

Mainers Build Shelters for Homeless Veterans

A group of VFW members from the Pine Tree State convert utility trailers into tiny homes so Maine's vets don't sleep on 'the cold, hard ground'

Jul 14, 2025

Last October on a crisp, clear morning, volunteers gathered at the headquarters for Veterans Emergency Temporary Shelter (V.E.T.S.) nestled in the woods just outside Boothbay, Maine. They were there to work on and showcase utility trailers-turned temporary shelters for homeless veterans.

From as far north as Bridgewater, Maine, where snowfall averages 89 inches, south to Kittery, Maine, homeless vets have been provided warmth thanks to Boothbay V.E.T.S.

Vietnam Veteran Ed Harman was inspired to start up Boothbay V.E.T.S. after hearing of a homeless veteran in Maine who died from exposure due to a lack of warm shelter. He soon learned veterans experiencing homelessness in the Pine Tree State was all too common.

“We are veterans working for veterans,” Harman said. “I don't care who you are, no one should have to sleep on the cold, hard ground.”

V.E.T.S. volunteers convert utility trailers into comfortable, warm living spaces for vets needing shelter as they look for employment and permanent housing.

Harman said he works with the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services to identify current needs. He also works with the VA in Maine.

“We do not turn any veteran in need of a shelter away,” Harman said.

Each trailer is complete with a bed, microwave, mini refrigerator, table, chair and a portable toilet. Bottled water, non-perishable food items and linens also are provided. Seven quilting groups have partnered with V.E.T.S. to donate quilts for each trailer.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

Harman, a member of VFW Post 2197 in Topsham, Maine, said the best part of the trailers is the insulation which can withstand temperatures well below freezing.

The builders are proud that the insulation, which comes from Texas, will not burn, as it is completely fireproof. Small heaters are included in the trailers, as well.

When the group originally tested the first trailer, it was minus-10 degrees outside. The heat was turned on in the trailer, and in less than an hour, it was 70 degrees inside.

While the original model for the trailers was designed for single occupancy, V.E.T.S. volunteers have completed units for a family of four so that families do not have to be separated during uncertain times.

Harman said the family trailers have a murphy bed and two twin beds, along with the other amenities included in the single units.

During the October visit to Boothbay V.E.T.S., then-VFW Department of Maine Commander Anthony Kimble commended the work the volunteers are doing.

“This is such an important avenue for our homeless veterans, especially in central Maine,” Kimble said. “Providing quick access to shelter and helping these vets get counseling, this is priceless.”

In addition to providing emergency shelter, Harman works around the clock to help veterans get connected with their earned VA benefits. While he commends the VA system in Maine, he knows that there is a brief waiting period for homeless vets to get help, which is why he said these trailers are vital.

VFW Post 2197 Commander Roger Stevens said seven members of his Post regularly volunteer.

“This whole thing is amazing,” Stevens said. “Ed is on the go constantly. He works 24/7 on this.”

Harman recalled the story of a couple who lived for more than three months in one of the trailers. They saved enough money for a deposit on an apartment and two months’ rent.

V.E.T.S. delivered a trailer to Acadia National Park more than 100 miles from Boothbay. A vet had been living in the park for about 100 days.

Harman recalled the vet saying, “I just died and went to heaven,” when he entered the trailer for the first time. “These are the stories that get me right here,” said Harman, touching his heart. “This is why we do what we do.”

‘A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE’

The process of converting the trailers into what is essentially a tiny home is not an easy or inexpensive one. Harman said it takes two men about 16 weeks to build one. Window and insulation installation is not a quick task.

Last year, the Maine Department of Corrections offered to provide manpower to V.E.T.S. The commissioner for the state’s Department of Corrections is Randall Liberty, who is a veteran.

Residents of Mountain View Corrections Center’s apprentice carpenter program earn time off their sentence by participating in this endeavor of helping homeless vets.

Trailers are delivered to the corrections facility where the work is completed. Harman calls it a winning situation for everyone.

“With more people working on one trailer, it gets done much quicker,” he said. “This also provides Mountain View residents a skill they can use when they get out. People deserve a second chance at life.”

Corinne Bailey, the women’s vocational instructor at the Maine Correctional Center, heard about this and called Harman.

Bailey thought the project could provide marketable skills for women as well. She brought a group from the Southern Maine Women’s Reentry Center to Boothbay to learn.

One of those women is Victoria Scott. She is participating in the work on the trailer conversions.

“It immediately felt like coming home to extended family, because we got the warmest welcome, received with non-judgment and optimism and figuring it out with us,” Scott told TV station News Center Maine.

Incidentally, Scott is completing a college degree while in the corrections system. She had been looking at ways to reduce homelessness in Maine when she heard about working on the mobile shelters.

“We are not just touching veterans lives here, we are touching everyone’s lives,” Harman said. “Most importantly, we are trying to save the lives of our brothers and sisters.”

To learn more about Boothbay V.E.T.S., visit <https://www.boothbay-vets.com>, email boothbayvets@protonmail.com or write 752 Wiscasset Road, Boothbay, ME 04544.

This article is featured in the 2025 July/August issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written

by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.