Issue 02

Summer 2026

NJ VETERAN

A KEEPSAKE MAGAZINE FOR THE VETERANS COMMUNITY

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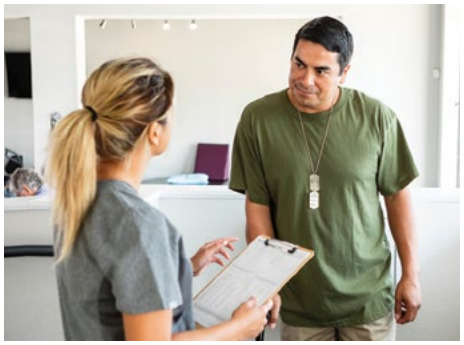

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Cover Photo: Parwan Province Afghanistan. A steel beam from the WTC is flown around Taliban-controlled territory 2010.

Our Next Mission

As veterans, we know what it means to serve a cause greater than ourselves. We raised our right hands, wore the uniform of our nation, and stood in harm's way not for politics, but for the ideals of freedom, security, and the belief that America is worth defending. That duty did not end when we took off the uniform — it simply changed form.

Today, our country faces a different kind of battlefield. Instead of rifles and roadside bombs, we are confronted with deep divisions that cut through families, communities, and institutions. Red versus blue. Rural versus urban. Left versus right. Too often, we speak past one another rather than to each other. Too often, we assume the worst about our fellow Americans rather than seeking common ground.

This is not the America we swore to protect.

Veterans are uniquely positioned to address this crisis of division. We have seen what happens when societies fracture. Many of us served in places like Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan — regions torn apart by ethnic, religious, and political conflict. We worked alongside former adversaries, mediated between warring factions, and helped rebuild trust in shattered communities. We learned that reconciliation is possible, even in the most painful circumstances, when people are willing to listen, compromise, and work toward a shared future.

We also know something else: unity is not naive idealism. It is hard, deliberate work.

Our next mission as veterans is not to choose sides in America's political battles, but to stand between them. We can model how to disagree without dehumanizing. We can create spaces where conversation replaces confrontation. We can remind our neighbors that we are all Americans first — bound together by shared values, shared history, and shared responsibility for the country we pass on to our children.

In New Jersey, this mission is especially critical. We are one of the most diverse states in the nation, home to veterans from every background, every community, and every walk of life. That diversity is our strength — if we choose to treat it as such. Through our veteran organizations, community programs, health fairs, service projects, and local leadership, we can build bridges that politics alone cannot.

This issue of *NJ Veteran Magazine* focuses on service beyond the uniform — on how veterans continue to lead, to heal, and to bring people together. Whether through mentorship, volunteerism, small business leadership, or community advocacy, veterans are proving that our commitment to this nation does not fade with time.

We did not shy away from difficult missions overseas. We should not shy away from this one at home.

Healing our divided nation will not happen overnight. But it can begin with us — one conversation, one partnership, one community at a time.

That is our next mission.

Respectfully,

Jeff Cantor
Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Editor & Publisher, NJ Veteran Magazine

1SG (Ret) Patrick Gongora from the 404th CA Battalion (ABN)

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A Night of Remembrance and Moral Reckoning: LTC (Ret.) Scott Mann Brings 11 Days to New Jersey

By Jeff Cantor NJ Veteran Magazine

On **August 26th at 5:00 PM, the Veterans Foundation of America (VFA)** and **Chapter 19 of the Special Forces Association** will host a powerful evening of remembrance, reflection, and healing at the **Carteret Performing Arts Center**.

The event will feature a dinner and a performance of 11 Days, the one-man play written and performed by **LTC (Ret.) Scott Mann** — former U.S. Army Green Beret, author, and founder of Task Force Pineapple.

The date is not accidental.

August 26th marks the **five-year anniversary of the Abbey Gate suicide bombing**, when 13 service members, eleven Marines, one Soldier, and one Navy Corpsman, were killed during the evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. That day remains etched in the hearts of Gold Star families, veterans of the Afghan war, and the broader military community.

This event is not just theater.

It is a moment of collective remembrance — and an opportunity to confront something many veterans carry quietly: **moral injury**.

The Story Behind 11 Days

Scott Mann served more than two decades in the U.S. Army, much of it in Special Forces. He deployed multiple times to Afghanistan and built deep relationships with Afghan partners who stood shoulder-to-shoulder with American troops for years.

When Kabul fell in August 2021, Mann — like thousands of other veterans — watched in disbelief.

The speed of the collapse and the chaos of the evacuation triggered something far deeper than frustration. It triggered a moral wound.

In response, Mann co-founded **Task Force Pineapple Express**, a grassroots volunteer network of veterans, operators, and advocates who mobilized in real time to evacuate Afghan allies before they could be hunted down by the Taliban.

The story of those frantic days — the phone calls, encrypted messages, desperate pleas, and life-or-death decisions — became the foundation for *11 Days*.

The play is not political.

It is human.

It tells the story of loyalty, betrayal, brotherhood, and the unbearable weight of leaving someone behind.

Abbey Gate: A Date That Still Hurts

On August 26, 2021, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device at Abbey Gate outside Kabul's airport, killing 13 U.S. service members and more than 170 Afghan civilians.

For many veterans of the 20-year Afghan war, that moment felt like the final fracture in a long and complicated conflict.

The loss at Abbey Gate was not just tactical — it was deeply personal.

The war's end left many service members grappling with questions that have no easy answers:

- What was it all for?
- Did we do enough?

- Could we have saved more?
- Why did we leave people behind?

That internal struggle is what experts describe as moral injury — the psychological, emotional, and spiritual wound that occurs when one's deeply held values are violated by circumstances beyond their control.

Unlike PTSD, which is often rooted in fear-based trauma, moral injury stems from grief, guilt, betrayal, and unresolved meaning.

The end of the Afghan war represents a profound moral injury for many who fought there.

11 Days gives that injury a voice.

More Than a Performance — A Community Gathering

This special evening at the Carteret Performing Arts Center will include:

- A formal dinner
- The live performance of 11 Days
- Community reflection
- Space for connection among veterans and supporters

The event is proudly sponsored by **Braven Health** and their **Braven Salute healthcare plan**, which is specifically designed to support veterans and military families in New Jersey.

Braven Health's partnership underscores something critical:

Veteran wellness is not limited to physical care. It includes mental health, emotional resilience, and community healing.

By supporting this performance, Braven Health recognizes that healing requires more than prescriptions — it requires conversation, storytelling, and acknowledgment.

Why This Night Matters

The Veterans Foundation of America has long focused on community-building initiatives: outdoor therapy, health fairs, adaptive sports, resilience training, and peer connection programs.

Chapter 19 of the Special Forces Association represents some of the quiet professionals who carried the weight of America's longest war.

Bringing *11 Days* to New Jersey is a natural extension of that mission.

This night is about:

- Honoring the 13 service members lost at Abbey Gate
- Acknowledging Afghan partners who stood with us
- Creating space for veterans to process what the war's end meant
- Recognizing moral injury as real and worthy of discussion
- Strengthening bonds within the veteran community

For those who served in Afghanistan, this will be deeply personal.

For those who did not, it will be illuminating.

For all, it will be meaningful.

The Power of Storytelling

Scott Mann often speaks about storytelling as a path to healing. Special Forces operators are trained to build trust through human connection. In 11 Days, Mann uses that same skill set — not to influence a village overseas, but to reconnect a community at home.

Theater becomes a tool of transition.

Story becomes a vehicle for reconciliation.

And in a world that moves on quickly from headlines, this performance insists that we pause — and remember.

Event Details

Event: *11 Days* — A One-Man Play by LTC (Ret.) Scott Mann

Hosted by: Veterans Foundation of America & Special Forces Association Chapter 19

Date: August 26th

Time: 6:00 PM (Doors Open at 5:00PM)

Location: Carteret Performing Arts Center, 46 Washington Avenue, Carteret (Parking Garage at 29 Washington Avenue)

Includes: Dinner and show

Sponsor: Braven Health – Braven Salute Healthcare Plan

The Mission Continues — At Home

Five years after Abbey Gate, the war in Afghanistan may be over on paper — but for many veterans, it continues internally.

Events like this don't erase pain.

But they create space for it.

And sometimes that is the first step toward healing.

On August 26th, New Jersey's veteran community will gather not just to watch a play — but to honor sacrifice, confront moral injury, and stand together.

Because the mission at home is just as important as the one overseas.

And no veteran should carry that burden alone.

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WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY
LTC (RET)
SCOTT MANN

DIRECTED BY
JASON CANNON

A TASK FORCE PINEAPPLE PRODUCTION

The Importance of Joining Your Veteran Groups

By SGM (Ret.) Myles Cappiello

President, Special Forces Association, Chapter 19

For NJ Veteran Magazine

A Call to the Next Generation of Veterans

Last week, I attended a meeting at Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 262 in Monroe Township, a community home to more than 2,500 veterans. At the meeting, there were eight members in attendance.

Eight.

This is not unique to Monroe. Across New Jersey, whether you walk into a VFW hall, an American Legion post, or many other long-standing veterans' organizations, you will see the same pattern: declining membership and aging rosters.

The reality is clear — younger veterans, particularly those from the GWOT era, are not joining in the numbers needed to sustain the powerful advocacy infrastructure that generations before them built.

And that should concern all of us.

Why Membership Numbers Matter

I belong to multiple veterans organizations, including:

- Special Forces Association (SFA)
- Association of the United States Army (AUSA)
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
- American Legion
- National Infantry Association
- Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (Associate Member)

Why?

It's not about carrying membership cards in my wallet. It's about numbers.

When our organizations lobby in Washington, D.C., and in Trenton, lawmakers look at membership totals. The larger the membership base, the stronger the political clout. Public officials understand numbers. They understand collective voice.

If an organization represents 35,000 veterans, it carries weight. If it represents 26,000 — or fewer — that weight diminishes.

In 2015, there were approximately 35,000 VFW members in New Jersey. Today, there are fewer than 26,000. The New Jersey chapter of the Special Forces Association has dropped from 150 members twenty years ago to just 119 today.

Membership decline directly affects influence. And influence directly affects benefits.

What's at Stake

Veteran benefits — at both the state and federal levels — are not permanent guarantees. They require:

- Legislative support
- Budget allocations
- Advocacy pressure
- Organized representation

As government budgets tighten and competing priorities grow, benefits we "earned and deserve" can be questioned. When membership shrinks, our lobbyists lose leverage. Our collective voice becomes quieter.

I recently spoke with Linda Greenstein, a strong advocate for veterans in the New Jersey Legislature. She reinforced this very concern:

"Veterans organizations play a critical role in advocating for the men and women who have served our country honorably. The strength of an organization's membership matters as it reflects how many people are voicing their support for any given issue. Groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion have long been powerful advocates for their members, but that influence is reliant on participation. As membership declines, so does the collective voice that helps secure benefits for veterans in the State House. Encouraging the next generation of veterans to get involved in these organizations is essential for their continued success."

The message is clear: Participation equals power.

It's Not Just About Politics — It's About Brotherhood

Let me be clear: joining doesn't mean you have to attend every meeting, chair a committee, or volunteer every weekend.

Simply becoming a member strengthens the numbers.

But if you do attend a meeting now and then, you may rediscover something you didn't realize you missed — camaraderie.

Recently, I found myself in tears laughing with another veteran as we reminisced about "Urban Buffer" — riding the old floor buffer as a young private in Germany, spinning in circles to see who could stay on the longest.

Every branch has its own version of these stories. Army. Navy. Air Force. Marines. Coast Guard. (We may not have many Space Force veterans yet — but give it time.)

These are the moments only veterans understand. The language. The humor. The shared absurdity. Family members may look at us like we're crazy — but fellow veterans nod and laugh because they've been there.

That connection matters.

A Responsibility to the Next Generation

If you are a GWOT-era veteran — Iraq, Afghanistan, post-9/11 operations — you are eligible for many of these organizations. Many of you can join more than one.

You do not have to relive the past.

You do not have to commit endless hours.

You simply need to stand up and be counted.

And if you are already a member, reach out to a younger veteran and encourage them to join.

We fought hard to earn our benefits. We must work just as hard to preserve them.

The Bottom Line

Veterans organizations are only as strong as their membership.

- Numbers drive influence.
- Influence protects benefits.
- Participation preserves our legacy.

Before we begin losing what previous generations fought so hard to secure, let's strengthen the ranks.

Join.

Encourage others to join.

Keep our voice strong in Washington and in Trenton.

Because silence does not protect benefits — numbers do.

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Veteran Service Organization Update

Marine Corps League of New Jersey: Continuing the Mission of Service

By Christopher Soldano | Commandant,
Department of New Jersey | For NJ Veteran Magazine
commandant@dnjmcl.org

Across New Jersey, thousands of Marines continue to live by a simple but powerful motto—Semper Fidelis. Always Faithful. That commitment does not end when the uniform comes off. It continues through organizations like the **Marine Corps League**, and here in the Garden State, through the Department of New Jersey **Marine Corps League(DNJMCL).**

Under the leadership of Commandant **Christopher Soldano**, the Marine Corps League of New Jersey remains committed to supporting Marines, veterans, and their families while preserving the traditions and values of the Corps.

Who They Are

The Marine Corps League is a **congressionally chartered veterans service organization** made up of:

- Honorably discharged Marines
- Active-duty Marines
- Reserve and retired Marines
- Qualified Fleet Marine Force (FMF) Navy personnel

In New Jersey alone, the League represents **more than 2,300 members**, organized into Detachments across the state. These Detachments serve as local hubs for camaraderie, mentorship, community service, and veteran advocacy.

The mission is clear: **honor the legacy of the Marine Corps, support fellow veterans, and continue serving the community**.

How Veterans Can Get Involved

For Marines and eligible veterans looking to reconnect with the brotherhood and sisterhood of service, the Marine Corps League offers an accessible path.

Veterans can connect through:

- The state website: https://dnjmcl.org
- Local Detachments throughout New Jersey
- Leadership contacts and event listings available online

At the national level, additional information and resources can be found through the League's broader network.

Whether recently separated or decades removed from service, the League provides a place to belong—and a way to continue serving.

Strength in Membership and Community

The Marine Corps League of New Jersey is more than a membership organization—it is a **community of purpose**.

Through its statewide network, the League provides:

- Veteran outreach and support
- Scholarship programs
- Leadership development opportunities
- Community service initiatives
- Fellowship among Marines and their families

Each Detachment plays a critical role in strengthening local communities while ensuring that Marines remain connected to one another long after their time in uniform.

Focus Areas for 2026

Looking ahead, the Department has outlined several key priorities for 2026 aimed at strengthening both the organization and its impact.

Leadership Development

The League will continue expanding **Department-level leadership schools**, ensuring that members are prepared to lead at both the local and state levels.

Member Engagement

Statewide events, including the annual **Department Convention**, will foster connection, collaboration, and continued engagement among members.

Detachment Growth

A major focus will be on expanding **outreach to Marines who have not yet joined the League**, ensuring that no Marine is left disconnected from the community.

Scholarships and Community Support

The League will continue its commitment to **supporting education and community initiatives**, reinforcing its role as a service-driven organization.

At its core, the mission remains rooted in **mentorship, advocacy, tradition, and the enduring bond among Marines**.

Legislative Priorities: "Honor the Contract"

While the Marine Corps League is widely known for its service and community work, it also plays an important role in advocating for policies that support veterans.

The League emphasizes a central principle: **our nation must "Honor the Contract" with those who served**.

Federal Priorities

The League supports:

- Full funding for veteran and military family programs
- Protection of earned benefits
- Strong oversight of the VA budget and appropriations
- Reform and modernization of VA and Department of Defense systems

Additional focus areas include:

- Improving the VA disability claims and appeals process
- Combating unaccredited claims consultants, often referred to as "claim sharks"

- Addressing toxic exposure issues
- Strengthening survivor benefits, including Dependency and Indemnity Compensation

Supporting Veterans After Service

Ensuring a successful transition to civilian life remains a top priority.

The Marine Corps League advocates for:

- Expanded education benefits and reduced administrative barriers
- Increased support for veteran employment and entrepreneurship
- Stronger programs to combat veteran homelessness
- Protection and expansion of the VA Home Loan Guaranty program

Health Care and Wellness Priorities

The League also continues to focus on the health and well-being of veterans.

Key priorities include:

- Eliminating veteran suicide
- Expanding access to mental health care and PTSD treatment
- Advancing traumatic brain injury (TBI) research
- Preserving TRICARE benefits
- Improving coordination of community care and long-term care access

Recommendations for New Jersey Leadership

At the state level, the Marine Corps League encourages continued collaboration between New Jersey leadership and federal programs.

Recommendations for the Governor include:

- Strengthening coordination between state agencies and VA programs
- Supporting legislation that protects veteran benefits
- Expanding mental health and suicide prevention resources
- Promoting employment, housing, and education initiatives for veterans

A Continued Commitment to Serve

The Marines of the Department of New Jersey Marine Corps League remain committed to a mission that extends far beyond their time in uniform.

They continue to serve—supporting fellow veterans, advocating for meaningful policy change, and strengthening communities across the state.

For those who have worn the uniform of the United States Marine Corps, the League offers more than membership. It offers a continuation of service, a connection to shared values, and a lifelong bond.

As Commandant Christopher Soldano and the members of the League remind us:

The mission continues. The service never ends.

Semper Fidelis.

A Legacy of Service, Advocacy, & Community - The Jewish War Veterans of New Jersey

Al Adler | Past Commander JWV | For NJ Veteran Magazine
ama1308701@yahoo.com

"A Jewish Voice for Veterans; A Veterans Voice for Jews."

That powerful motto has guided the **Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV)** for more than a century—making it the **oldest continuously active veterans organization in the United States**.

As we reflect on the winter of 2026—with its bitter cold and record-setting blizzard—the members of JWV across New Jersey never slowed down. If anything, the season highlighted the enduring strength, resilience, and commitment of an organization that has stood at the intersection of patriotism, advocacy, and community for over 130 years.

A Proud History Rooted in Truth and Service

The Jewish War Veterans was founded in 1896 by Jewish Civil War veterans who gathered in New York City with a mission: **to combat the false narrative that Jewish Americans had not served in combat**.

The truth, as JWV has proudly demonstrated ever since, is that Jewish Americans have served in every conflict in our nation's history—from the days of **Peter Stuyvesant and New Amsterdam** to today's global military operations.

That founding moment was more than symbolic. It was a declaration that Jewish service members have always stood ready to defend this nation—and that their contributions would never be erased or ignored.

Standing Against Hate for Over a Century

From its earliest days, JWV has been more than a veterans organization—it has been a force for justice.

For over 130 years, the organization has taken a stand against:

- Discrimination
- Racism
- Antisemitism

During the rise of Nazi Germany, JWV organized one of the earliest and largest protests and boycotts against the regime. During the Cold War, the organization spoke out against extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and challenged dangerous ideologies at home.

During the Vietnam War, JWV members supported deployed service members by organizing care packages and advocating for the return of prisoners of war.

Today, that mission continues—especially as concerns about antisemitism rise across the country.

A Strong Presence in New Jersey

The JWV Department of New Jersey remains highly active, bringing together veterans and families through advocacy, outreach, and community service.

This winter, members of JWV and the JWV Ladies Auxiliary traveled to Washington, D.C., for their annual Capitol Hill Action Days on February 3rd and 4th.

During these visits, JWV representatives met directly with members of Congress, including:

- Andy Kim
- Herb Conaway

The organization presented its legislative priorities, advocating for policies that directly impact veterans and their families.

Legislative Priorities That Matter

JWV continues to advocate for key issues affecting today's veteran community, including:

- Passage of the **Major Richard Star Act**
- Addressing toxic exposure and expanding the PACT Act
- Strengthening suicide prevention and mental health resources
- Supporting women in the military

A major focus this year has been combating antisemitism, particularly as it affects veterans and service members. JWV leaders are calling on elected officials to partner with the organization in addressing hate and educating the public.

As always, JWV stands ready to serve as a resource—both for policymakers and for communities seeking to understand and combat discrimination.

National Leadership in Action

On March 3, 2026, **Scott Stevens**, National Commander of JWV, testified before the Armed Services Committee at the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

In his testimony, Commander Stevens outlined JWV's legislative priorities and emphasized the growing concern over antisemitism in the United States.

Joining JWV at the hearing were other major veterans service organizations, including the **Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion**, and the **Disabled American Veterans**—demonstrating a united front on issues affecting veterans nationwide.

Members of JWV and JWVA with Congressman Herb Conaway Jr

The Power of the JWV Ladies Auxiliary

An essential part of JWV's mission is carried out through the **JWV Ladies Auxiliary**, led nationally by **Carol Adler**.

In New Jersey, Auxiliary members are deeply involved in supporting veterans and their families through:

- Visits to veterans homes and hospitals
- Community events such as barbecues, Purim celebrations, and bingo
- Musical entertainment programs for residents

At the national level, the Auxiliary's "**Grant A Wish**" program provides meaningful gifts to terminally ill or hospice veterans—offering comfort and dignity during difficult times.

Additional programs include:

- A **Child Welfare Program**, providing stuffed animals to first responders to comfort children in crisis
- **Baby showers for pregnant veterans**, supplying essential items like diapers and infant care products

These initiatives reflect the Auxiliary's commitment to service, compassion, and community support.

Celebrating 130 Years of Service

On March 15, 2026, JWV celebrated its 130th anniversary, marking more than a century of advocacy and service.

To commemorate the milestone, members gathered at the site of the organization's founding in New York City. Among those in attendance were:

- National Commander Scott Stevens
- National Vice Commander Selina Kanowitz
- Ladies Auxiliary National President Carol Adler
- Members of JWV Post 1 and other distinguished guests

The anniversary served as a reminder of JWV's enduring mission—and its continued relevance in today's world.

Members of the JWVA Department of New Jersey presenting Grant A Wish at Menlo Park Veterans Home

Continuing the Mission

From its founding in 1896 to its work today, the Jewish War Veterans of the United States remains a vital voice for those who served.

Whether advocating on Capitol Hill, supporting veterans in hospitals, or standing against antisemitism, JWV continues to uphold its mission:

To honor the past, serve the present, and protect the future.

One thing remains constant. **The commitment to veterans, to community, and to country.**

God bless our troops in harm's way—and God bless the United States of America.

JWV National Commander Scott Stevens testifying before Congress.

AUSA Northern New Jersey Chapter

Strengthening the Bond Between the Army and the Community

By LTC Sarah Bernal | AUSA NNJ President | for NJ Veteran Magazine

Across Northern New Jersey, a growing organization is making a powerful impact on Soldiers, veterans, and the broader community. The **Association of the United States Army (AUSA)** Northern New Jersey Chapter stands as a true embodiment of AUSA's national mission:

"Voice for the Army – Support for the Soldier."

Under the leadership of Chapter President **Sarah Bernal**, the Northern New Jersey Chapter has become a dynamic force—connecting military, veterans, young professionals, and industry leaders in meaningful and impactful ways.

A Mission Rooted in Service

The Northern New Jersey Chapter serves a wide geographic region, including **Hunterdon, Somerset, Middlesex, Essex, Bergen, Passaic, Hudson, and Union counties**. Its mission is twofold:

- **Support Soldiers and their families**
- **Educate and engage the public about the U.S. Army's role and mission**

Through its work, the chapter strengthens the connection between the Army and civilian communities—ensuring that the sacrifices and contributions of service members are understood and supported.

Developing Leaders for Today and Tomorrow

One of the defining strengths of the Northern New Jersey Chapter is its commitment to **professional development and leadership growth**.

The chapter actively supports:

- Educational seminars and leadership programs
- Mentorship opportunities for Soldiers and young professionals
- Networking events that connect military members with civilian careers
- Engagement with ROTC and JROTC cadets

A standout feature is the Chapter's **Young Professionals program**, which provides emerging leaders with opportunities to connect, grow, and contribute to the military and veteran ecosystem.

In partnership with local organizations, AUSA Northern New Jersey also leads **fundraising initiatives that provide scholarships for ROTC and JROTC ca**dets, helping shape the next generation of military leaders.

Supporting the Total Army Family

AUSA Northern New Jersey takes a holistic approach to service—supporting not just Soldiers, but the **entire Army family**, including veterans and their loved ones.

This includes:

- Providing assistance during times of need
- Advocating for veterans and military families
- Creating community-based support networks
- Offering educational programming about military service

The chapter also plays an important role in connecting **Corporate Members** with the military community, fostering partnerships that support innovation, employment opportunities, and long-term career pathways for transitioning service members.

Signature Events That Build Community

AUSA Northern New Jersey is known for its robust calendar of events that bring together the military and civilian communities.

Fall Programming

- **Networking Event with Rutgers ROTC**
  (including cadets from Seton Hall, Ramapo College, Montclair State University, and Kean University)
- **Annual Salute to Our Veterans 5K Run**
  Held at Liberty State Park, this event supports Habitat for Humanity of Greater Newark while honoring those who served.
- **Veterans Day Parades**
  Participation in local parades to celebrate and recognize veterans across the region

Winter Programming

- **Wreaths Across America Ceremony**
- Hosted at **Rahway Cemetery**, honoring and remembering fallen service members
- **Membership Meeting & Know Your Benefits Seminar**

Helping veterans better understand the resources available to them

Spring Programming

- **Professional Development & Networking Events**

Bringing together military, business, and community leaders

Summer Signature Events

- **Army Gala – June 12, 2026**

Hosted at Liberty State Park, this flagship event celebrates the Army's legacy and

future, while strengthening community ties.

- **Golf Outing with NNJ AUSA & PGA HOPE – June 5, 2026**

Held in Edison, NJ, this event supports **PGA HOPE**, a program that introduces golf as a therapeutic activity for veterans.

Grassroots Impact, Lasting Connections

What sets the Northern New Jersey Chapter apart is its grassroots approach.

Events are often hosted in:

- Local restaurants
- VFW posts
- American Legion halls

These settings create an environment where members can:

- Connect with guest speakers
- Share experiences
- Build lasting relationships

Through keynote speakers, educational forums, and networking opportunities, the chapter continues to strengthen the bond between the Army and the communities it serves.

A Growing Force for Good

Membership in AUSA Northern New Jersey offers more than affiliation—it provides an opportunity to make a real difference.

Whether supporting Soldiers, mentoring young leaders, advocating for veterans, or educating the public, the chapter continues to expand its impact across the region.

As the organization grows, so does its ability to serve as a bridge between:

- The military and civilian sectors
- Veterans and employment opportunities
- Young leaders and future careers

Join the Mission

The Northern New Jersey Chapter of AUSA invites veterans, service members, professionals, and community supporters to get involved.

To learn more or become a member, visit:

https://www.ausa.org/chapters/northern-new-jersey-chapter

Continuing the Commitment

The AUSA Northern New Jersey Chapter represents the very best of what a veterans and military support organization can be—engaged, forward-thinking, and deeply committed to service.

By supporting Soldiers, empowering future leaders, and strengthening community connections, the chapter ensures that the Army's mission—and its people—remain supported at every level.

Because in Northern New Jersey, the mission continues long after the uniform comes off.

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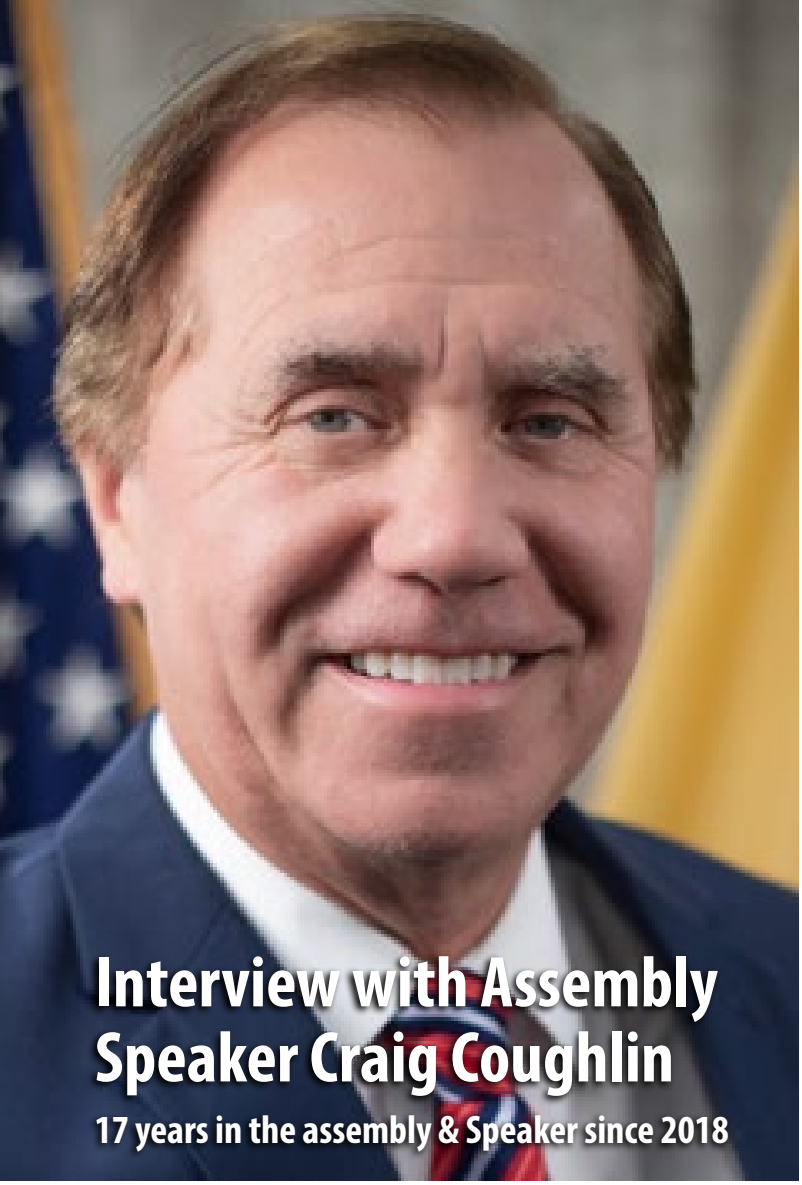


Interview with Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin

17 years in the assembly & Speaker since 2018

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

New Jersey Veteran Magazine recently sat down with **Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin**, the Speaker of the New Jersey General Assembly, for a conversation that moved from his roots in Middlesex County to the day-to-day realities of governing—while highlighting what he believes New Jersey owes its veterans: respect, follow-through, and a commitment to getting results.

From the first moments of our interview, Speaker Coughlin was warm, direct, and grounded in the values of the community that shaped him.

"Born in Perth Amboy… raised in South Amboy."

