

in this issue >>>

Piquette support services help veterans rebuild their lives

Reflections on serving the veterans at Piquette

Helping homeless veterans get jobs

Coffee and Conversation group

Why I volunteer at Piquette: Carol Cleary

GM Affinity Group sponsors golf benefit

Concert features Piquette staff and veterans

West Point Cadets meet Piquette veterans

Thanks to Volunteers and Donors

Upcoming events



A Quarterly Newsletter from Piquette Square for Veterans, 6221 Brush St., Detroit, MI 48202

Volume 2 December 2011

Piquette Square

News
and
Views

Piquette support services help veterans rebuild their lives

Every weekday morning, Odester Lawrence gets up at 4:30 to catch the bus to the VA Hospital, where she works as a housekeeper. It is a short trip in distance, from her place at Piquette Square to work, but a large step in her life journey.

"It's all good since I came to Piquette," says Odester, 51. "I'm more self-sufficient than before, and I know my life will continue to get better, as long as I do what I am supposed to do."

Because of her good work ethic, she will soon be hired full-time at the VA Hospital. In her Piquette apartment, she proudly displays a certificate from the VA for going beyond her duties to help another in need. She received the honor for helping the daughter of a serviceman who was at the VA for treatment. While waiting for her father, the daughter experienced diabetic distress, and Odester was the first to notice.

"Because I am diabetic myself, I recognized the symptoms," Odester says. "I

alerted the doctors right away and then got her some orange juice to raise her blood sugar."

Odester says that her sense of duty and discipline has been rekindled by living at Piquette. She has taken advantage of many of the support services, including employment assistance, computer classes, counseling, and special activities sponsored by Piquette donors and volunteers.

Odester's experience exemplifies how Piquette has become a national model to help formerly homeless veterans rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society.

Half of the Piquette tenants have participated in a class or program to enhance their job readiness. One fifth are now working, and 12 are currently in school seeking a degree.

Without the comprehensive support services at Piquette, these successful



Odester Lawrence at Piquette Square

outcomes would not be possible. Unfortunately, the initial funding for these services will expire next May. Southwest Solutions is seeking donations to sustain these services long term and make sure that these veterans do not fall through the cracks of community responsibility again.

Please consider giving to this important cause. To contribute online, click the donate button on the top of our website (www.swsol.org). Or, please use the return envelope we have included. To learn more about the Piquette appeal, contact Mary Madigan at mmadigan@swsol.org or 313-297-1371. ♦

Reflections on serving the veterans at Piquette

by Lisa Todd, Coordinator of the Resident Support Services Team

I have been part of Piquette since it opened in June 2010. As I look back now, I am struck by the community we have all built here. It gathers together the 150 men and women who call Piquette home, the staff, and all the volunteers and donors.

Before moving in, most of the veterans did not know each other, and most had adopted street survival skills that often made them socially wary. Despite this beginning, the spirit of community is now palpable at Piquette.

You see it in the exchange of greetings, the easy smiles and laughter, the interaction at events, the pride in all that Piquette offers, and so many

other ways. Without this sense of community, the mission of rebuilding lives would be harder to accomplish.

I am mindful of the great challenges our tenants must overcome. Reinstating a drivers' license can be daunting for someone who has lived a transient lifestyle. Restoring good credit, good faith with relatives, and a sense of self-worth ... These are life goals that the veterans strive toward.

The Resident Support Services Team is devoted to helping veterans meet these goals. With help, each veteran develops a personalized plan and timeline, follows up on

referrals, and solves obstacles. As counselors, our satisfying moments occur when a veteran gets a job, visits with a once estranged family member, signs up for a class to learn new skills, or sees a doctor about a health issue long ignored.

For me personally, though, perhaps the most gratifying moments are when we develop eviction-prevention plans that prove successful. So far, our team has helped 15 tenants avoid eviction and remain at Piquette, which I truly believe is the place that provides them the best chance to be well and do well. ♦

Coffee and Conversation group

by Robin Kiss, Support Service Specialist

In the Piquette Library on Saturday mornings, tenants gather to talk. Joe Roth, who has taken the library under his wing, makes coffee for everyone. Anyone is free to join and share in the conversation and camaraderie.

I serve as facilitator. We discuss a wide variety of topics, from what is going on in the building to what is happening in the world. The tenants sometimes suggest things they would like to do together, like cleaning up around the building or going for a walk in the neighborhood.

Indeed, the walk has also become a Saturday morning ritual. The conversation continues along the way and the veterans encourage each other to be healthier and more fit. ♦

Helping homeless veterans get jobs

David Cohen's office at Piquette is always hectic. His appointment schedule is busy with anxious veterans wanting to find work and knowing that a job is essential to uplift a life fallen into homelessness.

David is our full-time coordinator and job developer for the HVRP (Homeless Veterans' Re-integration Program). In the past five months alone, David has helped arrange employment for 32 veterans with the Salvation Army, GMA, UPS, FedEx, and other companies. In addition, David has helped place 27 veterans in workforce training programs offered through the Department of Defense and others.

