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Martinsburg VFW reaches out to 'brothers in arms' at American Legion

Matthew Umstead May 29, 2017

MARTINSBURG, W.Va. — Members of American Legion Post 14 in Martinsburg have raised money for a new headquarters, one breakfast at a time, thanks to the support of their "brothers in arms" at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 896.

Since January, Post 14 has held "all-you-can-eat" fundraisers on the second and fourth Saturday of each month at VFW Post 896 headquarters at 241 N. Queen St.

Held from 8 to 11 a.m., the breakfast costs \$6 for adults, and \$4 for active-duty servicemen and women, and children ages 10 and younger.

"I offered an olive tree, not an olive branch," VFW Post 896 Commander Michael Keller II said Monday of his organization's willingness to accommodate Post 14 activities at the VFW club.

"I don't charge them anything for meeting in my place," he said. "They're a veteran's organization."

Post 14 was displaced from its former headquarters at 125 W. Race St. at the end of 2016 when their lease with the Martinsburg City Council was terminated.

The Legion began leasing the West Race Street building in 2008 after the organization sold it to the city for \$550,000.

The American Legion building, which is behind City Hall, is to be razed for construction of a new police department and municipal court building.

American Legion Post 14 Commander Ken Moneagle said Friday that the veterans service organization has suffered financially since it sold the building to the city, and he noted he has requested an audit be done.

Moneagle said financial losses by the club's bar at the West Race Street building last year were particularly substantial.

Because of Post 14's financial troubles, Moneagle said the organization only has about \$20,000 in the building fund, and he estimated that it still needs to raise at least \$480,000 for a new clubhouse.

Plans by Post 14 to construct a new building on an undeveloped 4.1-acre parcel in the 500 block of South Spring Street have been abandoned due to costly storm water-management upgrades that would have been required to build it there, he said.

Post 14 bought the parcel at auction for \$125,000 in October 2008 after the Berkeley County (W.Va.) Council declared it surplus property.

The South Spring Street acreage has been for sale since September, and Moneagle said the Legion still is attempting to sell it.

"It's really not a bad piece of property," he said.

Besides the breakfasts, Moneagle said the organization is working to hold larger fundraising events, including a gun bonanza and a golf tournament.

"It's just going to take time," he said of fundraising efforts.

The arrangement with VFW Post 896 has led to combined efforts by the two groups, and both leaders said they were interested in doing more together.

"It's a win-win for all of us," Moneagle said.

One of the first things the two groups collaborated on was a combined flag ceremony, which also included some other organizations, Keller said.

"They're my brothers in arms," he said. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for Ken Moneagle."