

New Cape Group Adds to Network Helping Veterans

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Supporting those who have volunteered to serve their country in the military is not a simple task.

It's not just about saluting the troops on Veterans Day.

It's not just paying your taxes to help support the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans have made a commitment to their country in a sacrifice that sometimes can create difficulties later in their lives due to a wound suffered in combat, problems with post-traumatic stress or some less-dramatic factors. They deserve a multi-layered network of support, both public and private, to provide assistance in difficult times.

A welcome recent addition to that cause is the Citizens-Veterans Advisory Council of Cape May County. The new charity is working to help military veterans who find themselves in crisis situations.

The group of about 40 volunteers has helped one local nonprofit secure a second van to transport veterans to VA clinics. They help with claims for disability and health insurance. And they even arranged for \$900 in repairs to one veteran's car so he could get to appointments with doctors and drive his daughter to school.

Organizers say their connections with hospitals, public-service agencies and other charities allow them to quickly solve problems when veterans need help the most.

The group is a complement to other groups and agencies - from the American Legion to groups like Disabled American Veterans - that work to help ex-military. The VA offers many services, but its huge bureaucracy can be a hindrance when there is an immediate need.

"Our thing is to help provide emergency help when people need it today," says Johnnie Walker, of Lower Township. "They can't wait six months or eight months. By then they're lost."

The Cape group is in the process of getting its official nonprofit status. Once that is attained, it can increase its fundraising efforts. The help those funds promise to provide will make things a little easier for a group of people who deserve all the gratitude their country can provide.