Speaker Coughlin described himself as a lifelong Middlesex County resident—**born in Perth Amboy and raised in South Amboy**—with only a brief departure for school.

A proud public-school graduate, he attended local schools through high school before heading to **St. John's University**, where he earned both his undergraduate degree and his law degree. During that time, he lived in Queens—yet even after decades of public service, he noted with a smile that he now lives just over **five miles** from the home where he grew up.

That closeness to home, to neighbors, and to everyday working families is a theme that has followed him throughout his career.

Law, Local Government, and a Practical Kind of Leadership

Speaker Coughlin has spent decades practicing law and described his firm's focus on public-sector work, representing towns, counties, and redevelopment agencies—helping communities solve real problems.

As former Council President of Marlboro Township, I shared my appreciation for his longstanding legal representation of Marlboro and the value his team has brought to our community over the years. Speaker Coughlin spoke proudly about his firm's origins and how the municipalities they serve have been central to their mission since day one.

Inspired by His Mother—and a 1968 Moment That Stayed With Him

One of the most powerful parts of the interview came when Speaker Coughlin explained what first drew him toward public service.

He spoke about losing his father at a young age and being raised by a mother who—like many working parents—showed up for her family while also staying engaged in civic life. He recalled her helping neighbors get to the polls during a time when not everyone had access to transportation.

Then he told a story that still guides him today: watching the **1968 presidential election returns** as a child, asking his mother who she wanted to win, and why.

Her answer stayed with him for a lifetime:

She wanted leaders who "**cared about people like us**"—a working, middle-class family in a small town where neighbors looked out for one another.

Speaker Coughlin said he has tried to live up to that lesson ever since.

First Elected Office: The School Board—and the Power of Local Government

His first step into public service began right where many meaningful careers start: **local government**.

He was appointed to a vacancy on the **South Amboy Board of Education**, then ran and won election. From there, he served on the **South Amboy City Council** and later became a **Municipal Court Judge**.

He emphasized that local government is often the most important level of government in people's daily lives—because when streets aren't plowed, when traffic lights don't work, when public safety is needed, and when families need services, it's local leaders who respond.

That real-world focus carried him into state government in 2010, after a vacancy opened in 2009. In a remarkable pivot, he described an eight-day transition from judicial service to campaigning for the Assembly—another example of how quickly public service can call you forward.

17 Years in the Assembly—and a Speaker Since 2018

Speaker Coughlin is now in his **17th year** in the New Jersey General Assembly, having taken office in **2010**, and becoming Speaker in **2018**.

When asked whether being Speaker was always a goal, he offered a practical response: first, you focus on being excellent at the job you have. Leadership, he said, comes when opportunity meets preparation—and when people are willing to step up and lead.

A House That Works: "96–98% of Bills Passed with Bipartisan Support"

In today's political climate, it was striking to hear Speaker Coughlin speak so clearly about **bipartisanship**.

He shared that over the last two legislative sessions, **96% and 98%** of bills passed with bipartisan support. He explained that in the Assembly, lawmakers may disagree on issues, but they work in a setting where respect still matters—and where members can talk on the floor about families, sports, weekends, and legislation without the constant division that dominates national politics.

In his words, it's a reminder that there is still hope when leaders choose cooperation over conflict.

What He's Most Proud Of: Working on Food Insecurity, Middle-Class Stability, and Seniors

When I asked what he is most proud of in office, Speaker Coughlin didn't hesitate.

He said he made **fighting food insecurity** the cornerstone of his speakership—calling it not just a government function, but a **moral obligation** rooted in the values he learned growing up.

He described New Jersey as a leader in this space, noting that other states ask what New Jersey is doing and how it is approaching hunger relief. He highlighted a wide slate of legislative efforts and the establishment of a dedicated advocate focused on food insecurity.

He also described major priorities aimed at strengthening the middle class, including:

- **Raising the minimum wage**
- Developing plans to address **property taxes**, especially for **seniors**
- Supporting family stability through policies that help people care for loved ones
- Implementing "**20+ tax cuts**" during his time as Speaker

These are issues that hit home for veterans and military families—especially those balancing retirement, disability, caregiving responsibilities, or fixed incomes.

"Veterans Ought to Be Important to All of Us."

Speaker Coughlin spoke with heartfelt respect about veterans, calling service "brave, heroic, and selfless." He also shared personal ties to military service: family members who served in **World War I, World War II, and** the **Naval Reserve**.

He emphasized that he admires people who commit to something bigger than themselves—people willing to do hard things for others. And because of that, he believes veterans have earned not only appreciation, but action.

The 3% Disabled Veteran Business Set-Aside: "We Have to Define Why"

A major focus of the interview was New Jersey's **3% set-aside law for disabled veteran-owned businesses (SDVOBs)** — a policy intended to reserve 3% of state contracting for SDVOBs. I raised a key challenge: the state's best performance has only reached **0.9%**, far below the legal threshold.

Speaker Coughlin's response was clear and strategic: before solutions can work, government must define the real reason the numbers are low.

- Is it a lack of effort or enforcement?
- Is it a capacity issue—too few veteran businesses positioned to compete in certain sectors?
- Is it a pipeline and development problem?

He pointed to the value of committee hearings as a starting point—specifically recognizing past efforts, including a hearing led by Chairwoman Cleopatra Tucker, as an important step to define the problem directly from those experiencing it.

His message was that if the issue is enforcement, then accountability must follow. If the issue is business development, then the state must help build capacity so veteran-owned businesses can compete and win.

He also noted that Governor Sherrill is a veteran, and expressed confidence that her administration is positioned to help drive meaningful progress—while emphasizing that the Legislature should "stand alongside" to ensure results.

Getting Veteran Bills Passed: "Provide Information. Be Vigilant."

Finally, we discussed a frustration many veteran advocates share: too many veteran bills never make it out of committee or reach a full vote.

Speaker Coughlin offered practical advice for the veteran community:

- Stay **engaged** and organized
- Work through veteran organizations and coalitions
- Provide lawmakers with **clear information**
- Help define **who benefits**, **how many people**, and **what it costs**
- Be persistent—even when it's uncomfortable

He noted that during the last legislative session, over **7,000 bills** were introduced—and only 400 became law. Of those 400 bills, 17 bills were veteran-related, along with additional resolutions, adding that helping veterans is not optional; it's a duty. The fact that 400 bills were signed into law means tough decisions had to be made about priorities, timelines, and cost. With New Jersey facing fiscal pressure, he said the state will need to be smart, cost-effective, and intentional—without abandoning the moral responsibility to support veterans.

In one of the interview's most memorable lines, he said it is "**offensive**" that someone who served this country could come home and face homelessness or lack basic support—placing veteran homelessness in the same moral category as hunger.

Parting Words: "Let's Treat Veterans with the Respect They've Earned."

As we wrapped up, Speaker Coughlin offered a message that felt deeply sincere:

"**God bless you… let's keep our veterans and our active military in our thoughts and prayers… and let's continue to work together to make things better. Let's treat veterans with the respect that they treated… [and] earned**."

For the veteran community, the message from the Speaker's office is clear: New Jersey can do better—but progress requires partnership. It requires advocacy grounded in facts, presented with persistence, and pushed forward through hearings, legislation, and accountability.

And it requires leaders who still remember what public service is supposed to mean: caring for neighbors, fighting for working families, and honoring those who served.

NJ Veteran Magazine will continue highlighting leaders who shape policy affecting our veteran community. Conversations like this one remind us that advocacy works best when it is informed, collaborative, and rooted in mutual respect.

Borinqueneers Park and the Effort to Honor the 65th Infantry Regiment in Perth Amboy

By Samuel (Sam) Delgado | For NJ Veteran Magazine

Perth Amboy, New Jersey, a city with more than 300 years of history and long recognized as a gateway community for immigrants is now home to a growing effort to honor a distinguished, yet historically underrecognized, military unit in United States history: the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the Borinqueneers.

The name "Borinqueneers" comes from Borinquen, the original Taíno name for Puerto Rico, translated as "land of the brave lord." The nickname was adopted during the Korean War and reflects both the regiment's cultural heritage and its reputation for courage in combat.

The 65th Infantry Regiment traces its origins to 1899, when Congress authorized the creation of native Puerto Rican troops following the Spanish-American War. The unit was formally incorporated into the Regular Army in 1908 and went on to serve in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and later conflicts.

Its most significant combat role came during the Korean War, where the regiment participated in nine major campaigns. During the winter of 1950, the Borinqueneers played a critical role in supporting the U.S. Marines' withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir. Operating as part of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division, they secured key mountain passes, including the Funchilin Pass, and held defensive positions under sustained Chinese attacks to protect the Marines' route to the evacuation port at Hungnam. The regiment conducted one of the last recorded regimental bayonet charges in U.S. Army history while covering the withdrawal and remained among the final units evacuated on December 24, 1950. Their actions during this operation were essential to the successful withdrawal of U.S. forces under extreme conditions.

For decades, the story of the Borinqueneers remained largely absent from mainstream military history. That began to change through advocacy, scholarship, and public awareness efforts in the early 2000s. In 2014, the United States Congress awarded the regiment the Congressional Gold Medal, one of the nation's highest civilian honors, formally recognizing their service and addressing a long-standing gap in national acknowledgment.

In Perth Amboy, that history has a direct local connection.

Ninety-four year (94) old Ervin Machado, a resident of Perth Amboy, served in combat as a member of the Borinqueneers during the Korean War. Like many veterans of the unit, he rarely spoke about his experience. After returning home, he built a career, raised a family, and lived quietly in the community. His story reflects a broader pattern among Borinqueneers, service marked by sacrifice, followed by decades of limited public recognition.

Today, efforts are underway to ensure that stories like Machado's are preserved and made accessible to future generations.

Borinqueneers Park, a six-acre waterfront park located along the Raritan River, is being developed on the site of a former industrial brownfield. Situated across from the Robert N. Wilentz Elementary School on 2nd Street between Patterson Street and the waterfront, the park is part of a broader environmental remediation and community redevelopment initiative.

The site, once a scrap metal facility, required extensive cleanup. Through funding from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, support from the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, and guidance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the land is being transformed into a public space designed for long-term community use.

In April 2021, the Perth Amboy City Council formally named the site "Borinqueneer Park" in recognition of the 65th Infantry Regiment and the city's Puerto Rican Community, their sacrifices and contributions to the United States.

Building on that designation, the Borinqueneers Park Education Alliance a New Jersey nonprofit organization is leading the effort to fund and construct a permanent veterans memorial dedicated to the regiment. The organization operates with a focus on education, cultural heritage, and community engagement, while also serving as the financial steward responsible for fundraising and supporting the long-term vision of the memorial within the park.

"The proposed memorial is intended to provide a permanent and visible recognition to our Puerto Rican Community, and of the Borinqueneers' service. It will also serve as an educational resource, connecting residents, students, and visitors to a chapter of American military history that remains too often overlooked," said Perth Amboy Mayor Helmin Caba.

For Perth Amboy, the project aligns with broader community priorities. As a city with deep historical roots and a diverse, multi-ethnic population, it continues to serve as a point of entry and opportunity. Investments in public space, environmental resilience, and cultural recognition contribute to neighborhood stability and long-term economic development.

For the veteran community, the memorial represents an opportunity to ensure that the service of Hispanic veterans, particularly those who served under segregated

conditions, is fully integrated into the broader narrative of American military history.

The New Jersey Veterans Chamber of Commerce, with its focus on opportunity, advocacy, and support for veterans and military families, supports highlighting efforts like this one where service, history, and community development intersect.

As Borinqueneers Park moves toward completion and fundraising for the memorial continues, the objective is straightforward: to establish a permanent place of recognition that reflects both the historical significance of the 65th Infantry Regiment and the New Jersey Puerto Rican community that now carries its legacy forward.

The Borinqueneers have already secured their place in history. The responsibility now is to ensure that their service is permanently recognized in the America they helped defend.

For information about supporting of the project please email sdelg@bpealliance.org

Borinqueneer Ervin Machado & USMC Veteran Maria Salazar

From L to R: Annie Hundenlang, Perth Amboy Town Engineer; Ron Rios, Middlesex County Commissioner Director; Ervin Machado, 65th Infantry Combat Veteran (Borinqueneer); Helmin Caba, Current Perth Amboy Mayor; Shawn LaTourette, Former NJ Commissioner of DEP; Yvonne Lopez, Assemblywoman 19th Legislative District; Joel Pabon, BPE Alliance Board Member; Mel Ramos, BPE Alliance Board Member; Rose Morales, Perth Amboy City Councilwoman; BJ Torres, Former Perth Amboy Mayor

Healing in Six Strings: Guitar Vets & Band Together 4 Veterans Help NJ Veterans Find Joy, Purpose, and Camaraderie

By Jeff Cantor, NJ Veteran Magazine

For many veterans, the hardest part of service isn't the deployment—it's the quiet that can follow afterward. The unit dissolves. The routine changes. The sense of belonging can fade. And for veterans living with PTSD, isolation can become the default.

On the Jersey Shore, two Vietnam Veterans—Dennis Champ (U.S. Army) and John Fernandez (U.S. Navy)—are helping reverse that pattern with something deceptively simple: a guitar, a weekly class, and a reason to show up.

Supported by the Jersey Shore Jazz & Blues Foundation (JSJBF) and powered by proceeds from the Veterans Music Fest, their two-track music initiative is giving veterans a practical skill and, just as importantly, rebuilding the camaraderie many miss after leaving the military.

It starts with beginners in Guitar Vets. It grows into teamwork and performance through Band Together 4 Veterans.

And along the way, it helps veterans heal.

A Mission Fueled by Music—and Local Impact

The Jersey Shore Jazz & Blues Foundation has long been rooted in music education and community support. As John Fernandez explained, JSJBF traditionally focused on education, scholarships, and keeping music alive for young people—but leaders saw an opportunity to expand that mission to veterans.

The idea was straightforward: raise funds so veterans could receive lessons and training—then build a program that could last.

John, the past vice president of JSJBF, helped lead multiple successful fundraising events (from venues like the Wonder Bar and Bar A) with a consistent mission: support local veterans where the results can be seen and felt. As he put it, national organizations matter—but helping local veterans creates immediate, visible impact.

That local-first approach now directly supports two veteran music programs designed to reduce isolation, build confidence, and help veterans cope with PTSD.

Guitar Vets: A Beginner Program Built for PTSD Support

Dennis Champ is a Vietnam Veteran who served in the U.S. Army from 1970–1973, spending a year in Vietnam. Like many from his generation, he returned, went to work, and tried to move forward "keep the wolves away," as he said—while carrying what he carried.

Years later, his connection to the Lakewood Vet Center helped spark a new purpose: teaching other veterans to play guitar.

"Music through time has always been a great deal," Dennis said. "You get into music—you forget about other things in life."

That's the heart of Guitar Vets: a beginner-friendly program for veterans with little to no guitar experience, built specifically to support veterans dealing with PTSD.

Dennis describes guitar as both a focus and a challenge—something that requires attention, rhythm, coordination, and patience. In his words, it "puts you in a different place." It gives veterans "something else to think about," and it gets them out of the house—into a room with other veterans, practicing side-by-side.

Where Guitar Vets Meets

Dennis currently teaches at three locations each week:

- Manalapan Community Center
- 114 Highway 33, Manalapan
- Tuesdays, 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM
- Jackson Elks (East Veterans Highway, Jackson)
- Thursdays, 9:30 AM – 10:30 AM
- Village 5 Community Center, Whiting

Fridays, 9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Dennis also shared a key feature that removes barriers for veterans who may not own an instrument: veterans who attend classes receive guitars, provided through program support, and are able to keep them as they continue participating.

"Some pick it up quick, some don't," Dennis said. "So I'm just fighting to get there."

It's not about perfection. It's about progress—and showing up.

Band Together 4 Veterans: Rebuilding the "Unit" Through a Band

For veterans who already have some experience, John Fernandez leads the next step: Band Together 4 Veterans, a program aimed at intermediate players that focuses on building something many veterans miss deeply after service—a unit.

John served in the U.S. Navy beginning in 1969, flying with Helicopter Squadron 8 and deploying on the USS Ticonderoga, with tours in Vietnam-era operations. He spoke candidly about the era—how service members weren't always respected when they returned—and how time reshaped his view of what military service gave him: growth, capability, and lifelong connection.

He also spoke about music as a force that changes the internal weather.

Quoting Tom Petty, John reflected that music is "the closest thing we have" to something transformative—because it can change how you feel instantly. A sad song can bring you to sadness, a happy one can lift you up, and lyrics can connect you to meaning you didn't have words for before.

When asked about the purpose of Band Together, John didn't just talk about

performance. He talked about isolation.
He described something he sees repeatedly: veterans who want help and want connection—yet pull back at the last minute because it's hard to leave the house, hard to trust, and hard to rejoin community.
That's where Band Together becomes more than music.
"We're trying to rebuild that in a setting as a band," he said—forming a group where veterans are bound together again, not by orders, but by shared practice, mutual support, and a common goal.
And yes—the goal includes performance. But the deeper win is the reunion of community.

How Band Together Works

This is the program's first formal year, and John built it intentionally by partnering with Dennis—because Dennis knows the players: who is brand new, who is intermediate, and who is ready for a band setting.
John requested Dennis help identify veterans who would benefit, then directed them to rehearse with support from Ocean County Music in Point Pleasant Beach—a place John praised for its longstanding community impact, including work with both kids and veterans.
John's ideal band needs what every band needs: bass, guitar, keys, drums, vocals—the building blocks of something bigger than the sum of its parts.

Veterans Music Fest: Where the Community Shows Up

Both programs are supported by proceeds from the Veterans Music Fest, which brings the community together around music and mission.
This year's festival is scheduled for:

Veterans Music Fest

Saturday, November 7 | 12:00 PM – 8:00 PM
DJ's, 1801 Ocean Ave, Belmar, NJ

The festival features multiple bands, and John shared an important standard: every band that performs includes at least one veteran.
Leading the festival is LZ Jersey, an all-veteran band that has earned an unforgettable reputation with the crowd. John recalled how overwhelming the support was—people cheering them on not just for musicianship, but for what they represent: veterans showing up, taking the stage, and being celebrated.
John also made a point to credit the venue's support, noting that DJ's—along with owner Frank and Samantha and the staff—have provided an outstanding space, sound system, and consistent backing for veteran programming.

"Keep On Picking": A Message to Veterans Who Feel Stuck

Toward the end of the interview, Dennis offered a simple challenge that carried real weight:
"Challenge yourself a little bit… get out of the house… stay busy, stay active. Keep on picking."
John echoed that same idea with humor and honesty: it's easy to "fall back on that couch" and let the days slip by. Music—whether you're just learning a chord or playing on stage—gives veterans something that comes from within: joy, purpose, and connection.
And that may be the most powerful part: this isn't something being done to veterans. It's something veterans build from themselves, supported by other veterans who've walked the road.

How Veterans Can Join

The Veterans Foundation of America has partnered with the program to help streamline participation. Veterans who want to join can visit thevfa.org, complete the intake form, and email it to Dennis Champ for consideration.
Dennis put it plainly:
"My door is open… If you're a vet, you're in."

Final Chord

Guitar Vets and Band Together 4 Veterans aren't just music programs.
They're a bridge—from isolation back to belonging.
They offer structure without pressure, challenge without judgment, and the kind of camaraderie that veterans often miss most. Led by two Vietnam Veterans and supported by a local foundation committed to education and community, the programs prove something important:
Sometimes the path forward starts with something small—like learning your first chord.
And then, one day, you look up and realize you're part of a band again.
Keep on picking.

Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst
"Win as One" – America's Only Tri-Service Joint Base

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

In the heart of New Jersey stands a military installation unlike any other in the United States.

Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JB MDL) is the **only tri-service joint base in the nation led by three military components**—the Air Force, the Army, and the Navy. It is a living example of what true joint warfighting integration looks like.

Under the leadership of:

- **Air Force – Colonel Michael D. Stefanovic**
- **Army – Colonel Bryan R. Dunker**
- **Navy – Captain James B. Howell**

JB MDL embodies its powerful motto:

"Win as One."

And in today's complex global security environment, that unity matters more than ever.

AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP

Building the Runway for Global Power Projection

At the core of the joint base is the Air Force's 87th Air Base Wing, the host wing that provides foundational support and a secure operating environment for the Department of Defense's only tri-service installation.

Colonel Stefanovic describes JB MDL as more than just a base:

"We provide the runway for the Air Force's global airlift fleet, the ranges for the Army's ground force training, and the infrastructure for the Navy's critical aviation engineering mission."

From this single strategic location, Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen train together in a fully integrated environment. The result is a unified fighting force—greater than the sum of its parts—ready to respond to any crisis, anywhere in the world.

The Airpower Engine of the Northeast

JB MDL is a cornerstone of American air mobility. Its Total Force team includes:

- **87th Air Base Wing** (Host Wing)
- **305th Air Mobility Wing** (Active Duty)
- **514th Air Mobility Wing** (Air Force Reserve)
- **108th Wing** (NJ Air National Guard)
- **621st Contingency Response Wing**

Operating fleets of **C-17 Globemaster III** and **KC-46A** Pegasus aircraft, these units are on-call 24/7 to move personnel, equipment, and humanitarian aid across the globe.

JB MDL played a central role in **Operation ALLIES REFUGE**, supporting the largest non-combatant evacuation in U.S. history. Today, it continues supporting global missions like Operations ABSOLUTE RESOLVE and MIDNIGHT HAMMER.

Innovation in the Air Domain

Innovation at JB MDL is not optional—it's operationally required.

Key advancements include:

- **KC-46A Pegasus modernization**, extending refueling and communications capability
- Expansion into the **small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS) domain**, providing ISR and integrated base defense at a fraction of manned aircraft costs
- Agile problem-solving through the Air Force's Mission Enhancement Cell

This ecosystem of modernization ensures JB MDL remains a premier global mobility hub.

ARMY LEADERSHIP

The Nation's Mobilization and Ground Readiness Platform

From an Army perspective, Colonel Dunker describes JB MDL as:

"A premier Mobilization and Power Projection Platform."

Continuing the proud legacy of Fort Dix, the Army's mission here is to **train, mobilize, and deploy the Total Force**.

The joint base structure serves as a force multiplier. Army units can train on expansive ranges and then move directly to strategic airlift provided by their Air Force partners—seamlessly transitioning from training to deployment.

The Army's Core Commands at JB MDL

The Army mission is anchored by:

- **Army Support Activity-Fort Dix**

- **99th Readiness Division**
- **174th Infantry Brigade**

Each year, over **100,000 Soldiers** from Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard components train across the installation's 31,000 acres of ranges—making JB MDL the most critical ground readiness generator in the region.

Joint Integration in Action

The Army leverages Air Force C-17s for mobilization exercises. It conducts joint training scenarios involving Air Force and Marine Corps air support. Meanwhile, Army training ranges serve as essential preparation grounds for Air Force Security Forces and Navy Expeditionary units.

This cross-component training ensures that when America calls, forces deploy already accustomed to operating together.

Caring for Service Members and Families

Leadership at JB MDL prioritizes service member welfare.

Army commanders work alongside the Air Force's joint resources—such as the Military & Family Readiness Center—while maintaining strong NCO support channels and Army Community Service programs.

Colonel Dunker also encourages veterans to stay connected:

"We encourage veterans to connect with our warfighters through mentorship and by supporting the USO and other base organizations that strengthen our community."

NAVY LEADERSHIP

Engineering the Future of Naval Aviation

From the Navy and Marine Corps perspective, Captain Howell emphasizes that JB MDL provides the secure operational platform necessary to execute uniquely critical missions.

At the center of that mission is:

- **Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD Lakehurst)**

NAWCAD is the **Department of Defense's sole engineering source for aircraft launch and recovery equipment**.

In plain terms: this is the science that allows the Navy to project power from the sea.

Revolutionary Innovation: EMALS and AAG

Engineers at Lakehurst developed:

- **Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS)**
- **Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG)**

These systems power the Navy's newest aircraft carriers, increasing sortie rates and improving aviator safety. This is not incremental improvement—it is revolutionary transformation in carrier aviation.

Operational Readiness at Lakehurst

In addition to NAWCAD, JB MDL hosts:

- **Marine Aircraft Group 49 (MAG-49)** – Marine Corps Reserve aviation
- **Fleet Logistics Support Squadron VR-64** – Navy C-130 airlift

The combination of high-end engineering and combat-ready aviation units makes JB MDL a powerhouse for naval innovation and operational capability.

The Future: America's Premier Joint Warfighting Base

Looking forward, leadership across all three components is aligned on a singular objective:

Solidify JB MDL as America's premier joint warfighting platform.

Future initiatives include:

- Fully operationalizing the KC-46A Pegasus as both tanker and communications node
- Modernizing infrastructure to support next-generation platforms
- Expanding unmanned systems capabilities
- Enhancing quality of life for service members and families
- Maintaining readiness for large-scale mobilization across the Department of Defense

Colonel Stefanovic summarized it best:

"We are investing today to ensure this platform remains ready to project power for the joint force for decades to come."

Why JB MDL Matters to New Jersey—and the Nation

Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst is not just a military installation. It is:

A strategic mobility hub

- A ground force readiness engine
- The epicenter of naval aviation engineering
- A joint warfighting laboratory
- A major employer and economic driver for New Jersey

Most importantly, it is proof that integration works.

Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen train side by side—building a unified force capable of meeting tomorrow's challenges.

In a world where threats evolve rapidly, JB MDL stands ready.

Winning as one.

Who are the leaders at JB MDL?

CAPTAIN JAMES B. HOWELL

Commanding Officer Naval Support Activity Lakehurst

Captain James B. Howell was commissioned out of University of Florida's NROTC in August, 1998. Upon completion of flight school he transferred to Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron FOUR EIGHT (HSL-48) in Mayport, FL where he flew the SH-60B in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and Counter Narco-Terrorism operations.

He then transferred to HSL-40 where he served as an instructor pilot and Operations Officer. In 2006, he continued as instructor pilot and Operations Officer at the HSM Weapons School where he developed and supervised the tactical training of all deploying HSL/HSM detachments.Captain Howell served his Department Head tour at HSL-46 where he deployed as Officer in Charge of Detachment SEVEN in USS Mason (DDG-87) in support of Combined Task Force 151's counter-piracy operations. He finished his tour as Maintenance Office while the squadron made the transition to MH-60Rs.Following one year at the Naval War College in Newport, RI where he earned a Masters degree in National Security and Strategic Studies, he served as an aircraft strike planner in the US Strategic Command's Joint Functional Component Command - Global Strike.As Commanding Officer of Tactical Air Control Squadron TWO TWO, he deployed aboard USS Wasp (LHD-1) in support of Operation ODYSSEY LIGHTNING. In 2017, he also deployed aboard USS Kearsarge (LHD-3) during Hurricanes Irma and Maria relief operations.From 2018-2020, Captain Howell served as the Navigation Officer on USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78). While onboard the first-in-class aircraft carrier, he led the ship through performance trials, acoustic trials and Carrier Air Wing integration.His most recent tour was in Naples, Italy as the Current Operations Director for Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa and Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet. His team was responsible for the command and control of all Naval forces in the European and African theaters during multiple contingencies including Operations Allies Refuge, Allies Welcome and the Ukraine crisis.

COLONEL MICHAEL D. STEFANOVIC

Col. Michael D. Stefanovic is the Commander, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JB MDL) and 87th Air Base Wing, JB MDL, New Jersey. Colonel Stefanovic provides installation support to more than 80 mission partners at the Defense Department's only tri-service joint base. He is also responsible for providing mission-ready expeditionary Airmen, Guardians and Sailors to combatant commanders in support of joint and coalition operations.

Colonel Stefanovic entered the Air Force in 2001 after obtaining his commission through the ROTC program at the Georgia Institute of Technology, earning a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering. He has served in various base level and headquarters assignments, including an international assignment as a counter-IED and explosive subject matter expert to the United Nations in New York. He has deployed to multiple locations in support of overseas contingency operations.

Prior to his current assignment, Colonel Stefanovic served as Commander, 87th Civil Engineer Group, JB MDL, New Jersey.

COLONEL BRYAN R. DUNKER

COL Bryan Dunker assumed duties as the Garrison Commander of U.S. Army Support Activity-Fort Dix and Deputy Commander of Joint Base McGuire, Dix, Lakehurst (JBMDL) in July 2024.|

COL Dunker was commissioned in the Army Corps of Engineers after graduating as a Distinguished Military Graduate from Lehigh University in 2001. His military career has spanned 23 years of service across all three Army components: Active Duty, National Guard, and Army Reserve. He launched his career on Active Duty as a Combat Engineer Officer leading Soldiers in mechanized units throughout Germany, Kosovo, and Iraq. COL Dunker transitioned in 2006 and served four years in the WI and TN National Guards commanding at the company level. In 2011, he broadened his professional skills by transferring to the Army Reserve, and he subsequently gained field grade officer experience from the battalion to the Army Service Component Command (ASCC) and Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) levels.

COL Dunker holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from Lehigh University. He holds a Master of Art degree in Defense and Strategic Studies (Distinguished Graduate) from the U.S. Naval War College. He also holds a Master of Art degree in Strategic Studies (Distinguished Graduate) from the U.S. Army War College. COL Dunker's professional military education includes the Engineer Officer Basic Course, Engineer Captain's Career Course, College of Naval Command and Staff Course, Maritime Advanced Warfighting School, Security Cooperation Planner's Course, and Senior Service College. He is an Intern Engineer in the state of Pennsylvania and a certified Project Management Professional.

COL Dunker is Airborne, Ranger, and Sapper Qualified. His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (2OLC), Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal (3OLC), Army Achievement Medal (1OLC), Combat Action Badge, and Bronze de Fluery Medal.

COL Dunker is married to his wife, Katherine, and they are blessed with two young daughters, Anya and Eva.

A Letter to Our Veteran Community: Why Normandy Still Calls Us Home

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

Dear Veterans, Families, and Fellow Americans,

There are places in this world where history doesn't just live in books — it breathes in the air.

Normandy landings — June 6, 1944 — is not simply a date. It is the moment the tide of World War II began to turn. It is the day Allied forces established a beachhead at Normandy, France, launching the invasion of Europe. It is the day young Americans, many barely out of high school, ran into history — and into unimaginable fire.

If you have never stood on those beaches, especially during the first week of June when the remembrance ceremonies take place, I urge you to go.

There is nothing like it.

Standing on Sacred Ground

When I made my own journey to Normandy, it was not tourism. It was a pilgrimage. There were two reasons I needed to go.

First, to express gratitude.

