

# Serving Those Who Served

*Vietnam vet volunteers his time to help others navigate the maze of military processes*

By Lori Russell

In Wasco County, more than 6,000 people have been directly affected by their service or their loved one's service in the military. Some fought in the Pacific Theater during World War II, others under the scorching sun in Iraq. Spouses and children carried on at home while their loved ones were away, and often cared for them upon their return.

"Every family has its stories," says veterans' advocate Jim Burres.

A Vietnam vet who served as an electrical technician in the Navy from 1966 to 1973, Jim says his military experiences shaped his life.

"The time between when you are 18 and 24 you are highly impressionable," Jim says. "Your experiences create memories and develop your impressions of people."

It was his father's experience as a veteran that led Jim to dedicate his time to helping others who had served their country. John Burres was injured in an explosion while serving on a Navy minesweeper off the coast of France in 1944.

Jim began working on his father's claim for veteran's compensation 14 years ago. He immersed himself in the process, reading everything he could about the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, leg-

islation affecting veterans and the benefits they were due.

Prior to 1963, the VA was not required to give a reason for the denial of a medical or disability claim, Jim says. That made it difficult for World War II and Korean War veterans who had been discharged from the military by that time to appeal the decision.

Eventually, Jim's father—now 89—was awarded about \$300,000 in compensation from the federal government. He has spent two-thirds of



**A U.S. flag is affixed to the back of a motorcycle used by a member of the Patriot Guard. The group attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Veteran's Service Office in The Dalles.**

that helping other veterans, Jim notes.

Growing up in Condon, Jim says he learned "if your neighbors had a problem, you had a problem."

Following his father's example, Jim now spends 60 to 70 hours a week volunteering on veterans' issues. He drives elderly vets to health appointments, encourages those who may qualify for benefits to apply and talks with government officials—and anyone else who will listen—about how to help veterans and their families.

Jim believes those who served during the Vietnam War can play a valuable role in advocating for veterans of all ages.

"It is our time to care for the older vets and get the message to the younger kids to get their military records now—not to wait," he says. "That is why I'm out here."

Jim and other area veterans were the driving force behind relocating the



**The Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs created "Proud to be a Veteran" buttons.**



From left, veterans' advocate Jim Burres, Veterans Service Officer Les Logston and Wasco County Veterans Committee President Steve Lawrence at the new office in The Dalles.

Veterans Service Office to downtown The Dalles earlier this year. The central location and easy access has resulted in plenty of business for Veterans Service Officer Les Logston, who often receives as many as eight claims before noon. About 25 percent of those requests are for Washington residents.

While climbing to the rank of command sergeant major during his 27-year Army career, Les gained valuable knowledge about the intricacies of the federal bureaucracy.

His experiences as a young soldier serving 2½ combat tours in Vietnam allow him to relate to veterans on a personal level.

"Most combat veterans will talk with another combat vet," Les says. "We have experienced things that the average person never will see or understand. We always have a tie."

Les serves a variety of people, ranging from World War II and Korean War veterans and their families to those who served in Vietnam and the Gulf War. National Guard members activated for service during a period of war or domestic emergency also can establish eligibility for VA benefits.

Many young vets are interested in

pursuing their education and/or finding meaningful employment.

"I work with them on short-, mid- and long-term goals to better their quality of life," Les says. "We have some great federal job opportunities nearby with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bonneville Power Administration."

He also processes requests for medical, disability, death and burial benefits. Elderly veterans and their spouses who qualify for "aid and attendance" funds can offset some of the cost of care at home or in a skilled nursing facility.

Les not only knows the rules and regulations adopted by the VA, he understands the problems veterans, widows, widowers and children face.

"Each claim takes a lot of research, time and effort to prove," he admits. That is especially the case if the veteran or family does not have military records in their possession.

The time or complexity of the cases does not deter Les from staying committed to his work.

"When it comes to helping veterans, I have a passion," he explains. ■

### Need Some Help?

The Veteran's Service Office has information on services and local groups for veterans. Les Logston is available for appointments Mondays and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The office is at 201 Federal St. in The Dalles. For more information, call (541) 506-2502.

**Veterans Service Officer Les Logsdon, right, meets with Hulyn Roether, an Army combat veteran who served in the South Pacific during World War II.**

