

# RUMSHOCK VETERANS FOUNDATION

## STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR A COMPREHENSIVE, SELF SUFFICIENT, INTEGRATED LIFESTYLE SOLUTION FOR VETERANS. THIS INCLUDES HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, TRANSPORTATION, FOOD PRODUCTION/DISTRIBUTION TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONICS RECYCLING

PREPARED BY:  
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# Table of Contents

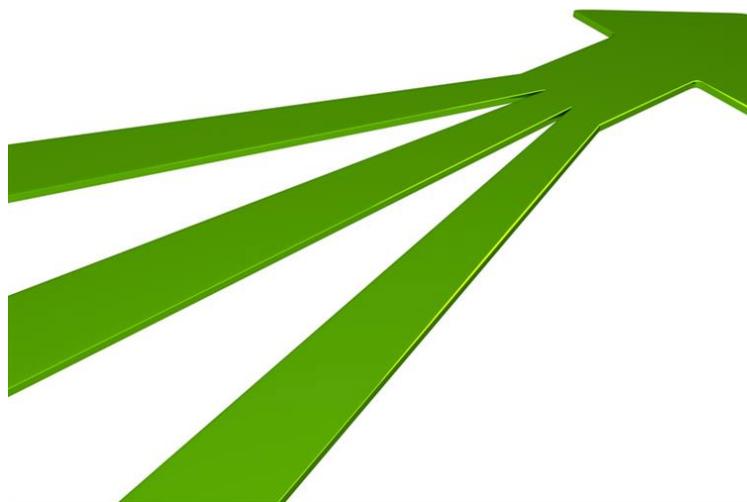
<b>I.</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
	• About Rumshock Veterans Foundation	
<b>II.</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>9</b>
	• Homelessness • Unemployment • Suicide	
<b>III.</b>	<b>Magic of RVF's Solutions</b>	<b>12</b>
	• Hydroponic Technology	
	• RVF's Secret Sauce: Combining Education and Employment	
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Project Components</b>	<b>14</b>
	• Rumshock Village	
	• Sustainable Hydroponic Farming (Distributed Food Production)	
	• Electronics Recycling • Transportation and Maintenance	
	• Canine Companionship	

## Executive Summary:

Rumshock Veterans Foundation is a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit corporation. RVF provides programs that will support veterans, after discharge, who are facing challenges as a result of their military service. The veterans that reside in Victory Village will be responsible for making the village a self-sustaining cooperative. They will be given room and board and also a job assignment, within the village, just like in the military. RVF will engage leadership and mentoring from military veterans, in the scalable and profitable hydroponic agricultural industry. RVF's innovative approach will create a convergent community that includes the following components:

- 1) A self-sustaining tiny village of affordable housing for veterans.
- 2) A new employment/profit sharing paradigm within a scalable, technologically sophisticated hydroponic farming system,
- 3) A veterans transportation service,
- 4) An e-waste recycling program that fosters a stimulating and educational environment for veterans, and
- 5) Canine Companionship that provides emotional support to those who need it.

Veterans will grow and market organic greens and herbs for consumers who prefer a nutritious, traceable, and local food source at competitive prices. In addition they will engage in electronics recycling, which enjoys a growing market demand throughout the United States. They will also provide transportation to veterans in need.



