

**HAROLD COLEMAN**  
**VETERAN: NAVY**



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## PERSISTENCE PAVES A VETERAN'S ROAD TO RECOVERY

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Harold Coleman acknowledges that he attended the school of hard knocks. Forced to drop out of a Naval ROTC program for what he calls "youthful exuberance," the 42-year-old St. Louis, Missouri, native served as an enlisted sailor aboard the U.S.S. Camden during Desert Storm. He spent nearly 4 years in the Navy but did not see combat.

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When he left the service in 1990, Mr. Coleman remained in Seattle, where he joined some friends in a business that eventually failed. He worked as a janitor and sold cars before returning to St. Louis in 1993, where he performed quality assurance for a local bottling company. When his girlfriend left him he says he became depressed and started drinking. "I was disappointed in the way my naval career turned out," Mr. Coleman says. "I had planned on being an electrical engineer and was always interested in renewable energy."

### A Troubled Economy Derails a Tenuous Existence

During the height of the housing boom, Mr. Coleman began to speculate in the real estate market and did construction and home repairs. When the market went bust, so did Mr. Coleman's investments. His marriage of 5 years ended in divorce.

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## A Light at the End of the Tunnel

He continued to struggle until a Missouri Career Center directed him to the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) at St. Patrick Center in St. Louis, which helps veterans prepare for careers in the "green jobs" market. With Mr. Coleman's interest in energy conservation and his experience in construction, he was a perfect fit. The employment specialist at St. Patrick Center supported his goal and linked him to a Building Performance Institute (BPI) certification course. Mr. Coleman completed the course, where he learned how to assess a home's energy performance, quantify energy loss, and write a statement of work to implement recommended changes.

Upon graduating, Mr. Coleman was hired immediately by the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis to help weatherize low-income houses. "I was in the right place at the right time," he says.

But it was more than luck. It was a combination of Mr. Coleman's drive to succeed and the assistance he received from the HVRP program at St. Patrick Center.

"They helped me get my own place and a real job doing a service I love to perform," Mr. Coleman says. "They put me on my feet." He received such practical assistance as money for uniforms and gas, but he also found people who cared.

Mr. Coleman believes the HVRP program was the fertile soil that allowed him to blossom. "I had a case worker who was the sounding board for my dreams," he says. And now he is paying that forward. When he worked for the Metropolitan Training Alliance, Mr. Coleman taught the BPI course for participants in the Better Family Life, Inc., Pathways Out of Poverty program, a green jobs training program authorized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. He has parlayed his teaching experience into a venture designed to make a difference in the lives of his fellow veterans. Mr. Coleman has his own company, North Star Development, LLC, based in St. Louis, where he plans to employ others—including veterans—to retrofit houses to increase energy efficiency and decrease utility bills.

## STANDING ON SOLID GROUND

Today, Mr. Coleman is active in the lives of his sons, ages 4 and 15, and he recently bought the first new truck he has ever owned. The way he sees it, he is still serving his country. As Mr. Coleman told a reporter for *The Atlantic* magazine, "In the defense of our country we can use guns and bullets. But we can also use energy conservation to reduce our dependence on foreign fuels." He concludes, "I want all veterans to know we can help keep America healthy and productive."

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