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VIEWPOINT

Support and contribute to the success of Miller's Vets

By JOAN EVANS

Have you ever wondered about the homeless veterans in our community? These are the men we see under the railroad trestle on Main Street near the bus depot. There is a local program at the Center for the Homeless which helps to make sure our honored veterans are not living on the streets or under bridges in South Bend. Miller's Vets-Company C was formed in January 2009 under the leadership of The Honorable Robert L. Miller Sr., a former St. Joseph County Superior Court judge and retired lieutenant commander in the U.S. Naval Reserves during World War II and the Korean War.

According to The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, nearly 50 percent of homeless veterans served in the Vietnam era, but some of the homeless you witness in our community may be veterans who served in World War II, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Miller's inspiration was driven by his granddaughter, Amanda Miller, who was the events coordinator

at the Center for the Homeless during the inception of the program. The goal was to get all of the homeless veterans in our community off the streets and to give them a purpose in a supportive environment. Miller's Vets builds spirit, defines self-respect and gives the veterans a new start in life.

I had the pleasure of watching the veterans practice their formations for an upcoming parade. The men were standing in the alley just north of the Center for the Homeless. The leader of the group spoke with a strong and authoritative voice of a commander. I thought he conducted himself as a drill sergeant as he may have many years ago. The silver-haired veterans followed the cadence of their leader as they had done so many times before in their careers. I watched with pride as I knew the history of the veterans was priceless. The common thread Miller recognized for the veterans was their military experience, mutual respect for one another and the camaraderie of the veterans.

As a community, our in-

spiration is to support and contribute to the success of Miller's Vets and keep the veterans in the public eye. We should be proud and appreciate the veterans for the service they have delivered to their country. The program has put uniforms on the veterans. They have practiced marching, perfecting parading and presentation of colors. The dedication of the veterans helps keep them focused. The valuable training and assistance of the Center for the Homeless supports the veterans' goals and creates a great partnership with the community.

The community involvement can be envisioned in the expansion of Miller's Vets. Miller has recently resigned this summer at the age of 90-plus but his vision carries on for all homeless veterans. The 747 Project was adopted to expand services to the homeless veterans which will further develop the opportunity for the veterans to be visible in the community. The building to the north of the Center for the Homeless will accommodate up to 25 veterans. The façade of the building is being repaired

and it will be a welcome feature for the homeless veterans of our community to regain their self-respect and pride. The addition of this stand-alone building will allow the veterans a safe and secure environment to afford better services and become productive citizens of our community. The opening for this building to house the honored veterans will be Nov. 11, which is Veterans Day. South Bend has a responsibility to support this program and more importantly our homeless veterans of our community. So, what can you do to make



Robert L. Miller Sr., who founded Miller's Vets, handed over leadership duties earlier this summer, but his vision lives on. Tribune File Photo BARBARA ALLISON

sure this program continues to grow and prosper? First, you can contact the Center for the Homeless and volunteer to assist with the remodeling of the building. If you have little talent with a hammer, then donate supplies or money. Second, as Miller's Vets grows, donations would help the veterans with health care items, socks, shirts, shoes and clothes. Third, do something to make a difference in the life of a homeless veteran and mentor. Take the time to listen to their experiences and take your children with you, too, so they

learn who served and protected our country. Miller's Vets now proudly serve our community and we need to show our appreciation for their dedication. I really don't want to see any more homeless veterans in our community living in squalor conditions. It does not take much for us to make a veteran feel valued by his or her community. Make the commitment and support Miller's Vets and call the Center for the Homeless today.

Joan Evans lives in South Bend.