

A SALUTE

to Veterans

*A special section of the Addison Independent
Thursday, November 7, 2024*



Local veterans describe their service & reception at home

By MARIN HOWELL

BRISTOL — For those who have served in the United States Armed Forces, often the battles they face do not end once they return home. Navigating health problems, finding work, and reconnecting with family and friends are among the common challenges veterans might face when readjusting to civilian life, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Vermont Vets Town Halls are aimed at shedding light on the experiences of those who have served — during their service and after returning home — to increase understanding and communication between veterans and citizens in their communities.

Such town halls, started with the help of author Sebastian Junger, have been held around the state each year since 2017. During these events, veterans are invited to share their experiences serving our country and what it means to them.

This year's series of Vets Town Halls kicked off in Bristol on Oct. 24 with an event at Holley Hall organized by the Bristol Social Justice Discussion Group.

“(Sebastian Junger and collaborators) came up with this initiative as a mechanism for veterans to approach their community and talk about their experience; to share their story,” Bristol veteran Jon Turner told those in attendance. “This is saving lives. This is changing lives, and it’s helping to build a stronger and more resilient community.”

Turner hosted the Oct. 24 event and was among about a half-dozen local veterans to speak. He served with the U.S. Marines from 2003-2007 and now operates Wild Roots Community Farm in Bristol.

He spoke with community members about how challenging it can be to leave your time in combat behind upon returning home, particularly on the anniversary of events experienced while serving or since coming home.

“That’s always difficult because it’s not something I ever anticipate, and every year I feel like it’s gone it proves me wrong,” he said. “It’s really easy at that point to go into a funk and stay in that funk and spiral down and not really care about anything else.”

He shared some of the brighter moments from his service, particularly those involving dogs. Turner recalled how during a combat tour in Iraq he and others became acquainted with a dog named “Dirt.”

“(While operating in Iraq) Dirt would be with us the entire time, and we’d go out on day missions and night missions, and we learned that he was actually pulling security for us,” Turner said. “He would make rounds and if we were in an ambush site, we would just kind of go around and he would keep dogs away from us. We watched this time and time again; it was unbelievable.”

Dirt was among a handful of dogs Turner came across during his time serving in Iraq and during a tour in Haiti. He said such experiences are the ones he wants to remember.

“For me, I think that having animals in my life at that time was really a saving grace and it reminded me what was important in life,” Turner said. “It doesn’t matter whether you believe in war, or you believe in peace, there’s these moments you have that kind of keep you whole and keep you from being completely lost in whatever it is you’re experiencing.”

He noted dogs continue to help him through harder days.

“I’m pretty in tune with my body and if I start to feel something coming, I do what I can,” he said. “Most of the time that involves the woods or a dog.”

RALPH TORREY

Vergennes veteran Ralph Torrey also spoke at the Bristol town hall. Torrey enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1968 and served as a helicopter crew chief during the Vietnam War.

He said the best piece of advice he ever received was to take his training seriously, a lesson he took to heart during basic training.

“I was like a sponge. I wanted to learn everything, I wanted to do it as well as I could,” Torrey said.

Torrey extended his tour in Vietnam twice. He noted that his job as a helicopter crew chief included providing air support to ground forces, such as those that needed help getting out of a difficult situation.

Torrey flew around 2,000 combat

“It doesn’t matter whether you believe in war, or you believe in peace, there’s these moments you have that kind of keep you whole and keep you from being completely lost in whatever it is you’re experiencing.”

— Veteran Jon Turner

ON THE COVER: Joe DeGray, who served in the U.S. Army in the 1950s and was a leader of Middlebury American Legion Post 27 for more than two decades, was seen by *Independent* photographer Steve James carrying the flag at a Middlebury Union High School football game earlier this fall.

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hours during his service. He was shot down once, after which his commanding officer told him he was off flight status.

