

TOWN

Veterans build homes to aid others in need

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Veterans who have served our country are proving in Huntington Station they can also learn the skills to help build a better local community.

More than 20 veterans received their certification in construction at the Huntington Opportunity Resource Center Nov. 13 after successfully passing through VetsBuild, a program offered by the nonprofit United Way of Long Island, that provides job training in green construction, facility maintenance and technology for veterans and their families.

“VetsBuild is not just about teaching home building skills and construction skills, it’s about building your lives,” said Craig Fligstein, vice president of community impact for United Way of LI. “It has accelerated positive changes in your life and allowed you to take a new turn in your career.”

Huntington Station resident Jerome Robinson, a 2017 VetsBuild graduate, said he served 11 years in the U.S. Army and as an officer in U.S. Army Reserves.

“We have served our country in different ways, but we are all looking for a way to move forward and find a new and exciting career path for ourselves,” Robinson said. “Personally, VetsBuild has opened up a number of doors.”

Robinson, 52, said he was previously employed doing overnight custodial work



Photo by Sara-Megan Walsh

Huntington Station veteran Jerome Robinson, ninth from left, stands with the 2017 VetsBuild graduating class at the Huntington Opportunity Resource Center Nov. 13.

for Stony Brook University and struggled to make ends meet after being laid off in September. He learned about the free six-week construction program through United Veterans Beacon House, a nonprofit organization that provides temporary and permanent residences for U.S. Military veterans in Nassau and Suffolk counties, and started classes Oct. 2.

“I knew it was a chance to make myself more marketable to potential employers and

find a career,” Robinson said.

VetsBuild will offer two to three training sessions a year for veterans depending on demand, according to Rick Wertheim, the senior vice president of housing and green initiatives for the United Way of LI. Those enrolled take daily classes in basic construction techniques and earn their Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour certification. Students then have the opportunity to train in specialized disciplines of the

trade, from electrical to gas work, based on their interests, Wertheim said.

Robinson said he will be moving forward with GasPro, to gain skills in gas appliance installation and repairs. Others in his class will become electrical apprentices and at least one will be going back to college for an associates degree in renewable energy.

The skills the veterans have learned are used to build energy-smart homes throughout Long Island, including some for other veterans in need. The United Way of LI debuted the most recently completed VetsBuild home at 40 Depot Road in Huntington Station. It was specially commissioned by United Veterans Beacon house to become a residence for five veterans with special needs.

The more than 3,500-square-foot house was named the 2017 Grand Winner for Innovation in Affordable Homes by the U.S. Department of Energy as part of its Housing Innovation Awards. The Depot Road home earned the recognition by being a “zero energy ready home” because it incorporates specialized innovative green features. These features render the projected annual energy cost at a netgain of \$200 per year due to its capability to sell off excess energy produced by its photovoltaic solar panels. Other green technology featured in the home includes a solar thermal water heating system, internet-controlled heating and air conditioning, and 100 percent LED lighting.