

CUTLER'S VETERAN PROGRAM

In President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address in 1865, he spoke of America's promise "to care for him who have borne the battle... to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace." For more than 150 years our country has struggled to live up to the aspirations of that promise. The basic needs of American veterans have become even more elusive in a society that is growing more complicated.

Like veterans that struggle, so does the Village of Cutler, Illinois. Yet the community of 450 people has devised a concept designed to directly assist disabled American veterans in a manner that also pulls the community up by its own bootstraps.

The Village of Cutler has successfully launched a program to provide a disabled American veteran and family with both, a career business opportunity and a companion mortgage free home. It starts with the fact that the community does not have a grocery store and residents must drive to other towns for basic groceries. The Village has purchased a former store building and is renovating it with its own revenues. The Village also purchased a modern home and taken together wants to provide the successful veteran with both, a viable grocery business and the home. A portion of the revenues from grocery sales to the community residents and veteran supporters around the area will be used to support additional affordable housing for veterans. In exchange, the community will ask those veterans to become involved and lead community improvement efforts, like neighborhood fix-ups and clean-ups.

The Village of Cutler is the first municipality to partner with the Arise Veteran Foundation of St. Louis, a non-profit group dedicated to helping veterans and their families find employment, housing, and provide mental, physical, spiritual, and relationship help. The organization has been successful in both business development and vocational training for veterans. Their involvement permits Cutler with the opportunity to better understand the actual needs of veterans beyond employment and housing.

One of the more endearing aspects of the effort are the volunteers coming forward to help out, both in terms of labor and donations. It turns out, American citizens universally appreciate, honor, and care about veterans. John F. Kennedy once wrote "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but live by them." If you would like to be part of project or know of a disabled American and family that could be interested in Cutler, please contact Village President Joe Loucks at 618-317-3156.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS FOR VETERAN WITH DISABILITIES FOR THE CUTLER PROJECT

1. An American veteran who is extraordinarily friendly, reliable, self-motivated, with a positive life outlook.
2. The veteran may have any disability that does not limit the management, operation, and eventual ownership of a community grocery store.
3. Member of a nuclear family unit consisting of a spouse, with or without children, where the spouse might or could be interested in participating in the daily or occasional management of the grocery store.
4. Prior retail/management experience helpful but not required. A demonstrated organizational skill set is appreciated. Willing to be trained if determined useful.
5. Lead a community effort to support other disabled American veterans with affordable housing opportunities in Cutler. Be actively involved with other veterans in coordinated actions to improve the community.
6. No preferences towards gender, ethnicity, or social preferences but strong allegiance to the betterment of veterans, the local community, and the country.
7. Honorable discharge.
8. Willing to relocate to Cutler and occupy the home being offered.