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Complex offers veterans housing, but comforts of home still in need

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VERNON — The military veterans renting rooms at the Carriage House at 1 Ellington Ave. got a visit from town officials Tuesday, and soon will get a whole lot more, thanks to a fund set up for their benefit at Rockville Bank.

Developer William Bellock took officials on a tour of the renovated Carriage House, which started taking in its first tenants this year.

"Every unit is different. It's just a function of what we had here," Bellock said.

Each of the seven one-bedroom units is indeed unique, with its individual floor plan and character.

One of the tenants, Army veteran Michael Harris, said he served in Vietnam in the early 1970s before joining the National Guard for several years.

Harris, who used to live in veterans' housing in Rocky Hill, said he much prefers his new accommodations.

"It's a better place than I was, it's nice and quiet here," Harris said.

Tuesday's tour was part of an ongoing effort to welcome the group of veterans into the community and provide support after some neighbors initially spoke out against their presence, insinuating that the men were drug-addicted and dangerous.

The veterans, who all have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after harrowing combat experiences, are supported by military housing vouchers and support services through the Hartford-based mental health nonprofit, Chrysalis Center.

Chester "Chet" Morgan, a 30-year veteran of the National Guard who organized the fund with Rockville Bank, thanked Harris and other veterans for their service to the country, and lauded Chrysalis staff for their work.

"It was really incredible, the job they did for those veterans," Morgan said.

Because many veterans often suffer through long periods of mental illness, poverty, and homelessness, by the time they reach a supportive housing program, they have little left.

Chrysalis Services Director Cathy Maloney said the nonprofit agency provides social services and housing, but the community support will be a tremendous help when it comes to the veterans' day-to-day needs.

"It's amazing. We're very, very grateful," Maloney said, adding that she was impressed by the high-quality, "beautiful" donations that already have started to come in.

Mayor Jason L. McCoy said the veterans deserve all the support they can get, after sacrificing so much to protect the American way of life.

"They kept us one of the strongest countries in the world," McCoy said. "We owe them for what they allow us to do. We owe them more than we could ever repay."

Also in attendance Tuesday were Town Administrator John D. Ward, Rockville Bank Vice President Eugene W. Skladnowski, Chrysalis Director David J. McQuade, and Chrysalis supportive housing specialist Nancy Henderson.

As the group toured the veterans' apartments, it was apparent that though all of their basic housing requirements had been met, the men are living in fairly sparse conditions with few creature comforts.

Maloney provided a wish list of items the veterans need, including bedding, lamps, decorations, all types of kitchen equipment, spices, sponges, trash cans, steak knives, DVD players, cabinets, coffee tables, TV stands, shower curtains, towels, vacuum cleaners, toiletries, scarves and gloves, used computers and printers, writing supplies, irons, ironing boards, umbrellas, cleaning supplies, men's watches, and non-perishable food items.

"We were shown the needs and now I hope the community steps up to fulfill the needs," Morgan said today.

To donate furniture or home goods, call Mary Feliciano at the Chrysalis Center at 860-263-4400.

To contribute financially, checks should be made payable to Chrysalis Center Inc., Carriage House Vets, and mailed to Rockville Bank Carriage House Vets Account, P.O. Box 660, Rockville, CT 06066.

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