



NEW ENGLAND CENTER FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

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Gifts of Hope

Food for veterans in the toughest times

"With demands for services continuing to rise, Wicked Local has designated the nonprofit as this year's recipient of its annual Gifts of Hope fundraising campaign."

The third in a six part series of reports being published in December in local papers throughout Greater Boston, Gatehouse Media and www.wickedlocal.com selected the NECHV as the 2012 recipient for the "Gifts of Hope" features.

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Veteran Ed Turk prepares donated food for dinner for veterans at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans.

WICKED LOCAL **NEWTON**
WITH NEWS FROM THE NEWTON TAB

By Brad Cole
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Boston — U.S. Army veteran Ed Turk spent 25 years in the service, and continues to support his fellow veterans today.

Turk served with the 101st Airborne Division, 1st Armored Division, 2nd Infantry Division and 1st Cavalry Division, and was stationed everywhere from Vietnam to Germany to Fort Riley, Kansas, and was sometimes responsible for feeding 10,000 men on a daily basis.

"From soup to nuts, I've served everyone from generals to prisoners," Turk said. He is now the director of food services at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans and helps prepare 150,000 meals a year.

"This is just a continuation of my military service. My entire military career was taking care of soldiers. This is an extension of that," Turk said. "These guys coming in here, most of them just had a little hiccup in their lives and they are trying to get it back together... this goes a long way in helping them help themselves get back into the mainstream of life."

In the 19 years Turk has been with the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, the food service program has grown immensely.

"The food service program at that time (1994) was sketchy at best. It was a patchwork type of thing," Turk said. "We worked in a non-state-of-the-art kitchen my first four years here. In 1998, with funding, we are in the kitchen we have now, a modernized facility capable of supporting 800 meals."

Funding, however, is an issue. Turk only has a limited amount of money to work with, and depends on donations to bring variety to the kitchen.

"In the last 19 years that I've been here, we had been level funded," Turk said. "This year, it increased, because food costs have gone up considerably."

He said the community support of the program has been helpful. Numerous businesses, schools and churches donate money or food. Donors like Amtrak, the Milk Street Cafe and Boston College provide Turk with their leftovers. At the end of every day, the program receives a number of sandwiches from Amtrak. These sandwiches are often distributed the next day during lunch. On Thursdays, Boston College provides a significant donation. The Thursday, Dec. 6 donation included macaroni and cheese, ham and vegetable and beef lo mien.

"It gives a nice variety to the residents here," Turk said. "Under my budget, I can only serve certain foods to get me through the year. When a donation comes in, it is a breath of fresh air."

The program serves breakfast, lunch and dinner during the week and a brunch and dinner on weekends and holidays. Turk tries to provide residents with a variety of meals, including chicken, beef, pork and pasta. Donations can allow for meals like steak, turkey and seafood platters.

Stephen Cunniff, director of community affairs, said the program also accept gift cards to stores like Stop & Shop, Market Basket, Whole Foods and Shaw's.

"I'll take any store. I will go wherever that store is to spend money," Turk said.

Some groups donate by sponsoring meals, Cunniff said. Goodwin Procter and Bertucci's both sponsored meals around Veterans Day, while Temple Beth David of Westwood will sponsor the Christmas dinner.

Donations are also important in that a third of the center's budget is raised via private donations, Cunniff said.

It's a lot of food: the 150,000 meals help feed the hundreds of veterans who utilize the center. The center is at 98 percent capacity, with just under 300 veterans residing there. While not



Veteran Jackie Tyler prepares for lunch to be served at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans.

every veteran eats their three meals at the center daily, there is always a long line of veterans waiting to get a meal in the mess hall.

The veterans at the center realize the importance of the food service program. One such Army veteran is Jackie Taylor, who served in the 101st Airborne Division. Now, he is a resident at the center who serves as one of the cooks.

"Cooking is what I do. I've always enjoyed cooking," Tyler said. "Feeding people is something I've always enjoyed doing."

Tyler has been cooking for 40 years, has a culinary arts degree and owned his own restaurant for seven years. This allows him to offer support to the veterans at the center.

"I think it is very important. You have veterans that need to eat. They need nutrients to conquer what they are going through, and they are going through a lot," Tyler said. "Nothing soothes the body quite like a good meal."

Meals on Dec. 6 included sandwiches, chop suey and shepherd's pie. Meals were served by volunteers from Holcim. Volunteer Mark Walsh made his second trip to the center on Dec. 6.

"I've walked by here many times. Actually seeing what they do here is impressive," Walsh said. "I think it's crazy when they thank us for helping out when we should be thanking them for what they've done. It's humbling."

Cunniff said many companies volunteer with the food service program to serve meals to the center's many veterans. Other groups to volunteer at the center recently include BNY Mellon, Wells Fargo Bank, the nonprofit Boston Cares and numerous state employees.

"We get a ton of support, but that is not to say we don't need it. Almost every day, we need help and support," Turk said. "The volunteers are greatly appreciated. We really need them. They help us take care of our veterans."

The New England Center of Homeless Veterans is opened on New Years Eve 1989. Since then, it has been dedicated to assisting veterans who are facing or at-risk of homelessness. In addition to the food service program, they offer an addiction services program, a case management program, a housing program and a special needs program, among others.

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How you can help

You can donate money to the New England Center for Homeless Veterans.

Send a check or make an online donation. Check may be mailed to the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, 17 Court St., Boston, MA 02108 ATTN: Gifts of Hope. Or visit www.nechv.org or call 617-371-1882.