

' ... VFW at Its Finest!'

Members in Massachusetts' District 7 helped keep families connected with quarantined loved ones

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VFW members in District 7 Massachusetts understand the importance of advocating for veterans and caring for their families. Especially now as they deal with a tragic outbreak of COVID-19 at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

The home is located in District 7 and the outbreak there is one of the worst in the nation. With 210 residents, there have been 77 COVID-19 deaths. 78 other residents and 83 staff tested positive for the virus over the course of two months.

As the state looks into possible issues at the Soldiers' Home, District 7 identified what it could do to assist families. When the situation in the Soldiers' Home became dire, all family visits were ended, and general communication from the home about residents was poor. Families grew desperate to reach loved ones, so the VFW helped raise more than \$5,000 to purchase 20 iPads and gave them to residents.

"This crucial and much appreciated effort enabled veterans and families to see and talk with each other for the first time in weeks," said District 7 Commander Troy Henke.

District 7 Posts and members also are raising awareness of the need to care for veterans by sharing information on social media and community forums and advocating for veterans as five investigations into the Soldiers' Home are in progress.

"As District Commander, I'm most interested and engaged in the legislative investigation. This is where our advocacy for our elderly veterans will see the greatest potential for change and reform in funding, administration, job requirements for staff and quality of life," said Henke.

In addition to action taken to help residents and their families regarding the devastating events in Holyoke, District 7 mobilized to voice concerns about the VA Hospital at Leeds when whistleblowers reported a lack of precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

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District 7 leadership and the VFW State Command reached out to U.S. Senators Edward Markey and Elizabeth Warren. This caused a quick change in protocols at the hospital and minimized the spread of the virus.

“The whistleblowers trusted us to take action and to keep them safe from retaliation,” Henke said. “This was the VFW at its finest!”

Henke is extremely proud of the ways Posts and members in District 7 are living up to the VFW motto that “NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.”