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Allan De Genova addresses a crowd of about 300 with B.C. Ambulance Services paramedic Bob Parkinson Saturday at the opening of Honour Ranch in Thompson River Valley.

A place of Honour for PTSD sufferers

Ranch to welcome members of Armed Forces, first responders and other uniformed personnel

GORDON MCINTYRE

THOMPSON RIVER VALLEY — The hills sweep down to the South Thompson River at the bottom of the valley and the fall trees are a silent explosion of yellow.

Farmstead and grazing horses surround the bucolic site, a quiet and peaceful place perfect for the new tenants.

"Honour Ranch will open in a few months, welcoming members of the armed forces, first responders and other uniformed personnel suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)."

"Starting today we'll get our programming in place," said Allan De Genova, the president of Honour House Society. "We will save hundreds and hundreds of lives, beginning early in the new year."

Most of the money for the

ranch came from donors, as did the furniture, washers and dryers, TVs. One anonymous donor provided \$181,000 and Ian Porter, principal at Everest Realty Advisors, donated the land, a former adventure park called Zippity Doo Dah that had fallen into receivership.

"Ian handed me the keys in January and said 'make it happen,'" De Genova said as he tried to hold back tears.

"It's been a long journey. For those unfamiliar with Honour House, De Genova was inspired by the story of Capt. Trevor Greene, a Canadian Armed Forces member attacked viciously with an axe to the head in Afghanistan in 2006.

"Honour House began operation in New Westminster in 2009, housing veterans, active soldiers and their families for free while they get treatment. To date, more than 10,000 free

nights have been offered. The idea for a ranch began a couple of years ago, and other Porter donated the land, snowballed.

There are 10 cabins and 10 more will be built, with a main chalet for dining and lounging. Only months ago the site sat in disrepair, with broken sewage pipes and a muddy mess where the chalet sits today.

De Genova, an honorary colonel at 5th Field Artillery Regiment, thanked pretty much every donor and volunteer who helped make his dream come true, people such as Bev Hodgson who with her new husband Gord spent their recent honeymoon putting up rails and fences at the ranch.

Hodgson also happens to be a paramedic, going on 27 years now. The first fatal car crash she

attended involved three guys whose vehicle was sliced through by a pickup truck. He warned, the following is graphic.

"All three of them were spread all over the highway," Hodgson, representing her paramedics' union, said. "We put them into bags and had to choose which piece was what because back then we were the body removal."

"We put them into pieces: Intestines, brains, kidneys, pieces of the spine. That's still very vivid in my mind. I can still see that image."

The ranch is three kilometres off Highway 97C, 15 kilometres south of Ashcroft, her hometown. "You can't be in this job and not have a critical incident happen to you," she said. "I've had some of my partners quit the Ambulance Service, people who suffered different

events that haunted them and couldn't see themselves getting back into an ambulance again."

"Honour Ranch is going to be great because people who have suffered from PTSD, they're still working. They're working and it's just that some things trigger them: A child's death, a certain murder, something that sticks with them and they can't let it go and it will trigger them again if they have the same type of calls happen."

There will be mental-health professional on-site. Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan sent a congratulatory letter and special medal to Bob Parkinson, a paramedic who has long lobbied for PTSD support.

And Judy Darcy, provincial minister of mental health and addictions whose riding happens to be home to Honour

House, told the crowd how her family's life had been affected by PTSD.

Her father had been captured by the Nazis in the Second World War and sent to a prison camp, where he managed to keep the fact he was a Jew secret. But the rest of his family were not as fortunate and he lost them.

"He carried the trauma of war and kept it a secret," Darcy said. "For about six decades her dad kept it bottled up, before telling his family a few years before his death at the age of 83 that he'd been a Jewish POW."

"Honour Ranch is saying to first responders and people in uniform that the days of 'suck it up and soldier on' are over," she said.
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Honour Ranch 2019

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