

A Salute to Veterans

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**Will County Habitat for Humanity's
Veterans Build Program**



TAKING FLIGHT

Honor Flight Chicago has a mission to “Honor, Thank, and Inspire”

By ALLISON SELK
For Shaw Media

Fall of 2021, Army and Vietnam veteran Jerry Zeborowski boarded a plane with nearly 200 other veterans as part of the Honor Flight Chicago program, a program designed to thank veterans who sacrificed for our country and to show the memorials built in their honor.

Honor Flight Chicago has a mission to “Honor, Thank, and Inspire by building awareness and appreciation of the debt of gratitude America owes its veterans for their service and sacrifice for our nation.”

Honor Flight Chicago was founded in 2008 as a part of the national Honor Flight non-profit organization. It offers one day, all-expense paid trip for senior veterans to Washington D.C. to tour the memorials built to honor these veterans who fought in World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

According to the Honor Flight Chicago Web site, 6,329 WWII, 2,095 Korean War and 741 Vietnam War veterans have flown since its inception.

Zeborowski was drafted in 1969 and chose to stay in order to receive his choice of training; he chose military intelligence. After his time was up in the Army in 1972, he began his law enforcement career at Triton College and in 1983 took a position as chief of police at Joliet Junior College.

He said he was able to use his military background at JJC because both positions had similar disciplines such as rules, regulations, policies, chain of command and orders. He left JJC for a civilian job at Schaumburg Police Department, but returned at JJC in 2003 as a criminal justice/law enforcement adjunct faculty member and stayed until 2017.

Joliet Junior College Veteran Coordinator Cheryl Hlavac said, “Jerry would go above and beyond to help his students, especially our student veterans. Jerry

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would come into the VRC (Veterans Resource Center) to work one-on-one with a student to help them achieve success in his class. He understood that the transitions from the military to education can be difficult and was always willing to provide extra assistance."

In addition to his duties, he was the co-advisor of the Veterans Alliance student club where Hlavac said he was "welcoming and sincere in his approach to students in the club."

Zeborowski said this was his time to take a flight with his fellow veterans, an experience of a lifetime, for this Vietnam veteran. He said the experience began as soon as he arrived at Chicago Midway International Airport as he was handed dog tags, a Honor Flight Chicago shirt to wear, photos were taken and he was taxied to the gate in a wheel chair, as all veterans were for safety.

On the plane, Zeborowski said there was instant camaraderie amongst the veteran strangers. When they landed, they were put on a bus with a police escort to start their tour of Washington D.C.

The group drove by the Marine Corps War Memorial which shows the flag raising at Mount Suribachi during

the Battle of Iwo Jima, then off to various museums and memorials throughout the area. Zeborowski said the most memorable for him was the WWII Memorial because his father and uncle fought in WWII.

After a long day in Washington D.C., the veterans boarded the plane back to Chicago and experienced one last mail call while on the flight. Friends and family wrote letters to the veterans to thank them for their service, many of which never received decades ago when they returned from war.

On top of the letters of gratitude, Zeborowski said hundreds of people awaited their arrival at the airport to welcome them home, definitely something he did not experience when he returned from Vietnam.

"We took quite a beating coming home when in uniform," Zeborowski said. "It was difficult being called names and threatened, I didn't appreciate it."

Zeborowski said this welcome was quite a change as people clapped, cheered, students played instruments-he said, "It was an incredible day."

"This was a nice change, something I will never forget. The greeting at Midway was phenomenal. You have to experience it or see it to appreciate it," Zeborowski said.

He encourages any WWII, Korea or Vietnam war veteran to apply.



Photos provided

PHOTOS ON PAGE 2 and ABOVE: Jerry Zeborowski from his Honor Flight in the Fall of 2021.

Just two simple words ... **Thank You**

On Veterans Day and always, we remember your sacrifices and honor our freedom.



