

WVDA Welcomes New Veterans to Agriculture Project Coordinator

Monica Tharp grew up on a farm in Lincoln County growing “a little bit of everything.” Her new job as the West Virginia Department of Agriculture Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Project Coordinator is bringing her back to her roots.

The Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture program was established back in 2015 to recruit, re-train and mentor men and women currently serving or who have served in the military in the past. The goal is to offer new opportunities in agriculture, whether it be raising livestock or growing vegetables, and help veterans transition from the battlefield to field work.

Tharp initially joined the West Virginia Army National Guard back in 2000 to pay for college but says, “Once I joined, I realized what a family it was. It was something I was very proud to be a part of.”

Tharp spent four years in the Guard and 15 more as a military spouse. Her former husband served in Iraq and returned home with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“I’ve seen a lot of suffering and a lot of ideas of how to face those PTSD issues that just



didn’t work. But the Vets to Ag program thinks outside of the box. There are a lot of aspects that fit perfectly for veterans as far as therapy,” said Tharp. “The program allows veterans to work one-on-one and not have to deal directly with the public unless they choose to do so. It’s

a very controlled environment.”

The program has so far helped dozens of veterans find a new mission in life. Tharp says that’s what Vets to Ag is all about.

“It gives veterans a purpose again. They need a reason to get up every morning. To see they give life back, that is a very therapeutic thing,” stressed Tharp.

Tharp is looking forward to working in conjunction with the Hershel “Woody” Williams VA Medical Center in Huntington and assisting veterans in finding the right agriculture opportunity.

“This is a very hands-on program. It’s exciting,” Tharp said. “I’m just now getting my feet wet and I’m looking forward to meeting the veterans.”

Cassey Bowden, WVDA Director of Agriculture Business Development said Tharp is a perfect fit.

“We’re excited to have Monica on our Vets to Ag team,” said Bowden. “Her experience and passion for assisting veterans will serve this program well.”

You can reach Tharp at mtharp@wvda.us or by calling 304-558-2210.