

Veterans Help Net and Veterans Chronicle Presents “THE MAN IN THE ARENA”

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”
~ Theodore Roosevelt



Bryan Bledsoe
Post Falls, Idaho

Bryan Bledsoe is a U.S. Army veteran who grew up in Spokane and attended Lewis and Clark High School. After high school, Bryan spent three years active duty in the Army and served one year in Vietnam as a helicopter crew chief and door gunner (66/67). When Bryan returned to Spokane, he used his GI Bill benefits to graduate from Eastern Washington University. After many years working in real estate and mortgage in Spokane and North Idaho, Bryan retired in 2011. He and his wife Jean, who is also an active and committed

Every month we are recognizing an extraordinary veteran help provider. This is someone who has entered the Arena and whose service has distinguished them and deserves acknowledgement.

veteran, live in Post Falls, Idaho. Bryan devotes much of his time – really, most of it – to veteran organizations and issues.

Bryan is an active member in the following organizations, and you will often see him in the Honor Guard at many of the veteran activities, ceremonies and funerals.

Veterans Help Net: One of founders and directors of the organization that helps publish Veterans Chronicle in *The Spokesman-Review* and the Veterans Press in the Coeur d’Alene Press with the mission to offer help and hope to veterans, their spouses and families.

The American Legion: Member and adjutant of Post 154 in Rathdrum, Idaho. Also District 1 Adjutant for posts from the Canadian border to the St. Joe River.

Disabled American Veterans: Member of Fort Sherman Chapter #9 (DAV) and coordinator of chapter social media.

Veteran of Foreign Wars: Member of Post 889 in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

Vietnam Veterans of America: Life member of Chapter 890 in Sandpoint, Idaho.

North Idaho Stand Down: Member of the Executive Committee for annual event; also raises money to help veterans and their families year round under St. Vincent de Paul non-profit 501c 3.

Employer Support of Guard & Reserves: North Idaho chair of DOD program that develops supportive work environments for Guard and Reserve members.

Truly a “Man in the Arena,” Bryan has not just joined a veteran organization – he has participated and led many of them. His commitment to providing “help and hope” to veterans in North Idaho and the Northwest is impressive and inspiring to all of us. It is definitely appropriate that he be recognized as our very first “Man in the Arena.”

You are one incredible man. Thank you, Bryan Bledsoe, and God Bless You.

Responses to “Faces of Agent Orange”

By Jean Bledsoe

This month, I thought I’d share some responses received to Faces of Agent Orange articles. There are so many stories, conditions, and diseases – so much heartache. If you can relate to any of this, please contact me at toxicexposure.stories@gmail.com.

~*~
I have a daughter who was born Aug. 21, 1976, one year after her father’s return from Vietnam. The name of her birth defect is T.A.R. Syndrome (thrombocytopenia with absent radius), which is characterized by missing platelets and the radius bone in both arms. She has had to endure 33 major surgeries, one that almost cost her life.

At 18 months old, a bronchial cyst between her heart and lungs was thought to be cancer; it had been growing since birth. She had to have over 100 platelet transfusions. She is ill to the present day from neuropathy, kidney problems, and mental issues from being bullied about her scars and short arms.

The genetic clinic told us she was one of 50 cases in the world and that it was very rare.

In denial, her father denied that she was his

until she was 16 years old. He would not even speak of the situation. This has caused much financial and emotional stress, as you can imagine, on her and me as a young mother.

She is on her own now with two healthy daughters.

I have spoken to other men that served in Vietnam and they told me they witnessed many children with missing limbs.

~*~
I was stationed at Beinh Hoa Air Base Vietnam as a flight engineer on UC-123K’s. Our missions were called Operation Ranch Hand. Our aircraft dispensed Agent Orange, Agent Blue and Agent White. I have three of the 14 diseases related to Agent Orange. I would like to keep my name anonymous because of the guilt of having been involved in these missions of Agent Orange exposure that have claimed health and lives of Vietnam veterans and innocent Vietnamese civilians.

