By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

Giving Thanks, Giving Hope

Veterans Inc.'s Holiday Harvest offers veterans, troops and military families all the ingredients for a happy Thanksgiving...with side orders of supportive services, education and training, counseling and housing assistance

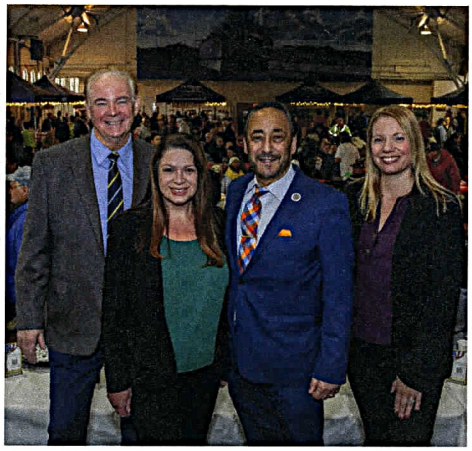




Thanksgiving is one of America's most treasured holidays, a time when families gather around sumptuous, full tables and share time-honored dishes and camaraderie. But in the midst of plenty, many veterans, active-duty troops and military families are going hungry, unable to afford to celebrate this special time. A veteran-run nonprofit organization, Veterans Inc., is dedicated to making sure that veterans and military families can partake of the seasonal bounty through its annual Holiday Harvest event, taking place this year on Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2026, at the group's headquarters in Worcester, MA.

"Veterans Inc. began 35 years ago when I and our Executive Director, my lifelong friend Denis Leary, realized that the national problem of veteran homelessness was reflected right here in Worcester, Massachusetts," explains Lt. Col. Vincent J. Perrone, USAF (Ret.), President & CEO, Veterans Inc. "The founding idea was simple: a veteran should never have to sleep on the street in the country he or she served.







"Holiday Harvest grew out of what we were seeing in our own programs," he continues. "Our staff kept meeting veterans, many of them working and housed, who were quietly going without a Thanksgiving meal because the budget didn't stretch that far. What began as a modest turkey distribution has become one of our signature events, now serving more than 700 full meals to veteran families every Thanksgiving."

Perrone has served as president and CEO of Veterans Inc. since he and other veterans founded the organization. "After retiring from the Air Force and a period as Director of Global Government Marketing at EMC Corporation, I joined a grassroots movement to address veteran homelessness in Worcester, MA, my hometown and the second largest city in New England," he recalls. "Our headquarters is the historic 1895 National Guard Armory in Worcester. Generations of soldiers drilled in that building before deploying, and today it serves veterans who have come home. There's a continuity in that we take seriously.

"Our connection to the military isn't just institutional; it's personal," he adds. "Many of our staff, from leadership to case managers, are veterans themselves. We know what transition looks like from the inside."

According to Perrone, Veterans Inc. initially opened its doors to meet the most immediate needs of homeless veterans living on the streets: a bed and three-square meals a day. Today, the organization has grown into New England's largest provider of services to veterans and their families, operating across all six New England states as well as Montana and North Dakota. "In that time, we've served more than 120,000 veterans and family members, and today we serve between 5,000 and 6,000 each year," he notes.

The Holiday Harvest event is held every year on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, and is open to all current and former members of the armed services in need of food for their households. Information and sign-up are at: www.veteransinc.org/events/holiday-harvest/

"We transform the indoor drill hall of our headquarters into a farmers' market," Perrone says. "Veterans and their families walk the hall and choose their own fresh produce and canned goods, then pick up a turkey, all the trimmings, stuffing and dessert. We designed it that way on purpose. Handing someone a pre-packed box is efficient, but letting a family choose what they'll cook for Thanksgiving at our farmer's market preserves their dignity and makes for a fun family experience.

"It's also a day that veterans can come together to spend time with one another and feel the camaraderie of shared service," he continues. "We're also very proud of our extensive list of community partners and volunteers who help make this day possible. Last year's sponsors included TJX, Raytheon, Santander Bank and many more.

"Holiday Harvest is the centerpiece of a busy fall season for us," Perrone adds. "We hold our annual Veterans Day pancake breakfast, our Veterans Week 5K charity run/walk/roll, our Substance Use Recovery Summit, and our holiday toy and coat drive, which last year put more than 4,000 winter jackets on veterans' families and 4,500 toys under their children's trees."

