

# VFW Post Feeds Hungry Veterans

## **In a partnership with a Pennsylvania food bank, VFW members in Huntingdon, Pa., use their Post's gaming proceeds to feed 120 veterans and their families every month**

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In 2014, Feeding America initiated a Hunger in America national study. It showed that one in five households served by the Feeding America network has at least one member that has served or is currently serving in the military.

In Pennsylvania, that number is higher. The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank reported that within its 27 county-service territory, 26 percent of all households receiving assistance have at least one member who served in uniform.

To help combat this problem, in 2015, the food bank initiated MilitaryShare, which offers monthly food distributions at VFW and American Legion posts to veterans. VFW Post 1754 in Huntingdon is one such distribution site.

According to Post 1754 member Reeder Swartz, he has about 25 volunteers each month to distribute the food. In two hours' time, some 120 families are served.

Each family receives eggs, milk, two types of meat, 40 pounds of dry goods, 10 pounds of potatoes, apples, onions and whatever fresh fruits and vegetables are in season.

It costs the Post \$10 per family, but Swartz said area businesses and churches host fundraising events for the food distribution.

"Pennsylvania state law requires that 60 percent of all gambling proceeds go back into the community," Swartz said. "The two VFW Posts in Huntingdon County use part of their proceeds to pay for this."

To qualify for the distribution, each family must be pre-approved. They need to provide a copy of a DD-214 or VA medical card and also meet certain federal income guidelines.

### **NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS**

406 W. 34th Street  
Kansas City, MO 64111  
Office 816.756.3390  
Fax 816.968.1157

### **WASHINGTON OFFICE**

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
Office 202.543.2239  
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org  
www.vfw.org

“It’s pretty simple,” Swartz said. “Each family drives into the distribution site, shows proper ID, opens their trunk, and we load the food and they take off.”

For those unable to drive, volunteers deliver food to homes. Swartz recalled a time when an 85-year-old woman and her 86-year-old husband were thrilled by taco shells.

“She calls the delivery her ‘goody box,’” Swartz said. “The next time I went to their home, they both told me they had never had taco shells in their lives, and that they really liked those a lot.”

Swartz said that Huntingdon County has the highest unemployment rate in the state and that many of the veterans he helps do not have much to live on.

“When our Post started doing this last January, we were feeding 32 families,” said Swartz, who served in Vietnam in 1968. “I had a goal that we would feed 100 families. We are now up to 120. It’s been so heartwarming for me.”

For Greg Stegall, MilitaryShare and Mobile Distribution manager with the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, this program is critical because he doesn’t want to see those who have served in the military go hungry.

A former member of the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard in Washington, D.C., Stegall’s son is a veteran, and his father was a WWII vet whose twin brother died in France.

“Too many veterans feel ashamed and don’t want to ask for help,” he said. “But it’s not just about the veteran. It’s the spouse and the kids who are at home, too.”

Stegall said that in addition to 24 monthly distribution sites, a homeless shelter is serviced weekly. Distribution also is done on a sporadic basis with National Guard units.

“I like working with VFW and American Legion because they are committed to taking care of their own,” Stegall said.

For more information on MilitaryShare, visit [www.centralpafoodbank.org](http://www.centralpafoodbank.org).

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