“I was so angry with him because I wanted to (be out there) with my men and do what I was trained to do, but it was probably one of the nicest things anybody ever did for me and it’s why I’m here today telling that story,” Torrey said.

Torrey said his time serving taught him some important things, such as responsibility and camaraderie.

“I still talk to many of the people I served with. I still think of them as 20-somethings,” he said. “No blood relations but we’re all family.”

He acknowledged that he also learned lessons he probably wishes he hadn’t.

“I learned how to have utter disregard for human life, and it was a defense mechanism,” Torrey said. “I was trained to think of the people that I was fighting as ‘the enemy,’ that was how they were referred to all through my training. They weren’t referred to as human beings or people; it was always ‘the enemy.’”

Torrey now serves as a volunteer at Josh’s House in Colchester, a wellness and recreation center for Vermont service members, according to the Josh Pallotta Fund’s website. The organization was established in honor of Joshua R. Pallotta, who served in the Vermont National Guard and was deployed to Afghanistan. Upon returning home, Pallotta struggled with physical injuries and Post Traumatic Stress (PTS). In 2014, he lost his battle with PTS and died of suicide.

(See Town Halls, Page 14)



U.S. MARINE VETERAN Jon Turner speaks about his service in Iraq during a Veterans Town Hall at Bristol’s Holley Hall on Oct. 24. About a half-dozen other veterans shared their experiences, as well.

Photo courtesy of Kristen Eaton/vetstowhall.org

Saluting our Veterans



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REMEMBER THAT FREEDOM IS NOT FREE.

A local double hero fights for lives of veterans

By PATTY LEWIS of New Haven

By the time Veterans Day arrives, the 2024 election will have hopefully ended. Many town hall events were held to inform the public of candidate positions on policy and public concerns. By far, the most consequential of these town hall events for me, the daughter of a World War II veteran and wife of Viet Nam War veteran, was held on Oct. 24 at Holley Hall in Bristol.

Vets Town Hall was sponsored by the Bristol Social Justice Discussion Group (thank you, Porter Knight!), the Bristol Recreation Department, and Lawrence Memorial Library. Emcee Jon Turner made it immediately clear to the 40 attendees that this was not a political event, but an opportunity for Veterans from all branches of service, including Reservists, from any era, to tell their story of what service to our country means to them.

Vets Town Halls are spreading around the country in an effort to increase awareness of the trauma our men and women in the military experience — trauma so severe, that the suicide rate for Veterans is occurring at twice the daily rate as for non-Veterans: 16 per 100,000 civilians vs. 32 per 100,000 Veterans (2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report.).

Jon Turner is one of those Veterans who proudly stands before community members to tell his story of fighting in the Iraq war, losing 16 members of his combat unit, coming back to civilian life a changed man struggling to cope. In an effort to turn devastation into rejuvenation, Jon provided housing for Veterans on his small farm in Bristol to teach them agricultural skills, giving them a new lease on life. Despite his own ongoing struggles, he also took on the challenge of Veteran suicide prevention by becoming a speaker for Vets Town Hall. He has traveled all over New England, providing dozens of Veterans the chance to tell their story without being

judged for their tears.

In this day and age of double sizing our soft drinks and French fries, we have learned that this is not necessarily a good thing. However, Jon Turner shows us that a Double Hero, fighting on the battlefield and now on his home turf for his fellow countrymen and women, is not just a good thing — it's lifesaving.

The next Vermont Vets Town Hall takes place at the Godnick Adult Center, Rutland, on Nov. 18, with a pre-event dinner at 5:30. (RSVP at vtvetstownhall.org required for the dinner). All events are free. Non-veterans are encouraged to attend and listen. All events are non-political, and all perspectives valued. There is no debate on American foreign policy.

Please join Jon and support his efforts to reduce Veteran suicide. Email Kristen Eaton at vermont@vetstownhall.org to see a list of future events or make a donation.

