

## Campaign aims to raise \$100,000 for Lancaster Barracks, a temporary home for offenders in Veterans Court

[JEFF HAWKES | Staff Writer](#) Aug 13, 2017



Lancaster County Judge Jeffery Wright presides over Veterans Court.  
DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

Life was challenging enough for Michael B., a 40-something, single father of a teenage son.

He was recovering from alcohol dependency. He also was an offender trying to meet the hard-nosed expectations of Lancaster County's Veterans Court.

Then Michael lost his apartment.

He started staying week-to-week at a budget motel or, when he could, with family.

"It was a couch here, a couch there," Michael said.

Judge Jeffery Wright, who has presided over Veterans Court [since its launch five years ago](#), said stories like Michael's are not uncommon.

### [Lancaster County Veterans Court reaches 5-year anniversary, deemed a 'tremendous success'](#)

Because of high demand for decent, affordable apartments across the county, landlords can easily reject applicants with criminal records, even those who served in the armed forces.

Wright said having no place to call home makes it harder for people to make amends and turn lives around.

That chronic need for housing is the reason for the Lancaster Barracks campaign.

Organizers hope to raise \$100,000 to buy and rehabilitate a city residence where three or more Veterans Court participants can live while they complete the four-phase program, which takes at least a year.

A recent \$15,000 pledge from the Pennsylvania Veterans Foundation has helped to boost the campaign over the halfway mark.

Organizers are now looking for a property and hope to move in the first participants by the end of the year. Labor by Veterans Court participants will help make the property habitable.

It's a joint project of Lancaster Housing Opportunity Partnership, which will own the property; CAPital Workforce, a construction work training program, and the volunteer-led Veterans Court Community Partnership, which raises funds for Veterans Court's nonjudicial expenses.

"This may be a model to share nationally if it works out," said Doug Hopwood, who oversees the 17-room Veterans Victory House, part of the 52-room TLC transitional housing facility at 105 E. King St.

Hopwood on a daily basis sees how the housing shortage effects all struggling veterans, not just those in Veterans Court. Last week he received housing referrals for two Veterans Court participants, but had no place to put them.

"We can't expect them to be able to focus on their recovery, employment, court commitments, volunteerism, treatment and relationships if they are constantly moving from place to place," said Judge Wright, who currently supervises 26 participants.

"I see the Lancaster Barracks as an investment in the health of our community."

Hopwood said transitional housing helps a formerly homeless individual establish a routine, find employment and save for the first-month's rent and security deposit.

Lancaster Barracks will replicate that model, but in a homelike setting where the residents will be expected to take responsibility for cleaning and maintaining the property, said Ray D'Agostino, CEO of Lancaster Housing Opportunity Partnership.

“I see the Lancaster Barracks as an investment in the health of our community,” said Bonnie Bowman, Lancaster County Recorder of Deeds and chair of Veterans Court Community Partnership. “It’s going to be a hands-up as participants become productive members of our community and live meaningful lives.”

Michael, who served in the Navy for four years and completed Veterans Court last March, said he now has a nice apartment, where he lives with his disabled mother and his son.

If Lancaster Barracks had been available to him when he was under court supervision, he said, he thinks he would have found living with other veterans therapeutic.

“You have camaraderie,” he said. “You have somebody else that is going through or has been through the exact things you’ve been through.”

*Donate at [www.lhop.org/lancaster-barracks](http://www.lhop.org/lancaster-barracks).*