

THE IMPACT POINT

Helping Homeless Veterans Successfully Rejoin Our Community

“I’m not a quitter, and I’ll never forget.”

Etienne John isn't a stranger to death and destruction. As a young boy, his family struggled during the Burundi civil war. Fortunately his mother escaped with her nine children, including 11-year-old Etienne, to a Refugee Camp in Tanzania.

Four years later, through the US Refugee Program, his family was relocated to Aurora, Colorado.

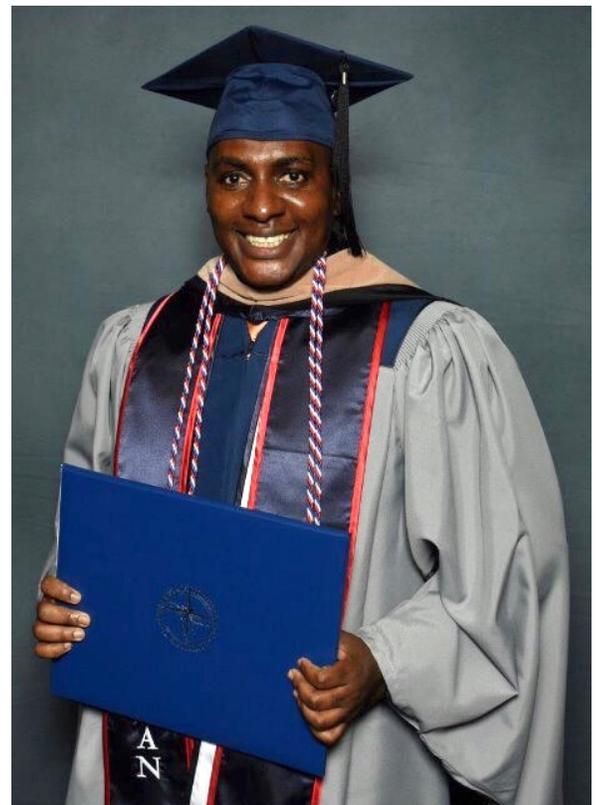
Aurora is a very long way from Tanzania, in every way. Adjusting to the cold mountain air, and an American high school as a 15-year old were only two of Etienne's daunting challenges. He spoke three languages, but not English. With fortitude and purpose, he tackled the new language with fierce dedication. He joined the debating team to push himself even further. He joined the Jr. ROTC and the track team. Etienne graduated near the top of his class with a 3.8 GPA.

September 11, 2001, changed our lives forever. For Etienne, it also directed his life's purpose, to join the military and help protect his new country. "I was at school and still remember every detail we watched on TV. I remember watching the people around me, suddenly looking like something was missing. I'll never forget how hard the pain hit me."

Etienne wanted to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy, but as a refugee, even with his stellar high school record, he couldn't qualify. "I'm not a quitter, I persisted, and after six months, my mother finally agreed to let me join the U.S. Army."

With the fervor of both a recruit and the memory of September 11 tattooed in his mind, while stationed in Germany Etienne studied for, and easily passed, his U.S. Citizenship test. Etienne was sworn in at the Embassy in Frankfurt. He shipped out almost immediately to Iraq.

As part of the Operation Iraqi Freedom campaign, Etienne spent 14 months stationed on an outpost where patrols and fighting were his day's work. "I perfected my War Face, a face the enemy feared," he says. War



brings death, and a sniper's bullet killed a buddy. "I'll always remember him," Etienne shares softly, as he indicates the silver bracelet on his right wrist.

Transferred to Jacksonville from Coronado, CA before leaving the service in 2012, Etienne started taking classes at Jacksonville University where he earned his degree in aviation management.

Life went from 110 MPH to practically zero after graduation. Job-hunting wasn't enough to keep at bay Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) that had built up over a lifetime of war and tragedy. Like so many other modern warriors, Etienne didn't ask for help and tried "self-medication," a strategy that left him living on the street in his car. "I believe that no matter how big the problem, you just don't quit," says Etienne, "but I didn't know how to restart my life."

"I really don't know what would have happened to me, if not for Five Star Veterans Center. For the first time in quite a while, I had a safe place to live, food, and people who believed in me. The Five Star Veterans Center mental health program helped restore my confidence. I came to understand that I wasn't alone.

Ever driven, Etienne entered the University of North Florida where he earned his MBA in management last month. Now he is job hunting again. His ideal job is one in aviation management, so if you, or someone you know, can help, please contact Five Star Veterans Center.

Thinking about September 11 today, Etienne says it reminds him of being back in the classroom, watching the planes hit the Twin Towers over and over again. "It is painful, but I push myself to watch it, I don't want to forget that feeling, ever."

Looking forward, Etienne says he wakes up every day "with a smile on my face. I will always remember how far I've come, and I'll never forget how grateful I am to this country, and to Five Star Veterans Center."

SEPTEMBER 11 MAY TRIGGER PTDS

For many veterans in recovery or experiencing homelessness, or trying to self-manage their depression, September 11 might remind them of their service and the trauma of war.

If you think a family member or friend is contemplating suicide please ask them to call the



If you, a buddy, or loved one is a veteran who needs help restoring their health, reconnecting with family and friends, or rejoining the civilian community, contact us at: 904-723-5950 | 5StarVeteransCenter.org

40 Acme Street | Jacksonville, FL 32211

Everyday We Help Homeless Veterans

Restore ★ Reconnect ★ Rejoin