## The Problem

- Approximately 40,000 American veterans are homeless and face the same difficulties as non-veterans in addition to service-related matters. Separation from military service and issues related to complex multiple deployments are among specifically identified veteran issues. Successful veteran reintegration into civilian life rests upon providing veterans with training that builds on their military knowledge and skill. Employment post-separation from service, homelessness prevention, and mental health programs that promote civilian transition are equally as important. Transportation to and from employment and treatment programs is a critical component.
- Combining an underserved labor force that can really do productive work and that has, for years, struggled to find meaningful employment (namely, veterans), is one of the ingredients that makes the RVF program unique. This labor force is diligent and capable of a period of prolonged focus. Moreover, some individuals may also be eligible for state or federal disability benefits (from Social Security or other programs, designed to offset the costs of training, caring, and housing them). This makes the appeal of investment in these segments all the more attractive.
- Demand for Food Source Traceability and Trust is gradually giving way to Distributed Food Production. A recent food transparency survey found that consumers want to see everything from a complete ingredient breakdown to sourcing information, with 94% of respondents saying they are likely to be more loyal to a brand that offers complete transparency.
- The U.S. electronic goods recycling market size is expected to reach USD 15.23 billion by 2025. Factors such as rapid industrialization, increasing demand for automobiles and consumer electronics, and growing need to manage proper utilization of natural resources are expected to propel demand for electronic goods recycling over the forthcoming years. According to the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI), approximately 4.5 million tons of electronic waste (e-waste) is recycled in the U.S. every year. Electronic goods recycling refers to conversion of electronic scrap into useful raw material

## About Rumshock Veterans Foundation

*The Rumshock Veterans Foundation is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation formed in the state of New York in February 2019. Our programs are intended to help veterans, after discharge, address any challenges they may face as a result of their military service, while honoring their dedication and the sacrifices they have made on behalf of our country.*

**William Whetsel** was born and raised in Greensburg, PA. After high school, he attended Penn State University before enlisting in the US Air Force as an EOD technician. After his time in the Air Force, he moved to New York City and began his 13-year career working with Trans World Airlines as a ramp crew chief. After 9/11, he became one of the first 100 people hired to help form the Transportation Security Administration. He then became a part of the team who was in charge of transitioning all US airports from private security to federal security. After a year of traveling around the country with the transition team, he became the TSA security supervisor at Stewart Airport for 8 years. William then retired and has had the burning passion to help his fellow veterans that are in a time of need ever since. In early 2019 he started the Rumshock Veterans Foundation with the help of his board. Because of trips back and forth to grandparents in the summer, he would stop and help and when a neighbor needed a house or a barn repaired. He would always lend a hand and help. Bill's grandfather was a nurse in a surgical hospital in Dijon, France in WW2 and his uncles served in Vietnam; one in the Army and one in the USMC. His dad also served in the Navy.

## Rumshock Veterans Foundation Board

- **William Whetsel, President** I served in USAF as a 46450 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Specialist, assisted in the formation of the TSA and DHS after 9/11 attacks, transitioning the airport from private to federal. Member of American Legion post 488 as a Sons of the American Legion.
- **Roxanne Lopilato, Treasurer** Accomplished Kitchen and Bath Designer with 20 years experience managing three branches for a Plumbing and Heating Supply Company. Creative, active, diligent and consistent with the ability to work in a team-oriented environment; persistent with the ability to get the best results. My passion for non-profit work began when I was a child and joined the Ladies Auxiliary in Park Slope Brooklyn with my aunt. Years later I found myself participating in several causes in my hometown of Greenwood Lake. These included a "Save the Lake" committee, board member of Grace Lutheran Church, and President of my homeowners association for many years. I currently hold the position of secretary for my homeowners association.

I truly enjoy helping others, getting involved to make changes for the better. When people come into your life and volunteer to mentor you, or help you when you are struggling; you get to feel first hand how wonderful it feels to be helped and if I can give that feeling back to someone else it is all worthwhile.

## Rumshock Veterans Foundation Board (continued)

- **Peter Lyons Hall, Vice president** Peter has served as vice president marketing for The CIT Group/asset-based lending division and as director of marketing for McGraw-Hill Information Services/Sweet's Group and led the company's efforts in digital presentations for the sales force. He has written for TSNN, the leading trade show information resource in the US, and frequently provides information for northeast Public Radio station WAMC and TV News 12 Hudson Valley. He has been a frequent guest on Cablevision's Neighborhood Journal program, on Channel 78.

