



The Leatherneck Club of North Texas Central Texas Office

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Leatherneck Club Launches Major Veterans Initiative

GATESVILLE – The Leatherneck Club of North Texas, which began operations in central Texas in April, has brought together a group of partner organizations to address the critical issue of veteran homelessness in the region. In a ceremony at the Coryell County Judge's Office this morning, the executive director of Dallas-based nonprofit organization ReserveAid, U.S. Marine Master Gunnery Sgt. Polly Widenkopf (Ret.) presented a check for \$20,000 to Maureen Jouett, executive director of the peer-to-peer organization Bring Everyone in the Zone.

“We realized that a coordinated effort was needed to address this very real problem,” Coryell County Veterans Advisor Marine Lt. Col. Richard Beil (Ret.) said.

“When Rich Beil made me aware of this effort, my board of directors in Dallas immediately decided that this was something we wanted to support,” Widenkopf said.

Peer-to-peer counseling uses a humanistic approach to the treatment of combat stress related problems by utilizing fellow veterans who understand their point of view instead of a scientific diagnosis of what should be considered neither a disorder nor a disability. “For far too long, it has seemed the veteran community has been expected to seek permission from civilians on how to treat our fellow veterans,” Beil said. “We categorically reject that view.”

Bring Everyone in the Zone is a member of the Military Veteran Peer Network and has been in operation in Killeen since 2008, conducting weekly peer-to-peer counseling sessions. “This effort is designed in part to prevent veterans from becoming homeless by addressing the issues that may lead to marital problems, substance abuse and, ultimately, homelessness”, Jouett said.

“The other side of the spectrum in the group of partner organizations is Operation Stand Down Central Texas, which seeks to find those veterans already living on the streets and bring them back to a productive life”, Beil said. Bring Everyone in the Zone has decided to work hand-in-hand with OSDCT to help those veterans become ready to reintegrate into society.

Bring Everyone in the Zone currently conducts weekly counseling sessions at their Second Street location on Thursdays in Killeen and on Wednesdays at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8577 in Copperas Cove. Additional counselors are needed for both locations and to provide additional services in Gatesville and the northern Coryell County area, Beil added.

“We are seeking combat veterans and spouses of combat veterans from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan willing to sacrifice one hour per week to help their fellow veterans,” Beil said. “We need experienced spouses on board because veterans in crises don’t go through it alone – their families go through it as well.”

Also participating in the effort is the Coryell County Sheriff’s Department. Mental Health Deputy Leon Ingersoll, a combat veteran himself, said, “No law enforcement officer wants an encounter with a veteran to escalate out of control. We in the department believe this is an approach that has been needed for years, and we want to be a part of it.”

County officials have agreed that this effort is long overdue. “This entire project and plan was created by (Lt. Col.) Beil and his Leatherneck Club, rather than by the county. However, he’s done such a great job of putting together the partnership of organizations to get this done, I’ve appointed him my Special Veterans Advisor,” County Judge John Firth said. “The Commissioners' Court and I have adopted this as our number one priority in veteran affairs. I hope all citizens and the business community will put their support behind this effort. As a veteran myself, I also ask every veteran organization to lend their unqualified support.”

For further information on the organizations involved in this project or to become a volunteer counselor, email Beil at iwojimajoe1775@gmail.com.

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