

## George Taylor Jr. carries on late father's mission of helping homeless veterans; NVHS has made big impact on lives of veterans; partners with organizations

By Ken Datzman

The late George Taylor Sr. spent many years of his life helping homeless veterans. The work he did in Brevard County is his life's legacy.

He founded National Veterans Homeless Support in 2008, a nonprofit organization that has uplifted the lives of many veterans over the last decade.

It trains volunteers to go into the woods to find homeless camps and interact with veterans, with the goal of helping them gain permanent housing while addressing their other immediate needs.

Many veterans through the years have thanked Taylor for reaching out to them in a time of darkness and despair in their lives. He provided peer-to-peer support.

A decorated U.S. Army paratrooper who served in Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, Taylor, a pillar in the community for decades, worked for Disabled American Veterans in Titusville before starting his own organization to assist homeless veterans.

"The organization he founded has made a big impact on the lives of homeless veterans in this county," said George Taylor Jr., his son and the current president and CEO of National Veterans Homeless Support in Cocoa.

"The work our volunteers are doing is awesome. Around 2008, there were about 1,800 homeless veterans in Brevard. Today, there are roughly 150 homeless veterans in the county. So that is a pretty dramatic decline. We're proud of that decrease in the homeless population."

That homeless statistic is based on the government's biannual "Point-in-Time" count.

Taylor added that the number of homeless veterans in Brevard County is now "manageable" for his organization.

"Essentially, we are now able to focus more on the prevention side of homelessness, helping at-risk veterans who are about to lose their homes. It takes a community to make this happen. We can't do it by ourselves."

Taylor is a full-time reservist in the U.S. Air Force's 920th Rescue Wing stationed at Patrick Air Force Base.

It's hard to imagine a veteran homeless in America, yet it happens. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, homeless veterans are predominately single males experiencing various challenges in life.

National Veterans Homeless Support's two main programs are Search and Rescue, and Transitional Housing.

Its Search and Rescue teams go out into the forests, parks, and streets to locate and make contact with homeless veterans that live there, he said. "That is our physical outreach program. It has been very successful."

Once the trained volunteers locate them, the organization provides basic necessities such as food and clothing until they are able to be housed in a National Veterans Homeless Support facility.

The organization has four homes in Brevard County that house veterans — two in Titusville, and one each in Cocoa and Melbourne.

"With the four facilities, we are able to house a total of 17 homeless veterans. We don't put a cap on their length of stay. They can stay as long as they are advancing their lives. The average stay is about six months to a year," said Taylor.

When his father started the organization, he put a national spin on naming it. Florida has the third largest population of veterans in the nation, behind only California and Texas.



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

George Taylor Jr. is president and CEO of National Veterans Homeless Support Inc. in Cocoa. The nonprofit was founded by his father in 2008. George Taylor Sr., a Vietnam veteran, passed away in 2020. The board appointed George Taylor Jr., who was the volunteer vice president for many years, to succeed his father. NVHS has made big strides helping homeless veterans in Brevard. The organization's two main programs are Search and Rescue, and Transitional Housing. Its partners include United Way of Brevard, the Brevard Homeless Coalition, and Volunteers of America.

"Many people think we are a nationwide operation, but we are only a small organization in Cocoa serving Brevard. However, I like to say we have a lot of friends. It's a coalition of partners. No nonprofit organization can achieve its mission without partners and volunteers. It takes a team to get the job accomplished."

Taylor added, "Through the years, National Veterans Homeless Support has been fortunate to have a lot of people working with us, both on the public side and the private side."

The National Veterans Homeless Support partners include United Way of Brevard, the Brevard Homeless Coalition, and Volunteers of America in Cocoa.

On Thursday, Nov. 11, America will celebrate Veterans Day, formerly Armistice Day. Armistice Day marked the anniversary of the signing of the armistice that ended

World War I in 1918. The federal legal holiday, observed on the fourth Monday in October during the mid-1970s, reverted to Nov. 11 in 1978. The day honors all veterans of the armed forces.

To prevent veterans from experiencing homelessness, coordinated efforts providing housing, basic health-care needs, and mental-health counseling are necessary.