Second, to understand — to truly try to comprehend — the military planning, coordination, courage, and sacrifice that unfolded on that day.

The five beaches — **Sword, Gold, Juno, Omaha, and Utah** — stretch peacefully today along the French coastline. But beneath the calm surf lies the memory of one of the most complex and costly military operations in history.

Standing on Omaha Beach, you quickly realize that the terrain tells the story better than any documentary ever could.

Soldiers were dropped from landing craft into water five to eight feet deep. Many drowned before ever reaching the sand. Those who made it to shore crawled across an open beach under relentless machine-gun fire. And then came the climb — a 150-foot ascent up steep bluffs, while enemy fire rained down from fortified German bunkers.

How many people would assault a beach like that?

They truly were the Greatest Generation.

Pointe du Hoc: "Rangers, Lead the Way"

No visit to Normandy is complete without standing atop the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. If Omaha Beach humbles you, Pointe du Hoc shakes you.

On D-Day morning, U.S. Army Rangers scaled 100-foot vertical cliffs under enemy fire to eliminate German artillery positions that threatened both Omaha and Utah Beaches. Using rope ladders and grappling hooks fired from rocket launchers, they climbed through machine-gun fire, falling debris, and exploding grenades.

Many did not make it to the top.

Those who did pressed forward across a lunar-like landscape of bomb craters and shattered bunkers. When they reached the gun positions, they discovered the large artillery pieces had been moved inland. Undeterred, small Ranger patrols pushed forward, located the guns hidden in a hedgerow, and destroyed them by hand using thermite grenades.

Out of roughly 225 Rangers who began the mission, fewer than 100 were still able to fight by the time they were relieved two days later.

Standing there today, the ground is still scarred by massive craters from naval bombardment. The bunkers remain broken and jagged. The Ranger Monument rises from the cliff like a stone dagger pointing toward the sky.

It is impossible to stand there and not feel the weight of what courage truly looks like. President Ronald Reagan once stood on those same cliffs and honored those Rangers,

calling them "the boys of Pointe du Hoc." When you look down at the sheer drop into the Atlantic below, you understand why their mission became legendary.

"Rangers lead the way" is not just a motto. It was proven on that cliff face.

The Power of the First Week of June

Visiting Normandy is meaningful any time of year. But the first week of June — during the D-Day remembrance ceremonies — is something entirely different.

The towns are filled with American flags. French citizens line the streets in gratitude. Veterans — fewer each year — return to the beaches they once stormed as young men.

During my visit, I had the privilege of meeting World War II veterans who were there in 1944. I almost felt like my own service was inconsequential in comparison.

I was in awe.

These men did not speak of heroism. They spoke of duty. Of friends who did not come

home. Of fear overcome by commitment to something greater than themselves.
Each year that passes makes those encounters even more precious. Soon, we will not have living witnesses to that day. The responsibility to remember will fall entirely on us.

A Paratrooper's Memory

One story that struck especially close to home was that of Pvt. John Steele of the 82nd Airborne Division.
As a fellow paratrooper, I stood in Sainte-Mere-Eglise and looked up at the church steeple where Steele became entangled after his parachute snagged during the airborne drop.
He hung there, wounded and exposed, while German forces fired below.
He survived.
Today, the town honors him each year by hanging a replica paratrooper from the church steeple — a silent reminder of courage suspended between life and death.
When you stand there, it stops being a story. It becomes real.

The American Cemetery: A Place That Changes You

Above Omaha Beach rests the Normandy American Cemetery.
Row after row of white crosses and Stars of David stretch across the green hillside overlooking the sea.
Over 9,000 Americans are buried there.
Walk those rows slowly. Read the names. Look at the ages.
Many were 18, 19, 20 years old.
The wind off the Atlantic is steady and quiet. It feels sacred.
You leave changed.

Why Every Veteran Should Go

Normandy is not about glorifying war.
It is about honoring sacrifice.
For veterans, especially those who have worn the uniform in more recent conflicts, there is something grounding about standing where freedom was reclaimed at such cost.
You realize:

- You are part of a lineage.
- Service is bigger than any one generation.
- The oath we took connects us backward through time.

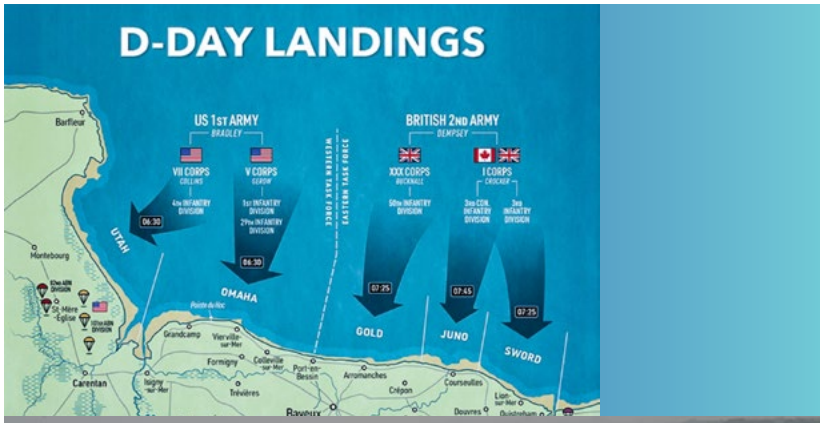
If a trip abroad isn't possible, films like The Longest Day or Saving Private Ryan offer powerful perspectives. But they cannot replicate the feeling of standing on that sand at sunrise on June 6th.

Why Every American Should Go

Normandy is not just a military destination. It is an American civic obligation.
Too often we say "thank you for your service" without fully understanding what that service cost.
When you stand on Omaha Beach and look at those cliffs, you begin to understand.
When you walk through the cemetery and see thousands of identical headstones, you begin to appreciate.
When you meet a 99-year-old veteran who returned to the beach he once stormed, you begin to grasp the weight of history.
We cannot forget.
We cannot allow convenience, politics, or generational distance to dull the memory.

A Call to Remember

The first week of June in Normandy is not simply a commemoration.
It is a reminder.
It reminds us that freedom is not free.
It reminds us that ordinary citizens can do extraordinary things.
It reminds us that gratitude must be active, not passive.
As veterans, we carry the torch forward.
As Americans, we carry the responsibility of remembrance.
If you ever have the opportunity to go to Normandy — especially during the D-Day anniversary ceremonies — take it.
Stand on the sand.
Look up at the cliffs.
Walk among the white crosses.
Say thank you.
Because one day, there will be no living witnesses left to tell us what happened there.
And it will be up to us to remember.
With respect and gratitude,
Jeff Cantor



"Uncle Leo" Rosenzweig: A Post-War Marine Who Never Stops Moving

By Jeff Cantor, NJ Veteran Magazine

If you spend any time around veteran events in Monmouth County, sooner or later you'll hear someone say, "Have you met Uncle Leo?"

They're talking about Leo Rosenzweig—a 98-year-old U.S. Marine Corps veteran who joined the Corps in 1946, and who still lives like every day is meant to be used up in the best possible way: serving others, showing up for veterans, and chasing the next adventure.

I sat down with Leo for a conversation about how it all started—and why, decades later, he's still one of the busiest veterans you'll ever meet.

"It came out of my head": Why a Jewish Teen Joined the Marines

Leo told me the decision to join the Marine Corps came quickly—but with meaning. When he was 18, right after graduating high school, he was draft-eligible ("1-A," as he remembered it). He went home and told his parents he wanted to enlist—specifically in the Marine Corps. As Leo put it, "being Jewish," his parents were surprised at first, but they came to accept it. His father even accompanied him to Manhattan to enlist.

Then came the letter: report to Parris Island.

Like many recruits, Leo packed as if he were headed to a summer camp. Parris Island quickly corrected that assumption.

Parris Island: The Haircut, the Wooden Barracks, and Getting "Squared Away"

Leo's memories of boot camp are vivid and often funny in retrospect—though the experience itself was no joke.

He recalled the shock of stepping off the bus into the full force of Marine Corps urgency, being rushed into processing, and the moment everyone is suddenly unrecognizable after the first haircut. He remembered wooden barracks, and the old-school reality of "laundry" that looked nothing like a modern laundry room—more like an enamel sink, a washboard, and a rope line.

And then the training: long days, constant movement, and the push to get "squared away."

On the range, Leo trained on the M1 rifle, learning to disassemble it, clean it, and handle it with discipline. He described a training pipeline that included weapons familiar to that era of Marines—rifle range work, grenade practice, and other field instruction that left no doubt: this was the Marine Corps, and the standards were the standards.

Quantico and the Amphibious Mission: A Clerk in the Post-WWII Marine Corps

After graduation, Leo's orders took him to Cherry Point, North Carolina, and then to Quantico, Virginia, where he served at the Marine Barracks / Amphibious Warfare School and worked in a clerk role (his MOS, as he described it). In the immediate post-World War II period, the Marine Corps was deeply focused on amphibious doctrine—how to coordinate equipment, landing operations, and supporting elements more effectively based on lessons learned.

Leo's day-to-day work included managing and issuing equipment—sometimes with long quiet stretches—until he'd head up to the mess hall, where friendships formed the way they do in uniform: naturally, through routine and shared time.

Brooklyn Navy Yard and Coming Home

Leo later served at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, close enough to home to feel familiar—but still very much inside a guarded military world.

When he separated and made his way home carrying his duffel bag, he remembered something that's almost charming now: he started jogging in the morning and felt like the only person doing it—years before "morning jogs" became a cultural norm.

He also spoke about what he didn't keep: like many veterans, he lost items over the years, including a group photo book. What remained—what mattered—was the identity and the values he carried forward.

The Life After: Work Ethic, Union Floor, and a Marine Who Became an Adventurer

After service, Leo built a working life rooted in skill and persistence. He described attending an automotive-focused high school program (academics plus mechanics), then working for years at a Pontiac dealership in Manhattan, followed by other dealership roles—eventually landing at a Buick dealership on 57th Street in New York, where he stayed for close to two decades through multiple changes in the business.

And then there's the other side of Leo: the explorer.

Leo didn't just "travel." He chased the ocean.

He described scuba diving across the Caribbean and beyond—Cozumel, the Caymans, Honduras/Belize, and even Chuuk Lagoon in the Pacific, known for its WWII shipwreck sites. He talked about hammerheads, reef sharks, barracudas—moments that still light up his voice decades later. The deepest he recalled going was around 145 feet—not a casual depth, not a casual life.

That restlessness—the need to keep moving, keep learning, keep doing—shows up again and again in Leo's veteran service today.

Service Continued: "Uncle Leo" as a Veteran Leader in New Jersey

At some point, Leo's life shifted from adventure to another mission: veteran community leadership.

In New Jersey, Leo became deeply involved with Jewish War Veterans Post 536 (Covered Bridge) in Manalapan, serving as its commander.

His work has included:

- Honoring veterans' graves by helping place flags each Memorial Day and supporting remembrance efforts
- Helping restore and dedicate a cemetery flagpole through a grant effort—practical patriotism in action
- Participating in community remembrance events in commemoration alongside other WWII veterans
- Serving locally through Manalapan's Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee, continuing to show up where veterans' needs are discussed and addressed

He's also been recognized and supported by Monmouth County partners. In late 2025, Leo—widely known as "Uncle Leo"—was highlighted through the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office Veteran Service Council, receiving a special initiative providing him home-cooked meals as a gesture of gratitude.

That story matters because it shows something important: Leo isn't just an attendee at veteran events. He's part of the connective tissue that *keeps them going*.

A Jewish Marine, a Polish Family Story, and Perspective Earned Over Time

In our conversation, Leo reflected briefly on his family's origins—his family was from Poland—and on how identity and history shape the way a person sees service, country, and community. He spoke plainly about what his parents did and didn't talk about at home, and how those realities inform the life you build.

The takeaway wasn't politics or theory. It was Leo being Leo—practical, honest, forward-moving.

Advice from a 98-Year-Old Marine Who Still Shows Up

When asked what he'd tell younger men and women considering service today, Leo didn't give a bumper-sticker answer. He spoke about responsibility—how advice carries weight, because today's world is unpredictable and sacrifice is real.

And yet, if you watch Leo in veteran spaces, you see his deeper message without him needing to say it:

Stay engaged. Stay connected. Don't isolate. Find your people. Keep moving.

That's what he's done for 98 years.

The Man Who Keeps Busy—So Other Veterans Don't Feel Alone

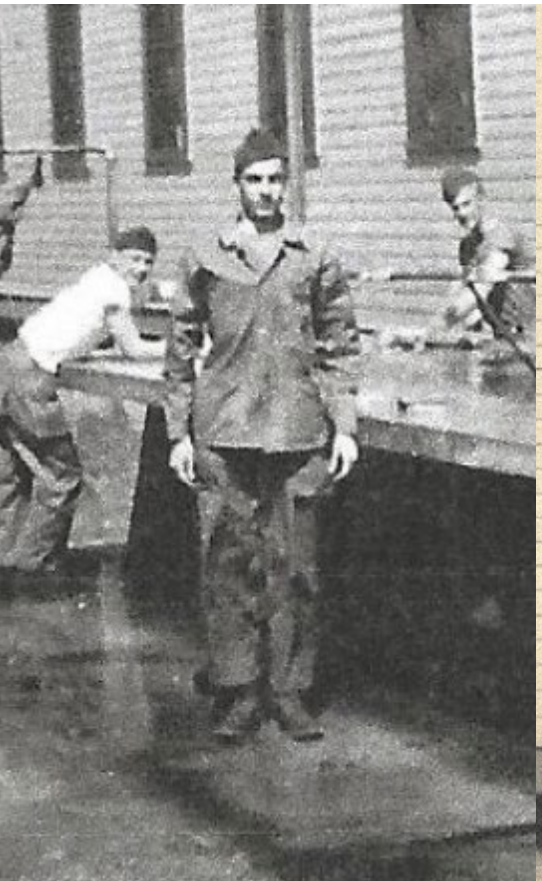
Leo Rosenzweig is the kind of veteran every community quietly depends on: the person who calls people, organizes, attends, advocates, visits, supports, and remembers—without needing recognition.

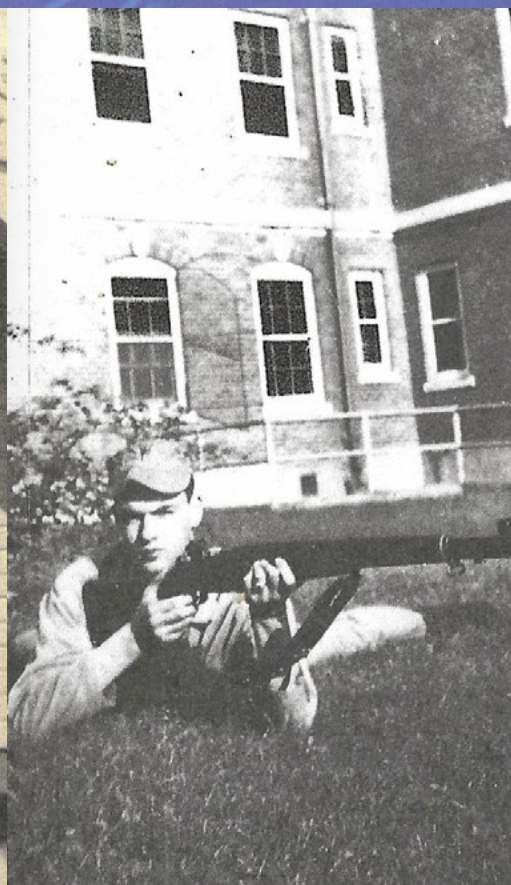
He joined the Marine Corps in 1946, lived a life of work and adventure, and then turned his later years into a second career of veteran service—helping others feel less alone, and helping communities remember who built the freedoms we live inside.

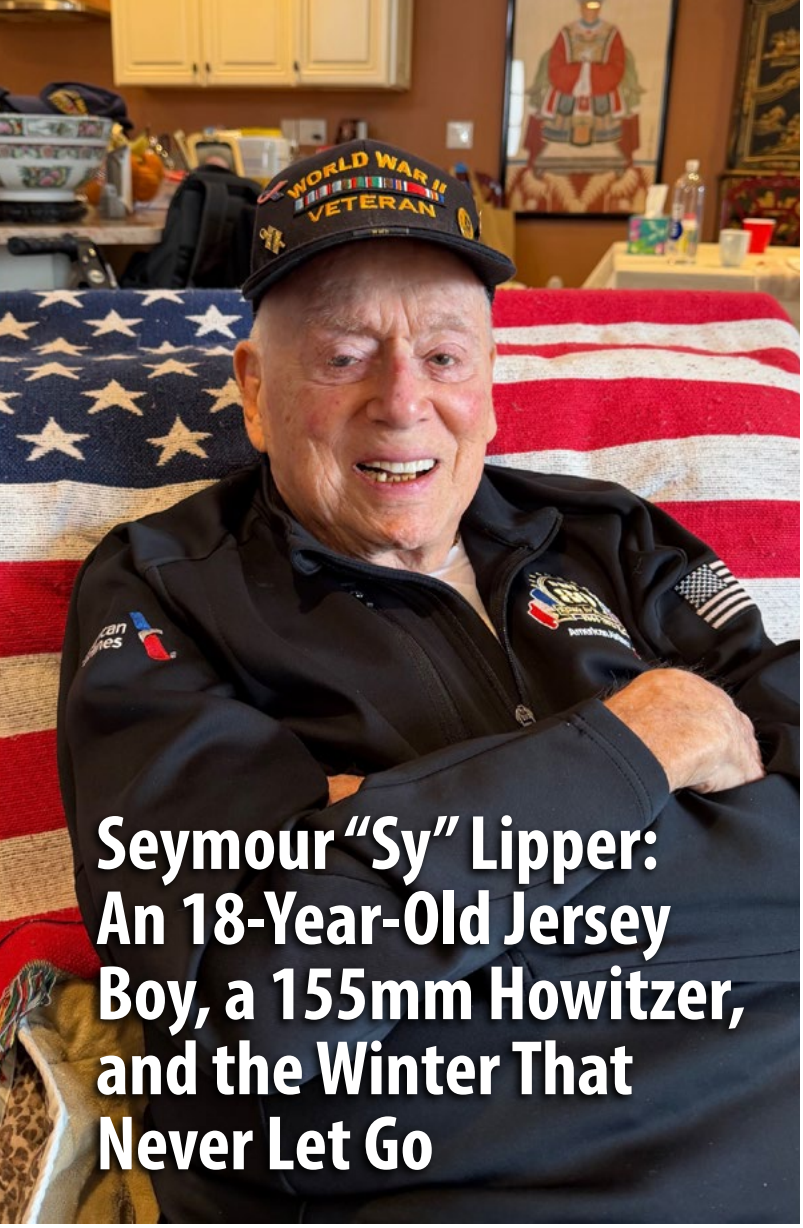
If you see Uncle Leo at the next ceremony, don't just shake his hand.

Ask him what he's doing next.

Chances are, it's more than the rest of us have planned for the whole month.







Seymour "Sy" Lipper: An 18-Year-Old Jersey Boy, a 155mm Howitzer, and the Winter That Never Let Go

By Jeff Cantor, NJ Veteran Magazine

Seymour "Sy" Lipper's story begins the way so many "Greatest Generation" stories do—quietly, without fanfare, and with the kind of grit that doesn't ask to be noticed.

Sy was born March 22, 1926, and raised in Monroe Township, New Jersey, the son of a baker and a homemaker. He was bright and driven—good enough to attend the Bronx High School of Science—and as a teenager he took a job that sounds almost impossible today: selling soda and chocolate in New York City subway cars.

Then the war called.

During his senior year in 1943, a recruiter visited Sy and his classmates with an opportunity: enlist in the U.S. Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP)—a pathway that combined military service with technical education. Sy was the only one of his peers to take it. But the program didn't last long. As the war's manpower demands grew, ASTP pipelines were cut short across the Army, and Sy soon found himself on a very different track—one aimed straight at the front.

From Classroom to Gun Crew

Sy was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he trained as an artilleryman. His weapon: the 155mm howitzer—a heavy field gun built to reach far, hit hard, and fire again and again in punishing weather.

He traveled on the Queen Mary from the United States to England and then into France. By the time he arrived in France, Sy wasn't just filling out a roster—he was stepping into gaps on an overstretched line as the war surged toward its brutal winter climax.

At 18 years old, he was sent into the chaos and confusion of the Battle of the Bulge, when German forces struck through the Ardennes and the fight turned into a freezing contest of endurance, identification, and survival. Sy recalled the reality of infiltration and uncertainty: German troops masquerading as Americans, the fear of what enemy forces might know, and the grim orders to stick tight to your squad and be ready to fire on anyone you couldn't identify.

For Sy, the winter left a mark that never fully faded. He survived without shrapnel wounds—but he did not leave unscathed. He suffered severe frostbite to his hands and feet—an injury he carried forward long after the guns fell silent.

Where Sy Served—and the Winter Front

Sy's wartime service is associated with the U.S. Seventh Army—a formation that, under Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch, fought an exhausting winter campaign in northeastern France as the Germans launched additional offensives in the same period as the Ardennes battle. The National WWII Museum notes that Operation Nordwind—a major German offensive in Alsace—was launched "in the midst of the Battle of the Bulge," hammering U.S. forces in bitter winter conditions.

It's also important to clarify something often mixed up in popular memory: Gen. George S. Patton is most closely tied to the Battle of the Bulge through his command of the U.S. Third Army, including the drive to relieve Bastogne. Patton did command the Seventh Army earlier in the war (notably in Sicily), but during the late-1944/early-1945 winter fighting in France, the Seventh Army's senior commander was Alexander Patch, as reflected in U.S. Army historical summaries.

Sy didn't need the history books to tell him how dangerous it was. He lived the version measured in numb fingers, frozen ground, and the constant pressure of staying alert when the enemy could be wearing your uniform.

A Twist of Fate—and a Discharge Home

After the winter ordeal, Sy received orders back to the United States for rest and recovery. He later learned he was expected to deploy again—this time for an additional tour in the Pacific.

But then came one of those life-changing bureaucratic errors that veterans still talk about decades later: Sy was mistakenly routed with soldiers being processed for discharge. In April 1945, he left the Army as a Technician 5th Class—a wartime rank held by skilled enlisted specialists whose technical competence kept the machine moving.

The Long Road After War

Sy didn't come home to a victory parade in his own mind. Like many who served in World War II, he came home, went to work, and built a life.

Using the GI Bill, Sy eventually earned a degree in Management and Foreign Trade from NYU—and rose to become an Executive Vice President in the electronics industry. His postwar career put him close to the leading edge of American innovation, including a chapter he loved telling: helping introduce the personal computer era alongside Apple's Steve Jobs at an industry event in Las Vegas (as Sy remembered it).

Retirement didn't slow him down. At 65, Sy went back to learning—taking courses at Essex County College, Montclair State, and Seton Hall, even completing pre-medical coursework simply because he wanted to keep growing.

At 82, Sy developed macular degeneration, forcing a new kind of adjustment—one more reminder that resilience is rarely a one-time act. Today, Sy is 100 years old, living in Monroe, NJ, with his wife, Carol—still grounded in gratitude, still grounded in service.

“You Can’t Get This Experience Anywhere Else”

Sy’s words about the Army are not romantic—and that’s what makes them powerful. He didn’t describe war as glorious. He described service as formative:

“The experience I had in the military was invaluable. I learned to be independent and have respect for myself, others and our country. You can’t get this experience anywhere else. I think everyone should spend time in the service as part of this country’s bravest generation.”

Sy Lipper accompanied a 155mm howitzer across frozen ground and came home with frostbite that never truly left. He also came home with a belief in personal responsibility, teamwork, and country—values he lived out in business, education, and family for the next eight decades.

In New Jersey, we tell veteran stories because memory is a form of honor.

And Seymour “Sy” Lipper’s service—steady, unassuming, and remarkable—will always be remembered.

Story update. Sy Lipper, part of the Greatest Generation, passed away on February 27th, 2026. He will be missed and we are eternally thankful of his service and sacrifice for our nation.

The Most Interesting Man in New Jersey

The Remarkable Life of Retired Master Sergeant John Welgos

By Jeff Cantor for NJ Veteran Magazine

Some veterans serve their country with distinction. Others go on to serve their communities in meaningful ways after leaving the military. And then there are rare individuals whose lives seem to encompass an entire history of service across multiple professions, missions, and generations.

Retired Master Sergeant John Welgos may very well be **the most interesting man in New Jersey**.

Over the course of more than **three decades in uniform**, followed by high-risk assignments with the **U.S. Department of State**, the **Central Intelligence Agency**, and a distinguished career in law enforcement with the **Edison Police Department**, Welgos built a life defined by courage, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to service.

From the **82nd Airborne Division** to the **2nd Ranger Battalion**, from **U.S. Army Special Forces** operations in Europe to intelligence missions in Iraq and Gaza, his journey reads like the pages of a military history book.

Yet through it all, Welgos remains grounded by the principles that guided him from the beginning: faith, perseverance, and the belief that opportunity favors those willing to pursue it.

A Young Infantryman with Big Ambitions

Welgos began his military journey as an **11B combat infantryman** in the U.S. Army. Early in his career, he quickly distinguished himself as a Soldier with exceptional motivation and discipline.

At **Airborne School**, he graduated as an **honor graduate**, earning his coveted jump wings before being assigned to the **3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment** within the legendary **82nd Airborne Division**.

While serving with the division, Welgos earned recognition as **Soldier of the Month and Soldier of the Quarter**, achievements that even led to time spent working directly with senior command leadership.

At one point in his career, he was accepted into **West Point Preparatory School**, a prestigious pathway to becoming a commissioned officer. However, hearing loss caused by military service medically disqualified him from attending. Instead of leaving the service, Welgos made a decision that would define his career—he chose to remain enlisted and continue serving on the front lines.

A Plank Holder in the Army Rangers

In 1974, Welgos took initiative that would place him at the center of one of the Army's most elite organizations.

After completing recruiting duty in New Jersey, he personally contacted a command sergeant major involved in forming the **2nd Ranger Battalion**. His determination paid off—Welgos was selected as a **plank holder**, one of the original soldiers who helped build the battalion from the ground up.

Serving with the Rangers for two years, he experienced the intense training and operational culture that defines the unit.

Following his Ranger assignment, Welgos moved to the **Fort Lewis Command Parachute Team**, where he worked under **Lieutenant Colonel Bill Shelton**, further expanding his airborne and operational experience.

Special Forces and the Cold War

Welgos' career continued to evolve as he was selected for **Special Forces**, ultimately earning the coveted **Green Beret**.

He served in **Germany** with the **10th Special Forces Groups**, where he trained and operated in the highly sensitive environment of Cold War Europe.

During this time he earned multiple Special Forces qualifications, including:

- **18 Bravo – Special Forces Weapons Sergeant**
- **18 Charlie – Special Forces Engineer Sergeant**
- **18 Fox – Intelligence and Operations**

These roles required mastery of weapons systems, demolition and engineering operations, and intelligence planning—skills that would prove invaluable throughout the rest of his career.

A Career of Critical Decisions

At one point in his career, Welgos was presented with an extraordinary opportunity—selection for the highly secretive **Delta Force**.

But life often presents difficult choices. At the same time, Welgos had the opportunity to begin a career in law enforcement in New Jersey.

He ultimately chose to join the **Edison Police Department**, where he would go on to serve the community for decades.

Yet his connection to elite military units never faded. Welgos later served as a **law enforcement liaison supporting Special Mission Units**, helping coordinate training exercises in urban environments across the Northeast.

In one notable training event, he assisted with operations at a former psychiatric facility shortly before the historic **1993 Mogadishu mission**.

Serving on the Front Lines of Intelligence Operations

Even after leaving full-time military service, Welgos continued operating in some of the world's most dangerous environments.

In 2003 he deployed to Gaza as part of a security team working for the U**.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service.**

During that assignment, his convoy was struck by an **improvised explosive device (IED)**, killing three members of the team. The experience underscored the constant risks faced by Americans serving overseas in diplomatic security roles.
Following that mission, Welgos transitioned into work with the **CIA's Global Response Staff**, supporting intelligence operations.
He later served **four tours in Iraq**, beginning shortly after the initial invasion. His work included assignments in 2004 in **Mosul** and other locations in northern Iraq where security teams operated under extremely challenging conditions.

A Lifetime of Service in New Jersey

Back home, Welgos continued serving his community through his work with the **Edison Police Department**.
During his law enforcement career he served as:

- **Narcotics detective**
- **Juvenile detective sergeant**
- **Founding member of the Edison Police Special Operations Group**

He also helped establish the **Municipal Alliance and Substance Abuse Resource Center**, an initiative focused on prevention and education.
Beyond policing, Welgos served as chair of the **Middlesex County Child Placement Review Board**, helping determine the best outcomes for children in foster care cases. His work demonstrated that service to others does not end when the uniform comes off.

Lessons from a Life of Service

Throughout his career, Welgos has emphasized several principles that guided his journey.
First is **perseverance**. From early setbacks like medical disqualification from West Point to navigating multiple career transitions, he never allowed obstacles to dictate his future.
Second is **networking and mentorship**. Welgos credits many opportunities in his life to relationships built through service and professional connections.
Finally, he speaks openly about the role of **faith** in helping guide difficult decisions throughout his career.

A Life Worth Celebrating

Today, John Welgos represents the very best of what it means to serve.
Few individuals have worn as many hats: infantry soldier, Ranger, Special Forces operator, intelligence professional, law enforcement officer, mentor, and community leader.
His story reminds us that the spirit of service can take many forms—and that sometimes the most extraordinary lives are lived quietly by the people next door.
For New Jersey's veteran community, Master Sergeant John Welgos is more than a decorated veteran.
He is a living example of what dedication, courage, and faith can accomplish.
And he may just be **the most interesting man in New Jersey**.

AN "ALL AMERICAN"

My name is John Welgos from New Jersey. A couple of years ago, I was probably like many of you — uncertain about my future. After checking around the job market and after much thought, I decided to find out what the so called "Today's Army" had to offer me.

What happened? Well, I enlisted for Combat Arms with a guarantee of Airborne School and an ultimate assignment with the 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The thought of being a Paratrooper with the famous 82d Airborne Division, the "All Americans", intrigued me. Now it is a reality. Since I completed jump school, I've earned the Expert Infantryman's Badge while in the 82d and attended Ranger School. Sure, Ranger School was rough at first, like Airborne School was, but I'm no superstar. I'm made of the same stuff you are and today I wear that distinctive Ranger tab with pride. Members of the 82d Airborne Division get to sharpen their skills through adventurous training in such places as Greece, Turkey, Puerto Rico, Korea and locations throughout the United States.

