

County Approves Funding For Veteran Services

By Kathleen Gasperini Staff Writer

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The Otsego County Board of Representatives allocated funding for support services to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder Wednesday, Oct. 2.

The state Office of Mental Health provided the county with \$108,000 in state aid for the Utica Center for Development peer-to-peer services for Otsego County veterans suffering from PTSD and other related combat stress disorders, according to the resolution.

“We understand that the peer-to-peer program is to help veterans and their families to feel a sense of camaraderie and to come together and offer understanding,” Jeff Osterander, outreach peer worker at the Utica Center for Development, said Wednesday, Oct. 16. “Some of the men and women only know the military, and they may come back from combat and need a sense of purpose and belonging.”

The peer-to-peer program from Utica Center for Development will be hosting an event for veterans and their families at the pedal-powered Rail Explorers railbikes starting at 9 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 20 at 136 East Main St. in Milford.

The Rail Explorers are custom bikes that ride the old railroad tracks and are equipped with electric pedal assist motors that follow the tracks through forests and farms along the Susquehanna River for a roundtrip of 12 miles, according to its website.

“We are going to have veterans and their families ride the Rail Explorers and pedal to the halfway point where we’ll have a lunch with sub sandwiches and drinks before they turn around and head back to Milford,” Osterander said. “It should be a good day.”

More than 20 veterans and their families have signed-up so far, but people can just show up at the tracks in Milford on Sunday to participate, Osterander said.

The Utica Center for Development peer-to-peer program works with the Oneonta Veterans Club and the Elks Lodge, mostly with veterans that were impacted by 9/11 and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, Osterander said.

“We are working hard on trying to get younger veterans to participate in our events or reach out if they want to talk or need something,” Osterlander said. “We want younger vets, women and men, to know that it’s not just about listening to war stories, but also to provide an opportunity to sit down and talk so that we can see what we can do.”

The peer-to-peer program offers a variety of activities throughout the year, including golfing, fishing in the summer and ice fishing trips in the winter, plus family get-togethers, according to the website.

For more information on the peer-to-peer program, call 607-376-2463.

The board recommended using Utica Center for Development for the veteran’s services for a one-year contract. The resolution stated that the PTSD programs will run Feb. 1, 2025, to Jan. 31, 2026.