David's success stems from his ability to cultivate employers and his deep-seeded understanding of those he serves. He has connections with about 50 companies, many

of which are partial to hiring veterans.

As a formerly homeless veteran himself, David knows how to motivate and mentor the clients he sees. "I empathize with their struggles, but I also do not accept excuses," David says. "I have no problem telling them that it's time to be responsible and support themselves and their families."

On Veterans Day, David was interviewed by the Detroit Free Press for an article about proposed legislation that would offer tax credits to businesses that hire unemployed veterans. David strongly believes that more opportunities and resources must be provided to veterans, especially with tens of thousands returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and needing to reintegrate into civilian society. "The more doors you open, the better for all," David said in the article. ♦

Concert features Piquette staff and veterans

There are so many talented individuals at Piquette, and a special concert on November 12th at Bethel Baptist Church in Roseville not only displayed those talents, but also raised \$1700.

"An Evening of Music with Chery Allen and the Piquette Vets" featured Chery Allen, Veterans Resource Facilitator and accomplished pianist, along with veterans Ned Hughes (pianist), Aelen Williams (singer) and Janine Woodard (storyteller). There were over 100 in attendance and all the veterans present at the event were recognized, including Junior Thomison, age 92 and World War II Veteran. ♦



The Raymond Zussman Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary 333 organized a Halloween bingo party at Piquette and then posed with staff and residents.

GM Affinity Group sponsors golf benefit

On a perfect fall day, about 100 supporters took to the golf course “The Jewel of Grand Blanc” to benefit Piquette Square. Don Gore, president of General Motors’ Veterans Affinity Group (VAG) Customer Care and Aftersales Chapter, helped organize the outing.

Gene Lauer, plant manager at GM Willow Run and a former Marine helicopter pilot, spoke at the event. Gene stressed how important it is for every citizen, as well as companies large

or small, to remember our veterans and help them through their struggles.

On Wednesday, October 19, members of GM Affinity Group for Veterans came to Piquette Square and presented a check for \$7500 raised from the golf event.

“We are deeply appreciative of GM’s ongoing support,” said Paul McNeill, property manager at Piquette. ♦

Why I Volunteer at Piquette

by Carol Cleary

As a widow of a veteran, my heart has been touched by stories of veterans who proudly served our country. After sharing with a friend about my desire to work with veterans, he connected me with Chery Allen, Veterans Resource Facilitator at Piquette Square. Seven months later, I continue to volunteer at Piquette, assisting in the clothing closet, food pantry, and library – and even helping with outdoor activities like baseball.

The environment at Piquette is pleasant and inviting. As a volunteer, I’ve seen tenants progress and know that many of

them will do what it takes to change their lives, get back into society, and become productive citizens. I also know that this progress is the result of the efforts and support of the Piquette staff.

I want to learn as much as I can from Southwest Solutions and the Piquette program. It is my heart’s desire to help start a homeless shelter for veterans one day soon. ♦

We thank all our volunteers and donors at Piquette.

West Point Cadets meet Piquette Veterans

On October 28, West Point cadets came to Detroit for a Leadership and Ethics Conference. The conference emphasized serving the community and always making moral choices. The goal of the conference was to reinforce these lessons in the young cadets – who are also the future leaders.

Keeping with this goal, the cadets visited Piquette to learn about the facility and talk to the tenants.

The visit was arranged by Pat Walker Locke, a member of the first class of women that graduated from the United States Military Academy (USMA) in 1980. Pat grew up in Detroit, and she felt it was important that the cadets come to Piquette.

The veterans told the cadets about their military experiences, how they became homeless, and how Piquette saved their lives. The two groups had lunch together, prepared by the Michigan Military Moms.

“The veterans’ stories will always stay with me,” one cadet said, expressing the sentiments of all his colleagues. “Our visit to Piquette Square was priceless.”

In addition to their Piquette Square visit, the cadets went to the nearby Model T Automotive Heritage Complex, dedicated to the birthplace of the legendary vehicle. The stop was arranged by Colonel Glenn Waters, director of the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic, and Dick Ruben, president of the Ford Piquette Avenue Plant. The cadets painted and repaired parts of the museum. ♦

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Upcoming Activities

VFW Fraser Post 6691

Holiday Party for Piquette Vets

December 4th at 1 p.m.



Michigan Military Moms

Cookie Day for Piquette Vets

December 10th at Noon

American Legion – Garden City

Holiday Dinner

December 25th at 3 p.m.



How to contact us

If you are interested in hosting an event at Piquette Square or making a donation, please contact **Chery Allen, Veterans Resource Facilitator** at (313) 874-7014 ext. 350 or by cell (313) 515-8372. For more information about Piquette Square and Southwest Solutions, please visit our website: www.swsol.org



A new mural commemorating military service adorns the railway retaining wall near Piquette Square. It was painted by youth and artists at Vanguard Community Development Corporation, and was funded by JPMorgan Chase Foundation. Home Depot donated paint and supplies.



Polish League of American Veterans (PLAV) provided an authentic Polish lunch for Piquette veterans.