Peter has also been an active volunteer for many community organizations and events, including The Children's Book Festival, Warwick in Bloom, The Warwick Farmers' Market, The Summer Arts Festival, the Artists' Open Studio Tour, Saint Stephen's parish, The Black Dirt Feast, and others. He designed and edited the final document that allowed the Town of Warwick, under the direction of John Hicks, to purchase the **Mid-Orange Correctional Facility** from the State of New York. He has developed websites and other digital solutions, along with branding enhancements, for a number of community organizations, including the Warwick Historical Society, the Vernon Chamber of Commerce, Village of Greenwood Lake, and **Warwickinfo.net**, a highly acclaimed community directory.

- **Marie Fay, Trustee** Accomplished Communications executive with a proven track record of leadership and marketing management. I wore many hats in my 30-year career, Marketing Services Manager, Business Logistics Manager, Olympic Affairs Director and Communications and Planning Director. As a result, I have a unique ability to manage multi-disciplinary projects and to navigate complex challenges. I am also a seasoned dog trainer with more than 10 years' experience in the field. I am a member of the Board of Directors for HiTor Animal Care Center. My role on the Board is to provide leadership and management to the Fundraising Committee. I am a compassionate person who wants to offer my skills to nonprofit organizations like Rumshock Veterans Foundation.
- **John Jack Laroe, Trustee** I joined the Peace Corps in 1975 and was sent to Ghana (West Africa) in January of 1976. I was connected with the Forest Products Research Institute in Kumasi. I traveled around the country visiting all the sawmills which were mostly owned by British, German and Swiss companies. Most of the problems they had were around the fact that they were using equipment that was twenty plus years old and they had trouble bringing in new machines due to the foreign exchange issues. The Ghanaian currency didn't have much value outside of the country because of the political instability. After about eight months I came down with the Typhoid Fever and was sent home. Overall, it was a positive experience as far as learning about a different culture which is one of the main goals of the Peace Corps.

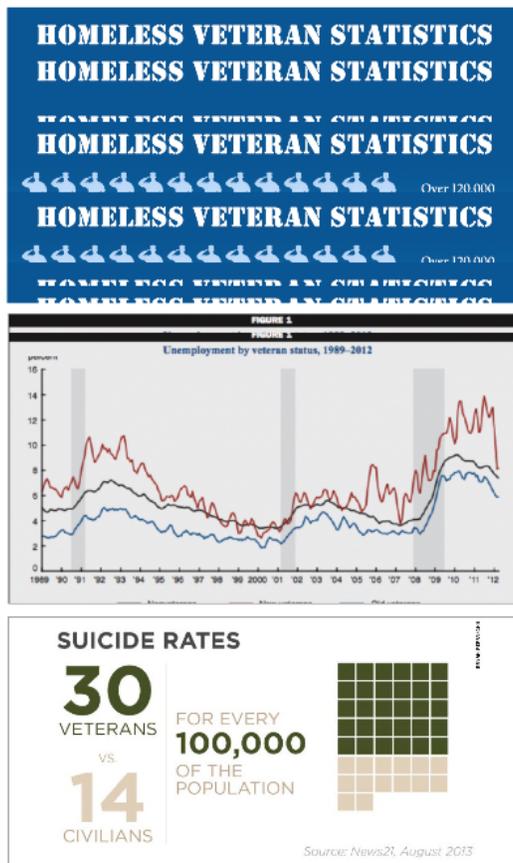
# Five Project Components

There are a total of five project components that comprise the Victory Village initiative from Rumshock Veterans Foundation, each integrated into a sophisticated, synergistic lifestyle solution for veterans. They are designed to provide participating veterans with a sense of fulfillment and personal pride, while generating a productive workforce for the community in which they reside. In addition, three of the program elements (Tiny Homes, Food Production and Electronics Recycling) will have an economic benefit for the community and will help offset costs of the overall program:

