

Returning veterans helped by golf fundraiser

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Published: 8/12/2009 12:04 AM

The scenic course at Chalet Hills Golf Club in Cary provided a retreat last week for the 125 players, who turned out to support The Heart of a Marine Foundation, based in Elk Grove Village.

The mature oak trees framing the course, and lakes and ponds that dotted its fairways, offered a respite from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Ironically, the same sort of peaceful sanctuary is taking shape in Elk Grove at Alexian Brothers Medical Center, where officials are finishing up the new Vet Center, driven in part by a donation from The Heart of a Marine Foundation.

"It's amazing what the ripple effect of love and generosity can do," says Kathleen Prunty, chief development officer for the hospital's Workforce Development Learning Institute.

She points to the six laptop computers and accompanying Aphasia software, designed to promote speech, language and cognitive development to victims of stroke and head injury, that were donated in July by Heart Of A Marine Foundation members.

"I'm really excited," Prunty says. "This is state-of-the-art stuff."

Prunty says the laptops pushed hospital officials to build out the new Vet Center, located in its Roncoli Center, to accommodate the military personnel coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan with traumatic brain injury.

Up until now, the only Vet Centers available to them were located in Rockford and Evanston.

It was two years ago when Prunty and Alexian Brothers officials began offering a series of symposiums for Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans and their families that they learned of the complex emotional and practical issues they face that were not being met.

"We have a very big population of service personnel in this area, and we want to be able to meet their needs, and the needs of their families," Prunty says.

The hospital is partnering with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs to develop the new center. It will be staffed by licensed clinical social workers, as well as a service officer from the VA, to help vets access their benefits.

Tucked away inside the center will be the computer bays, where veterans can work to regain their speech and sharpen their cognitive responses.

The need to provide for their recovery continues to drive supporters of The Heart Of A Marine Foundation. On Thursday at the golf outing in Cary, the foundation raised approximately \$20,000 to purchase more computers and Aphasia software.

Ultimately, say founders Roy and Georgette Frank of Elk Grove Village, they hope to supply them to every Vet Center in the country. However, they were thrilled with their most recent donation to Alexian Brothers, since it was their first one made locally.

"Now, we're able to treat veterans right here in our own hometown," says Barbara Matsukes, foundation spokeswoman.

Look for the Vet Center and its new bank of computers to be unveiled in September during a grand opening reception. Officials from both The Heart of a Marine Foundation and the VA hope the opening draws one of their biggest supporters: Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn.