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Calhoun business helps raise money for homeless veterans

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Tony Farrell, CEO of PTS Financial Services, and John Blair, vice president of sales, pose for a picture at the TRIB Meeting of Minds Convention in February. The event helped raise more than \$23,000 for homeless veterans.

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Calhoun's PTS Financial Services helped raise \$23,000 for homeless veterans in the area, including a 69-year-old female Army veteran.

The TRIB Group held their annual tradeshow convention in Atlanta in February to kick off the 2020 sales season, and part of this year's program included an effort to promote a social issue in order to raise awareness and support. TRIB Group's Dennis Shields, PTS Direct Benefits' CEO Tony Farrell

and Vice President of Sales John Blair collaborated and put on a patriotic-themed event to help raise money for homeless veterans.

According to Jim Lindenmayer, director of the Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Program, there are more than 49,000 veterans, from all branches and both sexes, find themselves homeless on any given night in the United States of America.

"No one whom has served in uniform would've ever thought that someday they would experience homelessness," said Lindenmayer.

This trio of men took their initiative and reached out to the local Marine Corps League and to Cherokee County Homeless Veterans Program in order to help promote their homeless programs at the TRIB Meeting of the Minds Convention in February.

PTS and TRIB Group held a reception for their members and vendors at The Battery in Atlanta. The night was described as a fun-filled as John Blair emceed the many attempts at riding the mechanical bull to raise money for the cause. At the end of the night, PTS and The TRIB Group had commitments or more than \$23,000.

"To say thanks is not enough, especially during this time with the COVID-19 pandemic, as it is stressful for many homeless people, not just veterans. Our program, with our all-volunteer staff, is grateful for the opportunity to continue to help others in need that The TRIB Group and PTS Direct Benefits has provided us a way to do so," Lindenmayer said. "These donations couldn't have come at a better time than now with this current crisis."

Two days before the event, the Cherokee County Veterans Program received a phone call about a homeless veteran in the area and were asked if they could help. The veteran turned out to be a 69-year-old female Army vet who had been struggling, living on the streets of Bartow County for the past six months. She had been evicted and with no family to turn to and little to no funds.

Lindenmayer said she did what most homeless people do – she attempted to survive. As the winter months were cold and rainy, she finally reached out for assistance after unfortunately being robbed of all her items, including her identification.

Within the day, the veterans program was able to accommodate her in a room at a local motel. They provided her with some essentials such as food, clothing and toiletries and other basic necessities.

"After going through intake, our program looked into getting her in the veterans long term housing program called SSVF. SSVF (Supported Services for Veteran Families) is designed to help Veteran families and individuals who find themselves homeless, obtain long term housing," explained Lindenmayer. "Unfortunately, part of the SSVF intake process requires the Veteran provide several documents and identifications in order to clear program eligibility. The only problem with this was that the veteran's ID and government documents were stolen and having a copy of a police report did not help. Furthermore, you cannot get a birth certificate until you provide a picture ID and without one you cannot get it. You could go online and order one, but with no home of record or funds you again find out that you cannot go anywhere."

Lindenmayer then sought the local Sheriff's Victim Advocate's office, because all veterans are fingerprinted. With that information, the sheriff's office ran her fingerprints and were able to pull up her picture and verify her ID.

"With a sheriff deputy in tow, we went back to the county health department and using the sheriff-obtained document we were able to obtain her birth certificate," Lindenmayer said.

Similar approaches were used to get her driver's license, but verifying her Social Security award letter ran into another snag – the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the onset of stay-at-home orders from Gov. Brian Kemp, the only way to contact the Social Security Office for her award letter was to call them. Daily attempts and hours on wait to get through to the SSA were not successful, so the team escalated the request to their local U.S. congressman's office and 24 hours later they had the document.

"With all of the required documentation in hand, we now were able to get it to the local SSVF program office to get an appointment to be seen for intake. Calls were made and the first available intake date was given for three weeks in the future ... WOW. COVID-19 and personnel shortages for this program were pushing everything out," Lindenmayer said.

Not wanting to leave the veteran unsupported, the program continued to support her at the motel and continued to provide food and local transportation via LYFT. Intake finally went smoothly, but it took another two weeks to get her into their program.

"At roughly \$400 per week to house and feed a homeless veteran, the seven weeks that we supported this veteran through the program used a lot of financial resources that were made available through the TRIB Group and PTS event," said Lindenmayer.

The female veteran is not the only homeless veteran that is being supported as a result of the fundraiser. In all, the program supports 10 homeless veterans, both males and females, and two with families that have been or continue to be supported by The TRIB Group and PTS Direct Benefits.