

For Immediate Release

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Massachusetts Non-Profit Leads The Way Nationally On Women Veterans In Crisis

Soldier On offers housing, access to services in the nation's only program designed for and managed by women veterans

NORTHAMPTON, Mass. — At a time when Americans are just beginning to pay attention to the special challenges faced by women who have served in the military, the Northampton-based non-profit Soldier On has created a national model for helping women veterans in crisis. Soldier On, which was created in 1994 with the goal of ending veteran homelessness, has operated a unique program for women veterans since 2005. Following the model Soldier On has employed with male veterans, the women's program focuses on resident veterans managing their housing and providing mutual support.

Jackie K's House, which is located in a duplex leased from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Leeds, Mass., provides housing for 12 women veterans. Unlike the men housed at Soldier On's nearby shelter and in its transitional living facility in Pittsfield, most of the women who reside at Jackie K's House do not come from the street, shelters or jails. Most turn to Soldier On when their living situations become untenable, due in large part to substance abuse issues and other effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. Like Soldier On's program for men, Jackie K's house offers veterans in crisis access to treatment and counseling, job training and education while living in an atmosphere of integrity, dignity and hope.

Concerns about a growing level of homelessness among women veterans have recently come to the fore with the VA vowing to make strides in addressing the issue. The problem of homelessness among women veterans has been heightened by an unprecedented number of women returning home from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Studies indicate that PTSD, which can take as long as 15 years to surface in male veterans, manifests much more quickly in women. The effects of PTSD, which can include addiction, rage issues and an inability to reintegrate to civilian life and family situations, are driving more and more women out of their homes.

As the VA starts to explore the issues related to female veterans, Soldier On offers a successful four-year-old model. At the same time, Soldier On is taking the next step in its work with women veterans. The organization's forthcoming first-of-its-kind limited equity housing project for formerly homeless veterans will include units set aside for women veterans.

The limited equity housing project, scheduled to move into construction October 29 in Pittsfield, Mass., will offer formerly homeless veterans the opportunity to become

homeowners. Soldier On's goal is to "change the end of the story" for homeless veterans by providing them with the chance to own their homes surrounded by the services they need throughout their lives.

The groundbreaking for the 39-unit Pittsfield project will be attended by Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States Armed Services, as well as Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray, and Stephen Coyle, CEO of the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust, Gordon Mansfield, former Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and Bob Woodruff, war correspondent for ABC TV and founder of reMIND, a non profit created to assist veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Admiral Mullen also has been named the 2009 recipient of the Soldier On award in recognition of his commitment to the cause of ending veteran homelessness.

For more information on Jackie K's House, the limited equity housing project, and Soldier On, visit wesoldieron.org.

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