



## NEWS LOCAL

# Falls centre helps veterans in need



By Alison Langley, Niagara Falls Review  
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Louis Frenette is the service officer for the Royal Canadian Legion Br. 479, in Niagara Falls, and manages the legion's Veteran Resource Centre. (MIKE DIBATTISTA Niagara Falls Review)

NIAGARA FALLS - The desperation in the voice on the other end of the phone was all too familiar to Louis Frenette.

The 75-year-old Niagara Falls man is the service officer for the Royal Canadian Legion Br. 479 and is the face of the Spring St. legion's Veteran Resource Centre.

The phone message was clear. A veteran needed help and Frenette sprang into action.

He learned a veteran had recently suffered a stroke and had been all but abandoned at a Saskatchewan hospital.

"I did what needed to be done," he said. "His sister lives in Niagara and she needed to get him here so I called my legion contacts out west and he's here."

Frenette, who served 15 years in the armed forces, is a force to be reckoned with.

A familiar face at Br. 479 for over 50 years, he volunteers at the resource centre and steers veterans to the agencies and services they need.

"I've personally dealt with everything from buying a box of Depends to suicide," he said.

"I've helped everyone from a 96-year-old woman to a 27-year-old Afghanistan vet.

Br. 479 opened the resource centre almost four years ago to help veterans who needed assistance accessing government programs such as pensions, grants for medical equipment and social services.

Some veterans simply don't realize what they're entitled to. Others are haunted by post-traumatic stress disorder that can lead to poverty, substance abuse and run-ins with the law.

"Sometimes veterans falls through the cracks," he said. "It's frustrating. These people served our country and deserve so much better."

He said clients often find their way to the centre when they've exhausted all other avenues.

"I see them when they're up against the wall and they have nowhere to go."

He said veterans are often too proud to admit they're having difficulty coping and balk at asking for help from community services.

Once Frenette shares his military story, however, any hesitation vanishes.

"I talk their language," he said. "As soon as I introduce myself, those barriers are down."

"One of the biggest problems in helping a veteran today is a lot of service providers do not speak their language."

While the resource centre was established to be a referral agency, it has become much more to Frenette.

"I pay rent, I buy food, I fix cars," he said. " I try to do whatever I can to help. If you walk in here, we'll take care of you."

The centre receives no government funding and is kept alive by donations.

For more information on the centre, call the legion at 905-354-4331.

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