



Shelter helps veterans struggling with addiction, economy

By Danielle Ameden/Daily News staff

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FRAMINGHAM — Brian Brandolini quit high school after his junior year in 1975, enlisted in the Marine Corps and climbed the ranks to gunnery sergeant.

When he later joined the reserves and came back home to Framingham, he took college courses in business and political science, ran his family's downtown shoe-repair shop and held other jobs, but he couldn't make ends meet.

He ended up at Larry's Place, a shelter for homeless veterans on Lincoln Street run by the South Middlesex Opportunity Council.

"I'm certainly not bitter about it. It's an unfortunate situation. I'm just thankful there are places like (this)," Brandolini, 54, said yesterday. "I'm very proud of my service, and I certainly don't blame the military or anyone else for my current situation, but my current situation isn't so bad. I'm with a bunch of fellow veterans and they're all in different phases of their life in terms of getting themselves squared away."

People who work with veterans say addictions, the difficult economy and other tough circumstances force them onto the streets and into shelters such as Larry's Place.

"It's hard luck, bad choices - there's a lot of reasons," said Peter Harvell, Framingham's veterans agent.

And they all have their own story.

Edward Ellis, 60, was raised in New York City and "got caught in" the last Vietnam War draft as a 20-year-old college student in Springfield in 1971.

He reluctantly signed up with the Air Force and got hooked on heroin while serving in Thailand for a year as a communications specialist, operating the base switchboard.

He has battled drug and alcohol addictions - and been in and out of detox facilities, police lockup, shelters and halfway houses - ever since.

He's been clean and sober now for three weeks.

"I still struggle with my disease," Ellis said yesterday at SMOC's headquarters on Howard Street, where he works odd jobs for the social service agency so he can pay his \$95-a-week rent at Larry's Place.

Ron Teixeira, who oversees Larry's Place and other SMOC homes, said it's upsetting to see fellow veterans struggling with homelessness.

"It bums me," he said. "It really upsets me. I'm a veteran myself. I served in the Vietnam era."

Brandolini said he never had a problem with alcohol or drugs, and lives at Larry's Place because he can't afford the high cost of living on his own.

He works for TJX Co. driving a mail truck.

There are veterans of all ages staying at Larry's Place, which opened two years ago today, including men who served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, Teixeira said.

"Each one has a different story interesting enough," he said. "All but two have a common thread in that they had some substance abuse."

One of the guys at Larry's Place suffered brain trauma after his vehicle went over an IED in Afghanistan, and he developed an addiction after he was treated with Oxycodone, Teixeira said.

"Sometimes you don't self-regulate," he said. "When he came back he was pretty addicted."

After serving in the Vietnam War, Ellis first sought help with his drug addiction from the Veterans Affairs hospital in New York City.

From there, he was shipped to the Bedford VA hospital.

He got married and started a family in Marlborough, but eventually ended up living in his car. "My wife finally had enough and told my kids not to let me back in," he said.

He bounced around and completed several detox programs before moving into Larry's Place a year and a half ago.

Setbacks in his life led him to start using again, including when his mother died.

He lost his job after he was arrested on drug charges in 2006 after police raided a place where he was smoking crack.

Ellis says he's on the right track now, and is grateful for his job under SMOC's Ready, Willing and Able program.

He goes to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings every day, and he planned to start counseling sessions last night.

"I can't do it by myself," he said. "(I take it) just one day at a time. So far, it's working."

(Danielle Ameden can be reached at 508-626-4416 or dameden@wickedlocal.com.)

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Bostoniac

12 hours ago

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ONLY THREE WEEKS OF SOBRIETY??? At age 60 if he can't maintain sobriety, his chances are miserable. Shame on whomever put this guy in the paper. The last thing he needs is to break his anonymity.

I remember him when he worked at FedEx on California Street. What a nice, sweet guy he was. But dang, let him recover in privacy, MWDN. This is ridiculous.

shelley01702

8 hours ago

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Thank goodness for Larry's place! Happy Veterans day to all and thank you for your service! Just curious is there a veterans home for women??

