

‘This is the Least We Can do to Help’

A VFW Auxiliary in Illinois hosts its third annual baby shower for women veterans. Each expecting mother leaves with a car full of items for their babies

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In January, VFW Post 2298 in the Chicago suburb of West Dundee, Ill., was filled to the brim with car seats, diaper bags, baby toys and formula, to name just a few of the items. For the third year in a row, the Auxiliary hosted a baby shower for women vets in the Northern Illinois VA System.

Auxiliary President Diane Ahrens said the shower was open to expecting mothers who served or are serving in the military. Nearly 30 women showed up for the shower and walked away with many gifts, according to Ahrens.

Each one received a car seat and Pack 'n Play (playpen). Diaper bags chocked full of baby wipes, diapers and formula also were on the gift list. Auxiliary members also distributed bags of stuffed animals and baby toys, including crib mobiles. The West Dundee Kohl's Cares Team donated Clifford the Big Red Dog stuffed animals with corresponding books.

“Kohl's Cares really helps us out so much,” Ahrens said. “Heaven forbid they ever quit helping us.”

Ahrens, who served in the Marines from 1978-80, said gender-specific clothing is purchased and also seasonal clothing depending on when the babies are due.

Twelve area restaurants provided the food to feed the 100 people who turned out for the event. Ahrens, who owns Piece-A-Cake bakery in East Dundee, provided the cakes.

“It's a lot of work, but it's amazing to me when it all comes together,” Ahrens said. “It does my heart good to see these women come together.”

Ahrens said she hopes other Auxiliaries around the country will start hosting baby showers if they aren't already. She pointed out that the showers can be done on a smaller scale in the

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beginning. Ahrens added that the first shower they hosted served 11 women compared to this one with 29.

Babies are ‘Expensive’ Blessings

The Auxiliary first decided to host the shower to help pregnant moms who were trying to assimilate back into the civilian world, while also preparing for childbirth.

And, as Ahrens pointed out, babies can be expensive blessings.

“Diapers are so expensive, and we all know how many diapers little ones can go through,” she said. “Then there’s all the other expenses on top of that. Meanwhile, these moms are dealing with a host of other issues oftentimes.”

At the shower, as has been customary since the inaugural event, Ms. Veteran America made a special appearance. This year’s winner, Air Force veteran Lindsay Gutierrez, traveled from her home in Georgia to celebrate with the moms-to-be and some new moms, too.

“I feel honored to have been a part of this spectacular event,” Gutierrez later noted via Twitter. “It’s because of a support system like the VFW that veterans are able to thrive as civilians. Never stop being that light for us.”

One expecting mom, Karla Porter, was unable to attend the shower as planned because her baby, Greta, made her entrance into the world sooner than expected. On top of having an emergency C-section to deliver Greta, Porter also was diagnosed with the flu.

She worried that the Auxiliary had purchased items for her and then she couldn’t show up. She said she was hopeful they had found another mom to receive the gifts.

When Porter contacted Ahrens to let her know what had happened, Ahrens reassured her that they had saved the gifts and asked for her address so they could deliver them.

“Moms who signed up but cannot make it do not lose out,” Ahrens said. “We deliver!”

Ahrens and her sister, Martha, drove two hours to Porter’s home to deliver all of the gifts.

“I never, in my wildest dreams, imagined they’d save them for me,” said Porter who was in the Army from January 2001 to September 2002 before being medically discharged. “I was astounded and had to fight off tears. There were so many gifts that I was just overcome. I can’t begin to express my gratitude to the VFW Post 2298 Auxiliary, the West Dundee Community, and especially Diane Ahrens.”

For Ahrens, who was a single mom for seven years, it’s important for the VFW and Auxiliary

to support these women.

“So many are having a hard time, even if they are married,” she said. “This is the least we can do to help in this time that is supposed to be such a happy occasion.”

Plans are under way for the 2019 shower. Ahrens said she is hoping to find some space in a warehouse to store items for next year’s event.

“It takes a full year to plan this type of shower,” Ahrens said. “I’m glad I have surrounded myself with overachievers.”

This article is featured in the 2018 May issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor, VFW magazine. Photo by James Harvey.