

Vet Donates \$10,000 to VFW for Harvey Repair

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A U.S. Navy veteran and member of VFW Post 912 donated \$10,000 to help the hall on North Main Street recover after Hurricane Harvey.

The hall, which had about 18 inches of water inside during the storm, needed a slew of repairs, and bills were starting to rack up.

That's when one member, Chris Lahowetz, owner of Electromagnetic Industries on Beaumont Street, came up with an idea for his company match up to \$10,000 to lend a hand.

"The VFW was having trouble raising funds at the time I made the offer," Lahowetz said. "They predicted they were \$20,000 in debt. If they raised it, we would donate the other portion of it."

After months of fundraising, a check for \$10,000 from Lahowetz was presented Tuesday night at the hall.

Lahowetz, a U.S. Navy veteran who served during Desert Storm, said the goal was to get the VFW back in good shape again, so it could continue its mission of helping the community and veterans.

"When I made the offer, several people, including Commander (Harold) Sams, immediately jumped in and donated money as well," he said.

Lahowetz was dealing with his own flood issues at the time. A resident of Whispering Pines,

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his home sustained severe flooding, and he was trying to save his home.

“We were lucky to get through it and have our house intact and everything,” Lahowetz said.

Before the storm hit, members of the VFW hall were looking to become more family-oriented and be a place where they could interact with the community more than it had in the past. The hall already had partnerships with Goose Creek CISD, presented awards for the Regional History Fair at Lee College and participated in the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life event.

It also gave money to other organizations like the Baytown Food Bank.

“We had started raising money to upgrade the facility so we could focus on being more community involved when Harvey hit,” Lahowetz said. “We had money set aside for building improvements, and were looking at redoing the parking lot and such. Then the hurricane hit, and all the money we saved up went to hurricane relief fund just to get back up and running.”

“It has been a rough nine months for the VFW,” Lahowetz added.

Even though Harvey took its toll on the VFW hall, the members still met there, even though the drywall had been ripped out and the floors were bare.

The VFW hall was able to raise funds on their end thanks to donations through their Facebook account, holding raffles and with the help of many others.

“There was a tremendous amount of money from individuals given to match this as well,” Commander Sams said.

Sams also said that other veteran organizations chipped in to help, like the Vietnam Veterans of America, the VFW Auxiliary, and from the VFW national headquarters.

The hall is utilized by other veterans’ services such as the American Legion members, the Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Disabled Veterans of America.

“Even though it belongs to the VFW, this is a central place for all of the veterans organizations in the Baytown area to meet to see about doing things for the community and fellow veterans,” Lahowetz said. “We definitely wanted to save it and wanted it to be around for a long time.”

This article was written by [Matt Hollis](#), The Baytown Sun. Photo courtesy of The Baytown Sun.

