

OPINION

The Gazette Editorial Board

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THE GAZETTE'S EDITORIAL

A challenge to help homeless veterans

With all the controversy swirling around the Penn State football program this week — including the firing of legendary coach Joe Paterno — we hope it doesn't diminish a worthy project to help homeless military veterans.

The Homeless Veterans Project is the brainchild of Mike Fornear and his former high school teammate, Kirk Ferentz, the University of Iowa's head football coach. It's an outgrowth of a local non-profit group they created in Pittsburgh several years ago that is expanding its focus on helping homeless veterans.

They recently launched their new fundraising initiative, called "Letterwinners Challenge." The timing coincides with today's national Veterans Day observance. Big Ten head

coaches, letterwinner associations and the BTN (formerly Big Ten Network) have embraced the challenge. Paterno is being dropped from the campaign. Sad but necessary.

Nonetheless, the project moves ahead on its own merits. It's a competition among regional letterwinner and varsity clubs to raise the most money for non-profits that help homeless veterans get on their feet and rebuild their lives.

Fornear, the operations manager, pledges that no more than 8 percent of the money raised will go to overhead costs; at least 92 percent will be distrib-



Kirk Ferentz
Iowa
head coach

uted to non-profit agencies that provide programs for veterans in need and to supply new emergency, transitional or permanent beds.

There's no way to place too much attention on this important issue. Nationwide, about 1 in every 5 homeless people is a veteran. An Oct. 11 Veterans Affairs report to Congress indicated that about 145,000 veterans were homeless during the past year, including about 1,000 in Iowa. With American troops pulling out of Iraq and more returning veterans from the Afghanistan War front, the VA's resources and that of non-profit agencies serving veterans are being increasingly stretched. This also comes at a time when suicide rates are rising among veterans — an average of 18 per

day take their own lives. Many were homeless.

The project's website homepage at www.homelessvetsproject.org reminds not too gently of our obligation to those who serve us in harm's way: "We do not leave wounded soldiers to die on battlefields alone. We don't leave them to die under bridges either."

So, UI Varsity Club members: here's a good opportunity to plug your alma mater and help a veteran in need. Give back to those who served America and protected your freedoms, including access to the higher-education institution that helped shape your life.

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