

MOAA Magazine Article

Texas Chapter Members Connect Veterans, Families to Needed Services

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Members of the Greater Dallas and the North Texas Chapter of MOAA, including Lt. Col. Charles Kelley, USAF (Ret), far left, support the Veterans Center of North Texas. (Photo courtesy of Greater Dallas and North Texas Chapter)

By Contributing Editor Blair Drake

Members of the Greater Dallas and the North Texas chapters of MOAA founded in 2014 the [Veterans Center of North Texas \(VCONT\)](#), a nonprofit that assists veterans and their families with accessing needed benefits and services. Today, about 13 members of the chapters — which merged this year to become the [Greater Dallas and North Texas Chapter](#) — support VCONT.

Lt. Col. Charles Kelley, USAF (Ret), chapter transition liaison, said chapter members were inspired to start VCONT after seeing statistics from the George W. Bush Institute indicating 65% of the approximately 165,000 veterans in the North Texas area have no idea where to go to obtain information about benefits or help with issues they face in trying to maintain productive lifestyles.

Since its inception, VCONT has assisted more than 3,000 veterans and families with employment, military benefits, financial and legal assistance, housing, transportation, and counseling, among other services.

Key to the success of this program is working with other community groups and maintaining a network of service providers, so when veterans come to VCONT, they can be connected with the correct provider to assist with their immediate and long-term needs.

In both 2018 and 2019, the chapter received a [Community Outreach Grant from the MOAA Foundation](#), which helped to provide the seed money for a new VCONT program, one that aids veterans in need of emergency temporary shelter, food, and transportation.

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Kelley said he and others realized the need for this type of assistance after a young couple with two babies came into the VCONT office about three years ago. “They were sleeping in their car, and no agencies had money to assist them because it was December and they were out of funds,” Kelley explained. “We passed the hat in our office and got them into a hotel. After that, we said we were never going to let that happen to a family again.”

The grants have allowed VCONT to develop a program where emergency funds are reimbursed by the chapter so veterans in need can receive immediate assistance. “While VCONT collaborates with other agencies ... these and other partners are often out of funds or their in-take process takes several days to several weeks — in many cases, too late to prevent an eviction or loss of utilities,” Kelley said.