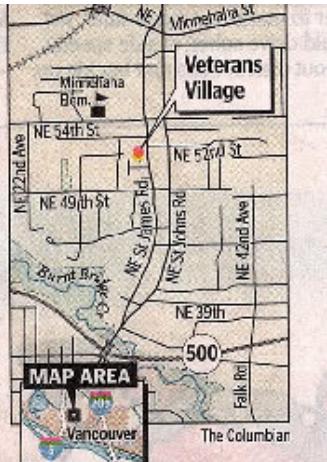


'We're building dignity for people':

Women vets focus of Veterans Village



Photos by TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

A crowd listens to America for Veterans Foundation board member Ingrid Friedberg speak Tuesday during a groundbreaking ceremony for America for Veterans Foundation's 32-unit residential community for women veterans.

Project will create 32 housing units for those exiting homelessness

By MIA RYDER-MARKS

The Columbian

As steel bit into the ground and dirt gave way, Rosemary Fryer took a moment to reflect on the symbolism of the moment.

After nearly 10 years of work, the America for Veterans Foundation broke ground on its first housing project, Veterans Village.

Located at 5118 N.E. St. James Road, Vancouver, the project will house women veterans exiting homelessness. The eight two-story modular houses will offer 32 individual units.

Those involved with the Amer-

ica for Veterans Foundation said they want the housing to be more than a place for the women to sleep, but also a place to heal and rebuild their lives after sacrificing so much to serve the nation.

"We're not just building some buildings," Fryer said as she dug deeper into the ground. "We're building dignity for people, and we're actually going to give them things that they need so that they can be back to being a part of society."

A long-awaited project

Fryer and her husband, Ron, a Vietnam veteran, have owned the property since 2015 with hopes of creating Veterans Village. But a lack of funding created significant barriers. The

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COMMUNITY FUNDED JOURNALISM



America for Veterans Foundation board member Rosemary Fryer speaks to a crowd during a groundbreaking ceremony Tuesday for Veterans Village. Women veterans are four times more likely to experience homelessness than male veterans.

Veterans

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COVID-19 pandemic also set back the project several years, Rosemary Fryer said.

A few years ago, real estate agent Ingrid Friedberg read about the nonprofit in The Columbian and wanted to get involved with its mission. She connected the Fryers to Battle Ground company Wolf Industries, which helped kick-start the project again.

Wolf Industries will build the housing units at its headquarters and use a crane to place them on the property.

Over the years, the America for Veterans Foundation has raised more than \$1 million for the project. But it still needs to raise more money before it can begin placing the homes on the property.

For now, the foundation is going to ready the property and in time begin setting up the housing, with the help of grants sought by the Fryers.

"My thing is, ordinary people do extraordinary things, and just because we're small doesn't mean we're not mighty," Rosemary Fryer said.

A meaningful mission

Sobering statistics drive the team's dedication.

Women veterans are four times more likely to experience homelessness than male veterans, according to a study in the National Library of Medicine.

While veterans homelessness has decreased, homelessness among women veterans has grown. In 2023, women veterans experiencing homelessness surged nearly 24 percent from the previous year, according to Veterans Affairs. Unsheltered homelessness — women living on the street and in cars — jumped nearly 48 percent.

"Women veterans are more invisible," Rosemary Fryer said. "They're marginalized because we have a male-centric military, and it's been that way for a long time."

Roughly 17 percent of today's military population are women. As the population of women veterans grows, so does the threat that they will end up home-



Photos by TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Dignitaries use gold shovels Tuesday during a groundbreaking ceremony for America for Veterans Foundation's 32-unit residential community for women veterans.



America for Veterans Foundation board member Ron Fryer and others in his organization have worked for nearly 10 years to open Veterans Village, a 32-unit residential community for women veterans.



Wolf Industries owner Derek Huegel speaks Tuesday during the groundbreaking ceremony. The company will build the housing units for Veterans Village.

tant to get this project developed so that we have a place to help them," Rosemary Fryer said.

Ron Fryer said the housing at Veterans Village will have no time limit for how long tenants stay.

"People can take as long as they need — even if it's years — to heal," Ron Fryer said.

The America for Veterans Foundation also plans to have security at the property. A small house and garage already sit on the property. Ron Fryer said the garage will be turned into a

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Rosemary Fryer
America for Veterans Foundation
board member

cey, who died in 2024. Ron Fryer said the property will feature a sign stating, "Michael's Dream."

The Fryers have the project set up so when they are no longer alive, it can exist for another few decades.

"This will still be a place for people, and we hope that it will go on for as long as it's necessary," Ron Fryer said. "But our real hope is that it will not be necessary."

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ABOUT THE PROJECT:

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Roughly 17 percent of today's military population are women. As the population of women veterans grows, so does the threat that they will end up homeless, speakers at Tuesday's groundbreaking said.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, many factors contribute to homelessness among women veterans: trauma, sexual assault, domestic violence, addiction, poverty and single parenthood.

"These women have served our country. They have deeply sacrificed, and when they came home, they didn't have a safe place to



Wolf Industries owner Derek Huegel speaks Tuesday during the groundbreaking ceremony. The company will build the housing units for Veterans Village.

land. That is an absolutely unacceptable situation," said Friedberg, a foundation board member.

A lack of gender-specific support and resources is also a catalyst for homelessness. Many existing services for veterans are not tailored for the needs of women veterans, including housing, mental health care and child care.

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tant to get this project developed so that we have a place to help them," Rosemary Fryer said.

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"People can take as long as they need — even if it's years — to heal," Ron Fryer said.

The America for Veterans Foundation also plans to have security at the property. A small house and garage already sit on the property. Ron Fryer said the garage will be turned into a woodshop for the residents to use, either for job training or as a hobby.

"Either way, it is designed to boost their self-esteem," Ron Fryer said. "If we can boost self-esteem, they will heal faster and better, and that's the whole goal of this project."

Ron Fryer started this project with the help of other veterans with the similar goal of helping veterans out of homelessness. One was veteran Michael Sta-

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