

VA facilities to receive stimulus funds

Seven Illinois cemeteries will split \$2.5 million

BY JOHN REYNOLDS
OF GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

RIVERTON — Seven Department of Veterans Affairs cemeteries in Illinois will split \$2.5 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, according to U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin's office.

"It's going to put people in the community to work," said Christiana Mulka, a spokeswoman for Durbin, D-Ill.

Camp Butler National Cemetery in Riverton will receive about \$487,000 in federal stimulus money for new equipment and renovations. One of the projects at the top of Camp Butler's list is cleaning and realigning about 3,000 headstones that have partially sunk into the ground and are not level with the other headstones.

"We have a program of constant maintenance on the headstones, but I have a very limited crew," said Michael Lewis, director of Camp Butler Cemetery. "What we would like to do is use part of the money to bring in a vendor or contractor who will go in and raise, realign and clean some of the sections that are in bad shape."

The headstones in need of attention are not necessarily the cemetery's oldest, which date back to the Civil War. The condition of a gravestone depends on the type of soil it was set in.

"Some parts of the cemetery are very sandy, and the stones shift quite a bit more there. Also, we're an open cemetery — still burying. When we go in and out of those sections, that causes some of the stones to



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Dave Buck, a caretaker at Camp Butler National Cemetery, adjusts a tombstone on Tuesday while preparing to make room for a new grave.

shift also," Lewis said.

Camp Butler also hopes to use the stimulus money to buy new equipment such as an entrenching bucket for its back-hoe and a new plow for the snowplow truck.

Lewis said the extra money should help the overall economy of the area.

"We will be hiring outside labor to do some of the work we need done in the cemetery. ... We would also be buying equipment from local vendors," Lewis said.

Springfield resident Matt Gilmour, commander of the Interveterans Burial Detail of Sangamon County, is at Camp Butler frequently. He's noticed that some of the headstones need cleaning and are sinking, but overall, he said, the cemetery is in pretty good shape.

Still, using stimulus money to ensure the cemetery's contin-

ued upkeep sounded like a good idea, Gilmour said.

Nationwide, the Department of Veterans Affairs received about \$1.4 billion in the stimulus package for cemeteries, hospitals and homes, according to Durbin's office.

In Illinois, Veterans Administration hospitals and homes will be splitting about \$63.6 million and \$12.8 million, respectively, in federal stimulus money.

Other VA cemeteries in Illinois receiving federal funds are:

- ▶ Danville National Cemetery, Danville, \$831,000
- ▶ Mound City National Cemetery, Mound City, \$150,000
- ▶ North Alton Confederate Cemetery, Alton, \$250,000
- ▶ Confederate Mound, Oak Woods, \$250,000
- ▶ Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Elmwood, \$391,000
- ▶ Rock Island National Cemetery, Rock Island, \$110,000

Stimulus money for VA facilities

Veterans homes operated by the Veterans Administration will receive about \$13 million for construction, and several VA hospitals and extended-care facilities will split about \$63.6 million in Recovery Act funding for upgrades and repairs.

A breakdown of the funding is as follows:

- ▶ VA Illiana Health Care System, Danville: \$13,500,000
- ▶ Chicago Health Care System, Chicago: \$3,238,000
- ▶ North Chicago VA Medical Center, Chicago: \$10,652,000
- ▶ Hines VA Hospital, Hines: \$29,800,000
- ▶ Marion VA Medical Center, Marion: \$6,366,000
- ▶ Illinois Veterans Home, Quincy: \$565,000
- ▶ Illinois Veterans Home, Manteno: \$3,930,000
- ▶ Illinois Veterans Home, LaSalle: \$8,000,000

Camp Butler facts

HISTORY: One of the original 14 national cemeteries established by President Abraham Lincoln. During the Civil War, Union soldiers trained at the camp and held prisoners of war.

SIZE: 53 acres

NUMBER OF GRAVES: 21,607 (through fiscal 2008)

OLDEST GRAVES: Confederate soldiers who became ill in 1862.

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