"Any Stone Age society knows that if you send warriors off to fight an enemy, you had better make sure to reincorporate them back into the community when they come home. But how can this be done in a huge, modern society? Simple — one community at a time."

—Sebastian Junger

Starksboro's Orvis gets scholarship

BARRE — The local chapter of The Forty and Eight, a national veterans organization, has awarded scholarships to five outstanding students in nursing programs in colleges in Vermont.

The recipients include Tracy Orvis of Starksboro, a sophomore student in the Associate Nursing Degree program at Vermont State University-Randolph. The others were Sebastian Morland of Plainfield and Rebeka Vilbrin of Barre, also students in the Associate Nursing Degree program at Vermont State University-Randolph; Lauren Thomas of Hardwick, junior in the Bachelor of Science track in the Nursing program at VSU-Castleton; and Katelyn Roberts, a senior in the Bachelor of Science track in Nursing program at Norwich University.



Post 19 meets at 7pm the 4th Wednesday of every month

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A LAD DECKED out in military camo is underscored by American flag bunting on a patriotic float in the Vergennes Memorial Day parade this past May.

Independent file photo/Steve James



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Service members do storytime

United Through Reading matches vets with kids

More than 1,000 classrooms across the country will be participating in the United Through Reading “Story Time with a Service Member” event beginning on Veterans Day, Monday, Nov. 11, and continuing all week, through Friday, Nov. 15. United Through Reading will send a Veterans Day video package to participating schools with a library of video recordings of service members reading an entertaining and educational age-appropriate story to classrooms across the country.

The annual “Story Time with a Service Member” event demonstrates the organization’s steadfast commitment to facilitate the bonding experience between distant serving military members and their loved ones, and members of the community, through video-recorded stories. In celebration of Veterans Day, the event creates tangible experiences amongst service members and thousands of students through the fulfilling experience of reading aloud. “Story Time with a Service Member” gives students the opportunity to honor America’s veterans and gain an authentic understanding of the role military service members play in their communities and throughout the country.

“This important national event gives tens of thousands of students in classrooms throughout all 50 states the

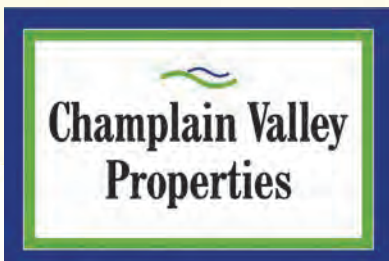
ability to gain a deeper appreciation of the men and women who serve in the military,” said Sally Ann Zoll, Interim CEO of United Through Reading. ““Story Time with a Service Member” is an educational and fun way for these students to connect with our service members in beautiful, emotional and unexpected ways.”

In keeping with United Through Reading’s mission to connect military families through the shared bonding experience of reading aloud, the event also supports National Family Literacy Month and Military Family Month.

United Through Reading keeps military families reading-ready, no matter the distance between them. Families stay connected through storytime video recordings and books sent to military families. These stories ease the stress of time apart due to military duty, maintain positive emotional connections and cultivate a love of reading and early childhood literacy.

Service members and veterans can record a story for their family at more than 400 United Through Reading recording locations worldwide, as well as on their mobile devices with their free and secure reading app. Since 1989, more than 3.4 million military family members have benefited from United Through Reading’s programs and services.

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Local and other Vt. businesses back their soldier employees

SOUTH BURLINGTON — Vermont Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve has announced its combined 2023-2024 award recipients for service and support to Vermont's National Guard and U.S. Armed Forces Reserve members. At their annual banquet held recently at the Vt Air National Guard Base in South Burlington earlier this fall, Vermont ESGR presented or recognized 64 awards given to more than 34 employers who provided outstanding support during the past year.



Two Addison County organizations were recognized.

