

DETROIT

## A home for homeless vets

### Groundbreaking set for \$20-million project

BY ZLATI MEYER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • June 1, 2008

When Army Spc. Robert Frazier returned to metro Detroit after the Persian Gulf War in 1992, he was physically and emotionally injured.

A helicopter crash crushed two discs in the gunner's back and ruined one of his knees. Combat shattered his spirit. In the 19 years since Frazier enlisted, the former Sterling Heights resident has lost his marriage, his ability to hold down a job and his home.

But this time next year, Frazier, who currently lives in a shelter, could be living in a Detroit apartment designed specifically for homeless veterans.

Southwest Solutions is to break ground at 10 a.m. Monday on a 150-unit apartment complex and commercial building called Piquette Square.

Veterans who will live in the one-bedroom apartments just north of I-94 and east of Woodward will have access to counseling and job-skills training when the complex opens in spring 2009. It will be the second permanent veterans housing complex in the United States and the largest of its kind, said Bob O'Brien, spokesman for the nonprofit.

"You'd be able to get most of the things you'd need, and you would have buses going to the hospitals on a regular basis, so totally beneficial for someone like me," Frazier said Thursday.

More than 4,000 homeless veterans are in the Detroit area, and one out of three homeless men in Detroit and across the country is a veteran, according to Southwest Solutions.

The \$20-million project is to be financed by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, grants, bonds and tax credits, O'Brien said. The apartments will be available on a first-come, first-served basis to veterans of all conflicts. Rent will be on a sliding scale.

Other office tenants could include medical staff with Veteran Affairs, state veteran and

labor departments and local businesses.

"Our hope is vets would be able to find employment in the area," O'Brien said.

But with the thousands currently deployed in Iraq, Frazier questioned why the government isn't developing more projects like Piquette Square.

"They're going to be coming back and needing help," said Frazier, a college dropout who two weeks ago moved to the Detroit Veterans Center, which offers temporary housing. "There's only so much help you can get from the government, and the rest you need to find on your own."

The Piquette Square idea originated 2 1/2 years ago in a series of meetings with Veteran Affairs, the MSHDA and Southwest Housing Solutions, O'Brien said.

"Our hope from this project is that it calls attention to what's possible for our vets when various government and private and not-for-profit entities work together," he said.

"The veterans administration can't do it all themselves. They needed partnerships with city and county and Southwest Solutions. I don't know why it's not something they've done before."

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