



**CLEVELAND COUNTY  
RECOVERY PROGRAM**



## **Cleveland County celebrates Veterans Day with \$330,000 investment in American Legion Post 88**

*Cleveland County commits ARPA funds to expand the American Legion's support for veterans*

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**NORMAN, OKLA. (November 10, 2022)** - On the eve of Veterans Day, Cleveland County Commissioners presented American Legion Post 88 in Norman with a check for \$330,000 of American Rescue Plan funding to support building upgrades needed to continue and expand veteran services, including the American Legion Post 88 Food Pantry.

"As a disabled veteran myself, I know first hand the struggles many veterans go through to obtain benefits and services," said County Commissioner Harold Haralson. "These obstacles only increased during the pandemic, and I am incredibly proud that the county will be able to use these ARPA funds to help bring access to services for veterans across the county and beyond. By investing in the improvements to the American Legion, we can ensure this outstanding organization is able to continue serving the residents of Cleveland County for years to come."

Cleveland County's diverse mix of people and geographies includes nearly 22,000 veterans, and each year the local American Legion Post 88 service officers work closely with the Veterans Administration to help hundreds of veterans receive the benefits they deserve. Since 2019, Post 88 has connected service members with more than \$8 million in benefits, and so far this year, they have assisted with the recovery of nearly \$2.3 million in additional benefits.

The mission of the American Legion is consistent with Cleveland County's commitment to veterans, which was reinforced in 2016 when the Board of County Commissioners voted to hire a county veteran services coordinator.

"We are very proud that Cleveland County is the first, and, so far, the only county in Oklahoma to invest in full-time support for our veterans and their families," said County Commissioner Darryl Stacy. "Cleveland County Veterans Coordinator Charlie Neely partners closely with a number of veterans' organizations, including American Legion Post 88 where he is certified as a Veterans Affairs Accredited Service Officer. This accreditation allows him to submit claims directly to the Veterans Benefit Administration on behalf of veterans and their families from his office at The Well on Tuesday through Friday."



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As they worked to create a practical and effective plan for the COVID Recovery Funds, Cleveland County Commissioners gathered extensive input from the community, including speaking to veterans groups about how the veterans they serve were affected by COVID and how the pandemic had impacted their ability to deliver services. Throughout the process, Cleveland County residents indicated that they wanted ARPA dollars to benefit people, infrastructure and the economy. The designation of funding to American Legion Post 88 aligns with all three of those goals, but, most importantly, benefits numerous people throughout Cleveland County by enabling Post 88 to serve more veterans and their families more efficiently for years to come.

“During the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, American Legion Post 88 never closed our doors,” Commander Ernest Martin said. “We are family, and the Legion knew that as others who serve veterans began to shut down, our veterans needed us more than ever. Constructed by the WPA, our building has been here since the 1930s, and these ARPA dollars will allow us to do much-needed structural improvements, wiring needed for better technological efficiency, and other upgrades so we can continue serving veterans and their families in Cleveland County and surrounding areas for another fifty years at no cost to them. Not only will this investment keep Post 88 operational, but it will also offset the loss of revenue we experienced during the pandemic. We have taken care of yesterday’s soldiers, we are taking care of today’s soldiers and we want to be ready to care for tomorrow’s soldiers. On behalf of the American Legion and the hundreds of veterans, service members and veteran families we serve each year, we are deeply grateful for the ongoing support from our county leaders and the community.”

By investing ARPA dollars, county officials are able to build on the natural collaboration and existing coordination already found among nonprofits such as the American Legion. Leveraging those existing resources in Cleveland County increases efficiency and expands the ability to provide services to those who were most severely impacted by the pandemic.

“Cleveland County is proud to partner with American Legion Post 88 in an effort to help hundreds of veterans, service members and veteran families receive the benefits they deserve,” said County Commissioner Rod Cleveland. “Along with improving their quality of life, these well-deserved benefits come back to Cleveland County as income when those who have served our nation purchase goods and services here, creating long-term economic impact for our community as whole.”

Each Monday, American Legion Post 88 hosts a walk-in benefits clinic at 710 E Main St., Norman, from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Veterans, active service members and veteran families may reach out via phone at 405-366-7575 to set up an appointment. Residents may also visit Cleveland County Veterans Coordinator Charlie Neely at The Well, 210 S. James Garner Ave., Norman, call him at 405-366-0673 or email Charlie at [cneely@clevelandcount yok.com](mailto:cneely@clevelandcount yok.com) for assistance.

This grant to the American Legion Post 88 is the first of several that will provide aid to local veterans. Cleveland County has set aside \$4 million in APRA funding specifically for nonprofit support with a focus on vulnerable populations such as veterans and those affected by behavioral health issues. Of that,



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\$500,000 is specifically designated to nonprofit veterans groups in Cleveland County who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Thursday's ARPA announcement comes just days after Cleveland County kicked off "Operation Green Light," illuminating the courthouse in green to show support for veterans as well as to raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by many veterans and their families and the resources that are available to them at the county, state, and federal levels.

"Through our partnership with American Legion Post 88 and other veterans organizations, and by shining the green light, we're expressing our profound gratitude for the sacrifices and contributions our veterans and their families made on the battlefield and at home," Haralson said. "At a time when our country is faced with so many challenges, we can all agree that those individuals who risked and sacrificed their lives fighting to protect our country and our way of life deserve our support. We encourage everyone to join us in displaying a green light for veterans and their families."

Residents are encouraged to participate by simply changing one light bulb in their house to a green bulb. This can be an exterior light that neighbors and passersby see, or an interior light that sparks a conversation with friends. By shining a green light, our veterans will know that they are seen, appreciated and supported.

### ***About the American Legion***

*The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic, mutual-help, and community service organization which now numbers 2.4 million – men and women – in more than 14,000 American Legion Posts worldwide.*

### ***About Cleveland County***

*Cleveland County covers more than 500 square miles and a steadily growing population of close to 300,000 people (2020 census), making it the third most populous county in Oklahoma.*

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