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NSVO  
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Feature

A few of the veterans at Nicholls have recently joined forces to charter a new program, Nicholls State Veteran's Organization (NSVO), with intentions of building camaraderie and giving back to the community.

Jordan Fabre, one of the charter members, said one of his goals for the organization is growing relationships between veterans on campus and developing a support system. "But more than just doing this for us, we want to be able to support charities and events/activities in the local community." The organization has taken a trip to New Orleans and visited the D-day Museum, and had a team for the Gumbo cook-off. They also go to the shooting range every fall and spring semester and participate in Intramural Sports.

Before NSVO the veterans on campus were just "a bunch of individuals. There was really no central place where we could converse, develop some sort of camaraderie." The Veteran's Affairs representative would certify the vets and help them to make their schedule, send it off to Veteran's Affairs for approval, and then the University would get payment. There was very little interaction between the vets themselves, and there wasn't much to the whole process. In the last year and a half the NSVO has really taken shape. "It's still somewhat of a rigid shape. We are trying to get it to be a little bit more concrete." Currently the NSVO team is in the process of developing a mission statement, requirements for participants and creating roles for officers. "We hope to hold some elections, and we are trying to develop it to where any issues can be run up through the chain of command or a management system." Justin Earls said, "We are like a brand new band, we don't really know anything, but oh we got a group and we don't know what we want to do with it yet."

More

Fabre said if the best of Greek life and the best of the military would be combined with an educational system that is what he would like to see for the NSVO. “For me that would be ideal. You build camaraderie, make connections, you help each other out, and you try and extend beyond yourself and help out people within your community, all the while being able to maintain some fulfillment.”

NSVO offers a “feeling that you belong to something that you’re used to, certain camaraderie, just a person with life experiences such as yourself.” Fabre said some of the things that they have to deal with as veterans are sometimes misunderstood by some people who are not vets. On a personal level there is something to gain from being a part of NSVO, “but it’s usually through interaction with other people that are just like you.”

Daniel Drennan said when he first retired from the army he didn’t have any friends, but knew this organization existed and invested all of his spare time into it. “They gave me a place that was comfortable for me to come back to.” Drennan said when there are new people coming into the group he tries to give them the warmest welcome possible and make them feel like this is a really good place to be. “I just want to give back what we all got when we first came to Nicholls, a network of friends that I can count on when I need.” Coming to Nicholls he said he didn’t know anything about school because he hadn’t even graduated from high school, but that there was always someone around to give him advice on his classes. “There was a level of leadership and mentorship that is similar to what we experienced in the military.” Drennan said he mostly wants their organization to give back to that community, but also expand awareness on campus of what they are, “because a lot of these kids are young and are fresh out of high school and haven’t experienced much of life. So they can look at us and see how our experiences could help them and give them a ‘world view’.” He also wants to give back to the other vets in this community that aren’t in school. “It doesn’t take much, just donating time. Like to the Vietnam vets that are older, they don’t need us to give

them \$1000, what they need is for someone to go sit down with them and listen to them talk and provide affirmation for their efforts.”

More

Martinez  
NSVO

Page 3

The veteran’s lounge is a product of the NSVO and has been there since the beginning of the Fall Semester in 2013. Drennan said it’s a “great spot if you’re having a bad day, or if you just want to go see people. That’s where we all congregate.” Earls said, “It’s a great place for mentorship.” Courtney Cassard, Director of Enrollment Services, said “we try to consistently make improvements and keep it as comfortable as we can for them.” Fabre said, “That’s one of the best things about it. We all have good days and bad days, but almost at any given time if you want to talk to somebody, or don’t want to talk at all and just want to sit in a room and listen to other people take a brain dump, you can do that and not feel strange about it.” All three men said they think the veteran’s lounge facilitates a community of student veterans helping each other with school and life issues. Fabre said, “A lot of times you have upper classmen and maybe even a few freshmen who are really intelligent with Math or English, there’s always someone willing to help in here in some way or other. And if no one is in here capable of doing that, then they will point you in someone else’s direction.” The funding for the organization and the lounge comes from student fees, and “a little bit of prostitution whenever things get tight,” said Fabre.

The veteran’s advocate, Gilberto Burbante, said his goal for the NSVO is for “them to really take the bull by the horn, take initiative and make this a successful program.” Burbante said he has been in their shoes before and knows kind of what they’re going through, so he wants to take the load off of them and help them through the process. There are 278 veterans at Nicholls currently and only 178 who have the GI Bill. Only around 100 vets actually participate in the organization. Burbante has a list of every vet on campus that is using benefits or has maxed out of benefits. Fabre said there is usually an email sent out that informs the existing and potential members of events and invites them to participate. “We

want to see this get bigger. The military was a very big part of our lives, and just because we take the uniform off doesn't mean that it's no longer a part of you." Fabre said, "We are finding our way every day."

More

Martinez  
NSVO

Page 4

One program NSVO would like to start is at the Lewis Infant Center in Houma, a boy's home that caters to five through twelve year olds who have been abused by their parents. Fabre said NSVO would like to start helping out at the center by spending time with boys, who spend the majority of their time with the nuns who run the center. "I try to think back to when I was that age, you get a bunch of sailors and marines and soldiers together that want to take time out of their day and develop some sort of interest in these people's lives. In my own life I always wanted to have someone like that." The team is still in the process of putting things together to start giving back to the community. This Saturday is a campus wide event called the Day of Service. This is an opportunity for every organization on campus to give back to the community. NSVO will be traveling to Reserve to the Southeast Louisiana War Veteran's Home. There they will give the veterans a Bible Study, exercise with them, provide a lunch and play bingo with them.

