HOUSING FOR RURAL VETERANS

AMERICA’S RURAL HEROES
Dear Friends,

Veterans of the United States military services put their lives in danger to protect this country and its citizens. Unfortunately, when these brave soldiers return home, they are not always provided for in a manner befitting their service. Far too many veterans find themselves without homes or living in substandard housing and unable to access the services they need to successfully rejoin society.

These problems are compounded in rural areas, where access to services often involves traveling great distances and crossing county or even state lines. Rural communities, which provide a disproportionate number of soldiers compared with the general population, often struggle to secure the resources and facilities that veterans require.

Despite these challenges, organizations in rural communities like those highlighted in this issue of *Rural Voices* are developing innovative and proactive approaches to provide housing options for rural veterans. With President Obama calling for an end to veteran homelessness by 2015, and support from organizations like The Home Depot Foundation, there is new hope in developing safe, affordable housing for veterans in rural America.

In Community,

Twila Martin Kekabah, Chair

Moises Loza, Executive Director

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**HAC would like to thank The Home Depot Foundation for its generous support of this issue of Rural Voices.**

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Cover Photo provided by: Community Action Network, Inc. Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this publication were provided by the organization featured in the article.
Affordable housing for deserving families is at the heart of The Home Depot Foundation’s mission.

Since 2002, The Home Depot Foundation has invested more than $300 million in local communities to build and renovate homes for deserving families; transform local parks and playgrounds; and repair community facilities.

In 2011, The Home Depot Foundation focused its financial and volunteer resources to help nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving the homes of economically disadvantaged U.S. military veterans. To date, the Foundation has committed $80 million and the volunteer skills of thousands of Home Depot associates to these efforts. From building wheelchair ramps, to renovating homes of wounded warriors, to remodeling transitional housing for homeless veterans, we are doing this to show our appreciation for the sacrifices they have made for all of us.

According to recent statistics, military veterans disproportionately live in rural communities. We know that to have an impact on individual families as well as on communities in rural areas, cross sector collaboration is essential. To make headway on the complicated housing issues that face veterans, we all must continue to work together and leverage our resources to improve the future of our communities.

We’re extremely excited to do just that through our partnership with the Housing Assistance Council (HAC). Through HAC’s new Affordable Housing for Rural Veterans Initiative and the development of a rural veterans revolving loan and grant fund, we not only hope to be able to help meet the immediate critical housing needs of veterans in rural areas, but provide training and technical resources to nonprofits that make a positive impact on these individuals, families and communities for years to come.
No one who has made sacrifices to serve our nation should ever be homeless. Yet, we know that tonight, and every night, thousands of veterans will go to sleep on our streets and in shelters all across this country. In fact, according to the most recent estimates, more than 67,000 veterans were without a home in 2011.

This is unacceptable.

Thankfully, in recent years we have made significant strides to address this national crisis. It is an effort that is built on partnerships between policymakers, agencies, and local providers who have stood up and unequivocally said that homelessness among veterans is unacceptable, that it will not be tolerated, and that we will work together to end it. But it is also an effort built on programs that identify the best approaches to meet the different needs of veterans who are experiencing homelessness — whether it is a Vietnam era veteran who has been living on the streets for years or a newly returning veteran with a family who is showing up at a shelter for the first time.

I have seen firsthand how the government’s response to homelessness is changing with the Department of Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, which I helped institute. The HUD-VASH program has ended homelessness for thousands of veterans by emphasizing a strong partnership between HUD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that allows homeless veterans to be identified and to be provided with housing vouchers to keep them in stable, supportive housing programs. It is a program that is working.

The vast majority of veterans live in suburban and rural areas, and unfortunately a growing number of veterans living in those areas are experiencing homelessness.

In 1992, Patty Murray became the first woman to serve on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. And in 2011, Senator Murray became the first woman to Chair the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. Murray is the daughter of a disabled World War II veteran. Murray’s work in a psychological ward at the Seattle VA hospital as a college student led her to become a leading voice in Congress for veterans suffering from the mental wounds of war.

In Washington state, Murray has worked with the VA to open community based health clinics all throughout the state and has worked to expand services at existing VA facilities. Senator Murray has been honored for her work by the Vietnam Veterans of America, American Ex-POWs, the VFW, the Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.

Read Senator Murray’s complete bio at http://www.murray.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/home
effective because it gets veterans into permanent housing and then begins to address their medical health, mental health, or other needs, instead of the other way around.

HUD-VASH is a critical tool in our effort to end veteran homelessness, but there is still room for improvement. There have been challenges providing services to veterans living in rural areas, to areas far from VA medical centers, or to a small number of veterans living in a community. A large part of the solution to these challenges is leveraging the experience and knowledge of local providers. That is why I have worked with my colleagues on legislation that encourages VA to collaborate with community partners, especially in rural areas, to provide case management to veterans who participate in the HUD-VASH program.

I have also pushed HUD to consider making awards of smaller numbers of vouchers in some rural areas to ensure that no matter where a homeless veteran lives they will have the same access to this important program. At the end of May 2012, nearly 33,000 veterans and their families were in stable housing through the HUD-VASH program, while another 4,000 were searching for suitable housing to rent.

For homeless veterans with different needs, VA offers a number of programs that can assist them. The largest transitional housing program, known as the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program, partnered with over 600 community organizations to serve more than 32,000 homeless veterans last year. Last Congress, I passed legislation to give the GPD program greater flexibility to collaborate with more diverse partners. As a result, in rural areas where there may not be a large number of homeless veterans, the program can now collaborate with a wide variety of community organizations that serve homeless persons.

While these important efforts are making real progress, significant work remains to reach the Obama administration’s bold goal of eliminating veteran homelessness by 2015.

The Government Accountability Office recently reported that while the number of homeless veterans has been declining, the number of homeless women veterans more than doubled between 2006 and 2010. In fact, today women veterans are twice as likely to become homeless as male veterans. As more women begin to transition home and step back into lives as mothers, wives, and citizens, we must be prepared to serve the unique challenges they face. That is why this year, I introduced the Homeless Veterans

### HELPING VETERANS KEEP THEIR HOMES

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers veterans assistance in keeping their homes when they fall behind on their mortgages. For VA-guaranteed home loans, VA provides supplemental servicing assistance to help cure the default. Veterans should work with their servicers to resolve the default. However, in cases where the servicer is unable to help the veteran borrower, the VA Loan Guaranty Service can take an active role in interceding with the servicer to explore all options to avoid foreclosure. Veterans with VA-guaranteed home loans can call (877) 827-3702 for assistance. Information is available at www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/docs/foreclosure_avoidance_fact_sheet.pdf.

