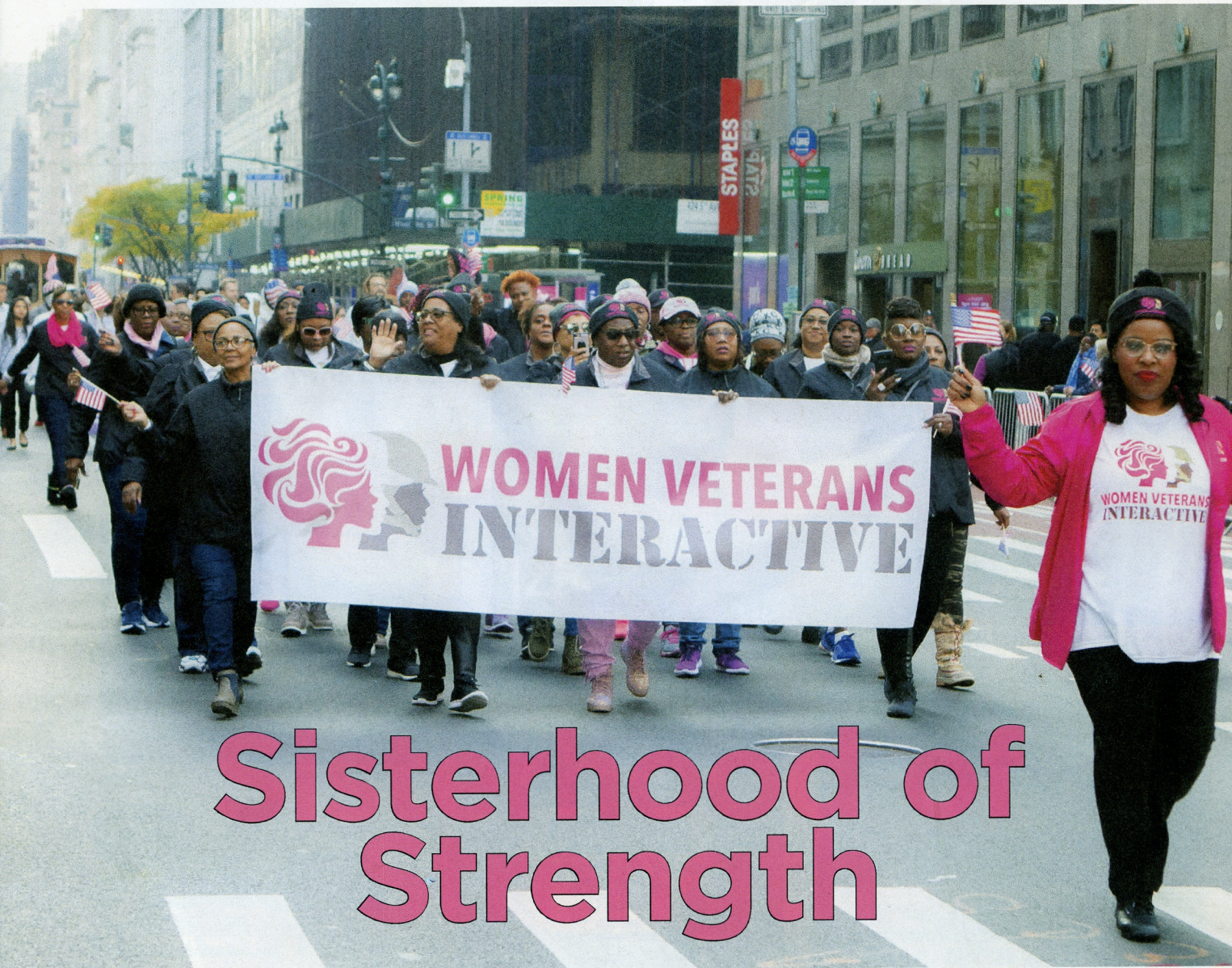


MARCH 15, 2025

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## Sisterhood of Strength

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Women serving in the military face unique and specific challenges, and many of these hardships are amplified when the nation's approximately 2.3 million women veterans transition to civilian life. A pioneering nonprofit organization, the Women Veterans Interactive Foundation (WVIF), was founded in 2011 and is offering impactful solutions-based programs to address the unique needs of women veterans.

"Mental health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety are common, so access to care and peer support is vital," explains WVIF founder, president, and chief executive Ginger Miller. "Many women veterans also struggle with employment and career transition, needing support to translate their military skills to civilian jobs. Housing instability, including homelessness, remains a significant issue, and emergency housing assistance is crucial. Navigating Veterans Administration benefits can be overwhelming, so guidance and advocacy are necessary.

"At WVIF, we address these challenges through a variety of programs," Miller continues. "Operation Safety Net offers emergency financial assistance for critical needs like housing and utilities. Beyond the Transition provides career counseling and training for women veterans exploring different career paths. We also host events like the National Women Veterans Pink and White Empowerment Summit and the National Women Veterans Leadership and Diversity Conference, focusing on health, wellness, leadership, and networking. Additionally, we offer VA benefits support, a monthly blog, social media resources, and local chapter support to connect women veterans with the resources they need. Through these

services, we provide the tools and community women veterans need to thrive and overcome challenges."

Formerly serving in the U.S. Navy, Miller herself has overcome towering obstacles as a woman veteran, including homelessness and caring for her husband, a disabled veteran who suffered from PTSD for more than a decade. Miller worked three jobs and went to school full time to pull her family out of homelessness, and she now holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Hofstra University and a master's degree in nonprofit and association management from University of Maryland University College.

