

Verona Man Seeks Donations To Fill Backpacks

By Henry M. Holden

Veterans returning from war usually had to undergo a period of readjustment back to civilian life. Some make the adjustment slowly, others often with severe PTSD, never quite make it back to normalcy.

Returning home from a seven-month tour in Afghanistan with the U.S. Marine Corps, Sgt. Brett D'Alessandro had a difficult transition.

"I was kept on medical hold as I faced the daily struggles of reintegrating into society," said D'Alessandro of Verona.

As he drove to a doctor's appointment, he saw a homeless man holding a sign that read 'Vietnam Veteran.'

"I couldn't help but think of that man for the rest of the day," D'Alessandro said. "I returned to my hotel and filled a backpack from my tour with layers of socks and t-shirts. I went back to find that man and gave him the backpack.

"The next morning on my way to work, I saw the same man, but this time with a small child wearing the backpack proudly. I stopped to say hello and before I could get a word out, the veteran gave me endless thanks for giving his family items they so desperately needed."

It was at this moment that D'Alessandro knew he had to do something. There are so many veterans out there who needed help.

"As I overcame my

personal battles, I knew I could help veterans overcome theirs by giving them the tools and resources that helped give me a second chance at life."

And so, Backpacks for Life, a nonprofit registered 501(c)3 organization was formed.

"Our mission is to provide homeless veterans with things they cannot provide for themselves," D'Alessandro said. "Reintegrating into society has many obstacles and sometimes isn't always easy for veterans. We are hoping to be the support system that homeless veterans may not have and help them in getting back on their feet; whether that means finding a job, finding housing or giving them a backpack

full of daily essentials to help them survive. Homeless veterans make up a large part of society and it is only right to help serve those who have protected our country."

Since its creation in 2014, Backpacks for Life has handed out 2,300 backpacks to homeless/low income veterans in need.

The backpacks are filled with essentials for street life including information on where to get help finding a job and housing.

The backpacks include toiletries such as shampoo, conditioner, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, wipes, razors, shaving cream, etc., first aid kits, socks, gloves, hats, ponchos, notebooks, pens, and stress balls.

D'Alessandro relies on



financial and product donations to fill the packs. For more information or to do-

nate contact them at: backpacksforlife@gmail.com.