

There are no second-class veterans': service officer

By Phyllis Sides

Bayer brings his own experience as a vet to job As a veteran, Richard Bayer brings an insider's perspective to his new job as Racine County Veterans' Service Officer. A Racine native, Bayer has lived here all his life except for when he was on active duty in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. He recently spoke with The Journal Times about veterans' issues.

Would you say your background as a vet helps you understand the problems veterans face better than someone else might? Most definitely. Being on active duty in the military especially during wartime, and even more-so for those in combat, is almost indescribable. It provided tremendous insight into a world of commitment, and sacrifice at all levels. Total dedication of the few for the sake of all. That dedication is held in a sacred trust by those that served for the sake of those that sacrificed so much and a commitment to them, and their families that their dedication and sacrifice shall not be forgotten. For that reason, I believe it would be quite difficult for a non-veteran to hold this position for very long.

You've only been the Racine County veterans service officer a short time. Are there any glaring problems to be rectified there? As I answer this question, I have finished my 26th day in this position. From my perspective, the most glaring problems have to do with my own growth as a servant to the veteran community right now.

There is an incredible number of benefits that are due our service men and women. There is also an incredible number of requirements that these fine people have to meet to receive those benefits. That is where my office, and the other veteran focused professionals in the Workforce Development Center, comes into play.

We help with benefits, forms, contacts with state and federal agencies. There is staff here to help the unemployed veteran work their way to meaningful employment. They also work with employers in making that right match, whenever possible, between work and worker.

What would you like to accomplish as veterans service officer? I truly would want every veteran in Racine County to know that he or she should be proud of their service, no matter when or where, and that they may very well be entitled to receive some benefit if they so deserve it.

I have met several who feel as though they are not as deserving as other veterans so they don't even bother to look into the matter. This is not right. There is no such thing as a second-class veteran. We all made a commitment to serve this country and state and we are ready to express their gratitude in this way.

My office is Racine County's expression of the very same thing. It would also be wonderful to be connected with a veteran's organization of some kind. This would

include such fine groups as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans or the Vietnam Veterans of America to name several. Our office can help making these connections, too.

What are some of the special issues, problems that veterans face? Many have physical and emotional difficulties that they live with each day because of what they did, or where they served. Some, like post-traumatic-stress-disorder, have been common to every conflict.

Others, like the Agent Orange exposure, for example, are specific to the Vietnam War. The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are showing their own signatures on the bodies and minds of the returning soldiers.

Others have to deal with employability when the veterans find themselves back in the civilian world. Some have known nothing but the military since they left high school. There is help available.

Why is what you are doing important? For the most part, lives are improved. This is good for the veteran, their families, and good for the entire community. If, along the way, we realize that we had a part in making this happen, then we are blessed as well.

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