

RRStar

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ROCKFORD — Rockford is the first city in the nation to effectively end homelessness among local veterans.

So Says Zero: 2016. The city is one of 75 cities participating in [Zero: 2016](#), which is tackling both homelessness among veterans and chronic homelessness.

Since June, the city has found housing for 73 veterans and has in place a system to house homeless veterans within a month. That helped the city reach "functional zero," a term first used in New Orleans. It means that every newly discovered homeless veteran on the street or in a shelter is provided permanent housing within a month, unless they decide to enter a longer-term treatment program.

Zero: 2016 says that to remain at functional zero, there can be no more than eight homeless vets awaiting housing and any new homeless person will be put in housing quickly. The city said the mechanisms are in place to reach those numbers, which it monitors through Rockstat, a data-driven performance appraisal of city programs and services.

"Today's announcement doesn't mean there will never be another homeless vet here in Rockford," said Antonio R. Riley, Midwest region administrator for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, who lauded the city's efforts during a celebration today at Memorial Hall. "What today's announcement does mean is that for that vet, we should be able to house that person in 30 days or so."

The city also has been recognized by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness for completing First Lady Michelle Obama's Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.

Rockford Mayor Larry Morrissey credited the city's success in finding homes for veterans to networking among case managers involved with housing and mental health, police and fire officials, landlords and HUD.

Agencies such as the Veterans Administration, Winnebago County Veterans Assistance Center, the Illinois Department of Employment Security Veteran's Program, Rosecrance Ware Center, Rockford Housing Authority and Carpenter's Place were among those working with the city's Human Services Department to find and build relationships with homeless veterans, then get them resources they need.

"We started by personalizing it," Morrissey said. "Every veteran has a name. Every person has a story. When we make their story part of our story and our life and our work, we're able to get

people housed, we're able to manage that list, we're able to make the connections to solve that problem."

The effort is coordinated by Community Solutions, a national nonprofit that oversees the Zero: 2016 movement. Community Solutions helped the city build the model it used to address veteran homelessness. Morrissey said those methods will be used to tackle chronic homelessness in Rockford.

"Rockford has defined itself as a vanguard community in a national movement to end homelessness, demonstrating that it's possible to solve this complex problem," said Beth Sandor, director of Zero: 2016. "We look forward to continuing to support them in sustaining these gains and working toward an end to chronic homelessness by the close of next year."

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