James I. Reeves
1918-1989 U.S. Army
Air Force 1943-1945
Pacific Theater
Operations



James W. Reeves
U.S. Navy
2003 - Present



Joseph L. Reeves
U.S. Navy
2009 - Present



Robert B. Baskerville
1923 - 1981
US Army 1942-1945
European Theater
Operations



Christopher J. Baskerville
U.S. Air Force
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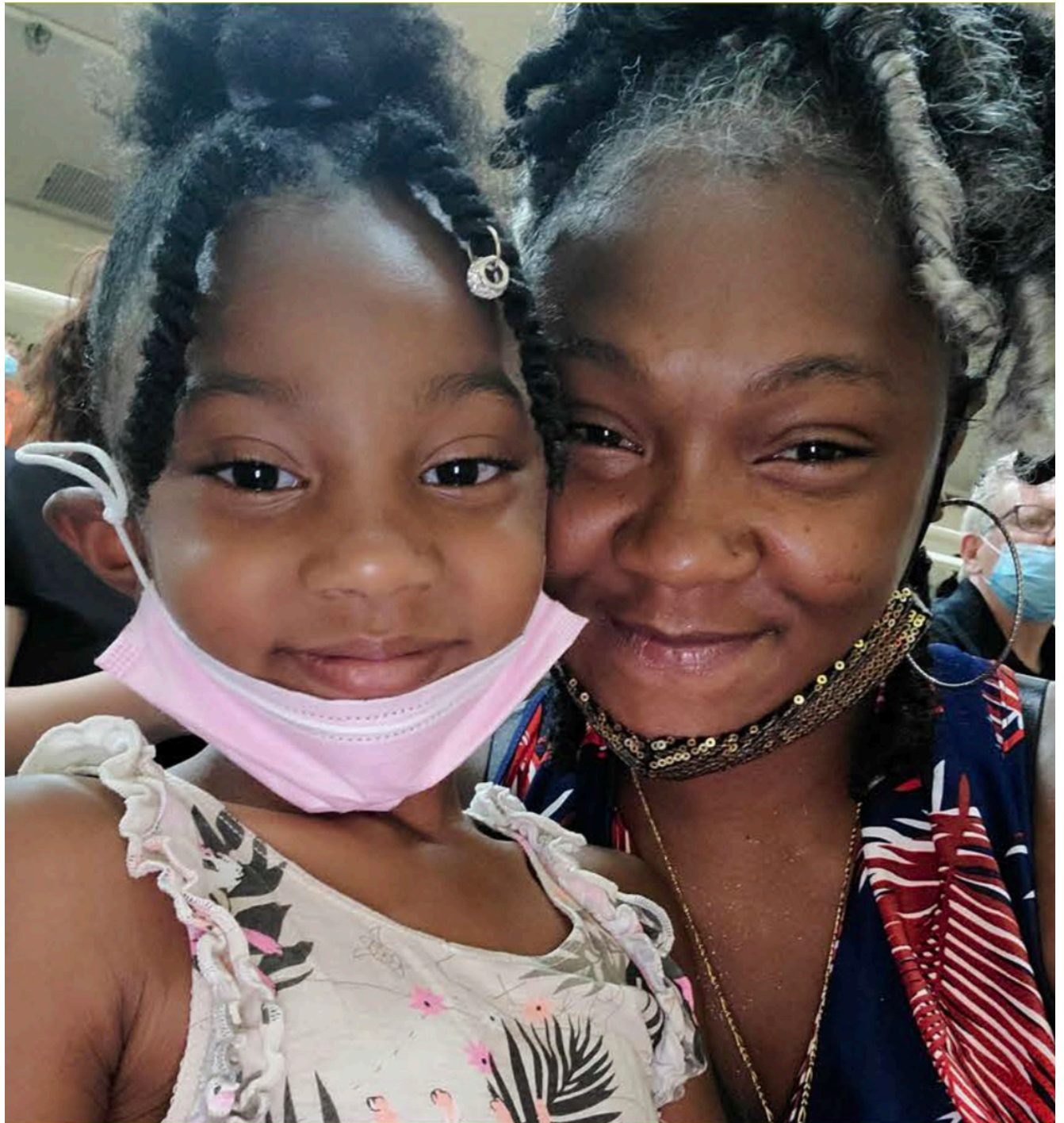


Photos provided

ABOVE: LaVonda Buford while serving in the U.S. Army.

RIGHT: Lavonda and Abigail Buford.