Job training and placement assistance is also crucial to veterans who can be at a disadvantage when competing for employment when their military occupations and training are not transferable to the civilian workforce.

But it all starts with housing, said Taylor. "Without a consistent place to stay — where they can get rest, keep their clothes clean, and regularly keep their hygiene up —

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getting and keeping a job is extremely difficult.”

If you are interested in volunteering or supporting the organization through donations, visit [www.NVHS.us](http://www.NVHS.us). National Veterans Homeless Support is a 2021 GuideStar Gold-certified nonprofit.

Less than 5 percent of nonprofits registered with GuideStar are recognized with the Gold Seal of Transparency. GuideStar is the world's largest database of nonprofit entities, and provides a Seal rating on Internal Revenue Service-registered nonprofits.

Taylor said veterans are often faced with many obstacles when they return to civilian life that put them at risk for homelessness, including difficulties finding affordable housing and earning a livable income.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are roughly 70,000 veterans living in Brevard. “About 4,400 of those veterans are living below the government's poverty level,” said Taylor.

Since 2009, Taylor worked alongside his father at National Veterans Homeless Support. Taylor came on as the volunteer vice president a year after his father founded the organization.

Now he's continuing his father's mission leading National Veterans Homeless Support.

His father, who was awarded a Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and Combat Infantry Badge while in the Army, died of a heart attack on May 17, 2020. He was a humanitarian, always working to help struggling veterans clear government bureaucratic hurdles.

“My father passed away unexpectedly. We were right in the middle of the pandemic. Within two weeks, the board voted to have me take over as president of the organization.”

He continued, “In mid-2020, a lot of veterans were struggling to pay their bills. We had many requests for assistance. We didn't turn away one single veteran who was about to face homelessness. Last year, we had about 345 clients and 250 of those veterans were at-risk of losing their homes.”

On a single night in May 2020, more than 37,000 veterans were experiencing homelessness in the U.S. That is 8 percent of all homeless adults, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The estimated number of homeless veterans in Florida in 2020 was 2,436, according to Statista, a research firm.

As part of its effort to end homelessness and help veterans better their lives, National Veterans Homeless Support created the Post-Traumatic Stress Awareness program.

Seventy percent of U.S. adults have experienced a traumatic event. Almost 20 percent go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, experts estimate that up to 20 percent of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans, 10 percent of Gulf War veterans, and 30 percent of Vietnam War veterans have experienced PTSD.

In 1989, combat veteran George Taylor Sr. himself received therapy for PTSD.

To help service members perform better in the field, military training emphasizes the importance of certain traits associated with “traditional masculinity,” including self-reliance and suppression of emotion.

But when veterans return home, strict adherence to these traits can become detrimental, leading to more severe PTSD symptoms and making it more difficult to treat, according to research published by the American

Psychological Association.

Traumatic experiences, including combat, can lead to feelings of “powerlessness and hopelessness,” both of which are in direct opposition to what society expects of men: that they should be “strong and in control,” according to the research.

The discrepancy between reality and societal expectations can exacerbate PTSD symptoms. Research estimates as many as 23 percent of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan experienced PTSD.

One of the ways National Veterans Homeless Support raises funds to provide its programs and services is by hosting benefits in the community. “This quarter is our busiest time of the year for fundraisers,” said Taylor. “Fundraisers are very important to our organization.”

National Veterans Homeless Support will host its annual “TechRev's 5k for Homeless Vets” benefit at 8 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 7, beginning at Eau Gallie Square on Highland Avenue in the Eau Gallie Arts District of Melbourne. To register for this event, visit <https://runsignup.com/homestretch>.

On that same day, National Veterans Homeless Support will have its annual “Shrimp Boil” fundraiser from 1-6 p.m. at Kelly's Burgers and Beer, 650 N. Wickham Road in Melbourne. The meal is \$15. There will be entertainment and raffle prizes. Visit the website for more details on the Shrimp Boil.

“The money we raise from our community events helps support the programs and services that assist veterans,” said Taylor. “We have made huge strides through the years helping homeless veterans get back on their feet. We've been successful because of the dedicated volunteers of National Veterans Homeless Support and the involvement of the community.”

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