

Helping our heroes

Group works to aid members of armed forces just back from Iraq, Afghanistan

By Wendy Foster
FOR THE SUN

Despite the fact that they're leaving the physical dangers behind, the homes that they're returning to don't necessarily feel safe.

As men and women who have served in the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan return home, many are unable to move beyond the ordeal that they've experienced. An alarming increase in the incidence of suicide among returning service personnel trying to deal with the complexities of re-entering their former lives prompted the formation of a group called Chaplains' Organized Response to PTSD's affecting Service-Personnel (CORPS).

The interfaith organization founded by Bishop Robert Cokinis provides resource help and mentoring to service personnel returning from the wars.

"CORPS believes that those who have given service to the country have paid irrevocably by their service, and should have as many means as possible helping to reintegrate into their communities and be successful," Cokinis said.

CORPS, which was founded in 2007, operates in a variety of ways with a focus on advocating for service personnel and their families, and promoting awareness about some of their challenges. Post-traumatic stress in particular is being experienced by an enormous number of returning service personnel.



Ken Brown, 21, of Lisle checks out the new computers with Ross Bishop and Post Cmdr. Michael G. Bogmenko at the Lisle Veterans of Foreign Wars post. TERENCE GUIDER-SHAW / FOR THE SUN

Its effects can be debilitating and destructive, but it is often ignored, according to health officials.

Although Cokinis and his fellow clergy in CORPS have backgrounds in counseling, they do not provide direct therapy to individuals with post-traumatic stress. Instead they connect service people with appropriate resources.

"Because of the nature of (it) there is silence surrounding it and barriers to getting treatment," Cokinis said. "We decided to help soldiers find clinical resources that they can feel comfortable with, that they can feel protected with. We help to make that linkage."

An important service provided directly by CORPS to returning service person-

nel is spiritual mentoring.

"We talk to them about whatever issues they may have with their spirituality

as the result of things they may have done or things

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