BELOW: LaVonda Buford volunteering with Habitat for Humanity.



VETERANS BUILD 2022

A new home for LaVonda and Abigail Buford

By **ALLISON SELK**
For Shaw Media

On Nov. 4, Will County Habitat for Humanity hosted a build-site program launch in Winfield as a part of its Veterans Build 2022 program.

Special guest Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Director Terry Prince said in a press release of the program, "A suitable home is the foundation for the well-being of a veteran and their family, especially given their service to defending our nation's freedom."

The Veterans Build Program, an arm of Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit provider for affordable housing, began in 2013 nationally and has been a part of the

Will County Habitat for Humanity since 2019, with the newest recipient, LaVonda Buford, being the third veteran housed in the county.

This year, a 2001 to 2003 Army Veteran, LaVonda Buford and her daughter Abigail will be the recipients of a new Habitat home located in Joliet. Buford joined the Army right out of high school to serve her country, and find her path and career. While in the military, she married and had a child. When she came off of maternity leave, she and her husband were to be deployed, so Buford made the tough decision to leave and was honorably discharged.

"I ask myself most days if I made the right decision. God does what He wants to do, this is the life I'm supposed to have," Buford said.

Buford and her daughter currently live in Hope Manor in Joliet, a housing complex for veterans and it was at a resource table at the manor where she saw information about the Habitat for Humanity Veterans Build Program and decided to apply.

"It was around the time of Covid so I was not working full time, and did not have enough for a mortgage," Buford said of her first application process. "But once I had a full-time job, I applied for a mortgage and had qualifying credit."

Will County Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Nicole Murray said home recipients must have the ability to pay for the mortgage as it's a hand

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up, not a hand out; must qualify as being a need-paying more than 30 percent of income for rent, crowded, unsafe or unhealthy conditions; willingness to partner with sweat equity hours.

Buford has worked at the Habitat for Humanity ReStore, volunteered in the community and on other Habitat projects so far, once her home begins to build, she will work on her home as well.

“We are getting the families out there and be invested-a part of it, with that comes more ownership and gratitude,” Murray said.

Chicagoland Habitat for Humanity Veteran Engagement Specialist Leslie Rodriguez said the sweat equity component can be important to a veteran.

“Especially veterans have a hard time asking for help, the sweat equity feels like a hand up instead of a hand out, Rodriguez said.”

After Buford was accepted for the home, the Habitat team needed to fundraise for this project. To date around \$210,000 has been raised toward the home cost. The Home Depot Foundation remains the lead sponsor of the area builds along with various veteran and corporate sponsors.

In addition, Jamie Albert of Will County Brewing found out the home

was for a veteran and connected Will County Habitat with breweries and Bridget Albert made bourbon connections which led to the creation of the promotion the House Beer & Bourbon Built. Will County Habitat for Humanity visited sponsor breweries and introduced the mission of the veteran build, the fundraiser was the Will County Beer and Bourbon Fest held May 21 at Hollywood Casino in Joliet, and breweries, bourbon distilleries, the Joliet Bourbon Club and sponsors have been scheduled to construct the home. All involved will share the moment as LaVonda receives the keys to her new home.

The build will take approximately a year and Buford said she can choose the siding, flooring, paint colors, her daughter wants a pink room, and other features as the build progresses. She said she’s grateful for this next step.

“I think this is an amazing opportunity, I live in a community built for veterans, which was a stepping stone. Finding Habitat was the next step in my veteran life-I may not have ever had the ability to own a home,” Buford said.

She wants to give back and also help fellow veterans. “I’m trying to get other veterans involved, recruit neighbor to volunteer and apply (for a home), someday I want to be able to work on their home.”

For more information visit chicagolandhabitat.org.



Lavonda and Abigail Buford.