For those veterans who may have obtained a conventional or sub-prime loan, VA may also be able to help. However, unlike when a veteran has a VA-guaranteed home loan, VA does not have the legal authority to intervene on the borrower’s behalf. It is important that a borrower contacts his/her servicer as quickly as possible.

If VA is not able to help a veteran borrower retain his/her home, the HOPE NOW Alliance may be of assistance. HOPE NOW consists of servicers, counselors, and investors whose main goal is to assist distressed borrowers retain their homes and avoid foreclosure. HOPE NOW provides outreach, counseling and assistance to homeowners who have the willingness and ability to keep their homes but are facing financial difficulty as a result of the crisis in the mortgage market. The HOPE NOW Alliance can be reached at (888) 995-HOPE (888-995-4673) or by visiting www.hopenow.com.
A large part of the solution to these challenges is leveraging the experience and knowledge of local providers.

As we have also seen, homelessness is not confined to our big cities. It affects communities large and small throughout our country. The vast majority of veterans live in suburban and rural areas, and unfortunately a growing number of veterans living in those areas are experiencing homelessness. According to a report issued by HUD and VA on veteran homelessness, in 2009, 72 percent of sheltered veterans lived in cities and 28 percent lived in suburban and rural areas. By 2010, the number of homeless veterans in suburban and rural areas had increased to 32 percent, while the number in cities declined to 68 percent. These numbers are further evidence that the face and needs of our veterans are changing. We must continue to work to ensure that the programs that serve our veterans adapt to meet their needs — whatever those needs are and wherever the veterans live.

It is also important to note that while we work to move veterans from the streets into housing, we also need to ensure that we prevent those who are at risk from spiraling into homelessness in the first place. VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program has prevented veterans and their families from becoming homeless and rapidly rehouses those who do. The program, which started in the fall of 2011, had served nearly 16,000 veterans and family members by the end of March 2012. Veterans who may be facing homelessness as a result of losing their homes can call 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838) or go to www.va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp to receive immediate assistance from this worthwhile program.

We also must always be aware of the challenges our elderly veterans face in finding adequate housing.

I am working to pass a provision that will fix an inadequate reimbursement system for care provided to our elderly veterans in state veterans’ homes. Currently, these homes provide a high level of services, but they are not sufficiently compensated for those services. This threatens the operation of these homes and can result in homes laying off staff or not accepting as many of our elderly, disabled veterans who need and deserve this care. I am pleased we could enact this critically needed change that will ensure VA can adequately reimburse state veterans’ homes for the care they provide, and I expect VA to move quickly to fully implement this provision.

While there remains a tremendous amount of work to be done, the accomplishments and progress that we have seen in recent years provides reason for optimism. We must continue to look for innovative ways to address the housing needs of veterans and invest in methods that are proven successes. With collaboration between VA, HUD, and state and local governments, there is reason to continue to believe that we can meet bold goals — even ending the scourge of veteran homelessness — once and for all.
Veterans who live in rural areas, therefore, often rely on services provided by their communities and other organizations. One such example provides housing for veterans in need. Habitat for Humanity’s Veteran Initiative has repaired, modified, or built 314 homes for veterans in the last year, half of which were located in rural areas. This is but one organization making a difference in our small towns; all organizations can be tremendous allies in our goal of spreading the word about programs to rural veterans.

As chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, I am concerned with ensuring rural veterans have access to the same benefits and care as their urban counterparts. The first question we must ask is, do veterans living in rural regions know of the benefits available to them?

We know that one million veterans living in rural areas are not receiving care through VA. That is, one million veterans who may be entitled to such care may need it but are not getting it. Although VA has an established system of clinics nationwide, again, many veterans have to travel hundreds of miles to access that care. I am hopeful in the near future we can reverse that paradigm by providing care in the community to put our veterans’ needs first.

But we must never underestimate the power of local organizations. These groups are the backbone of our society — they provide incredible services for the people they support. As chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, I am concerned with ensuring rural veterans have access to the same benefits and care as their urban counterparts. The first question we must ask is, do veterans living in rural regions know of the benefits available to them?

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But we must never underestimate the power of local organizations. These groups are the backbone of our society — they provide incredible services for the people they support. This is no less the case for those reaching out to the farthest corners of our nation to help our veterans. I applaud their efforts and hope that with their continued support we can eventually see all rural veterans receiving the benefits and care they have earned.
Military veterans disproportionately live in rural and exurban communities. And vets who live in urban areas are much more likely to live in smaller cities, according to the latest data from the U.S. Census.

Military veterans are least likely to live in the centers of the nation's financial, political, and media power — New York, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. Those large metropolitan regions have among the lowest percentages of veterans in the population of any of the nation's communities.

Rural and exurban counties are home to 30.6 percent of the nation's 22.6 million veterans. But these same counties represent just 25.9 percent of all residents over 18 years of age.

Where Veterans Live

Military veterans make up 11.7 percent of the adult populations in rural and exurban counties. In urban counties, however, vets are 9.3 percent of those over 18. (Exurban counties are in metropolitan regions, but nearly half of the people living there are in rural settings. These are counties that lie on the edge of larger metro areas.)

Nationally, 9.9 percent of the population over 18 years of age has served in the military. The map on the next page shows counties that are above the national average of 9.9 percent in purple. Those with vets at or below the national average are in green.

There are over 1,900 rural and exurban counties with a higher proportion of vets than the U.S. average. Only 642 rural or exurban counties have below-average veteran populations (shown in light green).

When vets move to cities, they are more likely to live in smaller urban areas than in the nation's large metro regions. Urban counties with a larger proportion of vets than the nation as a whole average 268,000 people. But urban counties with a smaller proportion of veterans than the country as a whole have an average population of 619,000.

The U.S. cities with the smallest proportions of veterans are among the nation's most notable and influential. Veterans make up only 3.7 percent of New York County's adult population, for example — 4 percent in the Bronx and 6.5 percent in Westchester County.

Veterans are 5 percent of the adult population in Los Angeles County; 4.8 percent of San Francisco County; 4.5 percent of Suffolk County (Boston); 5.6 percent of California's Santa Clara County; and 6.7 percent of Harris County (Houston), Texas.

Despite the presence of the Pentagon and nearby military bases, only 6.9 percent of the adult population in Washington, D.C., consists of military veterans, more than 40 percent below the national average.

