

# VFW Members 'Adapt and Overcome' to Provide Disaster Relief

## VFW efforts in North Carolina and Florida brought relief to Posts and communities in the paths of destruction

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From Hurricane Florence in North Carolina to Hurricane Michael in Florida, the VFW offered support during hurricane relief efforts last year.

### **'Started with a Social Media Post'**

Before Florence made landfall in September, the Department of North Carolina designated six Posts across the state as staging areas for receiving and distributing donated items, such as bottled water, diapers and food. One of those Posts was VFW Post 7383 in Cary.

Post 7383 Junior Vice Commander Tom Baker, a Navy veteran, said the efforts were much like a "logistics situation in a combat zone," because they had to figure out how to supply victims.

"We weren't able to get in some areas until it was safe to do so," Baker said. "That's why we planned to have all the staged sites ahead of time, so that when the storm passed, we would have Posts that had supplies ready to go."

Baker, who served in Iraq from 2009 to 2010, said local residents and many VFW members donated supplies for the people affected by the hurricane.

"We even had a truck with supplies come up from Waco, Texas, because they saw our social media push for donations," Baker said. "We are just getting donations from everywhere. It's amazing that it all just started with a social media post and media interviews."

### **Post Brings Hope to Florida Panhandle**

Anna Miner, a member of Post 10555 in Panama City Beach, Fla., is a retired Army major who earned her VFW eligibility in Berlin in 1973-76 and served two tours in South Korea in

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1989-90 and 1993-94. She said four of VFW's five Florida District 17 Posts were damaged during Hurricane Michael.

"We had very little damage at Post 10555," Miner said. "So our commander, Susan Johnson, set up the Post as a distribution point to help all the other Posts."

Miner said, as of early January, efforts to restore the damaged Posts in Florida District 17 are "ongoing."

Post 10555 members helped in other ways, too. Along with the HOPE (Healing Our Patriots with Equines) Project, headed by Post 10555 Assistant Chaplain Dave Togdon, they created a supply distribution point in Youngstown, Fla., located about 20 miles northeast of Panama City Beach in the state's panhandle.

Over a two-week period in October, the HOPE Project and members of Post 10555 helped an average of more than 170 community members each day. Distribution of supplies, such as baby wipes and food, were given to families up until the first week of December, according to Miner.

She added that many VFW Posts in Florida, Alabama, Texas, Maine, Illinois and Mississippi sent supplies and money for distribution. Miner also said that the Post 10555 Auxiliary received more than \$13,000 in donations to help veterans and families in the area.

Post 10555 Auxiliary members, according to Miner, also provided more than 100 pairs of shoes and helped distribute coats to school children in the area.

"Our Auxiliary was a very important part of helping the communities and schools," Miner said. "As a VFW District, we hung together and helped each other out, as well as our communities."

### **VFW Succeeds in 'Austere Environments'**

Baker believes the reason VFW is successful in conducting relief efforts with short notice in "austere environments" is because of the military experience throughout the organization.

"A majority of my 20s were spent trying to figure out how to move men and material, and operate in denied territory," said the 34-year-old. "With everything our members had to take into account during their service, they now have the experience and skills that allow them to come up with ideas of how to solve problems in a quick manner."

Tim Woods, commander of VFW Post 2423 in Indian Trail, N.C., also said that VFW members have the military mentality to "adapt and overcome."

Woods is a former Navy machinist's mate who served aboard the USS Duluth during

Operation Determined Response in 2000. His Post, like Baker's, also was a designated staging area for North Carolina during the storm. He said his Post had a lot of community support and received many donated items during relief efforts.

"We've been in contact with our state's Department and Posts across the state to find out who needs what in each of the areas," Woods said. "Even if we have limited sleeping hours and have to drive hundreds of miles out of the way to make it to certain areas, we do it."

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