



REUNIONS!

It has been more than a year now that our volunteers have been unable to meet with their veterans in person at veterans' homes. Now, thanks to the incredible effort developing vaccines and administering them to a grateful nation, our fully vaccinated volunteers and their veteran friends can once again visit together in person.

The long time apart and the enthusiastic reunions make clear how deeply the companions value each other's company. Tom, 94, and his peer companion Jerry were finally able to ride their bikes to Fort Williams again. Tom is doing great, but after Jerry fell and injured his knee, Tom joked that maybe they should switch roles in the Vet to Vet ME program. Glad to see the humor is still there after months of isolation!

Throughout the pandemic, Eric and Vernon have talked on the phone and Eric has delivered many books to his friend, who lives at a nursing home. They logged more than

300 in-person visits before COVID-19 interrupted their time together. A longed-for reunion took place at the home 13 months after their separation. “There’s a firmer foundation for the two of us when we’re together,” Eric said. “It’s really good that it happened.”

It was a big day for Dave and his friend, Leo, when they visited in person after being apart for 13 months. “We had a wonderful time together,” Dave reported. “It’s a blessing I have him as my vet.” The two had hoped to be able to resume their visits to the local coffee shop for muffins and coffee, but the nursing home administration said that will have to wait until it’s safer—a disappointment, but not enough to dim the joy of being together.

Another Dave reported that his vet was “getting pretty lonely not being able to get out.” Now they can sip their coffee and sit on the deck together and watch the birds come and go.



Paul said both he and his veteran friend were eager to go out for breakfast together. “We’re anxious to see each other again,” he said.

Tom said renewed visits with his veteran friend brought joy to both. “It’s all good; it feels really wonderful!”

Charlene, whose veteran friend Vi turned 98 during the pandemic, finally arranged an in-person visit at the Maine Veterans’ Home in Scarborough, where Vi resides. “She loved it!” Charlene said. “Vi and I got to sit next to each other and hold hands.” They both laughed a lot during that visit. Vi told Charlene she hadn’t laughed in a long time. The visit went so well that Charlene got permission to extend her time with Vi an extra 15 minutes. Sadly, Vi died on April 15, not long after Charlene’s second visit. Vi and Charlene had been V2VME friends since 2016.

Many other volunteers and their veteran friends are counting the days when they’ll both be fully vaccinated and ready to visit once again in person. Here’s to renewed friendships and strong ties in the days ahead! After all, that’s what Vet to Vet ME is all about.

New CDC Guidelines

Following CDC's new guidelines for COVID-19, Vet to Vet Maine will resume in-person, in-home visits between volunteers and their veterans providing:

1. the volunteer has received the full complement of vaccine shots and it has been two weeks since the last shot
2. everyone in the veteran friend's home, including the veteran, has received the full complement of vaccine shots and it has been two weeks since the last shot or
3. the veteran has received the full complement of vaccine shots and it has been two weeks since the last shot and no one who has not received a vaccination is at home during the visit.

Car rides can also be resumed, providing everyone in the car has received the full complement of vaccine shots and it has been two weeks since the last shot. Masks and social distancing of at least 6 feet apart are still required at locations outside the home or car. The two veterans can decide whether or not to wear masks and social distance inside the home. Under the latest CDC guidelines, this is no longer required as long as the stipulations above are followed. Since the vaccine is not 100% effective, some people may want to continue with such precautions.

As the weather warms, visitors and their veterans can meet outdoors with masks and at a distance until both have been vaccinated.

V2VME will continue to adhere to CDC guidelines and will adapt as necessary to new procedures recommended by the CDC.

Here are guidelines for those of you who visit veterans in a facility:

You may follow the regulations required by the facility, which will vary depending on the facility.

V2VME board also urges that you continue to take CDC-recommended precautions to protect yourself, such as mask-wearing and social distancing, keeping in mind that not all residents and/or facility staff will be vaccinated.

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month!