In the 82d Airborne Division, I enjoy recreational facilities such as the pools, gyms, bowling alleys and tennis courts, and at the same time, further my education through the Fort Bragg Education Center. Oh, by the way, I just re-enlisted and received a bonus of $10,000. If you don't believe me, check it out with a recruiter.

How old am I? I'm nineteen, an "All American", and my career is just beginning.

If you're still looking for a career with unlimited opportunities, take a look at the 82d Airborne Division. I did. Your local Army representative will be glad to help you.

John Welgos

PARATROOPER

THE 82D AIRBORNE DIVISION FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

Gold Star Mother Assemblywoman Melinda Kane
A Life of Service, A Legacy of Sacrifice

By Jeff Cantor for NJ Veteran Magazine

In New Jersey, few stories capture both the cost of freedom and the strength of those left behind as powerfully as that of **Assemblywoman Melinda Kane**, a Gold Star mother whose son, **Marine Lance Corporal Jeremy Kane**, gave his life in service to our nation.

Jeremy was killed in action on **January 23, 2010, in Helmand Province, Afghanistan**, at just 22 years old. But his story—like his mother's—extends far beyond that day. It is a story of service, sacrifice, resilience, and purpose.

A Jersey Kid with a Calling to Serve

Jeremy Kane's life began in a military family. He was born at **Fort Polk, Louisiana**, while his father was serving as an Army physician. From his earliest days, the sights and sounds of military life surrounded him—uniforms, helicopters, and a culture of service.

After his father left active duty, Jeremy grew up in **Cherry Hill, New Jersey**, where he attended **Cherry Hill High School East**. Like many young Americans, his path could have gone in many directions. But for Jeremy, service was never far from his heart.

His interest in the military was deeply influenced by family. His grandfather had served as a Marine in World War II, and his father had served in the Army. But it was the events of **September 11, 2001**, when Jeremy was just 14 years old, that transformed that interest into a calling.

He began training physically, focusing himself with discipline and purpose. By age 16, his family knew his intentions were serious—he was determined to serve.

Choosing the Marine Corps

Jeremy ultimately chose the **United States Marine Corps**, believing it would challenge him the most. He joined as a reservist while attending college, driven by a desire to gain discipline, serve his country, and take responsibility for his future.

Like many military families, Melinda Kane and her husband struggled with his decision. They were proud—but also fearful. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were ongoing, and the risks were real.

Jeremy made his decision official on **September 11th of his freshman year of college**, a date that held deep personal meaning for him. He believed service was not just an option—it was a responsibility.

Deployment and a Mother's Vigil

Jeremy later transferred to Rutgers-Camden and continued his path as a Marine reservist. On a day already filled with emotion—**Mother's Day**, which also marked the unveiling of his father's gravestone following his passing from cancer—Jeremy told his mother he would not be returning to school.

Instead, he would be deploying to Afghanistan.

For Assemblywoman Kane, the months leading up to that deployment were among the most difficult. Once Jeremy deployed, life became a waiting game—waiting for a phone call, an email, any sign that he was safe.

Communication was limited. Messages took days. Phone calls were brief and unpredictable.

But in those rare conversations, Jeremy's character stood out. He wasn't focused on himself—he was focused on others. He asked for items to support his fellow Marines and even the Afghan children he encountered. In one of their final conversations, he spoke with excitement about receiving multiple care packages—not for himself, but for what it meant to morale for everyone around him.

That was Jeremy—always thinking of others first.

A Hero's Final Act

On January 23, 2010, Jeremy was on patrol near a marketplace in **Helmand Province** when a man attempted to pass through a controlled area.

Jeremy stopped him.

Moments later, the man detonated himself.

Jeremy was killed, along with two Afghan children nearby. But in that moment, by stopping the attacker, Jeremy is credited with saving the lives of at least a dozen Marines behind him.

It was an act of instinct, courage, and selflessness—one that defines the very meaning of service.

The Knock on the Door

Back home in New Jersey, Assemblywoman Kane was preparing to meet a friend for lunch when she heard a persistent knock at her door.

At first, she thought it might be a solicitor. Even when she saw uniformed officers, she assumed they might be recruiters.

Then she saw their faces.

And she knew.
What followed was the moment every military family fears—the confirmation that her son was gone. She has described it as the worst possible news a parent can receive, a moment that changes life forever.
Jeremy was returned through **Dover Air Force Base**, and with the support of local leaders, law enforcement, and the community, his family brought him home with honor. A police escort from Cherry Hill to Dover became not just a procession, but a powerful tribute to a fallen Marine.

Gaps in Support—and a Call to Do Better

In the aftermath of Jeremy's death, Assemblywoman Kane faced another challenge—navigating grief without adequate support from the military system.
Because Jeremy was a reservist based in another state, she was not connected to the same support network as many active-duty families. The casualty officers assigned to assist her were, in her experience, unprepared and inconsistent. One was removed, another struggled with his own mental health, and ultimately, she was left to navigate an overwhelming system largely on her own.
It is an experience she has spoken about openly—not out of criticism alone, but out of a desire to ensure that no other family faces the same gaps in support.

Finding Purpose Through Loss

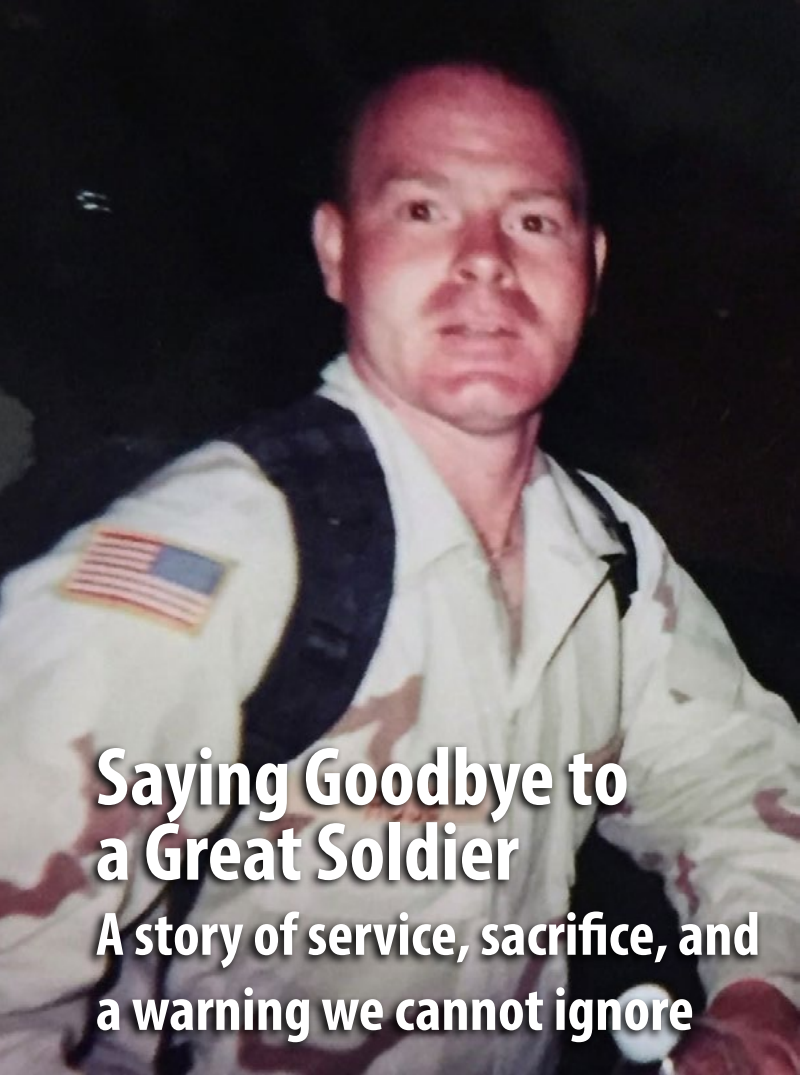
After losing both her husband and her son within a short span of time, Assemblywoman Kane faced unimaginable grief. But she made a conscious decision—she would not allow her life to end with their loss.
Instead, she chose to find purpose.
She pushed herself forward, even when it was difficult. She drew strength from Jeremy's example—his discipline, his resilience, his willingness to keep going under the hardest conditions.
That journey led her to advocacy, including her work with **TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors)**, which became a critical support system for her and continues to help countless Gold Star families.
It also led her into public service.

Keeping Jeremy's Legacy Alive

Today, as a member of the New Jersey General Assembly, Melinda Kane carries Jeremy's legacy with her every day.
She works from what was once his room—now her office—surrounded by his photos, his medals, and the memories of his life. But more importantly, she keeps his legacy alive by telling his story.
She speaks about why young men and women choose to serve. She challenges the stigma that sometimes surrounds military service. She educates others about sacrifice, about Memorial Day, and about what it truly means to wear the uniform.
And she reminds us that service is not something to question—but something to honor.

A Legacy That Lives On

Jeremy Kane was more than a Marine. He was a son, a brother, a student, and a young man who believed deeply in serving something greater than himself.
His final act saved lives.
His legacy continues through his mother's work, through the lives he protected, and through the countless people who hear his story.
For New Jersey's veteran community, Assemblywoman Melinda Kane stands as a powerful example of strength, resilience, and purpose.
And through her, Jeremy Kane's story continues to inspire—reminding us all of the true cost of freedom, and the enduring power of service.



Saying Goodbye to a Great Soldier

A story of service, sacrifice, and a warning we cannot ignore

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

This is a difficult story.

I had the opportunity—and the honor—to visit one of my soldiers from Iraq, SPC **Lou Rose**, along with his loving family. It was a visit filled with gratitude, reflection, and heartbreak.

Lou is 49 years old. A husband to Melissa. A father to four—Louie Jr., Ryan, Tyler, and Mikayla. A proud grandfather to twin three-year-olds. A soldier. A firefighter. A police officer. A man who has spent his entire adult life serving others.

And now, Lou is preparing for his final mission.

A Life of Service

Lou enlisted in the Army in 1995 and served honorably until 2004, including deployment to Iraq during the early days of the war. Like so many of our brothers and sisters, he answered the call without hesitation.

After his military service, Lou continued to serve his community. He volunteered with fire companies in Ocean Gate and Bayville, and later in West Milford. Today, he serves as a Sergeant with the West Milford Police Department.

Lou didn't just wear one uniform—he wore many. And in each one, he lived the values we all recognize: duty, loyalty, and selfless service.

A Devastating Diagnosis

On April 30, 2024, Lou was diagnosed with **Stage IV esophageal cancer**. Since then, the disease has spread to his brain and liver.

His doctors have been clear: this cancer is **100% attributable to exposure to burn pits** during his deployment.

LEFT: SPC Lou Rose getting ready to deploy to Iraq

There are no more treatments left.

Lou is now entering hospice care.

The Cost of War That Follows Us Home

For many veterans, the war does not end when we come home.

Burn pits—used extensively in Iraq and Afghanistan to dispose of waste including plastics, chemicals, fuel, and medical debris—exposed service members to toxic smoke and carcinogens on a daily basis.

We breathed it in. We lived in it. We didn't have a choice.

And now, years later, we are seeing the consequences.

When I first shared Lou's story, two other soldiers from our deployment reached out—both recently diagnosed with **throat cancer**, also linked to burn pit exposure.

This is not coincidence.

This is a pattern.

A Personal Warning

This story is not just about Lou.

It's about all of us.

I am a cancer survivor myself. I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma and underwent surgery to remove it, along with several lymph nodes. My exposure came from depleted uranium after JDAM strikes on our compound at the start of the war.

We all carry something from our service.

Some of us just don't know it yet.

PLEASE Get Screened

If there is one message that must come from this story, it is this:

PLEASE—get your cancer screenings.

Early detection can save your life.

There are resources available right now for veterans:

Advanced Cancer Screening Opportunity

The **Dana-Farber Cancer Institute** is offering access to the **Sentinel Study**, a groundbreaking blood test that can detect **over 50 types of cancer early**.

Eligible participants may receive this screening at no cost.

Apply here:

https://redcap.partners.org/redcap/surveys/?s=RR8XRFWXXLFEWPW8

VA Support for Toxic Exposure

Through the **PACT Act**, the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** has expanded eligibility for care and benefits related to burn pit exposure and other toxic exposures.

This includes:

- Expanded health care eligibility
- Cancer screenings and treatment
- Disability compensation
- Presumptive conditions for faster claims processing

Learn more:

https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/

A Soldier's Legacy

Sitting with Lou and his family, what stands out most is not the illness—it's the strength.

The love in that room.

The pride in his children.

The quiet understanding that he gave everything—not just in combat, but in a lifetime of service.

Lou Rose is the kind of soldier every leader hopes to have. The kind of man every community is lucky to know.

And now, as he prepares for this next chapter, we owe him something in return.

Carry the Message Forward

We cannot change what happened to Lou.
But we can honor him by taking care of ourselves—and by looking out for each other.
Call your battle buddies.
Share this message.
Encourage screenings.
Pay attention to symptoms.
Get checked.
Because the fight doesn't end when we come home.
And no veteran should fight this battle alone.

Final Thoughts

Today, we say goodbye—not just to a soldier, but to a brother.
A father. A grandfather. A public servant.
A great man. Sadly, Lou Rose passed away on April 4th, 2026 at 9:15AM.
Lou, we stand with you. We honor you. And we will carry your story forward.
Until Valhalla, brother.

SPC Lou Rose, SPC Gary Clune, CPT David Cabral, SPC Glen Horay, members of CAT-A 34 in Kirkuk, Iraq

Members of Bravo Company, 404th CA BN enjoying some much needed break time on July 4th, 2003

Braven Health stepping up to support veterans

Taking Care of Those Who Took Care of Us—One Community Event at a Time

By NJ Veteran Magazine Staff

Across New Jersey, a quiet crisis shows up in familiar ways: veterans skipping routine checkups, putting off screenings, pushing through pain, and trying to "tough it out" alone. The solution isn't complicated—but it does require commitment, partnership, and meeting veterans where they are.

That's exactly what **Braven Health** has done through its growing series of **Veterans Health & Resource Fairs**, delivered in partnership with the **Veterans Foundation of America (VFA)** and a coalition of healthcare and community organizations.

Last year alone, Braven Health-sponsored events made a measurable difference: **8 health & wellness fairs, 1,300 veterans served**, and countless connections made to critical screenings, benefits support, and follow-on care. Just as importantly, the effort expanded beyond healthcare with a **job expo in Middlesex County**, helping veterans and military spouses connect to meaningful employment pathways.

What These Fairs Deliver—Right When Veterans Need It

At their core, these events are about access and prevention. Veterans and military families can walk in, get connected, and leave with tangible next steps—often the same day.

Typical services include:

- **Health checks and wellness assessments**
- **Targeted screenings** (including cancer screenings and other preventative testing)
- **Resource navigation** (healthcare options, benefits information, and community supports)
- **Direct referrals** for additional care and services

It's a model rooted in respect: no red tape, no judgment—just practical support.

2026: A Bigger Year of Veteran-Focused Events in New Jersey

This year, Braven Health—working alongside the Veterans Foundation of America—will bring several major veteran-centered events to communities across the state. The goal is simple: **expand access, build trust, and strengthen veteran wellbeing through high-quality care and community connection.**

Veterans Health Fair – Wildwood

A major upcoming anchor event is the V**eterans Health Fair on May 28 at the Wildwood Convention Center**, scheduled to run during the same week as the **VFW State Convention at the Wildwoods (May 26–30, 2026).**

Thanks to the generosity and partnership of **Cooper University Health Care** and **Deborah Heart & Lung Center, veterans and military spouse**s will be able to access **health checks and cancer screenings**—the kind of early detection services that save lives when caught in time.

Braven Health is also supporting veterans in Bergen County on June 23rd.

In partnership with Bergen New Bridge Medical Center, we will conduct health checks and screenings for veterans & their spouses in Northern New Jersey. To see where we will be conducting health fairs, please visit the website at https://thevfa.org and click on the Veterans Health Fairs page.

Veterans Fishing Tournament – July 18th

On **July 18th** , Braven Health and partners will support a V**eterans Fishing Tournament at Monmouth Cove Marina in Middletown, NJ.**

Veterans will spend the day fishing for **sea bass and fluke**, then return for a

celebration that honors both camaraderie and service—including a special nod to the spirit of America and the role veterans continue to play in protecting our communities.

August 26th: Scott Mann's "11 Days"

On August 26th, the veteran community will also welcome **LTC (Ret) Scott Mann**, a retired Green Beret and founder of **Task Force Pineapple Express**, for his one-man play **"11 Days."** The performance powerfully tells the story of the effort to evacuate Afghan allies during the fall of Afghanistan. This will take place at the Carteret Performing Arts Center, 46 Washington Street, Carteret, NJ.

Also planned for August: a **Veterans Resource Fair in Passaic County,** designed to bring meaningful support directly to veterans throughout the region—especially those who may not have easy access to centralized services.

September 18th: NJ Veteran Business Summit – Brookdale College

Braven Health will also support the **New Jersey Veteran Business Summit**, led by the **NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce**, on **Friday, September 18th** at the **Collins Arena at Brookdale College in Lincroft, NJ.**

This summit will provide practical guidance for veterans interested in:

- Starting or scaling a business
- Federal/state contracting pathways
- Finding meaningful employment
- Building long-term financial stability

Sign up here: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/veterans-business-summit-tickets-1983817312986?aff=ebdssbdestsearch

Bringing Health Information Directly to Veteran Posts Statewide

Beyond major events, the Braven team will be conducting talks throughout the year at:

- VFW Posts
- American Legion Posts
- DAV Chapters
- Marine Corps League detachments

These sessions focus on:

- Understanding healthcare options
- Improving health outcomes over time
- Preventing injuries and reducing avoidable complications

If your post would like to host a Braven Health presentation, you can contact **Rob Maxton at (732) 245-2574**.

Why Braven Health's Commitment Matters

Braven Health's approach recognizes what many veteran families already live every day: no single system meets every need. Braven Health aims to expand access and options for veterans—supporting the broader goal of strengthening healthcare coverage alongside **VA healthcare** or **TRICARE for Life**, depending on individual circumstances.

And because real support is measured in actions, not slogans, these fairs represent something powerful: **consistent, boots-on-the-ground investment in veteran wellbeing.**

Learn More and Track Upcoming Events

For more information about upcoming events hosted by the Veterans Foundation of America, visit: https://thevfa.org.

Turning 65?

Keep your VA coverage—add more benefits and flexibility.

You've earned your military benefits — and nothing about this plan takes them away. Enrolling in Medicare does not replace your VA or TRICARE® for Life coverage or affect how you get prescriptions. Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) simply gives you more support when you want care outside the VA or need faster access — all for a $0 monthly premium.

Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) is built to work alongside your military benefits.

A good fit if you:

- ✔ Live in New Jersey
- ✔ Have Medicare Parts A & B
- ✔ Get prescriptions through VA or TRICARE for Life
- ✔ Want additional coverage outside the VA system

Medicare Enrollment Reminder:

Your Initial Enrollment Period starts **3 months before** your 65th birthday month.

Get Started

1-833-713-1313 (TTY **1-888-222-1108**)
Weekdays, 8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET (Apr–Sep)
BravenHealth.com/Salute

Service Area: Available in Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic, Salem, Union. Not available in Sussex, Warren, Morris, Somerset.

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Building Stronger Veterans Through Resilience First Aid

Proven Science. Real Skills. A Powerful – and Surprisingly Fun – Experience.

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

Veterans understand resilience. We lived it.

But here's the reality: resilience isn't a fixed trait — it's a skillset. And like marksmanship or leadership, it can be trained, strengthened, and sharpened.

That's exactly what **Resilience First Aid (RFA)** does.

Backed by neuroscience and validated through a large-scale study of 769 participants across multiple industries, RFA is proving to be one of the most effective primary prevention mental health programs available today — and it's doing so in a way that's engaging, practical, and yes… genuinely enjoyable.

Why Resilience Training Matters Now More Than Ever

Suicide rates remain a national crisis. In the United States alone, approximately 50,000 lives are lost annually to suicide. Veterans remain disproportionately affected.

Traditional mental health services are often reactive — stepping in after someone is already in crisis.

RFA flips the model.

Instead of waiting for breakdown, it builds protective strength **before** crisis escalates.

The Science Behind RFA

Resilience First Aid is grounded in the **Predictive 6 Factor Resilience Model (PR6)** and uses the neuroscience-informed **ALL Protocol (Appreciate, Listen, Lift)** — a structured conversational framework for peer support.

The expanded evaluation of RFA (n=769) showed:

14.5% Increase in Overall Resilience

7.8% Increase in Peer Support Skills

30% Improvement in Recognizing Suicide Warning Signs

77.7% Reduction in High-Risk Participants

187.3% Increase in High-Resilience Participants

Those aren't small gains. Those are measurable shifts in psychological protection.

What Actually Improves?

RFA strengthens six key resilience domains:

- **Vision** – Purpose and direction (+16.6%)
- **Reasoning** – Adaptability and problem-solving (+16.7%)
- **Collaboration** – Building strong support networks (+16.4%)
- **Composure** – Staying forward-focused (+16.4%)
- Tenacity – Perseverance under stress (+12.1%)
- Health – Sleep, movement, and physical wellness (+13.2%)

For veterans, these domains directly connect to leadership, mission focus, and team cohesion.

The Suicide Prevention Impact

One of the most powerful findings:

Participants improved **30%** in their ability to identify suicide warning signs.

That matters.

RFA trains people to notice early behavioral shifts — withdrawal, hopelessness, drastic mood changes — before a crisis becomes irreversible.

This isn't therapy.

This is equipping everyday leaders, veterans, and teammates with the awareness and confidence to intervene early.

Moving People Out of the Danger Zone

RFA doesn't just improve scores — it moves people out of psychological risk categories.

Before training:

- 15.6% of participants were in the **Low Resilience (high risk)** category.

After training:

- That dropped to **3.5%** — a 77.7% reduction.

Meanwhile:

- High Resilience participants nearly tripled (from 7.2% to 20.6%).

Research shows individuals reaching the high resilience threshold experience:

- 5.6x reduction in depression symptoms
- 4.2x reduction in anxiety
- 5.9x reduction in emotional vulnerability

For veterans managing operational stress, transition challenges, or trauma exposure, these are life-changing protective shifts.

And Yes… It's Actually Fun

Here's something veterans appreciate:

This isn't a dry lecture.

Participants consistently report:

- Engaging whiteboard-style neuroscience explanations
- Interactive discussions
- Practical tools that feel usable immediately
- Real-world examples
- Safe, inclusive environments
- Energizing instructors

Over **93% of participants rated the program as "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied."**

Veterans who've attended RFA workshops often describe it as:

"Engaging without being heavy."

"Practical, not preachy."

"A leadership tool disguised as mental health training."

There's discussion. There's laughter. There's team-building energy. And there's real skill development happening underneath it all.

Why This Matters for the Veteran Community

Veterans already possess grit.

But RFA adds structure to that grit.

It provides:

- A common language for stress and resilience
- A structured way to check in on teammates
- Tools to manage personal mental load
- Early suicide warning awareness
- Confidence in supporting others

In a veteran organization, nonprofit, chamber, or workplace setting, RFA builds what we call **collective resilience** — a network where no one falls through the cracks unnoticed.

A Shift From Reaction to Prevention

Mental health systems across the country are overwhelmed.

Primary prevention — building resilience before crisis — is where we must invest.

RFA demonstrates:

It is scalable

It works across industries

It significantly reduces psychological risk

It enhances suicide prevention capability

It increases peer support confidence

It maintains high engagement and satisfaction

For veteran-serving organizations, incorporating RFA into leadership development, wellness programming, or peer support initiatives could be transformative.

Final Thoughts

Resilience First Aid is not about "fixing" people.

It's about strengthening protective factors.

It's about teaching veterans how to:

- Regulate stress
- Spot warning signs
- Support their peers
- Maintain purpose
- Stay mission-focused in civilian life

The research is clear.

The impact is measurable.

And the experience is engaging.

In a time when our veteran community continues to face mental health challenges, programs like RFA represent a powerful step forward — proactive, practical, and built on science.

Because resilience isn't just surviving.

It's staying strong — together.

To enroll in one of the upcoming Resilience First Aid Certification Classes, please visit https://thevfa.org and register for upcoming classes.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Resilience First Aid

RESILIENCE FIRST AID CERTIFIED

Appreciate, listen, and lift resilience **proactively**

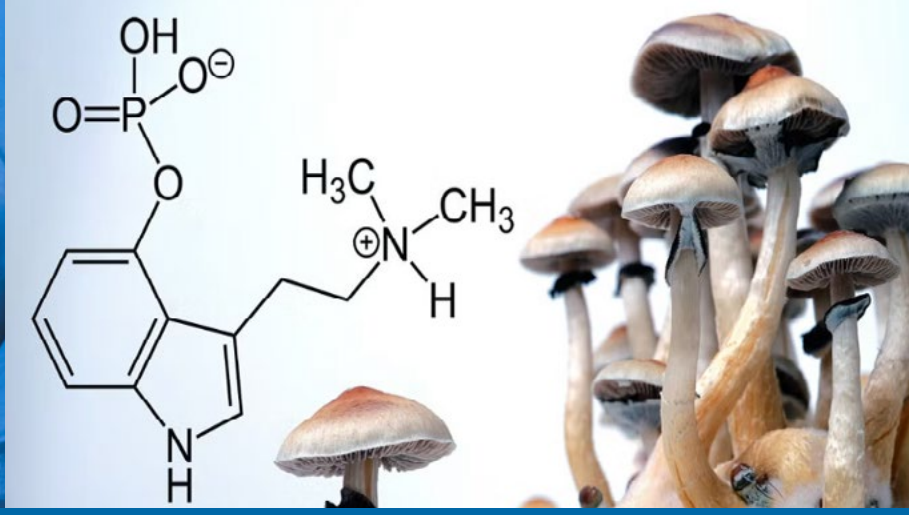
The Veterans Foundation of America offers Resilience First Aid Classes to help veterans improve their mental health. If you have signs and symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, or depression, then this two-day seminar is for you. You receive training in the six domains of resilience and you get to practice how to improve your outlook using skills learned from the seminar. This course certifies you for three years in Resilience. It is a great program designed to improve your overall mental health. It also helps you identify issues that others are facing and through the ALL Protocol lets you help others improve their overall resilience. Sign up today on our website. This course is normally $500, but through the generosity of philanthropic donors, we can offer it free for veterans. When you sign up on the website, you will receive emails of the next upcoming class that will be offered in the state. Sign up today!

3 Year Certification in Resilience First Aid

When you sign up for a class, you will be offered a personalized PR-6 (Predictive 6 risk factors) for resilience. This assessment will allow you to see which areas you are low in and what risk factors you can work on in a prioritized manner. This assessment is personalized for you and can be used to help you improve your overall resilience. Additionally, you will be given one year free access to the Driven App. This app allows you to work on your resilience every day. It is a fun way to work on skills, help you improve your sleep, gain better composure, and so much more. Make sure to sign up today for the next seminar.

> Understanding the six domains of resilience really helped me with everyday life. I was able to regain better compusure and I had a vision of where my life was going to go. It really helped me get back on track to accomplish what I truly wanted in life.
>
> - RFA Student

www.thevfa.org



A New Frontier in Healing: What New Jersey's Psilocybin Pilot Law Means for Veterans

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

New Jersey has taken a bold step into the future of mental health care with the passage of **S-2283/A-3852 (*Scutari*, Vitale, Calabrese, Verrelli)** — legislation that establishes the **Psilocybin Behavioral Health Access and Therapy Pilot Program** and appropriates **$6 million** to study and potentially expand therapeutic access to psilocybin in the state.

For many veterans in New Jersey, this law could represent far more than a policy experiment — it may signal the beginning of a new chapter in how trauma, PTSD, depression, and moral injury are treated.

While the program is still in its early stages, its intent is clear: to rigorously evaluate whether psychedelic-assisted therapy can safely and effectively help people — including veterans — who have not fully benefited from traditional mental health treatments.

What the Law Actually Does

Under the new law, the pilot program will be overseen by two key entities:

1. **The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH)**
2. **A newly created Psychedelic Therapy and Research Advisory Board**, composed of 11 members appointed as outlined in the bill.

The Advisory Board will be responsible for:

- Reviewing existing medical, psychological, and scientific research on psilocybin and other psychedelic substances.
- Evaluating outcomes from similar pilot programs in other states.
- Assessing safety, efficacy, and affordability.
- Making formal recommendations to the Legislature for a comprehensive statewide plan for therapeutic access to psilocybin.

Importantly, this is **not legalization for recreational use**. The focus is strictly clinical, structured, and evidence-based treatment delivered in controlled therapeutic settings.

Why This Matters for Veterans

Veterans are disproportionately affected by behavioral health conditions, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and traumatic brain injury-related mood disturbances. Many veterans have found relief through traditional therapies — but many others have not.

This is where psilocybin-assisted therapy could make a meaningful difference.

A Potential New Tool for PTSD and Trauma

Research from institutions such as Johns Hopkins, NYU, and MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) suggests that psilocybin-assisted therapy may help reduce symptoms of:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Treatment-resistant depression
- Anxiety linked to trauma
- Emotional numbing
- Moral injury
- Substance use disorders

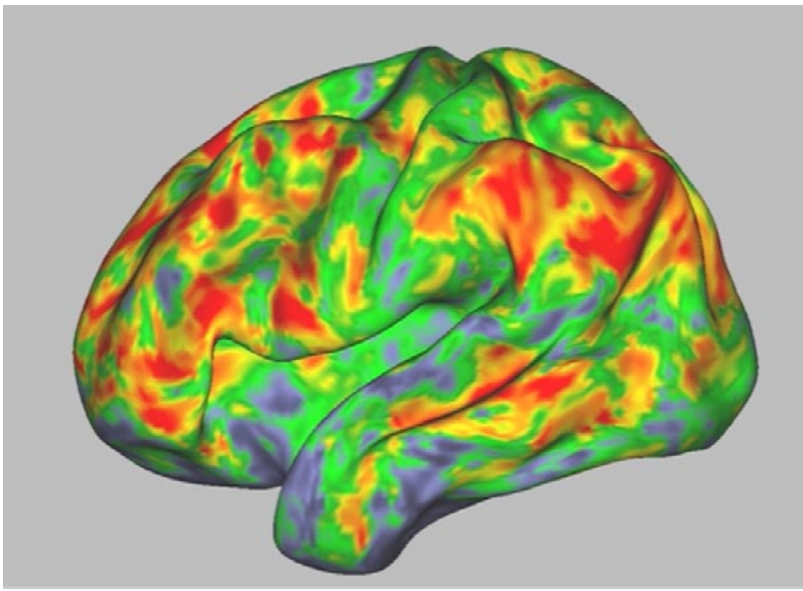
For veterans who feel "stuck" in hypervigilance, anger, or emotional shutdown, this approach may offer a different pathway — one that emphasizes guided introspection, emotional processing, and trauma integration rather than suppression alone.

