

WND EXCLUSIVE

JOHN ROCKER GOES TO BAT FOR VETERANS

Former major leaguer's organization helps homeless re-enter society

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While there are services to help military veterans, many returning troops still face homelessness and chronic unemployment.

Nationwide, [there are 26,531 homeless vets from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars alone](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:YDLPZLcVuYcJ:www.armytimes.com/article/20121226/NEWS/212260303/Number-homeless-Iraq-Afghan-vets-doubles+%&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a) ([http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:YDLPZLcVuYcJ:www.armytimes.com/article/20121226/NEWS/212260303/Number-homeless-Iraq-Afghan-vets-doubles+%&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a)

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However, a new, private, faith-based charity is standing up for them. [Save Homeless Veterans](http://www.savehomelessveterans.com/) (<http://www.savehomelessveterans.com/>) is emerging as a source of personal support, offering Christian counseling, housing, medical care and financial education.

WND spoke with John Rocker, former major league pitcher and director of public affairs for Save Homeless Veterans. Rocker shared the moving stories of veterans who came off the streets with nothing, but through the charity have earned homes, jobs and a chance to re-enter civilian life.

“When Save Homeless Veterans first reaches out to a veteran, those service members are facing an array of challenges,” said Rocker, [a columnist for WND](http://www.wnd.com/author/jrocker/) (<http://www.wnd.com/author/jrocker/>). “We give them the tools to find self-worth, achieve and be productive.”

Rocker described the PTSD, drug and alcohol issues that have prevented veterans from re-integrating to civilian life.

“The first thing we do is get them off the street and get them into a safe place, then start dealing with the issues of why they became homeless,” Rocker said.

The faith-based component of the Save Homeless Veterans makes a major difference. The 501(c)3 charity is centered around Roswell Street Baptist Church, under the care of Rev. Earnest Easley. Easley is director of ministry for Save Homeless Veterans.

The veterans start with an intake process, led by Lt. Col. Scott New, a retired Army chaplain. New learns the veteran's strengths and weaknesses. Unlike public welfare services, Save Homeless Veterans addresses the underlying issues that put veterans on the street in the first place.

“Getting these vets a paycheck is part of a comprehensive effort to help them build a more purposeful life for themselves,” Rocker said.

After the intake process, the veterans begin a 12-month counseling program.

Rocker is proud of the charity's record of placing formerly homeless vets into paying private sector jobs. Using Atlanta-based SelecSource staffing, Save Homeless Veterans places former service members in jobs so that they can achieve the self-esteem that comes with earning a paycheck.

Save Homeless Veterans provides a comprehensive spectrum of services, with housing as the focal point. Many homeless veterans lose their systems of support because they have no stable home of record. By getting the veterans into a home, they can begin to re-integrate with employers and social services. Right now, the charity has three homes, and Rocker says the goal is to get to 50.

Doctors, dentists and attorneys provide pro bono services to the organization. By turning to private sector solutions, Save Homeless Veterans does not rely on Veterans Affairs doctors and does not accept funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Rocker is especially proud of former Sgt. York Rudisill's story.

Rudisill is a Vietnam vet who enlisted in 1971. When he left the service after Vietnam, he found himself "giving up" and became homeless. When Rudisill connected with Save Homeless Veterans, he found a powerful support system.

"They've helped me with my health, finding me a job, I've got a nice home to stay in, and around people that really care," Rudisill said. "It's changed my life, and I'm looking forward to the rest of it now."

After establishing a stable residence, Rudisill then had the ability to tie in with Veterans Affairs. He recently received his first VA benefits since the Vietnam era.

The Save Homeless Veterans board of directors and advisers bring leadership experience from many different fields to bear. Rocker serves as spokesman and also rehabilitates and manages the properties that become veterans' homes.

Prominent financial adviser Ryan Mack volunteers to serve and provide financial education. Some of the charity's staff actually lived on the streets for a time, and are intimately familiar with the lives that homeless veterans face.

Save Homeless Veterans is always looking for people to volunteer time and resources (<http://www.savehomelessveterans.com/bios.html>). Helping service members get housing, food, gas and support until they can get jobs are top priorities.

"These are the men and women who defended our country, and now we're lending a hand to those who fought for us," Rocker said.



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