The 2023 event was canceled due to that summer's flooding. Guest speakers for the event were Major General Gregory Knight, Adjutant General, State of Vermont, and Bruce Townshend, Director of Engagement for Headquarters, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

The Pro Patria is the highest award that a state ESGR office can present to recognize a highly supportive employer. The award may be presented to an organization in each of up to three categories; small

business private sector, large business private sector, and public sector. Top award recipients receiving the "Pro Patria" award for 2023 were Vermont Telephone Company, Inc. of Springfield; General Electric Aerospace of North Clarendon and Rutland; and Tri-Valley Transit, the public transportation service provider in Middlebury that was formerly known as Addison County Regional Transit. The Top recipients of the Pro Patria award for 2024 were Norwich University Applied Research Institutes, and Green Mountain Power.

Other businesses and other organizations were recognized with the ESGR Patriot Award. The Patriot Award is often a foundation for the higher-level awards. Recipients included, among others, Martin and Kathleen Clark of Martin's Hardware and Building Supply Co. in Bristol.

ESGR also recognized 13 Vermont employers who were nominated by their citizen service member employees for the prestigious Secretary of Defense Freedom Award. This is the highest award presented nationwide to employers who provide exceptional support to their citizen soldiers,

airmen, sailors, Marines, and Coast Guard members. The 2023 first-level nominees included Tri-Valley Transit. The other 2024 Freedom Award winners were Control Technologies Inc., GE Aerospace, Perrigo/PBM Nutritionals, Powderhorn Outdoor Sports, Vermont Telephone Company and the Vermont Air National Guard. The 2024 first-level nominees included Green Mountain Power, Norwich University Applied Research Institutes, Dealer.com, Poulin Farms, Beta Technologies, and the Left Bank Restaurant at the Weston Inn.

Other awards presented or recognized included the "Above and Beyond" award, for support that well exceeds basic requirements under federal law.

Recipients included XFold Engineering, North Springfield; 802 Baseball Lab, St. Albans; KORE Power Solutions Division, Waterbury; the Left Bank Restaurant (Weston Inn), Weston; Rice Memorial High School, South Burlington; Vermont Hardwoods, Chester; 103 Auto/Heads Up Motorsports, Chester; GE Aerospace, Rutland/No. Clarendon; Engelberth Construction, Colchester; NuHarbor Security, Colchester; Trow and Holden, Barre; Mansfield Orthopaedics at Copley, Morrisville; Brattleboro Fire Department, Brattleboro; and UVM Medical Center, Burlington.

The "Seven Seals" award is presented (See ESGR, Page 13)

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Ronald L. LaRose

LTC, U.S. Army
Stationed: Camp Johnson, Fort Sill, Okla.
3rd Armored Division, Germany

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My hero!*

SUBMITTED BY: CONNIE LAROSE



Lucien C. Farnsworth

Airman First Class
U.S. Air Force
Stationed in Korea, Japan, and Germany
*Thank you Lucien and Dad & Grandpa and
Papa for all you did in the service, 1950-1954.
We love you very much. We miss you.
Your Loving Family.*

SUBMITTED BY: YOUR FAMILY

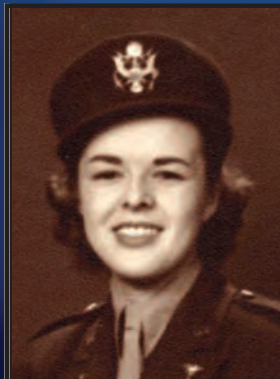


Christopher P.J. Cousino

Commander
United States Navy

*Served 11 August 1994 to 31 August 2023.
Deployments to Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain,
Dubai, Kabul, Afghanistan, South Korea,
Japan, Italy, and more.*

SUBMITTED BY - CONNIE LAROSE



Helen E. Burritt (Layn)

1st Lieutenant
U.S. Army Nurse Corps;
237th General Hospital
Stationed: France
Battles and Campaigns:
Ardennes and Rhineland

