

By Sheila Corson
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Generous donations and volunteers mean construction on the U.S. Armed Forces Legacy Project in Tonasket is progressing quickly, said project volunteer Dale White.

Already the group has erected basalt pillars - five toward the center of the project site representing the five branches of the military. Four of the eight concrete walls on which plaques will be hung are up, said White, who also chairs the Okanogan County Veterans Board.

The 162 plaques purchased so far soon will be installed, White said. On the back, high school students will paint a time line of U.S. wars.

The team is working on designs for the service office building, which will house a research library and a qualified service officer to help veterans, White added. Many veterans don't try to get benefits, such as medical coverage, because of the headache of paperwork, White said, but the service officer will help with that.

Many military personnel going back and forth to Iraq and Afghanistan need help reintegrating into communities, White said.

And with resources to help them with jobs, housing and more, Legacy Project volunteers hope to help them in the future just as much as remembering those in the past, he said.

For those veterans in the area who are homeless, poor or having other financial problems, the project can help them, too, he said. That would mean more resources for non-veterans if veterans are able to tap into their own benefits and resources, White added.

The service office also will have restrooms and showers, especially for the homeless veterans, he said.

About \$70,000 in grants and labor have been given so far, White said. The money has been raised and continues to be raised through several means, including \$20 annual memberships, \$100 plaques and purchase of the basalt pillars.

Many donations came through reduced costs or free services from the community. White said the City of Tonasket really "stepped up to the plate" when it gave the project a 99-year lease on city land and hooked the property up to the city water/sewer system for no charge.

Construction foreman Bob Thompson has donated time, and Web site designer Chuck Gallup donated his work, too, White said.

Project costs have increased like everything else, said Michael Stewart, project volunteer and vice chair of the county veterans board. Newly estimated costs for completion will fall at more than \$300,000.

Another donation being sought is for people who can help with finding and applying for grants, Stewart said.

When the project is complete, the service office will have either White or Stewart there to help veterans get the help they need, White said. That includes all veterans, whether they are active or retired.

And that's one big difference in the Legacy Project, said Stewart: "The legacy has morphed from a memorial of past conflicts to the help for our future veterans."

Goal is to dedicate it on Veterans Day 2010 or 2011, depending on whether funds come in soon enough, they said.

Stewart said all the long-range goals of the project make it not just a memorial, but also a legacy to leave to future veterans in the county.

More information is at www.usaflegacytonasket.org.