

‘We Need to Do Our Part’

Michigan VFW Post creates masks to prevent spread of COVID-19

May 25, 2020

VFW Post 3701 Commander Stacey Roberts said her membership understood the urgency in preparing for a possible COVID-19 outbreak in their rural town of Lakeview, Mich.

Roberts and her members planned ahead of government officials, crafting a plan to assemble volunteers willing to create masks for essential businesses around the Lakeview community, some 50 miles northeast of Grand Rapids, Mich.

“When we first planned a mask-making assembly, Michigan had not yet been shut down and hospitals were not accepting handmade masks,” Roberts said. “But we could see the path we were on, and we figured it would be better to have masks made and never be used than not be available at all.”

Michigan eventually joined other states after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order, mandating a stay-at-home order that took effect on March 24. By then, Roberts and 19 volunteers, the majority being Post 3701 and its Auxiliary members, had already worked three 12-hour days to create 450 masks in a hurry.

“Our community is very close, so when this virus started ramping up in our area we knew what we had to do,” Roberts said. “We would not be where we are today without the support of our community and this was our opportunity to give back.”

Roberts, however, had a tough decision to make.

“As commander, I had to weigh the safety of volunteers against the impact our efforts could have,” she said. “Although we faced no adversity for holding this function during a stay-at-home order, we certainly could have. I was prepared to deal with opposition because I knew morally that this was the right thing to do for the greater good of our community.”

With no more than 10 volunteers at a time, each at a workstation spaced six-feet apart and containing hand sanitizer, the crew worked on borrowed sewing machines to create the

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masks.

Volunteers then packaged each mask, which featured adjustable straps, bendable nosepieces and pockets for filters, for delivery.

The masks have since been used at four hospitals, four doctors' offices, two cities for public workers, a grocery store, one newspaper, an assisted living facility and by many members of Post 3701 and their respective families.

Post 3701 plans on doing another round of masks per request from Lakeview community officials, as well as blood drives in partnership with the Red Cross.

"It's times like these that test our strength," Roberts said. "It's in times like these that, as a community and organization, we need to do our part and serve those who supported us while we were fighting overseas. It is the least we can do."