

People In Crisis expands outreach programs to assist veterans

OCEAN CITY — People in Crisis, a local organization helping people obtain medical and living care, has expanded its programs to assist veterans.

Founded by Ocean City resident Lana Samuels, People in Crisis now operates nationally and has gained the support of physicians, pharmacists, lawyers, businesses and such personalities as Phil Martelli, St. Joseph's University basketball coach, who is a member of its outreach committee, and Matt Crowley, head golf professional at Stone Harbor Golf Club.

Samuels has gone door to door for years fundraising and identifying people in need. She discovered there were many area veterans puzzled about how to obtain their Veterans Affairs benefits. They required expert assistance to understand and complete procedures.

This led her on a search for advocates and agencies nearby that can help veterans navigate the system and get help in a timely manner. One contact, who now helps People in Crisis referrals, is Lou Green, 80, of Mays Landing, a self educated expert on VA health care.

Green is a retired business owner and Korean War veteran, who enlisted and served in the Air Force for four years. He has devoted himself to ensuring veterans get the correct information necessary to receive benefits.

"Mr. Green has been a god-send to us," Samuels said. "Now we have an excellent contact when we find a veteran in dire need of help."

Over the past 19 years, Green has provided free information to help thousands of veterans. He has worked with government agencies on programs accommodating as many as 1,200 to 1,800 people during sessions.

Green has developed direct contacts with key members and offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs and can direct applicants to VA contacts quickly.

"The system can be intimidating," Green said. "In some cases, the veterans just give up. I'm happy to assist People in Crisis by providing the vital information they need. I can answer most questions and, if not, give the veteran the right phone number for assistance. I also have VA pamphlets that will answer many of their questions."

Recently, People in Crisis referred Famiglietti to help Lindsey Villano whose grandfather, William Dickinson, a World War II veteran, had his Bronze Star stolen in 1995 during a Christmastime robbery. He is helping the family get a replacement. He may be reached at 609-441-3060.

Steve Garwood of Northfield, a Vietnam veteran, is an example of a former serviceman who is benefitting thanks to the efforts of Samuels, Green, LoBiondo and Famiglietti.

Working on his own and in need of food, cash and health benefits, Garwood was ready to give up. Samuels stepped in to

obtain food stamps for his family. She is obtaining additional assistance with the help of nurse Nancy Cosenza, a People in Crisis volunteer from Northfield, and Dawn Davis Earl and Valinda Newton.

"People in Crisis and Mr. Green did more for me in one year than I was able to do myself in four," Garwood said. "I'm now living with more hope."

Garwood is now a People in Crisis volunteer, as is Walter Tuthill of Linwood, a Korean War veteran, who received help in obtaining a hearing aid and VA benefits.

Tuthill, himself, has been

working for fellow veterans for over 20 years providing crafts for those confined to military hospitals.

"I'm associated with an organization called HHArts and Craft Kits. We provide art programs and crafts kits that keep patients occupied while in hospital confinement. I get cards and photos all time from them telling me how much they appreciate the materials," he said. Tuthill may be reached at 609-385-3395.

Veterans, or any person in need of medical or living assistance, can call People in Crisis at 609-334-8718. This is a free service.

Like People in Crisis, Green provides his help for free. He estimates he has worked with over 8,000 veterans over the years.

The first Wednesday of every month, you will find Green at Hamilton Mall in Mays Landing, near the entrance to Ruby Tuesday's, passing out information and counseling. He is assisted by two Vietnam veterans, a retired FBI agent and a non-veteran of Atlantic City. Green may be reached a 609-407-1332.

People in Crisis has found another advocate in Ed Famiglietti, who works for the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs. Like Green, Famiglietti has the ability to contact the correct office quickly, whether statewide or in Washington, D.C., that will provide assistance. Famiglietti works with the VFW, American Legion and many other veterans organizations. He is also in contact with Rep. Frank LoBiondo.

"Mr. Famiglietti is helping many veterans for us in many ways," Samuels said.