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Courier Times

Vets center to offer counseling

By: JAMES MCGINNIS Bucks County Courier Times

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A new center will offer counseling to veterans and the families of soldiers killed in the line of duty.

Ben Mastridge returned from Vietnam with a hole in his foot and had no desire to take a road trip to the Veterans Administration Medical Center in West Philadelphia.

"There are triggers for any kind of mental trauma and when you're out of your realm, you feel threatened," the Bensalem veteran said, remembering his return to the states in 1966.

But that could no longer be an issue for thousands of veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is planning more centers, much closer to home.

Bucks County Director of Veterans Affairs Dan Fraley and representatives from the Pennsylvania Veterans Administration on Wednesday announced the opening of a veterans center in Bristol. The new center - one of only 11 in Pennsylvania - should open in 60 days at the Canal's End office complex at 418 Mill St.

It will be a place for counseling, said Terry Luper, regional manager for readjustment counseling services.

"We're going to be providing individual, group and family counseling for veterans who served in the combat field," Luper said. "We'll also provide bereavement counseling for the families of any service member who's died on active duty, and that doesn't have to be combat related."



Dan Fraley(left), Bucks County director of Military Affairs, shakes hands with Congressman Patrick Murphy(2nd from left) following a press conference Wednesday discussing plans to open a Bucks County Veterans Center on Mill Street in Bristol Borough. - Matt Stanley/Staff Photographer

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Counselors also will be available to assist any service member who experienced sexual assault or sexual trauma while on duty, officials said.

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Congressman Patrick Murphy, D-8, thanked the Veterans Administration and officials in Bucks County for working together to bring counseling services to Bristol.

"We think it's a great site," Murphy said. "We're so proud that they picked this place."

Unlike some state-managed veterans centers, which face closure due to budget cuts, the Bristol center will be federally funded, Murphy said.

"This Congress has passed the largest increase in veterans' benefits in the history of our county," Murphy said. "This veterans center is an example of the fruits of those efforts."

Did you know?

Bucks County is home to about 60,000 veterans. Bucks has the fourth largest number of veterans of any Pennsylvania county.

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Yes, and it takes the pressure off of the staff of congressman Murphy. Its hard to look up information or aid anyone let alone a vet.

1

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