Expanding Options Beyond the VA

Another critical implication of this pilot is that it could eventually expand access to care outside the federal VA system.

If New Jersey develops a regulated framework for psilocybin therapy, veterans may one day be able to access treatment through:

- State-licensed clinicians
- Community health systems



- Academic medical centers
- Veteran-focused nonprofit programs

This could be especially valuable for veterans who:

- Are not enrolled in VA care
- Experience long wait times
- Live far from VA facilities
- Prefer civilian providers
- Have had mixed experiences within the VA system

While federal law still classifies psilocybin as a Schedule I substance, state-level pilots like New Jersey's could build the evidence base that eventually influences federal policy and VA practices.

New Jersey Veterans as Part of a National Shift

New Jersey is not alone. States such as Oregon and Colorado have moved forward with regulated psychedelic therapy models, and clinical trials nationwide are increasingly exploring psychedelics for trauma-related conditions.

What makes New Jersey's law particularly important is its explicit focus on **data, safety, and affordability** — key concerns for veterans and their families.

If the pilot produces strong results, New Jersey could become a national leader in trauma-informed psychedelic therapy, potentially shaping future VA guidelines and federal mental health policy.

In that sense, New Jersey veterans may play a quiet but powerful role in advancing how the nation treats invisible wounds of war.

Safeguards, Ethics, and Veteran-Centered Care

It is important to emphasize that this program is designed with safeguards in mind.

The law requires careful evaluation of:

- Clinical risks and contraindications
- Patient screening protocols
- Therapist training standards
- Long-term follow-up care
- Equity and access considerations

For veterans, this means the goal is t**herapeutic healing — not experimentation, not shortcuts, and not recreational use.**

Advocacy organizations in New Jersey — including veteran service organizations, county veteran offices, and nonprofits — will have an opportunity to ensure that veteran perspectives are incorporated into how the program is structured.

How Veterans Can Stay Informed and Engaged

As the pilot moves forward, veterans and families can take several steps to stay involved:

1) Monitor NJ Department of Health Updates

Watch for announcements about Advisory Board appointments, public hearings, and pilot program design.

2) Engage Local Veteran Organizations

Groups such as the Veterans Foundation of America (VFA), the NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce, VFW posts, and county veteran offices can help interpret developments and advocate for veteran inclusion.

3) Follow the Research

- Trusted sources include:
- Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic & Consciousness Research
- NYU Grossman School of Medicine – Psychedelic Research
- MAPS
- RAND Corporation veteran mental health studies

4) Talk With a Clinician — Not the Internet

If you are curious about psychedelic therapy, discuss it with a qualified mental health provider. Do **not** self-medicate or seek underground treatment.

A Cautiously Hopeful Future

New Jersey's Psilocybin Behavioral Health Access and Therapy Pilot Program is not a cure-all, and it will not solve every veteran's mental health challenges.

But it represents something deeply meaningful: a willingness to explore new ways of healing for those who have sacrificed so much.

For veterans who have carried the weight of war long after leaving the battlefield, this law offers the possibility of renewed hope — grounded in science, guided by ethics, and shaped by lived experience.

As this program unfolds, one thing is certain: New Jersey is taking veterans' mental health seriously, and that alone is a step worth recognizing.

Are You a Veteran Turning 65?

Keep your military benefits, but get even more.

If you are a Veteran and have Medicare Part A and Part B, adding a Medicare Advantage plan can give you more coverage—enhancing your VA health care or TRICARE For Life (TFL) benefits.

Key things Veterans should know:

- **You keep your VA health care.** Enrolling in a Medicare Advantage plan does not change or replace your VA health care or TFL benefits.
- **You gain flexibility.** You can continue getting care from the VA while also gaining access to doctors and hospitals outside the VA when it's more convenient. This includes our network of doctors, hospitals and specialists right in your own community.
- **You get extra benefits.** Many plans include services not covered by Original Medicare like routine dental, vision, and hearing coverage.
- **You may save money.** Some plans offer a Medicare Part B Giveback Benefit, reducing your monthly Medicare Part B premium.

Bottom line: You keep every benefit you've earned through your service, and you gain additional coverage and options to support your health as your needs evolve. You decide what's best for you.

Keep reading to learn how Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) works with your military benefits.

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What Can Medicare Mean for You as Veteran?

You already receive strong coverage through **VA health care** or **TFL**—and those benefits **remain fully intact**. But sometimes, your military benefits may not cover everything.

Here are just a few examples:

- Emergencies while traveling
- Civilian specialists outside the VA
- Care when a VA facility just isn't nearby

How a Medicare Plan Works With Your Military Benefits

Many Veterans worry that enrolling in Medicare could affect their VA or TFL benefits. **By law, it cannot.** Your VA health care or TRICARE For Life is still your primary way to get care.

Adding a Medicare plan simply gives you more options when you want or need care outside the VA.

Is Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) Right for You?

It may be a good fit if you:

- Have VA or TFL drug coverage
- Are enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B
- Want peace of mind when you need care outside the VA

Why Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) Has No Prescription Drug Coverage

Because you already get prescription coverage through VA health care or TFL, you don't need a second drug plan. Since Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) doesn't include Part D, it focuses on giving you more medical coverage and keeping your costs low.

>>>>>Read on to learn more.

A Medicare Advantage Option That Helps Support New Jersey Veterans

Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) gives you all your Medicare benefits plus more. Built for New Jersey residents with Medicare Parts A and B—including Veterans using VA health care, TFL or both—this plan is designed to enhance your existing benefits, never replace or interfere with them.

Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) – A Guide for Veterans Turning 65

(You do not need VA or military benefits to qualify.)

Extra financial support

- Pays up to $900/year ($75/month) of your Part B premium

Expanded routine and preventive care

- $2,000 or $2,500 coverage for expanded dental benefits for services like root canals, crowns, dentures and gum care. (amount varies by plan)*
- $75 quarterly allowance for over-the-counter items like toothpaste, headache medicine, and more
- $275 yearly fitness allowance
- $100 quarterly grocery allowance for eligible members**
- Earn up to an additional $385/year when you complete certain health screenings and tests

Plenty of $0 benefits

- $0 premium and $0 medical deductible
- $0 copay for in-network care
- $0 in-network routine dental, vision and hearing exams
- $0 telehealth visits for urgent care and outpatient behavioral health

Access to Care Nationwide

Get more options for care if you travel, spend time in multiple states, or need care when the VA is closed or backlogged.

You can:

- Continue seeing your VA providers exactly as you do today
- Choose to get care outside the VA system when it's faster, closer or more convenient
- Access additional services VA or TFL may not cover—like routine dental, vision exams and hearing aids

Anyone can enroll as long as they:

- **Have Medicare Part A and Part B**
- **Live in one of these New Jersey counties:** Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic, Salem, Union

Visit BravenHealth.com/Salute or call 1-833-713-1313 (TTY 1-888-222-1108), weekdays, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Eastern Time (ET), or scan the QR code to learn more.

Keep Your Military Benefits. Get Even More Coverage.

Learn more about Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO).

Questions? Our Medicare Specialists are ready to help you.

CALL:
1-833-713-1313 (TTY **1-888-222-1108**)

October – March:
Monday through Sunday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., ET

April – September:
Weekdays, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., ET

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*Basic services only. Does not include major comprehensive services such as crowns, bridges, dentures and other services.
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Million Veteran Program Study Shows Healthy Habits Can Add Decades to Your Life

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

A new clinical analysis from the **Million Veteran Program (MVP)** is offering powerful evidence that everyday lifestyle choices can dramatically extend life expectancy. The study, based on data from nearly **720,000 U.S. Veterans**, suggests that adopting a series of healthy habits could add **up to 24 years of life.**

The research was presented at the **Nutrition 2023**, and analyzed health and lifestyle data collected through the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** Million Veteran Program—one of the largest health research databases in the world.

For Veterans and their families, the findings provide both hope and a roadmap for healthier living.

A Landmark Study Using Veteran Data

The study was led by Xuan-Mai Nguyen, a health science specialist at the **VA Boston Healthcare System,** with senior authorship from **Walter Willett** of the **Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health** and **Harvard Medical School.**

Researchers examined the health behaviors of Veterans aged **40 to 99** who were enrolled in MVP. The findings were striking: adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors significantly reduced the risk of premature death.

According to Nguyen, Veterans who adopted **all eight healthy habits** experienced an **87% reduction in all-cause mortality** compared to those who adopted none.

Even more encouraging, the benefits appeared regardless of whether individuals already had chronic illnesses.

"There's a 20-year period in which you can make these changes, whether you do it gradually or all at once," Nguyen explained.

The study also found that eliminating participants with chronic conditions such as **type 2 diabetes, stroke, high cholesterol, or cancer** did not significantly change the results—meaning healthy lifestyle changes can still provide major benefits even for those already dealing with health challenges.

The Potential to Add Decades to Life

The analysis revealed that healthy lifestyle choices can add significant years to life expectancy depending on when they are adopted.

For example:

- **At age 40**: adopting the full set of healthy habits could add up to **24 years of life**
- **At age 50**: individuals could gain as much as **21 additional years**
- **At age 60**: nearly 1**8 years of life expectancy** could still be gained

Even small changes made a measurable difference. For men, adding j**ust one healthy behavior at age 40 added about 4.5 years of life**, while additional habits progressively increased longevity.

Women in the study saw similar gains. One healthy habit added about **3.5 years**, while adopting all eight habits extended life expectancy by **more than 22 years**.

Researchers noted that the benefits worked together in a **synergistic way**—meaning that the combined effect of multiple healthy behaviors produced a greater impact than any single change alone.

The Eight Lifestyle Choices That Matter Most

The study ranked eight lifestyle behaviors according to their impact on longevity. Together, they represent a practical blueprint for healthier living.

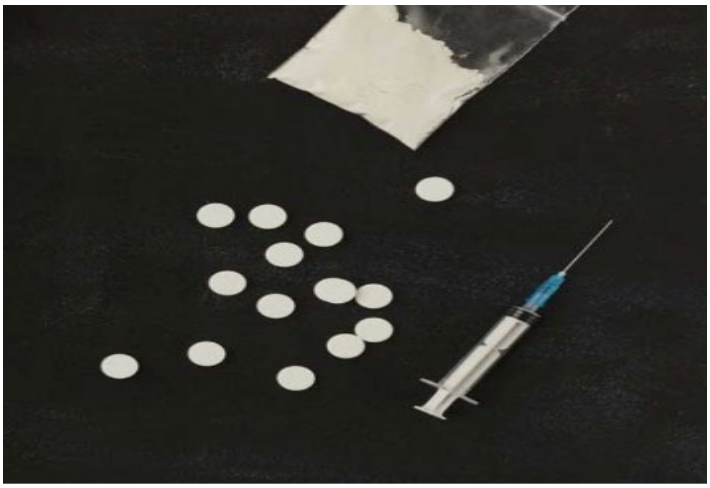
1. Regular Physical Activity

Exercise ranked as the most powerful predictor of longer life. Veterans who exercised experienced a **46% reduction in the risk of death** compared to those who were sedentary.

Researchers found that as little as **7.5 metabolic equivalent hours of exercise per week**—roughly equivalent to moderate activity such as brisk walking—was enough to produce measurable benefits.

2. Avoiding Opioid Addiction

Avoiding opioid misuse reduced the risk of early death by **38%**, highlighting the serious health risks associated with the ongoing opioid crisis.



3. Never Using Tobacco

Veterans who never used tobacco experienced a **29% lower risk of death.**

While the study used a strict definition that excluded former smokers from this category, medical experts emphasize that **quitting smoking at any point still significantly improves health outcomes.**

4. Managing Stress

Chronic stress is increasingly recognized as a major contributor to poor health. Veterans who successfully managed stress reduced their mortality risk by **22%**.

5. Following a Healthy Plant-Based Diet

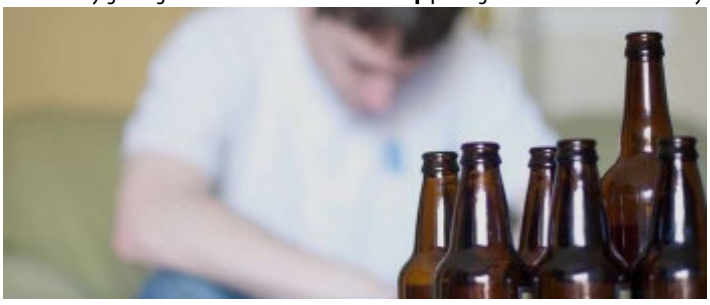
Eating a diet rich in **vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and healthy fats** reduced early mortality by **21%**. Researchers emphasized that following a **Mediterranean-style diet** was sufficient—no need to be strictly vegetarian or vegan.

6. Avoiding Binge Drinking

Limiting alcohol intake also contributed to longer life. Avoiding binge drinking—defined as **four or more drinks in one day**—reduced mortality risk by **19%**.

7. Getting Quality Sleep

Consistently getting **seven to nine hours of sleep** per night reduced the risk of early death by **18%**.



Poor sleep has been linked to a wide range of health problems, including cardiovascular disease, metabolic disorders, and cognitive decline.

8. Maintaining Positive Social Relationships

Finally, strong social connections contributed to longer life, reducing mortality risk by **5%.**

While that number may seem smaller than the others, researchers emphasized that social **isolation and loneliness are significant health risks,** particularly among older adults.

Studies have shown that people experiencing social isolation have a **32% higher risk of early death**, while those reporting loneliness are **14% more likely to die prematurely.**

Why Veteran Research Matters

One of the strengths of the Million Veteran Program is its **diverse population**. The study population included Veterans from a wide range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, making the findings more broadly applicable.

Dr. Willett noted that the diversity of MVP participants strengthens the value of the research.

The findings may not translate perfectly to the general population, researchers cautioned, because Veterans have unique life experiences. However, the study population consisted primarily of **retired Veterans rather than active-duty service members**, making the findings relevant to many Americans.

A Roadmap for Veteran Wellness

For the Veteran community, this study reinforces a powerful message: s**mall lifestyle changes can produce profound health benefits.**

The Million Veteran Program continues to generate groundbreaking insights that help clinicians understand disease risk, prevention strategies, and long-term health outcomes. With more than **one million Veterans enrolled**, MVP has become one of the most important research initiatives in modern medicine.

For Veterans seeking a healthier future, the findings provide a clear takeaway—**it is never too late to start making healthier choices.**

And as millions of Veterans continue to contribute to research through the Million Veteran Program, their service is once again helping to build a stronger, healthier future for the nation

Steadying the Watch: Practical Ways Veterans Can Cope With Stressful Situations

By Jeff Cantor for NJ Veteran Magazine

Stress is a familiar companion to many veterans. From the pressures of military service to the challenges of civilian life, veterans often carry experiences that shape how they respond to tension, uncertainty, and conflict. For those living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), everyday stressors can sometimes feel overwhelming or triggering, amplifying emotions and heightening reactivity.

The good news is that stress is manageable — not through avoidance, but through skill, preparation, and self-awareness. Developing strong coping tools can help veterans regain a sense of control, improve relationships, and protect both mental and physical health. Below are practical, evidence-based strategies that veterans can use to navigate stressful people, situations, and emotions with greater resilience.

1. Recognize Your Triggers Before They Control You

One of the most powerful tools in managing stress is awareness. Many veterans experience predictable triggers — certain sounds, crowded spaces, confrontational personalities, or reminders of past trauma.

Try this:

- Keep a simple stress journal for two weeks.
- Write down: *What happened? What did you feel? What was your body doing? How did you react?*

Over time, patterns will emerge. Recognizing triggers early gives you the chance to respond intentionally rather than react instinctively.

2. Master the "Pause Before Action"

When stress spikes, the brain shifts into survival mode — fight, flight, or freeze. In that moment, the goal is to slow things down before making decisions or saying something you can't take back.

Simple techniques that work in real time:

- **Box breathing (4-4-4-4):**

Inhale 4 seconds → Hold 4 → Exhale 4 → Hold 4 → Repeat.

- **Grounding exercise (5-4-3-2-1):**

Name 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste.

These tools don't eliminate stress — they give you back control of your response.

3. Set Boundaries With Stressful People

Veterans are often natural helpers, leaders, and problem-solvers — but this can make them vulnerable to being overwhelmed by demanding or toxic people.

Healthy boundary strategies:

- "I need a few minutes to think before responding."
- "I'm not able to engage in this right now."
- "I can help, but I need clear expectations."

Boundaries are not weakness — they are discipline and self-respect.

4. Use Physical Movement to Reset Your Nervous System

Stress lives in the body, not just the mind. Movement is one of the most reliable ways to release pent-up tension.

Effective options for veterans:

- Walking outdoors
- Strength training
- Swimming
- Yoga or stretching
- Fishing or being near water
- Martial arts or controlled physical discipline

Even 15–20 minutes a day can significantly reduce stress hormones and improve mood.

5. Stay Connected to the Veteran Community

Isolation makes stress worse. Connection makes it manageable.

Veterans often feel most understood by other veterans who "get it" without explanation. Regular engagement with veteran groups, support networks, or shared activities — like adaptive sports, community service, or peer mentoring — builds resilience through belonging.

Whether it's a local VFW, American Legion, fishing program, or wellness group, staying connected can be life-changing.

6. Practice Self-Compassion, Not Self-Criticism

Many veterans hold themselves to impossibly high standards. When stress hits, they may feel shame, frustration, or anger toward themselves for struggling.

A better mindset:

- "I'm not weak — I'm human."
- "My reactions make sense given what I've been through."
- "I am allowed to need support."

Self-compassion is not indulgence — it is emotional survival.

7. Build a Personal Stress Toolkit

Every veteran should have a "go-bag" for mental health, just like for physical readiness. This might include:

- A breathing exercise you trust
- A trusted friend you can call
- A place that brings calm (park, gym, water)
- A grounding object (challenge coin, photo, faith symbol)

- A list of positive affirmations or reminders

Preparation reduces panic.

8. Seek Professional Support When Needed

Coping skills are powerful — but they are not a replacement for professional care when PTSD symptoms are significant.

Effective treatments for veterans include:

- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Group therapy with other veterans
- VA mental health services
- Trauma-informed counseling

Asking for help is not surrender — it is strategy.

A Final Word for New Jersey Veterans

Stress may be inevitable, but suffering does not have to be. By recognizing triggers, practicing emotional regulation, setting boundaries, staying active, and leaning on the veteran community, you can build a stronger, steadier life after service.

You carried the weight of duty. Now it's time to learn how to put some of that weight down — with dignity, support, and strength.

The Major Richard Star Act: A Fight to End the "Wounded Veterans Tax"

By Nebojsa "Vic" Zlatanovic for NJ Veteran Magazine

For decades, Veteran service organizations have been pushing Congress to correct what many describe as one of the most unfair policies affecting combat-injured Veterans. The solution proposed by advocates is the **Major Richard Star Act**, bipartisan legislation currently pending in the **United States Congress**.

The bill seeks to fix a longstanding policy that prevents thousands of medically retired combat Veterans from receiving both their full military retirement pay and their disability compensation from the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**.

Supporters say the issue is simple: combat-injured Veterans should not have to sacrifice part of the retirement they earned because they were wounded in service.

Understanding the "Wounded Veterans Tax"

Under current law, many Veterans who were medically retired due to combat injuries face a **dollar-for-dollar offset** between their military retirement pay and their VA disability compensation.

This means that if a Veteran receives disability benefits from the VA, their military retirement pay is reduced by the same amount. The result is that thousands of injured Veterans receive less total compensation than they would otherwise earn.

According to **Richard Blumenthal**, the policy affects more than **50,000 combat-injured Veterans** who were forced to retire from service.

"The wounded veterans tax… causes more than 50,000 combat-injured veterans who were forced to retire to be barred from a full military pension that they earned or were promised," Blumenthal said.

Veterans advocates argue that retirement pay and disability compensation serve two entirely different purposes. Retirement pay is earned through years of service, while disability compensation is provided for injuries sustained while serving the nation.

Why the Bill Matters

The Major Richard Star Act is named in honor of **Richard Star**, an Army combat Veteran who developed lung cancer after exposure to burn pits during his deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Major Star spent the final years of his life advocating for reform of the offset policy that affects medically retired combat Veterans. The legislation bearing his name aims to ensure that wounded service members receive both the retirement benefits they earned and the disability compensation they deserve.

Veteran organizations across the country have rallied behind the bill. Leaders from groups such as the **Veterans of Foreign Wars** say Congress has been aware of the issue for years but has yet to resolve it.

Former VFW Commander-in-Chief **Al Lipphardt** summarized the frustration shared by many Veterans:

"For more than two decades, Congress has failed to address the longstanding injustice of withholding military retirement pay from disabled veterans."

The Latest Developments in Congress

The Major Richard Star Act has gained significant bipartisan support in Congress, with dozens of co-sponsors in both the House and Senate. However, despite this support, the legislation has struggled to advance.

In early March 2026, an attempt to pass the legislation through a unanimous consent request on the Senate floor was blocked by Ron Johnson, preventing the bill from moving forward to a full Senate vote.

Johnson objected to the proposal largely due to concerns about its cost, stating that the legislation could add **between $10 billion and $12 billion in spending over ten years**.

The objection marked the **second time the bill has been blocked from advancing to a full vote**, frustrating many in the Veteran advocacy community.

Advocates argue that the cost should be viewed as part of the long-term responsibility owed to those who were injured in combat.

As Senator Blumenthal and other supporters have pointed out, caring for wounded Veterans is part of the cost of war.

Why Advocates Say the Bill Should Pass

Supporters of the Major Richard Star Act point to several reasons why the legislation is necessary.

First, it restores retirement pay that Veterans earned through years of service and sacrifice.

Second, it helps prevent financial hardship for combat-injured Veterans and their families.

Third, eliminating the offset could simplify the administrative system that currently calculates reductions in retirement pay, reducing errors and appeals.

Finally, advocates believe the legislation sends a powerful message to those currently serving in uniform: that the nation will honor its commitments to those who are injured defending it.

What Happens Next

Despite recent setbacks, momentum behind the Major Richard Star Act continues to grow.

Veteran service organizations, lawmakers, and grassroots advocates are continuing to push Congress to bring the bill to a vote. With **2026 shaping up to be a midterm election year**, many observers believe the issue could gain increased attention as lawmakers respond to concerns from the Veteran community.

For the more than **50,000 medically retired combat Veterans affected by the current policy**, passage of the Major Richard Star Act would represent more than just a policy change—it would correct what many view as a decades-old injustice.

For these Veterans, the message is clear: the benefits they earned through service and sacrifice should not be reduced simply because they were wounded in combat.

PASS THE
MAJOR RICHARD
STAR ACT

Pictures from the NJ Department of Military Affairs

U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brittany Fralick, a production recruiter with the 108th Wing, New Jersey Air National Guard, center, is presented the Operation Blue Suit Award by Brig. Gen. Christopher R. Amrhein, Air Force Accessions Center and Air Force Recruiting Service commander, left, and Chief Master Sergeant. Rebecca A. C. Arbona, Command Chief Master Sergeant, Air Force Accessions Center and Command Chief, during the Operation Blue Suit banquet at the Hidden Gem in New Braunfels, Texas, March 27, 2025. The Operation Blue Suit Award is presented to recruiters who not only surpass all goals but also showcases outstanding development by making a direct impact on end

U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne L. Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, addresses the audience during the Welcome Home Ceremony for the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard, at the Jersey Mike's Arena, Piscataway, New Jersey, April 12, 2025. More than 1,500 44th IBCT Soldiers deployed to Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, the largest deployment of NJARNG Soldiers since 2008. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

U.S. Army Soldiers with the 42nd Regional Support Group, New Jersey Army National Guard, board a plane at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, Aug. 11, 2025. More than 80 NJARNG Soldiers are deploying in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. As Task Force Integrator, the 42nd RSG provides and conducts base operating support integrator and headquarters and headquarters battalion functions at designated CJTF-OIR locations by enabling coalition and joint partners to maintain the enduring defeat of Da'esh. (New Jersey National Guard photo by Mark C. Olsen)

U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Yvonne Mays, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, left, and Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Leonard, State Command Sergeant Major, New Jersey Army National Guard, accompanied by the 42nd Regional Support Group leadership, U.S. Army Col. David Hampton, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. John Bowker, address Task Force Integrator Soldiers during a battlefield rotation visit to Erbil, Iraq, Dec. 18, 2025. Mays and Leonard paid a visit to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility to meet with New Jersey Guardsmen who are currently deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Jordan Foster)

Pictures from Deployment

Health assessment during a Tuberculosis outbreak at the local medical center in Bamiyan, Afghanistan

Afghan orphans with the first winter coats they've ever owned 2010, Ghazni, Afghanistan

Bagram airbase, Parwan Province, Afghanistan 2010

Typical houses outside of Kabul, Afghanistan 2009

Visiting an Afghan orphanage to give out winter coats outside of Ghazni, Afghanistan 2010

Car repair shop in Parwan, Afghanistan 2010

Clinic Day to help the mother's and kids in Parwan, Afghanistan 2010

Scene outside an MRAP, Parwan, Afghanistan 2010

Afghan women sitting on gravel streets, waiting for clinic day, Parwan, Afghanistan 2010

Kids looking for handouts, Parwan, Afghanistan 2010

One of the best jobs in the military. Tail gunner on a CH-47

Kids looking for treasure in a military garbage dump in Kabul, Afghanistan 2009

C-130 sitting on Bagram Airfield 2009

2 Jersey Boys – then MAJ Jeff Cantor & then MG Ray Odierno, Kirkuk, Iraq 2003

School house in Northern Iraq 2003 filled with kids getting toys from Coalition Forces

Arab women bathe their kids and do the laundry in the Euphrates River, outside of Baghdad 2004

Kids always love soldiers. Kirkuk, Iraq 2003

Establishing the first Civil Military Operations Center in Kirkuk, Iraq 2003

VA | Million Veteran Program

The Million Veteran Program: A Mission to Improve Health for Veterans and Future Generations

By NJ Veteran Magazine Staff

Across the United States, Veterans have always stepped forward when their nation needed them most. Today, many Veterans are once again answering the call—this time to help advance medical science and improve health care for generations to come. One of the most important initiatives leading this effort is the **Million Veteran Program (MVP)**, a groundbreaking national research program run by the **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**.

The Million Veteran Program is one of the largest health and genetic research programs in the world. Its mission is simple but powerful: t**o learn how genes, lifestyle, military experiences, and environmental exposures affect the health and wellness of Veterans.** The knowledge gained through MVP is helping researchers better understand disease risk, prevention, and treatment—not only for Veterans, but ultimately for the entire population.

A Research Effort Powered by Veterans

The VA launched the Million Veteran Program with an ambitious goal: **to enroll more than one million Veterans in a long-term research study.** By combining genetic data with detailed health and service information, researchers can uncover patterns that were previously impossible to identify.

Participation in MVP is voluntary and straightforward. Veterans who join the program agree to several key components:

- **Provide a blood sample (up to 10 mL)** through a blood draw or collection kit
- **Complete surveys** about health, lifestyle, military service experiences, and environmental exposures
- **Allow access to their health records** from both VA and non-VA providers
- **Permit long-term follow-up,** allowing researchers to track health outcomes over time
- **Agree to be contacted about future research opportunities**

Blood samples collected through the program are used to analyze **DNA and other biological markers**, helping researchers understand how genes influence health and disease. These samples are securely stored in **VA-approved laboratories**, and the data is placed into the **VA MVP Central Research Database** for ongoing research.

Importantly, MVP testing is conducted strictly for research purposes. Results are not placed into participants' medical records or shared with physicians unless future medical advances require certain results to be communicated.

Discoveries That Matter to Veterans

The research made possible through MVP is already helping scientists better understand many of the conditions that affect Veterans. Because the program combines genetic information with service-related exposures and health records, researchers can study the complex interactions between biology and military experiences.

Key research areas include:

Mental Health

Researchers are studying ways to better prevent and treat conditions such as **post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and suicide risk**. Earlier identification of those at risk could lead to improved prevention strategies and targeted treatments.

Heart Health

Cardiovascular disease remains one of the leading causes of death among Veterans. MVP research is helping scientists understand what factors increase risk—and what factors protect individuals—from heart disease.

Cancer Research

MVP has already contributed to major discoveries related to p**rostate cancer, breast cancer, and other malignancies.** Genetic research can help identify individuals who may be at higher risk, allowing earlier screening and treatment.

Healthy Living and Wellness

The program is also studying how **nutrition, lifestyle, and behavior** influence long-term health outcomes. This research may help Veterans live healthier, longer lives.

Additional Conditions Under Study

MVP researchers are examining dozens of conditions that affect Veterans, including:

- Diabetes
- Alzheimer's disease
- Osteoarthritis
- Parkinson's disease
- Kidney disease
- Macular degeneration
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Tinnitus
- Substance use disorders
- Suicide prevention
- Gulf War illness
- COVID-19

To date, the program has supported more than 500 scientific publications, helping expand medical knowledge across multiple specialties.

Representation Matters in Medical Research

One of the most remarkable strengths of the Million Veteran Program is its diversity. About **25% of participants come from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds,** making MVP the largest research cohort of Black participants anywhere in the world.

This diversity is critical for medical research. Historically, many research studies did not include enough participants from different backgrounds, which limited scientists' ability to understand how diseases affect diverse populations. MVP is helping close that gap.

The program is also strongly committed to advancing research focused on **women Veterans**. More than **100,000 women Veterans have joined MVP,** contributing to studies on conditions such as:

- Breast cancer
- Endometriosis
- Osteoarthritis
- Heart disease

These studies are helping researchers better understand the unique health needs of women who served in the military.

The Power of Veteran Participation

At its core, the Million Veteran Program represents a continuation of the spirit of service that defines the Veteran community. By participating in research, Veterans are helping shape the future of health care.

Marine Corps and Army Veteran **Ubon Mendie**, an MVP participant, summed it up best:

"My investment in research isn't necessarily just for me or my friends that served—it's for my son, who could possibly be the one serving next."

Every Veteran who joins the program strengthens the research and helps ensure that future discoveries reflect the real experiences of those who served.

