



U.S. Rep. Alma S. Adams (NC-12), visible as second from the right, shares lunch with homeless veterans and members of her staff and the staff of Veterans Helping Veterans Heal on Friday, May 22.

## U.S. Rep. Adams visits veterans homeless center in Winston-Salem

BY ERIN MIZELLE  
FOR THE CHRONICLE

On the morning of Friday, May 22, and on the eve of the Memorial Day holiday weekend, U.S. Rep. Alma S. Adams (NC-12) was nowhere to be found that one might expect — she wasn't in a secured meeting room in Washington, D.C., and she wasn't off working on her recently announced amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), recommending improved medical care for service members with PTSD and mental health disorders.

She was, instead, where it mattered most, side-by-side with the ones who have fought day-in and day-out for our freedom.

Adams was with the veterans. For over two hours, she walked and talked with everyday heroes, right in the midst of Winston-Salem, during a tour of the Veterans Helping Veterans Heal (VHVH) Center, at 3614 Glenn Ave.

Veterans Helping Veterans Heal, a

transitional housing program for homeless veterans, is a two-year residential program for male veterans in Forsyth County that provides shelter, life-skill and financial literacy training for those in need to become self-sufficient through the help of case-workers, like senior lead case manager Marques Ford.

"I tell my staff, 'Don't work harder than the vet; it is their life and their plan,' and we try to hold everyone accountable to that," Ford said. "Ultimately, if the vets are going to be successful, they have to buy into their own life. But, if they are willing, I will walk hand-in-hand with them through their journey and help get them to a better place than when they came in."

Adams needed to look no farther than across the table to find all the affirmation she needed.

"After a workforce reduction, I lost my house, my job, and my marriage — all within one month. I ended up being homeless for five or six years. Ever since that time when I first came here (to VHVH), I have

been getting better and better, and a lot of it is because the staff here is so hopeful. They helped me get my life back together," said Mark McCray, SS.

"I have learned how to reach out to people who are there for me to help me through these things, these challenges that I face on a regular basis," said Charles Hinnant, U.S. Army. "I have a great support system here — I always thought the streets were helping but, but they weren't at all. I have a lot of people on my side that I never knew I had, and I appreciate the VHVH for every thing they have ever done for me."

After the grace was given and the lunch was finished, Adams and her staff left the Veterans Helping Veterans Heal center with an even greater appreciation for those who serve our country, saying numerous times how much she appreciated the words and stories shared with her on that special tour with several of the over 37,000 veterans in North Carolina's 12th Congressional District.



HARRY Executive Director Ciat Shabazz (second from right) with veterans (left to right, standing) James Broadway, Woodrow Haney, Melvin Davis Jr. and (sitting) Ronald Ferguson.



Alfonzo Boyd is one of the attendees at the HARRY Veteran Community Outreach Services' seventh annual Commemoration and Picnic.

### Veterans

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Adams' outreach director. State Rep. Paul Lowe, whose wife is a veteran; Mayor Pro Vivian Burke, whose late husband was a veteran and Mayor Allen Joines all spoke.

Joines said that the city has a goal to eliminate homelessness among veterans by 2016.

"I feel very confident that we'll be able to announce before the end of the year that we've ended veterans' homelessness in Forsyth County due to a lot of individuals, a lot of organizations that have supported us."

The effort is part of the Zero: 2016 campaign being led by Community Solutions, a New York based nonprofit, with 69 communities across the nation taking part, including Greensboro. Locally the United Way, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Homes 4 Our Heroes and HARRY are among those helping veterans find services and permanent housing to get Winston-Salem closer to its goal.

Many of the veterans that are part of HARRY where on-hand helping with Monday's activities. HARRY Board Member Ret. Sgt. Alfonzo Boyd served 10 years in the Marines. He said it was a childhood dream of his to serve because his father

was a Marine. Boyd, who fought in the first Gulf War, said transitioning from a structured military life back into a civilian one was challenging, especially with complications like post-traumatic stress disorder, which is very common among combat veterans. He said HARRY helped both him and his father get their VA benefits.

Another HARRY volunteer, Ret. Staff Sgt. Melvin Davis Jr. served six years in the Army, which included seeing combat in the Vietnam War. He said anyone who serves in combat never forgets the experience and he knew soldiers who lost their lives in the war.

"I can't speak for them, but I feel if they were here, they'd tell you they'd done it for their country," he said.

A purple heart recipient, he said that he had to enlist the aid of a congressman to get his VA claim started. He said he still experiences complications from those old war wounds and still has to fight for his VA benefits.

HARRY Founder and director Ciat Shabazz wore earrings adorned with a photo of her late brother Harry Smith, a veteran who died of colon cancer that was undiagnosed and untreated by the VA. It was his difficulties with the system led her to found HARRY. Though veterans still have a lot of require-

ments they must meet to get benefits, Shabazz was hopeful about change at the VA, which had a booth at Monday's event where VA Winston-Salem Regional Office Director Cheryl Rawls spoke onstage.

"This director here is definitely interconnected with the veterans and trying to meet the needs of the veterans," said Shabazz. "She has an open door policy, you can email her, you can talk to her."

Rawls, who is an Army veteran, became head of the local VA office, which processes claims for North Carolina and other states, after it had made national headlines in 2012 when the sheer amount of backlogged paperwork appeared "to have the ability to compromise the integrity of the building" according to an inspector general report. There were 1,481 claims that were 2 years old when a massive initiative began to get those claims completed. By September 2014, Rawls told a veterans town hall meeting that the number of claims that were over 1 year old had been reduced by 94 percent.

On Monday evening, at 6 p.m. in the Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum, a more somber commemoration was held, as the name of every fallen service member in Forsyth County since World War I was read.

### Juneteenth volunteers sought

The 11th annual Juneteenth Festival will be held Saturday, June 20, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the historic Winston Mutual Building on Fifth Street and Martin Luther King Drive.

Volunteers are needed to help with set-up, children's area, stage, parking and information. Food vendors and exhibitors are also needed.

For more information, please visit [www.triadculture.org](http://www.triadculture.org) or call 336-757-8556. Contact e-mail is [info@triadculturalarts.org](mailto:info@triadculturalarts.org).

May 31st is World No Tobacco Day. Interested in quitting? Email [info@smokefreeforsyth.org](mailto:info@smokefreeforsyth.org) for more information on Cessation courses starting in July!



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Join us as we embark upon our 25th Anniversary year! We're honoring our intergenerational wisdom, strength, and knowledge to build stronger, safer, more self-determined neighborhoods.

We are honored to have our Keynote Speaker Hazel Mack, Regional Managing Attorney at Legal Aid NC; Founder & President of Carter G. Woodson Charter School

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To purchase tickets or for more information, contact (336) 602-2519