



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 24, 2024

VETERAN PROGRAMS RECEIVE STATE FUNDING AHEAD OF MEMORIAL DAY

Uniontown, PA – The Fayette County Veteran Affairs Office is expanding its outreach efforts this summer, thanks to a \$15,000 state grant.

Awarded by the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Veterans' Trust Fund Grant supports local veteran organizations offering transportation services or legal assistance, tackling food or housing insecurity, or promoting behavioral and mental health and suicide-prevention programs.

Fayette County Veteran Affairs Director Brian Bensen said the grant will be used to promote rehabilitative programming for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and continued outreach efforts.

"We're hosting a date night and open house at Touchstone. The date night gives veterans the opportunity to bring their significant others to a blacksmithing class, where they'll learn a new skill and create something together," Bensen said. "Our open house will show off the other programs Touchstone offers, such as glass making and ceramics. If veterans are interested, we have the funding to make it happen."

The first Veteran Date Night takes place 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday, June 7, at the Touchstone Center for Crafts in Farmington. Interested veterans can register by calling 724-430-1241, ext. 1. Spaces are limited.

Touchstone will also host 15 veterans for an open house retreat this summer, which aims to provide participants supplementary therapy that differs from their routine programming provided by veterans' hospitals.

"For example, through the Touchstone program, a veteran may learn that he or she enjoys painting and will incorporate painting as a form of therapy, by this means making it a part of their rehabilitation," Bensen said. "The key is finding new outlets for PTSD-related issues. I feel this is important, because it gives our veterans a safe place to get their minds off things. It also provides an opportunity to meet other veterans that are battling the same issues."

The grant will also bolster promotional efforts for and transportation to the Lone Pine Acres Equestrian Center in Hopwood, which offers horseback riding as a form of therapy. Bensen's office partners with the equestrian center to offer alternative rehabilitation options, as it's a "safe place" for local veterans and their families.

“This grant funding will also allow us to try other events with the purpose of helping more veterans and branching out to other organizations,” Bensen said. “A major outcome of this funding is that every veteran will not only learn about county programs, but also use them. Reaching all veterans is our goal.”

Bensen’s office regularly coordinates with other Fayette County veteran organizations to host events and ensure all veterans’ burial places are recorded and receive markers and American flags every Memorial Day. The funding will allow those efforts to continue, as well as support the annual, county-sponsored veterans’ appreciation picnics.

“This is not just my job. This is my mission and calling. Not every veteran will seek help through the VA. We are prideful and put others before ourselves. Trying new ways to support our veterans is important to me, because one size does not fit all,” Bensen said. “We have lost too many of our brothers and sisters to suicide. It’s not just my duty and responsibility to help them. It’s all of ours.”

To learn more about the Touchstone Center for Crafts, visit www.touchstone.org. For more information about equestrian therapy options, visit the Lone Pine Acres Equestrian Center page on Facebook.

The Fayette County Veteran Affairs Office is located in the Gallatin Building at 2 West Main St. in Uniontown. Email bbensen@fayettepa.org for more information about upcoming programming and available services.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) and Hotel Tax Grants in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.

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