



Getting to know...

Operated by
Vets, For Vets

The DV Farm of Gilsium

On Whitney Stage Road you will see the sign. *"DV Farm. Operated by Vets for Vets working together to reintegrate back into civilian life."*

This isn't just a place of hope and support. It's a gateway to a better life; utilizing camaraderie, hard work, genuine understanding and practical applications.

Mike Rivers is very passionate about his vision and takes diverse opportunities to share his mission and his experiences. He has appeared on radio and television, including NPR, BBC & both NH and Boston Chronicle. He talks at events, on YouTube and in his own backyard with all who wish to come and listen. The main focus of his passion lies in the staggering number of veterans who are in need of a step up into a new life. The DV Farm in Gilsium was born out of this passion. Here he can help a handful at a time. That's all he can hold at the moment; but saving a veteran and giving them the tools to create a fresh, newly meaningful life shouldn't be a rush to completion.

Through corporate-free fundraising and saving up personal money, Mike was able to begin the process of creating a program that is non-government funded. This enables him to operate in a way that he believes, through the personal experiences of himself and other former soldiers, can bring lasting success. Based off the idea of the Veteran Victory Farm, Mike strives to apply all the good things witnessed and eliminate what he considered detrimental or just didn't work. Mike and his wife Martha, both former homeless veterans, have lived here since about June of 2016 when they started the DV Farm. He credits her as "Administrative Specialist" along with other crucial roles she plays, including a very understanding ear for vets.

Mike will not allow the DV Farm to be used as "a flophouse" as he put it. Potential residents must be self-motivated and act responsibly. They must be serious about putting in the work that will be necessary to get better and live better. Vet applicants will be interviewed, screened, and often re-interviewed. They are warned of the strict expectations and rules, to the point that Mike says, "I almost try to talk them out of it."

Potential residents are made aware of random drug testing and possibilities of searches. No weapons, alcohol, drugs or cars are allowed to be brought. No female guests. The reactions to this help him gauge how committed an applicant is and commitment is crucial.

He prefers someone who has been through another program first, to have experienced what a typical program is like so they can appreciate the method used here. He looks to help vets who've had issues with drugs or alcohol and who are also currently homeless. If accepted, they are initially there on a trial basis. None are allowed off the property for at least 30 days. Privileges and expectations increase at a monitored pace. Much of a typical day is filled with the chores of animal care and homestead projects, such as building a barn and creating a riding trail for horses.

Mike expresses love for the town. He says Gilsium has been gracious to them and he feels blessed to have the neighbors he has. In addition to the private monetary donations needed to keep things running and improve, he was asked if there were additional ways we can help. He said although they do not have the storage space to take extra food and clothes donations, simple things like a Wal-Mart gift card for the vets with no income can mean a great deal.

During our conversation, Mike greatly emphasized two things; **ONE:** He wants to let Gilsium residents know he maintains an open-door policy Monday through Friday, anytime you'd like to visit or take a tour. If you would like to come on a weekend, please call ahead and he can make arrangements.

TWO: He states a strong desire for he and the others from DV Farm to be a real part of this community and give back to it as well. "We want to be there when you need us."

DV Farm is a 501(C)3 non-profit which provides meals, housing, camaraderie, animal therapy and skills for a successful life as a veteran.

To learn more, go to dvmfarm.org, call **354-8035** or email info@dvmfarm.org.

