



## Coming home - Civil War veterans returned from battle to face many problems

By Jim Barnard



*Provided photo/Lake Erie Shores & Islands*

*A statue called "Coming Home" at the Ohio Veterans Home in Perkins Township.*

### SANDUSKY

During the latter years of the Civil War, veterans returned to their homes with injuries, amputations, diseases, mental problems and addictions. A

large number were forced to reside in county homes at a great cost to the counties.

In Ohio, members of the Grand Army of the Republic and others felt it would be better for these veterans to live in a single home where they could share their experiences and receive the medical care they required. In 1889, the Ohio Soldiers and Sailors Home opened in Sandusky with 17 residents. The property consisted of a hospital, living quarters and ancillary buildings.

Resident veterans lived in cottages, not barracks. When full, the residents lived 50 men to a cottage. Cottages were two story buildings with front porches and other amenities for providing a home-like atmosphere.

Upon arrival the veterans were bathed, shaved and given a haircut. They were issued a full set of clothing including a suit, white shirts, underwear, shoes, overcoat and hat. They ate together in a large dining building. They all worked on the property for which they received a small pay. There was no cost to these veterans.

Is it possible that the success story that is the Ohio Veterans Home could be used as a model for the care of today's returning veterans?

Today, veterans of the Middle East wars are returning home with similar, but different, problems. Injuries and wounds which might have been fatal in the past are now receiving quick and expert treatment. Many of these injuries, however, have left the returning veterans with needed long-term care for their physical and mental problems.

More than 75,000 homeless veterans sleep on the streets because they have no place to call home. Today's veterans need more psychological and psychiatric care than did previous veterans.

The veterans returning from the Middle East are facing a major difference from what previous veterans encountered — homelessness. The economic problems facing the country are extremely hard on today's veterans. They require affordable housing, employment training, placement assistance, physical and mental health care and other supportive services.

The problem has been getting the services to the homeless veterans and getting the homeless veterans to the services. The government, through the Veterans Administration and other public and private agencies, has been working on this problem.

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans was formed in 1990 from a group of community-based homeless veteran service providers. The coalition acts as a liaison between government agencies and community based providers.

In addition to the Veterans Administration, the Departments of Labor and Housing and Urban Development have initiated programs specifically aimed at homeless veterans.

For the first time in U.S. history the U. S. has a comprehensive multi-agency strategy to end and prevent homelessness. Veterans Administration secretary Eric K. Shinseki estimated the 75,000 homeless veterans will be reduced to 60,000 by June 2012.

One attempt to reduce those figures has been initiated by an organization named Valor Home. Valor Home provides residential living for more than 14,000 men nationwide and 300 in Ohio. These are located in Summit, Portage and Lorain counties. Valor Home is funded primarily through grants from the Veterans Administration.

The Lorain County Valor Home is providing 30 single occupancy rooms for male veterans. They are located on the fifth floor of the St. Joseph Community Center in the city of Lorain. Valor Home provides support services, both on-site and community based for their residents.

So, the answer seems to be not a large facility, with hundreds of residents, but smaller community-based facilities located throughout the state.