Looking Back, Looking Ahead

The Veterans Business Council continues to make its presence felt throughout Saratoga County by leading, and supporting, important Veterans initiatives. 2017 was another year filled with opportunities for our VBC members to make a difference in the lives of Veterans who need our help. We met that mission head on with enthusiasm.

Whether it is helping Veterans directly find jobs through our work as a council, or by supporting other Veterans organizations in their efforts to provide housing, food, and services to those in need, the members of the VBC are proud to be a part of the solution. We are truly honored to try to help those who defended our freedom and now need some assistance.

In these pages ahead you will hear more about our collective accomplishments from 2017 and our excitement for 2018. The VBC hopes you will continue to support our efforts and those of our colleagues taking care of Veterans throughout Saratoga County and our nation.
Chair’s Message

It seems like it was only yesterday that we held the very first meeting of the newly formed Veterans Business Council (VBC), a subgroup of the Saratoga Chamber of Commerce. Now, more than four years later, it is with extreme pleasure and a deep sense of responsibility that I have been chosen to be the next Chair, following the tireless leadership of our first two Chairs, Chris Homicz and Dan Colvin. With the dedicated efforts and assistance of more than 20 council members, all who are Armed Forces veterans, and Denise Romeo, VP of Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce, we have been continuing our mission of providing support avenues for the varied needs of the veterans in Saratoga County.

One individual’s compassion and efforts can make a difference to many veterans. And what a group can do is amazing! The pride about the people I have met in VBC, and being involved in the good work that we all are doing, means more than anything to me. Their continued commitment to serve our local veteran community is a testament to the character of each wonderful VBC council member.

After having met with veterans, hearing from them their personal stories of appreciation, I am deeply thankful to our local business community members for their high level of support. There is little greater reward than feeling the gratitude expressed by those who have been trained to protect our country and who have seen battle. Local businesses running programs sponsoring free cars to veterans needing reliable transportation to get to work, or connecting veterans to specialized training classes, to many other services, may open new doors to meaningful employment, personal life mastery, financial ease, and renewed engagement with life, friends, family.

Please talk with us about how we, together, can discover and create ways to give back to this group of America’s heroes, our Armed Forces veterans.

Karen Charbonneau
Chair, Saratoga County Veterans Business Council
2017 A Year Of Successes For The VBC

The following programs and initiatives were either led by, or supported by, the Veterans Business Council:

Clifton Park/Halfmoon EMS - Support for EMT tools for graduates

VCHC – Work stipend for veteran intern

Continued support of the Naval Base and their application for a $450,000 grant

Saratoga County Board of Supervisors
- Return the FAVOR
- Revolutionary Run

Firecracker 4 Military Cadence

Wreaths Across America

Honor and Serve Breakfast

Veterans Miracle Center Dinner

Saratoga Military Ball

SUNY Adirondack Vets Initiative

H&V Collision Center Car give-a-way

FourBlock – Mike Abrams (helps enlisted veterans integrate with the business world)

VBOC

Boots to Business

Connect with the VBC at www.saratoga.org/pages/veterans-business-council
Saratoga WarHorse

Five years ago, very few people would have known what you were talking about if you’d mentioned Saratoga WarHorse. The fledgling organization was in its first full year of operation as a non-profit 501(c)(3) and was finding its footing. Its mission: to assist U.S. military veterans suffering from the invisible, often disabling, emotional wounds of war.

The myriad of challenges faced by our veterans are fairly well-known to the general public: post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, to name some. Despite their best efforts, the veteran suicide rate remains above the national average for both male and female veterans.

Enter Bob Nevins of Saratoga Springs. Bob had served as a medical evacuation helicopter pilot in Vietnam from 1970-71, followed by service in the New York National Guard. Later, he became an airline captain for 24 years. Over the period of time following his Vietnam service, Bob became increasingly aware of the ever-rising rates of veteran suicides. It was a problem Bob simply could not ignore.