Building a Healthier Tomorrow

The Million Veteran Program demonstrates the incredible impact Veterans can have beyond their military service. By combining the power of modern genetics, long-term health data, and the lived experiences of those who wore the uniform, MVP is transforming how researchers understand disease.

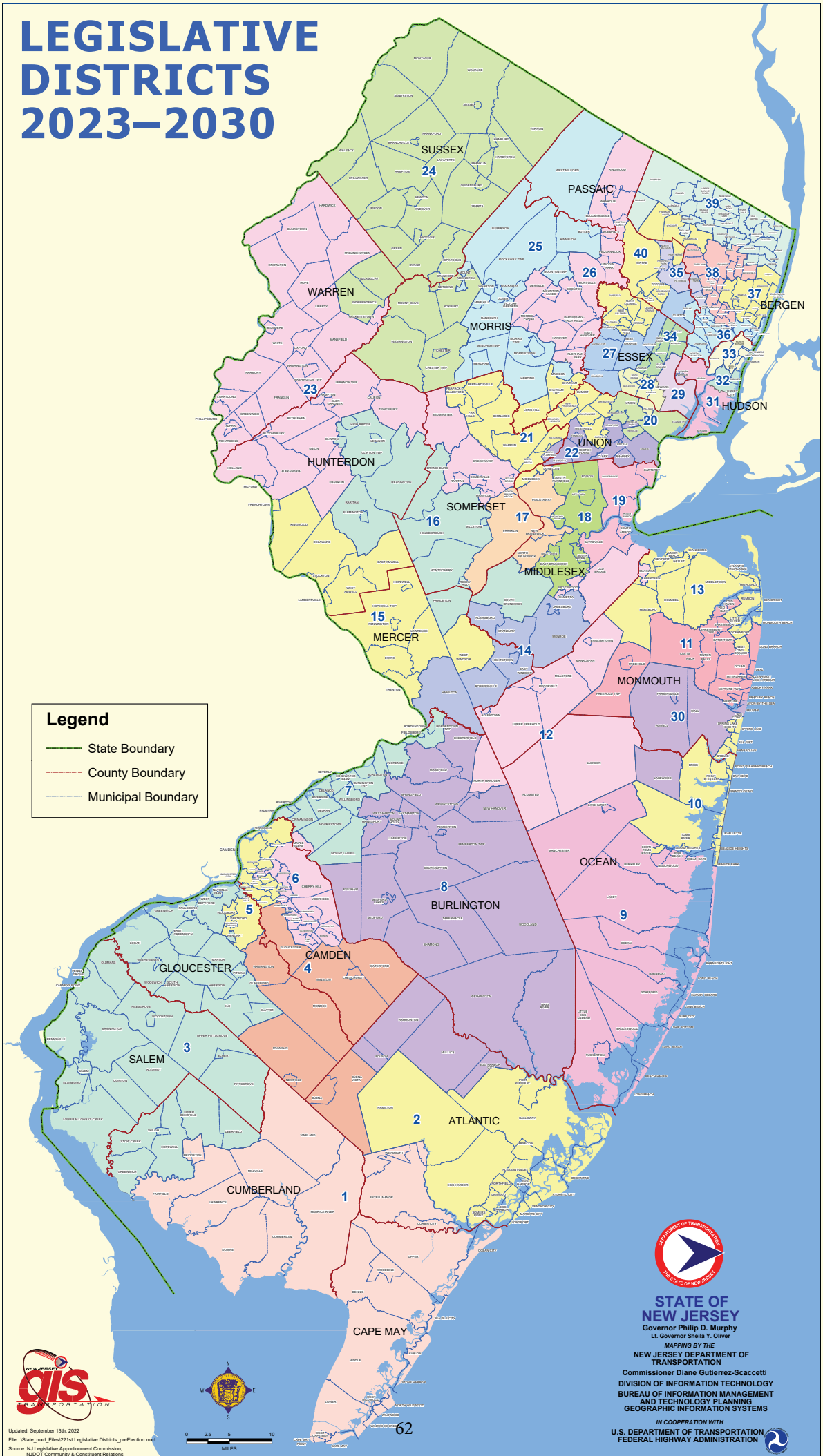
The program is strongest when it includes Veterans from **all eras, backgrounds, and branches of service.** Today, more than **one million Veterans have already joined,** helping build one of the most important medical research databases in history.

For Veterans interested in making a difference in the future of health care, participation in the Million Veteran Program offers a meaningful opportunity to once again serve—this time in the pursuit of scientific discovery and better health for generations to come.

Need help/information? Call the VA toll-free.

866-441-6075 | Monday - Friday; 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. ET

LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS 2023–2030



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
Governor Philip D. Murphy
Lt. Governor Sheila Y. Oliver

MAPPING BY THE
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti
DIVISION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
BUREAU OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY PLANNING
GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS

IN COOPERATION WITH
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

Updated: September 13th, 2022
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Source: NJ Legislative Apportionment Commission, NJDOT Community & Constituent Relations

222ND NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE
ROSTER OF MEMBERS
2026-27 Session

SENATE INDEX

NAME	PARTY	DIST.	PHONE
AMATO, CARMEN F., JR.	R	9	(732) 678-1355
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Deputy Majority Whip			
BRAMNICK, JON M.	R	21	(908) 232-2073
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Majority Whip			
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Assistant Majority Leader			
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Assistant Majority Leader			
LAGANA, JOSEPH A.	D	38	(201) 576-9199
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Republican Budget Officer			
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Deputy Republican Leader			
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Conference Leader			
SCUTARI, NICHOLAS P.	D	22	(732) 827-7480
Senate President			
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SINGLETON, TROY	D	7	(856) 234-2790
Majority Caucus Chair			
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STACK, BRIAN P.	D	33	(201) 721-5263
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TESTA, MICHAEL L., JR.	R	1	(609) 778-2012
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TIVER, LATHAM	R	8	(856) 817-2143
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Senate President Pro Tempore			
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ZWICKER, ANDREW	D	16	(908) 308-8672

DEMOCRATS: 25 REPUBLICANS: 15

Addison B. Hinrichs, *Secretary of the Senate, (609) 847-3915*

GENERAL ASSEMBLY INDEX

NAME	PARTY	DIST.	PHONE
ABDELAZIZ, AL	D	35	(862) 264-2540
ANGELOZZI, ANTHONY	D	8	*Phone # to come*
AUTH, ROBERT	R	39	(201) 564-7420
AZZARITI, JOHN V., JR., M.D.	R	39	(201) 666-0881
BAGOLIE, ROSAURA "ROSY"	D	27	(973) 535-5017
* *Deputy Parliamentarian*			
BAILEY, DAVID, JR.	D	3	(856) 226-3530
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BARLAS, AL	R	40	(862) 702-8458
BERGEN, BRIAN	R	26	(973) 539-8113
Minority Whip			
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BRENNAN, KATIE	D	32	(201) 683-7917 *
CALABRESE, CLINTON	D	36	(201) 943-0615
* *Deputy Speaker*			
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Majority Conference Leader			
CLIFTON, ROBERT D.	R	12	(732) 970-6386
Assistant Minority Leader			
COLLAZOS-GILL, ALIXON	D	27	(973) 509-0388
* *Deputy Conference Leader*			
COUGHLIN, CRAIG J.	D	19	(732) 855-7441
Assembly Speaker			
DANIELSEN, JOE	D	17	(732) 247-3999
Deputy Parliamentarian			
DEANGELO, WAYNE P.	D	14	(609) 631-7501
* *Deputy Speaker/Deputy Whip*			
DEPHILLIPS, CHRISTOPHER P.	R	40	(201) 444-9719
Minority Conference Leader			
DIMAIO, JOHN	R	23	(908) 684-9550
Minority Leader			
DONLON, MARGIE, M.D.	D	11	(732) 704-3808
DRULIS, MITCHELLE	D	16	(908) 968-4329
DUNN, AURA K.	R	25	(973) 206-1876
Assistant Minority Whip			
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Minority Parliamentarian			
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GREENWALD, LOUIS D.	D	6	(856) 435-1247
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Deputy Conference Leader			
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INGANAMORT, MICHAEL	R	24	(973) 300-0200
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KENNEDY, JAMES J.	D	22	(732) 943-2660
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Deputy Speaker			
MACURDY, ANDREW	D	21	(908) 679-8499 *
McCLELLAN, ANTWAN L.	R	1	(609) 778-2012
Deputy Minority Leader			
McCOY, TENNILLE R.	D	14	(609) 631-0198
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MOEN, WILLIAM F., JR.	D	5	(856) 547-4800
* *Deputy Speaker*			
MORALES, CARMEN THERESA	D	34	(973) 450-0484
* *Deputy Whip*			
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ONYEMA, CHIGOZIE U.	D	28	(973) 762-1886 *
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* *Deputy Majority Leader*			
PETERSON, ERIK	R	23	(908) 238-0251
Deputy Minority Whip			
PINTOR MARIN, ELIANA	D	29	(973) 589-0713
Assembly Budget Chair			
QUIJANO, ANNETTE	D	20	(908) 316-0266
Speaker Pro Tempore			(908) 327-9119
REYNOLDS-JACKSON, VERLINA	D	15	(609) 571-9638
RODRIGUEZ, ED	D	20	*Phone # to come*
RODRIGUEZ, GABRIEL	D	33	(201) 223-4247
* *Constituent Outreach Chair*			
ROWAN, MAUREEN	D	2	*Phone # to come*
RUMPF, BRIAN E.	R	9	(609) 693-6700
Minority Budget Officer			
SAMPSON, WILLIAM B. IV.	D	31	(201) 455-2966
Deputy Speaker			
SAUICKIE, ALEX	R	12	(609) 758-0205
SCHAER, GARY S.	D	36	(973) 249-3665
Policy Chair/Deputy Speaker			
SCHARFENBERGER, GERRY	R	13	(732) 856-9294
Minority Policy Chair			
SCHNALL, ALEXANDER "AVI"	D	30	(848) 245-9486
* *Deputy Whip*			
SIMMONS, HEATHER	D	3	(856) 226-3530
* *Deputy Whip*			
SIMONSEN, ERIK K.	R	1	(609) 778-2012
SINGH, BALVIR	D	7	(856) 461-3997
SPEARMAN, WILLIAM W.	D	5	(856) 853-2960
SPEIGHT, SHANIQUE	D	29	(862) 237-9752
Deputy Speaker			
STANLEY, STERLEY S.	D	18	(732) 875-3833
STEWART, KENYATTA	D	35	(973) 925-7063 *
SWAIN, LISA	D	38	(201) 576-9199
Assembly Appropriations Chair			
SWEENEY, MARISA	D	25	*Phone # to come*
TUCKER, CLEOPATRA G.	D	28	(973) 926-4320
TULLY, CHRIS	D	38	(201) 576-9199
Deputy Majority Leader			
VENEZIA, MICHAEL	D	34	(973) 893-5869
* *Majority Whip*			
VERRELLI, ANTHONY S.	D	15	(609) 292-0500
Deputy Majority Leader			
WAINSTEIN, LARRY	D	33	(201) 305-5139 *
WALKER, JERRY	D	31	*Phone # to come*
WEBBER, JAY	R	26	(973) 917-3420

DEMOCRATS: 57 REPUBLICANS: 23

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610 E. Landis Ave., Vineland 08360.
ASSEMBLYMAN ANTWAN L. McCLELLAN, R.
School House Office Park, 211 S. Main St., Suite 104, Cape May Court House 08210. (609) 778-2012
610 E. Landis Ave., Vineland 08360.
ASSEMBLYMAN ERIK K. SIMONSEN, R.
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3123 Atlantic Ave., Suite 100, Atlantic City 08401. (609) 677-8266
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3123 Atlantic Ave., Suite 100, Atlantic City 08401. (609) 677-8266
ASSEMBLYWOMAN MAUREEN ROWAN, D.
District office address and phone number to come.

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199 East Broadway, Suite G, 1st Floor, Salem 08079. (856) 279-2920
ASSEMBLYMAN DAVID BAILEY, JR., D.
711 N. Main St., Glassboro 08028. (856) 226-3530
199 East Broadway, Suite G, 1st Floor, Salem 08079. (856) 279-2920
ASSEMBLYWOMAN HEATHER SIMMONS, D.
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199 East Broadway, Suite G, 1st Floor, Salem 08079. (856) 279-2920

DISTRICT 4 *(Parts of Atlantic, Camden and Gloucester Counties)*
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129 Johnson Rd., Suite 1, Turnersville 08012. (856) 232-6700
1379 Chews Landing Rd., Laurel Springs 08021. (856) 401-3073
ASSEMBLYMAN DAN HUTCHISON, D.
1379 Chews Landing Rd., Laurel Springs 08021. (856) 401-3073
ASSEMBLYMAN CODY D. MILLER, D.
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Red, White & Que Smokehouse BBQ

Veteran-Owned. Community-Fueled. And Serving the Best BBQ in New Jersey.

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

If you've spent any time chasing great barbecue, you know the truth: real BBQ isn't just food—it's a craft. It's patience. It's discipline. It's long hours, steady hands, and an obsession with doing the same thing the right way, every single day.

That's exactly what you'll find at **Red, White & Que Smokehouse BBQ**, the veteran-owned barbecue destination that has earned a growing reputation as the **best BBQ in New Jersey**—and, as some customers will argue, as good as any smokehouse in America.

Located on **Route 22 West in Green Brook,** Red, White & Que is owned by **Dan and Katie Misuraca,** a husband-and-wife team whose complementary strengths have built not only an elite BBQ operation, but a community hub where veterans are honored daily—not just on holidays.

Where to Find the Smokehouse Everyone's Talking About

Red, White & Que is conveniently located in central New Jersey:

Red, White & Que Smokehouse BBQ

150 US-22, Green Brook, NJ

Phone: 732-200-5998

Hours: 11:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. daily (or until sold out—because the best BBQ always sells out)

With about **89 seats indoors and 25–30 seats outdoors**, it's the kind of place you can bring the family, meet friends, or show up solo and still feel like you're part of something.

From Florida and Howell to Green Brook: A Jersey BBQ Story

Dan grew up in **Sanford, Florida**, just outside Orlando. Katie is a lifelong **New Jersey native**, raised in **Howell**, with deep roots in the Garden State—"many, many generations," as she put it.

Katie jokes that she's the reason Dan is in New Jersey—and the reason New Jersey now has barbecue that can go toe-to-toe with anything you'd find down south.

And for those who measure BBQ credentials by Southern standards, I'll say this plainly: I've eaten a lot of barbecue. My daughter lives in South Carolina, and I've had BBQ all over. **Red, White & Que stands out.** It's the real deal.

Dan Misuraca: Marine Corps Service and the Discipline Behind the Pit

Dan served in the **United States Marine Corps from 1992 to 1996** as a **field radio operator**, spending much of his time with an artillery battalion and also serving with infantry. He was stationed at **Camp Pendleton, California**, and deployed during **1995–1996** to the Middle East, including time in **Kuwait and Saudi Arabia,** among other locations.

That service matters not only because it reflects sacrifice—but because it shaped the way Dan approaches his craft and his business.

Katie explained it best: barbecue is built on **trial and error**, and you have to love the process enough to keep refining until you "lock it in." And once Dan locks it in, his Marine-bred discipline takes over—execution, consistency, and standards.

That consistency is often the difference between "good BBQ" and **BBQ that becomes a destination.**

The Origin Story: A Housewarming Smoker and Friends Who Started Showing Up with Tupperware

Like many great small businesses, Red, White & Que started with something simple.

When Dan and Katie bought their house in 2014, Katie gave Dan a small smoker as a housewarming gift. Dan calls himself an "obsessive compulsive hobbyist"—when he gets into something, he goes all in.

Before YouTube tutorials, he learned by reading BBQ forums, studying techniques, and experimenting. Soon, their weekends became BBQ-centered gatherings with friends traveling in from New York City—thanks to a direct bus route to their home.

Dan would smoke brisket one weekend, ribs the next, pulled pork after that. Katie handled the sides. And then something happened that every entrepreneur recognizes as the first real sign:

Their friends started showing up with Tupperware.

That's when they knew—they weren't just hosting parties anymore. They were building a following.

A Marine Corps Reunion That Became a Business Plan

In 2015, Dan invited eight of his closest Marine Corps friends to New Jersey for a week. They cooked barbecue every day—brisket, ribs, "everything"—and even cooked **two whole pigs** during the week.

When it was over, Dan and Katie looked at each other and realized something:

They could do this. Not as a hobby. As a business.

They had the food. They had the passion. And they had something else that's often overlooked: **a retail management and customer service background**, built through years working for Journeys (yes—the shoe store), where Dan worked for 15 years and Katie worked for 10.

They knew how to create an experience—good service, good vibe, and customers who want to come back next week.

They found their first location on Craigslist—nine miles from home—an open-concept space that fit a tight budget. They wanted customers to see the smokers, feel the energy, and experience the restaurant the way it felt at their home BBQ parties.

That "party at our house" feeling became the brand.

What a BBQ Day Really Looks Like: The Work You Don't See

People love BBQ. Most don't realize what it takes to serve it fresh every day.

At Red, White & Que, the day starts the day before.

Meats are loaded into the smokers around **noon or 1:00 p.m.** for overnight cooks like brisket, pulled pork, and pastrami. Dan arrives late at night—around **10:00 or 11:00 p.m.**—to finish those cooks, then loads the next round at **2:00 a.m.** for ribs, chicken, sausage, and other quicker cooks.

By **8:00–9:00 a.m.**, meats are coming off the smoker. Staff arrives. Sides get prepped. The front of house gets ready. Doors open at **11:00 a.m.**

It's not glamorous. It's not easy. It's disciplined—and that's why it's excellent.

Katie summed up their roles perfectly:

- **Dan handles the meat.**
- **Katie runs service and manages the team.**
- Together, they create the experience.

The Pickled Vegetables Everyone Talks About—and the "Fermentory" That Almost Was

If you've eaten at Red, White & Que, you already know: the barbecue is world-class—but the **pickled vegetables** are a secret weapon.

That part of the story comes straight from a bold business move in early 2020, when Dan and Katie rented a second space in Kearny to open what they called a "fermentory"—a place to experiment with pickles, hot sauces, and other fermented goods.

They signed the lease on **February 14, 2020.**

A month later, COVID hit.

They couldn't even get a health inspection until June, so they pivoted—fast—and began shipping pickles and hot sauces across the country. What started as a setback became an unexpected national business, reaching nearly every state (including Alaska).

Then came another hit: **a smoker fire** at their Kearny restaurant location—one that could have become catastrophic if not for quick action and an outstanding response from the local fire department.

Between COVID disruptions, staffing losses, fire recovery, and insurance delays, they endured what many small businesses would not survive.

But that's the veteran mindset: **adapt and overcome.**

And today, the best of the fermentory's products live on at the Green Brook location—giving customers something unique you won't find at a typical BBQ joint.

A Place That Honors Veterans Every Day

Red, White & Que doesn't just say "support the troops." They put it into practice.

- **20% veteran discount—every day**
- A **"Buy a Veteran a Meal"** program funded by customer donations
- Catering and meal support for veterans' transitional housing, including **Garfield House** and similar organizations
- Multiple annual **"Give Back Parties"**—all-day community events featuring free food, veteran-owned business partners, and major raffle prizes (including trips)

Katie described these events as something that started small—customers donating $5 or $10—and grew into "pretty epic" days where hundreds of meals are served and veterans from multiple generations connect.

Dan painted the picture: Vietnam veterans hanging out together, families bringing in a Korean War veteran grandfather wearing his cap, people meeting other veterans by chance—sometimes for the first time in a long time.

That's not just a restaurant.

That's community-building.

Catering for Any Size—and a Business Still Building Forward

Red, White & Que offers dine-in, takeout, and catering—ranging from small gatherings to large-scale events. While they used to do more off-site catering setups before COVID, they currently focus on pickup catering—packed neatly in half trays and ready to serve—with delivery available in select cases.

Like many restaurants, they're still recovering from the long-term effects of the pandemic—but their growth into a larger location and a stronger team shows the trajectory: upward.

Advice for Veterans Who Want to Start a Business

When asked what advice they'd give to veterans looking to launch a business, Dan's answer was immediate:

Lean into the veteran community.

Go to the VFW. Go to the American Legion. Let vets know you're there. Bring the menus. Get involved.

"Vets want to help vets," he said—and he's right.

Katie added the entrepreneurial truth every veteran understands:

Be ready for anything. Make a plan—and be ready to make another one.

And if you can, find a partner who complements your strengths, so you don't feel like you're doing it alone.

The Bottom Line

Red, White & Que is the kind of business NJ Veteran Magazine loves to spotlight—because it reflects what veteran entrepreneurship looks like at its best:

- Discipline and consistency
- Adaptability under pressure
- Service-driven leadership
- A commitment to community

And yes—barbecue that's good enough to make New Jersey proud.

If you haven't been yet, take the trip to Green Brook. Show up hungry. Try the classics. Don't skip the pickles. And if you see it's sold out, don't complain—just come back next week.

That's what happens when you do BBQ the right way.

Red, White & Que Smokehouse BBQ

150 US-22, Green Brook, NJ

732-200-5998

Open daily 11:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m. *(or until sold out)*

South Jersey Business Solutions: Coast Guard Grit, Jersey Values, and a Brand-Building Mission

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

When you meet **Jessica Harrison**, you quickly understand why her clients trust her with their name, their logo, and their reputation.

Jessica is a **U.S. Coast Guard veteran** and the founder of **South Jersey Business Solutions,** a company that helps organizations across the country strengthen brand awareness through **custom-branded goods, apparel, and promotional materials**—everything from wearable gear and giveaways to **awards and plaques** that recognize excellence and build culture.

Her story is a familiar one to many in our veteran community: service first, hard work always, and a willingness to adapt when life—and the market—demands a new course.

From the Coast Guard to Corporate Branding

Jessica served in the **United States Coast Guard from 1993 to 1999**, assigned aboard the **USCGC Juniper**, a 225-foot buoy tender based out of **Newport, Rhode Island.** It's the kind of platform where you don't learn leadership in theory—you learn it because the mission requires it.

In the Coast Guard, Jessica learned to operate in an environment where:

- the standard is non-negotiable,
- details matter,
- and problems don't wait for perfect conditions.

Those lessons didn't stay at sea. They became the foundation of her approach to business.

Today, South Jersey Business Solutions serves customers **nationwide**, helping companies, nonprofits, and teams create branded merchandise that's on-message, on-time, and built to represent them well.

Building a Business Around a Strength: Branding and Marketing

Jessica founded **South Jersey Business Solutions** after recognizing a core strength that she could build into a service: **marketing and branding.**

Her company provides a wide range of customizable products, including:

- branded apparel for teams and events
- promotional items for marketing campaigns
- corporate gifts and giveaways
- awards, plaques, and recognition items
- branded goods that help organizations build visibility and loyalty

In a crowded marketplace, brand identity is often the difference between being remembered and being overlooked. Jessica's business exists to help clients make sure their name is seen—and associated with quality.

Adaptability in Action: The COVID Pivot

Like so many small businesses, Jessica faced a major test during the COVID-19 era. As market conditions shifted, she made a decisive move—pivoting from work in the **mortgage industry** toward **promotional marketing and branded solutions**.

That pivot wasn't accidental. It was a calculated response based on what she saw happening in real time, and it reflected something veterans understand well:

You don't get to pick the conditions.

You do get to pick your response.

Jessica demonstrated the kind of initiative and agility that separates businesses that survive disruption from those that stall out. She leaned into what she does best, built a model that served a national client base, and kept moving forward.

"Details and Communication" as a Customer Service Philosophy

In our conversation, a few themes kept coming up—especially **attention to detail** and **proactive communication.**

Those are not soft skills in the branding world. They are mission-critical.

When a business orders branded apparel for an event, or awards for a ceremony, timing is everything. Quality is everything. And if there's a problem, the last thing a client wants is silence.

Jessica's approach emphasizes:

- clear expectations from the beginning
- staying ahead of deadlines
- communicating early if something needs adjustment
- delivering a finished product that reflects the client's identity

That philosophy is deeply aligned with military culture: accountability, precision, and follow-through.

Leadership Lessons from the Coast Guard

Jessica also spoke about how the Coast Guard shaped her leadership style—especially around teamwork and responsibility. In military service, people don't succeed alone. You learn quickly how to rely on others, communicate clearly, and take ownership when something needs to get done.

Those values now show up in how she runs her business and serves her clients:

- teamwork as a standard, not a slogan
- accountability as a daily practice
- service as the central mindset—clients first, mission first

A Veteran Entrepreneur Who Pulls Others Forward

One of the most important parts of Jessica's story is that she's not building her success in isolation.

She encourages other veterans—especially those scaling a business—to use the resources available to them, including:

- Veteran business networks and chambers
- the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) ecosystem
- mentorship and peer support
- asking for help early rather than waiting until a problem becomes a crisis

That advice matters. Veteran entrepreneurs are often fiercely independent—but the strongest businesses are built with support, collaboration, and smart use of available tools.

Why This Story Matters

South Jersey Business Solutions is more than a promotional products company. It's an example of what happens when a veteran applies service values to entrepreneurship:

- adapt quickly
- execute consistently
- communicate clearly
- deliver quality
- and lift others while you grow

Jessica Harrison represents the best of veteran small business leadership: mission-driven, detail-oriented, and committed to helping other organizations look professional, feel confident, and build brand visibility in a competitive world.

For any business—large or small—looking for branded goods, apparel, promotional items, or recognition products, **South Jersey Business Solutions** is a veteran-owned partner worth knowing. You can get in touch with them at www.sjbspromo.com of via phone at (856) 371-7360.

And for our veteran community, Jessica's path is a reminder that service doesn't end when the uniform comes off. Sometimes, it simply changes form—and becomes a business built on the same core values.

Where Veteran Entrepreneurs Converge: The NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce Veteran Business Summit

By Jeff Cantor for NJ Veteran Magazine

On **Friday, September 18th**, veteran business owners from across the Garden State will gather at **Collins Arena at Brookdale Community College** for one of the most impactful economic empowerment events in New Jersey — **the NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce Veteran Business Summit.**

This isn't just another conference.

It's where veteran entrepreneurs sharpen strategy, build partnerships, access capital, connect to procurement opportunities, and leave with actionable steps to grow their businesses.

And in today's economic climate, that matters more than ever.

A Mission Beyond the Uniform

When service members hang up the uniform, many still feel called to serve. For some, that next mission becomes entrepreneurship.

Veterans bring leadership, discipline, logistics expertise, resilience under pressure, and mission execution skills to the private sector. But translating military leadership into commercial success isn't automatic.

That's where the **NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce** steps in.

The annual Veteran Business Summit was created to:

- Connect veteran-owned businesses with government and corporate procurement officers
- Provide education on state and federal contracting
- Offer direct access to capital resources
- Build mentorship pipelines between established and emerging entrepreneurs
- Create a statewide veteran business ecosystem

At its core, the Summit is about one thing:

Economic empowerment for those who have already served.

Why the Veteran Business Summit Matters

New Jersey is home to thousands of veteran-owned businesses — from construction and logistics firms to tech startups, healthcare providers, consultants, manufacturers, and retail brands.

Yet many veteran entrepreneurs face common barriers:

- Navigating certification processes (SDVOB, VOB, MBE, etc.)
- Accessing state procurement pipelines
- Scaling beyond subcontractor roles
- Securing working capital
- Understanding compliance and regulatory requirements
- Breaking into corporate supplier diversity programs

The Veteran Business Summit addresses these challenges head-on.

Attendees can expect:

Government Contracting Education

Experts walk through procurement opportunities at the state, county, municipal, and federal levels.

Direct Access to Decision Makers

Procurement officers and corporate supplier diversity representatives are present — not just speaking, but networking.

Access to Capital Conversations

Banks, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and alternative lenders discuss funding pathways.

Workshops on Growth & Scaling

Topics include operational efficiency, strategic partnerships, branding, legal compliance, and contract readiness.

Real Networking

Not casual "business card swapping" — but intentional relationship building among veteran leaders.

Brookdale Community College: A Hub for Opportunity

Hosting this year's Summit at **Brookdale Community College's Collins Arena** reflects the Chamber's commitment to education and economic development partnerships.

Brookdale is more than a venue — it is an anchor institution in Monmouth County that supports workforce development, continuing education, and entrepreneurial growth.

Bringing veteran business leaders together in that setting reinforces the message:

Education + Opportunity = Economic Mobility.

A Growing Statewide Movement

The Veteran Business Summit has grown year after year — not just in attendance, but in influence.

It has become a space where:

- Veteran founders meet prime contractors
- Emerging entrepreneurs find mentors
- Policy discussions happen around procurement equity
- Partnerships between public and private sectors are formed
- Veteran-owned businesses become visible and viable

New Jersey's veteran business community is no longer fragmented. It is organized, connected, and increasingly influential.

Beyond the Event: Building a Veteran Business Ecosystem

The Summit is a single day — but its impact extends throughout the year.

The NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce continues to:

- Advocate for procurement fairness
- Promote veteran certification participation
- Support veteran supplier diversity inclusion
- Provide networking and educational programming
- Connect veteran businesses to statewide opportunity

The Summit is where that ecosystem gathers in one place.

Why You Should Attend

If you are:

- A veteran business owner
- A transitioning service member considering entrepreneurship
- A corporate procurement officer
- A government agency buyer
- A lender or capital partner
- A policymaker focused on economic development

This Summit is where you should be on September 18th.

Because supporting veteran businesses isn't charity.

It's economic strategy.

Veteran-owned businesses hire locally, reinvest locally, and strengthen communities across New Jersey.

The Mission Continues

Military service teaches us how to lead teams, manage resources, execute under pressure, and solve problems.

Entrepreneurship demands those same traits.

The Veteran Business Summit is where that skill set meets opportunity.

On **Friday, September 18th,** at **Collins Arena, Brookdale Community College,** the veteran business community will gather — not to reminisce about service, but to build the future. Check the website for up to date information at https://njveteranschamber.com.

You can register for a ticket at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/veterans-business-summit-tickets-1983817312986?aff=oddtdtcreator

Because the mission didn't end when the uniform came off.

It just changed.

VETERAN BUSINESS SUMMIT

A PREMIER NETWORKING EVENT

Meet with Veteran Owned, Disabled Veteran Owned, and Military Spouse Owned Businesses.

FOR MORE INFO, PLEASE CONTACT
info@njveteranschamber.com

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This event will help you meet your state DVOB mandate.

2026

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September 18th

8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Collins Arena, Brookdale College, Lincroft, NJ.

Educational programming on federal contracting with the NVSBC, State contracting with NJ State Departments, and Private sector contracting with Billion dollar companies all looking for veteran businesses.

