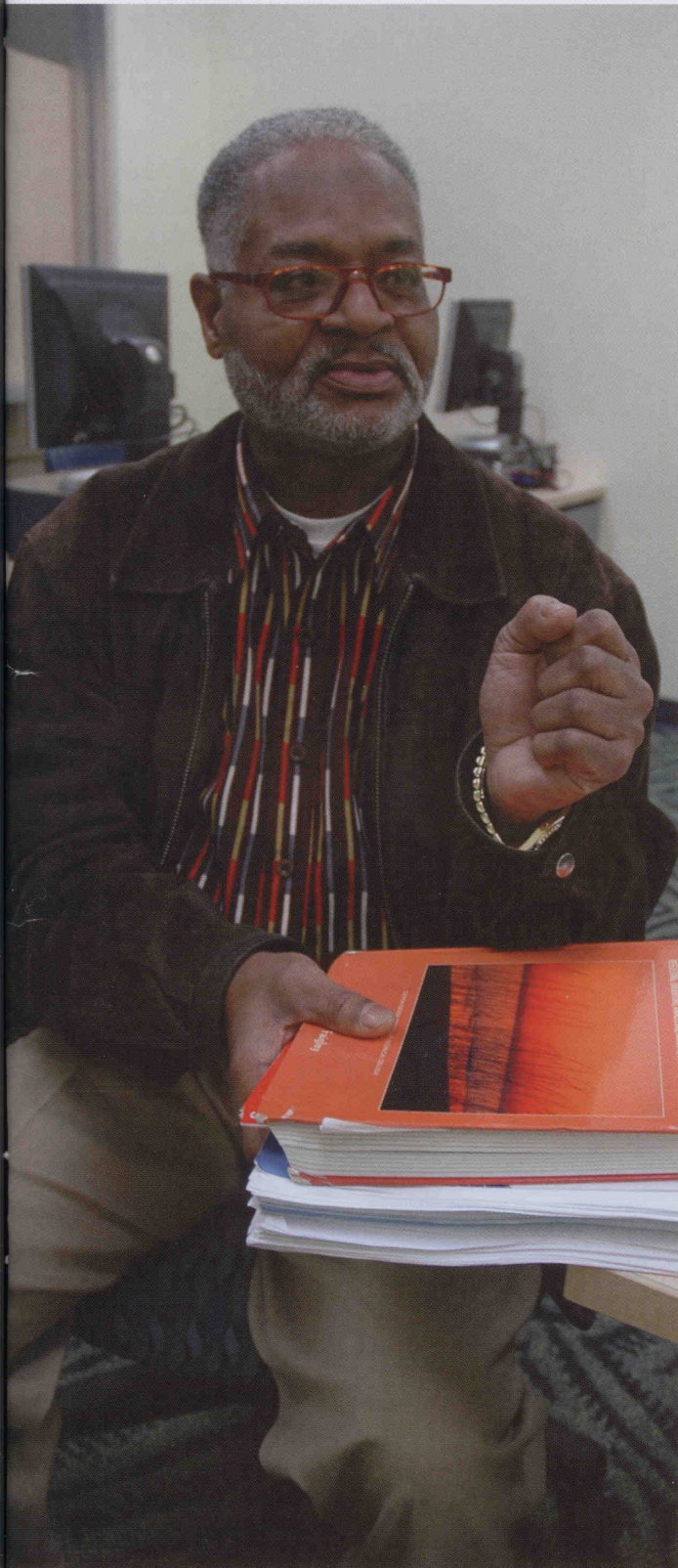


FROM HOMELESSNESS to COLLEGE



“Once I asked for help, the miracles started to happen.

With humility, I listened to those who could lead me in the right direction.” — Robert Keith

Joining the U.S. Navy in early 1980, 34-year-old Robert Keith was excited to become a career military man after spending more than a decade on Wall Street. In 1983, his ship, the *USS America*, was called to respond to the Marine Corps barracks bombing in Beirut, Lebanon. In route, the aircraft carrier encountered a typhoon in the Indian Ocean. As Keith was trying to secure equipment, the ship rolled and he fell down a set of stairs and landed on his back.

Diagnosed with degenerative disc disease, Keith spent years in therapy and on pain medicine before he was forced to retire from the Navy in 1990.

After years of having difficulty working and paying bills and hurting from the physical pain, Keith started drinking, which led to other things, and eventually led to homelessness.

“I went into a stupor and started doing things I shouldn’t have,” said Keith.

While he was living on the streets of Myrtle Beach, a fellow veteran told him to go get help at “the best VA in the country in Charleston.”

“I had to get knocked down before I realized I needed help,” said Keith. “And once I asked for help, the miracles started to happen. With humility, I listened to those who could lead me in the right direction.”

In February 2007, Keith joined the Charleston VAMC Substance Abuse Treatment Center (SATC) program. It wasn’t easy at first. He was

angry with the system and didn’t think it could help him. But now he’s “the greatest Charleston VAMC supporter” and wants to encourage other veterans who need help to give it a chance.

Using the tools the VA provides, Keith feels there are endless possibilities to what he can accomplish now.

Today, Keith is on his way to graduate Trident Technical College with a 2-year Associates Degree in Hospitality Management and Tourism in 2009. He’s part of the Veterans Upward Bound program, which helps veterans go to college. The program just recently came to South Carolina, and Keith is one of its first participants.

“I wear a big V on my chest—I’m proud to be a veteran, and this program is for us,” said Keith.

The VUB program helped Keith with every aspect of going back to school—from getting his transcripts from previous schools to supplying books, paper and pens.

“I couldn’t do all of it on my own,” said Keith. “VUB goes all the way to help.”

Keith is also on his way to getting an apartment or house of his own with help from the VA supported housing (VASH) program, which is a joint effort by the VA and US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program provides Section 8 ‘Housing Choice’ vouchers and intensive case management support services to move veterans out of homelessness.

With each door, another door opens for Keith, and he is looking forward to what the future holds.

“I’m always in recovery, and I’m filling that void with positivity now,” said Keith. “I’m keeping my mind active and expanding my horizons. There is hope for tomorrow.”