~*~
A veteran, after serving two tours in Vietnam, developed cancer and died two years after his diagnosis. Though his doctors claimed the cancer was Agent Orange-related, the VA does not yet recognize this form of cancer

as presumptively caused by Agent Orange exposure.

The family’s first son was born with spina bifida – the only condition presumed by the VA to be caused by Agent Orange exposure through the father. That son is now an adult in great need of help and medical care. His mother continues to work to try to get enough compensation for his care and worries about what will happen when she is no longer able to help him.

~*~
A veteran returned home from Vietnam with no apparent effects from his Agent Orange exposure. Then his son was born with multiple learning disabilities. But those were overcome, and all seemed well, until the son married, and his first son was born. This baby had many birth defects that occur in much higher numbers by children and grandchildren of Vietnam veterans. These included heart defects; cleft lip and palate; limbs rotated backwards; abdominal organs outside his body; and more. A number of these defects are considered incompatible with life. This innocent baby lived one hour.

VA partner helps formerly homeless Navy veteran pursue degree

By VA’s Veterans Homeless Outreach Office



Navy veteran and Miami native Ashley Esposito returned home from military service with hopes of becoming a chef. She comes from a family of chefs and was the cook for her squadron, preparing meals for 200 people by herself.

But upon returning home, Esposito experienced emotional and physical challenges. Her back began to ache, and she discovered, as a 26-year-old, that she had arthritis. Seizures led to an extended hospital stay, which kept her away from her job at the Copacabana. Soon, she found herself homeless for the first time.

“When you’re in the military and say you have housing problems, you can take out a loan and they’ll put you in base housing. There are so many options that you have as military personnel,” Esposito said. “When you get out into the civilian world, it’s not like that.”

After three years in and out of homelessness, Esposito did the only thing she could think of to do: “I went to

the VA and was like, ‘I need help.’”

Through VA, she met Seth Eisenberg, president and founder of Operation Sacred Trust (OST), a nonprofit organization funded by VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families program.

Eisenberg described how VA realized that every veteran needed individual attention, which helped spark a discussion to fund public-private partnerships like the one with OST.

OST’s approach includes posing veterans this question: “What do you want for the future of your life?” In Esposito’s case, the answer was getting a college degree and helping other veterans experiencing challenges similar to her own.

Esposito endearingly refers to Eisenberg as her “guardian angel,” but Eisenberg is equally grateful for Esposito. When asked what he thinks when he encounters people like her, Eisenberg responded, “I think ‘Thank you, God, for bringing Ashley in.’ I think of the 20-plus veterans every single day who never make it in.”

Esposito is currently employed by VA and working toward a business degree through Florida International University.

Visit www.411veterans.com to learn more about Operation Sacred Trust services.

Courtesy VAntage Point, the official blog of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans can find toxic exposure risks through app



Soldiers burn trash in an old dumpster at Joint Security Station Adl in western Baghdad in 2008. (Brock Jones/ U.S. Army)

By Dorothy Mills-Gregg
Military.com

For veterans who think they were exposed to toxic substances during their service, the Department of Veterans Affairs has a mobile application that will help them answer questions about what this potential exposure means for their long-term health.

Originally designed for VA providers, Exposure-Ed now lets anyone view a list of service-related exposures – broken down by type, conflict and date or location of service. It also has a map veterans can use to find the closest VA facilities and exposure-related program.

For example, veterans thinking they came into contact with the Vietnam-era herbicide Agent Orange can use the “Exposures” button on the home page for immediate access to a list of

illnesses related to exposure. Or, veterans can input in the time and location they served to view everything they might have been exposed to.

The last option sorts exposure risks by conflict, ranging from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn.

Through the app, users can find studies into the exposure, learn how to apply for benefits and connect with certain VA programs, like the “Agent Orange Registry Health Exam for Veterans.”

There is no log-on needed to access the App’s features, and it can be downloaded via the Apple Store or Google Play on smartphones or tablets. It can also be accessed through the VA’s mobile app at mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed.