Determined to give back to her fellow veterans, Miller formed the nonprofit organization, John 14:2, Inc., in 2009, and the group was instrumental in starting the first Prince Georges County Homeless Veteran Stand Down. Through her advocacy and outreach efforts with John 14:2, Inc., she hosted Veteran Round Tables in Annapolis, Maryland and was appointed to and served as Chairwoman of the Prince George's County Veterans Commission, as a commissioner on the Maryland Commission for Women, as a member of the Maryland Caregivers Coordinating Council, and as a member of the Maryland Veterans Resilience Advisory Council.

"When I founded WVIF in 2011, my goal was to create a dedicated space where women veterans could find support after they hang up their uniforms," she recalls. "I wanted it to be an organization truly for women veterans, built by women veterans. Our mission is to connect, engage, and empower women veterans by providing the tools and resources needed



for post-military success through financial assistance, workforce development, and community.

"My vision is to establish a chapter in every state, fully fund our programs, and operate with a fully staffed team," Miller adds. "To achieve this, we are focused on strategic planning, strengthening board support, engaging with our community, and expanding through fundraising and partnerships. Ultimately, my goal is for WWIF to be a nationwide network that empowers women veterans, helps them thrive, and connects them with the resources they need to succeed after their service."


So far, WWIF has had a major impact, serving the needs of more than 10,000 women veterans; awarding \$27,750 in grants and \$17,750 in scholarships; providing 3,000 emergency meals and 4,000 warm nights; and hosting 1,019 benefits claims clinic attendees. The clinic was established in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Baltimore Regional Office and is now held at WWIF's most significant event of the year: the National Women Veterans Leadership & Diversity Conference.

"Each year, we aim to reach even more, with a goal of supporting an additional 1,000 women veterans per year to meet the growing need," Miller declares, adding that the group is raising funds through multiple channels to support its mission. "We organize fundraisers to engage the community and generate necessary funds. We also rely on private donations from individuals who contribute directly to our programs. Corporate sponsorships play a significant role, helping us expand our reach and impact. Additionally, we apply for grants from both government and private organizations to fund specific initiatives. We are incredibly grateful to our sponsors, donors, and partners for their ongoing support, which enables us to continue empowering women veterans." Some partners and grantors include the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Center for Minority Veterans, Wells Fargo Foundation, Bank of America Foundation, USAA, Comcast NBCUniversal, Fiserv, Medallia, and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Women veterans can apply for support by submitting a DD214 form, which verifies military service and confirms honorable discharge; those with a VA ID card, indicating registration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, are also eligible. Active-duty service members transitioning or separating within 18 months can participate with a valid military ID. WWIF also accepts referrals from partner organizations. Once eligibility is confirmed, WWIF assesses their needs and connects them with the correct resources.

"We use a variety of strategies to get the word out about our programs," Miller notes. "Through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, we actively share updates, resources, and event information to reach women veterans. We also collaborate with veteran service organizations and local VA facilities for partnerships and referrals, ensuring veterans are directed to our programs. Additionally, we attend community events such as veteran conferences and expos, providing direct connections and information. Email newsletters help keep veterans informed about upcoming events and new resources, even for those who may not follow us on social media. Word of mouth from our supportive community encourages veterans to share their experiences and pass along information. With over a decade of service, WWIF has become a trusted symbol of empowerment and support. Through these

combined efforts, we ensure that women veterans know about the resources available to them and feel supported in their transition.

"Our programs have grown organically because we've always prioritized their voices and feedback; at WWIF, there's no wrong door," Miller adds. "We empower every woman veteran from the very start, ensuring they feel supported and valued. We offer an opportunity for women veterans to both serve and be served, creating a full circle of community and support." 



## In Their Own Words

WWIF founder, president, and chief executive Ginger Miller points out that there are many stories of women veterans finding their purpose and feeling empowered, noting that some even say WWIF has saved their lives.

"One particularly poignant story involved a woman veteran facing eviction while attending our claims clinic with her children," she recalls. "At the clinic, the VA rated her and granted her a 100% disability rating on the spot, along with vocational rehab. They expedited her claim, providing the funding to stop the eviction. We were also able to provide her and her children with food at the conference. It was a powerful moment that demonstrated how our programs can make a direct, life-changing impact."

**Other women veterans offer their own testimonials on the power of the organization:**

*"I learned about WWIF in 2018 and was interested to know more about it because I was getting close to retirement. What I found was a life-long community that helped me navigate my transition through networking, attending the Beyond the Transition program, annual conference activities, and Chapter events throughout the year. Now, I enjoy bringing others to the organization so they too can experience the same supportive sisterhood."*

**Renee Lewis, retired U.S. Air Force veteran, who served for 25.5 years**

*"Operation Safety Net has been instrumental in supporting countless women veterans nationwide. This incredible program provides emergency assistance without forcing women veterans to navigate the usual red tape. For women veterans facing tough times, this immediate support can be life-changing. If successful fundraising helps ease their burdens when they already have so much on their plates, I'm committed for the long haul—because this mission means the world to me. For me, this work is personal. Seeing a foundation so committed to helping women veterans thrive makes me determined to stay in it for the long haul. Because when we succeed, communities succeed. As soon as I saw that taking care of US was the foundation's SOLE FOCUS, I knew I would be involved. As a proud 10-year Lifetime Member and now a Legacy Member, the Women Veterans Interactive Foundation has helped me in so many ways. It has given me the confidence to grow, and I've seen my leadership skills truly flourish throughout this journey."*

**Latonia M. Parks, retired U.S. Army veteran**

