

In Virginia, two VFW Posts teamed up to help wounded veterans in nearby military hospitals.

By Janie Blankenship

# VFW Members Provide a Break From Hospital Life

Since February remembers *Hospitalized Veterans Week*, now is a good time to highlight what one group of veterans in Virginia is doing on behalf of recently wounded warriors recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

Members of Post 3150 in Arlington, Va., and Post 8208 in Ruckersville, Va., sponsor a Sunday brunch for the wounded twice a month at the Arlington Post. Although they have a two-hour drive to get there, members of 8208 are responsible for transporting the patients from the hospitals to the Post.

According to Ruckersville Post Commander John Miska, the first time they did this more than two years ago, some 58 Iraq and Afghanistan vets attended. The Post purchased a handi-capped-accessible bus with a lift to ease the burden of transporting those with wheelchairs. Miska said members were saving for a new Post home, but decided the bus was more important.

He added that Post members make frequent visits to the two military hospitals to deliver personal care items and *Operation Uplink* phone cards. They work with a network of other Posts and veterans service organizations to make sure everyone doesn't show up at the hospitals on the same day with nothing but cases of shaving cream.

Saying he and his fellow Ruckersville members are "just the drivers," Miska credits Post 3150 with the success of the Sunday brunches. Commander Eric Anderson said the Sunday events have

been a community occasion for the past 16 years, but it was only a couple of years ago that they decided to invite the wounded troops.

Today, some 20 to 50 servicemen and women attend the feast, prepared by Post volunteers. Many bring their families, who are visiting at the hospital, and others have come back multiple times.

"This is nothing more than a chance



Ray Miller of Post 8208 in Ruckersville, Va., helps Diane Chatham of the Army's 33rd Area Support Group onto the bus for transport back to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Member John Miska, Walter Reed patients Phil Porter and Jim Williams, and member Rich Fales came together Dec. 10, 2006.

for them to enjoy a day away from the hospital," said Richard Hoffman, Post 3150 quartermaster. "No one rushes to put pressure on them to sign up as members. They know they are eligible."

Hoffman said that he and others also stop at the two hospitals to donate clothing and other essential items those recovering might need.

Miska said that Posts as far away as South Dakota have heard about the joint endeavor in Virginia and have sent

money to help. A Massachusetts couple, Paul and Janet Carter, provided Post 8208 with its first \$300 to get started on the transportation.

Anderson said that while it is essential to let this newest generation of vets know VFW cares, it's vital not to forget about those in VA nursing homes.

"We can always tell how much our visits mean to those in the nursing home," Anderson said. "At Christmas, we give each of them an ornament and some of them lay them out for us to see year after year."

Post members frequently visit the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center's nursing home where they deliver fruit plates and talk with those in the mood.

Hoffman said he remembers going into one vet's room and not leaving for 45 minutes because they had such a good conversation.

"He told me his whole life story in that 45 minutes," Hoffman said laughing. "It seemed to me he was just so grateful to have someone to visit with, so we need to do more of that."

This year the Arlington Post also adopted 12 military families from Ft. Myer for the holidays. Some 35 children received gifts, and all families received a great deal of food for both Thanksgiving and

Christmas.

If your Post plans to volunteer in hospitals this month or any other, please let us know. Mail photos and news clippings to:

VFW Magazine  
Attn.: Hospital Visits  
406 W. 34th St.  
Kansas City, MO 64111

