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U.S. HOME PRICES SEE SHARPEST RATE OF DECLINE IN TWO DECADES DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2008

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Group Salutes Vets by Helping Them Get Benefits

Detroit Law Students and Professors Kick Off Nationwide Tour This Weekend

By **BIANNA GOLODRYGA, FELICA PANTINKIN and JONANN BRADY**
 May 26, 2008



26 comments

As American veterans are honored today, more than half a million former servicemen and servicewomen struggle to get the military benefits they were promised. And as wounded vets from Iraq and Afghanistan continue to come home, the problem is expected to get worse.

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The University of Detroit Mercy Law School has started an organization called Project Salute in which law students and professors give veterans free legal help in navigating the complex federal bureaucracy to get the disability benefits they deserve.

Begun last fall, the law school's dean, Mark Gordon, believes it's a great way to help veterans and train students.

"They are learning how to use the law to help people," said Gordon.

Willie Williams, a Vietnam veteran who was exposed to the toxin Agent Orange and had difficulty getting his disability benefits, said when Project Salute stepped in to help, he finally got the

Project Salute helps low-income vets get disability.

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money.

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"They are the best thing that ever happened to a veteran," Williams said.

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When an article about Project Salute appeared in the Detroit Free Press, the response was overwhelming. Within two weeks, the group heard from more than 300 veterans, said Gordon.

E-mails poured in from around the country. One vet from Spokane, Wash., offered to pay for gas if Project Salute would make the trip.

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A national tour was born when General Motors donated a 31-foot, handicapped accessible RV, outfitted with computers and printers.

Project Salute, which has the resources to continue through May 2009, has made nine stops so far in Texas, Florida and Georgia. This Memorial Day weekend kicks off a summer push to visit several more states, including New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, the Carolinas and others.

Already, more than 1,000 from World War II through Desert Storm have filed cases.

"A lot of them are frustrated," said student Stacey Pyszora. "They want to know, 'How can I better my claim that I am

trying to file? I've already been denied once. I'm appealing it. How can you help me, how does this system work?'"

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Many?
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