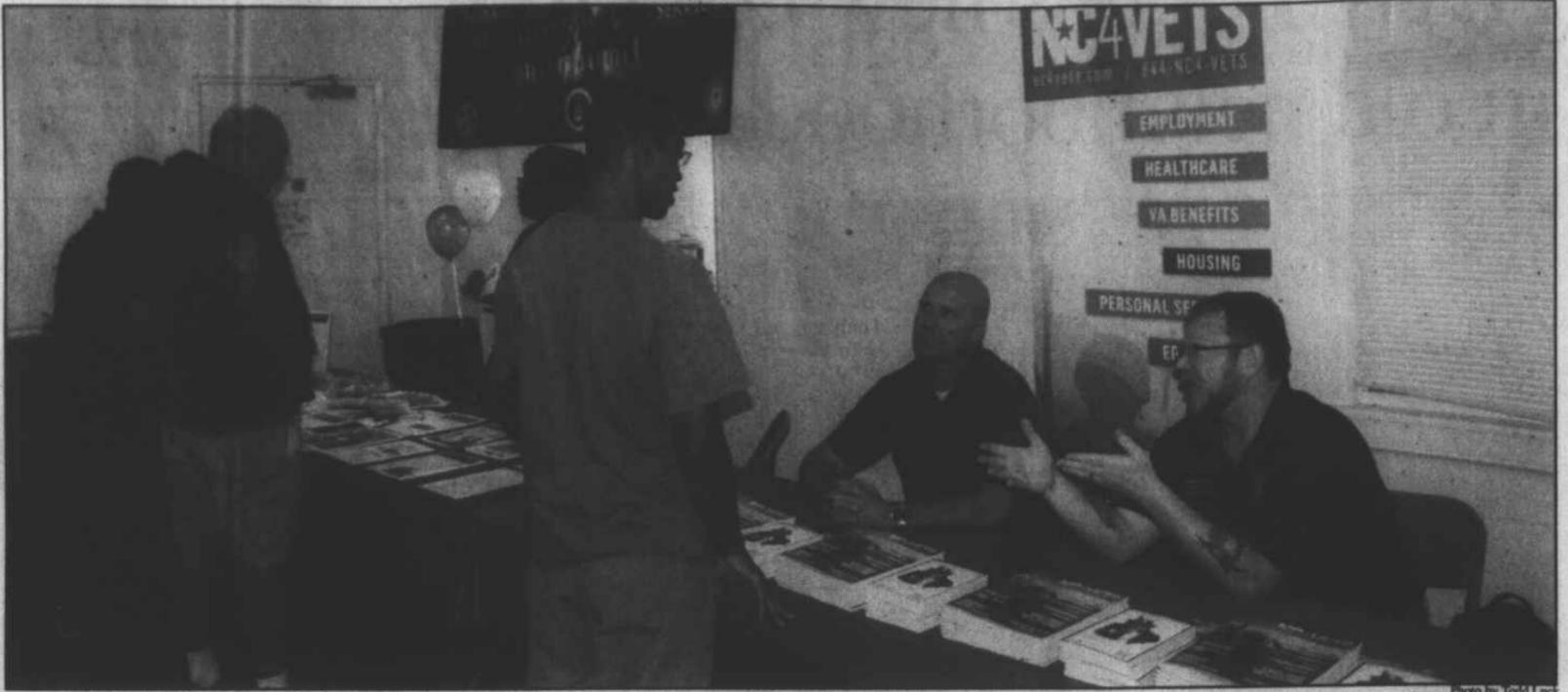


VETERANS DAY



Veterans check out the service providers at last week's events.

Photo by Todd Luck

Homeless vets get meal and assistance at local event

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Homeless veterans enjoyed a meal and a chance to connect with services at the Operation Corps event held Thursday, Nov. 5, at American Legion Post 55.

Op Corps was started by two local Veterans Affairs employees, Doc Digsby and Clarice McNeil, who are both Marine Corps veterans. It's the third time the duo has held the luncheon and resource fair for homeless veterans. Shelters and organizations that serve the homeless from around the area, not just Forsyth County, brought their veterans to the outreach event, which was sponsored by the Winston-Salem Regional VA office.

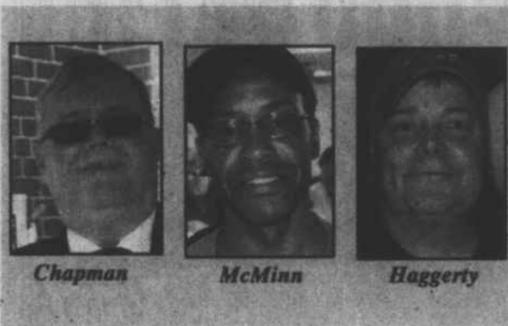
"No man or woman who comes home should ever have to wonder where

their next meal is coming from," said Digsby.

