



Outside Partnerships Benefit Veterans

VFW has given nearly \$8 million to veterans and active-duty troops thanks to the generosity of Burger King and Sport Clips customers

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Since 2007, the VFW has partnered with Burger King and Sport Clips to further serve veterans. Through programs such as Unmet Needs, Free Call Days and, most recently, the Help A Hero Scholarship, thousands of veterans and families have been supported.

Here's a look at how both of these companies work in conjunction with the VFW.

\$4 Million for Unmet Needs

Burger King franchise owner Mike DeRosa clearly remembers the day in 2007 when he decided he wanted to reach out to the VFW. He was sitting in a Border's bookstore, waiting on his wife, Sherry, when he saw an ad in a magazine for VFW's Unmet Needs program. The ad included a photo of a younger woman holding a baby while looking off into the

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distance.

DeRosa just learned the previous week his only daughter was going to have a baby, making him a first-time grandpa. The image in the ad pulled at his heartstrings, he said.

As the owner of 12 Burger King restaurants in Wisconsin, DeRosa called the VFW Foundation the following Monday with thoughts on how he could help.

The idea was to ask customers to donate \$1 during a designated campaign period. That money would then be donated to the VFW Foundation, earmarked for the Unmet Needs program, which assists service members or veterans experiencing financial difficulties.

DeRosa got other franchise owners within the Mid-America Franchisee Association on board and in the first year, Burger King's customers donated \$110,000.

Today, 850 to 1,000 restaurants nationwide participate annually and nearly \$4 million has been donated by Burger King's customers.

"When we started this, we thought it was a nice thing to do to help military families," DeRosa said. "But it's become so much more than that over the years."

He said the Unmet Needs campaign is a no-brainer for customers because it seems like everyone knows a veteran or someone serving in uniform.

"We raise more money for VFW than we do for any other charity we support," DeRosa said.

He added that he typically receives anonymous donations for the program and frequently has local businesses asking him what they can do to help.

"Sherry and I want veterans to know that Burger King will be with veterans until all their needs are met," DeRosa said.

'Special debt of gratitude'

In 2007, Sport Clips became the "Official Haircutter of the VFW" and thus began their support of VFW's Operation Uplink Free Call Days, offering free phone calls home to deployed troops.

"The first year we had a goal to raise \$35,000," said Gordon Logan, Sport Clips founder and CEO. "We actually raised \$85,000. We have increased our contributions each year since, reaching \$917,000 last year."



This is done during a

campaign period where clients are asked to donate at nearly 1,600 Sport Clips locations. Additionally, product suppliers such as American Crew and Paul Mitchell make donations.

And on Veterans Day, when Sport Clips offers free haircuts to veterans and active-duty military, \$1 for every cut is donated to VFW.

Since 2007, Sport Clips has provided 2,521,159 free calls totaling 30,388,105 minutes worth \$1,193,638.

Once troops began returning from Iraq and Afghanistan in large numbers, there was not the demand for Free Call Days.

That's when the Help A Hero Scholarship program was born. Since 2013, 580 scholarships totaling \$2.4 million have been awarded to service members and veterans.

“We feel a special debt of gratitude to those who have gone in harm’s way to protect our freedoms,” said Logan, an Air Force Vietnam veteran who served from 1969-74. “I wish everyone could read all the emails, letters and personal communications we receive from our scholarship recipients telling us how much their Help A Hero Scholarship means to them and their families.”

Logan, a member of Post 8587 in Georgetown, Texas, said that each year, Sport Clips has a nationwide emphasis on fundraising from mid-October leading up to the Veterans Day event. But many of his stores have various events throughout the year.

“It is part of our culture,” he said. “And it’s rewarding to see young people so involved and dedicated to helping our veterans.”

Since the Sport Clips/VFW partnership began, the haircutting franchise and its customers have donated \$3,984,000 to VFW. (At press time, the 2016 numbers were not available, but Logan said he expected to hit the \$1 million mark.)

This article is featured in the January 2017 issue of [VFW magazine](#) and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), associate editor, VFW magazine.