1. Rumshock Village (Tiny residential community of affordable housing for veterans)
2. Distributed Food Production Technology (Hydroponics and Microgreens),
3. Electronics Recycling
4. Transportation & Maintenance
5. Canine Companionship

# The Challenge: High Veteran Homelessness, Unemployment, Suicide

Underserved Veterans Groups:



Veterans have seen the worst of what mankind can conjure up in the defense of our country. They are struggling to regain a sense of dignity and self-worth. They experience mental health disorders, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress, and traumatic brain injury at disproportionate rates compared to their civilian counterparts. Eighteen to 22 American veterans commit suicide daily and young veterans aged 18–44 are most at risk. Health care professionals must be aware of patients’ military history and be able to recognize suicide-risk factors, regardless of age. Advancement in medical technology has allowed servicemen to survive their injuries but, for many, at the cost of a traumatic limb amputation and associated mental scarring. Health care professionals must be able to address physical safety concerns, as well as, emotional health of veterans. Approximately 49,933 American veterans are homeless and face the same difficulties as non-veterans in addition to service-related matters. Separation from military service and issues related to complex multiple deployments are among specifically identified veteran issues. Successful veteran reintegration into civilian life rests upon providing veterans with training that builds on their military knowledge and skill, employment post-separation from service, homelessness prevention, and mental health programs that

promote civilian transition.

**Creating structure.** • The military provides structure and has a clear chain of command. This does not naturally exist outside the military. They will have to create their own structure or adjust to living in an environment with more ambiguity.

**Adjusting to providing basic necessities (e.g., food, clothing, housing).** • In the military, these things are not only provided, but there is often little choice (e.g., you eat at determined times in a certain place, etc).

• Given the lack of choices while in the military, the vast array of choices in the civilian world can sometimes be overwhelming.

**Adjusting to a different pace of life and work.** • In the military, personnel do not leave until the mission is complete. In a private sector business, an employee might be expected to stop and go home at 5 p.m., whether the “mission” is complete or not. This may not be apparent to all veterans.

- Civilian workplaces may be competitive environments, as opposed to the collaborative camaraderie of other venues.
- Given the direct nature of communication in military settings, there may be subtle nuances in conversations and workplace lingo that are unfamiliar to veterans.

*Establishing services.* • Veterans and others may have to learn how to get a doctor, dentist, life insurance, etc. These services were previously provided by the military or third-party institutions. • A veteran may also need to navigate the paperwork and process of obtaining benefits and services from the Department of Veteran Affairs.

## Solutions: Addressing the Challenges for Veterans

1. **Education** RVF will create an education center; including a working educational laboratory for veterans needing to learn skills pertaining to energy technologies and business acumen.
2. **Employment** The hydroponic industry, a subset of controlled environment agriculture, will continue to exhibit a growth rate that far exceeds that of its traditional counterpart. Although population growth will add to overall produce demand, the hydroponic industry is in a unique position to fulfill the consumer's desire to move toward high quality, non-GMO and organic produce.
3. **Technological Evolution** The rate of technological progress, as well as the number of new products available, will continue to accelerate. The ability to farm under controlled conditions in an indoor environment closer to the consumer will shorten distribution time and allow for fresher produce at the market.

## Veterans

Studies examining the relationship between vocation and non-vocational outcomes have concluded that employment and meaningful engagement leads to better self-esteem, better quality of life, reduced symptoms (clinical functioning) and overall greater life satisfaction not only for the general population, but especially for veterans. The latest research shows that adults with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, who are meaningfully engaged through vocational outcomes report a higher level of overall life-satisfaction than their counterparts. Veterans particularly would benefit greatly by engaging in plant growth businesses like Hydroponic Farming. Apart from providing sustainable employment, individuals would gain meaningful engagement with team members which is essential to fostering mental health well-being. Furthermore, through the employment, participants would gain not only specialty skills practical to their employment position, but also social skills and interpersonal skills, as well as ensuring community integration. Organizations [like Rumshock Veterans Foundation] have the prospective potential to become a leading food source for the regions served, due to the many advantages of Hydroponic Technology Farming. The benefits of the employed workforce are, however, far greater than any monetary gain that the Institute would yield. Enhancing our individuals' lifestyles through meaningful engagement, the experience of respect, choices, competence, purpose, and community integration is the ultimate reward to give and receive. *Source: Lorena Rucaj*