Volunteers are at the heart of Vet to Vet Maine. You've heard us say that before, and it couldn't be more true as we have struggled to serve our veteran friends during the long months of this pandemic. Despite the stress, despair, isolation, and separation, our peer companions have continued to stay in touch with their veterans, delivering food and goodies, calling with a listening ear, driving by to wave hello, sending a letter, asking for referrals and services to ease difficult times, and doing what they can to assist and be a friend. Other volunteers, including board members, have continued to work with staff to keep V2VME in operation. Most of you received a cheery thank you from volunteer Gail Merritt, who expressed our sincere appreciation for all you do for Vet to Vet Maine and for our veterans. (If Gail wasn't able to reach you, know that we tried and want to thank you, too.) We can't thank you enough and are deeply grateful for your continued participation in Vet to Vet Maine. You are the heroes of this organization!

Vet2Vet Me Volunteer Highlight: Michael and Kathryn Garrity

By Marissa Keyes, V2VME Volunteer



Michael and Kathryn Garrity of York County have been selflessly offering their services to Vet2Vet Maine since September 2019. Kathryn served in the Army from 1975 through 1978. Michael also served in the Army during that time period as well, but then went on to serve in the Coast Guard from 1979 through 2001. Currently, Michael is the maintenance

and transportation director for the Saco public schools, while Kathryn is enjoying time with her granddaughter during her retirement. Kathryn has always found ways to give back to her community, and when she and Michael met Susan Gold, executive director of Vet2Vet Maine, they knew they had found a worthwhile organization that would enable them to continue to give back to their community while meeting fascinating fellow veterans.

After attending the V2VME training course in October 2019, Kathryn and Michael were matched to veterans who requested visitors. Before the coronavirus pandemic, Kathryn and Michael regularly visited and checked in with their veterans. Kathryn first visited a 103-year-old veteran in Ogunquit. When she died, Kathryn was matched to another veteran, but by then COVID-19 had struck. During the pandemic, the Garritys have had to get creative. For Kathryn, this means weekly phone calls to her veteran. For Michael, the coronavirus pandemic has prevented him from visiting his veteran regularly or accompanying the veteran on doctor visits. Now Michael checks in regularly via phone and has been able to safely provide minor maintenance services for his veteran that would have otherwise been difficult to get completed during a pandemic. Both Kathryn and Michael miss the face-to-face aspect of their duties, but they realize it is in the best interest to continue to maintain their distance, especially since Michael's work at the schools is considered high risk for members of the elderly population.

“Slow, steady, and practical,” coupled with hope—that is the lesson Kathryn's veteran has imparted upon her during this pandemic. Kathryn has taken this lesson to heart and uses it as an inspiration as she navigates the pandemic's murky waters. Michael's veteran has also maintained a positive, hopeful outlook. This has helped Kathryn and Michael keep things in perspective throughout all of this.

Now with vaccinations available, Kathryn and Michael are looking forward to visiting their veterans in person. For Kathryn, who was matched with her veteran in the early days of the pandemic and has never seen her, the first post-vaccination visit will be very special.



Welcome Auta Main, New Board Member

Vet to Vet Maine is pleased to welcome Auta Main to the Board of Directors. Auta recently retired from the Maine Department of Labor, where she had been leading the veterans' employment program for the past seven years. Before that, she served as Executive Director of the TimeBanks USA Network and Maine Time Banks for eight years. Earlier in her career, Auta served in the U.S. Air Force as a Russian linguist. After separating from the military, she used the GI Bill to earn a bachelor's degree in business administration at USM. In addition to owning and selling two small businesses, Auta's previous work has included coordinating employment, training, and entrepreneurship programs for women and minorities in Maine. She is currently working part-time as a veteran community organizer for Mainers for Working Families, whose priorities this year include improving access to healthcare and paid family and medical leave. Auta lives in Gardiner with her partner, Marianne Roth, two kitties, and a bossy little Shih Tzu.

Welcome, Auta!

