

Sonora VA Clinic dedicated Oct. 9

The open house and dedication ceremony for the new veterans clinic in East Sonora Friday included music by Sonora High's Golden Regiment Band, a color guard comprised of area veterans, a ribbon cutting ceremony, and a variety of speakers.



Frank Smart, chair of the Veterans Memorial spoke about the VA Health Care System and the Memorial. His speech is on the VVA-391 Web Site.

About 200 people toured the 8,000-square-foot clinic and shared a celebratory lunch

"There are three million veterans in the VA health care system who live in geographically rural areas, and \$215 million has been approved to better serve them," said Lisa Freeman, director of the Palo Alto Health Care System. "What we have here today represents the best of those efforts."

The clinic, at 13663 Mono Way, is part of the Veterans Administration's Palo Alto Health Care System, which includes facilities in Stockton, Modesto, Livermore, Palo Alto, Menlo Park, San Jose, Capitola and Monterey.

It's more than double the size of the former clinic off Greenley Road, which was opened in 2002.

"Veterans' services have been bought and paid for by the men and women who served our country," said Sonora Mayor Pro Tem Gary Anderson. "Some have come back with serious wounds, both mental and physical."

A co-founder of Tuolumne County's Chapter 391 of Vietnam Veterans of America, Vietnam veteran Frank Smart has been active in numerous efforts to help veterans.

Later in life, like many Vietnam veterans, he developed physical problems caused by Agent Orange and was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder.

"When I first visited the (Palo Alto Health Care System's) Livermore clinic, I had a big chip on my shoulder," he said, "but I was completely disarmed by the exceptional care I was given."

The new building will offer more than increased space. It will have the equivalent of three and one-half physicians, up from two and one-half, and offer added social services, including a case manager to help veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.



Pastor Rick Larson gives the benediction. Kerri Childress, Communications Director for VAPAHCS is on right with the VVA-391 color guard in the back.



Photo by George I. Eldridge

Lisa Freeman, director of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System watches as Ellen Shibata, ACOS of the Livermore Division cuts the ribbon which officially opens the new clinic.