*"It's beginning to be apparent to me that business entrepreneurs—not all of them, but many of them—are, in their effort to solve these types of problems [of social issues, income inequality, etc.], going to create business models that can grow faster than the mainstream economy would allow them to grow because of the social impact, and, of course, they can attract greater talent. And at some stage, they will probably have a lower cost of capital because they will be perceived as not having threats that companies that disregard their social and environmental consequences would have." - Sir Ronald Cohen, McKinsey.com*

### SUICIDE FREQUENCY



*Source: Veterans Administration suicide report, February 2013*

# The Magic of RVF Solution: Innovative Technology Combined with Undervalued Veterans Involvement

“RVF will create a valuable lifestyle for veterans by providing sustainable employment in a scalable hydroponic farming system, enabling them to obtain meaningful engagement with team members, essential to fostering mental health well-being, while growing organic greens and herbs for consumers who prefer a nutritious, traceable, and local food source. In addition, veterans will engage in a sophisticated electronics recycling program.” 1. Production of organic salad greens utilizing high efficiency hydroponic agriculture technology, a replicable, scalable, and sustainable business model. 2. Reliable revenue stream from Long-Term Purchase Agreements by organizations, institutions, and other groups. 3. Education of veterans. 4. Sustainable employment for veterans. 5. RVF’s farms are scalable with affordable housing facilities, to be located near production facilities. 6. Local supply chains are profitable and important for participating firms, even if volume is small. 7. The RVF Hydroponic Farming System is trustworthy and traceable. Customers can view where their food comes from, talk with the horticulturist farmer, and monitor its distribution from farm to table.

- RVF’s mission is to support and contribute profits in perpetuity to help support clients and to cover needs not covered by government benefits. Under a not-for-profit banner, the Rumshock Veterans Foundation will facilitate combining the leadership skills, ambition and desire to help veterans become productive members of our community.
- RVF is proposing to create an education and revenue-sustainable center capable of producing high quality produce and flora in demand for consumers, regional restaurants and food distributors in the Hudson Valley region. Working as a public/private partnership with regional academic institutions, veterans groups and special needs organizations, the RVF will incorporate new agriculture greenhouse designs and technologies capable of stimulating the growth of plants and edibles, reducing the power requirements often encountered by traditional greenhouses while serving as an innovation technology laboratory for emerging technology innovators in energy and agriculture. RVF will work with other technology companies that are applicable to our program. In addition to training programs, we will strive to utilize their technologies on site for the purpose of displaying and marketing their products. This should help us develop other revenue sources.
- RVF will create an impact driven business that provides employment for veterans by cultivating nutritious food for the community. We work towards empowering the global population with replicable tools to establish food sovereignty in a world that has a decreasing access to arable land.

## RVF's Secret Sauce: Disruption of the Labor Market and Traditional Agriculture, while Pre-Selling Its Products

RVF will redefine the labor force by hiring, training, housing, and mentoring veterans that have unique skills and which have been traditionally overlooked. This will take place in an environment that integrates socialization within a community while harvesting crops at intervals that are four times the average in traditional farming techniques. This program can produce a much higher yield than ever expected.



## PROJECT COMPONENTS

### 1. Rumshock Village: A Community of Tiny Affordable Housing

Rumshock Village is a custom-building project, that's the first master-planned tiny house community, on 75 acres. The pint-sized village initially consisting of six dwellings with private backyards will cater to ecologically aware small space veteran dwellers. Edible herb landscaping, a production facility, as well as a glorious urban garden are just some of the green amenities that are planned. All homes will include energy-saving features for reducing the community's overall footprint including solar power and water reclamation.



