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A Needed Assist for Veterans

Investor David P. O'Connor donates to a new Resilience Center at Teachers College

By **MELANIE GRAYCE WEST**

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To assist veterans and their families in the transition from military to civilian life, David P. O'Connor is giving \$1 million to fund a new center at Columbia University's Teachers College.

The recently launched Resilience Center for Veterans & Families studies the trauma, experiences and difficulties faced by veterans and works to develop and assess intervention programs that can best help them.

Mr. O'Connor, 51 years old, is managing partner of High Rise Capital Partners LLC, an investment firm. For more than a decade, he has served as a non-trustee member of the college's investment committee, a role that he was encouraged to take by his friend and former business partner Arthur Zankel, who served as a trustee. Mr. Zankel, who struggled with depression, committed suicide in 2005.

Mr. O'Connor said he and his wife, Maureen, were motivated to donate out of gratitude to members of the military, but also because of a growing understanding that veterans return from service in various mental states, each with a specific need.

While there are a lot of grass-roots and large, institutional organizations that support veterans, said Mr. O'Connor, there is more to do. "I'm proud of the way that our nation



David P. O'Connor

treats our veterans of these recent battles,” he said, “but we have to recognize we have to be in this for the long haul to support them and help them assimilate and flourish in civilian life.”

Mr. O'Connor said one of the most intriguing aspects of the research that will be done to support veterans will occur in the college's Loss, Trauma and Emotion Lab, led by George Bonanno. While some veterans don't display any obvious, immediate impact from trauma, others develop problems over time.

One area of study will be to map veterans' resiliency over time, said Dr. Bonanno. Another will look at how veterans manage the daunting transition from active duty to veteran status. In addition, the gift from the O'Connors will support cultural-competency training for counselors who work in the

college's clinic and meet with veterans.

Dr. Bonanno said there has been a general interest in trauma and resiliency since the Sept. 11 attacks, but that there is much more to learn about suicide, the experiences of women in the military and how military training to deal with trauma either hinders or helps veterans.

“You just don't go away for two weeks and be a soldier and then come home,” said Dr.

Bonanno. “When you become a soldier you’re in a completely different world.”

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