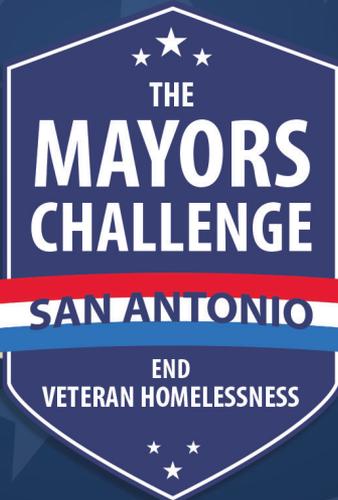


ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS



HUMAN SERVICES
CITY OF SAN ANTONIO



Mayor Ivy R. Taylor

In January 2015, I pledged San Antonio's commitment to the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. This challenge is part of the White House Joining Forces Initiative, supported by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the National League of Cities.

Specifically, the initiative challenged us to end Veteran homelessness locally by ensuring: no Veterans are sleeping on streets; every Veteran has access to permanent housing; and we have the capacity to improve housing stability for Veterans who become homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless.

Developing political will and public commitment to meet the goals of the challenge were key in establishing a foundation for success. Together, the City of San Antonio, non-profit providers and the business community created an effective system to move homeless Veterans into permanent housing and supportive services. Today, San Antonio has identified every homeless Veteran by name and has the capacity and a system in place to prevent Veteran homelessness whenever possible or ensure it is rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

I am proud to announce that San Antonio has effectively ended Veteran homelessness as defined by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. Collectively, as of May 9, 2016, we have housed or are in the process of housing 1,335 homeless Veterans. We have also developed a system to ensure that every Veteran has a place to call home in San Antonio. This system will continue to support Veterans who become or are at risk of becoming homeless in the future.

I applaud the efforts of our dedicated coalition of partners, the generous support of USAA, and the community's commitment to serve those who have served us. This strong network of providers played a critical role in meeting the goals of the Mayors Challenge by identifying Veterans, placing them in permanent housing, and providing ongoing case management. I would specifically like to acknowledge the Homeless Veteran Community Collaborative partners:

- ★ [City of San Antonio, Department of Human Services](#)
- ★ [South Alamo Regional Alliance for the Homeless \(SARAH\)](#)
- ★ [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs South Texas Veterans Healthcare System](#)
- ★ [American GI Forum National Veterans Outreach Program](#)
- ★ [Family Endeavors](#)
- ★ [San Antonio Housing Authority](#)
- ★ [Housing Authority of Bexar County](#)
- ★ [SAMMinistries](#)
- ★ [Haven for Hope](#)

This book provides a closer look at Veterans who have successfully transitioned out of homelessness through the work of these committed partners.

Although we have met the goals of the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, our work is not done. Achieving these objectives does not mean Veterans will never become homeless in San Antonio. San Antonio is "Military City USA" and the City and our community partners will continue to ensure San Antonio Veterans will have stable housing and needed support services to thrive.

THE MAYORS CHALLENGE

TIME LINE

In **January 2015**, Mayor Ivy R. Taylor kicked-off the San Antonio Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness



2015



The City of San Antonio Department of Human Services convened the Homeless Veteran Community Collaborative (HVCC)

- A working group of local homeless and Veteran providers, to assess and permanently house homeless Veterans
- Created dynamic by - name list of homeless Veterans



Developed strategy, provided community outreach, researched best practices, and held a community forum to engage the private sector, providers, media and other stakeholders



2016



Created SAPD IMPACT Teams

Initial point of contact in connecting the most chronically homeless and those with severe mental illness and addiction to HVCC partners and services



In January 2016, USAA contributed **\$2.1 million** to support permanent housing, navigation, and homeless move-in kits to strengthen our homeless continuum of care coordinated entry and assessment system

2017



1,335 VETERANS

As of May 9, 2016, over **1,335** homeless Veterans were identified, assessed, and have been or are in the process of becoming permanently housed including **123** who were chronically homeless

Today, San Antonio has a support system in place to ensure

- No Veterans are sleeping on the streets
- Every Veteran has access to permanent housing
- Our community has the capacity to prevent Veteran homelessness when possible or ensure it is rare, brief, and non-recurring

A photograph of Tommy Riester, a man with a grey beard and a tan cap, wearing a black t-shirt and a patterned scarf. He is holding a wooden staff with a bird's head on top. A dog is visible in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background shows a red metal structure and a white wall.