Rich S

7 hours ago

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Well it's certainly been a while since we've seen an MWDN story about how great and saintly SMOC is so apparently we were due. What is the common theme of these guys who they mention in the article? None of them served in combat or in any traumatic situation that would cause them to need help due to their service. If they had it would certainly be noted. A switchboard operator? Wow....that must have been really rough serving through thick and thin answering phones! So it's their own weaknesses and poor life decisions that are causing them to be a burden to society. Military service has absolutely nothing to do with the situation of the guy who can't afford his rent. I've got news for you pal: Things are tough all over. Get a life and stop sucking off the tax payers while hiding behind the fact that you were in the military. You are owed absolutely nothing.

Lulabelle

5 hours ago

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Pretty harsh comments Rich S. You must be perfect, with one exception. You don't have a soul. Congratulations Mr. Ellis on your newly found sobriety.
Framinghamnorth75
4 hours ago
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Thank you for your service veterans.....all veterans.
Rich S..... you are entitled to your opinion; but who are you to judge ?
livetoride
4 hours ago
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Three weeks, one day, twenty years- Does not matter, what matters is he has ONE DAY! And really, do you think they would put his name and his picture without his permission
Well said Lulabelle! Thank you for saying it for me !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
livetoride
4 hours ago
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And by the way Rich, Karma.. Just think Karma-
You are one heartless person
Kookenhaken
3 hours ago
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Rich S, your lack of compassion is breathtaking. You have no right to accuse these vets of being weak and undeserving of help. If these vets all had physical wounds, they'd probably be eligible for more support from the military and the government, and hopefully would not be in the straits they are now.
Just because someone did not spend their military service in active combat does not mean they were not subjected to stress and hardship. I know that at age 20, if I had had to deal with being drafted, giving up my educational goals, being sent halfway around the world and separated from my family for years at a time, and the constant stress of knowing that I might get sent somewhere else at any moment, I might not have dealt with the stress very well either. Additionally, during the Vietnam war, servicemen had to deal with the knowledge that the war was increasingly unpopular at home and around the world, and that many people would be unsupportive and even hostile toward them when they got home.
My brother-in-law spent two years in active duty in Vietnam; he watched many of his friends die and endured unspeakable horrors and hardship. That he is a functional man today is a testament to his strength and human decency--and he struggles with emotional and substance abuse issues too--but he would NEVER accuse a fellow vet of weakness for not having suffered as much as he did. He knows that the guilt that consumes him--he lived and came home in one piece while so many of his friends died or were injured--is shared by many of the men who had the 'easy' jobs out of harm's way.

I wish the vets in this article all the best--I hope they find the peace and healing they need, and I appreciate their service.
Chuck from Framingham
3 hours ago
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Rich, Sobriety is a daily struggle I am 24 years sober....Gulf war vet...Retired military
Knight owl
3 hours ago
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i guess i am one of the lucky ones. twenty four years ago i quit drinking one day and haven't looked back. no daily struggle. no desire to ever have another drink. i wish i could bottle my 'cure' and pass it on to others.
Chuck from Framingham
3 hours ago
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To all who have served....Happy vets day...well earned
greydevil
2 hours ago
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Bostoniac is right. Three weeks of sobriety is only the first step in a long journey, likely fraught with setbacks. The MWDN should have used better judgement.
Stillinfram
1 hour ago
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Typically I'm right with Rich S in his disdain for SMOC's arrogance and insensitivity as it relates to flooding Framingham with its services. This I won't be swayed on. But I cannot relate to his vitriol in this instance. I do feel for these vets, sober or otherwise, and think that the program offered at Larry's Place is needed in our society.

I just wish that SMOC would stop with its social injustice of crowding our town with its programs and its patients simply because it's good for their bottom line. How about choosing any other Metrowest town with better resources and fewer social services?

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