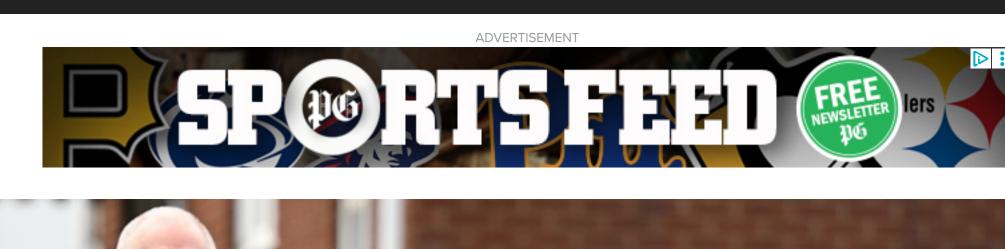
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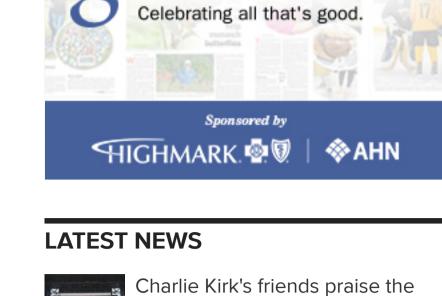
SEP 20, 2025 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ababetski@post-gazette.com 🛛 🔀

headquarters of one of the state's largest nonprofits supporting



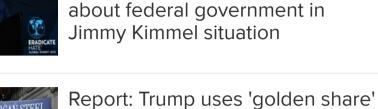
carefully unfolded an American flag and saluted once it was

hoisted atop its pole, ceremonially opening the sharp, new



slain conservative activist's faith at memorial Josh Shapiro raises concerns

Illinois



to stop U.S. Steel plant closure in





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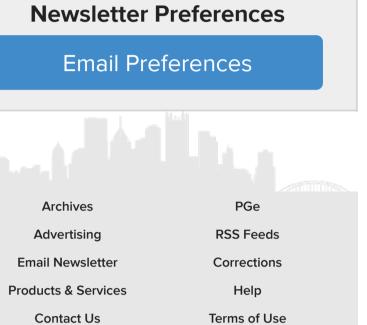
By medicalhelp.me

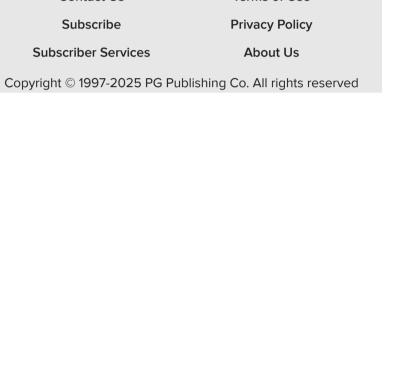
Show' theme, dies at 88

Sonny Curtis, Crickets member who penned 'Mary Tyler Moore

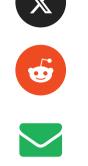


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Mr. Higdon, who served in the Navy during the Vietnam War era and later in the Army, was one of several dozen veterans who gathered at Operation Troop Appreciation's events center at 2017 Pennsylvania Ave. in West Mifflin

U.S. troops.

OTA founder Kristen Holloway, whose husband served in the military, started the organization in 2004 as a way to send clothes to a Pennsylvania National Guard platoon serving in Iraq.

Westmoreland counties.

of our troops."

renovate.

Beach.

deployed soldiers.

She expanded her mission in 2014 to support not only deployed soldiers, but returning veterans, creating "Welcome Home" kits with bedding, kitchenware, food and other essentials. Fully 90% of OTA's proceeds go directly toward soldiers and

Butler, Fayette, Green, Lawrence, Washington and

rent-free space in Century III Mall, to its most recent address, in the South Hills Industrial Park. "Our plan wasn't to grow into a nationally recognized nonprofit," Ms. Orluk told the assembled crowd. "It's just been a pleasure to build these relationships and work together with you in support

