

VFW Makes 'A Meaningful Difference'

As the second annual VFW Day of Service approaches in May, VFW Posts are encouraged to make plans now for volunteer events

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VFW members should mark their calendars now for the second annual VFW Day of Service is scheduled to kick off May 6. The inaugural event last year saw more than 400 Posts worldwide engaging in activities benefiting communities.

According to VFW Communications Director Randi Law, 98 percent of Posts participating last year have already said they will host events again this year.

“Our members show up when there’s a need,” Law said. “Day of Service offers a great way for them to demonstrate what they stand for, and that’s service to others. It should be noted that May 6 is the program’s start date and Posts are encouraged to host a Day of Service event then, or anytime thereafter during the month.”

This day of serving was created following the success of VFW’s #StillServing campaign, which launched in 2020. The social media campaign recognizes VFW members’ commitment to community service. Since then, more than 3 million people have engaged in the campaign.

“Bringing veterans and the community together to make a meaningful difference is what the VFW does,” Law said. “Our members are still serving.”

Here is a look at how a few Posts participated in the inaugural VFW Day of Service last year.

VFW POST 11079 CELEBRATES A MONTH-LONG “DAY” OF SERVICE

VFW Post 11079, in Elgin, South Carolina, opted to serve its community throughout the entire month of May. Beautifying the community, helping at-risk pets and offering resources to those in need were on the schedule for the month.

The Post’s day — or month — of service kicked off with its members venturing out into their

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local community.

“The comrades and incoming Auxiliary president completed a community cleanup,” said Post Commander Christine Rogers. “We collected 17 bags of trash along the roads near our Post.”

Next, members geared up to host a food drive. All donations were delivered to a local food pantry in dire need.

“We found out that they had to close every other week due to not having enough food donations,” said Rogers. “We collected over 2,500 pounds of food. This drive came at the right time.”

Recognizing both an urgent and ongoing need, the Post intends to continue helping. Partnering with a local food bank, they hope to make monthly donations.

Overlooking no one, the Post also held a collection for animal friends, inviting the community to donate food, towels, blankets and toys for distribution to local pet shelters.

The Post held its final event on May 21. All proceeds from the Support Your Local Heroes Benefit went to area firefighters and veterans. Partnering with the Blaney Fire Department, Post members organized an event that included a dunk tank to “dip” firefighters as well as games for all ages. Local vendors were also available to share information and resources with veterans.

‘WE STRENGTHENED THE TIES THAT HOLD US TOGETHER’

Because of COVID-19, many events and activities were put on hold in Brainerd, Minnesota, and community members were hesitant to come together in 2021.

“People had been staying away from public gatherings,” said VFW Post 1647 Auxiliary President Sue Sterling. “It was disheartening to see our member attendance dwindle.”

Helen Doucette, Auxiliary Post Sr. Vice President and 45-year member, came up with an idea to host a freedom festival for VFW Day of Service. She hoped the event would encourage the community to reconnect while celebrating the Post’s mission and goals.

“She is truly an inspiration,” said Sterling.

Doucette, along with VFW members, the local Disabled Veterans of America chapter and the city council worked together to organize Brainerd’s first-ever Armed Forces Day Freedom Festival on May 21. It required months of planning and extensive collaboration.

“This Freedom Festival was conceived as an Auxiliary activity for raising awareness of our

cause, but the Post worked with us every step of the way to make it the success it was,” Sterling said.

Local businesses also chipped in, donating goods and services to ensure people enjoyed the event. Sterling said that despite gloomy weather, it was a patriotic day that included face painting, caricatures, games, music and prize raffles.

Additionally, organizers used the event to celebrate tradition and teach younger generations about sacred customs, such as flag retirement and flag-folding ceremonies.

“Some kids asked questions when they saw the flag burning,” said Sterling. “One father was able to share with his son that this was how we show respect to the symbol of our country.”

During another ceremony, attendees learned how to fold a flag, what each fold represented and how it honored the person who served under it.

“It was heartwarming to witness an 8-year-old girl as she folded the flag with her father and to watch as adults learned, too,” Sterling said. “There was a lot of happiness that unfolded that day.”

Above all, Sterling was grateful to see how the event united so many. She hopes it serves as an example for other communities.

“The most encouraging facet of this event was the way everyone pulled together to make it work,” Sterling said. “Our VFW members worked together unselfishly to make it a success, and in doing that work, we strengthened the ties that hold us together.”

‘HEARTWARMING GENEROSITY’ MAKES AN IMPACT

In Bangkok, Thailand, members of VFW Post 9951 witnessed the devastating impact COVID-19 lockdowns had on struggling communities. They acted quickly to lend support in 2020 and have not let up since. For the Post, the inaugural VFW Day of Service offered an opportunity to continue its good work and generosity.

“VFW Post 9951 has been supporting the Place of Grace food bank for the past two years,” said Post Quartermaster William Stanley. “Lockdowns hit the working poor hard, and the Post sustained a supply of food during this time without external support.”

Although COVID-19 lockdowns have mostly passed, Stanley says people are still struggling because of inflation. As long as such problems persist, the Post will continue supporting the food bank, which serves five Bangkok districts. But that is not all its members plan to do.

“We recently voted to provide support for an orphanage,” Stanley said. “We intend to buy shoes, clothing and hygiene products for the children.”

Stanley admires the members who make such vital assistance possible.

“The heartwarming generosity and comradeship of our members sustains our Charity Fund and makes us all proud to be part of the VFW organization,” Stanley said. “We have had a significant impact in a very small corner of the world.”

To learn more about the second annual VFW Day of Service and to register your Post, visit VFWDayofService.org.

This article is featured in the 2023 February issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.