

Connecting Cobb getting our veterans the help they need

LOCAL COLUMNIST/DICK YARBROUGH

Occasionally, though not often, I will write something with which everyone agrees even if some begin their note with, “I don’t always agree with you, but. . .” Last week was one of those rare times.

The subject was the three Georgians, members of the 718th Engineer Company, 926th Engineer Battalion of the U.S. Army Reserve Command, who were killed by a terrorist drone attack in Jordan. (“Reflecting on the loss of three fallen heroes”.)

Expressions ranged from anger to grief to frustration as to why they were there in the first place to those who had been there and knew what it was like. Common in all the comments was a great appreciation for the men and women who have served in our military. That includes Dan Valentine, of Marietta, who is doing something tangible about it. Valentine is a retired Lt. Colonel and a veteran of 25 years in the U.S. Army and Army Reserves.

Today, he is program director of Connecting **Cobb** Veterans, a non-profit program founded specifically to connect veterans struggling with issues ranging from PTSD, family relationships, drug or alcohol addiction, legal issues, employment challenges and homelessness with the services they need and — as Dan Valentine says — have earned.

There are some 40,000 veterans in **Cobb** County. Last year, Connecting **Cobb** Veterans assisted veterans from every branch of the military, male and female, most over 50 and even some in the 18-25 age bracket.

Valentine stresses that Connecting **Cobb** Veterans is not a service provider. “There are lots of folks who do an excellent job of providing the services our veterans need,” he says, “but there are too many veterans who are not getting that help for a variety of reasons.”

Those reasons can range from a veteran not being able to identify the right service provider for their particular issue or encountering a complicated process that is too difficult for them to navigate (i.e., bureaucratic red tape) or they have been told “no” too many times and have given up or in many cases are simply too proud or ashamed to admit they need help.

Connecting **Cobb** Veterans has created a very defined process to identify the specific issues as it relates to an individual and then insures they are connected to the providers that can best help them. “One way to describe our service is that we run interference for them,” Valentine says.

In 2023, over 100 families were served by the organization. Today, inquiries from veterans seeking assistance can average from 7 to 15 inquiries a month. Many are looking for housing. “No one is better equipped to help veterans with housing issues than CCV,” he says. Last year, the organization found emergency lodging for 15 veteran families for an aggregate total of 170 nights. Valentine says one of their valued partners in the housing issue is MUST Ministries, which has a long-term transitional housing program for veterans and a volunteer retired colonel available to assist. But finding shelter for veterans is just one of the many ways Connecting **Cobb** Veterans works to help veterans deal with their particular concerns. Whatever that help may be, CCV will follow up with the individual to insure they got the support they needed and to determine if they need any other services.

So what can we do to help? Dan Valentine lists three things. First, as a nonprofit there is always a need for money. “We are able to help these veterans only because of the donations of those who believe in what we

are doing,” he says. You can donate by check to: **Cobb Collaborative, Inc.** Connecting **Cobb** Veterans, 980 South **Cobb** Drive, Bldg. E, Marietta, GA 30060 or by credit card to the Connecting **Cobb** Veterans donation page. (“Don’t hesitate to put a few zeroes behind the number,” he quips.)

There is also a need for volunteers. “We would particularly encourage veterans to help us in dealing with our veterans in need,” Valentine says. “We are also looking for volunteers to go out in the community and help get the word out about the organization. There are over 760,000 people living in **Cobb** County. My goal is that at least 500,000 get to know us and our mission.”

One of the best ways you can help is to get some VeteranHelp cards from Connecting **Cobb** Veterans. Keep one with you and hand the rest out to either veterans who could use some help or friends who might know or encounter a veteran in need. You could be saving a life.

We lost three heroes in Jordan. Thanks to Connecting **Cobb** Veterans for being there to connect struggling veterans with the help they need and have earned. As Dan Valentine says, “These men and women made a commitment to step into harm’s way for us. This is a small way that we can let them know we’re here for them.” After all, they are heroes, too.

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