SUBMITTED BY: CANDACE L. POLZELLA



Allen Vigotty

Army, Military Police Corps
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1st Lieutenant
U.S. Army Air Force; 322 Bomb Squadron 91
Bomb Group (H)
Stationed: England
Battles and Campaigns:
Air Offensive Europe; Schweinfurt Mission;
POW in Germany

SUBMITTED BY: CANDACE L. POLZELLA

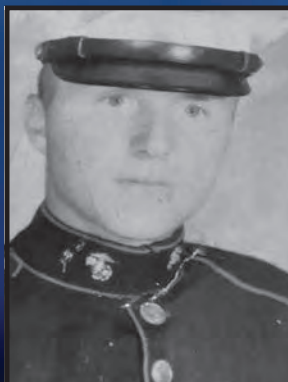


James A. Bouvier

1st Lieutenant
U.S. Army Air Corps; 384th BG
Stationed: Grafton-Underwood, England
Battles and Campaigns: World War II, POW,
Germany, 1944-1945

Our Hero!

SUBMITTED BY: CONNIE LAROSE



William Clark

Corporal - Marines
Camp Prenalton

I am writing to honor my father, William Clark and to thank him for serving our country as a Marine. We sadly lost him March 11th, 2023, but his memory will live on. He will always be my hero. Love your son, Cody and wife Betty.

SUBMITTED BY: CODY CLARK



Lawrence J. Lefebvre

U.S. Navy Seabees MCB-11, PO 4
Bethesda, MD; Port Hueneme, CA; Vietnam

Your family and friends are so proud of all that you have overcome including cancer from Agent Orange and we hope to spend many more happy times with you.

SUBMITTED BY: JACQUI HOOD



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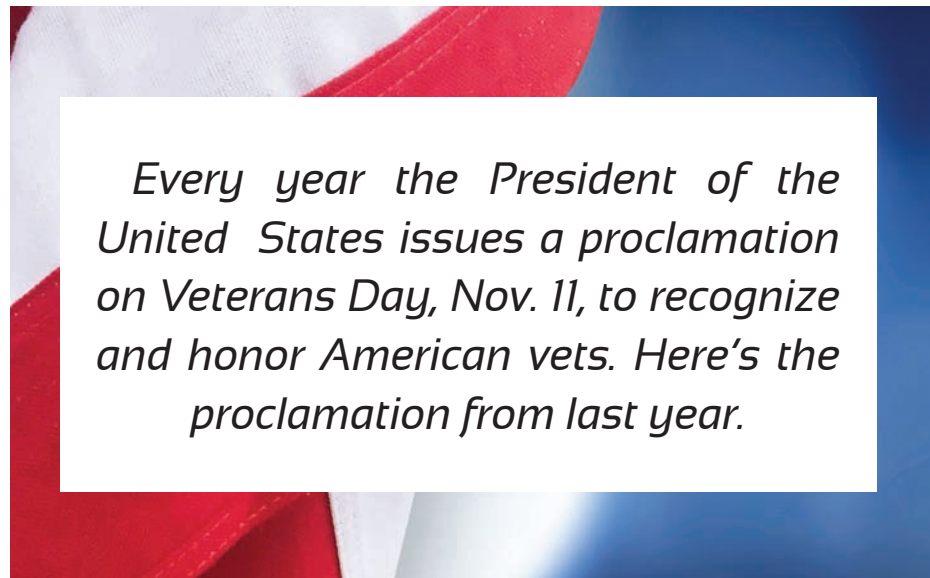
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A Proclamation on Veterans Day

This Veterans Day, we honor the generations of women and men who have served and sacrificed — not for a person, a place, or a President — but for an idea unlike any other: the idea of the United States of America. For nearly 250 years, our veterans have defended the values that make us strong so that our Nation could stand as a citadel of liberty, a beacon of freedom, and a wellspring of possibilities.