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Veteran Entrepreneurship Programs Empowering New Jersey's Veteran Business Leaders

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

Across New Jersey, universities and business development organizations are stepping forward to support the next generation of Veteran entrepreneurs. Recognizing that many service members leave the military with leadership skills, operational discipline, and mission-focused mindsets, several institutions have developed programs specifically designed to help Veterans transform their ideas into successful businesses.

Institutions such as **Centenary University**, **Rider University**, and **Fairleigh Dickinson University** now offer specialized entrepreneurship training programs that help Veterans move from concept to launch—and in many cases, to long-term growth.

These initiatives are playing an important role in strengthening the Veteran business ecosystem across the Garden State.

Centenary University's Veteran Ventures Program

At **Centenary University**, the **Veteran Ventures Program (VVP)** provides a structured pathway for Veterans and their families to explore and develop business opportunities.

The program is a **no-cost initiative** designed to serve Veterans, their immediate family members, and military contractors, with particular attention to service members approaching their **End of Active Service (EAS)** transition.

The flagship offering of the program is a **nine-week virtual entrepreneurship course** that guides participants through the essential steps of building a business.

The upcoming fall session will run **September 22 through November 17**, offering Veterans the opportunity to work through key concepts such as business planning, market validation, and operational strategy.

For individuals who are not yet ready for the full course, Centenary also offers a shorter preparatory program called **Innovation**, designed to help participants refine their ideas before entering the full entrepreneurship curriculum.

Participants who complete the program demonstrate a high level of engagement and commitment. Graduates also have the opportunity to request **continued consulting support**, ensuring they receive guidance as they move forward with launching or expanding their businesses.

Prospective applicants are invited to participate in **Zoom meetings with program staff**, where they can discuss their entrepreneurial goals and determine whether the program aligns with their needs.

For more information about the Veteran Ventures Program, interested participants can visit:

- www.centu.org/VVP
- https://www.centenaryuniversity.edu/degrees-and-programs/executive-education-short-courses/veteran-ventures-program

Rider University's Veteran Entrepreneurship Program

Another outstanding opportunity for Veteran entrepreneurs is offered through the **Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Rider University**.

Rider's Veteran Entrepreneurship Program (VEP) is a free, six-week summer program designed to help Veterans, their spouses, and dependents develop the skills necessary to launch or grow a business.

The program will run **May 13 through the end of June 2026**, with weekly sessions held on **Wednesday evenings from 6–9 p.m.** at Rider's **Norm Brodsky College of Business** in Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

The course begins by helping participants develop and refine their **business concept**, followed by structured instruction on industry research, customer identification, financial planning, and market strategy.

To ensure a personalized learning experience, **class sizes are capped at just 20 students**, allowing instructors to provide detailed feedback and guidance.

Participants are also paired with **volunteer business mentors** who provide real-world insight and advice throughout the program.

Veterans participating in the program gain access to Rider's academic resources, research databases, and course materials as they work through each stage of business development.

The weekly curriculum includes:

Week 1 – Business Concept Development

Understanding the industry and developing an initial business idea.

Week 2 – Industry Structure and Trends

Learning research techniques and using business databases to analyze markets.

Week 3 – Customers and Competition

Exploring demographics, market positioning, and competitive advantage.

Week 4 – Sales and Marketing Strategy

Developing promotional strategies, pricing models, and sales forecasts.

Week 5 – Operational Costs

Analyzing expenses related to staffing, supplies, and inventory.

Week 6 – Financial Planning

Fairleigh Dickinson University - Mission Ready Entrepreneurship

For more information and to apply, go to www.rider.edu/VEP

Mission Ready Entrepreneurship Academy at Fairleigh Dickinson University

A third major initiative supporting Veteran entrepreneurship is the Mission Ready Entrepreneurship (MRE) Academy, delivered through the **New Jersey Small Business Development Center** in collaboration with Fairleigh Dickinson University.

The MRE Academy is a **structured, no-cost program** created exclusively for **Veterans, active-duty service members, and military families**.

Unlike traditional workshops or short seminars, the program uses a **cohort-based** system designed to guide participants through every stage of the entrepreneurial journey—from idea development to business growth.

The program is divided into **three pathways**, depending on the participant's business stage.

Pathway 1: Explore & Validate

This pathway is designed for individuals who are considering a business idea but have not yet launched.

Participants complete:

- Entrepreneurial mindset assessments
- Business model development
- Feasibility testing
- Operational readiness training

The program requires about **15–20 hours of guided learning**, helping entrepreneurs validate their ideas before committing financial resources.

Pathway 2: Plan & Launch

Participants ready to start a business can enroll in an **eight-week live virtual course** focused on developing a **bank-ready business plan**.

The program includes:

- Eight live virtual classes
- Weekly consulting with professional advisors
- Launch preparation modules
- Development of a lender-ready business plan

This pathway typically requires **20–30 hours of work** including instruction, writing, and consulting.

Pathway 3: Strategic Growth

For established Veteran-owned businesses seeking expansion, the Strategic Growth pathway provides an **eight-week cohort program** focused on scaling operations.

Topics include:

- Marketing strategy
- Financial management
- Operational systems
- Leadership development
- Long-term growth planning

Participants also receive **confidential consulting sessions** with experienced business advisors. To sign up for this program, please visit **https://bit.ly/4b8NCHs**

Why the SBDC Network Matters

The Mission Ready Entrepreneurship Academy benefits from the infrastructure of the U.S. Small Business Administration-supported Small Business Development Center network.

Through this partnership, participants gain access to:

- Confidential one-on-one consulting
- Experienced professional advisors
- Capital access guidance
- Regulatory assistance
- Long-term business advisory support

Because the program is supported by foundation funding and the SBDC network, **all training and consulting services are provided at no cost to participants**.

Building New Jersey's Veteran Business Ecosystem

Veterans often possess the leadership skills, discipline, and resilience needed to succeed as entrepreneurs. Programs like those offered at Centenary University, Rider University, and Fairleigh Dickinson University help translate those strengths into practical business knowledge and real-world opportunities.

As New Jersey continues to grow its Veteran business community, initiatives like these are creating pathways for service members and their families to build successful companies, create jobs, and strengthen local economies.

For many Veterans, entrepreneurship becomes the next mission after military service—and thanks to these programs, they are not undertaking that mission alone.

Onward to Opportunity: Helping Veterans Build the Next Chapter of Their Careers

Syracuse University
D'Aniello Institute for Veterans & Military Families
JPMorgan Chase & Co., Founding Partner

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

For many Veterans, the transition from military service to civilian employment can be one of the most challenging phases of their lives. While military service develops leadership, discipline, and technical expertise, translating those skills into civilian career opportunities is not always straightforward. Fortunately, programs like **Onward to Opportunity** are helping Veterans bridge that gap.

Developed by the **Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)** at **Syracuse University**, the Onward to Opportunity (O2O) program is a nationwide career training initiative designed specifically to help transitioning service members, Veterans, and military spouses build successful civilian careers. Through industry-recognized certifications, career coaching, and professional development resources, the program is empowering thousands of Veterans to enter high-demand career fields across the country.

A Program Built for the Military Community

The Onward to Opportunity program was created with a clear mission: **to provide free career training and certification opportunities to members of the military-connected community**.

The program serves:

- Active-duty service members transitioning to civilian life
- National Guard and Reserve members
- Military Veterans
- Military spouses

Unlike many training programs, O2O focuses specifically on **industry-recognized certifications** that employers value. Participants receive professional training and the opportunity to earn credentials that demonstrate job-ready skills in competitive industries.

The program is offered **at no cost to participants**, thanks to support from corporate partners and philanthropic organizations that recognize the value Veterans bring to the workforce.

Training for High-Demand Careers

Onward to Opportunity provides training in several major career tracks aligned with today's workforce needs. These areas include:

Information Technology

Technology careers are one of the fastest-growing sectors in the economy, and Veterans often thrive in technical roles. The program offers certifications in areas such as:

- Cybersecurity
- Network administration
- IT support
- Cloud computing

These credentials can lead to careers with major technology companies, government agencies, and defense contractors.

Project Management

Veterans often have extensive leadership and operational experience. O2O helps translate those skills into certifications such as **Project Management Professional (PMP)** and other project management credentials that are widely respected in both the private and public sectors.

Business Management

Participants can pursue certifications that prepare them for careers in operations, logistics, human resources, and business leadership.

Customer Service and Human Resources

These tracks focus on professional certifications that support careers in corporate operations and workforce management.

More Than Just Training

What makes the Onward to Opportunity program unique is its **holistic approach to career development**.

Participants receive:

- Professional career coaching
- Resume and interview preparation
- Networking support
- Job placement guidance

Career advisors work closely with participants to identify their career goals and help align training opportunities with real-world job prospects.

This personalized support ensures that Veterans not only earn certifications but also understand how to leverage those credentials when pursuing employment.

A Nationwide Impact

Since its launch, the Onward to Opportunity program has trained **thousands of Veterans and military spouses across the United States**, helping them transition successfully into civilian careers.

Graduates of the program have moved into roles in industries including:

- Information technology
- Healthcare administration
- Financial services
- Government contracting
- Corporate leadership

Employers increasingly recognize the value of hiring Veterans who combine military leadership experience with industry certifications.

Supporting the Veteran Workforce

Programs like Onward to Opportunity play a vital role in strengthening the economic future of the Veteran community. By equipping Veterans with certifications and career tools, the program helps ensure that their service and skills continue to benefit society long after their military careers end.

For many Veterans, the transition to civilian life is not simply about finding a job—it is about building a meaningful new mission. Onward to Opportunity helps make that mission possible.

How Veterans Can Get Involved

Veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses interested in the program can apply through the **Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University**. Training is delivered online and through partner locations across the country, making it accessible to participants regardless of where they live. For those looking to advance their careers and translate military experience into civilian success, **Onward to Opportunity provides a pathway forward—one certification, one skill, and one career at a time**.

Popular Certifications Through Onward to Opportunity (020)

The **Onward to Opportunity** program helps Veterans earn **industry-recognized certifications** that employers actively seek. These credentials can open doors to careers in technology, business, and project management.

Information Technology Certifications

- **CompTIA A+** – Entry-level IT support and troubleshooting
- **CompTIA Network+** – Computer networking and infrastructure
- **CompTIA Security+** – Cybersecurity fundamentals
- **Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA)** – Network engineering and administration
- **Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP)** – Advanced cybersecurity leadership

Project Management Certifications

- **Project Management Professional (PMP)** – One of the most respected leadership credentials in business
- **Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM)** – Entry-level project management certification

Business and Operations Certifications

- **Lean Six Sigma Green Belt** – Process improvement and operational efficiency
- **Human Resources Certifications** – Workforce and personnel management credentials

Customer Service & Business Support

- **Customer Service Professional (CSP)** – Customer relationship management and service excellence
- **Certified Associate in Business Analysis (CABA)** – Business process and data analysis

Why Certifications Matter

Industry certifications help Veterans translate military leadership, logistics, and technical experience into recognized civilian credentials. Many graduates of the program move into careers in:

- Cybersecurity
- Information Technology
- Government contracting
- Corporate operations
- Project management

These certifications often lead to **higher salaries and faster career advancement**. For more information on Onward to Opportunity, please visit https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/programs/career-training/

Federal Contracting at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst

A Strategic Opportunity for Veteran-Owned, SDVOSB, and Military Spouse Businesses

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JB MDL) is not only America's only tri-service joint base—it is also one of the most active federal contracting hubs in the Northeast. With Air Force, Army, and Navy missions operating side-by-side, the base generates significant demand for goods and services across multiple industries.

For veteran-owned small businesses (VOSBs), Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs), and military spouse-owned businesses, JB MDL represents a real and measurable contracting opportunity.

The data proves it.

The Numbers: Strong Veteran Contracting Performance

The 87th Contracting Squadron (87 CONS), the lead contracting office at JB MDL (DoDAAC: **FA4484**), tracks its small business performance carefully. Over the past five fiscal years, veteran participation has remained strong—and in some years, exceptional.

Small Business Contracting Dollars & Veteran Awards

Fiscal Year	SB Eligible Dollars	SDVOSB	%	VOSB	%
FY2021	$101.3M	$20.1M	20%	$21.2M	21%
FY2022	$147.0M	$27.8M	18.9%	$27.8M	18.9%
FY2023	$144.0M	$31.3M	21.7%	$31.7M	22%
FY2024	$147.0M	$27.4M	18.7%	$27.9M	19%
FY2025	$162.5M	$38.1M	23.5%	$38.3M	23.6%

Key Takeaways:

- Over **$162 million** in small business-eligible contracts in FY2025.
- SDVOSBs captured **23.5%** of eligible contracting dollars.
- VOSBs captured **23.6%**—nearly a quarter of total small business awards.
- Veteran participation has remained consistently strong year over year.

That's not symbolic support—that's real opportunity.

What Types of Contracts Are Available at JB MDL?

Because JB MDL is a tri-service installation, opportunities span air, land, and naval missions. Based on recurring federal procurement categories and JB MDL mission needs, contracting opportunities typically include:

Air Force Requirements (McGuire)

- Aircraft maintenance support services
- KC-46A and C-17 logistics support
- Airfield maintenance and lighting systems
- Fuel systems services
- Construction and infrastructure modernization
- Cybersecurity and IT services
- Base operations support (BOS)

Army Requirements (Fort Dix)

- Training range maintenance
- Groundskeeping and environmental services
- Mobilization support contracts
- Facility repair and sustainment
- Medical support services
- Transportation and logistics coordination

Navy Requirements (Lakehurst / NAWCAD)

- Engineering and technical services
- Aircraft launch and recovery equipment support
- Research and development services
- Industrial manufacturing support
- Calibration and testing services
- Aviation systems modernization

Common Recurring Service Contracts

- Custodial and janitorial services
- HVAC maintenance
- Electrical and plumbing services
- Snow removal
- Waste management
- Food services
- Security services

Because JB MDL supports Air Force Global Mobility, Army mobilization, and Navy engineering missions, it generates recurring multi-year service contracts as well as specialized technical and innovation-focused awards.

How Do Veteran Businesses Find These Opportunities?

Many business owners believe that **SAM.gov** is the only place to look—and while it is essential, it's not the only tool available.

SAM.gov – Smart Searching Matters

SAM.gov remains the primary platform for tracking solicitations.

To search effectively:

- Use "**Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ"** as the performance location.
- Search by the contracting office DoDAAC: **FA4484**
- Use the "Contract Opportunities" tab.
- Filter by NAICS codes relevant to your business.

Understanding your NAICS code (as defined by the SBA) is critical. Notifications are generated based on NAICS alignment.

GSA eBuy (For GSA Schedule Holders)

If your company holds a **GSA Multiple Award Schedule (MAS)** contract, opportunities may be posted through **GSA eBuy.**

Many JB MDL procurements are competed through GSA vehicles, especially for:

- IT services
- Professional services
- Engineering support
- Equipment purchases

Companies with the right NAICS and schedule categories receive automatic notifications.

Capability Briefings with 87 CONS

One of the most underused—and powerful—tools available:

87CONS.SB.Office@us.af.mil

Veteran businesses can request a capability briefing with the Small Business Office.

This allows you to:

- Introduce your company directly
- Align your strengths with anticipated recurring requirements
- Understand contract expiration timelines
- Identify reprocurement cycles

For recurring services, the contracting office can anticipate when contracts expire and when they will be recompeted.

For non-recurring requirements, opportunities arise when the requiring activity submits a package to 87 CONS.

Building relationships and understanding cycles is critical.

What About Military Spouse-Owned Businesses?

While 87 CONS tracks SDVOSB and VOSB performance metrics, there is currently no separate tracked metric for military spouse-owned businesses.

However, military spouse-owned firms can:

- Compete under small business set-asides
- Pursue WOSB (Woman-Owned Small Business) certifications
- Compete under socio-economic categories
- Team with veteran-owned primes

Strategic teaming is often a powerful pathway to entry.

Strategic Advice for Veteran Contractors

If you want to compete successfully at JB MDL:

Know Your NAICS Code

Make sure your registration aligns with your actual core capability.

Build a One-Page Capability Statement

Include:

- Core competencies
- Differentiators
- Past performance
- CAGE and UEI numbers
- SDVOSB/VOSB certifications

Understand Reprocurement Cycles

Many service contracts are 3-5 years. Identify expiration timelines early.

Consider Teaming

Prime/sub relationships can open doors.

Attend Industry Days

When announced, these events provide insight into upcoming requirements.

The Trend Is Positive

The numbers show a clear trajectory: JB MDL continues to award a significant share of its small business contracting dollars to veteran-owned firms.

In FY2025 alone:

- **$38.1 million** awarded to SDVOSBs
- **23.5% participation rate**

That's one of the stronger performance metrics across Department of Defense installations.

Why This Matters

Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst is not just a military installation—it is:

- A $100+ million annual small business marketplace
- A tri-service logistics and mobilization hub
- A center of air mobility, Army readiness, and naval engineering
- A strategic contracting ecosystem

For veteran entrepreneurs in New Jersey and beyond, this represents a mission-aligned opportunity:

Continue serving—this time through business.

Key Contacts & Platforms

SAM.gov – Search using:

- Location: JB MDL, NJ
- DoDAAC: FA4484

GSA eBuy – For GSA Schedule holders

JB MDL Small Business Office

87CONS.SB.Office@us.af.mil

Federal contracting can feel complex—but veterans already understand structure, compliance, and mission focus.

The opportunity is there.

The funding is real.

And JB MDL continues to demonstrate that supporting veteran businesses isn't just rhetoric—it's measurable action.

If you are a VOSB or SDVOSB and ready to scale, the runway is right here in New Jersey.

Legislative Priorities for Veteran Business Growth in New Jersey

The NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce Policy Agenda for 2026–2027

By Jeff Cantor | NJ Veteran Magazine

Across New Jersey, veteran-owned businesses continue to grow as an important part of the state's economy. Veterans bring leadership, discipline, and operational experience to entrepreneurship, often building companies that create jobs and strengthen local communities. However, many veteran entrepreneurs still face barriers in accessing capital, government contracts, and fair procurement opportunities.

The **NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce** has developed a comprehensive legislative agenda for the 2026–2027 legislative session aimed at strengthening opportunities for veteran-owned businesses and ensuring that the state fulfills its commitments to those who served.

These policy initiatives are designed to expand economic opportunity, increase transparency in procurement, and improve access to capital for veteran entrepreneurs across the Garden State.

Strengthening the Disabled Veteran Business Set-Aside

One of the top priorities for the Chamber is improving enforcement of New Jersey's **disabled veteran-owned business (DVOB) set-aside law**.

Current law requires that at least **3% of state contracts** be awarded to disabled veteran-owned businesses. Unfortunately, enforcement of this requirement has been inconsistent.

Proposed legislation would amend **N.J.S.A. 40A:11-45** to add **liquidated damages for contractors who fail to meet the required 3% DVOB participation goal**. This enforcement mechanism would ensure that prime contractors make a genuine effort to include disabled veteran-owned businesses in state procurement opportunities.

In addition, the Chamber is advocating for increasing the state's DVOB participation goal from 3% to 6%, aligning New Jersey more closely with federal standards and policies in neighboring states.

Increasing Transparency in State Procurement

Transparency in government contracting is another major focus of the legislative agenda.

A proposed bill would require **every state agency with procurement authority** to publicly report its spending with small and diverse businesses. Agencies would be required to publish quarterly data showing:

- Total procurement spending
- Spending with certified diverse businesses
- Percentage of spending by certification category

The reporting would track certifications listed within the **NJ SAVI System** or any successor system used by the state.

Making this data publicly available would allow policymakers and the public to evaluate whether procurement goals are actually being met.

Expanding Access to Capital

Access to financing remains one of the biggest challenges for small veteran-owned businesses.

To address this issue, the Chamber is proposing the creation of a **$20 million Diverse Business Lending Fund** administered through the **New Jersey Economic Development Authority**.

The program would allow small diverse businesses—including veteran-owned and disabled veteran-owned companies—to use state contracts as collateral to access financing of up to **100% of the contract award value**.

Loans would be structured as **low-interest or no-interest financing**, and the program would apply not only to state contracts but also to county and municipal contracts.

Because these loans would be repaid, the fund could become a **self-sustaining revolving capital pool** supporting veteran entrepreneurs for years to come.

Encouraging the Private Sector to Hire Veteran Businesses

The Chamber is also advocating for **tax incentives that encourage large companies to work with veteran-owned businesses**.

Under the proposal, large private companies could deduct the full amount of funds spent with New Jersey-based veteran-owned and disabled veteran-owned businesses from their state tax obligations.

The goal is to incentivize private-sector companies to actively include veteran-owned businesses in their supply chains.

Improving Payment Timelines

Delayed payments can be devastating for small businesses operating on tight cash flow.

The Chamber is proposing a **Prompt Payment Program** requiring state agencies to pay veteran-owned businesses **within 15 days of completing work under a state contract** or a designated milestone within that contract.

Ensuring prompt payment would improve financial stability for veteran entrepreneurs and reduce the risk of businesses failing due to delayed government payments.

Training and Accountability in Procurement

Another priority is ensuring that procurement officers fully understand the state's diversity procurement laws.

The proposal calls for **mandatory annual diversity procurement training** for all state procurement officers. The training would be conducted through the state's diversity office in partnership with the **New Jersey Attorney General's Office** and the **New Jersey Diverse Business Advisory Council**.

Training would focus on:

- Conducting good faith outreach to diverse businesses
- Understanding diversity procurement laws
- Ensuring compliance with participation goals

Supporting Veteran Business Startups

To encourage new veteran entrepreneurs, the Chamber is proposing legislation that would **waive state registration fees for newly formed veteran-owned businesses** that obtain certification through one of the state's diversity programs. Lowering startup costs could help more veterans turn business ideas into viable companies.

Infrastructure and Local Government Contracting

The legislative agenda also focuses on ensuring that veteran businesses benefit from major infrastructure projects.

One proposal would require **all Infrastructure Bank-funded projects** to include veteran-owned businesses in their diversity participation goals, which currently apply primarily to minority- and women-owned businesses.

Another measure would tie **state funding for counties and municipalities** to the achievement of diverse business participation goals.

Additional Initiatives Supporting Veteran Entrepreneurs

The Chamber's legislative agenda includes several additional initiatives designed to strengthen the veteran business ecosystem:

- **Waiving EZPass tolls** for vehicles owned by disabled veteran businesses (S301)
- Establishing a **10% price preference program** for disabled veteran-owned businesses when bidding on public contracts
- Creating a **capacity-building and mentorship program** connecting prime contractors with veteran businesses
- Establishing a **state certification for Military Spouse-Owned Businesses**
- Creating a **"First Look" procurement program** requiring agencies to consider diverse businesses first for smaller purchases
- Establishing **ombudsmen within state agencies** to assist veteran businesses with procurement challenges and payment issues

Strengthening the Veteran Business Ecosystem

Finally, the Chamber is seeking the creation of a state budget line item to support the NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce. This funding would allow the organization to expand outreach, education, and training programs for veteran entrepreneurs across the state.

Unlike many business organizations, the Chamber does not charge veterans for its services, making sustainable funding essential to continuing its mission.

Building a Stronger Future for Veteran Entrepreneurs

Veteran-owned businesses represent one of the fastest-growing segments of the American small business economy. With the right policies in place, New Jersey has an opportunity to become a national leader in supporting veteran entrepreneurship.

The legislative priorities outlined by the **NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce** aim to ensure that veterans who served their country have the opportunity to succeed in business at home.

By improving procurement transparency, expanding access to capital, and strengthening enforcement of existing laws, these initiatives seek to create a more equitable and prosperous business environment for New Jersey's veteran entrepreneurs.

NJ Reentry Corporation - If You Served, We Serve: A Commitment to All Veterans

By Jeff Cantor, NJ Veteran Magazine

New Jersey has no shortage of organizations that say they "support veterans." What's rarer is a place that can meet a veteran where they are, including rock bottom—needing service-connection VA claim, fresh out of incarceration, battling PTSD or substance use, missing ID, unemployed, disconnected from benefits—and walk with them step-by-step until life looks stable again.

That's where New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC) stands out.

Veterans Outreach Services NJRC is a New Jersey-based nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to help all veterans. If you have served in the United States Armed Forces or National Guard, regardless of discharge status and reside in New Jersey, you are eligible for NJRC services.

Helping all veterans includes veterans who return successfully from jail or prison, addiction treatment, or the "theater of combat." In other words: they treat reentry as a whole-person problem—and they do the hard, practical work that turns "support" into results.

For veterans, NJRC's approach recognizes a truth we all know: you can't heal or rebuild if you're sleeping in your car, can't access benefits, can't get into treatment, and can't find work. So they start there—at the basics—and they build up.

The Veterans Outreach Services: Wraparound Help, Not a Referral List

NJRC's veteran-focused work is organized under its Veterans Outreach Services, which provides a clear set of supports aimed at stabilizing veterans and connecting them to the benefits and care they earned.

Services highlighted by NJRC include:

- **Housing rentals / housing support**
- **Employment training and placement**
- **Coordination of New Jersey and VA benefits**
- **Referrals and linkages to VA medical centers and behavioral health clinics**
- **Partnership with the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP)**
- **Help with discharge upgrades (less-than-honorable) and other legal needs**

That last point matters more than most people realize. A discharge status can determine access to services and benefits—and for many veterans with complicated histories, that barrier becomes a wall. NJRC's model acknowledges that reality and helps veterans navigate it.

"Do You Have ID?" The Small Things That Decide Whether You Make It

A veteran can't get hired without ID. Can't rent housing without ID. Often can't access healthcare or benefits without ID.

NJRC's broader wraparound model includes practical, reentry-critical supports like:

- **Medicaid registration and linkage to healthcare**
- **Motor Vehicle Commission identification assistance**
- **Legal services**
- **Addiction and behavioral health treatment connections**
- **Transitional housing supports**
- **Training and employment pathways**

This is what "reentry" actually looks like: not speeches—paperwork, appointments, transportation, case management, follow-through.

From Prison to Community: A New NJDOC Initiative Focused on Incarcerated Veterans

In late January 2026, the New Jersey Department of Corrections announced a new initiative designed to strengthen reentry support specifically for incarcerated veterans, emphasizing earlier identification and a continuity-of-care approach that does not end at release.

According to NJDOC, the program's emphasis includes:

- **Early veteran identification and verification**
- **Individualized case management and reentry planning**
- **Connections to eligible VA benefits**
- **Medical and behavioral health services**
- **Legal assistance, employment readiness, and housing resources**
- **Continuity of care after release via community-based linkages**

Coverage of the partnership also describes a "continuum of care" model—linking veterans to benefits enrollment, healthcare coordination, and housing referrals to reduce recidivism and stabilize lives. NJRC has started helping veterans at East Jersey State Prison.

For the veteran community, that's a big deal: it's a move toward treating justice-involved veterans as veterans first—people who deserve structure, clinical support, and a genuine path back.

Where the Work Happens: Centers, Training, and Real Access Points

One signature element of NJRC's model is bringing multiple supports into one coordinated pathway. Their Governor's Reentry Training and Employment Center in Kearny is described as a cornerstone program—providing benefits navigation, legal services, healthcare, housing referrals, and training/employment support in one ecosystem.

NJRC also operates across multiple locations statewide (with administrative offices and service sites listed publicly), making it easier for veterans and families to find an entry point rather than getting lost in a maze of agencies.

Why This Matters for Veterans in New Jersey

Reentry is not only a justice issue. For many veterans, it's a PTSD issue, a moral injury issue, a substance use disorder issue, a housing issue, a family stability issue, and a jobs issue—all at once.

NJRC's veteran work reflects a grounded truth:
stability is treatment, and community is prevention.

When a veteran has safe housing, a job pathway, access to healthcare, and support navigating benefits and legal barriers, the odds of relapse, crisis, and re-offense drop dramatically. That's not ideology—that's common sense.

How NJ Veteran Magazine Readers Can Help or Connect a Veteran

If you're a veteran, family member, or advocate, the best thing you can do is connect early—before "almost stable" becomes "back to square one." NJRC's public information hub outlines services, and their Veterans Justice Outreach Initiative details the veteran-specific supports.

If you're a community partner—employer, landlord, clinician, veteran organization—NJRC's model works best when the community contributes what it can: jobs, housing opportunities, mentorship, and referrals with warm handoffs. For more information on the programs that NJRC runs or ways to refer a veteran, please visit their website at https://njreentry.org or call 201-252-7641.

Because the veteran who is reentering society doesn't need another brochure.
They need a pathway—and someone willing to walk beside them.

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Helping Veterans Find Their Next Mission: How NJ Department of Labor One-Stop Career Centers Power Veteran Employment

By Jeff Cantor, NJ Veteran Magazine

For many veterans, the transition from military service to civilian employment can feel like stepping into unfamiliar terrain. Skills that were essential in uniform don't always translate clearly on a résumé. Navigating benefits, certifications, and career pathways can feel overwhelming. And sometimes the biggest barrier is simply knowing where to start.

In New Jersey, that starting point often has a name: the **One-Stop Career Center**.

Operated through the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, these centers serve as comprehensive employment hubs—providing veterans with career counseling, job training, hiring connections, and individualized guidance to help them successfully reenter or advance in the civilian workforce.

For thousands of veterans across the Garden State, One-Stops are more than employment offices.

They are launch pads for second careers—and second chances.

Veteran-Focused Career Services That Work

New Jersey's One-Stop Career Centers provide specialized support tailored to the unique needs of veterans transitioning to civilian life. Veteran employment specialists help translate military experience into marketable civilian skills and create personalized plans for employment success.

Services available to veterans include:

- Individual career assessments and employment planning
- Resume development and interview preparation
- Job readiness and skills training aligned with employer demand
- Job referrals and employer connections
- Certification and credential guidance
- Access to job search workshops and training programs

This personalized approach is key. Rather than offering generic job listings, One-Stop staff work directly with veterans to develop a structured employment pathway based on experience, interests, and barriers.

For veterans with additional challenges—such as disabilities, long-term unemployment, or legal barriers—One-Stops connect them with supportive services and partner agencies to ensure stability and long-term employment success.

A True "One-Stop" Model of Support

The name isn't accidental. These centers are designed to bring multiple employment services together under one roof.

Veterans can access:

- Career counseling and training programs
- Job clubs and networking workshops
- Education and credential programs
- Digital literacy and ESL classes
- Employer recruitment events
- Tuition waivers and workforce grants
- Public computers and career resource rooms

Many centers also coordinate with workforce development boards, training providers, and community organizations to connect veterans to education, apprenticeships, and industry-specific career pipelines.

