

Rochester-area groups hold outreach events for veterans

Terricha Bradley, Staff writer Democrat and Chronicle September 2, 2008

When the Rev. Roy Jones returned to Texas from serving in the Vietnam War in 1968, he was 21 years old and faced discrimination and racism. People called him a "baby killer," and he had no one he could turn to for help and support.

In the early 1970's, Jones moved to Rochester and joined the Veterans Outreach Center Inc. and helped with outreach services, so "nobody else has to go through what I went through," he said.

"Now we are here to help the ones that are coming back."

This summer, the VOC and Veterans Interfaith Clergy Advisory of Rochester (VICAR) held the first outreach event dubbed "Operation Reveille," offering services to Rochester-area veterans in need of housing, employment and counseling. VICAR, area clergy who are veterans themselves or are experienced in serving veterans, is a new organization providing material support for these programs through area churches.

Jones, 62, is a minister at Peace Baptist Church on Oregon Street, where service providers from VOC and state agencies gathered on Aug. 14 to sign up veterans for employment, housing and mental health services. Similar services will be offered on Thursday at Peace and in Henrietta at Christian Friendship Baptist Church on Sept. 26.

In addition to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, "there are a lot of older guys who are Vietnam and Korean vets who don't know what benefits (they) have," said the Rev. Dr. Willie Harvey, head pastor at Peace Baptist Church.

Nena Siverd, the VOC employment specialist, called the event a "one-stop center" for all vet services.

"We are looking for more clergy to join and to get vets we don't normally see (who are) looking for spiritual counsel."

Robert L. Young, 40, of Rochester served in the New York National Guard from 1992 to 1997. He attended the recent event and received employment information. He said he was laid off from Kodak and has not found work since.

"Jobs aren't available for skilled workers who are veterans," he said. "To make it this long has really been a blessing."

In addition to free counseling services, veterans received personal care items and beverages at the event. According to Peter Blind, vice president of workforce development and human resources for VOC, \$494,000 in federal grants from the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program and the Veterans Workforce Investment Program will help with enrollment for Operation Reveille.