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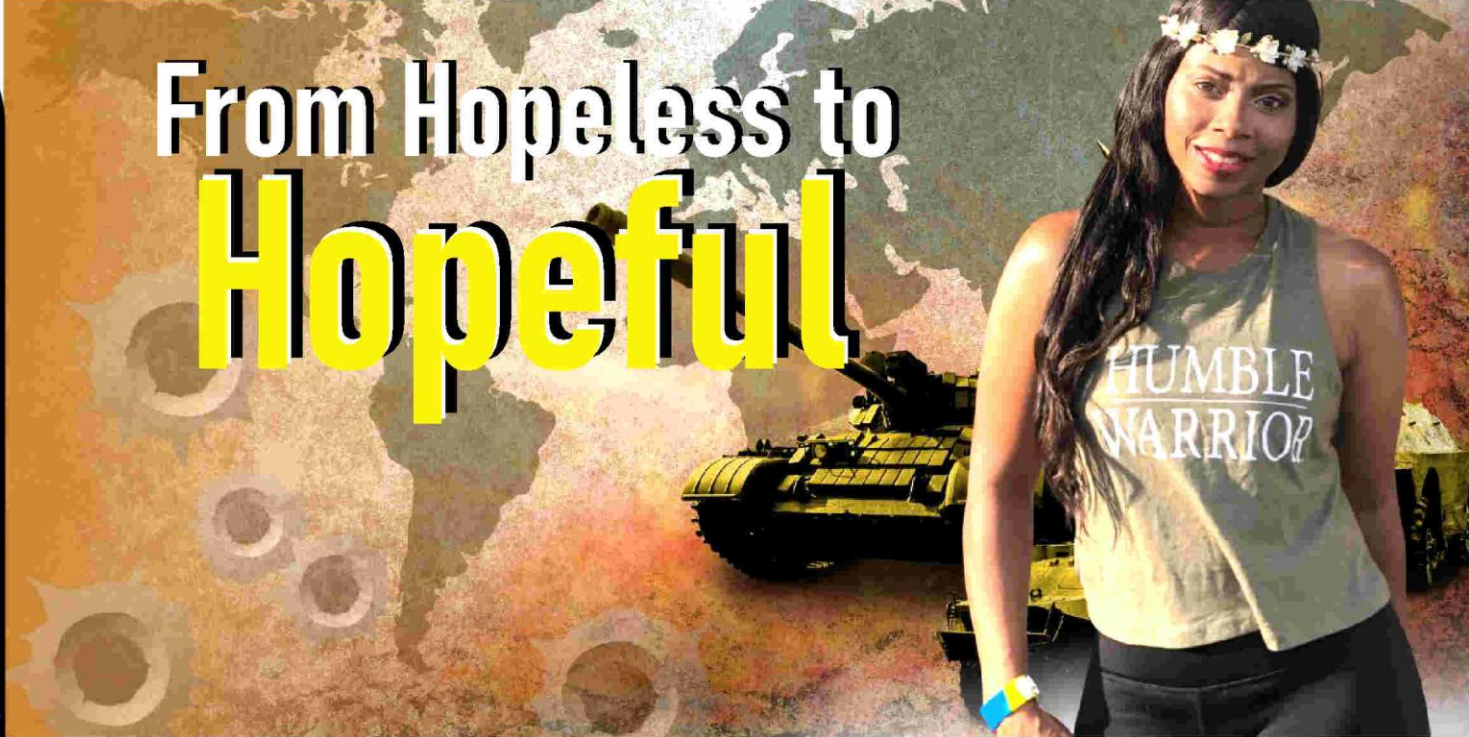
DETROIT NATIVE SUN

NOVEMBER 14 - DECEMBER 11, 2025

UNITING & ENLIGHTENING THE COMMUNITY

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From Hopeless to Hopeful

By Eddie Allen
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Life as she knew it changed in an instant for Natalie Hayes.

A fire at the Farmington, Michigan apartment where she'd lived for 17 years left her suddenly homeless and in need of resources of virtually every kind.

As a disabled military veteran, Hayes was more accustomed to serving others, but after escaping the blaze at 3 a.m., with little more than the clothes on her back and a few belongings, seeking help became a necessity.

Where could she turn?

Resources like Fisher House, a temporary housing facility for families of veterans receiving medical treatment, were unwilling to bend their rules for Hayes and her family, since her circumstances didn't match their criteria.

"I said, 'There should be something in between that meets the needs of people who stay there and people with housing emergencies,'" Hayes recalls.

Despite the fact that she receives dialysis treatments, her housing tragedy wouldn't be addressed -- even by a military support program designed to give temporary housing.

"It was just really disheartening to be a veteran, to be disabled and to not be able to get help," she adds.

Thankfully, the American Red Cross stepped in to offer resources.

"They were awesome," says Hayes.

But in the trenches, just as their members had served on military front lines, was an organization that specializes in efforts to prevent homelessness and providing assistance to Michigan women who've worn the uniform.

"My veteran sisters were a godsend," Hayes says, thanking Motown Women Veterans. Motown Women Veterans took a collection for Hayes and generated enough money to help her recently purchase beds and mattresses, along with other household items.

Alexis Harrison-Derriso, founder and president of the non-profit organization, says it was in keeping with the mission, to rally their troops on Hayes' behalf.

"Not to mention veteran sisterhood," says Harrison-Derriso, "to support her during those bad days."

Despite the ongoing challenge of rebuilding after losing the home where she spent much of her life and raised her children, Hayes is temporarily living with her sister, and looking for a new residence.

She says Motown Women Veterans proved itself valuable beyond the networking, social outings and camaraderie for which the organization is known, helping to provide a critical lifeline.

"I'm starting to see light at the end of the tunnel," Hayes says.

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