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## 'Mission's accomplished.' Veterans center named after Col. Robert E. Spiller, Korean and Vietnam War vet

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Members of Col. Robert E. Spiller's family, along with Gov. Andy Beshear Center being built on Mizpah Road in the Kentucky Transpark during an Cooperative on Wednesday.

PHOTOS BY Grace Remov/grace.remov@bgdailynews.com

## MORE INFORMATION



SLIDE SHOW:  
BG veterans  
center named  
after Col.  
Robert E.  
Spiller

Col. Robert E. Spiller had two missions in life – taking care of the poor and needy and getting a veterans nursing home in Bowling Green.

Spiller's son, also named Bob Spiller, reflected on the latter goal Wednesday at the official naming ceremony for the Bowling Green veterans center at Green River Regional Educational Cooperative headquarters.

The center, which is expected to be completed in 2024, will be called the Robert E. Spiller Bowling Green Veterans Center. The 80,000-square-foot facility is located on 25 acres of Transpark land donated by the Inter-Modal Transportation Authority.

It will be the state's fifth long-term skilled nursing care center for veterans, with private suites for 60 veterans and access to state-of-the-art equipment, physical therapy and recreational activities.

Gov. Andy Beshear said the donation demonstrated the values of the Bowling Green community.

“This is 25 acres being donated in a park right now that is on fire, that is having business after business after business locate here,” he said. “And you know what they said? They said honoring our veterans should come first.”

Spiller lived a life of service. He moved from his hometown of Philadelphia to Bowling Green to attend Western Kentucky University, where he graduated with a degree in history in 1949.

There, he also met his wife, Cora Jane Morningstar. After graduation, Spiller had a 30-year military career, serving in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. His final assignment was chief of staff of the Berlin Brigade, for which he earned a Distinguished Service Medal.

In 1980, he returned to Bowling Green and became very involved in the community with Cora Jane.

Everyone knew Col. Spiller was the key force behind the Bowling Green veterans center, Beshear said.

After realizing there was a gap in veteran care, he did research on veteran care, he did research on veterans nursing homes, wrote letters and traveled to Frankfort to talk to anyone who would listen, his son said.

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| MONDAY GATHERING | Questions TBA           |

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Spiller continued to pursue his goal through several administrations and many legislative sessions.

In the meantime, he drove veterans to Nashville, the closest place they could receive care. He made those visits at least monthly, said American Legion member Jim Manley.

Every American Legion board meeting, he made nursing home reports, said American Legion member Malcom Cherry. In those reports, he would share the number of veterans in each of the state's four existing veterans centers in Hazard, Wilmore, Hanson and Radcliffe, as well as the number of veterans on the waiting list.

Cherry never doubted that Col. Spiller would achieve his goal, and although he passed away before the groundbreaking, "against all odds, he finally got it," he said.

Rep. Michael Meredith, R-Oakland, became a "quarterback" for the center in the Kentucky legislature. He

was also nicknamed a “bulldog” and the “glue” of the effort by others at the naming ceremony.

Meredith said that people who knew Spiller knew two things about him – he was a character and he was devoted to his community.

After years of work and a few setbacks, Meredith sponsored House Bill 2 this year, which allocated the final \$16.63 million to complete the center from state funds after construction bids rose due to inflation.

The bill flew through the House and Senate easily, and was one of the first bills to become law this year.

“It took everybody from the state Senate to the state House and the administration to make that happen in such a positive and proactive way,” Meredith said. “Everybody pulled in the same direction, and it probably was one of those examples of what we can accomplish when we all work together.”

The younger Spiller said that when Col. Spiller was asked for advice, he told people to “take care of your troops.” He would often invite soldiers over for holiday meals when they couldn’t make it home.

“I look at this honor as a culmination of their life’s work of just trying to help their fellow human beings,” Spiller said. “Having his name on this facility that is taking care of veterans is just unbelievable. It’s the highest compliment they could get and we thank you. Mom and Dad, mission’s accomplished.”

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