RUMSHOCK VILLAGE: A VETERAN OWNED CONFIGURATION HONORING VETERANS WITH HOUSING AND A COMPREHENSIVE, SELF-SUFFICIENT, INTEGRATED LIFESTYLE. INVOLVING HYDROPONIC FARMING, EMPLOYMENT, ELECTRONICS RECYCLING AND VICTORY TRANSPORTATION

## 2. Distributed Food Production - Hydroponic Technology

- **Water Efficiency.** Hydroponic systems use significantly less water than soil-based farming and allow you to recycle the water you give to your plants. Instead of having it drain down through the soil and away from the roots of a plant, it's collected and pumped right back to the plants. This cycle of irrigation, collection, and irrigation again continues until the plants have consumed the water.
- **No Weeds.** Do you know how much time farmers spend combating weeds? Weeding is one of the most back breaking and time-consuming tasks of anyone growing plants in soil. In hydroponics, there are no seeds from other plants in the growing medium so there are no weeds growing and fighting against your crop.
- **No herbicides.** Since there is no soil and no weeds, farmers have no reason to use toxic chemicals like herbicides to fight unwanted vegetation. The absence of these chemicals helps you grow cleaner food.
- **No pests.** Soil based farming is vulnerable to attack from a vast number of unwanted pests that can destroy a season of hard work over night - birds, squirrels, gophers, deer, groundhogs, the list goes on. Hydroponic systems can be set up in places where these pests don't exist or where you've created effective barriers, like four walls and a roof.
- **Quick turnover.** With hydroponics, there are no seasonal limits or restoration periods required for the farm. Once a plant is harvested, the next can be planted in its place allowing for maximum yield per sq. ft.
- **Precise control over the nutrients your plants need to thrive.** By using plant-specific nutrient formulas and daily monitoring, the farmer has control over how much nutrients they are getting. By providing plants with exactly what they need to grow and develop to their full size, there is little risk of poor crop quality or quantity.
- **Ergonomic design.** Hydroponic systems can be set up and placed at more accessible heights. Because you're not limited to growing on the ground, the labor of planting, transplanting, and/or harvesting can be done more comfortably and have less impact on a farmer's body.
- **Freedom to grow just about anywhere.** Commercial hydroponics doesn't have the limitations of being held to rural agricultural land. Being able to grow closer to the people eating your crops increases accessibility and eliminates the need for complex distribution networks that take away profits from the farmer.
- **Ability to grow year-round.** Growing hydroponically allows you to grow year-round, and supply local produce 365 days a year regardless of the season. Being able to grow year-round helps farmers eliminate business risks of a poor crop season and helps increase local food access in the community.

### 3. Electronic Waste Recycling

**E-Waste Recycling** Our main space in the warehouse will be used for this program. We will take donated items and break them down to resale for revenue. The Foundation's vehicles will also be used to transport items for this program. This program will require 1-2 veterans who will also live in the village. The Electronic Waste Recycling program, mandated by NY State Law (NYS Electronic Equipment Recycling and Reuse Act, Environmental Conservation Law, Article 27, Title 26) can be expanded without increased cost; instead, vets would receive credits for working there.

E-waste is the informal name given to those electronic products that are nearing the end of their "useful life" and about to be thrown into the trash. The most popular types of electronic products that are thrown out include: computers, televisions, smartphones, tablets, copiers, fax machines, and speakers. It's important to note that in order to minimize the environmental impact of e-waste, you should instead try to reuse, refurbish, or recycle your electronic products. Keep in mind that e-waste is not only harmful to the environment, with an EPA estimated 60 million metric tons entering landfills each year, but the waste also represents a lost economic opportunity. In fact, many of the product's components can be sold or recycled to create new devices. The latter two actions can not only generate income, but they help to reduce the negative environmental impact of e-waste that is not disposed of properly.



