

‘Lending a Helping Hand’

Unmet Needs grant helps Army vet and family stay warm

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The VFW’s Unmet Needs program helped keep an Army veteran and his family warm in the wake of calamity during the winter months of 2019.

Army veteran Dennis Rooney used VFW’s \$1,353 Unmet Needs grant to replace a broken water heater in his home, a necessity that intensified after the passing of his 32-year-old daughter left him and his wife to care for their grandchildren of ages 10, nine and one.

“Everything has kind of hit us all at once this year,” Rooney said. “The income hasn’t been adequate to sustain us completely now that my disability has progressed, so we thank VFW for lending a helping hand. It’s meant a lot to us.”

Rooney, who served with the Army as combat medic stationed at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, was medically discharged in 1993 following the loss of hearing in his right ear and an ongoing struggle with severe back pain.

For the 20 years that followed his discharge, Rooney had taken up real estate sales, which at the time provided him with a steady income. But the injuries sustained while in the military loomed.

“I did pretty good for many years, but my issues made it harder to perform my job as I got older because of the constant travel and going up and down the stairs,” he admitted. “I had to go down to the VA and get approved for vocational rehabilitation to find another career path through college.”

Already facing a fixed income after injuries sidelined his progress in the real estate business, Rooney’s water heater broke in the winter and finding the money to replace it proved hard.

“We really didn’t have any money to replace it,” Rooney said. “We kind of went without adequate hot water for a month until VFW was able to come in and approve us for a grant to get that fixed.”

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The importance of the water heater intensified after Rooney and his wife had to take in their three grandchildren following the passing of his daughter due to an undiagnosed heart disease less than two months later.

“That was a devastating blow. Everything hit us all at once, and we’re still struggling but staying strong,” Rooney said. “That’s why anything extra at this point helps, so we’re deeply grateful for VFW stepping in and helping in any way that they could.”