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## **Help on way for homeless veterans**

By **CHRIS DOUCETTE**, QMI Agency

As many as 100 veterans are believed to be living on the streets of Toronto, but now there is help for those who have so proudly served our country.

Leave the Streets Behind — an initiative involving Canada’s Veterans Affairs, the Royal Canadian Legion and a local shelter — aims to identify homeless veterans, to bring them inside and help them access the services they are entitled to.

“Our service men and women have always stood up for Canada’s values. It is our responsibility to be there for them when they need us the most,” Veterans Affairs Minister Jean Pierre Blackburn said at the Good Sheppard Ministries.

“Leave the Streets Behind will help us meet our sacred duty to those veterans who may desperately need our assistance during difficult times in their lives,” he added.

Joseph Sweeney, a Korean war veteran, knows all too well the difficulties soldiers face after service.

“It was a real culture shock after being discharged,” the 75-year-old said. “Assimilating into civilian life was very hard.”

At 17, Sweeney joined the Royal Canadian Regiment and went off to battle. He left the army three years later in 1954 and soon found himself in trouble.

“Psychologically, mentally, physically, depression and fits of rage,” the senior explained. “But there was nowhere to go.”

Sweeney spent the next 20 years battling drug and alcohol abuse. And by the time he got his addictions under control, he had lost everything — “my wife, my family, my house.”

The program has identified more than 50 homeless veterans in Montreal and Vancouver, where it has been in place since last year. And many of those vets are now off the street.

A Veterans Affairs case manager will work full-time from the Good Shepherd Ministries, located at 412 Queen St. E. [chris.doucette@sunmedia.ca](mailto:chris.doucette@sunmedia.ca)



**A new initiative called Leave the Streets Behind — a collaborative effort involving Veterans Affairs, the Royal Canadian Legion and Good Sheppard Ministries — aims to help homeless vets. Veteran Joseph Sweeney, 75, wishes such a program was available when he came home from the Korean war in the 1950s. (CHRIS DOUCETTE/QMI AGENCY)**