

History of the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home and the New Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home

With the intention of easing the demand for nursing care by veterans needing to get into the veterans' home system, the fourth Nebraska Veterans Home opened on September 2, 1980 in Omaha, Nebraska at 156th and West Maple Road. The home opened under the name of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home (ENVH), approved under Legislative Law LB184. The home was initially licensed as an Intermediate Care Facility. ENVH opened its doors with only fifteen members, the first member admitted to the home was Herman Otto Bach; an 82-year-old World War I Veteran. On August 30, 1981, the State Legislature passed LB351 officially changing the name of the facility to the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home. The home was named after State Senator Thomas S. Fitzgerald, Jr., who worked with other state and county officials on the negotiations to acquire the county building and was the major sponsor of the legislation to develop the Nebraska Veterans' Home in Omaha.

The home's residents are referred to as "Members", because they were "members of the Armed Forces" and they are all members of one community and home. The members occupied the first and second floor levels and the basement was refurbished into a member service area, which consisted of an All Faith's Chapel, library, game room, craft room, laundry room and a kitchenette, which opened out to an outdoor pavilion. The second floor was licensed as a Health Clinic, which consisted of a medical department, pharmacy, physical therapy department, occupational department and a dental office.

Because of the increasing need to care for veterans, their wives, widows and Gold Star parents, who needed treatment for many chronic and active illnesses, the home re-licensed as a Skilled Nursing Facility in 1982.

On November 11, 1981, the All Faiths Chapel was dedicated and on November 11, 1989 the Avenue of Flags was established at the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home.

In December of 1992, a vintage Vietnam Era M60 Tank was placed on the front grounds as a symbol to the purpose of the facility as a Veterans' Home.

On February 19, 1994, U.S. Senator Robert Kerrey dedicated the Special Needs Unit at the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home. This unit was designed to take care of veterans with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

In 1994-95 major renovation was completed with a new dining room/food storage service area, new elevator, bathroom remodeling, and the installation of over 450 energy efficient windows. Funding for this renovation was a collaborative effort between the State of Nebraska and the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs.

In August of 1994, the facility was disconnected from an aging sewage treatment plant and tied into the Omaha City Sewer System. In December 1996/January 1997, the facility was removed from its last existing water well source and tied into the City of Omaha.

On July 18, 2006 the 1-East Unit became the new Assisted Living Area.

In the 26 years that the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans' Home existed, it was home to Veterans of WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and their spouses.

In 2001 it became evident that the facility at 156th and West Maple Road needed either a major overhaul or needed to be replaced because it had become inadequate to care for the needs of the Veterans that were being served in Eastern Nebraska. After reviewing the options available, the determination was made that a new home was the best option. A team was established to begin the process for acquiring a new facility. Several sites were suggested and looked at by the team, but when the City of Bellevue so generously offered to donate the land (approximately 20 acres) for the new Veterans' home it was an offer too good to pass up. Along with the land donated by the City of Bellevue, the Sarpy County Board of Commissioners donated the money to build an access road to the new Veterans' home.

The new single level, 119,000 square foot facility was completed in June 2007 and the support organizations unanimously voted to name it the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home. On July 14, 2007, 70 members moved from the Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans Home to the new Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home. One of the members was in the Omaha Veterans Affairs Medical Center when the move occurred and upon his discharge Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home became the new home to 71 members.

The interior of the facility resembles a town square known as the Thomas Fitzgerald Town Square honoring Thomas S Fitzgerald Jr. A portrait of Thomas Fitzgerald hangs over the town square fireplace, which displays his name. The town square includes a canteen, vending area, game room, library, barbershop, a bank and the entryway to the main dining room. Other areas around the town square include restorative care, activity/craft spaces, chapel and medical clinic

Four distinct neighborhoods based on care levels, skilled (Service Neighborhood), intermediate skilled (Motivation Neighborhood), assisted living (Dedication Neighborhood) and secured memory support (Allegiance Neighborhood) serve as home for our members. Each neighborhood allows for a total occupancy of 30 members.

On August 28, 2007, the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony occurred at the main entrance of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home. Governor Dave Heineman, and other dignitaries cut the Ribbon officially opening the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home.

After passing the initial VA compliance survey, the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home has been proudly admitting veterans to the home.

Employees of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home are committed to giving the highest quality of care possible to our American heroes.