HEY, VETERANS DID YOU KNOW

Veterans diagnosed with ALS are eligible for benefits?

If a veteran diagnosed with ALS served 90 or more days in any branch of the military and was honorably discharged, the VA presumes that the condition was a result of military service.

Benefits include:

- VA ALS clinic visits with specialists at your VA medical center
- Medical equipment for your respiratory, mobility, communication, daily living, and other needs
- Disability compensation in a monthly, tax-free payment
- Specially-adapted housing grant (SAH) to help build, buy, or remodel a home to meet disability requirements
- Automobile grant to buy a disability-accessible vehicle
- Aid and attendance allowance to help pay for home care

Does someone you know have ALS? If they served, please see “How Can I Get Help?” to get help with accessing benefits.

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WHITWORTH UNIVERSITY



The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 passed! Now what?

By Darryl Heisey
State Veterans Service Officer
Idaho Division of Veterans Services



Are you a Vietnam veteran who served on a ship in the territorial waters of Vietnam? If you are, there is some great news related to ships that were 12 nautical miles off the coast of Vietnam.

The Blue Water Vietnam Act of 2019 was signed into law by the President of the United States on June 25, 2019. This law makes it possible for a veteran who served on a U.S. Navy or Coast Guard vessel in Vietnam "blue waters" between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 to file for claims under the presumption of Agent Orange exposure.

The Department of Defense and the Veteran Affairs are working together to establish the ships list and the current location to determine if your ship falls under the law. You can review these websites to determine if your ship qualifies:

www.va.gov/shiplist-agent-orange.pdf
www.archives.gov/research/military/

logbooks/navy

You can also email archives2reference@nara.gov for more information.

Eligible survivors of deceased Blue Water Navy veterans also may benefit from the new law and may file claims for benefits based on the veteran's service. This also affects veterans who served at the Korean DMZ from September 1, 1967 through March 31, 1968; the veteran will still need to provide evidence that shows proof of service on the Korean DMZ during the appropriate times.

An estimated 420,000 to 560,000 Vietnam-era veterans may be considered Blue Water Navy veterans. To qualify under the new law, these veterans must have a disease associated with herbicide exposure, as listed in 38 Code of Federal Regulations section 3.309(e).

We are advising all veterans with a current condition established as an herbicide presumptive condition that may fall under this new law to contact their State or County Veteran Service Officer and file the claim. If a veteran has been previously denied for presumptive conditions, we strongly suggest they reopen the claim!

The State and County Veteran Service Officer can inform you of the conditions and will assist you in getting your claim filed on the appropriate forms. All claims received for Blue Water Vietnam Navy veterans will not be worked by the Veterans Affairs until January 1, 2020.

Ultimately, if you know someone who may qualify under this new law, we encourage them to make an appointment with your State or County Veteran Service Officer and get the claim submitted.

Veterans appreciate civilian support



By David Sutton
American Legion Post 241
Chaplain, U.S. Army Veteran

Our United States armed forces are now and have always been in the forefront when we think of the strength and dedication of our soldiers, sailors, Marines, and aviators. Their service and commitment are the focus of America's expression of thankfulness.

The appreciation for support has become a mutual expression of our veterans towards the "civilian" populace, those who did not serve in the military. Our veterans are realizing more and more how vital this civilian support has become. They return the gracious expressions of appreciation with, "And thanks for your support because we could not serve as effectively without the support of all American citizens!"

How important is the support of those who did not serve? What are some of those people doing to express their support? What does that do for the pride and enthusiasm we have for those who lead our armed forces?

Paul Fuchs is a shining example of that support. A regular attendee at American Legion Post 241 gatherings in Spokane Valley, Paul accompanies his 94 year old father Neal Fuchs, a

veteran of the United States Air Force, to all the meetings.

"I love our veterans and what they are doing and have done," Paul said. "I have a son, cousins and my dad who served."

Owner of First Class Response, a firefighter training company that provides firefighters and rescue teams and HazMat personnel training, Paul is involved in several community activities. Each time he sponsors an event, he tries to include American Legion and other veteran groups to assist by presenting the colors and speaking on occasions.

