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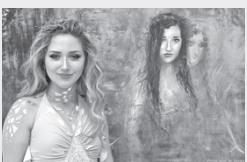
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Homeless veterans can find shelter & stability at Niagara Gospel Mission on Veterans Day

Guest Editorial by Niagara Gospel Mission

Whether you observe Veterans Day on Friday, Nov. 10, or on the official date, Nov. 11, the holiday is "a celebration to honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good," according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

But a 2022 Point in Time survey, completed by HUD in January 2022 is a reminder that more than 33,000 veterans in the United States continue to live in dire straits, "on the streets or in another place not meant for human habitation."

"We've seen a decline in homelessness among veterans here in Niagara Falls," said John Cooper, assistant director at Niagara Gospel Mission. "But statistics show that thousands of veterans across America continue to survive on

the streets or in shelters like ours, where we provide beds for up to 12 veterans each night. Many have lost touch with family members, which makes their situation even more painful."

Cooper said 15% of the homeless in Niagara County are veterans.

"In response, we instituted a veterans program with its own dorm to allow these men more privacy as they collaborate and deal with issues only they can understand," he said. "We work directly with veterans organizations in the area to connect each vet with the services he needs. And we educate our community about the needs of vets who are struggling with addiction, mental health issues and other related challenges."

Veterans who suffered traumatic experiences with resulting mental health or substance abuse disor-

ders may receive disability benefits, but have difficulty using those benefits appropriately.

"That's why programs like ours can be helpful," Cooper said. "We can provide a safe space with essential services like food and shelter, along with case management, and other support in a structured environment to provide a path toward stability."

Cooper said Niagara Gospel Mission's Christian discipleship program offers an opportunity for long-term transformation in a setting where everyone is working toward the same goals.

"We help clients reconnect with God, find a network of support in a local church, and reconcile with family members," he said.

Cooper said the community can honor its local veterans by donating money to support the Niagara

Gospel Mission's services for veterans.

"Donating toward the cost of meals and shelter is a very practical way of ensuring the veterans in our area receive the care they need," he said. "Or donating items such as new packaged underwear, new Bibles, good books for our library, or study supplies, would be very helpful."

Niagara Gospel Mission is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit offering essential services and transformational resident programs for men experiencing homelessness, and at-risk families in the community. The agency receives no government funding, choosing instead to rely on the gifts of individuals, businesses, churches, civic groups and private foundation. For an overview of all our services, visit niagargospelmission.org.

FAQ about Veterans Day

Metro Creative Graphics

Each November, millions of people recognize the service and sacrifice of military veterans on Veterans Day. Initially commemorated as Armistice Day but renamed Veterans Day in the United States in 1954, the holiday is a federal holiday throughout the country.

The first Armistice Day was observed in 1919. Despite that lengthy history, the general public may still have questions about Veterans Day.

•**When is Veterans Day observed?** The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs notes that Veterans Day is always observed officially on Nov. 11, regardless of which day of the week that happens to be. In 2023, Veterans Day is Saturday, Nov. 11. Because Veterans Day falls on a Saturday in 2023, the federal observation date is Friday, Nov. 10.

•**Why is Nov. 11 so significant?** Nov. 11 is a significant day in world history because it marks the signing of the armistice between the Allies of World War I and Germany at 5:45 a.m. on Nov. 11, 1918. Though the formal peace treaty, the Treaty of Versailles, was not signed until 1919 – and hostilities between the sides continued



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for hours after the armistice was signed – the day is still viewed as the end of World War I.

•**What distinguishes Veterans Day from Memorial Day?** The

VA notes that Veterans Day honors all those individuals who served honorably in the military during both wartime and peacetime. Memorial Day is a day to honor and

remember military personnel who died in the service of their country, particularly those who lost their lives in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle.

•**What is the significance of red poppies?** Red poppies are ubiquitous on Memorial Day, but they're also visible on Veterans Day. Though it's not taboo to wear red poppies on Veterans Day, it's a tradition that aligns more with Memorial Day. That's because the poppies are typically worn to honor fallen military personnel. A 1915 poem written by a Canadian lieutenant colonel named John McCrae referred to the fields of poppies growing around the graves of World War I soldiers in Flanders.

•**Do other countries honor their military veterans?** Many countries across the globe honor their military veterans, and many do so on Nov. 11, as well. For example, Canadians and Australians observe Remembrance Day in honor of their nation's respective veterans on Nov. 11. Great Britain observes Remembrance Day on the Sunday nearest to Nov. 11.

Veterans Day is a day to honor and commemorate the brave men and women who have honorably served in the U.S. military during wartime and peacetime.

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