Although he is quick to allow that he is not a mental health professional, Bob was able to build a team and implement a unique and innovative method to help alleviate the debilitating emotional fallout of war. Since the program’s beginnings more than 800 veterans have gained a new lease on life, thanks to their participation in The Connection. The techniques developed by Melody Squier (Director of Equine Development and Lead Instructor) of Saratoga WarHorse, creates a highly personal one-of-a-kind experience. Through a purpose designed program, the veterans are able to form a deep and meaningful emotional bond with an off-the-track Thoroughbred. In effect, through The Connection, emotional channels are re-set and heart and brain are reconnected in a healthier way. To become a true believer in the program however, one only need see the emotional release that becomes so apparent on the veterans’ faces once The Connection has worked its magic.

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Saratoga WarHorse (continued)

Amazingly enough, thanks to the generosity of its supporters, Saratoga WarHorse is able to provide transportation, meals, and lodging free of charge to each veteran participant nationwide. This invaluable work has also expanded to a satellite facility in Aiken, South Carolina.

Saratoga WarHorse is gaining greater notice and recognition, too. The organization was the recipient of a 2013 National Jefferson Award honoring those who've made significant contributions to their communities and/or to society. In addition, The Connection is the subject of a long-term research study at the University of South Carolina. Saratoga WarHorse is also the subject of a PBS documentary to air nationwide in 2018.

Videos of actual sessions, as well as letters and testimonials from the veterans, confirm just how well the experience works. As Bob Nevins puts it: “We are not getting letters and emails thanking us for a great weekend. We get letters thanking us for changing lives.” Saratoga WarHorse relies on grants, donations and community support. For more information go to the website at www.saratogawarhorse.org or call 518-886-8131.

If you are a veteran or know of a veteran that could use our help, contact Bob Nevins at Bob@SaratogaWarHorse.org or 518-744-3600.

Photo Credit: Sharon Castro Photography, Saratoga Springs, New York
Thank You Dan Colvin!

The entire Veterans Business Council thanks Dan Colvin for his leadership during the 2017 year as Chairman of the Council. Dan was tireless in his efforts to help fellow Veterans find jobs through the VBC. He also led the charge on many efforts the VBC took on to support fellow Veterans organizations to raise funds, provide services, and promote awareness of Veterans issues. Dan will continue on the council as the Immediate Past Chairman. Thank you Dan and Semper Fi!

Members of the VBC, and their guests, recently attended The Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce’s 100th Annual Dinner to represent the council among the 1,000 attendees at the event.
The Veterans Business Council

**Executive Committee:**
Karen Charbonneau - Chair
Jason Collins - Vice Chair
Randal Hagen - Secretary
Michael Kennedy - Treasurer
Dan Colvin - Immediate Past Chair
Dave Cummings - Ad Hoc member

**VBC Members:**
Ally Andolina - DeCrescente Distributing
Emil Baker - ESGR
Chris Bozeth - General Electric
Karen Charbonneau - Miranda Real Estate Group
Erica Choi - Bank of America
Jason Collins - SUNY Empire State College
Dan Colvin - Momentive Performance Materials
Dave Cummings - Retired Army
Doug Dinon - General Electric
Greg Dixon - The Wesley Community
Ray Gagnon - JDog Junk Removal & Hauling
Randal Hagen - Ballston Spa National Bank
Chris Homicz - Regeneron Pharmaceuticals

Scott Iseman - O'Connell and Aronowitz, PC
Michael Kennedy - Saratoga Bridges
Bob Nevins - Saratoga WarHorse
Joe Pennell - Ayco
Keith Prairie - Martin’s Point Health Care
Michelle Taylor - Star Screen Print & Embroidery
Robert Van Pelt - AUSA Capital District of NY Chapter

For more information, contact:
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Connect with the VBC at www.saratoga.org/pages/veterans-business-council