OTA's two-floor, 11,000-square-foot facility, once owned by the

Knights of Columbus, was in poor condition when Ms. Orluk

closed the sale three years ago; it cost more than \$150,000 to

OTA received plenty of help from local politicians and large

organizations, including the Pittsburgh Steelers and The Home

Depot, which provided floor and ceiling tiles as well as a crew to

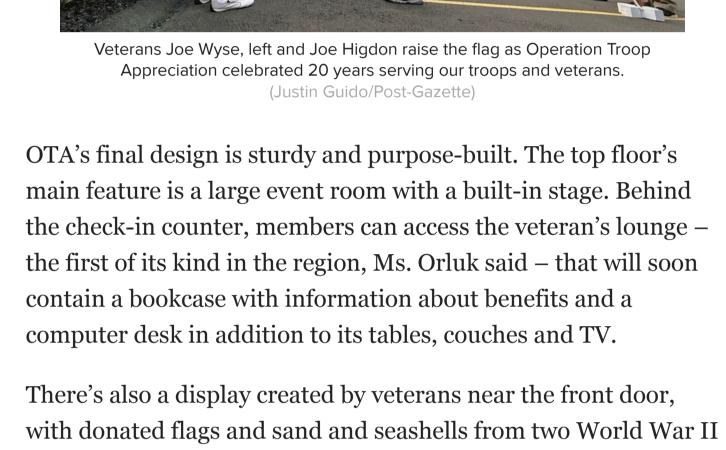
veterans, and the organization estimates that it has served more

than 210,000 members of the military from Allegheny, Beaver,

Current CEO Monica Orluk worked with Ms. Holloway nearly

from the beginning, through OTA's 15 years of operating out of a

assist with construction.



D-Day landing sites in Normandy: Utah Beach and Omaha

The spacious basement is the heart of OTA's operation. Ms.

Orluk led a tour through rooms full of clothes and protein-rich

food stacked nearly to the ceiling, with some boxes marked with

sticky notes denoting when they would be sent to deployed soldiers. Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Hill, a Marine Corps veteran from Pittsburgh who served two tours in Vietnam and more than 30 years in the Army Reserves, said care packages like OTA's

often made the difference between a bad day and a good one for

"When you get care packages, that means the world," he said.

"This organization has done so much for so many in

southwestern Pennsylvania." OTA's conference room commanded the middle of the basement floor, flanked by an assembly line for "Welcome Home" kits. The organization's offices and a full kitchen rounded out the floor.

Matthew Claycomb, an Army veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom

who works to find housing for homeless veterans through the

Veterans Leadership Program, said OTA's "Welcome Home"

"It's so important that you continue what you're doing to help

packages have helped to supplement his efforts.

out," he said. "I've never seen anyone here in this organization turn somebody away." First Published: September 20, 2025, 6:59 p.m. *Updated: September 21, 2025, 11:27 a.m.*

Adam Babetski is a business reporter for the Post-

Gazette. He earned bachelor's degrees in journalism

and medieval history from Penn State and a master's

in investigative journalism from Northwestern.

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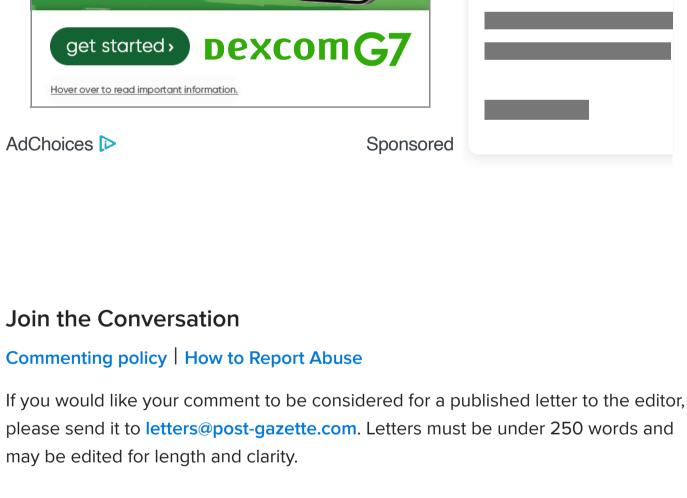
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Thank you, Monica for all the work you do for our troops.

Congratulations on your new headquarters.

I want to thank all veterans for their service.

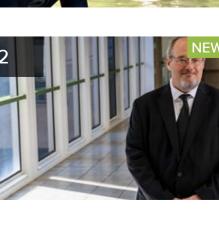
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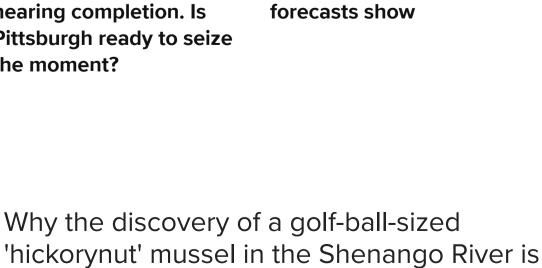
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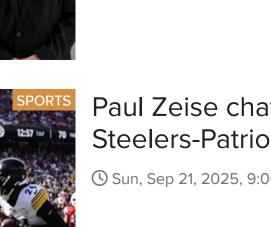
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