He also organizes and presents "mock" car accidents at schools to emphasize the dangers of drunk driving and texting while driving.

"Mostly we want to educate the kids on the consequences of poor decisions in life," Paul said.

When Post 241 created a flag retirement program, Paul was the first contact made to include the Boy Scouts of America. He has been in scouting in some way for 50 years. His Troop 71 specializes in flag retirement and has enhanced the visibility of American Legion in the community.

Sons of the American Legion and American Legion auxiliary (along with all veteran organizations) are an excellent ways for adult children of veterans to serve in the community. The organizations are community service-based and adhere to the principles of their supporting Posts.

Jack* is another civilian supporter of our veterans.

Jack provides fire wood to veterans who need it to keep their houses warm. He never served in the military, but said, "I love America and those who dedicated themselves in service."

His support began at Newby-ginnings in Post Falls where he wanted to help veterans. He met a veteran who said he would like to help him deliver wood.

From there, Jack expanded his passion for loving people to members of his church, and then to anybody who needed wood to keep warm.

"My faith in God drives me to support and love all people, so when He provided (timber on several acres) I thought of our veterans and expanded it from there," he said. "I especially thought of our veterans because they serve God and Country in their respective organizations."

Jack has a double opportunity to help veterans as he volunteers at Shalom Ministries as a cook. He said many homeless veterans eat at Shalom regularly and he gets to hear life stories while befriending them.

Our veteran organizations are strengthened by caring citizens like Paul and Jack. Enjoying and loving the freedoms we have are a direct result of our veterans committing their lives to serve and protect everyone. Those who could not serve support in myriad ways. It's important for them to do so. And it is important to our veterans.

To the citizens who thank a veteran for their service, we say, "You are worth it!" And to the civilians who give very much appreciated support, we say, "Thank you!"

*Name changed

HEY, VETERANS DID YOU KNOW

The VA offers support for caregivers?

If you're the caregiver of a veteran, the VA has resources for you as well. Caregivers play a vital role in veterans' health and well-being. Whether you need immediate assistance or have questions about what service eligibility, the licensed social workers who answer the support line can:

- Provide information about VA assistance.
- Help you access services.
- Connect you with the Caregiver Support Coordinator at your VA Medical Center.
- Just listen, if that's what you need right now.

Call the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274 or visit www.caregiver.va.gov to get started.

HOW CAN I GET HELP?

Every county and state has a Veteran Affairs office to answer questions about benefits and provide assistance. There are also other useful resources for veterans in the Inland Northwest.



GO ONLINE

VA.gov
The Department of Veterans Affairs website has resources on every topic relevant to veterans.

VA.gov/welcome-kit
The VA Welcome Guide covers all types of benefits and services available for veterans, new recruits, active service members and their families.

DAV9.com
Based in Post Falls, Disabled American Veterans Chapter 9 Fort Sherman shares links and information to both local and national help organizations for veterans.

Explore.VA.gov/benefits-navigator
Explore VA benefits and discover which ones you and your family may be eligible to receive.



IN PERSON

Spokane County Regional Veteran Service Office
1117 N. Evergreen Rd.,
Spokane Valley, WA
(509) 477-3690

Apply for emergency services, or have any benefits or service questions answered by 5 Veteran Service Officers (VSO) and staff.

North Idaho Veteran Services and Benefits Office
120 E. Railroad Ave., Post Falls, ID (208) 446-1092

Meet with a VSO or staff for help with VA benefits enrollment, claims or other veteran needs.

Goodwill Support Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)
130 E. Third Ave., Spokane, WA (509) 828-2449

SSVF helps homeless veterans and their families find housing and connects veterans with other support organizations.



BY PHONE

Spokane County Regional Veteran Service Office
(509) 477-3690

North Idaho Veteran Services and Benefits Office
(208) 446-1092

Veteran Crisis Line
1 (800) 273-8255, press 1

North Idaho Crisis Center
(208) 625-4884

Washington or Idaho 2-1-1

Dial "2-1-1" for health and human resources referrals.

