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NEWSMAKERS 2012

News-makers: Veterans Matter and new VA Clinic make progress in 2012

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By Jay Hathaway, Toledo Free Press Staff Writer

Two groups in the area have made significant progress during 2012 in providing health care and housing for veterans.

On Sept. 19, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) opened its new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic. The new facility is located at 1200 S. Detroit Ave., and, at 66,000 square feet, roughly doubles the size of its previous Glendale Avenue location.

The clinic had its official ribbon-cutting ceremony Nov. 9 during Veterans Day weekend and featured speakers Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Toledo Mayor Mike Bell and Brig. Gen. Mark E. Bartman, an assistant adjutant general of the Ohio Air National Guard. The event also featured the unveiling of the "Faces of Heroes" wall, a large art piece featuring the photos of 1,500 local veterans.

The ceremony was a huge success for the clinic and about 300 people attended, according to Derek Atkinson, VA public affairs officer.

The clinic is administered by the VA Ann Arbor Health system. Some of the new services offered at the facility include occupational therapy and an expanded physical therapy program. The latter also features an underwater treadmill.

Many of the established VA services are still offered, such as mental health treatment, and others have been upgraded for ease of access. Virtual medical services, such as a direct link to the Cleveland Veterans Benefits office, utilize technology to eliminate travel and communication lag.

Atkinson said he is excited for the future of the facility and the additions that will be made over time.

"We designed the clinic with expansion in mind," Atkinson said.

The VA clinic was not the only Toledo veterans group to receive a boost over the past year — another was aided by the power of rock stardom.

The nonprofit group Veterans Matter assists veterans who are screened and accepted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Veterans Affairs Supported Housing program (HUD-VASH). The HUD-VASH program provides housing for veterans in need, but requires a rent deposit up front. Ken Leslie recognized this was a



The new VA Clinic in Toledo on Detroit Avenue opened Sept. 19. Toledo Free Press File Photo by Sarah Ottney

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problem for many veterans, and co-founded Veterans Matter in February as a way to raise funds for the deposits. Leslie approached ProMedica's Advocacy Fund for \$26,250 to fund the idea and on Feb. 17, the first family was able to leave a shelter for their new home.

The group has made considerable strides in 2012, thanks in part to some assistance from a rock 'n' roll legend, ZZ Top bassist Dusty Hill.

Hill has been a longtime advocate for veterans, and when he learned about Veterans Matter, he saw an opportunity to get involved in his home state of Texas, as well as nationally.

Ken Leslie, founder of Veterans Matter.
Toledo Free Press File Photo by Joseph Herr.

"Dusty and his wife started the Houston Veterans Matter chapter, raising \$16,000 the first day. This allowed us to house two waiting Houston veterans that very same day," Leslie said.

Hill embarked on a radio tour of eight cities promoting Veterans Matter with an auction of ZZ Top gear. The auction raised \$5,400 and one of the radio stations agreed to match that amount.

Leslie and ZZ Top have several other events planned for the future, including the "60,000 Soldiers Housed" campaign and may feature other music industry names.

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