

Carrying On

West Virginia Posts help rebuild after historic flooding

Jan 13, 2017

After record flooding killed 23 people and destroyed many small towns in West Virginia last June, VFW members united to provide assistance and seek aid of their own.

The June 2016 floods in West Virginia were what the National Weather Service called an “exceptional meteorological event”—one that happens once every 1,000 years. The floods experienced throughout central and southern West Virginia were caused by a “derecho,” or a long line of rapidly moving thunderstorms, leading to eight inches of rain in 12 hours in



some parts of the state.

The 2016 flooding is tied for the seventh-deadliest flood in West Virginia’s documented history, with a death toll of 23 people. Of those 23 lives lost, 15 were from Rainelle, W. Va., including Post 4484 member Denver Barker, a WWII veteran and life member.

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Rainelle's town motto "A Town Built to Carry On," is apt as community members work to rebuild what was lost in the flood—including VFW Post 4484. The Post's home was flooded beyond repair, and Post members are working diligently to find a new place to meet. At press time, they were meeting in the local armory.

Like other institutions in Rainelle, Post 4484 has taken a severe financial hit. Post Quartermaster Kelly Goddard said the Post's income came strictly from bingo nights, which it hasn't hosted since June 23, 2016.

"We're the only organization in this town that gives everything back that we make," the former All-American Post commander said. "I know the people from this town can't help because they themselves are hurting."

In the true VFW spirit of giving, Posts from Virginia donated to cleanup and recovery efforts in the devastated area. Post 1115 in Hillsville, Va., gave \$1,000. The Department of Virginia also donated \$1,000.

Goddard, who is the VFW national programs chairman for 2016-17, personally donated \$1,000 to relief efforts, and his wife gave \$500. A group of past Department of West Virginia commanders pooled \$960 to support the Post.

"Every Post member is on the committee [to find a new Post home]," Goddard said.

'In the go of it'

Two hours from Rainelle, members of Post 9097 in Hurricane, W.Va., put in 350 man-hours to help those affected clean up after the devastating floods.

According to Post Commander Harold Chipps, the Post served as a drop-off location for donations. Members distributed donations throughout a 40-mile radius of the Post.

"We had people coming from out of state to deliver [goods]," said Chipps, who served with the 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq in 2003. "We served for a month as a drop-off point. We were very busy for awhile."

The Post delivered more than nine trucks and trailers full of clothes, food, cleaning supplies and household goods.

Chipps said several members were directly affected by the flooding.

“We actually went over and redid devastated homes,” Chipps said. “We took out damaged insulation and installed new. We installed hot water heaters. We were hands on and helped with things that were damaged.”

He said Post members helped roughly 50-75 veterans and their families.

“We don’t do it for the accolades,” Chipps said. “The people of West Virginia really came together and helped out tremendously. We were glad to be able to spearhead and be in ‘the go of it.’ ”

As of October, five counties remained in a state of emergency, per a proclamation issued in September by West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin.

Photo caption: James Lane (left) and Tom Trent, both employees at an adventure resort in West Virginia, who volunteered their time and kayaking and rafting skills, carry “Mama” an Australian shepherd, after rescuing her from her home in Rainelle. Mama was returned safely to her owner.

This article is featured in the January 2017 issue of [VFW magazine](#) and was written by [Kelly Gibson](#), senior writer, VFW magazine. Photo by The Register-Herald, Beckley, W.Va.