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Springfield law firm teams up with Northampton veterans' agency to help homeless vets

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SPRINGFIELD - Springfield law firm Robinson Donovan announced a partnership this morning with Soldier On, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping homeless veterans regain a place in their communities.

Soldier On, a private, nonprofit organization based at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center campus in Northampton, provides programs that help veterans from as far away as New Haven, Conn., with education and job training and overcome substance abuse.

Homeless veterans are not served by Veterans Affairs and the federal government and it's up to the private sector to provide a helping hand, Jeffrey L. McCormick, managing partner at Robinson Donovan said. "Robinson Donovan wanted to go beyond the more typical sponsorship to hands-on involvement with an organization making a difference in the community," McCormick said.

To that end, Robinson Donovan will provide Soldier On with legal support and marketing resources, McCormick said. Timing is especially important because some 20 percent of the nation's homeless people are veterans, McCormick said. That percentage is climbing as veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan, "some with severe post-traumatic stress disorder," McCormick said.

"What we stand for and what we all stand for in our community is as important as what we sell," McCormick said.

Philip F. Mangano, the executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, met with Soldier On president and chief executive officer John F. Downing. Downing and McCormick to announce the partnership.

The partnership is part of a national trend in which private entities target their specific resources and talents towards ending homelessness, Mangano said.

"Jeff and his team are volunteering to reinforce on the front lines all that Soldier On has established," Mangano said.

Such team efforts are making a difference. Ten years ago there were some 250,000 homeless veterans on the nation's streets on any given night, Mangano said. Today that number is about 143,000, Mangano said.

"Why? Because organizations like Soldier On have rolled up their sleeves," he said.

Soldier On operates transitional living facilities for homeless veterans in Northampton and Pittsfield.

The organization is currently moving towards the creation of limited equity housing for homeless veterans in Pittsfield and eventually Leeds. Such programs, Downing said, are the first of their kind and will serve as a national model. Legal support and strategy provided by Robinson Donovan will include the limited equity housing projects as well as veteran-owned businesses. Soldier On, meanwhile, is slated to get upwards of \$500,000 on federal funds to give beds to an additional 45 homeless veterans. Downing said his organization already has 120 beds for homeless veterans at its shelter, which it leases from Veterans Affairs.



Photo by Mark M. Murray / The Republican Philip F. Mangano, executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, speaks during a press conference at the Marriott Hotel in Springfield this morning as he announces the formation of a pioneering partnership between Springfield law firm Robinson, Donovan and the Northampton based agency Soldier On.