The following reasons from Compucycle.com can help understand why consumers should make a diligent effort to properly dispose of electronics.

- **E-Waste Contains High Levels of Precious Metals** Electronic waste contains precious metals that are estimated at a 40 to 50 time richer value than the ores that are mined from the Earth. Unfortunately, when electronics are simply thrown away, the majority of these precious metals are lost. For example, it is estimated that only 10 – 15 percent of the gold found in e-waste is recovered for reuse, recycling, or resale. Properly recycling and disposing of e-waste can increase the percentage of precious metals that are successfully recovered from outdated electronics.
- **E-Waste Contains Toxic Substances** It's no secret that e-waste contains toxic substances; however, far too many people think that throwing away a small amount isn't harmful to the environment. The truth of the matter is that many electronic devices contain gold, platinum, chromium, cadmium, mercury, lead, rhodium, tellurium, and other heavy metals that can harm the environment in almost any sized quantity. The toxins that are emitted from improperly disposed of e-waste can contaminate the water, soil, and air. Additionally the harmful toxins can cause reproductive disorders, cancer, endocrine disruption, and other serious health issues.
- **Prevent International Movement, Contamination, and Exploitation** The uncontrolled movement of e-waste has resulted in heightened levels of global contamination. Additionally, a large portion of e-waste is moved (unbeknownst to the average consumer) to third world countries where cheap labor and primitive disposal approaches increases the aforementioned health risks to local residents. Additionally, when e-waste is broken down into scrap in developing countries, workers are often exposed to dangerous life-threatening fumes.
- **Recycling E-Waste Can Cut Greenhouse Gas Levels** Did you know that if more electronics are recycled, then less will need to be produced, and greenhouse gas levels can be greatly reduced? As seen through the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) model, manufacturers are encouraged and even rewarded for building better, longer lasting products, that can more easily be upgraded or recycled. In this vein, if consumers are educated about how to reuse or recycle their electronics, then not only can they enjoy the economic rewards, but a positive environmental impact can be enjoyed by current and future generations.
- **EPR Model Can Lead to Innovative Technology** As noted in reason number four, the EPR model can also benefit consumers. In fact, when manufacturers focus on raising their technological standards, then they can create better electronic products for the consumer. Consumers, in return, can enjoy the monetary benefits of electronics that can more easily be upgraded, instead of the financial burden of devices that must constantly be replaced due to new software releases, product launches, or hardware changes.

## Electronic Waste Recycling (continued)

- **EPR Model Can Create Fairer Consumption Costs** In addition to the environmental and consumer benefits, the EPR also creates a model for fairer consumption costs. In layman's terms, if the manufacturers and sellers include the cost of recycling into the product, then the consumers purchasing the products will inevitably pay for its safe disposal. In the latter model, non-consumers are saved from paying safe disposal costs via added taxation.
- **Saves Landfill Space** It's no secret that e-waste takes up a large portion of landfills. In fact, a recent EPA study found that each year an estimated 60 million metric tons of e-waste is thrown into landfills throughout the globe. Implementing recycling best practices can greatly reduce this figure and subsequently have a positive environmental impact for current and future generations.
- **Green Job Creation** The beauty of recycling e-waste is that it can create more jobs, especially in the low income areas where many of the recycling plants are located. Creating more e-waste recycling jobs not only means that more people will be employed throughout the year; but, it also means that more tons of e-waste can be properly sorted, recycled, reused, and inevitably disposed of properly each year.
- **Data Security and Identity Theft** Did you know that consumers who simply throw away their electronic devices are more likely to experience data security breaches or have their identities stolen? A large portion of e-waste is generated from devices that are functioning but outdated. Whenever you are disposing of electronics that are still functioning, you need to ensure that you have properly cleared all of your personal information from the device.
- **State Requirements** While there is currently no federal law that states e-waste shouldn't be shipped abroad or thrown into landfills, there are 28 state laws, including New York, that have placed a ban on e-waste in landfills.