Today, I am thinking of all our Nation's veterans, who put their lives on the line to protect our democracy, values, and freedom around the world. We honor our wounded warriors, so many of whom the First Lady and I have met over the years, who are bound by a common sense of duty, courage, and optimism, and we remember those who are still missing in action or prisoners of war and renew my pledge to bring them home. Our military families, caregivers, and survivors also answer the call to serve. I remember so clearly the pride I felt in our son Beau during his service in Iraq as well as those mornings I saw the First Lady saying a prayer for his safe return. Our veterans and their families give so much to our Nation, and we owe them a debt we can never fully repay.

As a Nation, we have many obligations, but we only have one truly sacred obligation: to prepare and equip the brave women and men we send into harm's

way and to care for them and their loved ones when they return home. Since the beginning of my Administration, we have worked to make good on that promise, passing nearly 30 bipartisan laws to support our veterans and service members and their families, caregivers, and survivors. That includes the PACT Act — the most significant effort in our Nation's history to help millions of veterans exposed to toxic substances during their military service. Since I signed the PACT Act into law last year, more than 478,000 veterans and survivors are already receiving benefits — ensuring that veterans exposed to burn pits and other harmful substances and their loved ones get access to the care and support they need.

My Administration is also committed to ending veteran suicide and homelessness and ensuring that our veterans have the resources they need to live full lives and thrive in their communities. We released a national strategy to reduce military and veteran suicide by improving lethal means safety and enhancing crisis care as well as by addressing the economic, legal, and mental health issues that impact veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs is also funding community-led suicide prevention programs, which help connect veterans and their families to needed services. Every veteran deserves a roof over their head, which is why we have taken bold

Dr. Robert Austin,
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actions to end veteran homelessness, permanently housing more than 40,000 veterans last year and investing \$1 billion to provide supportive services to help homeless and at-risk veterans and their families. My Budget also proposes tripling the number of rental-assistance vouchers for extremely low-income veterans to prevent homelessness. Further, we have taken steps to improve the economic security of veterans and their families by expanding job training programs for transitioning veterans and their spouses and issuing rules to protect them from predatory educational institutions. We are also working to ensure every veteran has access to the benefits and services they have earned.

Earlier this year, I signed an Executive Order directing more than 50 actions to improve access to child care and long-term care for Americans, including military and veteran families, and to support family caregivers, especially those who care for our veterans. Recognizing the talents and contributions of veteran and military spouses, caregivers, and survivors to our workforce, I signed an Executive Order establishing the most comprehensive set of administrative actions in our Nation's history to support their economic security — increasing training and employment opportunities for military spouses in the workforce throughout the transition to veteran spouses status and encouraging all Federal agencies to do more to retain military and veteran spouses through flexible policies. The First Lady's Joining Forces initiative is further supporting

(See Proclamation, Page 13)



All due respect

A COLOR GUARD from American Legion Post 27 displays the U.S. flag while players and fans at the Middlebury Union High School Tiger football game at Doc Collins Field on Aug. 30 stand for the National Anthem.

Independent photo/Steve James



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Proclamation

(Continued from Page 11)

military and veteran families, caregivers, and survivors by improving economic opportunities and expanding resources to promote health and well-being for this community.

As we mark the 50th anniversary of an all-volunteer force and the 75th anniversary of the full integration of women in the Armed Forces and the desegregation of the troops, my Administration reaffirms our commitment to supporting everyone who serves in our Armed Forces. We have taken steps to ensure that the more than 918,000 women veterans enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs health care have equitable access to benefits and health services, in part by expanding access to reproductive health care. We have worked to proactively review the military records of veterans discharged under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and to modernize the process of upgrading discharges to help all veterans access their earned benefits. We will continue to support our LGBTQI+ veterans and veterans of color who have made innumerable contributions to our Nation and have truly made our military stronger, tougher, and more capable.