Healthcare for Homeless Veterans HCHV
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504 E. Second Ave., Spokane, WA

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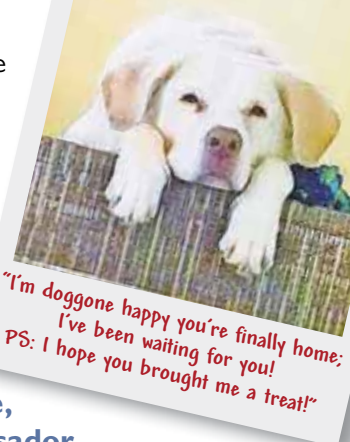
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VeteransHelpNet partners with *The Spokesman-Review* to publish Veterans Chronicle on the third Friday of every month to increase awareness about veteran issues and help veterans find hope and help.

If you would like to share a veteran story or a "Did You Know" fact about resources for veterans, please contact info@VeteransHelpNet.com or visit www.VeteransHelpNet.com. For advertising information, please contact (509) 459-5095 or advertising@spokesman.com.

Buddy Checks make a difference

By The American Legion

Prior to Veterans Day, American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford called on Legionnaires to follow up on the inaugural Buddy Checks to fellow veterans that debuted last March and received National Executive Committee support the following spring.

During the 2019 Spring Meetings, the NEC passed Resolution 18, which calls for the twice-annual Buddy Checks to be conducted Legion-wide on the weeks of the American Legion's birthday and Veterans Day.

American Legion posts again stepped up. In Weehawken, N.J., members of Post 18 took to the streets to connect with members of the post who haven't been active in recent years, including one 91-year-old World War II widower.

"That's what (non-commissioned officers) do in the service. You're supposed to check up on your troops," Post 18 Commander Chris Page said. "We're charged ... with the health and welfare of our troops. What we like to do is check up on our members and make sure they're OK. We also check in on their families as well. It goes back to helping out with the community."

And in Fort Gibson, Okla., members of Frank Gladd Post 20 were conducting Buddy Checks and came into contact with an 87-year-old Korean War veteran who hadn't paid his membership dues in two years. Post Post and District Commander Jim Quinn said



World War II veteran Ernie Troisi of Union City, N.J., received a visit from Post 18 on Veterans Day on Monday, Nov. 11, 2019. (Photo by Steven B. Brooks)

the veteran told the post he could no longer make it to post meetings and that his membership in the Legion was no longer important to anyone.

"I was dispatched to the veteran's house with his membership card," Quinn said. "When I arrived at the veteran's house, he invited me in and we had about a half-hour conversation about the current weather and our time in service. I asked him about his welfare and if there was anything we at the post could do for him. He replied that he was fine, but he had trouble driving."

Quinn left the veteran's membership card with him and "told him if he needed any help with going places to call the post and we would arrange to take him where he needed to go. He told me he was not in that bad of shape but if he needed help he would call."

The post processed the veteran's membership with "Pay It Forward" funds. Two weeks later the veteran called the post and requested Quinn return to his house. "When I arrived he presented me with a check for his 2019 and 2020 dues," Quinn said. "The moral of this story is cast your bread upon the waters, and it will be returned to you tenfold. An act of faith and kindness shown to this veteran convinced him that his post stands for the ideals of The American Legion and not just to collect dues."



Veterans find housing stability with SSVF

"It was like we had our life back. The help from SSVF opened up opportunity, which helped me be able to get my job. Without Goodwill, we would still be living on the streets, and I don't think my wife would have made it." - Travis

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is a housing stability program serving veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Goodwill partners with Volunteers of America to provide these intensive services to veterans and their families in Spokane, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Kootenai, Ferry, Lincoln, Whitman, and Bonner counties. SSVF is able to assist over 400 veterans each year.

SSVF uses a "housing first" approach to assisting veterans. The focus is on housing stability, not treatment, with an emphasis on crisis intervention and client self-determination.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What services does SSVF provide?