## 4. Village Transportation & Maintenance

**Village Transportation (UberVet) Transportation Service** will be available to veterans without their own cars. There will be two vehicles (1 ADA accessible van, 1 full size pick up). They will both be used as general purpose vehicles within the village and outside the village. Vegetable deliveries from the Hydroponic Farm will also be managed through **Village Transportation**. The **Village Transportation** will share space within the Warehouse/Multi-purpose building. Inside this space will be a 3-bay garage for maintenance on our vehicles as well as space for veterans to repair their cars as part of the maker space concept. Two fully equipped sets of tools will be available for the veterans to use. Two qualified veterans from **Victory Village** will be assigned as drivers.

**VETERANS TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS** Of the approximately 3 million rural veterans enrolled in the VA health care system, • 56% are age 65 or older • 41% have service-related disabilities • 39% earned less than \$26,000 annually (FY 13). Often one or more of these factors impacts the veteran's ability to travel to health care appointments. For example, an age- or service-related disability may make driving difficult or unsafe; or the veteran may be comfortable driving close to home, but not to a VA medical center located a long distance away. Financial limitations are another potential barrier, preventing veterans from paying for fuel or car maintenance, or accessing for-hire travel options, such as taxis. Options for sharing a ride with others may be difficult to



Mind or arrange, or family members may have obligations of their own which makes it difficult for them to drive veterans to appointments. Rural veterans often experience many of these conditions. In addition, rural veterans may have access to fewer local general and specialist health care providers than their urban peers, live in communities where smaller hospital systems are closing due to financial instability, and have limited broadband coverage making it more difficult for them to access telehealth services. Indeed, the VA data shows that veterans who live in rural settings have greater health care needs and lower health-related quality- of-life scores compared with urban veterans. The five states with the highest numbers of enrolled rural veterans are Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. Veterans with an injury-related mental health condition, such as traumatic brain injury, are another group for whom transportation to health care services may be problematic. The need to access health care among this group of

veterans is exemplified by findings that indicate the risk for suicide is higher among those who have experienced combat related trauma. Those who experienced multiple wounds have an even higher risk. However, these veterans may not be able to transport themselves to treatment or have access to information on available transportation options. *Source: National Center for Mobility Management*

## 5. Canine Companionship

The most popular reason we have dogs is for their companionship. Evidence shows that dogs help people live a healthier and happier life. Dogs have been shown to improve their humans' cardiovascular and mental health by reducing blood pressure, increasing exercise, and decreasing stress and anxiety levels. They have also been shown to help in the treatment of depression and grief.



Nearly 78 million dogs are pets in the United States. Just like Queen Elizabeth, many people around the world report that their dogs are part of the family and just as important as their children and spouses. Dogs steal our hearts, chew our shoes and may wreak havoc in our lives but they bring us endless amounts of joy and allow us to engage in social interactions. Dogs' friendly and outgoing personalities enable them to expose their human companions to other individuals, potentially facilitating new friendships among humans. Additionally, dogs can serve as activity partners, show animals, and surrogates for human companionship.

The Canine Companionship program for Veterans is designed for those who believe in the human-animal bond as well as the healing power of animal training. Since the earliest days of human existence dogs have provided a level of companionship unique to anything else. The Canine program aims to help Veterans establish a foundation of communication with a matched dog from a partnering shelter/Puppy Development Program. Once this communication is established, Veterans will begin to connect with their dogs on a mutually-beneficial level, developing the ability to train new behaviors and synchronize in a unique partnership. While in this program, Veterans will learn the value of modern, canine training techniques that will enhance and build upon the unconditional bond that their canine companion has to offer.

*Source: PsychologyToday | Clear Path for Veterans*