A Fond Farewell and Gratitude for Making a Difference

Andrea Tolbert, longtime Vet to Vet volunteer visitor and leader in the Vet to Vet Maine organization, submitted her resignation from the V2VME board of directors in April, which was accepted with regret. Andrea first signed on to Vet to Vet in May 2017 as a volunteer peer companion, visiting Marcia Farr until Marcia's death in 2020. Andrea was a member of the first V2VME board of directors, formed in 2018. She helped guide development of V2VME's social media presence and more recently facilitated virtual training via Zoom and the production of a virtual training course that will allow V2VME to expand its reach to volunteers in other regions.



Andrea is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and the owner/practitioner of a private practice in Portland, Maine. A veteran herself, Andrea honorably served in the US Army for 4+ years, including deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Thank you, Andrea, for all your contributions to Vet to Vet Maine! We'll miss you and we wish you well.

A word of farewell from Andrea:

It is with sadness and excitement I write to inform you that I will be leaving Vet 2 Vet Maine to pursue an opportunity to live, study, and work abroad in Spain. It has been a wonderfully enriching experience serving as a Vet 2 Vet Maine Volunteer, as both a Visitor and a Board Member. I will always cherish the relationship with my Veteran Friend, Marcia, who passed away last year. She was a beautiful person and I learned so much about life and friendship from her, gaining far more than I ever could have given. I will forever experience both longing and gratitude for her every day. During my term on the board I deepened my love and appreciation for this organization and all the wonderful people who make it happen. The volume and scope of activity done by our volunteers behind the scenes is astounding, and kudos to Sue Gold for making it all come together! While I would love to stay here forever, it is time for my next adventure but I will be sure to join the Vet 2 Vet Maine team upon my return!

Time for a Treat!

Starting in May, all volunteers (in whatever V2VME position they hold) who post their hours for the previous month by the 7th of the following month will be entered into a raffle. The winner will receive a \$10 gift certificate to a coffee shop or McDonald's or other eatery. Those who don't post their hours before the 7th will receive a friendly reminder call from volunteer Gail Merritt, with an offer to post the hours for the volunteer. If you need help posting your time, please contact Brenda Stevens (York County) at outreach@vet2vetmaine.org or call her at 579-4017 or Judie O'Malley (all other locales) at director@vet2vetmaine.org or call her at 579-4024.

Why it's important: A large part of the cost of operating Vet to Vet Maine—from staff salaries to background checks to insurance and software fees—is covered through grants and generous donors.

Understandably, these grantors and benefactors want to know that the program works and that their money is well-invested in an effort that is getting results. Vet to Vet Maine has made a difference in the lives of dozens of veterans (and their volunteers)—in large part because of the time our volunteers commit to their veteran friends. Proof of that service is found in our Volgistics records, where volunteers each month post their hours devoted to the program and their veteran.



With our track record, documented by the time our volunteers spend with veterans friends, we can also attract new donors and grants.

So thank you, keep those time reports coming, and good luck in the raffle!

Caregivers Support

The V2VME Caregivers' Network quarterly meeting, held via Zoom on April 8, featured Lori Campbell of Southern Maine Agency on Aging, who spoke about dementia and the challenges it presents caregivers. A recording of the meeting is available for viewing by contacting Kathy Lavigne at kathylav1949@gmail.com or (207) 809-3401.

The 3rd quarterly zoom meeting will be on August 13 at 6:15 pm. Two in-home health aide agencies, one in Cumberland County and one in York County, will speak about the services they offer. Caregivers whose veterans participate in Vet to Vet Maine are encouraged to contact Coordinator Kathy Lavigne at rlav@live.com for more details.

Congrats to Jonathan Bretton

Vet to Vet Maine sends warm congratulations to Cpt. Jonathan Bretton for his recent selection as the U.S. Army Center for Military History's first scholar in residence. In his new role, Jonathan will serve as a guest faculty member at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point for a year, and will then develop educational military history tours at the Army's Center of Military History in Washington, D.C. As historian for the Maine National Guard, Jonathan hosted two presentations on the Guard's role in World War I and World War II for V2VME's project in conjunction with the Maine Humanities Council. Those presentations are available for viewing on V2VME's website, <http://www.vet2vetmaine.org>.

