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# 2016 EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION Awards Program

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<b>Project ID</b>	PIP-8
<b>Title of Program</b>	Guilford County Thank A Vet
<b>Program Category</b>	Public Information and Participation
<b>Submission Date</b>	6/21/2016 4:57:35 PM
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<b>Implementation Date</b>	12:00:00 AM
<b>FLSA Designation</b>	Both (if applicable to a team)
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### **Description of Productivity Improvement**

Guilford County has approximately 40,000 Veterans living in our area. On Memorial Day, May 28, 2015, the Guilford County Register of Deeds Office began providing Veterans with a County photo ID card through our "Thank a Vet Program". This ID card can be used for discounts at participating businesses. We initiated the program with two primary goals. The first goal was to encourage veterans to register their DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, with the Register of Deeds Office. Veterans are advised at final transition briefings to do so, however, many forget due to competing priorities for their time in their transition to civilian life. This document is the most important document a veteran receives upon discharge or retirement from service. There are many benefits to the veteran recording the DD Form 214: 1) It is used to help veterans secure benefits through the Veterans Administration (VA); 2) it helps the veteran obtain certified copies for free when needed which can also replace the original if it's misplaced (the Register of Deeds office has always issued as many free copies to veterans as often as they need them completely free of charge); 3) it can help funeral homes obtain proper military honors in the event of the passing of the veteran; 4) It can be used by widow(ers) to apply for benefits through the VA. The second goal was to obtain benefits and discounts for veterans through local business contributions.

The results of Guilford County Thank a Vet have been nothing short of statistically astonishing. From January 2010 until the inception of the program, a total of 301 DD Form 214s were recorded in the Register of Deeds office. Since Thank a Vet's Memorial Day start on May 1, 2015, a total of 1132 DD Form 214s have been recorded. For the calendar year 2015, 931 DD Form 214s were recorded which is a 2015% increase from 2014!

Thus far, as of June 14, 2016, we have recorded 268 DD Form 214s. Since the program's inception, a total of 1,128 DD Form 214s have been recorded with our office.

Since May 1, 2015, the Guilford County Register of Deeds has issued 1424 ID cards to veterans used for commercial discounts at nearly 275 businesses in participating in the "Thank a Vet Program". Some examples of the benefits they have offered are discounts/incentives in areas as diverse as accounting, auto maintenance, dentistry, fitness, funeral homes, legal services, restaurants and a myriad many others. One veteran remarked that the program allowed him to save \$3,000 in closing costs on a home. The "Thank a Vet Program" is free to Veterans and to our businesses partners.

### **Description of why this project was initiated**

Our nation's Veterans make up less than 1% of the United States population. Their service in our military and to our country as well as sacrifice for the common good represents the highest of American ideals. Veterans come home at times from multiple deployments and have trouble readjusting to their lives. We often encounter servicemen and women and say "Thank you for your service." We were looking for a way to truly demonstrate the appreciation we have for their impact on our freedom and lives and feel this program offers a small token of our appreciation. The Guilford County Thank a Vet Program started by the Register of Deeds is the first in North Carolina.

Veterans use their DD-214's for a variety of purposes from purchasing a car, to identifying themselves in other commercial transactions, and in some instances to gain employment. They sometimes misplace this document and then they have to go through either our local Veteran's Affairs office or their branch of service to obtain another one. This can take as long as three weeks to obtain a new one. With that said, Guilford County government, businesses, and the community wanted to be supportive of our veterans and show we truly value their contributions.

The most compelling reason Thank a Vet has been successful has not been the increase in DD-214 filings alone. We believe Thank a Vet demonstrates to our 40,000 veterans that with every discounted purchase they make Guilford County Government truly cares about them, their wellbeing, and service to our country. Register of Deeds staff aren't just increasing their "productivity" in just providing an additional service but they see the human "value" in our veterans through hearing their stories and the affirmation they feel as they immediately receive their ID cards. Thank a Vet has also been a conduit for Veterans to gain information about Guilford County Veterans Services (<http://www.myguilford.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Veterans-Services-Brochure-updated.pdf>) and have a sense of community through Veterans Coffee events in the Piedmont (<http://myfox8.com/2015/07/21/veterans-coffee-events-in-the-piedmont/>).

**Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).**

**Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings**

The program was set up with minimal investment. Hardware and software to start the program was under \$10,000; this included equipment for both the Greensboro and High Point Offices. Several local news agencies (news and print) advertised in the lead up period. Team members briefed Veterans gatherings and flyers were displayed on county buildings. Veterans also advertised via connections with their military family and friends.

The discounts and savings to Veterans from the 275 businesses are listed on our Thank a Vet website <http://www.myguilford.com/rod/merchant-list/>. We list the merchants with their logo, address, specialties along with their mapped locations. We designate a "Business of the Month". For example, the current Business of the Month is Beamer Tire and Auto located in Greensboro that offers veterans 10% total purchases or \$10 off oil changes. Businesses that have signed contracts with us are also provided a window display showing their support of the program. This helps the business gain customers via free advertisement.

Here are two news segments: Time Warner Cable News Segment on Thank a Vet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=burBkzLOj3o> and WFMY News 2:

<http://www.wfmynews2.com/news/local/2-wants-to-know/how-to-get-veteran-discounts-365-days-a-year/224006593>. As one reporter states about Thank a Vet: "It is a win for the County in its mission to serve and for merchants who will gain more customers."

Lastly, Register of Deeds staff regularly make it known Guilford County has a Veterans Services office so they can gain more information about veteran benefits they may be eligible for but not aware of. This information may lead to cost savings, cost avoidance, and a higher level of service.

### Other descriptive information

The Guilford County Register of Deeds office was the first to initiate a "Thank A Vet Program" in North Carolina. Our goal has been to start a flagship program and have it spread across the State of North Carolina. Jeff Thigpen, Register of Deeds has urged other counties in North Carolina to begin their own "Thank A Vet" programs. The Guilford County Register of Deeds has provided numerous counties sample introductory business letters, business sign up templates, IDenticard contact information for software, County Information Services (IS) technical support, and encouragement/advice. In the first year since the Guilford County Register of Deeds initiated this program, we've supported and assisted six other North Carolina counties in creating their own Thank a Vet programs. Here are the counties and number of merchants participating in their respective areas: New Hanover (58); Rockingham (53), Surry (67), Ashe (50), Watauga (94), and Randolph (57). The programs are very popular and kick off events have had been widely attended in each county. Please take a quick look at our photo gallery: <http://www.myguilford.com/rod/thank-a-vet-gallery/>

The overall goal of this effort is to expand Thank a Vet programs into every county in North Carolina! We believe it is possible. It's reasonable to work toward reciprocating agreements with merchants in multiple counties to accept the Thank a Vet card in the future too. For example, a Guilford County Vet with a Thank a Vet card might receive a discount in New Hanover, Randolph, and Rockingham counties?

Being recognized as a 2016 NCACC LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award recipient would help showcase our efforts to create new and innovative ways to show Veterans across North Carolina counties we care! Thank you for your consideration.