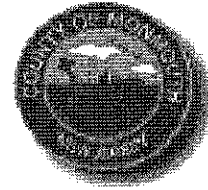


Monmouth County

The Place You Want to Be

Press Release



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AUG 30

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 27, 2010

Freeholder Mallet pushes plan to focus county resources on helping local veterans

Objective is to maximize benefit levels

FREEHOLD, NJ – Freeholder Amy A. Mallet has initiated a plan to bring services already being provided to Monmouth County veterans under one umbrella and train personnel in the Division of Aging, Disabilities and Veterans' Interment to assist veterans in obtaining their benefits.

As a result, the county has begun gathering details about what services are currently being provided to veterans, such as transportation to hospitals and clinics. Additionally, two people in the Division of Aging, Disabilities and Veterans' Interment will be trained as veterans' service officers.

"Monmouth County has the third-highest population of veterans in New Jersey, yet it is ranked fifth in the state of total Veterans' Administration expenditures," Mallet said. "This disproportionate allotment of funds is due primarily to the absence of a county veterans' service officer."

The employees who will be trained and become certified as county veteran service officers already counsel people suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). They would remain in the Division of Aging, Disabilities and Veterans Interment.

The idea stems from a recent seminar on PTSD and TBI held at Monmouth University, West Long Branch. Thomas Pivinski, director of the Division of Aging, Disabilities and Veterans' Interment, reported favorably on the event and highlighted the keynote address by John Dorrity, director of Ocean County's the Bureau of Veterans Services.

Mallet, Pivinski and staff then attended a forum sponsored by state representatives to address veterans' issues.

"The veterans and their families spoke out on a variety of matters, but the overarching message was their frustration in dealing with the bureaucracy," Mallet said. "There is a huge backlog of benefit claims and this, combined with their inability to get to the right person, was the message we heard."

"A Monmouth County veterans services officer would advocate for veterans and their families and aggressively pursue all federal and state benefits and entitlements on their behalf," Mallet said. "This would maximize state and federal VA program money coming into Monmouth County."

(more)

For example, Somerset County has 13,296 veterans and receives \$79.6 million in Veterans Administration benefits. By comparison, Monmouth County has 36,300 veterans and receives just \$90.3 million. This means Somerset County veterans are getting more than double the benefits as the average Monmouth County veteran. Veterans in Burlington County receive 50 percent more.

"This money represents additional income being brought into our local economy through the benefits that veterans and their widows receive from the Veterans Administration," Mallet said. "An increase in income for veterans would help they may their everyday expenses and lessen their reliance on our county Division of Social Services, which is already stretched."

Monmouth County veterans will be needing veterans' services for more extended periods in the coming years, Mallet said. Monmouth County has the third-highest veteran population under 65 and rank fourth-highest with veterans who are 65 or older.

On Aug. 10, Mallet, Pivinski and county staff visited the Ocean County Bureau of Veterans Services and met with Dorrity and Ocean County Freeholder Joseph H. Vicari and spoke with Ocean County Freeholder Gerry Little. The bureau assisted in bringing \$81.6 million in veterans' benefits last year.

"We were very impressed with their operation and would like to do something similar here," Mallet said.

"When you help an individual you are helping their family," Mallet added. "When you help a family you are helping their community, and when you help a community you are helping our entire county and beyond. A veterans services officer would benefit our veterans and our county overall."

Veterans' Interment places flags on graves and does research to correct veterans' graves that have been misidentified. Disabilities provide wheelchairs for veterans, while other divisions provide transportation to a number of veterans clinics and hospitals on a regular basis.

"I am confident that a trained staff will help give clear direction to our existing resources in a way that will greatly benefit the veterans and their families," Mallet said.

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