Simply, the cities where most of the financial, political, and military decisions are made are the places where you are the least likely to have a vet as a neighbor.

There are swaths of rural America with below-average proportions of vets. The Delta, parts of the Southeast, West Texas, Utah, Kentucky (and southwest Virginia), and the Rio Grande Valley all have below-average veteran populations. Many of these areas (the Delta, the Black Belt, the Valley, and southeastern Kentucky) are also persistently poor areas of rural America.
The distribution of veterans who have served since just before the first Gulf War show a slightly different distribution. To begin with, they are much more concentrated than vets overall. Two-thirds of U.S. counties, in fact, have a smaller percentage of Gulf War vets than the nation as a whole.

And Gulf War vets are not overrepresented in rural counties.

Nationally, 2.3 percent of the adult population (those over 18) have served in the military since 1990. These are Gulf era veterans.

Blue counties in the map (right) have more Gulf era vets than the 2.3 percent national average. (Dark blue are rural or exurban counties; light blue are urban counties.) Yellow counties have a smaller percentage than the national average. (Light yellow are rural or exurban counties; dark yellow are urban counties.)
ENDING HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS
by Dr. Susan Angell

A goal to end veteran homelessness by 2015

When Americans think about their vision of homelessness, they tend to dream up the urban environment. Images of back alleys and people living under bridges can be pervasive.

In reality, our rural communities are experiencing homelessness at rates that rival those of our cities. Homelessness in rural America is a major concern. For our veterans, the situation is acute. There were 67,495 homeless veterans on a single night in January 2011. While this number represents a 12 percent drop compared to the previous year, it is still too high. Currently, veterans comprise 14 percent of the U.S. homeless population but less than 8 percent of the total population.

In 2009, President Obama and VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki announced an unprecedented effort to end veteran homelessness by 2015. You might call an initiative like this bold and ambitious; however, at VA, we know it is an achievable goal. The plan includes helping homeless veterans and those at risk of homelessness acquire safe housing, needed treatment services, employment opportunities, and benefits assistance.

Challenges for Rural Homelessness

The footprint of veterans in rural America is significant. In 2008, VA established the Veterans Health Administration Office of Rural Health to support the unique needs of enrolled veterans residing in geographically remote areas. About 3.4 million veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system live in rural areas in the U.S., and these veterans are increasingly made up of large numbers of Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans. In some of the most rural states, like West Virginia and Montana, the percentage of homeless veterans is high. In West Virginia in 2010, 25 percent of homeless persons were veterans; in Montana, 16 percent were veterans.

Veterans in rural areas are more likely to be homeless for longer periods of time and have serious medical problems. Rural veterans have different needs than veterans who live in urban areas. Veterans in rural areas are more likely to be homeless for longer periods of time and have serious medical problems; they are less likely to be diagnosed with mental health challenges or substance use and less likely to receive public assistance.

Services from VA for Rural Homeless

To help address all the needs of these at-risk veterans, VA established the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans, a 24-7 hotline where trained counselors connect homeless veterans, their families, and support networks with specific VA services to help avoid or overcome homelessness. The hotline, 1-877-4AID-VET, is co-located with the Veterans Crisis Line and provides a “warm transfer” to any veteran dealing with mental health challenges. In order to coordinate the local provision of services and follow up case management, the call center identifies staff at the closest VA medical center who can help. The local contacts work to link veterans to needed VA and community services.

The hotline has been successful in connecting veterans to the services they require, but there are still challenges to accessing and providing homeless services in rural areas. These challenges include few, if any, homeless shelters; limited hours; and large geographic areas, where services are often stretched over multiple counties. Other challenges may include limited access to and general lack of services; affordable housing; child care; credit counseling; family reconciliation; healthcare; substance use treatment; behavioral health, dental, vision, and specialty care; reentry services; and transportation. More than two-thirds of all shelters are located in larger cities, leaving fewer resources for rural America.
Presently, VA’s ongoing prevention, transitional housing, and permanent housing programs are helping to close the gaps in services for homeless veterans living in rural areas. VA’s SSVF program grants serve rural and urban areas, providing funding for community-based programs aimed at ending veteran homelessness.

VA is also exploring ways to reach and address the unique needs of rural veterans. The Veterans Homeless Prevention Demonstration Program (VHPD), also referred to as the HUD-VA Pilot Program, is a partnership between VA, HUD, the Department of Labor (DOL), and local community agencies. It is designed to explore ways to offer early intervention homeless prevention, primarily to veterans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan, and support efforts to identify, conduct outreach, and assist these veterans in regaining and maintaining housing stability. Two of the five VHPD sites serve veterans in rural locations, including Watertown, New York, near Fort Drum, and Killeen, Texas, near Fort Hood. VA expects to learn valuable lessons about preventing homelessness in rural areas from these VHPD sites.

Help us continue to help our homeless veterans. Be a partner. Make the call to the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838) if you know a veteran who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Visit our website at www.va.gov/homeless and help VA spread the word about VA’s services for this at-risk population.

-Dr. Susan Angell is the Executive Director for the Homeless Veterans Initiative Office at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

A state-by-state look at where veterans live is available at www.dailyyonder.com/gulf-war-era-vets-not-especially-rural/2012/05/16/4022. We divided each state into rural, exurban, and urban counties. (Exurban counties are in metro areas, but about half the people live in rural settings.)

For example, Maryland has the highest percentage of rural Gulf War era vets (at 4.6 percent). Nevada has the largest percentage of all vets living in rural areas (at 16.4 percent).

-Bill Bishop is the Coeditor for the Daily Yonder. For more from Bill, subscribe at www.dailyyonder.com.

This photograph was used with permission of Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, “Portraits of Home: Veterans in Search of Shelter.”

Photographer: Cathy ten Broeke
How local nonprofits partnered with veterans to develop innovative Canal Street Apartments

Several years of planning and hard work by veteran advocates and two nonprofit housing agencies led to the January 2011 opening of Canal Street Apartments in Winooski, Vermont. Housing Vermont and the Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) were the developers of the six-story building. It features two-year transitional housing for homeless veterans on the first four floors, plus permanent affordable housing on the top two floors.

The $5.6 million project broke ground in October, 2009. A partnership formed by COTS and Housing Vermont owns the building. The VA awarded a $1.2 million grant to COTS to support construction of the building. TD Bank provided construction financing and a permanent loan. The Green Mountain Housing Equity Fund IV, whose investors are TD Bank, National Life, NBT Bank, Citizens Bank, People’s United Bank, and Merchants Bank, provided more than $3 million in equity through federal tax credits. Other sources included the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Community Development Program, City of Winooski, and the Residential Energy Efficiency Program.

