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## **Legal Services Volunteer Attorney Uses Retirement to Serve Fellow Veterans**



When “Frank”, a homeless veteran suffering from mental health issues, reached out to Pisgah Legal Services for help, he couldn’t have known that the volunteer lawyer helping him was a veteran himself, Will Parz.

“I met with Frank and we went into the conference room and talked.” says Will. “I was able to calm him down because he knew that I understood what he was going through.”

Will worked on appealing an issue in small claim’s court and was able to get Frank a housing voucher with the assistance of social workers at the VA Medical Center in Asheville. Will called Frank after the holidays to check on him and offer encouragement and support. Frank is doing well and will soon be moving into his own home. He is getting the medical treatment he needs and has even referred his friends to contact PLS for their legal needs.

“I’m wired to help people,” says Will. As a volunteer attorney for PLS, Will is one of the hundreds of attorneys who make it possible for the nonprofit to serve more than 16,000 people

annually. Staff attorneys and a network of approximately 300 volunteer attorneys help low-income people on the verge of homelessness, survivors who escape domestic violence, the elderly at risk of consumer fraud, veterans who need benefits, children who have been abused, and people desperate for health care.

Attorney Parz volunteers to help indigent people with a variety of legal matters, but he has a special place in his heart for veterans.

### **A History of Serving**

Will served as a police officer in the Navy during the Gulf War and after his discharge, began a career in law enforcement. After the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, he re-enlisted into the military and joined the Army as a military police sergeant. He became squad leader to a unit immediately mobilized and deployed to the initial stages of the Iraq War.

During a combat patrol, enemy forces attacked with grenades and bombs. He suffered severe spinal and head injuries and was medically evacuated back to the States.

Sergeant Will Parz was awarded the Purple Heart Medal, Combat Action Badge, and other commendations for his meritorious service in the Iraq War. After multiple surgeries and medical treatment, he defied the odds and was walking again. Despite the progress, the severe disabilities prevented him from returning to life as a police officer.

Will applied to law school after being honorably discharged and retired from the Army. He studied at Western Michigan University-Cooley Law School while undergoing spinal surgeries, a grueling physical therapy regime, and recovering from combat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). With a fighting spirit and determination, Will graduated in the top 10 percent of his class. He then went onto working as an Assistant District Attorney and Special Prosecutor at the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office.

Will began his career in the law but never forgot his fellow veterans. He left the DA's office to work at the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs and was instrumental in starting the Veteran's Treatment Court in Milwaukee and the Veteran's Law Clinic in Knoxville.

### **Serving Veterans with Free Legal Aid**

In 2017 he retired and moved to Asheville, where he says the mountains and the people energized him. "I was looking for a place to volunteer because I still wanted to help people," says Will. "When I found Pisgah Legal, I knew it was a perfect fit."

He joined Pisgah Legal's EAGLE program, or Emeritus Attorneys Giving Legal Expertise. Here, retired attorneys practice under the supervision of a Managing Attorney. Will was instrumental in increasing the capacity of the PLS Veterans Law Project and serves as a volunteer coordinator for the program. The Veterans law Project provides legal aid to veterans to ensure receipt of benefits, discharge upgrades, diversion to the Veteran's Treatment Court, petitions for criminal expunctions, and connections to community resources.

"Will has been a valuable asset to Pisgah Legal Services," says PLS Managing Attorney, Robin Merrell. "He has a compassion and an understanding of the experiences these veterans have undergone - both during their service and at home. He can look them in the eyes and they know he has their back."

Helping people is vital to Will's own journey toward healing. "I wouldn't be doing this work without Pisgah Legal," says Will. "The attorneys here are wired like me. They are here because they are driven by a mission to help people - people who are struggling. They have nurtured my legal spirit and helped me soar as an EAGLE."

"I love doing this work. It's nice when you see what needs to be done to help people and you can do something to make an immediate and lasting impact. Maybe this is why I survived the war."

For more information about Pisgah Legal Services, call 828-253-0406 or toll free at 800-489-6144 or visit [www.pisgahlegal.org](http://www.pisgahlegal.org).