**VETERANS TO SHARE STORIES AT TOWN HALL EVENTS
*Community invited to attend and listen as Veterans Day approaches***

Colchester, Rutland & St. Johnsbury, Vermont – DATESENT, 2019:  On Sunday, November 3rd in Colchester, Rutland, and St. Johnsbury, veterans are invited to speak, unscripted, about what their service means to them. All community members are encouraged to attend and to listen.

Inspired by author Sebastian Junger, these gatherings aim to establish a greater understanding between local veterans and the friends and neighbors they fought for. In the tradition of warrior storytelling, veterans are invited to describe the pride, grief, rage, or quiet appreciation of life that the war bestowed upon them ⁠—to share a story, summary of service, message, letter home, excerpt from a war journal, or even the story behind a photograph. The events are non-political, and all perspectives are valued.

“We often hear about veterans, but we very rarely get to hear from them, to hear their own voices talking about their experience,” says Marty McMahon, the host at the St. Johnsbury location, and a member of CCV’s Veterans Services Team. “We can’t have a real dialogue with veterans until we take the time to listen with no judgment.”

"For many veterans, it may be difficult to speak of their experience out of concern for judgment and misunderstanding," adds Jon Turner, Chittenden County event host and an outings leader for the Sierra Club Military Outdoors.  "Having an opportunity to gather with community members to be heard assists with the reintegration process and makes it possible to find trust in those whom we did not serve with."

The event format is drawn from a June 2015 [*Vanity Fair* article](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/05/ptsd-war-home-sebastian-junger) by Sebastian Junger, highlighting the challenges of post-traumatic stress among veterans. He suggested “making every town and city hall in the country available to veterans who want to speak publicly about the war” and believed holding these community forums would “return the experience of war to our entire nation, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought.”

U.S. Representative Seth Moulton (D-MA), a Marine combat veteran, hosted the first Veterans Town Hall of this kind in 2015 in Marblehead, Massachusetts. 2017 marked the first Vermont event, a Burlington town hall spearheaded by local event coordinator Kristen Eaton. Eaton, who continues to facilitate the annual Veterans Town Hall in Chittenden County, emphasizes that the events would not be possible without the dozens of individuals and organizations who have offered support and feedback since 2017. Among those are Community College of Vermont (which has coordinated the Rutland event since 2018, and added the St. Johnsbury location this year) and Saint Michael's College Military Community Services and Student Veteran Association (the venue sponsors for the Chittenden County event).

"Support of our military does not start with a 'support the troops' bumper sticker and culminate with grilled chicken on Memorial Day weekend," says Kyle Aines, CCV's Associate Director of Veterans and Military Services, and the host of the Rutland event. "As military members struggle to reintegrate back into society, it is imperative that society have a clear understanding what they are transitioning from. The Veterans Town Hall is that bridge and connection."