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## Combat vets can access new counseling service

WILLMAR — Combat veterans in Kandiyohi County now have access to new mental health counseling in Willmar.

By: **Carolyn Lange**, West Central Tribune

WILLMAR — Combat veterans in Kandiyohi County now have access to new mental health counseling in Willmar.

The federally funded service will initially be offered once a month to veterans, said Trisha Appeldorn, Kandiyohi County Veterans Service Officer, who is hosting an open house from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday at the Health and Human Services Building to introduce veterans to the new program.

A good turnout and requests for service Thursday could eventually lead to the Veterans Affairs-operated mobile counseling service coming to Willmar as often as three times a month.

"I know there is a need," said Appeldorn, who said she's seeing an increase in the number of Iraqi veterans landing in jail or seeking in-patient treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Many of these combat veterans, she said, have been home from a combat zone for about two years but are now having negative experiences that could be helped with counseling.

Getting help now could prevent issues from escalating, she said.

Renville and Redwood counties have had the mobile counseling service for several years. "Their veterans love it," Appeldorn said.

Starting in October, the counseling program — which is based at the Brooklyn Park Vet Center — will be offered free of charge from 6 to 8 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month in Room 2005 in the Health and Human Services Building in Willmar.

The room is located down the hall from Appeldorn's office.

Besides not having to drive to St. Cloud or the Minneapolis area for VA counseling, she said the program is offered during a time that is convenient for school or work schedules in a quiet, non-intimidating atmosphere.

These programs have been available for years at the Veterans Affairs centers in the state but are now available in rural areas through the mobile counseling program.

Group and individual counseling will be provided by Neil Krenz, a readjustment counseling specialist with the mobile vet center, for such things as post-traumatic stress disorder, military sexual trauma or bereavement.

Krenz is a former field artillery captain in the Minnesota Army National Guard and is an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran.

Krenz is able to provide counseling and diagnostic services, said Appeldorn. He is also a certified offender-workforce development specialist, which makes him qualified to work with veterans having difficulty finding jobs because of a criminal history.

Appeldorn said the informal open house this week will include refreshments, opportunities to meet Krenz and time to learn about what the program offers. It is available to any combat veteran from any war, and their family members for military-related issues.

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