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## Vet-Fest 2021 shows hope for the future



**Tammie Bloom, the office manager at Otter Springs Park and Campground, staffs the table in the Lodge House on Saturday (Aug. 7) during Vet-Fest 2021. Here, she accepts donations in a quilt-awarding process where the winner will take the quilt seen behind her. Money donated through this activity is to help the Camp Valor Project. Gilchrist County is known as the Springs Capital of the World, and Otter Springs Park and Campground is a destination for many travelers to enjoy.**

### **Story and Photos**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 8, 2021 at 8:11 a.m.**

**GILCHRIST COUNTY** – Rain dampened the turnout Saturday for the 2021 Vet-Fest, but the vendors were helpful to all the visitors as they shared information and opportunities to buy items or donate to causes.

The family-oriented fun event has endured through the global COVID-19 pandemic, and a couple of years of rainy weather, including a very wet Friday night (Aug. 7) event and Saturday's continuation of the two-day fest.

Vet-Fest is one of the annual fundraiser events for the Camp Valor Project by ForVets Inc. The ForVets mission statement notes it seeks "To provide a transitional living and learning community with recovery facilities and support services for empowering and enhancing rehabilitative outcome for Military Veterans with service related disabilities."

"Camp Valor is a much needed program and will serve to create a well-defined path to a rich, well deserved, bright future for these brave men and women who have sacrificed so much for their country," Dan Cavanah, ForVets Inc. president, has noted.

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Among the military service veterans at Vet-Fest 2021 were the POW-MIA Rolling Thunder Chapter 3 from Gainesville. Seen here are (front row, from left) Erinn McCann, Steve Queal, and Larry Jenney, and (back row, from left) Rolling Thunder Chapter 3 President Herb Hilderbrand and Roy CeCelle.



Among the military service veterans at Vet-Fest 2021 were officers and members of the Tri-County DAV Chapter 63. Seen here are (from left) Fred Johnson, Jr. Vice Cmdr. Ken Bamberger, Cmdr. Larry Folander, Adjutant Charles Goodman and Treasurer George Wood. Charity Hall is a member of this chapter. Her picture and information are below.

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**Charity Hall of Newberry started Lovin The Fit Life with a goal of working with injured military veterans. She is a service-disabled veteran. She is certified in fitness and nutritional education. To visit her website, go to <https://lovinthefitlife.com/>. She has free services and discounted services for veterans. Hall uses facilities at Otter Springs Park and Campground, and is seeking other avenues to meet with people who can be served by her teaching them about Lovin The Fit Life. Notice the fogged up window from the humidity outside. Photographers in Florida may remember to take outdoor pictures first, when covering an event that includes air-conditioning inside and high humidity and temperatures outside.**

The vision for Camp Valor includes constructing and operating facilities where these programs can be administered in one location.

The housing plans at Camp Valor include cabin-styled architecture with modern building technology that will blend well into the natural surroundings, and a large, two-story lodge with several one-bedroom efficiency style ADA compliant suites.

Plans for the main lodge also include a large, central kitchen, ample dining hall, recreation rooms, gymnasium, basketball court and exercise facilities, and a non-denominational chapel in the main facility courtyard to provide a sanctuary for gathering and reflection.

To see more about Camp Valor, click <https://forvets.us/camp-valor/>. To donate to the Camp Valor Project, click <https://forvets.us/donate/>.

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Leah Gamble, the manager of instructional services at the Levy County campus of the College of Central Florida, shares information about CF. All three campuses of the college start class on Aug. 16. CF has many opportunities and advantages for military service veterans. The CF Veterans Center, Building 11, Room 11C, is at 3001 S.W. College Road, Ocala. Call 352-854-2322, Ext. 1720 or send an email to [vaasst@cf.edu](mailto:vaasst@cf.edu) for direct communication. In addition to veterans' services, there is a veterans' lounge and a veterans' club. Patriots is the team name for various sports and other activities at CF. Go Patriots!



Lauren Cabeza, care coordinator with the Meridian Mobile Response Team (left) and Robert Wells, vice president of ForVets Inc., are among the people at the event who can help people know about the services of Meridian Behavioral Health and ForVets. Wells also serves as the executive director of the Gilchrist Prevention Coalition, a local organization that strives to decrease the death, destruction and misery caused by drug abuse. Debbie Destin, Otter Springs Campground and Park Events Manager, and Dan Cavanah, ForVets Inc. president, are other people who are leading the effort toward bringing Camp Valor to fruition. Another non-profit organization represented at the event was the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group.

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**Karin Steinhart and her daughter Summer Steinhart of Reverence by Karin are among the many vendors who offered homemade crafts at Vet-Fest 2021. Another set of homemade crafts vendors was Three Sisters Creations of Trenton, makers of dreamcatchers and wreaths. The three sisters are Shanna, Amy and Heather, the daughters of Violet Colson. There were other vendors at the event too.**



**Representing the Springhouse Quilt Guild of Gilchrist County at the Vet-Fest 2021 event are Melva Leynes (left) and Maureen Bass. The guild often makes quilts to help local charitable organizations, such as the Trenton Women's Club with a quilt donated to help with the annual Veterans Breakfast, and other quilts to help veterans. The quilt that they are standing in front of is among those used to raise funds so the guild can help various interests in the community.**

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In the top photo, Terri Jones, the director of Parrot Educational and Research Center and Habitat (left) watches as Miles, a Congo African Gray (*Psittacus erithacus Erithacus*) takes a dollar bill (seen in Miles' bill) from a veteran and puts it into a bucket to donate to that non-profit facility.



In this second photo, the dollar is in the bucket and the bird's bill is money-free. The parrot was rewarded for his work immediately after depositing the donation. Jones said she feeds 100 parrots there daily and relies only on donations at the facility in Homosassa Springs (Citrus County). Two methods to contact Jones are via texting to 732-995-8562 or send a letter to her at P.E.R.C.H., Post Office Box 171, Homosassa Springs, FL 34447.



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Also present from Parrot Educational and Research Center and Habitat (PERCH) are (top photo) Desi, a male Eclectus Parrot (*Eclectus roratus*) who is in his 40s and Trixie, a female Eclectus Parrot (*Eclectus roratus*) who is 50 years old. PERCH Director Terri

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Jones said this species of parrot is s sexually dimorphic, meaning male and females are differently colored. Jones also brought Priscilla, an African Pied Crow (*Corvus albus*).



Melvin and Jessie Miller of Williston brought their food concession facility to the event. Seen at the left is Steve Queal of the Rolling Thunder of Gainesville, as he awaits buying boiled peanuts or other great food served by the Miller couple. Melvin is a veteran of the Vietnam War.