Canal Street Apartments houses veterans in the COTS program on the first four floors. There are 16 units (12 studios and four two-bedroom apartments) for veterans who receive supportive services through COTS in a program which receives annual funding support from VA. The top two floors consist of 12 units (ten studios and two two-bedroom apartments) of permanent, affordable apartments for the public.

“This is a remarkable example of a coordinated, thoughtful response to providing services and housing to veterans”

-Nancy Owens, President, Housing Vermont

“Veterans have sacrificed so much for their country, and we are so proud to have this beautiful new building to let them know how much we appreciate their service,” said Rita Markley, executive director of COTS. “Canal Street demonstrates Vermont knows how to treat our veterans when they return home, offering them safe and decent housing.”

More than 250,000 veterans experience homelessness each year. Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are becoming homeless faster than those from previous wars: 9,000 of these soldiers are homeless. They also have...
unemployment numbers higher than the general population (21.1 percent).

**Veterans Lead the Way**

Vietnam veterans pushed to make the Canal Street project a reality. They did not want the younger generation to face the same challenges they had without a support structure in place. These veterans helped form the COTS Veterans Advisory Council, which advised COTS staff during the project’s planning and construction. They also have helped raise awareness by speaking to various veterans’ organizations about the project.

Founded in 1982, COTS provides emergency shelter to homeless families and individuals, case management and referral services to those who are homeless or marginally housed, and permanent housing to low-income families.

Since its inception in 1988, Housing Vermont has raised more than $247 million in private equity to finance 144 affordable rental housing developments throughout Vermont. This equity has leveraged an additional $351 million in private financing and public investment. The 4,400 apartments created or renovated in these efforts serve low- and moderate-income Vermonters, including seniors and those with special needs. Many developments also include commercial space.

-Kenn Sassorossi is the Vice President for Asset Management and Partners Relations at Housing Vermont. He can be reached at kenn@hvt.org.

For more on Canal Street Housing and other housing activities in Vermont, visit www.hvt.org.
What is the overall scope of your work with rural veterans?

Our work at Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV) covers a wide range of issues. We help with housing needs like rental assistance, utility payments, and homelessness prevention, as well as with employment and legal issues that veterans may face. Our assistance goes to veterans that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

What are some of the rural-specific housing issues that veterans face?

Rural homeless veterans face a lack of opportunities for safe shelter compared to urban or suburban veterans. In northwest Minnesota it could be a couple hundred miles to the nearest homeless shelter. This means that there’s more doubling up for rural homeless folks, who may end up staying with distant relatives, in a friend’s garage or basement, or squatting in a fish house or camper. In general, relatives and friends in rural areas might be more likely to take in a homeless person, because there are so few other options to turn to. From a policy perspective, it’s difficult once a family member takes in a homeless veteran, because he or she may no longer qualify for government-funded housing programs.

One of the largest issues that rural veterans face due to housing location is probably lack of public transportation. Homeless individuals in particular face legal barriers in obtaining a driver’s license, but in rural areas, having a car is sometimes the only way to get around. Not having a driver’s license while living in a rural area makes it much harder for veterans to access healthcare, veteran’s benefits, and county benefits. Generally when people are homeless in rural areas it is because they have ties to the area. They are unlikely to want to move to non-rural areas, even if it means better access to services.

Another difficult issue for rural homeless veterans is that funding for services tends to go to urban areas. Additionally, for the rural resources that are available, some cities may not qualify for rural funding even if they serve rural areas. Specific need varies from veteran to veteran, whether it be for first month’s rent, job training, or benefits. Solving the remaining housing issues for rural veterans will take a multi-tiered approach.
**Do the housing needs of recent veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan differ from those of veteran streams in the past?**

Yes, we are seeing more female veterans as well as more families and children needing services. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are more common medical disorders with recent veteran streams. We are also seeing much higher rates of unemployment because of the economy.

**What are some of the funding resources that you use in your work to help rural veterans with their housing needs?**

At MACV we work with government grants as well as private foundations and donors to support rural veterans. In general there is a large base of support for veterans, though of course more funding is always needed. One of the public funding sources we use for housing support is the SSVF statewide grant, which lets us work with veterans where they are. Additionally, some of our work is through a rural Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP) grant. In our Duluth and Mankato service areas, veterans also access the HUD-VASH program. The VA’s community-based outreach clinics (CBOCs) are also an increasingly accessible source for rural veterans to receive supportive health services.

Partnerships are an important part of our work since an organization like ours that serves the entire state can’t be officed everywhere in the state. We coordinate Stand Down events in several rural areas, which are one to three-day events that provide services to homeless and in-crisis veterans. Resources at a Stand Down event can include shelter, food, employment, legal, benefits, and health services, among others. Stand Down events are a great opportunity to connect veterans with their local agencies that can offer legal services and local benefits.

**How do you address the needs of veterans with disabilities?**

There are HUD-funded programs available for homeless veterans with disabilities, but sometimes they require that an individual have spent a night in a homeless shelter before he or she can qualify for services. This can be a hard requirement to meet in rural areas that have fewer shelters available and more examples of doubling up.

Additionally, many veteran supportive services are tied to rental housing, but rental housing is less common in rural areas than in non-rural areas. It can be quite difficult to find an affordable or supportive housing rental unit in a rural area. Our organization does have some permanent supportive housing in the Duluth and Mankato areas for veterans.

**What are some of the resources that rural communities offer in assisting homeless veterans when compared to non-rural communities?**

Often rural areas are yellow ribbon communities that embrace military service and veterans. They place a lot of value on supporting these veterans. Definition-wise, this can make rural homeless veterans harder to identify, because they may already be having several needs met by their community. But ultimately this is a strength of rural areas. For example,
As proud Americans, one thing that unites us all is the pride we share for veterans of all ages that have served our country. That pride is uniquely felt in small towns and rural America.

Rural America is at the heart of a greater proportion of veterans in the United States. In a report from Western Interstate Commission for Higher Learning (WICHE), Dr. Mimi McFaul, associate director, stated that 44 percent of U.S. military recruits are from rural areas. Almost one-third who died in Iraq were from small towns.

