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LOCAL - LIFESTYLE

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Cabrillo unveils new vets center

Access to health, social and educational services streamlined

By **TOVIN LAPAN**

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APTOS — Veterans now have a “triage” center for social services at Cabrillo College, an effort to make the transition into school from military service a bit easier and more welcoming.

Cabrillo student and Air Force veteran Roderick Moreland, 24, helped champion

the need for a Veterans Information Center on campus, and on Wednesday helped introduce the community to the center during a grand opening.

“This is triage for returning veterans, to link them up with health services, social services and educational benefits,” Moreland said from beneath a large white cowboy hat that shaded his bearded face from the afternoon sun.

“When I came here I had to talk to three or four people to figure everything out, and there really wasn’t much of a network for

veterans. Now they just have to go to one place to get the information and assistance they need.”

Veterans of all ages attended the grand opening, and several took the time to thank Moreland personally for his efforts.

Capitola Mayor Dennis Norton, who attended the ceremony, received his associate’s degree from Cabrillo after returning from the Vietnam War.

“This is a great idea,” Norton said.

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DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Rep. Sam Farr tours Cabrillo College’s new Veterans Information Center with student veterans Roderick Moreland and Benjamin Abel, second from right, Wednesday.

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“When I was here we didn’t have anything like this, and it really is needed. It’s great for the veterans and their families.”

While the center is designed to help Cabrillo’s student veterans — there are approximately 200 enrolled this year — it is open to anyone who has served in the military.

The center will provide peer-to-peer mentoring, academic counseling, tutoring and other services.

Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, presented Moreland with a certificate of recognition Wednesday.

“Santa Cruz is known as a community that has often

opposed wars,” Farr said. “You can criticize the conflict and the decisions of the commander in chief, but when it comes down to the men and women in uniform, we will be 100 percent supportive.”

Farr added that 90 percent of those who have fought in Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years are expected to file for disability.

“Veterans are coming from a totally different place and totally different background from other students,” said Moreland, president of the Cabrillo College Veterans Club. “Veterans have the highest suicide rate among students. A lot of that is attributable to stress. So, if we can take away just a little bit of that stress while veterans make this difficult transition, we’ve done our job.”