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Tribune File Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

**Judge Robert L. Miller Sr., founder of the Miller's Vets group at the Center for the Homeless, salutes during the dedication of the Garden of Peace Monument and Cemetery in 2010. Miller will retire as the commanding officer of the group in the fall.**

## Miller to step down as head of veterans program

**By MEGAN DOYLE**  
Tribune Staff Writer

**SOUTH BEND** — Even as former Judge Robert L. Miller Sr. plans to retire as the leader of Miller's Vets, the Center for the Homeless program might expand beyond South Bend to help homeless veterans throughout Indiana.

The new commanding officer will be motivated by real desire to transform the lives of the program's members, Miller said.

"I've already written a manual. I can teach anyone to do what's in there," Miller said. "I can't teach them to be compassionate. They need a drive to help these homeless veterans. They have to have that compassion."

The former judge founded

Miller's Vets, a Center for the Homeless initiative, in 2009 to restore pride to homeless veterans. Its members dress in military uniform to march at events to honor local veterans.

The program also provides veterans who cannot afford a funeral with a full military and religious service and burial for no charge.

"I can't begin to tell ... how much these veterans appreciate the program," Miller said. "It means a lot to have crowds stand up and applaud and thank them for their service."

Miller, now 90, will select a new commanding officer before the new Robert L. Miller Sr. Veteran's Center at 747 S. Michigan St. is dedicated on Veteran's Day, Nov. 11.

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## Miller: 'We need so many people'

"I want to step down," Miller said. "(The Veteran's Center) will be dedicated on 11/11/11. I thought that would be an ideal time if I could have a new commanding officer then ... I want someone ready to fill that desk when it is opened."

The Notre Dame Alumni Association advertised the position for Miller, who graduated from the university in 1942 and then from Notre Dame Law School in 1947.

"We decided to approach Notre Dame because they have so many clubs," Miller said. "There are an awful lot of alumni out there who

attended Notre Dame and served in the military and are active in their alumni club. I think we will have no problem finding good, competent, compassionate leaders to keep this thing rolling."

The founder will continue to be involved as an advisor.

"I've lived way beyond my life expectancy, so I'm keeping my eyes open," Miller said. "This is a young man's game."

Even as Miller searches for his replacement, he hopes to expand Miller's Vets beyond South Bend.

In April, the officers of all Notre Dame Alumni Clubs in Indiana received a video and a written invitation to begin their own chapters of Miller's Vets in their communities.

"All we are going to do is reach out to them," Miller said. "I hope these clubs are going to find these veterans at their shelters and put them in uniform and let them do the colors."

The current Miller's Vets staff at the Center for the Homeless will supervise the expanding program as the Notre Dame Club of St. Joseph Valley helps operate the local chapter, Miller said.

"We need so many people to help with veterans who are down on their luck, who have no money for a funeral," he said. "And we've got a huge number of people who want to help a homeless vet and don't know how to find them."

The original charity will finance all the new chapters until each group can collect its own donations, Miller said. The alumni clubs are not required to contribute any funds to the project.

The Center for the Homeless will continue to be the base for the local chapter of Miller's Vets.

"We're nothing without the center," Miller said. "If we go and find somebody under a bridge, we have no place to house them or feed

them or clean them up ... all I can do is dress them up and give them pride in their uniform again."

Angela Willson, director of initiatives for the Center for the Homeless, described Miller as "tireless."

"He is one of the most passionate people I have ever met; passionate about veterans, passionate about patriotism and passionate about giving," she said. "Nothing slows him down. He is constantly challenging those of us who work with him."

Since the beginning of Miller's Vets in 2009, the program helped veterans at the center reconnect with their military service in a positive way, Willson said.

"Its purpose is to inspire a re-energized sense of purpose in the veterans, to put them back in uniform and have them present the colors at public events," Willson said. "We honor their service."

Many veterans at the center are reluctant to talk

about their service, Willson said, but Miller's Vets can begin a healing process for them.

"Miller's Vets is for those who want to take another look at their service, to build a sense of pride, of patriotism again," he said.

Later this year, the center will further expand its efforts to help homeless veterans when it opens the new Veteran's Center. The facility will house 25 male veterans.

"We will then look to expand our Miller's Vets program and look at our services and programs for our veterans," she said. "Obviously, Miller's Vets will be a part of that."

Willson said Miller has been dedicated to the center.

"Judge Miller is 90 years old," she said. "He has had a long and very, very full life of volunteering. ... He will just continuously give and give and give."

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