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Going Green

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Green spaces are well-known to improve the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. One national non-profit, Project EverGreen, is helping military families, children, veterans, and their communities enjoy healthier outdoor spaces.

"Military families often face unique challenges, including frequent relocations, long deployments, and the stress of having a loved one in service," points out Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. "Volunteering to help care for their lawns and yards provides tangible support, shows appreciation for their sacrifices, eases some of their burdens and creates healthier green spaces. That is what Project EverGreen's GreenCare for Troops program has done for military families across the United States since 2006."

Headquartered in Cleveland, Project EverGreen was founded in 2003 by a group of landscape industry professionals who wanted to give back to their communities – in particular military families – by providing them with basic landscape and lawn care services at no charge through the GreenCare for Troops initiative. It added the SnowCare for Troops program in 2010 and the GreenCare for Communities initiative in 2008.

"The mission of Project EverGreen is to make a difference in how yards, parks and communities create a greener, healthier, cooler Earth," Code explains. "This mission is woven into all our programs and initiatives. For example, through the GreenCare for Communities projects, Project EverGreen and its partners have renovated community parks and public green spaces totaling more than 200 million square feet of green space.

"These projects have connected people, plants, and their communities to maximize the health of grass, plants, and trees, which in turn sequesters carbon and cleans the air," she continues. "The initiative supports healthy green spaces in neighborhoods and cities, enabling maintained green spaces to function as the lungs of the city and offsetting the negative effects of a warming environment."

GreenCare for Troops is marking its 18th year in 2024, and over the years, it has provided an estimated \$20 million in donated lawn, landscape, and snow removal services and peace of mind to thousands of military families across the United States who are enduring a deployment. Since its inception, 20,000 military families have reg-



istered for either the GreenCare or SnowCare for Troops programs.

"GreenCare for Troops is more than a program that checks a box and takes care of a necessary service, it has become a transformative experience for both volunteers and recipients," Code asserts. "Not only do our volunteers provide a valued service that relieves a burden for military families, but they are also sustaining a healthy, safe lawn and yard for kids to play and families to unwind in at the end of a stressful day."

According to Code, Project EverGreen volunteers support military families in numerous ways, including promoting healthier, positive


green spaces; encouraging outdoor activities and enhancing mental health and well-being; building communities; providing stability and peace of mind; improving property values and curb appeal; and demonstrating appreciation and gratitude for the military.

The GreenCare and SnowCare for Troops programs are needs-based programs open to families of all active-duty deployed service members, including all military branches as well as reserve and guard forces. Only one residence is permitted, with a lot size of less than one acre, and the military member must reside at this location. Deployment orders or letters from command verifying deployment are required for registration; and families should not register more than four weeks in advance of deployment.

Code says Project EverGreen has to think creatively to publicize the programs. "We promote the programs heavily through social media and through family advocates on military bases," she notes. "We are always looking for additional on-base contacts to

help get the word out about the programs."

Project EverGreen is endorsed by the National Association of Landscape Professionals and is supported by corporations and foundations both inside and outside the professional lawn care and landscape industries. The title sponsor of GreenCare for Troops is Nufarm, and the title sponsor for SnowCare for Troops is BOSS Snowplow.

"The strength and inspiration for all our programs comes from both the dedicated volunteers and the military families," Code remarks. "Our volunteers treasure the feeling that they are doing something good for military families even if it just mowing or fertilizing the lawn. And the peace of mind it delivers for military families and the appreciation they have shown for the work of our volunteers is priceless." 

For more information or to volunteer, visit the organization's website at: <https://projectevergreen.org>



In Their Own Words



Many soldiers report that one of the biggest concerns about deployment is leaving loved ones to deal with household chores and repairs. SnowCare for Troops and GreenCare for Troops help alleviate some of that anxiety.

"It was very difficult to stay focused on my job in a Medevac unit; being consumed with issues at home is very stressful and that feeling of helplessness eats at you," comments Jeremy 'Jay' Quenneville, principal of Jay's Snow Plowing in Fairfax, VT.

As a three-time-deployed soldier in the U.S. Army, Quenneville knows the stress of leaving behind loved ones when you're the "go-to" person for home issues. For instance, three days into his most recent deployment from the Vermont National Guard, Quenneville got a distress call from the family. An ice dam on

the roof was causing a massive leak inside the house, and contractors all over the area were inundated with service calls and not available. "I certainly understand the need from my own experience and want to do what I can to help out local military families who need help with snow removal," he notes, adding that he has signed up to help five military households with snow removal through the SnowCare for Troops program.

Military spouse Jodie Arreguin turned to ExperiGreen Lawn Care as part of the GreenCare for Troops program when her husband was deployed to the Middle East as part of the Ohio Army National Guard.

"I had not looked into lawn care services during our readiness preparation, but I had not realized how much effort Rick put into the yard in a year," says Arreguin. "With his being gone during the early spring and summer seasons, I knew it would need attention and that I would have absolutely no time for any of that."

Arreguin works full time, and she and Rick have a 19-year-old stepdaughter and two younger ones, ages 10 and 6, at home, which keep the household busy. "One of the great things about this program, is that when my husband comes home, he will not have to look out at the yard and think about all the work it will take to get things back to the way he wants them. ExperiGreen, has it covered, and I do not have to think about doing anything with it."

"When we had the initial conversations with Jodie, we just talked on the phone about some of the struggles she is experiencing as a full-time parent and single mom," says Shawna Fisher, senior coordinator-social media, and brand strategy for ExperiGreen. "It's been a lot more than she expected or was prepared for." The company even added some

additional complimentary services to the program to address different issues they found through the summer.

Arreguin points out, "The company was super excited to help us, and they've been amazing to work with. The clover is getting cleaned up and the yard is looking great. It is so nice to pull into the yard and see things in order, even if some days I feel like things are falling apart."

Similarly, the GreenCare for Troops program removed a huge burden for Lisa Schmidt and her family during her husband's deployment. Volunteer Bill Barthen, who serves a full-time role in the Wisconsin Army National Guard, stepped in to help the Schmidt family with both lawn care and snow removal.

"It was a complete burden off my shoulders just not having that on my radar, knowing that Bill would do the work and I didn't have to think about starting up my lawn mower," she continues. "I could focus on spending time with my two kids, prioritize them and know it is taken care of. Especially in the winter months with snow plowing, knowing that I will have to get my car out of the driveway to get to daycare and to work, and I will come back home, and it will be all cleaned off. All I can say is it was a complete relief, and I was so incredibly thankful to have his service."

For his part, Barthen says his purpose is to "create peace by providing service to others, and this is one small way of me reaching out and offering support to a family that has a deployed service member. I would like to see a lot more businesses and individuals donate a little bit of time to help these people - it is really a small token of appreciation for the immense sacrifices they make."