

## Top stories

Feb. 21, 2008, 12:14PM

# Law school providing legal help to local veterans

By **ROSANNA RUIZ**

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While it took almost 40 years to notify Vietnam veteran Willie Williams of his possible exposure to Agent Orange, the government needed less than a few weeks to determine that his maladies aren't related to the herbicide.

The Dayton, Texas man, who already lost one leg to diabetes and might lose another, feels his government abandoned him, yet he clings to the chance that he will get the veterans benefits he said he's owed.

Williams and about a dozen other veterans got help Wednesday from the University of Detroit Mercy Law School's ongoing nationwide tour called Project SALUTE — Students And Lawyers Assisting U.S. Troops Everywhere. Attorneys and law students will also be available today at a Montrose-area American Legion Hall.

Houston is the last stop in Texas as the project, with its mobile law office, motors onward to Pensacola and Orlando, Fla., next week, with more stops in dozens of other U.S. cities during the 11-month tour.

The tour will also have a lasting benefit for local Houston attorneys, about 50 of whom will receive training Friday at Lone Star Legal Aid on the benefit claims process. The attorneys agreed to offer their services for free, said Mark Gordon, dean of University of Detroit's law school.

"Veterans are a group that deserve our help for free," Gordon said.

Williams, 57, was tested last month for possible exposure to Agent Orange. Among the binder of documents he and his wife, Anne, had with them was the Jan. 24 Veterans Affairs letter that the test results indicated his coronary and peripheral artery disease were unrelated to Agent Orange.

He pointed out that the letter includes no mention of his diabetes, which has been linked to the herbicide.

"The VA acts like they don't want you to file a claim," he said.

Honorably discharged veterans who served in Vietnam from 1962 to 1975 who have adult onset diabetes are eligible for benefits, according to VA's Web site. Williams served there for nine months in 1970.

Vincent Brandlein, another Vietnam veteran, said he's frustrated with the VA's response to his claims to cover his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Since he's retired the memories of savagely wounded men and night patrols have flooded back with greater frequency.

He became visibly agitated when he talked about the VA clerk who accused him of wanting to "double dip" into both veterans and Social Security benefits.

"If the VA was run like the military," the Conroe resident said, "there would be lot of people getting kicked out of the service."

John House, a spokesman for the Texas Veterans Commission, said he welcomed the boost in services available to veterans, but he cautioned that there's no "magic wand" when it comes to the benefits process.

"We wouldn't want veterans to be misled," House said.

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### RESOURCES

#### IF YOU GO

**What:** The University of Detroit Mercy School of Law's nationwide tour, called Project SALUTE, that connects attorneys with low-income veterans who need help with federal benefits. Training for attorneys will take place Friday at Lone Star Legal Aid, 1415 Fannin.


**When:** Today 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Where::** American Legion Post #416, 1216 W. Clay St.

**Who::** For information, go to the [law school's Web site](#).



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