



Looking for a Few Good Men



BY **WENDEE HOLT CAMP**
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CULTURE & POLITICS FRONTLINES SPRING 2008

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When they come home from Iraq and Afghanistan, our veterans may find themselves out of a job as well as out of uniform. Time to call Green Collar Vets.

The woman known as Fort Worth's Green Hornet and her sidekick sit in plush chairs inside a single-story brick building on Race Street, filling their spacious one-room office with talk and laughter. The ceiling is made of recycled tiles, the walls are covered in textured, earth-tone clay plaster rather than toxic paint, and on the front desk there's a carved wooden sign that reads "Green Is Sexy." During two years of weekly wine-er, brainstorming-sessions, these two well-dressed, 50-something businesswomen have plotted how to green up this conservative Texas town. Now they've set their sights on something bigger: a scheme to



Recruiting drive Jyl DeHaven, left, and Georgia Richey, right, with two recent vets. Photograph for OnEarth by Misty Keasler

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change the lives of U.S. veterans.

The Green Hornet, aka commercial real estate developer Jyl DeHaven, doesn't call herself an environmentalist. Yet she persuaded the city to designate a 10-square-block district encompassing her office as a mixed-use green "urban village." She also serves on the mayor's sustainable building committee. "Two to three years ago, I'm not sure the phrase 'sustainable building' was in anyone's vocabulary," she says. "This is a very conservative town. We don't like trends."

In 2006, while advising the Tarrant County chapter of Habitat for Humanity on building energy-efficient homes, she met an administrator in the Department of Veterans Affairs who mentioned the high unemployment rates plaguing veterans, particularly young ones. "I couldn't understand how people put their lives on the line, and then they would come back and couldn't find a job," DeHaven says. When 23-year-old Iraq war veteran Paul Hess showed up on her doorstep a few months later looking for work, a seed was planted. Green Collar Vets was born.

DeHaven and Georgia Richey, an insurance agent and "green friend," founded the nonprofit organization in early 2007. The goal: to create a green-collar workforce for burgeoning industries, which often have a shortage of quality laborers, by training unemployed veterans. "They have strong skill sets," DeHaven says. "Why not pull them into an industry that's growing by leaps and bounds?" The jobs that DeHaven has in mind might be anything from solar panel installation to organic agriculture to weatherizing houses.

Green *is* sexy. Sergeant Hess is smoking hot. But it was his work ethic that impressed DeHaven. "He's a quick study," she says. "He takes pride in his work. He's respectful. All the characteristics that, as an employer, you'd look for." DeHaven and Richey are not shy about parading him in his military dress blues to raise awareness of their endeavors.

With funding from private donations and grants, Green Collar Vets plans to open chapters around the country. "When a local chapter adopts a veteran, we're going to try to spend an average of \$2,500, with a maximum of \$5,000, per veteran," says Richey. "Our mission is to make it easy for vets to find jobs and training," even beyond what the GI Bill may cover.

Veterans will have to apply competitively to be sponsored by a local chapter, and a new Web site (www.greencollarvets.org) will serve as a nationwide clearinghouse of information. DeHaven hopes that 5 percent of all vets involved will eventually start their own green businesses. The nonprofit may get a boost

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from the Energy Independence and Security Act, signed into law in December 2007, which, among other things, authorizes \$125 million annually for green-collar jobs training.

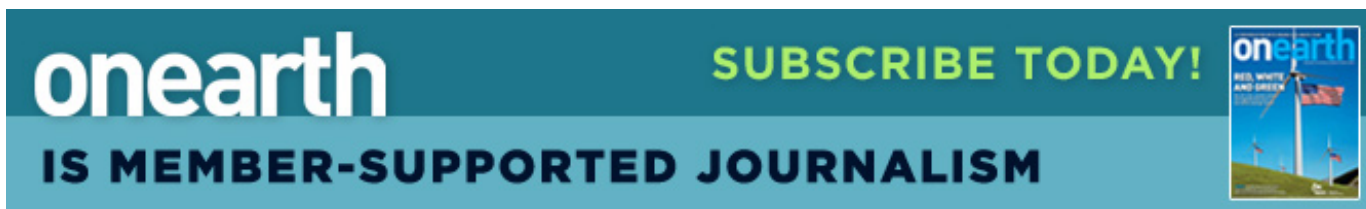
"Does going green cost more initially?" DeHaven asks. "Maybe, but let's look at the long-term vision. We're a country that's into instant gratification, but I think we're starting to appreciate that we have to look at longer returns than an hour and a half from now."

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Over the past year, Houston-based freelance writer and photographer Wendee Holtcamp has traveled on assignment from Australia to the Peruvian Amazon to the Galapagos Islands. Her work appears in such publications as Scientific American, National Wild... [READ MORE >](#)



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#1 **Mary K** Wrote on March 2, 2008 - 08:25

What a logical yet wonderful idea. Vets get good jobs and this country can move away from oil dependence. Way to go girls, the best of luck.

#2 **Ruth Uppena** Wrote on April 7, 2008 - 11:32

My nephew, David M. Thomas, now living in Boise, Idaho, is having a hard time finding a good job. He has a Buliding Materials Management in Wisconsin. Is there a way for him to join you? He is taking computer training classes right now. He is not a vet, but does need a job



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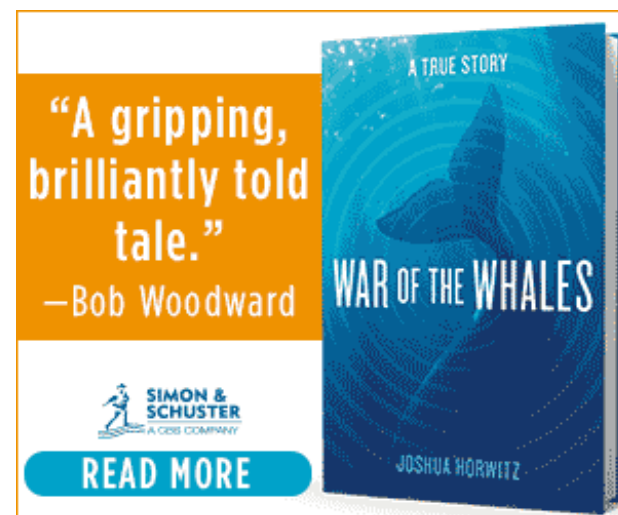
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