

Pennsburg Veterans Organization Expanding its Horizons

Looking for local veterans to assist with their mission

By Kelly Chandler
Staff Writer

It turns out that empty space doesn't sit well with Vets for Vets founder and administrator Jake Leone.

Much the opposite, Leone said he wants all the rooms in the organization's 4th Street, Pennsburg transitional home to be filled to capacity. So VFV has decided to expand its program to reach out to a wider variety of veterans. They are now welcoming those who served in Vietnam, Desert Storm,

Bosnia and other campaigns, as well as non-combat veterans.

Leone said VFV wants to maximize the space they have available to serve more veterans in need. The space is currently home to two young veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We aren't getting a great number of recently discharged veterans referred to us through our network," Leone said, noting other programs like those offered by Veteran's Affairs (VA) are quickly made available to those veterans

where they are handed everything from housing to monthly checks.

"Unfortunately, we have turned away some of these earlier era vets with the hope we would be seeing a greater number of recently discharged desert vets."

And VFV recognizes the unique life experience some of the older veterans would have that could benefit the younger vets already in the house.

"I believe that sharing stories of life decisions from some of our older veterans could help better shape the future decisions of our younger vets," Leone said. "That's how I learned many of my most valuable lessons in life."

He is also looking for a group of veterans from the community to help the home's veterans get back on their feet.

He said VFV is recruiting several people to give one day a week or every other week to ensure the veterans are up and out completing their daily responsibilities. Those volunteers will

also mentor the veterans.

At VFV, all veterans are required to perform specific chores and responsibilities in the house and "chip away at" objectives from their veteran individual performance plan (VIPPP), established before their admission to the house, Leone said. That could be anything from acquiring full-time employment to paying down outstanding debt, he said.

The veterans are also required to pay into an escrow account, which they are refunded 100 percent after completing the program, to help them get their own housing. Community service is also mandated, he said.

Leone, who will soon be starting active duty with the 103rd Attack Squadron at Horsham Air Guard Station, said having a volunteer team to help out with day-to-day accountability is vital as he won't be able to be the day-to-day presence he previously was.

"We hold these reviews not

just to maintain camaraderie amongst our veterans, but also to ensure that our veterans are doing their part to meet individual goals, achieve their desired personal success and to get back on their feet. If they're not working towards self-improvement, we simply find another program to refer them to.

"We're not a shelter, we are not a handout, we are a hand up."

Leone said he feels that expanding the program and adding a community veterans group for accountability will only make VFV stronger and better able to continue its mission of service to those who have served.

It will also keep the non-profit 100 percent volunteer.

"This will further solidify and ensure the future of our program success," he said. "It'll allow us to give all proceeds and donations directly back to our veterans and our mission."

For more information on VFV, visit www.soldiertocivilian.org or call 484-938-VETS(8387).