

## Tax Watch: Patriot Housing gets swift results for vets in Westchester (video)

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*Bruce Frazier*

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**Army veteran Bruce Frazier, 60, relaxes Wednesday in his new apartment at 89 Bruce Ave. in Yonkers. He found the place as part of the 100-day Patriot Housing initiative in Westchester. / David McKay Wilson/The Journal News**

In 2009, Bruce Frazier, a U.S. Army veteran who busted up his knee and back when his parachute didn't open fully in a training exercise, became homeless. On Wednesday, Frazier, 60, moved into a one-bedroom apartment on Bruce Avenue in south Yonkers — a most welcome relief after bouncing among shelters throughout the metropolitan region over the past four years.

“Another chapter in the life and times of Bruce Frazier,” he said, relaxing in his front room, bathed in sunlight. “I'm so glad to be here. It's hard in the shelter system.”

For Frazier, a Harlem high school basketball star who played on the Venezuelan national team, landing the apartment ended a dispiriting housing journey that began two decades ago when he acquired a taste for crack cocaine. Now clean after spending the past 18 months at the VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System in Montrose, Frazier found placement through Westchester's Patriot Housing initiative, begun in August with the goal of housing 75 homeless veterans within 100 days.

It's part of the national 100,000 Homes campaign, carried out in collaboration with the Rapid Results Institute, based in Stamford, Conn. The institute has found that its 100-day process can be a useful structure through which organizations — both for-profit and nonprofit — can create change by setting lofty yet achievable goals, challenging participants to find new ways to collaborate and pursuing those goals with the 100-day span.

Westchester is among 226 communities to join the national campaign, including Phoenix, Atlanta and Salt Lake City. The Westchester effort was launched with a three-day boot camp led by institute facilitator Evan Smith of Mahopac, which included representatives from housing organizations, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and social services officials from Westchester County.

“We put them through exercises to stretch the bounds of what seems possible,” Smith said. “It gets exciting to (see) them start mobilizing around a common goal.”

The boot camp united players in the complex web of agencies that provide services to homeless veterans. That three-day meeting also uncovered a trove of 25 federal housing vouchers for Yonkers veterans, controlled by the VA's Kingsbridge office in the Bronx. Westchester officials hadn't known of the bounty.

“It made the whole trip worthwhile,” said Phil Gille, Westchester's first deputy commissioner of social services. “And the 100-day process has made us better at making sure nobody slips through the cracks.”

On Tuesday — Day 82 of Westchester’s initiative — longtime housing advocate Karl Bertrand told Tax Watch that 57 veterans had been housed, 12 more had federal veterans’ housing vouchers along with apartments that needed to be inspected to ensure they were up to snuff and another 22 had very good possibilities.

On the walls of Bertrand’s Elmsford office hang framed newspaper articles dating to 1983, when Bertrand, a newly minted social worker from Hunter College, rallied Yonkers churches to form the Sharing Community and establish Westchester’s first shelter for the homeless. Thirty years later, the lack of affordable housing continues to squeeze low-income Westchester residents trying to make it in one of the nation’s highest-priced housing markets when the federal sequester effectively dried up the availability of federal Section 8 vouchers.

Ever the optimist, Bertrand remains committed to the mission, and emboldened by the results of the Patriot Housing initiative, as government and the private sector work together to solve one of our region’s most intractable problems.

Through the process, the public agencies have cut red tape, reached out to more landlords and looked at new ways of doing business.

“It’s like the stars aligned,” Bertrand said. “There’s a real openness to doing things in smarter ways.”

On Bruce Avenue, meanwhile, Frazier was unpacking his books and thinking about what he might cook for his daughter, Aniger, 22, who lives in the Bronx. He has missed cooking her dinner in his own kitchen and sharing a meal at his table.

“She likes her steak medium rare, just like I do,” he said. “Now I have a home that she can visit.”

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