Some One-Stops even host direct employer interviews and job fairs on site—bringing hiring managers face-to-face with veteran job seekers.

Supporting Veterans at Every Stage of Transition

Whether a service member is separating from active duty, a National Guard member returning from deployment, or a veteran looking to change careers later in life, One-Stop Career Centers are designed to meet them where they are.

Veteran employment services are part of a broader commitment to serving multiple populations with specialized needs, including mature workers, individuals with disabilities, and returning citizens.

The goal is simple but powerful:

Provide personalized support so every veteran can find meaningful employment.

And the impact reaches far beyond individual job placement. Employment stability strengthens families, supports local economies, and reduces long-term social service needs. When veterans succeed in the workforce, entire communities benefit.

A Statewide Network of Opportunity

One of the greatest strengths of New Jersey's One-Stop system is accessibility. With locations across the state, veterans can find assistance close to home—whether they live in a rural community, suburban county, or major city.

Below is the full directory of New Jersey Department of Labor One-Stop Career Centers.

New Jersey One-Stop Career Center Locations

Atlantic County
Pleasantville One Stop Office
2 South Main Street, 2nd Floor
Pleasantville, NJ 08232

Cape May County
3801 Route 9 South, Unit 3
Rio Grande, NJ 08242

Cumberland County
3322 College Drive
Vineland, NJ 08360

Essex County
50 South Clinton Street, 2nd Floor
East Orange, NJ 07018

990 Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson Boulevard
Newark, NJ 07102

Gloucester County
1480 Tanyard Road, Suite A
Sewell, NJ 08080

Hunterdon County
8 Bartles Corner Road
Flemington, NJ 08822
Mercer County
26 Yard Avenue, Building 4
Trenton, NJ 08625

Middlesex County
550 Jersey Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

161 New Brunswick Avenue, Suite 300
Perth Amboy, NJ 08861

Monmouth County
60 Taylor Avenue North
Neptune, NJ 07753

Morris County
13 Emery Avenue
Randolph, NJ 07869

Ocean County
1433 Hooper Avenue, Suite 214
Toms River, NJ 08753

Salem County
147 South Virginia Avenue
Penns Grove, NJ 08069

Somerset County
75 Veterans Memorial Drive East, Suite 102
Somerville, NJ 08876

Sussex County
30 Moran Street
Newton, NJ 07860

Union County
200 West 2nd Street, 2nd Floor
Plainfield, NJ 07060

Warren County
445 Marshall Street
Phillipsburg, NJ 08865

A Call to Veterans: Your Next Mission Starts Here

The military teaches discipline, leadership, teamwork, and resilience—qualities employers need every day. The challenge is not whether veterans have the skills. It's making sure those skills connect to the right opportunities.

That is exactly what New Jersey's One-Stop Career Centers are built to do.

If you are a veteran seeking employment, training, or career advancement, help is already available—in your county, in your community, and ready when you walk through the door.

Because leaving the military doesn't mean leaving service behind.

It just means finding a new mission.

And in New Jersey, the One-Stops are ready to help you find it.

New Jersey career connections
careerconnections.nj.gov

NJDOL One-Stop Career Center

VETERAN SERVICES

REGISTER HERE FOR JOB SOURCE,
where you will find all the tools you need to get started on your next career opportunity.

Registration provides FREE benefits and information, including:

- Access to your current Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefit information on your dashboard
- All of your job search information and documents in one location
- Tools to help create resumes, professional letters and more
- Organization of employer contacts, references and follow-up information
- Access to career assessment and skills matching tools to help you choose a career path

VETERANS AND SPOUSES*,
find out what services you may be eligible for and who can help.

THANK YOU VETERANS

* **Service member, veteran, spouse, family caregiver or widow(er)**

To find your local One-Stop Career Center, SCAN HERE

HIRE VETS MEDALLION PROGRAM
HIREVets.gov
Recognizing employers who HIRE veterans

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WD-95 (8/24)

Finding Meaningful Employment After Service

A Roadmap for Veterans, Transitioning Military, National Guard Members, and Military Spouses

By Michael Mattessich | for NJ Veteran Magazine

For years, life in the Armed Forces follows a structured path. You operate within a clear chain of command. You follow orders. You execute missions with precision. The expectations are defined. The standards are high. The mission is clear.

Then one day, that structure shifts.

Service ends. The uniform comes off. And a new set of questions emerges:

- *What do I do now?*
- *How do I make a living?*
- *Where do I even begin?*

For veterans, transitioning service members, National Guard members, and military spouses, the move into civilian employment can feel overwhelming. The uncertainty can bring anxiety, frustration, and even self-doubt.

But here's the truth: you are not starting from scratch—you are starting from strength.

Start Early: Don't Wait Until Your Final Day

One of the most important steps in finding meaningful employment is simple: start preparing before your service ends.

Set clear goals. Ask yourself:

- What industries interest me?
- Do I want to use the same skills I had in the military—or pivot into something new?
- Do I need certifications, licenses, or additional training?

Transition planning should begin months—if not a year—before separation. The earlier you start, the smoother the runway.

Translating Your Military Experience for Civilian Employers

One of the biggest barriers veterans face isn't a lack of skill—it's language.

Military occupational specialties (MOS codes) and internal terminology don't translate automatically in the civilian world. Most hiring managers won't understand what "011" or "3051" means.

Instead of listing codes, describe your role in terms employers recognize.

For example:

Instead of:

3051 – Logistics Chief

Say:

Logistics Coordinator – Responsible for scheduling, allocating, and reconciling shipments of supplies to support mission execution across multiple units.

The key is to:

- Avoid military jargon
- Use plain, results-driven language
- Quantify your impact when possible
- Match your experience to the job description

Remember, you're not changing who you are—you're translating your experience into terms the civilian market understands.

Interview Preparation: Speak Civilian, Think Strategic

Many veterans undersell themselves in interviews simply because they aren't comfortable explaining their experience in civilian language.

Prepare in advance:

- Practice explaining your leadership, decision-making, and operational experience in relatable terms.
- Be ready to discuss strengths like adaptability, accountability, and teamwork.
- Understand that most interviewers are working from a structured list of questions—they aren't trying to trip you up.

Most importantly, **bring your own questions**.

Ask about:

- Company culture
- Team structure
- Leadership expectations
- What success looks like in the first 90 days
- Growth opportunities

An interview is a two-way street. You are also deciding whether the role is right for you.

Know Your Value

Veterans often underestimate the strength of their background.

You are:

- Adaptable
- Highly trained
- Mission-focused
- Comfortable under pressure
- Experienced in leadership and teamwork
- Skilled in logistics, operations, compliance, communications, and more

Employers may not always understand what military service entails—but once educated, many quickly recognize its value.

Helping Employers Recognize Veteran Talent

It's also important to understand that there are tangible incentives for companies to hire veterans.

Employers may qualify for:

- **Federal tax credits up to $9,600 per veteran hired** (with a six-month employment requirement)
- Additional state-level incentives, including proposed New Jersey legislation such as S1204
- Payroll savings and training benefits tied to veteran hiring programs

Beyond financial incentives, veterans consistently demonstrate strong retention rates and leadership potential—traits companies are actively seeking.

A Partner in the Mission: Employing Veterans & Military Spouses LLC

Helping veterans navigate this transition is the mission of **Employing Veterans & Military Spouses LLC (EVMS LLC)**, a New Jersey Veteran-Owned and Small Business Enterprise.

Founded by **Michael Mattessich**, a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran, EVMS LLC provides hands-on support for veterans and military families seeking meaningful employment. Michael brings extensive experience to this mission:

- Former Director of the HVRP program for Goodwill NYNJ
- Served with the Army National Guard's SFRG as a Military and Family Specialist
- Founder of the B4VOIN charity, which distributed over 1,000 bicycles to veterans and families across New Jersey
- Recognized by Governor Phil Murphy and Congressman Josh Gottheimer for his dedication to improving veterans' quality of life
- EVMS LLC offers:
- Resume assistance
- Career guidance
- Job placement services
- Training and support for civilian career transitions
- Employer engagement and veteran talent recruitment

Sample Job Opportunities Currently Available

Veterans bring diverse skills—and opportunities span every industry. Sample roles include:

- **Plumber (Experienced)** – $30–42/hr — Hazlet, NJ
- **CHA/CNA** – $18–25/hr — Newark, NJ
- **Senior Manager, Corporate Development** – $140–170k — Franklin Lakes, NJ
- **Beverage Business Development Manager** – $130–150k — Remote
- **Director, Government Pricing** – $170–249k — Morristown, NJ

These are just examples. EVMS LLC works with employers across industries and locations—including some international opportunities.

For Military Spouses and National Guard Members

Employment challenges don't affect veterans alone.

Military spouses often face interrupted career paths due to relocations. National Guard members balance civilian careers with service commitments. Both groups bring resilience, flexibility, and adaptability that employers value deeply.

Finding meaningful employment isn't just about income—it's about stability, identity, and long-term growth.

Final Thoughts: Mission Continues

Transitioning from military to civilian life can feel uncertain—but it is not a loss of identity. It is a continuation of service in a new form.

You are not "starting over."

You are bringing discipline, leadership, and resilience into a new arena.

And you don't have to navigate it alone.

Contact Employing Veterans & Military Spouses LLC

Website: www.evmsllc.com

Email: evmsllc@gmail.com

Phone: 201-970-1171

If you're a veteran, transitioning service member, National Guard member, or military spouse seeking meaningful employment—or if you're an employer looking to hire exceptional talent—reach out.

The mission of service doesn't end. It evolves.

And meaningful employment is one of the strongest foundations for building the next chapter.

The Norwegian Foot March Comes to Lakehurst

By Bob Leicht, SFA Chapter 19 | For NJ Veteran Magazine

A 110-Year-Old Military Challenge

Originating in 1915 with the Norwegian Army, the Norwegian Foot March was designed as an overnight tactical exercise. Its purpose was straightforward but demanding: demonstrate that a light infantry unit could move cross-country with weapons and mission-essential gear, establish a position short of the objective, and at first light launch an attack.

More than a century later, that tradition is alive — and thriving — across the United States.

According to records maintained by the Norwegian Military Attaché in Washington, nearly 3,950 U.S. troops participated in sanctioned marches in 2019. Last year, participation exploded nearly ten-fold to almost 40,000. This year alone, dozens of installations across the U.S. and 11 overseas bases have hosted sanctioned events. But one location stands apart.

Lakehurst: A Night March Like No Other

At Naval Support Activity Lakehurst — the naval component of Joint Base McGuire/Dix/Lakehurst (JBMDL) — the Norwegian Foot March has taken on a uniquely New Jersey identity.

With groundwork laid by members of the New Jersey Chapter of the Special Forces Association — the late Lew Jones and Bobby Mazur — the march was sanctioned by the Norwegian Military Attaché and approved for execution across the installation. Many of those Special Forces veterans are also members of the Corporal Steven Koch Chapter of the 82nd Airborne Division Association, and today the two organizations jointly host the event.

The course begins and ends at Historic Hangar 1 — known worldwide as the "Hindenburg Hangar." From there, marchers transit the cantonment area, push out toward naval aviation test facilities, reach the 15-kilometer turnaround near Bass Lake, and return — totaling 30 kilometers (18.6 miles).

The terrain is roughly half paved and half sandy, uneven roads — making foot placement and situational awareness especially critical in darkness.

Because yes — this march is conducted at night.

To the best of our knowledge, Lakehurst is the only Norwegian Foot March in the United States conducted under true overnight conditions, faithful to the original 1915 concept. It is as much tactical as it is physical.

Even more unique: according to the Norwegian Military Attaché, Lakehurst is the only one of hundreds of annual sanctioned events organized and executed by veterans — solely to provide an opportunity for today's servicemembers.

Why the Attraction?

The draw is two-fold.

First: the physical challenge. Marchers must carry a 24+ pound ruck over mixed terrain and meet strict time standards determined by age and sex. There are no allowances for rank, branch, or reputation. The standards are unforgiving.

Second: the reward. Those who meet the standard receive an official certificate issued by the Norwegian Attaché — signed by the Chief of Defense Norway (the equivalent of our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). Servicemembers may submit that certificate through personnel channels to request authorization to wear the Norwegian Foot March Badge — a foreign military decoration.

For many Special Forces and Airborne veterans, earning foreign jump wings, winter warfare badges, alpine tabs, and other distinctions came with operational duty. But for many conventional troops, those opportunities were limited. The Norwegian Foot March provides what many call a "twofer" — a grueling challenge and a recognized foreign award.

In just three years at Lakehurst, troops and cadets have proudly worn the badge on their Class A and B uniforms — a symbol of grit and earned bragging rights.

Growth, Grit, and Hard Lessons

The Lakehurst march has grown rapidly:

- 74 participants in 2023
- Over 400 registered for October 2024

When registration opened last April, 300 slots filled in two hours and six minutes. Later applicants were wait-listed.

Unfortunately, the October 2025 event landed squarely in the middle of a federal government shutdown. Permission to proceed came just two days before execution, causing many to assume cancellation. Even so, 108 marchers showed up.

Participants included Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, several Marines, ROTC cadets from Rutgers, Princeton, Seton Hall, Valley Forge, Georgia Tech, and veterans.

Of the 108 who stepped off one minute after midnight:

- 85 crossed the finish line
- 73 met their individual time standards

Those who did not finish were primarily sidelined by injury or inadequate preparation. And that lesson is timeless:

You cannot store physical fitness.

There is no substitute for training under load, in boots, with weight.

A Veteran-Led Operation

The first year required significant trial and error. Organizing volunteers, coordinating across multiple JBMDL offices, marking a safe night course, securing medical coverage, and ensuring compliance with Norwegian Army standards demanded extensive planning.

Over time, improvements included:

- Enhanced marking at "decision points" to prevent marchers from missing turns
- Professional race timing services with electronic chip timing
- Online registration and time analysis against official standards
- Dedicated water/aid stations, medical personnel, and communications

Support from Joint Base McGuire/Dix/Lakehurst was extraordinary — from command

authorization and JAG review to security, civil engineering, and medical support overnight.

Volunteers included:

- Veterans of the 82nd Airborne
- Members of the Association of the United States Army
- High school Army and Air Force JROTC detachments
- FBI Explorers
- Musicians of the 63rd Army Band, who played the U.S. and Norwegian national anthems before stepping off at 0001

An especially meaningful presence has been Ms. Susan Satkowski, Esq., Honorary Norwegian Consul for the Pennsylvania/New Jersey region. Through her support, cadets from the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy — interning at Norway's UN Delegation in New York — have attended and marched.

In 2024, one Norwegian cadet completed the 30-kilometer course in 2 hours and 43 minutes. When asked about the pace, he shrugged: "This course is flat; at home we have hills."

What's In It for the Veterans?

For the Special Forces and 82nd Airborne chapters, there is no financial benefit. Norwegian regulations prohibit charging participation fees. Budgets currently do not allow for purchasing badges for awardees — something organizers hope to address through future fundraising.

So why do it?

The reward is psychological.

Being around today's servicemen and women — watching them challenge themselves under load, in the dark, against uncompromising standards — is energizing. It reminds us that the force remains strong.

It also allows veterans to give something back: a demanding opportunity many of today's troops might not otherwise have.

A Tradition Worth Continuing

The Norwegian Foot March at Lakehurst has become a signature New Jersey event — a blend of history, international military tradition, and veteran-led service.

It demands preparation.

It demands discipline.

It demands humility.

But for those who step off after midnight and return before dawn — it delivers something rare: earned pride, a tangible symbol of accomplishment, and a connection to a 110-year-old warrior tradition.

To those considering the challenge next year:

Start training.

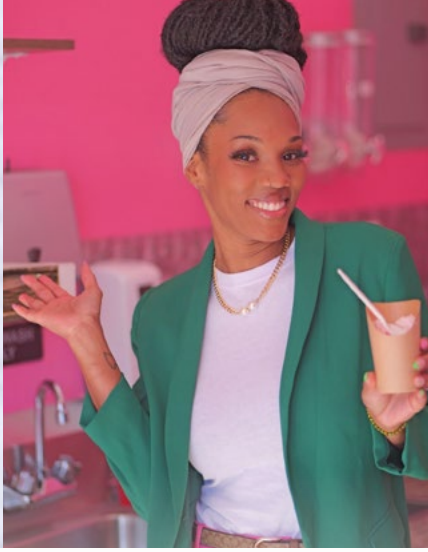
Load your ruck.

Break in your boots.

And remember — you cannot store physical fitness.

We'll see you at Hangar 1.

MEDITERRANEAN HEALING BOWL Recipe



Chef Tori Funn

Serves 2

This bowl follows one structure and allows flexibility without losing balance. The base stays the same. The protein and sauce can change based on preference, tolerance, or access.

BASE BOWL INGREDIENTS

1 cup cooked basmati rice or herbed rice

2 cups roasted vegetables (zucchini, eggplant, red bell pepper, red onion)

1 cup fresh cucumber and tomato, chopped

2 tablespoons pickled red onion

2 tablespoons fresh herbs, chopped (parsley and dill preferred)

AUTHENTIC MEDITERRANEAN ROASTED VEGETABLE SEASONING

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon dried oregano

½ teaspoon ground cumin

½ teaspoon ground coriander½ teaspoon smoked paprika

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon Salt and black pepper to taste

Toss vegetables with olive oil and seasoning. Roast at 400°F until tender and lightly caramelized.

PROTEIN OPTIONS (CHOOSE ONE)

OPTION 1: CHARRED OYSTER MUSHROOMS

Plant based

2 cups oyster mushrooms, torn 1 tablespoon olive oil

1 teaspoon ground cumin

½ teaspoon smoked paprika

½ teaspoon garlic powder

¼ teaspoon ground coriander Salt and black pepper

Sear mushrooms in a hot pan until golden and slightly crisp at the edges.

OPTION 2: GRILLED CHICKEN

Traditional

1 cup chicken thigh or breast, sliced 1 tablespoon olive oil

1 teaspoon dried oregano

½ teaspoon ground cumin

½ teaspoon paprika

½ teaspoon garlic powder Salt and black pepper

Marinate briefly, then grill or pan sear until cooked through and lightly charred.

OPTION 3: MEDITERRANEAN FISH

Pescatarian

1 cup salmon or white fish 1 tablespoon olive oil Lemon juice

½ teaspoon dried oregano

¼ teaspoon ground cumin Salt and black pepper

Bake, grill, or pan sear until flaky.

SAUCE OPTIONS (CHOOSE ONE) OPTION 1: CLASSIC DAIRY TZATZIKI

1 cup plain Greek yogurt

½ cup grated cucumber, squeezed dry 1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 small garlic clove, minced Salt to taste

Fresh dill

Stir until smooth. Chill before serving.

OPTION 2: CASHEW TZATZIKI (DAIRY FREE)

½ cup raw cashews, soaked and drained

¼ cup water

2 tablespoons lemon juice 1 tablespoon olive oil

1 small garlic clove Salt to taste

Fresh dill

Blend until smooth.

OPTION 3: HEMP SEED HERB SAUCE (NUT FREE)

½ cup hemp seeds

¼ cup water

2 tablespoons lemon juice 1 tablespoon olive oil

1 small garlic clove Salt to taste

Fresh parsley or dill

Blend until creamy. Adjust water as needed.

ASSEMBLY (PLATE SCHOOL METHOD)

Spoon rice into one side of the bowl. Add roasted vegetables to fill half the bowl. Add protein to the remaining quarter. Top with cucumber tomato mix, pickled onion, fresh herbs, and sauce of choice.

PLATE SCHOOL NOTE

Half the bowl is vegetables. One quarter is protein. One quarter is energy. The sauce supports the meal, not the other way around. Keep the structure the same and adjust only what you need. Eat like you know better.

To learn more about Plate School and the Green Genius philosophy, visit greengeniusmeals.com or follow @greengeniusfunn on Instagram.

Veterans

WORD SCRAMBLE

Unscramble the following military-themed words.

ADEML _____

CEEVIRS _____

EERANVT _____

RTEITUB _____

AGOUECR _____

OREH _____

PADRAE _____

OOHRN _____

RPEID _____

MILMEARO _____

RMLYIITA _____

YTUD _____

OPTIART _____

AYODLHI _____

SHATKN _____

IACFRERO _____

STYHIOR _____

IEMANR _____

RAVBE _____

ACEEP _____

VYAN _____

SELORIDS _____

MERVONEB _____

TCOMBA _____

Education & Health Centers of America, Inc.

Education & Health Centers of America, Inc.'s (EHCA) Veteran Resource Program provides support to veterans with unmet needs throughout the State of New Jersey. Veterans are assessed one-on-one and are linked to available services.

Contact our Veterans Resource Program Today:
Education & Health Centers of America, Inc.
3350 State Route 138, Building 2, Suite 222
Wall Township, NJ 07719
1-833-920-VETS (8387)
Hadams@ehcamerica.org
Smarshall@ehcamerica.org

Veterans Foundation of America
a veterans 501c3 non-profit organization
jeff@thevfa.org
Phone: 732-778-7708
www.thevfa.org
We focus on veterans mental & physical health including fishing trips, resilience training, health fairs, and music at no cost to veterans

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YWCA Northern New Jersey Operation Sisterhood
Supporting the journey beyond service

YWCA Northern New Jersey's Operation Sisterhood provides personalized support to female veterans.

Our FREE services include:
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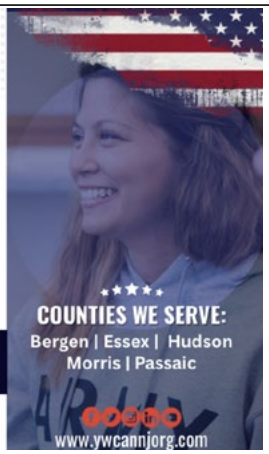
LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PROGRAM:
www.ywcannjorg.com/womens-empowerment/

Questions? Contact Lucy Del Gaudio
ldelgaudio@ywcannj.org 551-288-0836



VETS 4 WARRIORS® Discover the power of connection

We are a 501c3 through the Rutgers Foundation
Fatima Aguilar fatima.aguilar@rutgers.edu 855-838-8255
www.vets4warriors.com
Vets4Warriors provides essential support to the veteran community by offering 24/7, free, and confidential peer support services to active duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members, veterans of all generations, and their families/caregivers. We act as a vital lifeline, offering a compassionate and understanding voice to those in the military community who are facing difficulties, ensuring they know they are never alone.

NJCRI
NORTH JERSEY COMMUNITY RESEARCH INITIATIVE
Seeking Cures for Tomorrow, Providing Support for Today.

North Jersey Community Research Initiative (NJCRI)
501c3
Contact : Name: Ida Seshie, Email: i.seshie@njcri.org, Phone: 973-483-3444 ext. 204
www.njcri.org
NJCRI provides a wide array of invaluable services to the veteran community. Veterans have access to drop-in center services that include two congregate meals per day, showers, laundry facilities, technology support, and a food pantry. We offer primary medical care for adults and adolescents, comprehensive mental health and psychiatric care, substance use counseling, and harm reduction programs.

A 501(c)(3) Honoring and empowering all veterans with essential resources, benefits guidance, and opportunities that support continued success beyond military service.

LATINO VETERANS EST NJ 2024

Larry Mantilla
lmantilla@latinovetsnj.org
www.latinovetsnj.org

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NJ State Veterans Chamber of Commerce
501c6 Non-profit corporation focused on veteran economic development issues including starting a business, gaining access to capital, certifying your business, gaining access to networks, procurement fairs, and more
info@njveteranschamber.com
www.njveteranschamber.com

HOOK, LINE, AND WARRIORS

Veteran Fishing Trips through Hook, Line & Warriors

You can register for trips via email at:
hooklineandwarriors@gmail.com
Or you can call or text:
609-425-9401 or 609-425-6091

AUSA

Dix Chapter Association United States Army
AUSA is a 501c3
Arthur G.A. Maggs, Jr.
Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army Retired
President, Dix Chapter
agamaggsjr@hotmail.com
908-403-4326
"Soldier for Life"
AUSA charges for membership, but there is no charge for Basic Membership

GPVN
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"OUR TOOLS. YOUR MISSION"

Greater Philadelphia Veterans Network (GPVN)
501c3
gpvnops@gmail.com
GPVN.org
Making Greater Philadelphia the best place for Veterans by building an ecosystem of successful veteran employees, leaders, and veteran owned businesses. Through GPVN's motto of "Our Tools, Your Mission," we are dedicated to helping veterans through the entire lifecycle of their professional careers, from employment, to leadership, to Veteran Owned Businesses.
No fees.

SOUTH JERSEY LEGAL SERVICES

South Jersey Legal Services, Inc., is a private non-profit law firm.
Website: www.sjlslaw.org
Centralized Intake Unit: 1-800-496-4570 (Monday through Friday 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM)
Online Intake: https://www.sjlsintake.org/intake/1017/language/1
SJLS provides free legal services aiding low-income clients in selected civil cases based on established priorities in Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Monmouth, Ocean and Salem Counties.

AMERICAN VETERANS AMVETS

AMVETS
501c3
amvets@amvets-nj.org **609-526-4356**
www.amvets-nj.org
www.facebook.com.newjerseyhq **or** www.instagram.com/njamvets
Veteran Claims & Resources and Community Events and Programs
Our Veteran services are free

Sgt. Ron Wright
VFW Post 303
Winslow/Waterford Veterans of Foreign Wars Post # 303

Sicklerville, NJ 08081
vfwpost303.org
856-740-5101 Post / 856-264-7121 Cell USNAVGB8@GMAIL.COM
Commander: Ray Harris
Sr. Vice Commander: George Bethel Jr. Vice Commander: George YoungBlood
We at the VFW are a 501(c)(19) National Combat Veterans Organization. We Service and Advocate in
various ways for our Nation's Veterans, Dependents and Communities.

Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Department of New Jersey
A Jewish voice for Veterans; a Veteran's voice for Jews since 1896

JWV is the nation's longest-running Congressionally chartered veteran organization, We are committed to upholding America's democratic traditions and fighting prejudice, injustice and discrimination of all kinds

Veterans, regardless of wartime service, and all who believe in our core mission & values are welcome
Email: JWVDeptNJ@gmail.com

BRIDGING THE GAP
OPENING DOORS FOR VETERANS

Bridging the Gap for Veterans is a 501c3 with the mission to open career doors for the military community. Our programs and services provides for a Right Start for a Veteran transitioning to civilian life. Contact us to support your career goals at:

info@bridgingthegap.vet

www.BridgingtheGap.vet

Braven Health℠ Has Your Back—

So Your VA Benefits Stay Right Where They Belong.

If you rely on VA or TRICARE® for Life for care, you deserve a Medicare Advantage plan that strengthens what you already have — not one that replaces it.

Your VA/TRICARE for Life benefits stay fully intact.

By law, Medicare Advantage cannot interfere with your military benefits. Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO) simply works **alongside** them.

Why add Braven Health?

Because sometimes life happens outside the VA:

- Emergencies while traveling
- Civilian specialists
- No VA facility nearby

Why No Drug Coverage?

You already use VA or TRICARE for Life for prescriptions — so this plan intentionally leaves out Part D to keep costs low.

Is This Plan Right for You?

- ✔ You use VA/TRICARE for Life for prescriptions
- ✔ You have Medicare A & B
- ✔ You want backup coverage for non VA care
- ✔ You want peace of mind — without changing your military benefits
- ✔ You live in the plan's service area.

Braven℠ HEALTH

Turning 65? Learn How It Works With Your Benefits

1-833-713-1313 (TTY **1-888-222-1108**)
Weekdays, 8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET (Apr–Sep)

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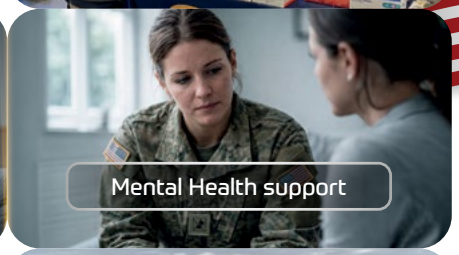
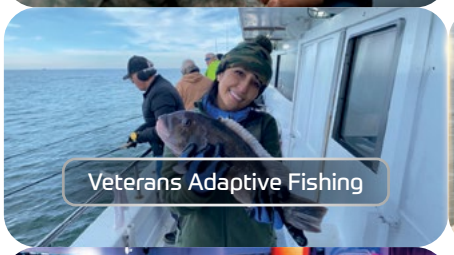
Veterans
WORD SCRAMBLE

ANSWER KEY

ADEML	MEDAL	OPTIART	PATRIOT
CEEVIRS	SERVICE	AYODLHI	HOLIDAY
EERANVT	VETERAN	SHATKN	THANKS
RTEITUB	TRIBUTE	IACFRERO	AIR FORCE
AGOUECR	COURAGE	STYHIOR	HISTORY
OREH	HERO	IEMANR	MARINE
PADRAE	PARADE	RAVBE	BRAVE
OOHRN	HONOR	ACEEP	PEACE
RPEID	PRIDE	VYAN	NAVY
MILMEARO	MEMORIAL	SELORIDS	SOLDIERS
RMLYIITA	MILITARY	MERVONEB	NOVEMBER
YTUD	DUTY	TCOMBA	COMBAT





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www.thevfa.org

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VETERANS FOUNDATION OF AMERICA
www.thevfa.org

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- Help with PTSD
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Please donate here

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https://thevfa.org

The Veterans Foundation of America is a registered 501c3 charitable organization

Turning 65?

Both veterans and their spouses may be eligbile to enroll in Braven Medicare Salute – NoRx (PPO).

You stood with our veterans. We stand with you.

Military spouses keep our community strong. As you transition into Medicare, you should have coverage that supports you in return.

What you get:

- **Up to a $900/year savings** on your Medicare Part B premium
- **$0 monthly plan premium**
- **$0** in-network routine dental, vision & hearing network routine dental, vision & hearing
- **$0 telehealth** for urgent & behavioral visits
- Freedom to get care **outside the VA system**
- Allowances for **over-the-counter items, fitness, and more**

Best for those who:

- ✔ Have VA or TRICARE® for Life prescription drug coverage
- ✔ Want emergency/non-VA care options
- ✔ Live in the plan's service area and have Medicare Parts A & B

Not ideal if you need coverage for prescription drugs outside of the VA system

Braven℠ HEALTH

Talk to Us

1-833-713-1313 (TTY **1-888-222-1108**)
Weekdays, 8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET (Apr–Sep)
BravenHealth.com/Salute

Service Area: Available in Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic, Salem, Union. Not available in Sussex, Warren, Morris, Somerset.

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