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Celebrating the opening of the RIMO airport lounge

September 12, 2013 - Rhode Island

I recently had the honor of joining governor Lincoln Chafee, Rhode Island Airport Corp. CEO Kelly Fredericks, major general Kevin McBride, the adjutant general for the State of Rhode Island, elected officials, including retired Navy lieutenant and city councilwoman Camille Vella-Wilkinson, and dozens of military men and women, past and present, to celebrate the opening of the Rhode Island Military Organization (RIMO) Airport Lounge at Warwick's T.F. Green Airport.

Since its founding, the RIMO has been hard at work to provide support and services to our military, and we have been collaborating with them to make the City of Warwick one of the most military-supportive municipalities in the state. The lounge is one of several critical milestone projects that RIMO has identified and developed; others include the establishment of the Student Veterans Organization, headquartered at the Community College of Rhode Island's Warwick campus and the establishment of a local Veterans Resource Center in our Oakland Beach neighborhood.

The lounge project, three years in the making, is meant to offer members of Rhode Island's military a comfortable, welcoming and serene place to spend private time with their families when returning from or heading out to deployment. The room, furnished and stocked completely with donations from individuals and local businesses, features plush leather seating, soft lighting, lush carpeting, a flat screen television and DVD, and a refrigerator. Pepsi-Cola and the Girl Scouts of Rhode Island are donating refreshments - including the Scouts' famous cookies - for the foreseeable future.

During the ceremony, RI National Guard chief master sergeant Lori Ashness noted that the freshly-painted walls are bare. This, she said, is not an oversight, but part of the RIMO's plan for its clients to claim the lounge as their own. A donated shadow box will be installed for military personnel to leave their coins, and a large corkboard will be hung, allowing people to leave notes, photos, patches and other memorabilia to commemorate their journeys.

The lounge will be staffed daily, from early morning until at least 10 p.m., and, while a number of volunteers - from students to World War II veterans - have stepped forward, more help is needed. If you know of anyone who would be interested in volunteering, or if you would like to make a donation to support this worthwhile cause, please contact Dorothy Healy, the group's volunteer coordinator, at RIMOVolunteer@gmail.com

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick and the chairman of the RIPTA board of directors.

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