

Toms River VA Outpatient Clinic Ribbon Cutting

*Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Chris Smith
Toms River, NJ—November 18, 2024*

Welcome Under-Secretary Elnahal, Mayor Rodrick, VA New Jersey Healthcare officials, medical professionals, clinic staff, and most of all welcome veterans to the new, state-of-the-art, Toms River VA Outpatient Clinic.

We gather here today to solemnly and joyously recommit ourselves to President Lincoln's powerful challenge to his own and each generation of Americans.

In his second inaugural address he said: "With malice toward none with charity for all with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan ~ to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

Because of your noble sacrifice and bravery and tenacity, we are free and can hope for a sustainable peace and a better tomorrow.

Words are inadequate to fully convey America's thanks.

As many of you know, I led the successful effort in the 1980's to establish an Ocean County VA clinic to address the overwhelming need we saw then for veteran's care here in the region.

In fact, I won House passage of three separate pieces of legislation in 1986, 1987, and then again in 1988—all of which required the Veterans Administration to establish a veterans' clinic in Ocean County. In response, the VA finally began its work on the clinic in 1988, a facility which served its purpose but could no longer keep up with the capacity.

Today's Toms River VA Clinic is designed to better meet the unique healthcare needs of an ever-growing veteran's population in Ocean County and the region with enhanced capacity to offer world-class comprehensive medical care, in an expanded and modernized setting.

Bottom line: more veterans better served with services they need with fewer wait times.

Recognizing this community's long and steadfast commitment to supporting Veterans, and supporting the infrastructure necessary to provide their care, at the urging of local veterans and former Mayor Mo Hill, I have introduced legislation joined by Andy Kim to name this clinic in honor of long-time Toms River resident Leonard G. Lomell ("Bud" Lomell)—a highly decorated WWII Army Ranger, a D-Day Veteran, and a veteran of the Battle of Hürtgen Forest. For his leadership and extraordinary bravery, he received the Purple Heart, a Silver Star, and a Bronze Star.

Upon his return home, he accepted an appointment as the first Director of the Ocean County Veterans Bureau, a position from which he helped his fellow veterans access the services, housing, and healthcare they needed. There is no more fitting individual deserving of this honor.

May God continue to bless and protect and strengthen and where needed—heal—each and every veteran and his or her family.