

Vets treat PTSD with 12 steps

BY GRETCHEN EHLKE
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MILWAUKEE — A new peer-to-peer support program for combat veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder in Wisconsin applies the 12-step framework of Alcoholics Anonymous to help heal the emotional wounds of military trauma.

PTSD Anonymous, launched a month ago, isn't meant to replace professional counseling, but to offer a sympathetic ear from someone who understands the effects that military and combat-related trauma can have on soldiers, their families and their quality of life, said Ron Worthey, one of the organizers.

"One thing you lose when you leave the military is you lose your teamwork. Nobody has your back anymore. You're alone. With this new program we educate you that you are not alone. You have a new team," said Worthey, a Wausau resident who served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1968.

Worthey and others revived a concept that began in Washington state eight years ago, but fell by the wayside. In just a month, the program has grown from three or four veterans to 12 to 15 people who gather Wednesday nights at Kronenwetter town hall.

"When you're talking to another veteran and they're telling you their problems, you're on the same wavelength. So you are basically pulling things out of yourself that you don't realize sometimes until months down the road," he said.

If you go

What: PTSD Anonymous

Who: Any veterans are welcome to attend.

When: Wednesdays, 6 p.m.

Where: Kronenwetter Municipal Center, 1582 Kronenwetter Drive, Kronenwetter

For more information: Visit the national website at www.ptsdanonymous.org, or the Marathon County group's website at <http://soulsofthonor.us>

"The number of veterans diagnosed with PTSD varies by service era. Between 11 percent and 20 percent of veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan have the disorder in a given year, according to the National Center for PTSD at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

That's compared to about 12 of every 100 Gulf War veterans and 15 percent of Vietnam veterans. The disorder usually occurs after a soldier on a mission is exposed to traumatic and life-threatening experiences.

PTSD Anonymous was established in 2008 by Stephen Kubiszewski, who hoped to develop a nationwide network of community-based, veteran-lead support group meetings. Himself a combat veteran and retired mental health counselor, he came up with the concept after finding that his PTSD patients had no follow-up help after therapy.