The Holiday Harvest is just one small facet of Veterans Inc.'s services; the organization offers a full suite of benefits and assistance to veterans and military families year-round. Core programs include:

- **Employment and training, supported in part by the Call of Duty Endowment, which helps veterans, including those recently separated, translate their military experience into civilian careers, as well as the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program, which seeks to help unhoused veterans regain their independence through employment.**
- **Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), which helps veteran families who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing, preventing a crisis before it can happen.**
- **Benefits counseling, so veterans and families receive everything they've earned.**
- **Behavioral health and long-term substance use treatment, including medically assisted treatment for veterans and their adult family members who suffer from substance use disorders and Post Traumatic Stress.**
- **Suicide prevention and education through the SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program, which is a critical lifeline in stemming the tide of veteran self-harm in our communities.**
- **Housing, from emergency shelter through transitional and permanent housing.**

"Our mission is to help veterans and their families achieve stability, independence and a good quality of life," Perrone asserts. "The goal isn't just to get someone off the street; it's to get them into permanent housing, meaningful work, good health, and a community that has their back. We reach that goal by treating the whole person and the whole family. Housing, employment and training, benefits counseling, behavioral health, long-term substance use care, and suicide prevention aren't separate programs to us; they're the pieces a veteran needs to put a life back together, and we deliver them under one roof wherever we can.

"We also believe in meeting veterans early, before crisis hits," he continues. "That's why so much of our work focuses on transition: the service member who separated six months ago and is quietly struggling to find work, or the family that doesn't yet know what benefits they've earned. Reaching them at that stage prevents the homelessness, addiction and despair we were founded to address."



Veterans Inc. works with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, state veteran's agencies, veterans service offers, social media and outreach staff to get the word to service members who are transitioning to civilian life, veterans and their families. "Honestly, the most powerful referral is a veteran we've helped telling another veteran to call us," Perrone points out.

"Eligibility for our other programs varies because many are funded by federal grants with their own criteria," he explains, nothing that funding comes from a combination of federal grants, state contracts, corporate sponsorships, foundation support and individual donations. "In general, our services are available to veterans of all eras and all branches, including the Guard and Reserve, and to their families. Our benefits counselors and intake staff work with each veteran to determine which programs fit, and if we can't help directly, we connect them with someone who can. Nobody who calls us gets turned away without a next step."

Perrone says Veterans Inc. tries to reach separating service members early, before problems arise. "The challenge we see most often is the transition itself: A service member leaves a structured world with a clear mission, a steady paycheck, housing, and health care, and within months the family is navigating civilian employment, a new community, and a benefits system that can feel impenetrable," he explains. "Financial stress builds quickly. And the habit of self-reliance that served them well in uniform can keep them from asking for help until things are serious.

"Layered on top of that are the invisible wounds: post-traumatic stress, moral injury, traumatic brain injury, and substance use that often begins as self-medication; families carry these too," he continues. "What works is early, integrated support. That's why we've built our services to address the whole picture at once."

Perrone urges military families to reach out before they think they need to. "Veterans Inc. exists for you, not just for the veteran in crisis on the street," he asserts. "If someone in your household is separating from service, or has recently, we can help with the job search, the benefits paperwork, the housing question, and the harder conversations. You've earned it, and asking isn't weakness."

Perrone also urges people without a direct connection to the military to get involved. "The veterans we serve don't need charity as much as they need a community that keeps its promises," he declares. "Holiday Harvest works because our community partners, non-profit networks, along with hundreds of volunteers and individual donors, show up every year. If you want to be part of that, we'd welcome you at **https://www.veteransinc.org/**

"Thirty-five years in, our mission hasn't changed: no veteran should be left behind," Perrone adds. "We just keep finding better ways to keep that promise. As our motto says: *'They were there when we needed them; we must be there now that they need us.'"*

Changing Lives

Veteran's Inc. hopes to serve every veteran in need, and the organization keeps expanding to reach more individuals and families. "A veteran might come to us with nowhere to sleep and leave, months later, with a permanent apartment, a job, and a treatment plan that's working," explains Lt. Col. Vincent J. Perrone, USAF (Ret.), President & CEO. "Another might never need a bed at all, just help translating a military resume into a civilian one, or a benefits counselor who finds the compensation they didn't know they'd earned. Two stories that show what that looks like are below:"

"**Marcus** served two tours with the Army in Afghanistan and came home to a job that disappeared within a year. When his marriage ended, so did his housing. He spent most of a winter sleeping in his car in a shopping center parking lot. An outreach worker from Veterans Inc. found him at a local food pantry in February. Within a week he had a bed in our transitional housing program at the Armory, a case manager, and a benefits counselor who discovered he'd never filed a disability claim for the injury that made him leave the Army in the first place. Over the next year he moved through treatment for the drinking that had crept in, started working again through our employment program, and was approved for a HUD-VASH voucher. He signed the lease on his own apartment in Worcester 18 months after we met him. Last November he came back to the drill hall for Holiday Harvest to help hand out food to veteran families."

"**Abby** separated from the Air Force after eight years with a husband, two kids and a transition plan. The plan didn't survive contact with the civilian job market. She sent out dozens of applications and heard almost nothing back, and by month five the family was behind on rent. A friend from her old unit told her to call us. Our SSVF program covered the rent arrears so the family could stay in their home, and our employment team, funded in part by the Call of Duty Endowment, rewrote her resume so that 'managed a $4 million supply account' read like the business experience it was. Two months later she was hired as an operations coordinator for a regional distribution company. She told her case manager afterward that the hardest part wasn't the job search. It was making the initial phone call."

Note: Names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

VETERANS Inc.