TOMMY RIESTER

U.S. Navy | Petty Officer
Second-Class

Tommy Riester served in the United States Navy as a Petty Officer Second-Class (E5) for nine years. During his service he was part of an amphibious construction battalion that provided ship to shore transport activities. When his tour of service was completed, he initially found employment in a warehouse which stored luxury cars and goods.

Later, Mr. Riester purchased a recreational vehicle to travel throughout the United States before deciding to settle permanently in San Antonio. While in San Antonio, he developed medical complications that prevented him from obtaining suitable employment and led to him becoming homeless. Finding it difficult to afford even a cane for ease of mobility, Mr. Riester decided to learn the craft of cane making and became a Master Cane Maker.

While at the Haven for Hope Prospects Courtyard, Mr. Riester met with an American GI Forum (AGIF) outreach specialist. AGIF helped him with his Veterans benefits and housing assistance. In a short time, Mr. Riester was able to move into an apartment of his choice. Due to his medical condition, his Navigator was also successful in helping him obtain a service dog named Cooper.

“I am grateful for Cooper and Teresa (Family Endeavors) for guiding me in the right direction and helping me with housing and services.”



JOHN
U.S. Marine Corps
| Corporal

John served as a Corporal (E4) in the United States Marine Corps for four years. He was deployed to Ramadi, Iraq as a Humvee Infantry Gunner and trained Iraqi soldiers. After serving his tour of duty, he worked as a car salesman, security guard, and at a ski resort making minimum wage.

He moved back to San Antonio to be close to family and attend college. He first enrolled at San Antonio College (SAC) and then transferred to Texas Lutheran University where he received a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Kinesiology. After graduation, John found it difficult to find employment in his new career field and continued to work at minimum wage jobs.

While attending college, John was able to stay with his family but his parents decided to sell their house. Unable to find an affordable place to live, John visited the American GI Forum (AGIF). Feeling depressed and overwhelmed by his situation, he found solace and comfort among his fellow Veterans.

The staff at AGIF helped motivate and inspire John by working with him to locate affordable housing and providing him with the necessary tools to find employment in his career field. John was recently hired as a fitness trainer for United Services Automobile Association (USAA).

“I am grateful for the professors who helped me with my education and the staff at AGIF for helping me change my outlook in life and finding me a place to live.”

ERIC McNEAR

U.S. Navy | Petty Officer
Second-Class



Eric McNear served in the United States Navy as a Petty Officer Second Class (E5) for 6 years where he worked as a Machinist Mate in the engine room on the aircraft carrier USS Ranger. Once out of the service, Mr. McNear made his living as a Disc Jockey (DJ) and lived in Las Vegas, Houston, and Atlanta. Through his profession, he was able to make a good living and afford a nice life.

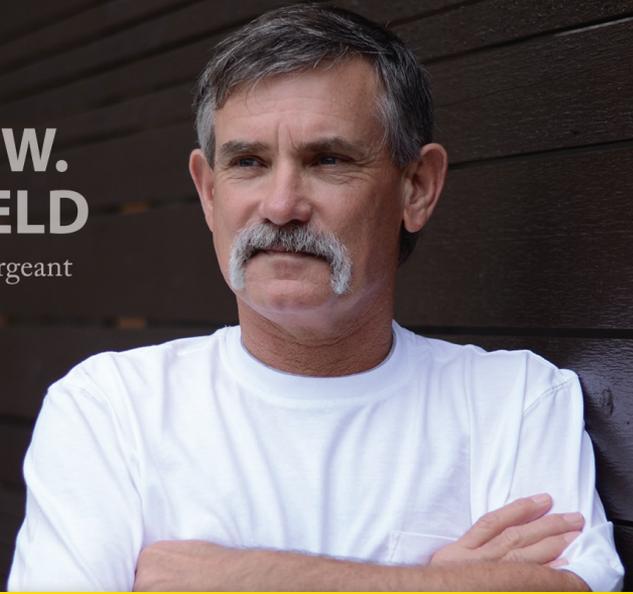
However, in Atlanta Mr. McNear developed a drug addiction that led to him losing his job, car, and high-rise apartment. He soon found himself living on the street before he made his way to San Antonio to live with a family member. When he arrived in San Antonio, he discovered one of the household members was a drug dealer and Mr. McNear relapsed into his drug addiction. Again, Mr. McNear was back out on the streets and was homeless for eight years.

