



New London Homeless Hospitality Center

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Article published in The Day, Jul 10, 2010

New London Opens New Home For Vets

Transitional housing site opens in New London

By Jennifer McDermott Day Staff Writer

New London, CT - The first transitional housing for homeless veterans in the region opened Friday, with politicians praising it as a way to thank veterans for serving and give them a chance at a new life.

The New London Homeless Hospitality Center used a grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to purchase a four-family house at 51-53 Mountain Ave. Eight homeless veterans will live at Project Home while they navigate government programs, find work and look for more permanent housing.

"In politics we often focus on what divides us, but today we're focused on what brings us together," former U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons said at the opening, held in the backyard of the house. "Helping veterans is something that we can all agree on."

"We have an opportunity that is so very important, and that is to thank our veterans," added state Sen. Andrea Stillman, D-Waterford. U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, state Rep. Betsy Ritter, D-Waterford, and Mayor Rob Pero shared similar sentiments about the importance of giving back to veterans who sacrificed for their country.

"This is a community that took on a challenge and made it happen," said Linda Schwartz, the state's Veterans Affairs commissioner. "You have created a new house and a new opportunity. That's what veterans deserve, a chance."

The aim is to help veterans who need extra support before living on their own, such as those who are struggling with a mental health or substance abuse issue or who have been unemployed for a long time. Veterans can stay for up to two years but the goal is to get them into their own apartments quickly and help about a dozen veterans annually.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," Cliff Frazier, a new resident of Project Home, told the audience. "And we'll try to give you a few success stories out of here."

Afterward, Frazier said he was grateful for the little things, being able to wake up in his own bed, fry an egg in his kitchen, watch "SportsCenter" and plan his day. He used his new address to enroll in school. A year from now, he said, he will be in his own place, with stable employment as an electrician. Frazier, 34, served in the Navy Seabees, a construction battalion, from 2000 to 2007. He deployed around the world, including to Iraq and Kuwait.

He grew up in Meriden and moved to New London earlier this year with his girlfriend. That relationship ended about three months ago, and he began staying in the shelter.

Transitional housing for veterans is available elsewhere in the state, including in the Hartford and Bridgeport areas, but not locally.

"It's good to have some place to call home," Frazier said.

The opening also included a plaque presentation to Waterford Police Officer David Anderson and other members of the Freedom Riders USA, who organized a benefit that raised more than \$12,000 for the house, and also to Ted Olynciw, a retired contractor from Waterford, who oversaw the renovations. Blumenthal presented the hospitality center with an official citation to commemorate the day.