

VFW Teams with Retailer to Clothe Vets in Need

Post 1498 in Clifton Park, N.Y., joined forces with longtime VFW magazine supporter Haband to provide winter clothing to veterans in New York.

Feb 07, 2019

Those familiar with Albany, N.Y., know how frigid the temperatures can get in the winter months, with an average snowfall of 54 inches per year. For those living on the streets of this capital city, winter can be deadly.

That's why VFW Post 1498 in Clifton Park, N.Y., about 10 miles north of Albany, and clothing retailer Haband in Mahwah, N.J., some 33 miles north of New York City, have partnered to provide winter apparel to vets in need.

Post members have long been involved at the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany. On one visit a few years ago, Post Commander David Brinkmoeller witnessed a man come in off the street in desperate search of a coat.

"I thought this is something that the government did for our veterans," Brinkmoeller said. "Noney Grier with [VA's] Voluntary Service told me that clothing and personal items are all donated from the community – there is no funding for things like that."

Brinkmoeller took this story back to his Post members, who decided to do something about it.

Meanwhile, at [Haband](#) headquarters in Mahwah, then-CEO and president John DiFrancesco held an operational meeting where company leaders discussed how Haband could support veterans.

"We wanted very much to contribute to something beyond the commercial," said DiFrancesco, who retired in 2016 after a four-year tenure. "I've known Dave a very long time, and he told me what was needed. It was a good fit with the kind of products we were

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able to give.”

The Post had raised about \$1,200 to purchase clothing from Haband. In exchange, pallets of clothing worth “thousands of dollars” showed up at Brinkmoeller’s home for delivery to the Stratton VA.

October marked the fourth such delivery. Haband sent 648 clothing items to Brinkmoeller totaling more than \$25,000 for this delivery. Everything from coats and parkas to sweaters and flannel shirts were delivered to the Stratton VA. It took four SUVs to deliver the items.

Jim Keller, chief of VA’s Voluntary Service at Stratton, said that last year his department helped 5,917 veterans, issuing 31,991 items, including clothing, shoes, toiletries, snacks, meals and transportation vouchers, as well as gift cards.

“This level of support for our veterans is only possible with the incredible support of our donors, especially organizations like VFW,” Keller said. “Over the past five years, VFW has contributed more than \$145,000 in monetary and material donations — \$71,000 of that originated from Post 1498. The VFW Auxiliary contributed more than \$79,000 during the same period.”

Serving 22 counties, Grier said clothing is one of the primary needs she sees daily, especially winter clothing.

“Our food pantry serves about 20 veterans a day,” Grier said. “Donations come from the community. The items we need the most and have the most requests for are winter coats and boots.”

Voluntary Service has three storage rooms at the medical center to hold donations. New patients admitted to the hospital are delivered a handmade blanket and a bag of toiletries.

“We get a tremendous amount of support from VFW and Auxiliary,” Grier said. “Almost any day of any week, you will find VFW members here. They are the reason we are able to do the service work we do.”

An Army vet who served two tours in Vietnam, Brinkmoeller said his Post also donates about 800 pairs of socks each year to the VA.

“What they do helps so many people,” he said. “And not just homeless vets, but those who are brought in to the hospital with nothing on but their pajamas. That’s why what Haband is doing is really a wonderful thing.”

‘It’s Very Personal to Them’

DiFrancesco said the Haband and VFW endeavor is “employee” driven.

“I didn’t dictate that we do this,” he said. “These are just really great people who work at Haband. They embraced this project because it’s very personal to them.”

Lisa Spitz, Haband’s inventory manager, is responsible for organizing the clothing assortment.

“I always try to pull things I think will be useful for vets in need,” she said. “I try to pull an assortment of sizes since we don’t know who will end up with the clothing. Our goal is to accommodate as many vets as we can.”

Spitz said 27 percent of the Mahwah staff are veterans or have family members who are vets. Incidentally, Spitz’s husband is a veteran.

DiFrancesco said his 95-year-old father is a WWII veteran, having fought through North Africa and into Europe. His uncles all served in WWII as well.

“All of a sudden, we discovered we had a lot of deep connections to the military,” DiFrancesco said. “Everyone is very proud of this program. And while most of my senior staff has retired or moved on, new people have stepped in and embraced this very worthy cause.”

Spitz, who has been with Haband for three years, concurs. “As long as the VFW wants to continue doing it, we are happy to send clothes,” she said.

This article is featured in the February 2019 [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.