Two amazing young men from Statesville, North Carolina, who raised their hands to serve our country to fight terrorism on foreign soil are Dale Beatty and John Gallina. In 1996, they enlisted in the North Carolina National Guard when they were both 17 years old. They were deployed to Iraq in late 2003. On November 15, 2004, their lives changed forever when the vehicle they were riding in hit an antitank mine that exploded, leaving Beatty a double amputee below the knees and Gallina with severe back injuries, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Two Combat-Wounded Veterans Remain on a Mission

Beatty and Gallina’s continued journey together displays an unbreakable bond of friendship, service, trust, courage, and leadership. Their shared experiences in the National Guard created a strong sense of community and instilled a humanitarian spirit to give back and make a difference in the lives of service-connected disabled veterans from all conflicts.

Recognizing an unmet need, they decided to reach across the generational divide to adapt or modify
existing homes older veterans already own. Together they cofounded Purple Heart Homes in 2008, whose mission is to partner with communities to provide personalized housing solutions for service-connected disabled veterans and their caregivers.

Most of the service-connected disabled veterans that receive housing solutions from Purple Heart Homes come from rural America.

**Vietnam Veteran Dave Morrell, Harrisburg, North Carolina—Aging in Place Program**

Dave Morrell volunteered to serve three tours of duty in the U.S. Army Special Forces from 1967 to 1969. Like many Vietnam veterans answering the call of duty, Morrell’s exposure to Agent Orange resulted in diabetes and heart problems. Morrell’s left leg had to be amputated; he will likely have additional surgeries in the years to come and will be spending more time in a wheelchair.

As Morrell aged, combined with his service-connected disabilities, he found it increasingly difficult to get through the narrow doorways of his existing home. It is a challenge for him to get into his bathroom without having to crawl into the room to shave and shower.

The special adaptations made to Morrell’s existing home included wider, more accessible 36-inch doors; a roll-in-wheelchair-accessible shower; a roll-under sink; and hardwood floors. Building an 18-by-20-foot addition onto Morrell’s bedroom enabled professional tradespeople to take his existing bedroom and create the wheelchair accessible bathroom and laundry.

Morrell can now successfully age in place in his existing home without having to move into a costly assisted-living facility or a VA nursing home.

**Desert Storm Veteran Jim Davis, Richlands, North Carolina—New Home Program**

Marine E4 James Davis served our country during Desert Storm from 1990 to 1996. He returned to Camp Lejeune for his second enlistment and additional training when the vehicle he was riding in on base was hit head-on by a Humvee. This unfortunate accident resulted in spinal neuropathy and eventual paralysis in Davis’ legs from the knees down.

Today Davis is 100 percent service-connected disabled and spends most of his time in a wheelchair. To add to the unfortunate circumstances, the Davis family country home in Richlands, North Carolina, was destroyed by fire.

Purple Heart Homes and financial sponsor NewDay USA built a new specially designed pre-engineered edition house from Clayton Homes. The pre-engineered edition was designed to be completely barrier-free and wheelchair accessible. The new home was built on the same property where the family home was destroyed by fire.
The pre-engineered 2,200-square-foot ranch-style home has accessible hallways, doorways, and a bathroom with a roll-in shower, roll-under sink, and counters that enable Davis to freely move around his home in a wheelchair. The more accessible home freed Davis’ wife from many of her caregiver responsibilities, enabling her to return to college to get the degree she had postponed.

Douglas Hamilton Kinard, Jr., enlisted in the U.S. Army because he believed it was his duty to serve our country. He enjoyed being a soldier so much that he wanted to make the military his career. That dream changed March 15, 2005, during a dangerous early morning mission to escort a convoy in need of repair back to the Baghdad International Airport. Corporal Kinard was the lead gunner when a marine unit ahead of them engaged in heavy fire with enemy combatants. Kinard’s unit waited while the marines engaged in battle. Kinard’s vehicle suffered some friendly fire, and he was directly hit by an improvised explosive device (IED). The explosion ejected him from the gunner turret in the Humvee; he landed on his head and slid 50 feet down the highway. Once stopped, his 50 caliber rifle, which had been ripped from its stationary port on the Humvee, landed directly on top of Kinard.

Kinard woke up three days later at Camp Victory. He never fully recovered from his injuries, but he went back to serve with his unit.

Today Kinard’s degenerative condition makes it impossible for him to access the bathroom at his family home in West Columbia, South Carolina, because it is too small. The master bedroom in their home is upstairs, and he has difficulty climbing the steps. He has fallen multiple times.

Purple Heart Homes received a gifted foreclosed home from Citibank in Claxton, Georgia, where the Kinard family will move. The four-bedroom home will be adapted and modified to meet all of Kinard’s service-connected disabilities.

The home will be a hand up and not a handout. Kinard will pay a mortgage for ten years at 50 percent of the current market value to Purple Heart Homes. That money will be used to help fund projects for the Aging in Place Program and help Purple Heart Homes to become a self-sustaining nonprofit organization.

The New Greatest Generation

Beatty and Gallina, two small-town friends from Statesville, North Carolina were trained to leave no soldier behind on the battlefield and feel that we should not leave any service-connected disabled veterans behind at home.

Beatty and Gallina were featured on the cover of TIME (August 29, 2011) with three other returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. The cover story, written by Joe Klein, referred to them as “members of the new greatest generation.” Klein wrote, “The returning veterans are bringing skills that seem to be on the wane in American society, qualities we really need now: crisp decision making, rigor, optimism, entrepreneurial creativity, a larger sense of purpose and real patriotism.”

Beatty and Gallina exemplify those who Klein labeled “members of the new greatest generation.”

- Vicki Thomas is the Director of Communications for Purple Heart Homes. For more information, go to www.purplehearthomesusa.org.
Early in 2011, Leroy Spencer and his wife, Helena, were afraid they might have to move out of their deteriorating home in Hoover, Alabama. Their roof leaked, their air-conditioning was broken, wood in the house frame was rotting, windows were broken, and they prayed their 38-year-old furnace could keep going. But in a bad economy with a lot of medical bills, their options were limited. “I’ve experienced so much hardship in my life; I’m one of the hardest people you will meet,” Spencer said. “At 70 years old now, I’ve served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam and Korea, battled cancer, had a quadruple-bypass surgery.”

The Spencers’ home was repaired in 2011 thanks to a partnership between Habitat for Humanity and The Home Depot Foundation, which together set up the Habitat for Humanity Repair Corps to help veterans facing difficult living conditions. The Repair Corps program and local volunteers supplied the Spencer family with a new roof, HVAC system, windows, fresh paint, and other exterior repairs.