BENEFITS AND SERVICES

Covid-19 Funeral Expenses

Covid-19 Expense Reimbursement Campaign from FEMA is designed to provide financial assistance to family members of the deceased who incurred Covid-19 related funeral expenses. The guidelines are being finalized, but it will require a Death Certificate that lists Covid-19 as a direct or indirect cause of death, along with funeral expense documents. The funeral assistance line is: (844) 684-6333 or TTY: (800) 462-7585.

You can use the FEMA website to get the most up-to-date information:

<https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance>

There will be only one application per deceased individual allowed, so applicants should wait until all expenses are known before applying for the reimbursement. And apply only through the government site, since scammers have been reported using this benefit to lure unwary people to reveal confidential information.

Dental Care for Maine Veterans

Beginning May 15, Maine veterans will have access to dental care thanks to the formation of the Maine Veterans' Dental Network, a collaboration of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Affairs (MBVA); Northeast Delta Dental, which has provided \$35,000 to fund the network; participating dental clinics; and Federally Qualified Health Centers. Dental services will be provided on a first-come first-serve basis to Maine's veterans who otherwise could not afford them and will be available until funding runs out. Any veteran who is not 100 percent service-connected to the VA, doesn't have dental insurance, and cannot afford to pay for dental care out of pocket, may receive services under the grant. FMI or to enroll in the program, contact Sarah Sherman at 207-430-5816 or email sarah.sherman@maine.gov.

Dental services in the southern Maine area will be provided at Community Dental in Biddeford and Portland and UNE Dental Clinic in Portland. Six other clinics will handle the needs of veterans in other areas of the state. The state of Maine also provides funding for emergency dental care under the Veterans' Emergency Financial Assistance Program.

For more information about this service, visit the website

at <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/tax-finance-benefits/vefa.html>.

V2VME volunteer David Barber, who has been a tireless advocate of accessible dental care for veterans since 2017, said, "It's been a journey."

Help Getting Your Stimulus Check

If you or your veteran has not yet received the most recent Stimulus check (Economic Impact Payment), you can go to <http://www.irs.gov/eip> and click on "Get My Payment." If you need further help, you can call the IRS at 800-919-9835. Contact

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Thank you to our Generous Donors

CARES Grant Continues to Fund V2VME's Service to Older Veterans



Vet 2 Vet Maine was awarded a second \$7,500 mini-grant in March. These mini-grants are made possible through CARES Act funding provided by the federal government in response to the COVID-19 emergency. This grant will support Vet to Vet Maine's response to the growing needs of older veterans in Southern Maine.

Vet to Vet Maine is deeply appreciative of the support we receive from our donors, including these generous contributors:

Rotary Club of South Portland-Cape Elizabeth

Jones, Rich & Barnes Funeral Home

Antiques USA

Priscilla Miller (for the Shirl Weaver Women's Special Fund)

Network for Good

Amazon Smile

Our gratitude to donors who contributed in memory of V2VME participant Jackson Caldwell: **Kathleen Lee and Jane Runnels**

Thanks also to those who donated to Vet to Vet Maine in memory of Carol Rancourt:

Elaine Killelea, Suzan Nelson, and Judie O'Malley.

And thanks to our monthly contributor, **Paul Watkins!**

Thank you all!

VET TO VET MAINE ACTIVITIES (ON LINE)

April 26, 27, and 28: Vet to Vet Volunteer Training via Zoom
4 pm to 7. To register or FMI, please call Program Director Judie O'Malley at

207-579-4024 or email director@vet2vetmaine.org

May 5: Volunteers Case Review

4:30-5:30 pm via Zoom

May 11: V2VME Board Meeting

5-6 pm via Zoom

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