

Building Jericho's walls: Vet housing breaks ground

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BY BILL EGBERT

THE JERICHO PROJECT, a nonprofit specializing in supportive housing for the homeless, broke ground yesterday on the first of two Veterans Residences it is building in the Bronx to deliver stable housing and comprehensive counseling to low-income and homeless vets.

Although veterans are disproportionately represented in the city shelter system, there are only two supportive housing projects dedicated to veterans in the city.

Jericho's Veterans Residences will be the first such dedicated housing program built in the city in nearly 15 years.

The Jericho Project Veterans Initiative also announced that it has received a three-year, \$225,000 grant from the Coleman Fung Foundation to support its efforts.

Coleman Fung, himself a veteran, came to America from Hong Kong when he was 16, and served in the Army before founding a software company.

"Jericho Project's proven track record for ending homelessness will demonstrate to other organizations across the country how to help our nation's veterans," Fung said.

The two planned Jericho facilities will feature small studio apartments, staff offices, community rooms, computer labs and gardens.

The first Veterans Residence, on E. 194th St., will house 56 men and women, and will open in 2010. The second, at Kingsbridge Terrace, will provide homes for an additional 76 veterans and be completed the following year.

Trained staff will provide comprehensive counseling on educational, vocational, medical and psychological issues.

"We focus not only on where veterans live, but how they live," said Jericho Project Executive Director Tori Lyon.

Lyon pointed out that homeless vets tend to isolate themselves, and don't access services as readily as civilians.

"But we've found that when veterans get together, they do better," she said. "They support each other. That was really the idea behind our Veterans Initiative."

Vietnam vet Alex Carter moved into another Jericho residence on Anthony Ave. three years ago, after kicking a drug habit, he said, and he's looking forward to relocating to a Veterans Residence and helping younger vets readjust.

"I want to get them on the right track," said the 69-year-old Air Force vet.

At the planned Veterans Residences, 40% of housing will be reserved for low-income vets, with priority given to veterans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The remainder of the units will be set aside for veterans with a history of homelessness and substance abuse.