

News and stories

Foundation works to open veterans activity center in Bay City

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Andrew Dodson | [MLIVE](#)

BAY CITY, MI -- When Keith Markstrom formed the Bay Veterans Foundation in 2015, he had big dreams of opening a building where veterans could meet for camaraderie, obtain counseling and support, and receive some basic training in wood working and construction techniques.

The goal would be to get enough vets trained and put them to work in the community.

Before that project could become a reality, though, Markstrom needed to prove his group was serious. So, in a little over two years, they raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to [bring Battery Park back to life](#) and installed a [monument there honoring Gold Star Families](#), the first of its kind in Michigan. They also launched a Veterans Support Group held monthly at the Dow Bay Area Family Y.

"We needed to establish a track record and I think we did that in a short period of time," Markstrom said. "I think people now see us as a credible organization."

Now, it's time to get to work. Again.

Markstrom and the **Bay Veterans Foundation** officially kicks off its capital campaign for the activity center on Saturday, Feb. 10, at the State Theatre with its Red White and Brew Revue, a night of music by singer-songwriters Jennifer Naegele, Laurie Spear, Sarah Schingeck and Amanda Jane Beson. The event, which kicks off at 7 p.m., is focused on recognizing women veterans.

Tickets for the general public are \$15. Male veterans pay \$5; women veterans get in for free. After the concert, a social gathering is being held at Tri-City Brewing Co., 4170 Shrestha Drive. A \$1 from every pint sold is being donated toward the veterans center.

Bay County is home to about 8,400 veterans, according to the U.S. Census' five-year rolling average from 2011 to 2015, which makes up about 10 percent of the adult population. Of those veterans, 52 percent are 65 or older; 6 percent are 18 to 34. Bay County has one of the highest amount of veterans per capita in the entire state.

The activity center won't feature a bar, like the various service organizations across Bay City. And it won't just be a place where veterans come for a cup of coffee and tell old war stories.

Markstrom describes it as a "makers space," where there will be shop equipment, hand tools and table-top CNC machines.

"They're going to learn not just how to use a handsaw or a hammer," he said. "We want to introduce them to something they would never take on themselves."

Markstrom's vision for the center snowballs as he continues to describe it.

Once a handful of veterans are trained, he said, he wants to see them fix up homes that are owned by the Bay County Land Bank and ready them for sale.