

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

# Vets Helping Vets

By Chris Crawford, Staff Writer

Members of the military often share a deep commitment to service. For several Gorham residents, that dedication has not ended with their retirement from the military. Jim Arcaro, Roger and Kathy Lavigne, and Rob Sanford have all been actively involved with Vet 2 Vet Maine (V2VME), a non-profit organization whose mission is to help alleviate loneliness and social alienation among Maine's veterans.

Although Roger, Jim and Rob all moved to Gorham after they retired from the Navy, they hadn't met until the day the photo for this story was taken. Each of them is enthusiastically serving as a peer companion to a matched Vet in Gorham, visiting with their matched Vet, via phone during the pandemic. According to Susan Dudley Gold, Executive Director of V2VME, "In addition to being a friend, the volunteers serve as 'eyes and ears' of the veterans they visit and can consult with staff when referrals for other services are needed."

Roger said, "The ability to meet and develop a bond with another Vet who may not be able to get out into the community on their own, is a special opportunity that only another Vet can fill." Sometimes both Vets end up with a friend for life. Roger served 20 years as a US Naval officer, Lieutenant Commander, working in Explosive Ordnance Disposal, the "Bomb Squad." He said, "We chose the Navy so we would always be stationed near water in places like Hawaii, mainland



V2VME will be holding training sessions for new volunteers on April 26, 27, and 28 from 4-7 p.m. via Zoom. Enroll as a volunteer online at [www.vet2vetmaine.org](http://www.vet2vetmaine.org) or call Judie O'Malley at 207-579-4024 or email [office@vet2vetmaine.org](mailto:office@vet2vetmaine.org).

China, Thailand, and Japan. Roger's father served in WWII.

Jim was stationed at Brunswick Naval Air Base as an aviation electrician's mate. Jim's vet, a Navy corpsman (medic) during the Vietnam War, is now house-bound. The two of them enjoyed going out together for breakfast or a trip to the beach every week before COVID. Now that they are both fully vaccinated, Jim said, "V2VME is such a great program. I'm glad we can resume face to face visits and go on our field trips again."

Rob Sanford, a retired Weapons Technician stationed at Norfolk Naval Station, joined V2VME about five years ago as a way to honor the memory of his father, who also served in the Navy. Rob said, "V2VME works hard to find a good match in shared interests for both Vets, and sometimes, but not always, within the same branch." Rob also spoke about how V2VME helps to preserve important

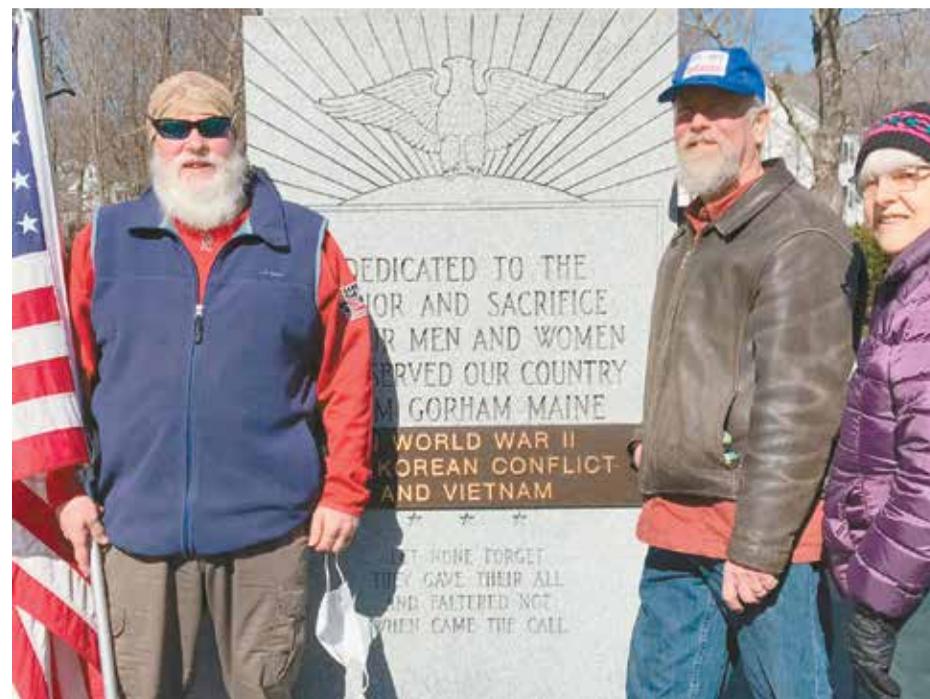


Photo credit Chris Crawford

Retired Navy Vets Jim Arcaro and Rob Sanford, and Roger Lavigne (not pictured) and his wife Kathy Lavigne are all volunteers in the Vet 2 Vet ME program.

memories and traditions. Rob helped one of his Vets pull together memoirs and photos from the Korean War. Rob used his experience and connections at USM, where he is a professor in Environmental Studies and Policy, to help his Vet finish the project and to get it published for the Vet's family.

Through Roger's involvement with the V2VME program, his wife, Kathy, realized there was an un-met need for a support system for those who manage care for the veterans, so she spearheaded and runs the Caregiver Support Network which provides assistance and training for the peer caregivers in the program. Kathy uses her professional and personal experi-

ence to provide resources, support and training for the V2VME caregivers. When veterans of three of the caregivers died, her counseling degree was called upon. She said, "I feel needed and uniquely qualified to support this group of Veterans as they reach out to support others."

Kathy and Roger moved to Gorham in 1989 after Roger's retirement from the Navy to be near family and to build their dream home. Roger worked for 15 years in Residential care for the dually diagnosed/homeless in Portland and another five years assessing agency treatment services.

## Vets Helping Vets CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Kathy worked 15 years in government civil service (GS 12) and then 5 years with Amistad & Catholic Charities, in safety programs for the chronically mentally ill.

During their travels in the Navy, Kathy and Roger adopted three young children, two boys and a girl. Nicanor, Mateo, and Analyn attended school in Gorham. The Lavignes now have 5 grandchildren who live in Maine and New Hampshire. Their email addresses are: [rlav@live.com](mailto:rlav@live.com) and [kathylav1949@gmail.com](mailto:kathylav1949@gmail.com). They welcome any opportunity to speak about military life or to help a Vet in need.

Jim Acaro and his wife, Debbie have lived in Gorham since 1983. Jim is semi-retired, after spending 30 years as the Supervisor of the Electrical team at L.L. Bean. Their two children, Elizabeth and Jimmy, attended Gorham Schools and are living in Maine.

Rob and his wife, Robin, moved to Gorham in 1996 when he became Professor of Environmental Studies & Policy at USM, where he still teaches. His two sons, Daniel and Morgan, and daughter, Corey, all attended Gorham schools. Two of the Sanford's grandchildren, Simon and Violet, live in Gorham.

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