

FOOD from page 1A

This option was severely limited last year as there were restrictions on volunteer activities and a reluctance in volunteers to assist when the danger of infection was high. That is no longer the case, and there is an explosion of onions, peas, lettuce and other vegetables on the near horizon which soon will be added to the possible food options for clients.

The Food Share Garden, coordinated by Board Vice President Bart Mealer, has stepped up food production during the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing the amount of produce grown and distributed by 2,000 pounds, producing more than 12,000 pounds



Florence Food Share is now open for people to come "shop" in-person at the food pantry.

MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

during 2020.

"The past year was incredibly difficult for so many people in many ways," Morgan said. "If you or anyone you know is experiencing food insecurity, please come and use our services. I also want to thank our clients for being so patient and understanding for the changes we had to make during this time,

and we look forward to seeing you in our pantry!"

Florence Food Share is located behind Grocery Outlet, at the north side of the Lutheran church parking lot. The nonprofit is open Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.; on Monday and Wednesday from 4 to 6 p.m.; and every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

VETS from page 1A

Vet Centers were initially formed to assist Vietnam-era vets with readjustment after serving in that controversial conflict.

They provide support to veterans readjusting to civilian life, regardless of time of service, and to victims of sexual assault and violent trauma. The mission of Vet Centers has been expanded since its establishment in 1979 to include veterans who served in all American military conflicts since WWII.

Locally, Will Wagner is a readjustment counselor through the Eugene Vet Center. He will be leading the new effort in Florence, as he specializes in providing counseling services to combat veterans and individuals dealing with substance abuse and other traumatic circumstances.

Wagner himself is a veteran and has additional training in suicide and crisis intervention.

"I travel to Florence from the Eugene Vet Center every other Wednesday to meet with clients at the DAV office," he said. "I am really excited about the chance to work with veterans in Florence."

He clarified that the Vet Center is part of the Veterans Healthcare Administration, but does not release confidential information unless releases are signed.

"We are specialists in military service related-PTSD, military sexual trauma, bereavement and grief

counseling, and also employ marriage and family therapists to help with the veteran's transition to civilian life," Wagner said. "We are licensed therapists that work directly with a clinical team to ensure veterans receive whole healthcare."

Steve Baggin is Adjutant of the Florence DAV and one of the chapter leaders. He has been working to find a way to return some level of services to Florence-area vets.

"Since the closed the VSO office over by Highway 101, we have to go to Coos Bay or to Eugene to see someone. The office here closed and there is no longer a VSO coming here, which makes it hard on a lot of our vets who have health and mobility issues," Baggin said.

He also pointed out the increasing need for acknowledgement of the problem of veteran suicide, including locally, and mentioned it as one of the goals in having Wagner make the trip from Eugene to speak with vets in this area.

Wagner is aware of the unsettling nationwide trend. "Suicide Prevention is a major part of all VA-Care Modalities. The Vet Center is unique in that we're a walk-in outpatient format and utilize a more community-based access model rather than the typical hospital structure," he said.

Wagner also sees part of his job as sharing information with veterans who may live in more rural areas or who have chosen a more isolated lifestyle.

His major concern is that many veterans are not aware of what they are eligible for or how to access those benefits.

"Thanks to the Mission Act, which was passed in the 2020 omnibus CARE bill, vets that live more than 40 miles from a veterans medical facility, or have to wait more than a month to be seen, can go to NOVA Urgent Care and be seen by a physician, and they can even get set up with a primary care doctor if they don't already have one," he said.

Veterans who wish to speak with Wagner regarding any of the different areas of physical and mental health with which he is conversant can drop in on alternate Wednesdays at the Florence DAV office and sign up.

Wagner especially encourages any veterans to stop in and speak with him, even if it is in a more informal session or even at a time when he is not normally scheduled.

"I always enjoy coming to the coast," he said. "We have about 6,000 vets between Coos Bay and Newport, and I know some of them extremely well. I really like working with the vets out there. Being a vet myself, I want to do whatever I can to help my fellow vets, even if that means setting up a special time or place to meet."

The Florence DAV can be reached at 541-991-8014.

For more information about veteran services, visit www.va.gov.

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BOTH MEETINGS ARE CURRENTLY ON HOLD.
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- Urologist Dr. Bryan Mehiloff attends.
- Tuesday Lunch Group (3rd Tuesday) 12 noon - 1:00 p.m. - Ichiban Chinese/Japanese Restaurant
- Urologist Dr. Roger McKimmy attends.

Contact Bob for more information:
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