll help you with employment, they’ll help you get a primary care doctor or a mental health counselor, all the medication you need so you don’t have to struggle with paying for them. The VOC helped me with all that.”

“The VOC saved my life. The VOC really saved my life.”

Emil’s addiction was a particularly difficult challenge as he adjusted to civilian life.

“My addiction took me down so far I wanted to commit suicide.”

He got clean and relapsed several times. Finally, things turned around.

“The VOC sent me to Canandaigua where I stayed for 68 days and got clean, then they sent me to Richards House where I lived for eight months. Then I got an apartment in Highland Manor where I stayed for five years, saved my pennies and bought a house in Chili.”

“I’m now coming up on 14 years being clean and continue being a part of the VOC. I go to the groups and continue to get help and to help others. I still go down and check on the guys at Richards House because I’m an alumnus.”

Emil takes full advantage of what the VOC has to offer: Men’s Group every Wednesday, Resiliency Group on Tuesdays and Thursdays. And he gives back as well, serving as a peer mentor for Veterans Treatment Court.

“Even today I have counselors here I can talk to about anything I’ve got going on. I’m not sure where I would’ve been without the VOC.”

“I’ve been coming here for over 40 years,” Emil says with a wide smile. “And I’m still here!”



★ 2021 SPECIAL EVENTS RECAP ★

FLAG DAY



We hosted our annual Flag Day campaign from June 11th through June 14th. Community members had the opportunity to support local veterans by donating at retail locations across the Greater Rochester

Region. Over 140 volunteers handed out thousands of flags at more than 21 locations.

GOLF FORE VETS

Our annual Golf Fore Vets tournament was hosted on July 26th at Midvale Country Club. Golfers teed off throughout the day and were able to finish with a champagne toast with our Executive Director and members of our Board of Directors.



FOUNDERS DAY



We recognized VOC's founding members with a special program and monument unveiling on August 6th. The Founders Monument was gifted to us by Dr. Barry Culhane, who has been a

champion for all veterans for many years, and was created by artist William S. Yager. Stop by our North Campus at 447 South Avenue to see this beautiful monument!

POUND THE GROUND 5K RUN/WALK

We hosted our annual Pound the Ground 5K Run/Walk on August 18th at Mendon Ponds Park. A virtual option also gave participants the opportunity to run or walk on their own time and at their own pace. More than 300 people signed up to participate in support of VOC and the veterans we serve!



STAND DOWN

Nearly 200 veterans attended our 20th annual Stand Down at the Rochester Public Market on August 13th. Veteran service organizations across Rochester were



on-site to make sure our veterans have access to services they might need. This year, we added a job fair component to the event. We are excited to share that 33 employers joined us for this

great event!

SUICIDE PREVENTION & AWARENESS WEEK

As part of National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Week, we hosted three events to recognize and raise awareness for veteran suicide. On September 7th, community members came



together at the Highland Bowl in Rochester for our Raise the Flag for Awareness Campaign. We distributed 22 American flags and released 22 butterflies in remembrance of the 22 veterans who commit suicide every day. Participants at our Crisis in a Crisis Workshop on September 8th learned about topics including populations at risk for suicide and addiction treatment best practices. The VOC art therapy program was part of the discussion as local veterans showed off their creative talents at our Armed with Creativity art show on September 10th at VOC. In all, 23 art pieces and four creative writing submissions were on display representing two creative writing categories and 11 art categories, including glasswork, photography, mixed media and acrylic painting. The winning entry in each category has been entered into the National Arts Festival. Together we are raising awareness for the brave men and women who served our country as we show them that they are not alone and help is available.

OPERATION WE REMEMBER



We hosted Operation We Remember, a 20th anniversary 9/11 remembrance ceremony, at the Blue Cross Arena on September 10th. Community members came together to remember and

honor the lives lost, the families impacted and the first responders who became heroes on that tragic day.

VISIT VOCROC.ORG OFTEN FOR
NEWS AND UPDATES ABOUT OUR SPECIAL EVENTS!

VETERANS OUTREACH CENTER HIRES AIR FORCE VETERAN & AIR NATIONAL GUARDSMAN JULIO TALLEDO AS DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS



Veterans Outreach Center welcomes Air Force Veteran and Air National Guardsman Julio Talledo as the organization's new Director of Operations. Talledo will lead the daily operations and provide strategic direction and oversight to VOC's veteran programming.

"We are incredibly grateful and excited to have Julio join our team," Veterans Outreach Center Executive Director and U.S. Army Veteran Laura Stradley said. "He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position, and we are confident that his skillset will ensure that our operations and veteran programs continue to be of the best quality. He truly brings a veteran-first attitude to everything he does."

Talledo is an Air Force veteran who spent 11 years in

the Reserve component, four years on Active Duty, and is currently a Major serving with the New York Air National Guard. He was born in Argentina and migrated to the USA in 1993.

Talledo attended Canisius College in Buffalo, NY and earned a Bachelors in Psychology and a Master of Business Administration. Prior to his Active Duty assignment, he worked in the banking industry. Talledo graduated from HSBC Bank's Executive Leadership Management Development Program in 2004 and held a Certified Lease & Finance Professional (CLFP) designation.

During his most recent assignment as an Air Force ROTC instructor at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Talledo completed a Master of Health Systems Management. He is passionate about our community and creating a place where our veterans are shown respectful, compassionate care.

HOPE FOR HEROES TELETHON

NOV 11, 2021
7 P.M. - 7:30 P.M.
WROC-TV 8
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Joan Brandenburg, CFRE - **Director of Advancement**

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*Veteran

MISSION

To serve veterans with compassion and advocate for all who have worn our nation's uniform so they can RISE and live life to the fullest.

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Respect: We treat everyone with dignity and compassion, and we show appreciation for strengths as well as vulnerabilities.

Integrity: We are trust-worthy, honorable and professional. Taking ownership of our actions and communication is a top priority; we do this by conveying honesty and respect through tone, verbal and non-verbal interactions. We demonstrate fiscal responsibility with all resources.

Service: We believe that service is part of the American fabric, and recognize the great sacrifices that are made by all who have worn our nation's uniform. We are committed to serving our veterans and their families with passion and deep appreciation for their service.

Excellence: We are hard-working, innovative and creative; we strive for continuous improvement. Our goal is to consistently grow the quality and scope of our services, in order to better meet the needs of our veterans and their families.



YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

EVERY DONATION DIRECTLY IMPACTS THE LIVES OF LOCAL VETERANS WHO SERVED OUR COUNTRY. DONATE TODAY!

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