

Grant will help VFW post make building accessible

Brian McCreedy, Milford Bureau Chief

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MILFORD — Weeks before his death, longtime Alderman Walter Farley Jr. was too weak to navigate the steps into VFW Post 7788.

"There were times when we had to carry him in," said post 7788 Cmdr. Gregory Smith. "He wished he was able to spend more time with his friends here before he died."

Then there is Bob Fowler, who lives across the street from the 422 Naugatuck Ave. building. Fowler was the state's first Vietnam vet to be injured in combat as he took several rounds to his leg.

"It was too much for him," Smith said of Fowler, who was physically unable to attend Wednesday's press conference announcing that Post 7788 received \$30,000 in state grants to fund accessibility projects.

"This post is Bob's family," Smith said. "The sooner we can get him in here the better."

Farley and Fowler are just two examples of countless veterans who have or had difficulty entering and exiting the VFW building.

The post has 600 members. About 200 are either disabled or could benefit from improved accessibility to the building, Smith said.

State House Speaker James A. Amann, D-Milford, said that he received a call in December from Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities Chairman Tony Candido seeking assistance for the veterans.

"When Tony calls, you certainly listen," Amann said. "This was a no-brainer. Today, I was able to make good on a promise. Connecticut is trying to do its best for its veterans. I hope this gesture shows we care about you."

The funds will help with the installation of two ramps leading into the building, retrofitting four bathrooms to ensure the facilities are accessible, and the installation of an elevator lift.

Smith said the entire project will cost \$75,000 to \$100,000, but without the state funds it would have taken forever to get off the ground. He said members of the post have created a building fund to help secure additional dollars.

Smith said the post also benefits the community as it has played the occasional host for the Milford Chapter of the American Red Cross. Also, the members have sent more than 100 boxes to residents who are deployed in the armed services.

Mayor James L. Richetelli Jr. thanked Amann, Candido, Smith and the veterans for their roles in securing the funds.

"You all recognized a need and stepped up and did something about it," Richetelli said. "We need better accessibility for our veterans."

To donate to the VFW Post 7788 building fund, send a check to "Quartermaster VFW Post 7788," 422 Naugatuck Ave., Milford 06460.

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State grant to help veterans' project

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MILFORD — A local veterans group trying to raise \$100,000 to equip its headquarters with handicapped facilities has been awarded a \$30,000 state grant with the help of House Speaker James A. Amann.

"We hope this little gesture shows how we appreciate our veterans," Amann said at a press conference at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7788 on Naugatuck Avenue. "We hope this infusion of state funding helps their fundraising efforts.

"The timing here is incredibly good," Amann added. "We are trying to do more for our veterans."

Post Commander Greg Smith said the fundraising project has been going slowly. He told Anthony Candido, chairman of the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities, about the post's fundraiser, and Candido passed the word to Amann.

"We were glad to help," said Candido, who is also chairman of Connecticut Easter Seals and founder of Connecticut Concerned Citizens for People With Disabilities.

Smith said the overall project for the 61-year-old building would cost \$75,000 to \$100,000.

It would include two handicapped-accessible ramps on either side of the building, an inside elevator from the basement lounge to the first floor meeting room, and four handicapped-accessible bathrooms.

"We have 600 members, and this would serve about 200 of our members who are handicapped," Smith said.

Mayor James L. Richetelli Jr. noted the VFW hall also served the surrounding community.

"We know the post here served as an election polling place when the Margaret Egan Center had a fire several years ago," Richetelli said. "This building is used by many different community organizations for many different functions."

Donations may be sent to: Quartermaster, Building Fund, VFW Post 7788, 422 Naugatuck Ave., Milford, CT 06460.

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