One day, a friend that was also homeless, informed Mr. McNear about a program that helps homeless Veterans. Mr. McNear reached out to SAMMinistries and received a VASH voucher, food and medical assistance.

“SAMMinistries regularly checks up on me to see how I am doing. I am grateful to have food, shelter, a bus pass and to have a normal life once again.”

RONNIE W. MERRIFIELD

U.S. Air Force | Sergeant



Ronnie W. Merrifield served as a Sergeant in the United States Air Force for eight years. During his service, Mr. Merrifield worked on missile and munitions testing, maintenance, and equipment operations.

When he completed his tour of service, Mr. Merrifield went through a divorce and later moved to Texas where he worked at a variety of jobs including apartment maintenance, Coca Cola delivery driver, bus driver, truck driver, and retail manager for the Salvation Army.

Mr. Merrifield left the Salvation Army to seek better employment opportunities, but was unable to secure a new position and soon found himself homeless. Mr. Merrifield made his way to San Antonio and stayed at the Haven for Hope Prospects Courtyard. While at the Courtyard, Mr. Merrifield met a Family Endeavors Navigator who helped him transition from Haven for Hope into an apartment. The Navigator is also assisting him with employment training and searches.

“I am grateful for my children, my family, that the kids have finished college and Family Endeavors for the services they provide for Veterans.”

DUSTIN MARTINEZ

U.S. Navy | Petty Officer
Second-Class



Dustin Martinez held the rank of Petty Officer Second-Class (E5) in the United States Navy for seven years as a Military Police (MP) Master at Arms. Mr. Martinez was discharged from the Navy in 2011 and moved back to San Antonio.

The future looked bright for Mr. Martinez who earned both a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Human Resources and obtained employment with the Texas Attorney General's Office. Shortly, after accepting this position, Mr. Martinez received a call from his former wife, living in San Diego, asking if he could take care of their daughter due to an overseas deployment.

Not wanting to uproot his daughter, Mr. Martinez resigned his position, sold his possessions and moved to San Diego. When his former wife completed her tour overseas, Mr. Martinez returned to San Antonio but was unable to resume his old position and could not find other suitable employment. He found himself living out of his car and residing at homes of various friends.

Mr. Martinez credits his military experience in helping him adapt to his homeless situation and motivating him to seek assistance from the American GI Forum (AGIF). Through the AGIF, he received housing assistance and is very grateful for his family, friends, a place to live and access to food. He has a different outlook on homelessness now, Mr. Martinez is still job hunting, working on a second Master's, and continues to serve his community by volunteering at AGIF assisting his fellow Veterans.

“You don’t know everyone’s story.”



CHERYL

U.S. Army | Specialist



Cheryl served as a Specialist (E4) in the United States Army in both Reserve and Active Duty Status. She excelled in multiple career fields over an eight year enlistment to include: culinary arts, accounting, and nursing assistant.

Cheryl and her husband divorced after her military service and her husband and son moved to San Antonio while she and her daughter stayed in North Carolina. It did not take long for Cheryl to miss her son, so she sold everything and moved to San Antonio to be near him to see him graduate from high school.

At first, Cheryl and her daughter lived in hotels but her funds quickly depleted and she found herself forced to live on the streets. Cheryl went to the American GI Forum (AGIF) looking for assistance where she confided to her case manager that her divorce was due to domestic violence and that she and her daughter had nowhere to live.

AGIF worked quickly to house Cheryl and her daughter and also provided her transportation.

“I am grateful for everything, thankful for God, grateful for my military experience and grateful for AGIF.”

DAVID M. PECAROVICH

U.S. Army | Specialist



David M. Pecarovich served in the United States Army for four years with the rank of Specialist (E4). He provided depot-level maintenance support, logistics, and overhauling of Hawk Missile Systems. Upon completing his service, Mr. Pecarovich returned to school and traveled throughout the United States earning a living as a bartender.

Mr. Pecarovich returned home to Palm Springs, California where he developed a drug addiction and was incarcerated. Once released from jail, Mr. Pecarovich struggled to find employment and reached out to family for help.

Mr. Pecarovich's sister invited him to come to Texas, however he could not find employment. Mr. Pecarovich lived out of his car for three years near the Haven for Hope Prospects Courtyard. While at the Courtyard, he met a Family Endeavors Navigator who assisted him with Veterans Affairs (VA) registration to receive medical assistance through the VA medical care system. The Navigator also worked with the American GI Forum to help Mr. Pecarovich transition from the Haven for Hope campus to a new apartment.

