

FLORIDA VETERANS

A POPULATION AT RISK

STORY: PAT JOCELYN



The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs reports that Florida has the third largest veteran population in the nation—1.6 million strong. That's 12 percent of the state's population 18 and older.

Ironically, it's that same population that is in trouble—big trouble.

Why?

Veteran suicide rates in Florida are among the highest in the country. The Department of Veterans Affairs 2012 Suicide Data Report says that military and veterans account for nearly one in every four Florida suicides. Nationally, 22 veterans are committing suicide every day—that's one every 65 minutes.

In 2013, The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) reported that 44 percent of all homeless veterans in the nation live in just three

states: California, New York, and Florida, with Florida having the second highest rate. Local nonprofit organizations regularly assist groups of homeless veterans, some with young families, who live in the Ocala National Forest. At the national level, it's estimated that more than 150,000 vets and their families live in national forests.

dog. She finally got that dog because a local nonprofit intervened and assisted with much-needed funding.

These and other compelling situations all point to a large slice of Florida's population that needs help.

With that in mind, *Style* magazine is launching an in-depth series that will examine the major challenges facing Central Florida vet-

organizations in support of veterans that are competing for area volunteers and program funding. Discussions will review how to identify which nonprofits have the highest percentage rates of donations that are funneled directly into program support vs. paying for overhead, salaries, and administrative costs, etc.

Local veterans who have

This coalition provides a platform for nonprofits in support of veterans where members can share ideas, resources, and information.

Style will also provide overviews on projects like Veterans Village, a housing development being built in Leesburg in partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter and another nonprofit, Combat Veterans



"GOVERNMENT MONEY WHILE IMPORTANT IS LIMITED, AND AVAILABLE SERVICES ARE OFTEN AT CAPACITY. IT IS CRITICAL... THAT COMMUNITY GROUPS REACH OUT TO HELP PROVIDE THE SUPPORT, RESOURCES, AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT MOST AMERICANS TAKE FOR GRANTED... VETERANS WHO PARTICIPATE IN COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS ARE AFFORDED MORE SERVICES AND HAVE HIGHER CHANCES OF BECOMING TAX-PAYING, PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS AGAIN."

— NATIONAL COALITION FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

According to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, Florida has more than 249,000 disabled veterans, the third largest population in the nation. Critically disabled veterans, including multiple amputees, vets who are severely burned or veterans with debilitating PTSD, are returning home to Florida only to discover overburdened and complicated state and federal support systems. Those same systems are often unable to meet the vet's critical needs. One wheelchair-bound veteran living in Central Florida waited more than five years before she received a service

erans, existing support systems and organizations that are intervening on behalf of these veterans, and those areas of needed support that are severely lacking or not addressed at all.

Style will report on local businesses and nonprofit organizations providing housing assistance, educational opportunities, career counseling, job prospects, mentoring, and other support programs geared to helping veterans help themselves.

Local experts will share more detailed information about the growing number of Central Florida nonprofit

PTSD or were physically injured while in service to their country will share personal experiences about the daily challenges they face dealing with spouses, children, other family members, and relationships. They will discuss their greatest needs, how local organizations have helped, and where significant voids still exist.

Unique organizations and initiatives will be spotlighted like the newly formed Coalition for Florida Veterans, which was founded by David Booth, a nationally recognized combat veteran who is an expert on veterans' issues.

To Careers, this initiative is being specifically designed with veterans in mind.

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans believes the most effective programs for veterans at risk are those developed at the grassroots level including community-based nonprofit organizations, many of them run by fellow veterans.

It is *Style's* intention to support local veterans by providing insight into their dilemma and highlighting the initiatives that can help.