

Community Blueprint to help military

BY DEAN POLING
THE VALDOSTA DAILYTIMES

VALDOSTA — Valdosta Lowndes County will serve as a pilot program to coordinate, organize and develop community services to help military members, veterans and their families.



Ryan

This week, Vice Admiral Norb Ryan is scheduled to visit Valdosta to discuss and implement the Community Blueprint program. Ryan is also president of the Military Officers Association of America. He asked for recommendations of three American cities for the pilot program from among MOAA's 416 chapter cities, said Buddy Johnson of Valdosta.

Johnson is a member of the Valdosta MOAA chapter, which was instrumental in initiating the successful Honor Flight South Georgia program a few years ago. Honor Flight took hundreds of regional World War II veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit the World War II Memorial. Johnson is a regional director in the national Honor Flight organization.

The Community Blueprint plan wanted a small town, a medium-sized city and a large city for the pilot program. The South Georgia MOAA chapter recommended Valdosta, which was selected as the medium-sized pilot city. Valdosta joins Huntsville, Texas, and Tyler, Texas, as pilot cities.

The idea behind

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Community Blueprint is finding a way to "help local leaders assess and improve their community's support for veterans, warriors and their families," according to a mission statement.

Representatives from 55 non-profit organizations, military family service organizations, faith-based groups and senior Veterans Administration, Department of Defense and Department of Labor officials identified eight mission areas.

These are behavioral health, education, employment, family strength, financial-legal services, homelessness, reintegration, and volunteerism.

With Valdosta selected as one of the pilot cities, area organizations which fit into the mission areas have been invited to participate, Johnson said.

MOAA first asked Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce to participate in the Community Blueprint program. Several other organizations that can help the military and veterans in the mission ar-

reas have also been invited to participate. Together, these groups can gain a better "understanding of how they can contribute to an improved support matrix, including offering opportunities for civilians, service members, veterans, and their families to volunteer and serve alongside each other."

Ryan is expected to arrive Monday evening in Valdosta and meet with organization representatives and other interested community leaders, 10 a.m. Tuesday, May 24, Holiday Inn and Conference Center, 1805 W. Hill Ave.