

'You Can Count on Ray'

Decorated colonel transforms his service officer position into a highly trained, five-person team

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"I became a full-time volunteer because I wanted to give back to veterans and their families," said VFW Servicer Officer Raymond Denisewich, 67, of Cranston, Rhode Island.

Monday through Friday, he is in the office by 7 a.m. On most weekends he provides outreach services to older and homebound veterans, racking up 50-65-hour workweeks.

"My wife routinely confirms the insanity of my schedule," he joked. "But after serving in the military, this is the most rewarding job of my life."

Colonel Denisewich's decorated military career began in 1972 and spanned 36 years. He served in numerous command and staff positions and earned several awards including the Legion of Merit and Bronze Star Medal.

His commitment to service has not waned. Since becoming a VFW Department of Rhode Island Service Officer in 2016, Denisewich has transformed his one-person post into a highly trained, five-person team.

From obtaining housing, food, and even Christmas gifts for a homeless veteran and his family to providing meals to a VA medical center during the COVID-19 crisis, no task is too great – or small – to command Denisewich's full attention.

After several years, he says funding remains a challenge. He is working constantly to secure grants and raise money in creative ways, like with the annual Oldies Dinner Dance, which is set to celebrate its fourth year. All fundraiser contributions provide direct assistance to disabled, distressed and homeless veterans.

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Additionally, Denisewich continues to tackle new initiatives. In 2019, after realizing that many young veterans were not enrolling in VA health care or applying for earned benefits, he helped establish the Post-9/11 Committee.

“There are more post-9/11 veterans than any other group,” he said. “We need to assist and advocate for them as much as possible given the highly complex nature of VA compensation benefits.”

Effectively serving and engaging with these veterans to show them a way forward is now one of Denisewich’s primary focuses. Because of generational differences in socialization and communication, he recognizes the need for out-of-the-box solutions to reach younger veterans.

Earlier this year, Denisewich helped organize a get-together, complete with food and drink, live music and presentations focused on the specific needs of post-9/11 veterans. With more than 100 in attendance, the event was a success, resulting in 18 new VFW members and more than 21 new claims submissions. He said it was the first of many.

To date, Denisewich has spent more than 2,400 volunteer hours assisting veterans, and since 2016, the Rhode Island Service Office has successfully collected \$16 million in new claims and has had 50,000 actionable contacts with veterans and their families.

Denisewich has no plans of slowing down any time soon, which is good for both the individuals he assists and his colleagues, who summed it up by saying, “You can count on Ray.”