Photo provided

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CANTIGNY POST 367

Annual Collection for Deployed Troops

Collection Deadline
Monday, November 14

Operation Care Package 2022

Monetary Donations Accepted for Care Package Mailings

Suggested Items for Donations:

FOOD
Oatmeal (Instant), Noodles, Beef Jerky, Granola Bars, Crackers, Cookies, Pretzels, Chips, Canned Fruit (pop top cans), Fruit Cups, Gum, Individual packets of Ketchup, Mustard, Salt, Pepper

TOILETRIES & HYGIENE
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OTHER
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Post and Auxiliary Meeting

2nd Thursday each Month 6:30 pm

Karaoke Fridays 7:30-11:30pm
Queen of Hearts Pot \$11,000 & Growing
Annual Collection Deployed Troops
Deadline
Monday, Nov. 14, 2022
Operation Care Package 2022

Veterans Day Ceremony 10am

American Legion Post 1080, 2625 Ingalls Ave. Joliet

ALL-TERRAIN CHAIRS

Vetank chair changes a veteran's life for the better

By **ALLISON SELK**
For Shaw Media

Army veteran Alan Roundtree lost both of his feet due to illness which hindered his ability to sell his art at fairs and enjoy the great outdoors, one of his favorite pastimes.

"I go hunting, fishing, do garden work, I can't do that in my wheelchair," Roundtree said.

Roundtree's ability to be independent changed for the better when AllenForce Founder and CEO Donna Allen Rielage, saw him at an event and told him about the Vetank program which provides all-terrain chairs for veteran use at no cost to the qualified veteran.

"With the Vetank, I can get around anything. I wouldn't be able to hunt, fish or sell my art without assistance, I don't need assistance with the Vetank," Roundtree said. "It makes me feel good to get out and do things."

AllenForce was founded by Allen Rielage in memory of her father and Army veteran Don Allen in order to serve veterans of all eras. The organization offers programs to veterans such as it's Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies, Vet Rec, She Force and the newer Vetank program with a goal "to promote a healthy and successful lifestyle for all veterans of all branches of the United States Armed Forces and their loved ones."

Allen Rielage said long-time volunteer, the late Gary Awalt, brought the idea of the all-terrain chairs to her after he saw how it had helped other disabled veterans become more independent. Awalt asked if AllenForce could offer some type of loaner program in order to help veterans live an inclusive life.

AllenForce now has two stand-up and two sit down all-terrain chairs through

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Photo Provided

Raul Basultu in VETANK, USMC Veteran, American Legion Post 335 and David Ruiz Veteran VFW Post 5979

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THIS VETERANS DAY
AND EVERY DAY!

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• ALL-TERRAIN

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donations and grants by Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation, Stumpy's Pub, Naperville Trackchair and a private veteran. The Plainfield Firefighter/Paramedics Local 4560 donated funds to purchase a trailer large enough for three chairs and a grant from Boeing allowed AllenForce to purchase a small 5 x 8 trailer for personal use with the loaner program.

"This trailer is all enclosed and has a solar charging system, so the veteran can borrow one small trailer and one Vetank and haul it out comfortably," Allen Rielage said.

Qualified veterans or family members of the veteran can contact AllenForce to use the Vetank for a day, a week or a month if needed and AllenForce takes the chairs to community and AllenForce events to allow veterans or families to participate more independently.

"The Vetank chairs provide inclusion in a way different than a scooter or hospital wheelchair. This vehicle, aside from accessibility it provides, looks cool and allows the veteran to operate under their own timeline, Allen Rielage said.

In addition to personal use, Roundtree takes the Vetank chair to events to show people how to use it and has even taken it to the home of a fellow veteran.

"I took it to a vet from one of my veteran organizations. He is 81 years old and he played with it for about three hours in his garden," Roundtree said. "The best benefit is more flexibility."

To find out more about the Vetank program or other programs and events through AllenForce, visit the web site allenforce.org.

Allen Rielage said the non-profit has a Veteran's Day pinning event on Nov. 11 from 7:30-9:30 p.m. at Garage Band Brewing downtown Plainfield.



Fishing Will County Rock Run, Donna Rielage, Army Veteran Samantha Bergstrom and her husband.

Photo Provided



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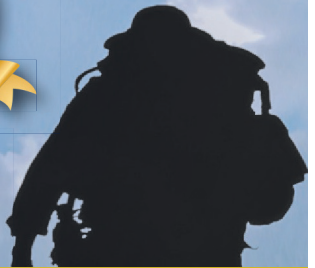
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