“When repairs started, I just got on my knees and just thanked God,” he said. “All of these volunteers working on my home have restored my faith in the younger generation and restored my faith in human life.”

Habitat Works with Rural Veterans

The Habitat for Humanity Repair Corps is one of many ways that Habitat for Humanity engages with veterans and active military personnel. The housing organization, founded in 1976 in Americus, Georgia, and now a home builder in nearly 80 countries worldwide, has as its mission “A world where everyone has a decent place to live.” As part of that, Habitat builds new houses in partnership with veterans, repairs veterans’ homes, and mobilizes veterans to volunteer to build.

Not far from the Spencers’ home, in rural Iredell County, Alabama, Vietnam veteran Hugh Stone moved into his new Habitat home in November 2011. He had been living in a trailer for 16 years and had been denied a bank loan. He was so happy to get a Habitat home that he kept a scrapbook of the construction, including newspaper articles and photos of volunteers from a nearby Methodist church who helped build his house.

“Habitat is increasingly focused on ways to honor veterans and support their transition back home, especially given the current economic circumstances that limit job opportunities and exacerbate access to affordable housing,” said Christopher Ptomey, director of federal relations for Habitat for Humanity International.

“Veterans were hit hard by the housing crisis, with more than 1.5 million veterans now spending at least half of their monthly incomes on rent,” he continued. “Habitat is working to provide affordable homeownership opportunities to these veterans.”

In 2011, Habitat completed over 300 construction projects in partnership with veterans as partner families, including new construction, rehabs, renovations, and home improvements.
preservation projects. In a recent survey of Habitat affiliates in areas with significant military or veteran populations, over two-thirds reported that they actively engage military/veterans in their programs. Of those, 98 percent engage military/veterans as volunteers, 46 percent engage military/veterans as homeowner families, and nearly 30 percent have military family/veteran employees.

Habitat’s motto is “A hand up, not a handout.” The organization does not give away homes in the United States. Rather, it qualifies applicants, making sure they will be good homeowners. All potential homeowners are required to put in sweat equity on their home and others’, and every homeowner has a mortgage with monthly payments that go toward funding more Habitat houses.

In the United States, Habitat for Humanity is made up of more than 1,500 independent affiliates, each one a grassroots organization founded by, and run by, members of that community. They apply to Habitat for Humanity International for formal affiliation, but all major decisions are made at the local level. The web of Habitat affiliates includes all major cities but also many tiny and rural communities where few nonprofits operate, such as Effingham, Georgia; Bonners Ferry, Idaho; Ammonoosuc, New Hampshire; and Mission, South Dakota.

**Working with Veterans**

Four wounded warrior volunteers are Pat Filippone’s “core team” at Habitat for Humanity of Osceola County, Florida. “Whatever we need, they take charge and do it,” she said. “We had a donated older home that needed a lot of rehab work. They said take us out there and we’ll see what we can do. They organized the volunteers, the work schedule.”

“It isn’t a matter of feeling sorry for them,” she continued. “Their leadership, their organizational skills, the ability to work as a team make them outstanding volunteers.” Because some veterans can feel displaced when they return to the United States, Filippone said, the Osceola affiliate is looking into building special housing for single veterans.

One of the most active Habitat affiliates is the aptly named Almost Heaven Habitat for Humanity, which serves Greenbrier, Pendleton, and Pocahontas Counties in West Virginia. Last year the affiliate kicked off its Veterans Initiative, based in part on grant support from The Home Depot’s Repair Corps program, by performing critical home repairs in Rupert, West Virginia, for 79-year-old veteran Lon Martin.

At the ceremony at Martin’s home, Liz Warner, chief operations officer for Almost Heaven, said the affiliate has been serving veterans and their families for years, but it has found itself serving even more recently.

“As part of our new effort to reach out to veterans, we are developing a closer relationship with VA clinics and other veterans groups to ensure more veterans like Mr. Martin, who have fallen on hard times and have fallen through the cracks, get back on their feet and not only live their lives with dignity and respect, but also feel a valued member of the community,” she said.

“We are committed to ensuring that every veteran has a safe place to call home,” said Kelly Caffarelli, president of The Home Depot Foundation, which helped fund the Almost Heaven initiative.

Repair Corps grants in West Virginia and in affiliates throughout the United States will pay for home repairs for veterans, from insulation and weather stripping to the installation of wheelchair ramps and renovated bathrooms and doorways to accommodate disabled veterans. Larger
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a relative or friend may know someone at a local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) chapter, and make a referral. The downside of this of course is that service access can be less anonymous.

What role should prevention play in dealing with rural veteran homelessness?

Prevention is a really important piece in assisting rural veterans. In foreclosure situations, for example, it’s a matter of reaching out and connecting with veterans before the process is too far gone. Rural veterans need more access to affordable legal resources to deal with these situations. Partnerships with the county veteran service offices and other community agencies that provide case management are crucial in expanding preventative services to veterans in rural areas that might otherwise be unable to have access, since we ourselves have limited resources and our outreach offices are not located in all communities. There is a huge value in addressing a crisis before it happens. In rural areas, homelessness for a family could mean moving to a new town and children switching school districts, which can be traumatic experiences. Looking into the core causes of imminent homelessness before it occurs leads to happier, cheaper outcomes.

- Phil Kloer is a Senior Writer/Editor at Habitat for Humanity International. For more information, go to www.habitat.org.

The photographs that appear in this article were used with permission of Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, “Portraits of Home: Veterans in Search of Shelter.”

repairs, such as roofing, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and structural improvements, will also be available. The program is designed under the same model as new homes built for Habitat families, where the veteran will repay the zero interest loan necessary for these repairs, which is then deposited into a revolving fund to assist additional families in need of decent housing.

Martin’s wife, Edna, passed away earlier in 2011 due to a stroke. “I just can’t thank you enough for even considering helping me in this way,” Martin said at the Veterans Initiative kickoff at his home. “Edna was my life, and it seemed as if everything was falling apart without her. You have brought hope and a ray of sunshine back into my life!”

- Phil Kloer is a Senior Writer/Editor at Habitat for Humanity International. For more information, go to www.habitat.org.

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WORKING WITH VETERANS IN RURAL TENNESSEE
by Rozann Downing and Alma Jones

Community Action Network helps veterans build homes in their communities

Community Action Network, Inc. (CAN, Inc.), a nonprofit organization, was established in 2005 to promote rural development by producing affordable housing and increasing the skill and employability of participants through hands on training in rural West and Middle Tennessee.