Though the City of Winston-Salem declared an end to veterans homelessness recently, meaning veterans identified in the homeless service system get housing within a matter of weeks, it still takes a lot of effort to get homeless vets back on their feet. The VA has been a part of that effort, said VA Veterans Service Center Manager Doug Chapman. The VA has homeless coordinators that work with local shelters to identify veterans and help get them into housing. Homeless veterans also have expedited claims that are processed within 75 days.

"No veteran should be homeless," said Chapman.

VA staff served veterans a meal donated by Golden Corral on University Parkway. The VA was also offering claims assistance, flu shots,



vocational rehabilitation and other services to the vets. Other organizations there included DAV, a disabled veterans non-profit that co-sponsored the event; Veterans of Foreign Wars; Goodwill Industries' military and veterans employment program Operation: GoodJobs; and the state's veteran services, NC4Vets. U.S. Rep. Alma Adams' outreach director, Earline Parmon, was also there.

Veterans Helping Veterans Heal (VHVH), a

local transitional housing facility for homeless veterans, brought several of its current residents to the event. VHVH offers case management and a variety of services to veterans staying in its 24-bed facility to make sure they can become self-sufficient again and stay that way. The average length of stay is eight months and vets can stay there up to two years.

Coast Guard Veteran Michael Hall was among those staying at VHVH

who were at Wednesday's event. He said that he arrived there a couple months after being incarcerated for a probation violation. During his incarceration he lost everything and had no place to go once released. He was grateful to find services that helped him.

"It's been a blessing to be there and get the help that they're providing," he said.

Army Vet. Joe Haggerty, who is also staying at VHVH, said he learned about Goodwill's services at the event and plans to take them up on offers for clothing, job interviews and truck driver training.

Haggerty has been homeless since he was laid off from his job as an executive at Parade magazine in 2011, after a long career working on the business side of the newspaper industry. He said the com-

bination of losing his job and his wife through divorce at the same time proved too much for him. Depression and alcohol abuse prevented him from regaining employment causing him to lose everything. He's stayed with friends, moving every couple months when he'd worn out their patience.

He said at first he was worried about going to a facility for homeless vets, but instead found himself impressed by VHVH's facility, services and the vets staying there, which he says are helping him tremendously. He said he was also touched by the reception he got at the Op Corps event.

"It's a humbling experience, to walk in and be honored by the friendliness of the people," he said, adding that everyone there made him feel accepted.

New N.C. secretary: 'We're serious about our veterans'



USMC Major General (ret.) Cornell Wilson Jr., is sworn in as N.C. secretary of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

The man who was over 81,000 Marines and civilians is now over a new Cabinet-level department and says the N.C. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is committed to veterans.

USMC Major General (ret.) Cornell Wilson Jr. was sworn in last month as secretary of the state's new Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Wilson has been Gov. Pat McCrory's Military Affairs advisor since October 2013. He now has a cabinet-level position that leads the new department that serves the military and veterans. Wilson served in the Marine Corps from 1972 to 2010, climbing in rank until he became Commanding General of U.S. Marine Forces, Southern Command, which covers the Caribbean and South America.

He oversaw a \$1.5 billion budget and 81,000 Marines and civilians.

Wilson said the new department, which has about 100 employees on staff, demonstrates the state's commitment to veterans.

"It all says a lot about North Carolina," he said. "We're serious about our military, serious about our veterans."

The department serves a sizable population. North Carolina has the fourth largest military presence in the country with 100,000 active duty military personnel, along with those serving in the

National Guard and Reserves. The state has almost 800,000 veterans, giving it the nation's eighth largest veterans population.

Wilson said the department will work to resolve issues involving military bases and their surrounding communities. For example, it will try to ensure windmills or tall buildings don't impede the flight paths around military bases, interfering with their ability to train. He said North Carolina did well in the latest Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process and wants to make sure bases continue to perform well so they won't be considered for closure in any future rounds of BRAC.

"We think we're in pretty good shape in North Carolina, but we still want to make sure we do everything we can to improve the military value of the installations, so if a BRAC does come around, we're in good shape," he said.

The existing Veterans Affairs division is now under the new department. NC4Vets, as the state's veterans affairs is known, provides services and referrals to veterans, such as helping them with their federal Veterans Affairs claims. It also provides a comprehensive guide of veterans resources available online and in print.

Wilson said North Carolina has made strides to help veterans, including offering in-state college tuition to veterans. The state also implemented a pilot program, NC Military Pipeline, to help those transitioning from military to civilian life find

jobs. The state is offering them training, job search assistance and letting them count their military experience toward civilian jobs.

"There are employers looking to hire veterans but they're not quite sure how to do it, so we put programs in place to bridge that gap," he said.

Wilson said the department will be

working with the American Legion and other veterans organizations to find and solve veterans issues.

Those who need assistance from the state's Veterans Affairs division can call 844-NC4-VETS or visit nc4vets.com.

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