This Veterans Day, may we honor the incredible faith that our veterans hold, not just in our country but in all of us. They are the solid-steel backbone of our Nation, and we must endeavor to

continue being worthy of their sacrifices by working toward a more perfect Union and protecting the freedoms that they have fought to defend.

In respect and recognition of the contributions our veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors have made to the cause of peace and freedom around the world, the Congress has provided (5 U.S.C. 6103(a)) that November 11 of each year shall be set aside as a legal public holiday to honor our Nation’s veterans.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim November 11, 2023, as Veterans Day. I encourage all Americans to recognize the valor, courage, and sacrifice of these patriots through appropriate ceremonies and private prayers and by observing two minutes of silence for our Nation’s veterans. I also call upon Federal, State, and local officials to display the flag of the United States of America and to participate in patriotic activities in their communities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of November, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-eighth.

— JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.



ESGR

(Continued from Page 7)

to agencies and individuals who’ve supported the ESGR mission of enhancing relationships among members of the Guard and Reserve, their families, and their civilian employers. Recipients included Mark Audy, Vermont Director,


U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Services; Larry Forsyth, Vermont Department of Labor; JVSG Program Administrator/Local Veterans Employment Representative; and Linda Fowler, former Vermont ESGR Volunteer Support Technician.

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Steven Heffernan, who served two tours in Afghanistan.
Photo courtesy of Steven Heffernan

Town Halls

(Continued from Page 3)

“The mission of (Josh’s House) is to end veterans suicide,” Torrey said. “It’s a very, very serious issue.”

Speakers at the Oct. 24 event highlighted other resources available to Vermont veterans, such as the Vermont Veterans Outreach Program, which aims to help veterans and their families access the benefits they’ve earned through their service.

To learn more about the program visit www.tinyurl.com/veteransoutreach.

STEVEN HEFFERNAN

Another veteran who shared their experiences at the town hall was Bristol veteran Steven Heffernan. He has served for more than 30 years in the Vermont Air National Guard as an explosive ordnance disposal tech, including two tours in Afghanistan.

Heffernan spoke of how someone’s service can impact loved ones back home.

“We’re out on the forefront fighting, and all I can think about is how I can keep my soldiers safe. You don’t think about what your family goes through back home,” he said. “They give as much as the soldier does.”

He shared with attendees some of the lessons he learned during his service.

“Your humanity is one of the first things that will go. When you see one of your people get hurt, it’s like ‘they did this to my men, they don’t matter,’ and they do,” he said. “I got to meet with a lot of villagers ... and the worst thing is that 90% of the people are just like us. They just want to live; they want to grow a family and that. It’s that 10% that are either Al-Qaeda or what have you that don’t want you there that make trouble, and it’s very hard.”

JUSTIN SINKEVICH

Addison veteran Justin

Sinkevich served for five years in the United States Marine Corps. Talking at the town hall he highlighted the many challenges veterans face upon returning home.

“To call myself a veteran, I feel very proud of that,” he said. “What I see happening to our veterans nationwide — 22 a day committing suicide, homeless veterans — there should be no such thing as a homeless veteran.”

Sinkevich echoed other speakers in saying his service taught him lessons he now incorporates into his daily life.

“The Corps in a way helped shape me into who I am today,” he said. “Not that I’m saying I’m perfect, but sometimes you need a wakeup call to see things in a different way.”

The Bristol Vets Town Hall was one of several being held around the state this fall. A full list of upcoming town halls can be found at www.vtvetstowhall.org.




Army veteran Ralph Torrey with his chopper in Vietnam.
Photo courtesy of razorbacksgunships.com

“I learned how to have utter disregard for human life, and it was a defense mechanism. I was trained to think of the people that I was fighting as ‘the enemy.’”

