

‘Comfort Rucks’ for Homeless Vets

Missouri VFW and Auxiliary members provide community outreach

Dec 03, 2019

Homeless veterans in Missouri found helping hands in VFW and Auxiliary members. During the Department of Missouri’s Council of Administration community service event at Branson’s Chateau on the Lake in September, members filled 172 “Comfort Rucks” for homeless vets.

Post and Auxiliary members, as well as corporate sponsors and outside groups donated rucksacks, personal care items and cold-weather gear to fill the rucksacks. The sacks will be distributed at veteran outreach events throughout Missouri.

“There are 523 counted homeless veterans in the state of Missouri,” VFW Department Homeless Chairman Ted Donaldson said. “However, there is a large part Missouri where we cannot verify the numbers of homeless veterans, so I am sure they are underreported. We use the numbers from homeless counts to be as accurate as we can.”

Additionally, VFW Department of Missouri Commander Troy Williams said service officers and members accepted nearly 50 referral forms for compensation and pension benefits and answered questions about VFW at six locations in Branson. Members also distributed Buddy Poppies, handed out Voice of Democracy and Patriot’s Pen essay forms and recruited members for the organization.

Williams is asking Missouri VFW Post and Auxiliary members to become more active in their communities with events like the Branson outreach.

“I thought it was great fun,” District 1 Commander David Klaassen said. “We were out in the community, and people got to see us.”

Department Surgeon and Post 5925 Commander Royce Kelb is active in Benton County helping veterans apply for benefits.

“Right now, the Blue Water Navy Act allows veterans who were 12 miles off the Vietnam shore to apply for benefits,” he said. “The herbicides came out over the water and these

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veterans have the same kind of cancers and health problems. They need to reach out to a VFW service officer.”

VFW Quartermaster General Debra Anderson, a Desert Storm veteran, represented the national organization at the meeting.

“The community service and outreach activities are what the VFW is all about,” she said.

The events at the Council of Administration meeting Saturday are a first for POW/MIA Chairman Joseph Cerchi.

“Usually, after the meetings, everyone disappears,” he said as he helped fill rucksacks. “Look at this, we’re all standing here like a family.”

Story and photo by Teresa Shaw, Richmond Daily News.

This article is featured in the November/December 2019 issue of VFW Checkpoint. If you're a Post, District or Department Commander and aren't receiving the Checkpoint e-newsletter, please contact the VFW magazine at magazine@vfw.org.