Mr. Pecarovich just completed trucking school and received a Commercial Driver's License. He is currently seeking employment and has applied for several jobs.

“I am grateful for all the support from my family and the people who helped me get my life back. I am also grateful for having a safe place to lie down at night.”

SETH JARMON

U.S. Army | Private
Second-Class



Seth Jarmon served as a Private Second-Class (E2) in the Army for three years as a Hawk Missile crew member. Once out of the service, Mr. Jarmon obtained a job and built a stable home life. This stability was threatened when Mr. Jarmon developed a drug addiction that caused him to lose his job, home, and was sent to prison.

After completing this and several subsequent prison sentences, Mr. Jarmon made his way to the American GI Forum (AFIG). AFIG helped Mr. Jarmon access Veteran Assistance benefits and enrolled him into their AGIF Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program.

With the support of AGIF, Mr. Jarmon also reached out to the Veterans Affairs Office (VA) and was transferred to Villa Serena, A South Texas Veterans Healthcare System substance abuse rehabilitation center, where he enrolled in Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) and was provided a supportive housing voucher. CWT is a vocational rehabilitation program that matches and supports Veterans in competitive jobs.

Eventually, Mr. Jarmon applied for and was hired into a position at the AGIF. Today, he works as an Outreach Worker and helps other Veterans who are experiencing homelessness find homes. At the AGIF, Mr. Jarmon's experiences and success serve as a beacon of hope to fellow Veterans who may be struggling.

“I am grateful to have another chance at life and that I am not dead or in prison.”



DARRELL G. PARKS JR.

U.S. Army | Private
Second-Class



Darrell G. Parks, Jr. served in the United States Army as a Private Second-Class (E2) for 13 months in logistics with a specialty in food and ammunition supply control. When he completed his tour of service, Mr. Parks found it difficult finding employment that paid a living wage and did various odd jobs including plumbing and landscaping.

Due to financial hardship and lack of employment opportunities, Mr. Parks soon found himself separated from his wife and children. He continued to seek employment and tried to improve his situation but eventually became homeless. During this time, Mr. Parks was diagnosed with diabetes and with his health failing, sought help through the Veterans Administration (VA).

He also enrolled in the American GI Forum (AGIF) transitional housing program and started receiving medical treatment for his diabetes from the VA.

While in the AGIF Transitional Housing Program, Mr. Parks also made contact with a Family Endeavors Navigator who is presently assisting him with finding an apartment and employment.

“I am grateful for God and the VA for helping me with my medication, and assistance with diabetes and a knee problem.”

A portrait of Robert Gill, a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark olive green trench coat over a maroon sweater. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a wall of horizontal wooden planks.

ROBERT GILL

U.S. Army | Specialist

Awarded nine Air Medals during his tour, Robert Gill served a total of six years in the United States Army and held the rank of a Specialist (E4) when he left the service. During his tour, he was deployed to South Vietnam as a door gunner on a UH-1C Huey Helicopter.

Upon leaving the service, Mr. Gill developed a drug addiction and soon after began to sell drugs. Mr. Gill was incarcerated for 26 years for drug related offense and was finally released in 2015 under the Presidential Clemency program. During his incarceration, Mr. Gill spent his time educating himself, studied law, and was a model inmate. After his release from prison, Mr. Gill was a resident at Cross Point Inc., a halfway house that offers specialized programs for both former inmates and Veterans.

Mr. Gill also worked with the local Veterans Affairs (VA) office to obtain additional services through the Family Endeavors Navigator program. The assigned Navigator mentored and assisted Mr. Gill with his VA benefits and guided him through employment searches and housing placement using his Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Voucher.

Today Mr. Gill is working as a paralegal at a local law firm and is enjoying his new independence.

“I am grateful to have shelter, it allows a person to function, feel secure, have privacy and be self dependent.”

**If you know a Veteran in need of housing
or would like information on donating to help our
continued fight to support Veterans and their families
who may be struggling in the community,
please contact:**

**(SARAH) The South Alamo Regional Alliance
for the Homeless
1 Haven for Hope Way Ste. 3.301
San Antonio, TX 78207**

**210.220.2382
contactsarah@sarahhomeless.org**



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