



Administrator Ryan Rogers (left) with his service dog Ranger that comes to work with him every day and Resident Henry Kilgore

In July, 2015, I visited Arbor Health, LLC in University City. Arbor Health is 45-resident residential care home that is dually licensed with the Department of Health and Senior Services and Department of Mental Health. Arbor Health is an all-male home that specializes in assisting homeless military veterans get off the street and integrate back into civilian life. Residents range in age from 29 to 82 years.

Arbor Health and Administrator Ryan Rogers took over operation of the home in November 2014. Administrator Rogers, along with Arbor Health executives Kendall Brune and Wes Sperr, showed me around. They have already made many changes and have plans to make many more. They said they are not where they want to be but they have come a long ways. They told me about a former Marine who lived there who has successfully integrated back into the community. He now lives in a private home that was donated for him.



Administrator Rogers posing with his Army uniform

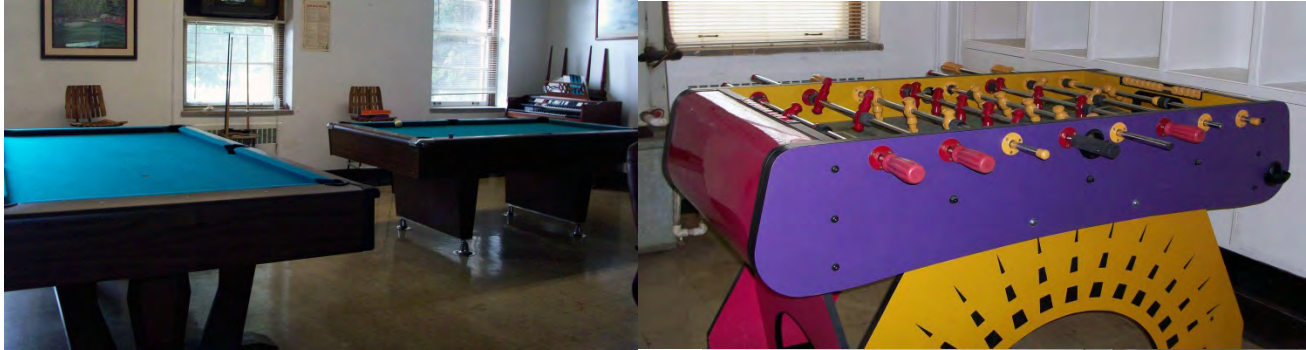
Administrator Rogers, who is a combat service connected disabled Army veteran, prides himself in being able to relate to the struggles many of the residents have. At one time, he was on 22 medications, including narcotics and psychotropic medications. He spent weeks at a time in bed with pain. He lost his home and everything he had.

In the midst of his troubles, Mr. Rogers headed to California looking for work. On the way, he nearly totaled his pickup truck. It took him seven to eight months to find work. He took a job as a local Veterans Employment Representative, covering 15,000 square miles helping veterans retain employment. He created the most successful program in southern California and was selected to serve on the State Board.

He said has waked the journey these guys are walking. They relate to him and know he has their best interest at heart. He took over as administrator at Arbor Health on November 1. At that time, the home was in disrepair and had no programming for the residents. They are not where they want to be but have come a long ways.

In addition to Mr. Rogers' military experience, their Psychologist is a disabled veteran and several staff members have also served in the military.

They have developed several partnerships, including a community college vocational rehabilitation program. A veterans' ministry network throws birthday parties with cake, cards, and presents. Home Depot donated new beds and JC Penney donated new bedding. Home Depot also donated all new windows. There was an error and the windows didn't fit. They are



again donating new windows and allowing them to use the ones that didn't fit to build a greenhouse.

Game room



Monsanto donated supplies for the garden. Nike has agreed to donate shoes and clothing. A church donated towels. They have received donated pool tables and an electronic dart board. [SmartCare](#) donated monitoring technology that “learns” a resident’s daily living patters and silently reports to caregivers if movement or activities seem out of the ordinary. [SmartCare](#) is owned by a Marine.