Beginning in May 2012 CAN, Inc. started a new initiative which aims to increase homeownership, homeowner repair, and employment opportunities, specifically for veterans and military families. This veteran-specific initiative builds on work CAN, Inc. has been doing for years with veterans in rural Tennessee.

A Fruitful Partnership

When Jerry Merrell became disabled and had no income, he found out very quickly that he would be losing his home through foreclosure. He wound up in an old farm house owned by friends that was primarily used for storage. He was homeless, but soon found that disability was not the end; it was the signal of change and a new beginning. Jerry, a Northwest Tennessee veteran, served several overseas tours during his 20-plus year career in the U.S. Navy.

After visiting the T.A.R.P. (Training, Advocacy, Referal, Peer-Support) Center for Independent Living in Paris, Tennessee and learning about the Independent Living Philosophy, it soon became apparent that disability just meant that a new approach was needed. Jerry worked with the T.A.R.P. staff to develop an independent living plan, instituting achievable steps toward his long term goal of regaining independence through home-ownership. As these steps were completed, a referral to the Community Action Network (also based in Paris, Tennessee) resulted in the development of a partnership between the organizations, and others that helped to put together resources enabling his final goal to become a financially reachable reality. Mr. Merrell received down payment assistance and mortgage reduction by leveraging several funding sources together through Federal Home Loan Bank of Cincinnati American Dream, Tennessee Housing Development Agency HOME grant, and Housing Assistance Council’s SHOP funds.

Soon a new home was being constructed for Jerry on a one acre lot on a quiet country road and at last Jerry had found his way home. Owning his own home again has been life changing for Jerry. Jerry now volunteers to give back to his community. He became active with the T.A.R.P. Center for Independent Living and now serves on the Board of Directors as Board Chair. Jerry is also T.A.R.P.’s Veterans Advisor. His home has given him renewed self-respect, self-worth and dignity, which had been lost along the way on his journey through homelessness but was regained through his patient determination and hard work.

The next step in CAN’s Veteran Initiative is to build two homes for veterans. The first home will be built for a homeless veteran (who is currently living in a motel) that applied for assistance at the Veteran Outreach Event. The home will be built through a USDA Rural Development Demonstration Initiative and funded by a USDA Section 502 loan through Rural Development, Tennessee Housing Development Agency’s Housing Trust Fund Grant, and Federal Home Loan Bank of Cincinnati’s Affordable Housing Program. CAN, Inc. anticipates beginning construction in October 2012.

- Rozann Downing is the Executive Director and Alma Jones is a Member of the Board of Directors at CAN, Inc. Rozann can be reached at rozann24@earthlink.net.
In 2010 the VA Home Loan Program guaranteed loans for over 300,000 veterans, active duty military personnel, and their families to purchase, refinance or improve a home. The VA Home Loan Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), provides government-backed guarantees for home mortgages. The guarantees back-up home buyers and protect the private lending institution providing the mortgage loan against losses if the homeowner fails to repay the loan. The VA guarantee replaces the protection the lender normally receives through requiring a down payment, allowing eligible families to obtain favorable financing terms. Along with the upfront financial benefits to the home buyer, the VA may also be able to provide assistance down the road if the homeowner is having difficulty making mortgage payments. Eligible applicants include veterans; active duty personnel; certain reservists and National Guard members; spouses of military personal who die on active duty or as a result of a service-connected disability; and spouses of military personnel who are missing in action, captured in the line of duty, or are forcibly detained by a foreign government or power.

According to Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) figures for 2010, over 15 percent of VA loan guarantees go to military families living in small town or rural areas, and VA backed mortgages account for seven percent of all HMDA reported home purchase loans in rural areas.
The National League of Cities (NLC) is a member-based organization representing more than 19,000 cities, villages, and towns across the country. NLC partners with 49 state municipal leagues to serve as a resource to city leaders to build better communities.

With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan beginning to wind down, more than one million veterans will be coming home by 2016. These men and women will come home changed by their experiences to communities that have also changed while they were away. Some of the changes to veterans are positive. However, the reality is that some veterans return home with visible and/or not visible wounds and require unique solutions to meet their needs around housing, employment, education, health, and family supports. In urban or suburban environments, where community resources are located only minutes away, meeting these varying needs is a challenge. In rural areas, where resources can be hours away, meeting these needs can seem impossible. To help communities across the country learn about some of the best practices for meeting the housing needs of veterans with disabilities, NLC is researching and disseminating information on a variety of successful efforts.

Meeting the housing needs of veterans in rural areas is a uniquely important yet challenging task that will grow in the coming years. Of the approximately 22 million veterans living today, about 6.1 million already live in rural areas. While not all of these veterans are enrolled with VA to receive services, of those who are, nearly 43 percent live in rural areas. An estimated 914,000 veterans with a service-connected disability are from rural areas, and roughly one-third (31.9 percent) of VA-enrolled veterans who served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan are expected to return to their hometowns in rural areas.

Like everyone, veterans need affordable and accessible housing in order to stabilize their lives. Similarly, the housing needs of veterans vary depending on their level of disability. Some veterans have experienced chronic homelessness and/or have disabilities that require intensive and ongoing supportive services. Other veterans have lived independently for decades but are now aging and require modifications to their homes to allow them to continue living independently. Still others fall in the middle of these two examples and require periodic assistance with medical appointments, grocery shopping, or other tasks. With secure housing and the appropriate levels of assistance and care, veterans can establish themselves in communities and begin to find ways they may be able to continue to serve, using their skills and experiences from the military. To best meet the needs of veterans with disabilities from across this spectrum, we have to know first what need exists.
How to find out about Veterans in your area

For a contextual understanding of the veteran population, there are two primary locations for data. The first is the National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS). The NCVAS is within VA and serves to collect, analyze, and disseminate key statistics. The other primary source of data about veterans is the U.S. Census Bureau. In addition to information collected during the decennial census, the Census Bureau conducts an annual survey of approximately three million households with the American Community Survey. By using the publically available data tool, American FactFinder, you can find information about your community in areas such as age, race, income, employment, household size, disability status, veteran status, and more. These data sources can give a better understanding of the veteran population in your community and provide a baseline of information that can encourage others in the community to form partnerships aimed at increasing cooperation and support for housing for veterans with disabilities.

