

JAMES JONES
VETERAN: MARINE
COAST GUARD



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HELP IN THE FORM OF A HAND UP, NOT A HAND OUT

In July of 1973, James Wesley Jones was walking down the street in his hometown of Franklin, Tennessee, when a Marine recruiter saw him. The recruiter piqued his interest as he pitched the “elite branch of the military sector where they do not focus on numbers but focus on quality.” His mother quickly disapproved, but his father supported him, so right after high school graduation in 1975, he enlisted and headed to Parris Island in South Carolina for training. He graduated boot camp on October 7, 1975, at age 18.

After boot camp Mr. Jones went to infantry AIT training, taking just a quick 10-day leave to get married. This leave was extended to 20 days so he could get things situated with this wife before heading to Cheery Point Air Station in North Carolina. He stayed in North Carolina for 2 years, receiving three promotions. He set up small fuel stations in war zones for trucks and air crafts. He then moved on to the Marine Air Group, where he worked with tactical air fuel dispensing systems operating and delivering 10,000-gallon fuel bladders. During this time, Mr. Jones received meritorious promotions, including time and grade. While based at Okinawa, he learned how to speak three languages, including Philippine, Japanese, and Thai. After spending 2 years at Camp Lejeune, he chose to go back to Cherry Point, where he became the color guard commander, trained drill teams, and performed at chain of command ceremonies at the battalion. He later went on to train Navy Seals.

A Tough Transition

On November 28, 1989, Mr. Jones was discharged and returned home to Tennessee to raise his family. He describes his transition to the civilian world as feeling “out of place.” Because of the many jobs and promotions he received while in the service, he “had to get used to being home with my wife and two kids.” Mr. Jones got a job with a construction company where he worked for 5 years, but the transition from military to civilian life didn’t fare well for his marriage, and he divorced. “I thought about drugs and alcohol, but it remained just a thought,” he explains.

He worked hard at keeping himself clean and off drugs. After moving out of his home, he remained in Franklin for a while, but he soon realized he needed a new start.

Mr. Jones then moved to Nashville and remarried in 2010. His wife was significantly younger than he was, and one day she sold everything he owned out from under him. “I became homeless—everything I owned was in a duffle bag,” he states. He heard about Operation Stand Down (OSD) Nashville in March of 2011 from the local American Job Center. He started taking AMVETS courses, including OSHA courses, chemical safety and pathogens management, home energy auditing, first aid, and construction. While gaining certificates and a business license (and gaining a foothold in the industry), he also became a certified chef.

His first job in Nashville was at the Renaissance Hotel, which he found out about through his HVRP counselor at OSD. He saved his first three paychecks to purchase a vehicle, which quickly became his home. The next three paychecks went toward securing his own apartment. After nearly a year of working at the hotel, he found a new job that allowed him more time to work on starting his own business, which was his dream.

Becoming an Entrepreneur

Mr. Jones named his business “House Tight.” It provides home organization, including energy audits of homes that provide information to home owners about what they can do to cut energy costs. “For every three jobs that I got, I vowed to do one for free. This is my niche and what I have to offer. I am still working on growing my business and am putting up a website and have an email address,” he explains. “I’d like to move to Texas and continue expanding my business.” He continues: “OSD secured housing and offered me educational avenues to better myself. They gave me a hand up and not a hand out. Whether providing a bus pass or a gas card, the job development sources helped me out a lot. They check in with me and this was important and helpful to me. We just had a graduation and I was the guest speaker.”

“Always Look Forward”

Mr. Jones’s advice for other veterans who are beginning their journey of transitioning to civilian life is as follows: “Always look forward. Things are always there for you; you just have to get them. Push forward and keep trying, and your only failure will be when you don’t try. Keep God first in your life and keep moving forward.”

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