Other improvements include WIFI access for residents, a free clothing pantry, and a new roof. They are renovating the third floor and adding 16 private rooms and are hoping to increase their license capacity for 16 additional residents. They are turning the old chapel into an adult daycare center and a theater and have been receiving bids for LED lighting throughout.

Upcoming projects include adding an aquaponics room where they will grow fish and fresh vegetables. They are working on a partnership through Operation Food Search to trade fresh food for canned food.

They plan to build a detached smoking room and turn the current indoor smoking room into a therapy room. They will be adding a commissary and will give the residents with vouchers to purchase products. They are planning to add an art room with a kiln, outdoor arbor space on the roof, an elevator, individual room air conditioners units, bocce ball, horseshoe pit, an awning and new patio furniture. They also plan to put reptiles in the aquarium in the game room and get new card tables and poker chips.

They have added a fire sprinkler system, added strobe lights to the fire alarm system for deaf residents, and have a State Emergency Management Agency approved emergency plan.

They have been working to reduce medications and were one of the recipients of the [MC5](#) Music & Memory Certified Care Home Incentive.



Medication Technician Sherry Luckett

I spoke with Medication Technician Sherry Luckett. Sherry is from St. Louis and was the oldest of six children. She described herself as the responsible one who takes care of everybody else.

Her grandfather and uncles all served in the Army. Her grandfather told her that she was too girly for the Army. She was terrified of water and her sister was terrified of heights. Ironically,

she joined the Navy and her sister joined the Air Force. The scariest part of her service was learning to swim.

During her service in the Navy, she was stationed in San Diego, California and Okinawa, Japan. She also served at the St. Louis Reserve Center. She said she enjoyed her military service.

She now has four children, three girls and one boy and six grandchildren.

She has worked at Arbor since April 2014. Her responsibilities include passing medications, managing move-ins, and working with Medicaid and Social Security. She is a “people person” and her favorite part of the job is interacting with the residents. Some residents don’t get visitors and “sometimes people need someone to talk to.” Her expectations for herself are higher than everyone else’s. She gets frustrated when she can’t provide something that a resident wants.

The most challenging part of the job is the paperwork and regulatory oversight by the Department of Health and Senior Services. Since she has worked there, the building has undergone cosmetic improvements. It is cleaner and the atmosphere is calmer. The residents are happier and are more engaged with staff, other residents, and what is going on. They are more alert and aren’t as bored. They talk to the residents to discuss their plans for the future and to get their input.

There is more for the residents to do now besides eating, sleeping, and watching TV. It is a friendlier place to work. The residents especially enjoy the pool tables and garden and are participating in activities more. One resident used to only come out of his room for meals and his medications. Now he spends time working in the garden. They are also looking forward to the implementation of the Music & Memory program.



Resident Jason Lee sharing his artwork



Mural honoring the residents' military service. Resident Jason Lee was one of the primary artists.

Resident Jason Lee was born and raised in St. Louis. He is an accomplished artist and shows his art in a local gallery. He sometimes gets inspiration from photos he has seen. Other times, his inspiration comes from his imagination.

Mr. Lee has lived at Arbor for two-and-a-half years. It has changed for the better. The food is better. Staff treat the residents with respect and everyone treats each other better. They can now play pool and other games and watch TV. He said, "We don't smoke as much as we used to because now we have something to do."



View of the garden from a second story window



Resident Albert Thomas posing with vegetables that he grew in the community garden

Albert Thomas said he is from all over. He has lived in Chicago, Denver, and Las Vegas. He went straight into the military after high school and was stationed in Fort Bragg, NC. He was a Parachuter. His job was to maintain parachute equipment, pack parachutes, and put parachutes on large equipment.

He is a mechanic and has 15 children. Before moving to Arbor seven years ago, he was homeless. He said the staff treats the residents well. The food is so good that he is “getting fat.” He enjoys playing pool, listening to music, and smoking. Most of all, he enjoys the garden. He especially likes corn, peas, and okra.