We provide comprehensive case management and financial housing assistance for eligible veterans and their families. Some services we offer include: rent payments, deposit payments, application payments, STA passes, referrals for VA healthcare, VA disability, VA Pension, SSI/SSDI payments, substance abuse counseling, career/employment programs, and more. SSVF is a federally-funded program.

How will I know if I am eligible for SSVF programs and services?

SSVF's outreach staff conducts screenings with veterans to determine eligibility. To request an eligibility screening, call (509) 828-2449.

I have barriers that could affect my eligibility to be a tenant. Will SSVF be able to help me?

Yes, if you are a veteran and meet the program eligibility criteria. We work with barriers such as mental or physical trauma, rental arrears, felonies, bankruptcy, evictions, etc. SSVF does not provide legal or health services, but we do help participants connect with those services.

Do I have to be literally homeless in order to receive SSVF funds?

No. SSVF can help veterans who are at risk of losing their home, as well as veterans who are unhoused (sleeping on the street or in a car, for example).

Are there other services or items SSVF provides to veterans and their families?

SSVF can also assist participants to obtain VA benefits and assist participants to coordinate and obtain other public benefits in the community. SSVF staff also provides case management to support veterans as they stabilize their housing and increase their income.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families

130 E. 3rd Ave. Spokane, WA 99202
M-F, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (509) 828-2449
homesforveterans.discovergoodwill.org

HEY, VIETNAM VETERANS DID YOU KNOW

Type II diabetes may qualify you for VA benefits?

If you develop Diabetes Mellitus (Type II), you are eligible for VA health care benefits and a monthly disability check. Due to presumed exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam, there are currently 14 listed diseases that automatically qualify you to receive compensation. Conditions secondary to diabetes are also covered, including neuropathy, chronic kidney failure and heart disease. Contact your Veterans Service officer (VSO) for more information or for assistance in filing a claim. This is a free service.

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In Idaho, contact Department of Labor Veteran Services Representatives at 600 N Thornton St., Post Falls or (208) 457-8789.

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Disabled veterans can fly Space-A

By Jim Absher
Military.com

The 2019 National Defense Authorization Act allows veterans with a permanent and total service-connected Department of Veterans Affairs disability rating to travel space available on military aircraft.

Veterans will be assigned a travel priority of Category 6, the lowest priority available, along with retirees and their dependents. Dependents of disabled veterans are not eligible for Space-A travel.

Authorized disabled veterans can travel in the continental United States (CONUS) or directly between CONUS and Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa.

Disabled veterans must have a DD Form 2765, Defense Department ID Card (Tan), in order to fly Space-A.

Space available flights, known as Space-A or military hops, allow eligible passengers to fill unused seats on DoD-owned or -controlled aircraft.

Space-A passengers can fly only after all the space-required passenger and cargo has been accommodated.

Space-A passengers are then loaded in priority groups, with emergency leave being the top priority and retirees and disabled veterans rating the lowest priority.

Space-A passengers can take up to two pieces of luggage at 70 pounds each; pets are not allowed.

Not all Space-A flights originate from military bases. Commercial airports such as Baltimore-Washington Marshall International and Seattle-Tacoma International also offer Space-A flights.

Air Mobility Command, which runs the Space-A program, lets passengers register for flights via email, and all Space-A terminals have Facebook pages where you can see what flights are coming up and how many seats are available.

UPCOMING EVENTS

VETERANS SELF DEFENSE STAND DOWN SPOKANE
Sat., Jan. 4, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 3-6 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 5, 12-3 p.m.
Spokane Health and Fitness Expo Spokane County Fair and Expo Center

404 N. Havana St., Spokane Valley

Learn self defense with the assistance of a walking cane. Free for veterans (Health and Fitness Expo admission is \$8). Space is limited. Contact Aaron Anderson at (509) 315-6214 or aaron@SticksNStonesMartialArts.com to register.

Join us in providing our homeless veterans and their families access to local community providers and veteran specific services. To attend as a community provider, please contact Jenniferm@giin.org

Graduation is no time to learn you haven't saved enough for college.

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