While an understanding of veteran needs from the 30,000-foot level can be helpful to get efforts started, nothing can replace locally available knowledge. This is particularly true in rural areas, where developing and using personal relationships can be either a source of great assistance or yet another obstacle to overcome. Resources such as regional VA medical centers and the public affairs office at military installations, available through regional VA medical centers, need to be understood and connected with community-delivered resources. Conversations with the public affairs office at military installations and with National Guard or military reserve units can also be starting points for identifying what resources exist, and are needed, for veterans locally. Additionally, conversations with local service and veteran organizations like the VFW and/or American Legion can be helpful, as can conversations with church leaders, community action agencies, and hospitals.

Knowing what resources are available can be as important as knowing how they are connected to eligible veterans. Understanding the community engagement process can identify areas of strength that can be enhanced or replicated, as well as areas of improvement that require attention. Just as important as what veterans have and do not have access to are what organizations veterans already use and trust for help. Trusted organizations are places to contact for lessons about what is or is not working. These groups are likely able to provide insights about what steps are needed to make meaningful and lasting improvements for veterans.

After getting a sense of what the community’s needs are and what resources exist and are being utilized, the process can begin to effectively fill any gaps. In some cases, enhancing communication between veterans, community stakeholders, and military resources is a primary need. Engaging with locally elected officials to emphasize the importance of better community communication may help eliminate or reduce some service gaps. However, in some places, specific resources may not be offered by anyone in a particular area.

Clallam County, WA

In Clallam County, Washington, service providers encountered this situation. Clallam County is a large and sparsely populated county in the northwest corner of Washington State. More than 40 percent of county residents live in one of three cities, and in parts of the county there are less than ten people per square mile. Like many rural areas, Clallam County has a higher unemployment rate than the rest of the state as well as higher levels of poverty, making housing even less affordable.

To better meet the needs of homeless persons across Clallam County, leaders recognized the need to address limitations around financial resources and professional staff capacity. Central to overcoming these challenges has been regional planning and partnerships. For example, during the development of capital projects, officials found that investments were more easily obtained when three or four partners were involved. Partnerships between
homeless agencies, housing agencies, behavioral health groups, or veteran groups used detailed memorandums of understanding, contractual agreements, and other partnership documents to avoid problems and proactively address the concerns of investors. As the number of successful collaborations has grown, new partnerships have been formed with nonhousing partners like the Department of Corrections and the Family Court system.

Housing and homelessness leaders have also realized the importance of having a presence during discussions about broader community issues, such as access to public transportation, healthcare, food and utility assistance, education, employment training, and prisoner release. To help facilitate cross-jurisdictional cooperation, Clallam County officials held their first regional forum in October 2011 with community planners and housing and healthcare representatives from neighboring Jefferson County, another large and rural area. Local tribal leaders from Native American communities were also engaged, and the event drew nearly 100 local elected leaders to discuss shared needs and potential areas of partnership.

To complement increased levels of collaboration, Clallam County has also used technology to overcome geographic challenges. In 2011, the Washington State Department of Health and Human Services established an online portal to benefit applications and services called Washington Connections. To increase access to community-based services and assistance, Clallam Connections was created and linked into Washington Connections. To provide accessibility to people who do not have personal Internet access, these web-based service connections are available at the county’s three Housing Resource Centers and all public libraries. Other jurisdictions, both rural and nonrural, have also begun using web-based portals to increase access to services. In 43 counties and cities in California, Colorado, Maryland, Texas, and Washington, Networks of Care exist in an effort to better serve veterans, service members, and their families.

“One of the key lessons we’ve learned in working with homeless veterans in remote areas is that the best way we can honor these men and women is by serving them where they are, not where we think they should be.” said Cheri Fleck, with West End Outreach Services, which serves Clallam and Jefferson Counties. “In the past, we expected veterans to come for services that were located at a VA medical center or community outreach center that in some cases were hours away from people. When we began reversing that process, we saw that we could gradually build trust with some veterans who have intentionally lived away from the places where services are located for years.”

In an era of tight budgets, America’s veterans are beginning to return home after more than ten years of war. In addition, there are many veterans among the nearly 11,500 people who turn 65 every day. In rural areas, rugged terrain and vast distances complicate the already challenging process of housing veterans. While the lessons from Clallam County were gained as a result of its work serving homeless veterans, they can also be applied to efforts to better serve veterans with or without disabilities who have housing. Understanding the need, identifying service gaps and overlaps, coordinating communication between various stakeholders, using technology as possible, and recognizing the need to deliver services to veterans rather than exclusively working to bring veterans to services are tangible steps that can help ensure that all veterans in rural communities have safe, accessible, and affordable places to call home.

- Elisha Harig-Blaine is a Senior Housing Associate (veterans and special needs) with National League of Cities. For more information about NLC and their work on veterans’ housing, visit www.nlc.org.
Research on Rural Poverty

As a prelude to the 2012 edition of Taking Stock, which will be released later this year, HAC presents its newly updated poverty map and accompanying poverty research, entitled “Poverty in the United States.” The map shows county-level poverty data from 2010 Census counts. Along with the map, HAC released a Rural Research Note entitled “Poverty in Rural America” presenting an overview of the poverty in rural communities illustrated by the map. HAC also conducted a webinar in conjunction with the release of the poverty map which is available for download or review at HAC’s webinar archive site.

- For more on rural poverty, go to www.ruralhome.org/povertymap.

HAC Blogs for Rooflines

HAC is making rural housing a regular part of Rooflines, a blog covering affordable housing and community development around the country. HAC staff accepted Rooflines’ invitation to regularly blog, submitting posts on rural rental policy, rural homeownership, and rural seniors’ housing needs. HAC will continue blogging about rural housing issues with future posts including data analyses, stories from the field, policy commentaries, and more.

Maintained by NHI, the publisher of Shelterforce magazine and a variety of research reports, Rooflines is a lively, multifaceted collection of essays by NHI staff and outside contributors including HAC.

- Links to HAC’s posts are collected in the Information and Publications section of HAC’s website.

Senior Housing Symposium in Vermont

On June 5th and 6th, more than 100 rural housing stakeholders from 17 states met in Burlington, Vermont to learn about solutions to meet the emerging needs of rural seniors. Attendees of the conference participated in an intense two-day program. Highlights of the workshop topics included aging in place, universal design, and advocacy for senior housing programs. The conference also included a site visit to a senior housing development in the Burlington area.

Supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies, this HAC training was co-sponsored by Cathedral Square Corporation, as well as the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Housing Vermont, and LeadingAge Vermont.

- For more information and to access materials from the training, visit www.ruralhome.org.
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