



August 27, 2011

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact Sheila Abarr, AFRH Public Affairs Officer  
Tel: 202-445-0548 | Email: Sheila.Abarr@afrh.gov

**AFRH SAFEGUARDS ITS VETERANS AFTER QUAKE SIGNIFICANTLY DAMAGES HISTORIC BUILDINGS.  
LANDMARKS STILL IN JEOPARDY AS RETIREMENT COMMUNITY BRACES FOR HURRICANE IRENE.**

***Armed Forces Retirement Home – Washington*** – On Tuesday, August 23, 2011 at 1:50 pm, the residents and staff of the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) had their world shook by a 5.8 magnitude earthquake, which significantly impacted the historic AFRH-Washington campus. All 600 residents are now safe and secure in current dormitories buildings thanks to swift staff action. However, several historic buildings at AFRH, which are now closed, have severe cracks, caved-in ceilings, and crumbling rocks. At present, these compromised landmark structures are in jeopardy of further destruction given the impending Hurricane Irene.

Noteworthy damage occurred in the Sheridan Dormitory, home to all Independent Living residents. Three of the five elevators were compromised when weights inside collapsed in the quake, leaving just two elevators operational. Right after the quake subsided, AFRH staff rapidly evacuated all residents from that building as well as the healthcare facility, LaGarde, and attended to the residents' personal health needs. Now some 600 residents remain steadfast and very thankful for their safety.

At an AFRH Town Hall meeting Thursday, resident Jim Webster (Navy, WWII veteran) stood and exclaimed, "The AFRH staff was fantastic, and we should all stand and applaud them!" After a standing ovation by the residents, Webster added, "We are safe, we got evacuated from our building, everything went smoothly, and we have our food on time! They are great."

Resident Wilfred McCarty (Army, WWII vet) said he saw so many acts of kindness at AFRH in the aftermath of the quake. "A lady-friend of mine who uses a walker was carried down the stairs on the back of a construction worker", said an emotional McCarty. "A male social worker got plates of food to take to residents who couldn't stand in line. And our staff stayed to help way beyond normal work hours", he added.

AFRH Acting COO Steve McManus stated, "August 23 was a frightening day in many ways, yet it was a lucky day for the AFRH. Thanks to everyone's quick and decisive actions, we moved everyone out of harm's way in a very short period of time." When the quake struck, McManus was conducting a meeting in a conference room where the ceiling collapsed from falling concrete slabs, rubble, and debris.

"Our primary focus over the past two days has been the safety and comfort of our residents", said McManus. He stated, "Our nation's heroes have sacrificed a great deal to ensure our safety in the past, so we regard their safety and wellbeing as our top priority". To accommodate the veterans, Dining Services was relocated to the Fitness Center in the Sheridan dormitory and is fully operational. In fact, the residents have had no interruption at all in community services such as dining, healthcare, or activities.

Along with securing resident safety, management implemented a damage-control plan to safeguard the historic AFRH-W grounds, which date back to 1851. The hardest hit building was the landmark 1850s-era Sherman Building, home to AFRH management, Resident Activities, Dining Services, and The William E. Doar Jr. Public Charter School for the Performing Arts (WEDJ) ([www.wedjschool.us](http://www.wedjschool.us)). All residents, 200 children, and all associated staff members were quickly and safely evacuated with no reported injuries. The charter school was notified that it would be at least two months before they can re-occupy their space.

In the Sherman Building, many large stone blocks, which form the crenellation around the building, crashed inward through the roof into classrooms and offices and out onto the ground. Now there are numerous pieces of stone that did not fall – but are holding on by a thread around the parapet. Besides falling stone, the key issue is the clock tower of

Sherman South. There are major cracks through the arches and around one of its corners, and the structure is visibly leaning to the west.

Justin Seffens, AFRH Facilities Manager, is working with structural engineers to shore up the damage in the Sherman Building. The consensus of engineers and masonry experts is that the structure is severely compromised and there is a possibility of immediate failure, especially given the intense wind and rain that is expected from Hurricane Irene, which will hit Washington on Saturday.

The Sherman Building will be stabilized over the next two days to hopefully prevent more damage. Engineers will "strap" the tower with 12-inch industrial fabric bands to prevent it from falling. Then, they will begin to dismantle stone from the highest points downward to be re-installed later. Additional damage at AFRH-W includes the chimneystacks at the historic living Quarters 1 and 2 are similarly cracked, though the damage there is not as severe as that of the Sherman Building.

### **About AFRH-Washington**

The AFRH-Washington is home to 600 former enlisted and veterans, and is host to the historic Lincoln Cottage (the original "Soldiers' Home, circa 1851). The residents have served in many conflicts and eras including World War II, Vietnam, The Korean War, and Desert Storm. The community consists of 272 acres with walking paths, a golf course, a bowling center, and a fitness center.

AFRH-Washington is recognized as having a national level of historic significance because of the important role it has played in US military history, as well as its legacy in politics, medicine, agriculture, landscape, and architecture. About 102 historic buildings, structures, and objects dating from 1842 to 1944 are located here, along with several historically significant landscape features.

The AFRH-Washington is a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places and the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic sites. The Lincoln Cottage and the three original masonry buildings constructed in 1854 were all designated as a single National Historic Landmark in 1979. And, in 2000, President William Clinton dedicated a section of the campus as the President Lincoln's Cottage National Monument.

The Sherman Building is located within the Soldiers' Home National Historic Landmark – one of four buildings with a "Key" level of historic significance. Since 2004, the Sherman has housed the main administrative offices of the AFRH. The Sherman Building is a visual landmark from many points throughout the Washington region.

For more information about AFRH and to see photos of residents and earthquake damages, please visit [www.afrh.gov](http://www.afrh.gov).

##