— Veteran Ralph Torrey

“We’re out on the forefront fighting, and all I can think about is how I can keep my soldiers safe. You don’t think about what your family goes through back home. They give as much as the soldier does.”
— Veteran Steven Heffernan





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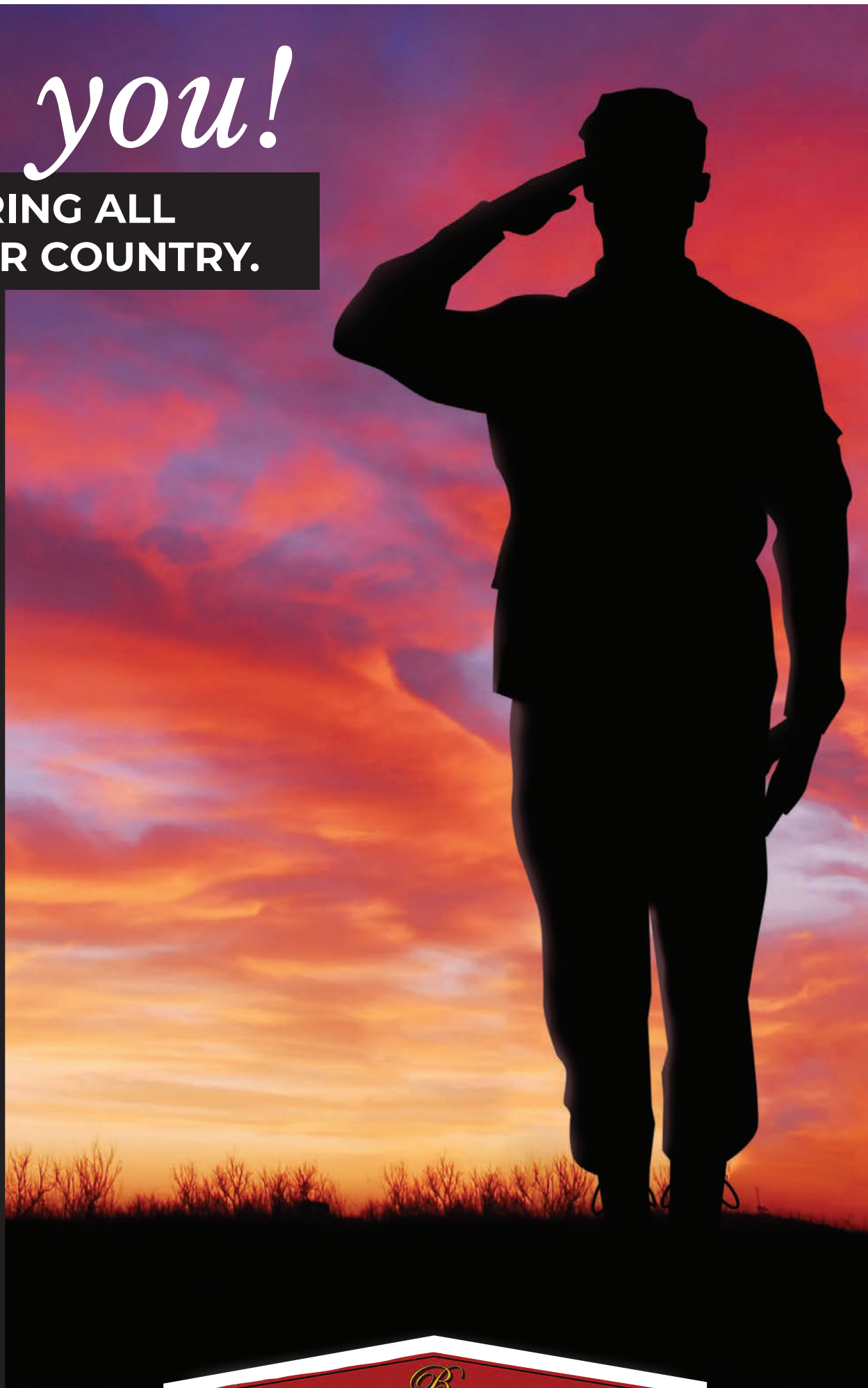
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