

DIALOGUE

OUR VIEW

Innovative proposal to help veterans is a labor of love

Maybe you've seen it around town. It definitely stands out in traffic. It's the large combination dump truck bearing airbrushed paintings of a bald eagle, the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima, a soldier tending to his fallen comrade, and other patriotic images delivering a message of thanks to veterans of American armed forces.

That unique and striking tribute to veterans, owned by Wilsonville residents Rick and Elizabeth Peters, keeps right on rolling — and so does the vision it is intended to promote.

The innovative proposal to build a new Oregon Veterans Center right here in Wilsonville attained a major milestone last week with the unanimous passage of House Bill 3009.

We should be in a hurry to add that there are many more mile-

stones ahead before the dream could possibly become a reality.

For example, the bill must get through the Oregon Senate and be signed by Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Even then, the bill only directs the state to get going on a second Oregon Veterans Home. It doesn't locate that home in Wilsonville, nor does it create any of the other services and amenities contained in the Peters' ambitious vision.

Still, the unanimous passage of House Bill 3009 last week is extremely

encouraging. It reflects broad support and enthusiasm for the concept developed and promoted by the Wilsonville couple, along with state and federal agencies and veterans groups.

There should be little disagreement that Oregon needs a second veterans home. The first, consisting of 151 nursing and memory care beds, was opened in The Dalles in 1997 after

decades of

failed attempts.

The idea was long overdue, considering that states such as Oklahoma, Maine and Mississippi — each smaller than Oregon — have five or more such facilities. Even though one home represented progress, Oregon is still far behind all of these other states.

While it's true that the shortage of veterans homes in Oregon does not deny the veterans needed treatment — they can be housed in facilities that are intended for the general population — these homes allow veterans to be with other veterans if they so desire, and to receive the recognition they deserve. They also can help veterans

become a community resource so students can

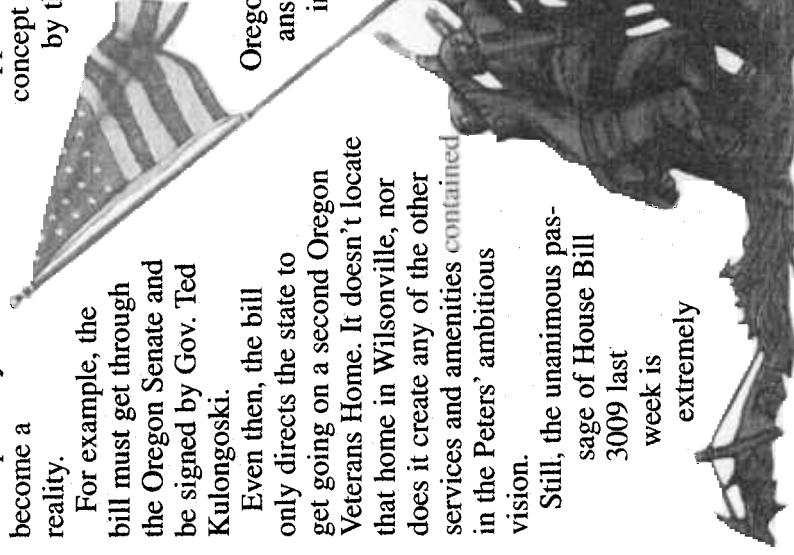
learn about history firsthand by visiting the homes and hearing veterans' stories.

There are still many questions that must be answered before we know whether an Oregon Veterans Center is right for veterans, or whether Wilsonville is the right place to build it.

Organizers have found a proposed location just north of the city, but it is outside the urban growth boundary. It would be no small feat to bring this parcel inside the city and put together the puzzle pieces to make it all work.

In the end, it may not make sense, or it may not be possible. We don't know yet.

We do know that proponents of this ambitious plan deserve a salute from the community — and support for their continued efforts in exploring this laudable concept. ■



AIRBRUSH ARTWORK (DETAIL) BY JERE HARLEY / OREGON VETERANS FOUNDATION